

Chapter 7: Evolution

How Is Everyone Doing the Best They Know How?

“Yeah, But...”

You are enough. At your core, you are Love. As a competent adult, your shadow is the primary thing that keeps you from remembering this Truth. You can release your shadow by adopting a Learning Orientation to Life. This involves seeing how everyone is doing the best they know how, while also having the opportunity to learn how to do better. Pain does not mean anyone is to blame. Pain means we have something to learn. You can stop beating yourself up for your past failures, because you’ve always been doing the best you know how. You already are worthy of Love. It’s okay to let go of your pain.

Given that you’ve read this far, I trust that at least some of these statements resonate somewhere deep within you. In our journey together so far, perhaps you’ve had moments where you felt like you were remembering things you already knew. Perhaps you’ve had moments of “Of course!” Or perhaps you’ve had moments where you felt your heart singing.

At the same time, perhaps your experience has also included moments where a voice inside you piped up with a “Yeah, but...”

If so, this voice is perfectly fine, and I support you in listening to it, accepting it, and exploring how it is serving you the best way it knows how.

Exercise: My “Yeah, Buts...”

Directions: Check inside for a moment, and see if you can get in touch with any reservations or objections that have become present for you while reading. If so, please feel free to list them below.

Yeah, but... _____

Yeah, but... _____

Yeah, but... _____

Yeah, but... _____

Now, ask this voice the following question. “How are you supporting me the best way you know how?” Write down any answers that come forward, and thank it for sharing.

Some Common “Yeah, Buts...”

At this point in our journey together, some of the most common “yeah, but” include the voices of:

- ♥ **The Inner Critic.** “Yeah, but I know I could have done better...” “Yeah, but I’m not really worthy of...” “Yeah, but I suck at...”

- ♥ **The Inner Victim.** “*Yeah, but they never should have...*”
“*Yeah, but it’s wrong that...*” “*Yeah, but they hurt me...*”
- ♥ **Self-Doubt.** “*Yeah, but I can’t trust myself to make good choices.*” “*Yeah, but I’m too scared.*”
- ♥ **Right/Wrong.** “*Yeah, but what about Right and Wrong?*”
“*Yeah, but what about the Holocaust?*”

And these voices are not wrong.

At the same time, they do present us with a learning opportunity – an opportunity to practice what we’ve been learning, and an opportunity to perhaps find a broader, more loving, less pain based perspective on life.

If we look at these objections, we find two primary questions running throughout them. First, “*are we really doing the best we know how?*” And second, “*but what about right and wrong?*” These are great questions, and we’re going to invest two of these last chapters looking at them. This chapter explores the first question, and Chapter 9 explores the second. Please note that these are the most academic of all the chapters, and so please feel free to skip over any sections that don’t call to you.

The Rules Change as We Grow

Everyone is doing the best they know how.

“*Oh, really? Yeah, but what about...?*”

This tenet can be one of the most powerful tools for our growth and development – and it can also be one of the most challenging ideas to accept. It can support us in moving from the Question of Blame to the Question of Love, but it can also trigger some of our deepest judgments and strongest beliefs. So how can we make sense of this conflict, without getting pulled in to yet another war over beliefs? How can we move beyond pain, fear, and anger, without fighting, fearing, or blaming these tools? **How can we move beyond judgment without making judgment wrong?**

In the past, this has been an unbelievably challenging question. It goes to the heart of the challenge of beliefs, and to the depths of human suffering.

And in truth, this challenge can’t be answered by a change of mind. It can only be resolved by a change of heart. For while our mind and body see things from the perspective of either/or, our heart and Authentic Self see things from the perspective of both/and. Love sees the world through different eyes, and so our greatest answers aren’t found in books. They’re found in our practice. They’re found in our experience. They’re found in our love.

That said, I’ve found a particularly valuable tool that has helped my mind come to terms with this issue: the discovery that **the rules change as we grow**. As we move from a battle for survival, to a striving for success, and then to a search for fulfillment, the rules of life and love change radically and repeatedly.

For example, the opportunities and responsibilities of a parent are very different than those of a child. Similarly, as we evolve spiritually, our task is to first build an ego, and then release it. Up until now, we’ve dealt with this distinction by talking about the difference between the Game of Life and the Game of Love. In this chapter, we’re going to go into another level of detail, by exploring how both of these are part of the broader process of spiritual evolution – how **both the Game of Life and Game of Love are part of the journey into Love**.

For while we tend to talk about love as if it was a single concept, there are at least ten major types of love, and five major stages of love, from the most physical to the most spiritual. Each comes with its own rules. And amazingly, the rules in one stage are often exactly the opposite of those in other stages. **What we have to master in one level of the game often becomes exactly what we have to move beyond in the next.** A positive choice in one context often becomes negative in another.

When food is scarce, gorging on high-fat, high-calorie foods can support our survival. However, as we learn to master our basic physical needs, the same pattern can become a primary challenge to

our health. This challenge is vividly demonstrated in the movie Super Size Me, and by the current epidemic of childhood obesity.

Similarly, when our physical desires run the show, developing a healthy conscience allows us to tame our anger, fear, lust, and self-centeredness. Developing the capacity for guilt and judgment is essential to meeting our social needs of approval and success. But as we learn how to get along and fit in, we keep adding to our repressed shadow. And after a certain point, we often find ourselves in situations where the harder we try to be good, the worse we feel. When this happens, the game shifts from being about creating our self-judgments, to releasing them. It moves from learning how to motivate ourselves through pain, to letting go of the Cattle Prod of Guilt.

As a third example, in studying the natural stages of moral development, Lawrence Kohlberg discovered that right/wrong morality is a middle stage of our moral evolution, not the end. He gave a set of moral dilemmas to different people, and studied how their answers evolved over time. One example involved a man who needed to acquire an expensive drug in order to save his wife's life. The drug cost much more than he could afford, and the pharmacist refused to discount its price. Then the question was: given this situation, should the man steal the drug?

Interestingly, Kohlberg found three major stages of answers – “yes, because I want it,” “no, because that would be breaking the law,” and “yes, because in this case, her life is more important than the law.” And he found that people naturally evolve, one stage at a time, through these different perspectives. We grow from **pre-conventional morality** (“It’s right because I want it”) to **conventional morality** (“It’s right because the authorities say so”) to **post-conventional morality** (“It’s a more effective choice because it serves the Highest Good.”) The rules of morality change as we evolve. And it’s not just that the content of each stage differs – it’s that **our very capacities change as we grow**.

Remarkably, what we have to master in one stage (i.e. getting enough food, using guilt to control our impulses, dividing the world

into battles between right and wrong, or developing a strong ego) often becomes exactly what we have to release at the next. The rules of life and love change – radically and repeatedly – as we evolve.

And boy, can that make things confusing!

For without understanding this underlying pattern, we naturally assume that the rules of our current stage are the “One True Path.” We tend to see our rules for life as the “right” ones, and judge other people – and other aspects of our self – that follow different rules, or have different needs. We learn to fight against our body (when was the last time you read a diet book based on loving your body’s desire for food?) We learn to fight against anything that would cause us to question our beliefs. We learn to fight against any challenge to our ego’s sense of superiority and control. And in doing so, we find ourselves in a chronic state of war.

So let’s see if we can shed some light on this fascinating if challenging pattern – and in doing so, better understand how everyone is doing the best they know how.

A Rainbow of Love

There are many types of love, each of which is a reflection of Love.

Imagine that you’re in a beautiful cathedral, looking at an ancient stained glass window lit up in stunning hues by the afternoon sun. As you marvel at this work of art, it’s easy to dwell on the picture made by the different colored panes, while forgetting the beam of clear light that is the source of their radiance. Similarly, as we savor our experience of the many colors of love – the thrilling taste of a first kiss, the awe of watching our children grow, the joy of reconnecting with a long lost friend – it’s all too easy to dwell on these delights, while forgetting the waves of warm, clear, dazzling Love of which our experiences of love are “merely” a stunning reflection.

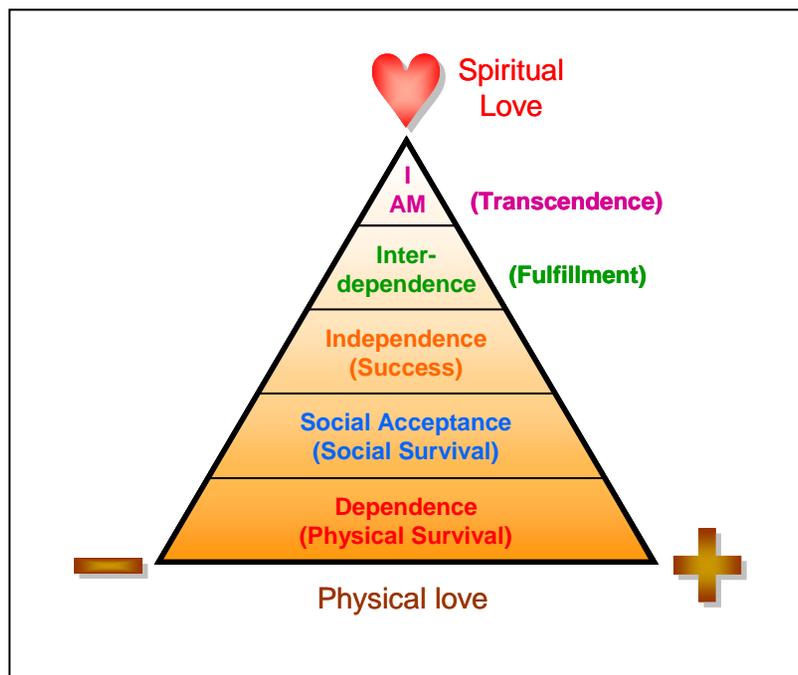
Throughout this book, I’ve intermingled the terms love and Love – sometimes capitalizing the word, and sometimes not. To me,

Love is our Authentic Self. Love is the Light of God. Love is our One True Name. Love is the radiance through which all else is experienced. Love is the song of the Infinite, calling forth from our spiritual core. Love is awareness of the great I AM. Love IS. And yet, our smaller selves – the many facets of our personalities which fight for control inside our heads – our smaller selves can only experience Love through the filters of the physical; for what we feel as love is really the illumination of a greater Light, strained and seen through the many colors of our humanity.

As another analogy, picture yourself lying in the grass on a large hill, looking up at the clouds as they float across the sky. As a lazy day game, you imagine what the different clouds look like – that one a dog, this one a tree. It’s a lovely summer day, and you revel in the warmth on your skin as the occasional shaft of sunlight breaks through the clouds and plays across your body.

Now, let’s look at some of the physics behind this scene. As the sunlight travels through the air, it moves quite freely, and while some of the higher frequencies get filtered out and scattered (which is why the sky is blue) most of it passes through. As the light travels through the clouds, much of it is blocked, but even on the cloudiest days, enough gets through to see by. And as the light hits your body, while some of it is absorbed by your eyes and skin, very little actually passes in to your body itself.

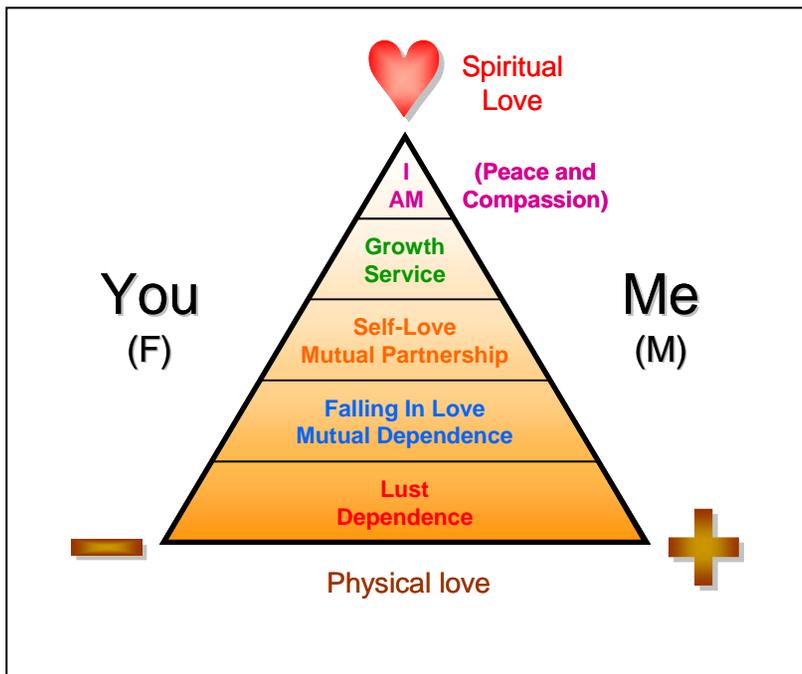
And so it is with Love. The air is like our spiritual heart, which largely acts as a clear channel, while also reflecting just enough Love for us to feel its presence (*Ahah, we cry! Love is blue!*) The clouds are like the different layers of our mind, blocking much of Love’s energy while also letting much through (*Ahah, we cry! Love is a dog! No, it’s a tree! No, it’s a dog! No, it’s a tree!*) Our body is very much like, well...our body, being sustained by Love while also being too physically dense to allow much of it in (*Ahah, we cry! Love is life, and warmth, and how our bodies look!*) As Love gets filtered through our hearts, minds and bodies, we experience it as love.



The key point is this. There are many different types of love we can experience, each with different characteristics – and with different rules. Some types of love are more physical – they’re tied more to our **survival** as a species, and our **success** as individuals. Other types of love are more spiritual – they’re tied to our sense of **fulfillment**, meaning, and purpose. These types of love are organized into five stages, like a game that has five different levels to it. We all start out at the first level of dependent love. The Game of Love is then both about mastering each stage of love, while also developing the capacity to love in new, more mature, more spiritual ways.

Five Stages of Love

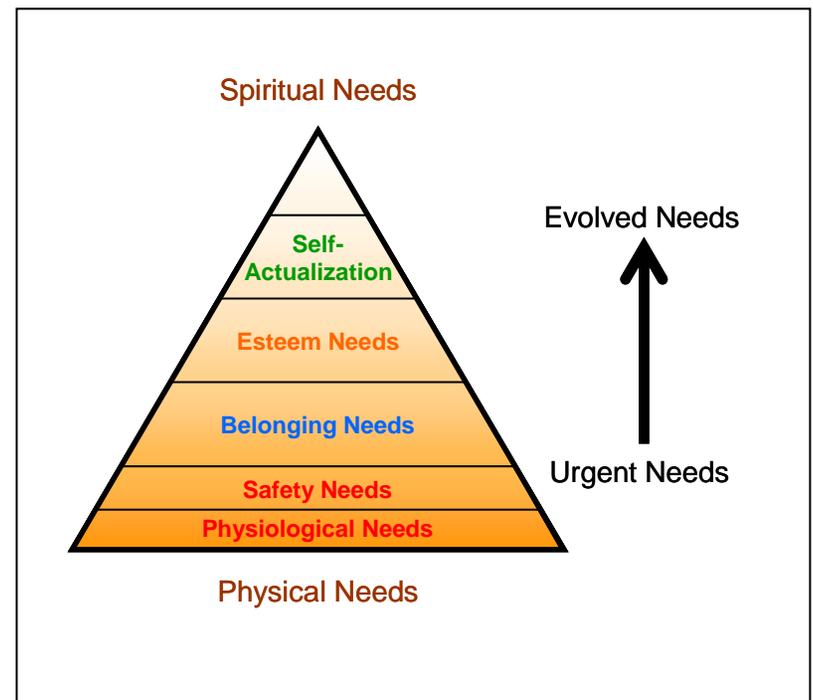
The picture **Five Stages of Love** illustrates these five levels, along with the core “goal” of that stage of the game. It shows how the journey of Love evolves from its more physical aspects (love) to its more spiritual aspects (Love). And as we do so, the primary goal of each level also evolves from the more physical (survival and



success) to the more spiritual (fulfillment and then transcendence, where we rest in a Love Beyond Belief).

The more physical manifestations of love each struggle between the polarities of selfishness and selflessness, between a focus on you vs. a focus on me, because they're experienced through the eyes of a world with finite resources. Where the "law of the jungle" rules, we often have to choose whether the survivors are going to be "us" or "them." Where the costs of non-conformance include rejection and shame, we often have to choose between our own needs and desires, and those of our community. And where there aren't enough opportunities to go around, we often have to choose who we're going to compete with and who we're going to cooperate with, in this great game called life.

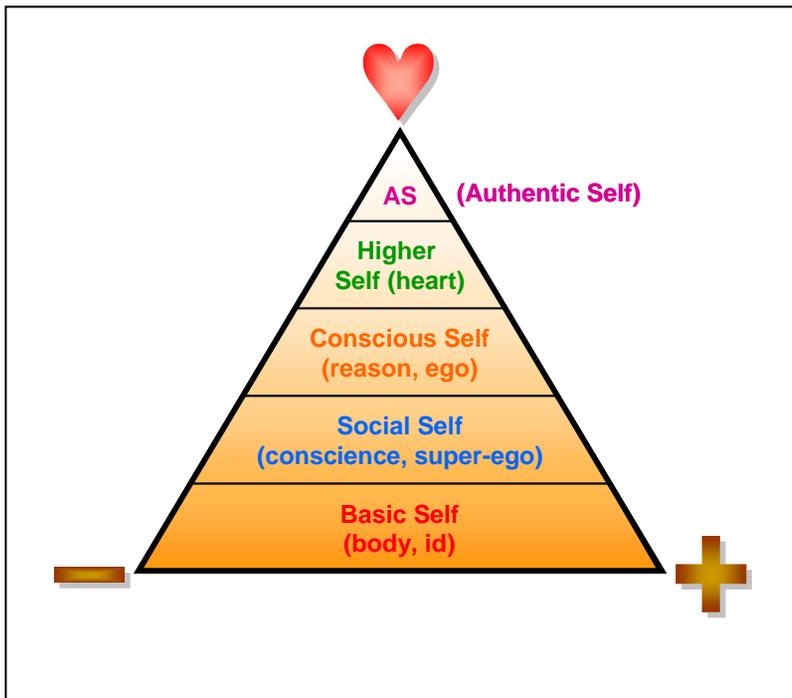
However, there's no need for competition when the world is viewed through the spiritual eyes of Love, for Love is ruled by a higher law. From a place of Love, one of the most selfish things we can do is serve another. At the same time, before we can truly love another, we must first learn to survive in this physical world, and we



must first learn to love ourselves. This does not mean that competition is wrong – it simply means that there are multiple aspects of ourselves, each of which is responsible for handling a different set of our needs, and each of which sees the world – and experiences love – in radically different ways.

So let's look at this in more detail. The figure **Ten Types of Love** shows ten different aspects of Love, and **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** shows how our most basic needs are related to these five stages and ten forms of Love.⁷

While Abraham Maslow considered himself an atheist, his work contributed to the foundations of spiritual psychology – of the integration of the psychology of our smaller human self with the spirituality of our Authentic Self. He famously discovered that as humans we have a range of very different needs, and that these needs are arranged in a hierarchy. If we can't breathe, shelter and political safety don't matter a whole lot. If we continually fear for our safety, our needs to feel a sense of self-esteem tend to take a



back seat. One of the things Maslow taught us is that when push comes to shove, **the urgency of our physical survival tends to take priority over the importance of our spiritual fulfillment.** When one of our lower needs is significantly **deficient**, it naturally comes to the surface and takes priority. Then, as we handle these more urgent needs, we're just as naturally drawn to pay attention to our more evolved needs.

The Challenge of Choosing Up

However, as we master each stage of the game, we naturally become **attached** to that level. As shown in the picture **Five Selves**, our sense of self is actually divided between at least five major aspects, which span from the most physical to most spiritual aspects of Reality. Each self is primarily responsible for the needs and rules associated with that level of Love. As we evolve, we naturally become **identified** with that aspect of our self, and we become **addicted** to meeting its desires (i.e. pleasure, acceptance and

success). We cling to what we know, and may think this is all there is.

Ultimately, our spiritual evolution is a journey of evolving identification. We are born pure but helpless, *“trailing clouds of glory”* and wrapped in the arms of Love.⁸ But we quickly forget our spiritual nature, as we get down to the urgent business of physical and social survival. Then as we learn to master our physical, social, and psychological worlds, our path becomes one of releasing our attachments to our more basic selves, as we choose up to the next level of being. Evolution is a step-by-step process of connecting with higher and higher “frequencies” of Love, and higher and higher aspects of our self, until eventually we're able to rest in the infinite majesty of our Authentic Self. And so what we must master at each level often becomes exactly what we're called to move beyond in the next.

Who we are is Love, but we forget this when we identify with our body (*“I am hungry”*) our conscience (*“I am good when I do the right things”*) and our mind (*“I think therefore I am”*). We're spiritual beings having a human experience, and our journey of awakening is one of learning how to handle each level of the game – and then moving on to the next, while continuing to work with the levels that have gone before.

As competent adults, most of our “lower energies” have gotten stored in our unconscious shadow. Like ballast on a hot air balloon, our negativity holds us down. And so after a certain point, a primary task of our spiritual growth involves learning how to find and love our shadow, so we can release these weights on our consciousness.

But in our process of growth, we often find ourselves caught in a conflict between different aspects of ourselves. We find ourselves feeling like we're at war. We find ourselves torn between our more spiritual aspects, which inspire us to grow to the next level, and our more physical aspects, which want to maintain the status quo. We find ourselves caught between choosing love or choosing fear.

This is the root conflict between the Game of Life and the Game of Love. And it's the root conflict within our selves. Yet we're here to learn and grow, and long-term happiness comes from choosing love. It comes from choosing up. Not because it's the "right" thing to do, but because it's the path to everything we most desire.

Pain is the Price We Pay for Resisting Life

One set of needs are not better than another, and it's not "wrong" to choose down. At the same time, the further up this hierarchy we move, the better we tend to feel (over time, while also remembering that like with an oak tree, the process of growth involves all four seasons). Urgent deficiencies in our "lower" needs are signaled by fear and pain, while the satisfaction of our "higher" needs comes with feelings of joy, bliss, fulfillment and inner peace. Lower pleasures eventually lead to boredom and addiction, while the joy that comes from growth and service is much more lasting.

As we look at the different stages and types of love, we find a similar hierarchy. While each of us is born with the innate capacity to love in many ways, we also tend to start with most of our focus on the more physical forms of love. Then much of our spiritual evolution and maturation comes as we master the "lower" forms of love and "work our way up" the pyramid of love.⁹

All of these forms of love are gifts, just as all of our needs are gifts, and all of the aspects of our selves are gifts. Without hunger we would quickly die, and without the yearning for growth, we would never evolve into our full potential. At the same time, **much of what makes life so confusing are the battles that come up between our different needs; and much of what makes love so confusing are the conflicts that come up between our different types of love.**

For example, we may find ourselves torn between our desire for pleasure (i.e. to eat three pints of ice cream) and our desire for a positive self-image (i.e. looking good in tight jeans) or between our desire to be right and our desire to be loving.

Romantic relationships are a great example of the different stages of love. In our desire for romantic love, part of us may yearn for a raw, lustful encounter. Another part may crave the rush of falling in love, or desire being with someone who will make us look good to others and help us feel accepted. At the same time, a piece of us may desire a mature relationship based on mutual service and growth. These are all different aspects of love – and yet they're often in conflict.

We are free to "choose up" or "choose down," and both choices provide opportunities for learning and growth. At the same time, **choosing down tends to be much more painful than choosing up.** And when our Authentic Self decides it's time for us to learn a certain lesson, or grow in a certain way, our feedback often becomes increasingly painful until we listen to it. As the saying goes, "*if you don't get Spirit on the whisper, you'll get it on the yell.*"

Yet we tend to judge our more physical aspects as bad or wrong, and we tend to assume that the same rules apply at all times, and in all situations. When we judge that someone wasn't doing the best they knew how, we're often caught in **level confusion**, where we're assuming that all their aspects "should" have been playing according to the rules at a given level.^{10-yellow} However, as we learn how the rules change as we grow, and how we have different aspects that remain at each of these levels, it becomes easier to see how each aspect of each person is doing the best it knows how. And in this place of awareness and acceptance, we're able to start letting go of our chronic wars and our addiction to pain. We're able to open ourselves to forgiveness and healing. We're able to resolve the challenge of beliefs – and we're able to start finding peace.

So let's look at these five stages and ten forms of love, and how the rules to love change as we grow.

Love as Dependence

In the last century, the science of psychology has revolutionized our understanding of the mind. Chief among its discoveries have been **the power of our unconscious**, and how **development evolves**

through a set of consistent, discrete stages. This latter discovery led to the field of developmental psychology, whose pioneers include Maslow, Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Fowler, Gilligan, Kegan and many more. What follows is a **brief** synthesis of this science of developmental psychology, as integrated with the spirituality of the great wisdom traditions. As such, it draws heavily on the work of these theorists, as well as that of Ken Wilber, David Deida, Clare Graves, Huston Smith, and David Hawkins.¹¹

Of necessity, the material has been simplified; in places, probably over-simplified – and this increases the risks of misapplying this content. So let’s talk about this risk.

The primary gift of developmental psychology¹² is that it helps us better understand how everyone is doing the best they know how, and how the rules change as we grow. **The primary challenge of developmental psychology is that this tool can also be used to judge some people or stages as superior to others.** When I first came across Ken Wilber, it felt like I’d found the answers to the universe – and then I found myself using his Integral Theory to justify why I was right, and my family’s religious beliefs were wrong. I was simultaneously trying to “convert” my father to my new beliefs, while also using those concepts to put his religion down. And I couldn’t understand why he was resisting!

So as you read, please take note of how our tendency towards judgment is **not** at the top of the pyramid. If you find yourself tempted to use these tools as weapons, either against yourself or against others, I invite you to breathe, connect with your intentions, and use this as an opportunity to step more fully into the Five Core Practices. Is an adult better than a child, just because they are more mature? Is someone who views the world by moonlight worse than someone who views it by the light of day? In a rainbow of Light, is purple better than green? We are all spiritual beings having a human experience, and our self-worth does not come from how aware we are of this Love. Our self-worth comes from our Authentic Self, and from the Love we already share.

Characteristic	Rules of this Stage
Stage of Love	Dependence
Types of Love	Dependence, lust
Core Needs	Physiological and safety needs
Primary Goal	Physical survival
Self As	Basic self (i.e. body, id)
Voices	Inner child, inner animal, raw emotions
Primary Rule	Survival of the fittest
Gifts/Challenges	Pain, fear, anger, desire
Key	Parental love

Love as Dependence

With that caveat and warning, I invite you to set your intentions for how you want to use this material, and then look at the table **Love as Dependence.** This summarizes some of the key characteristics of the first level of Love, which I label as Dependence.

As we look across the scope of human history, it can be easy to pass judgment on the savagery of man. Our history books often seem like just a long list of atrocities and pain. If we listen to Darwin, life is driven by a simple, solitary rule: survival of the fittest. And if we listen to B. F. Skinner and the behaviorist school of psychology, life is driven primarily by our instinctual drives to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

These observations can be accurate – up to a point. The first stage of our journey into Love **is** driven by our needs for physical survival, and our needs to receive loving from our caregivers. It **has** given us a legacy of savage violence. And it **is** sourced out of our most primitive, animalistic aspects. This first stage of evolution is decidedly uncivilized – it’s a raw, dangerous, fiery, passionate, chaotic, intense free-for-all. Tennyson captured this stage beautifully in his description “*Nature, red in tooth and claw.*”

In fact, for tens of thousands of years, the primary goal of civilization was to tame this beast called man, by whatever means necessary.¹³ And when it comes to our most basic self, the carrots and sticks of classical conditioning can be very effective. As my sister Shauna jokes, “parenting is really just an escalating series of bribes.”

At this stage, our sense of identification is very basic. When a two year old is angry, they **are** their anger. When a tribal hunter is stalking his quarry, they **are** their quest for food. And while it’s easy to look down on this stage, or see our physical drives as something we need to fight to control, this stage isn’t inferior or wrong.

For we all go through this stage. And while children can be little terrors, they’re also little treasures. They’re **lovable** little terrors, for children also come with an innocence, a purity, and a deep connection to Love. Children give us the opportunity to serve, and they can be some of our master teachers.

Our hunger for life, our anger, our fear, our pain, our desire – while in later stages these become among our greatest challenges, this is only because they’re also among our greatest gifts.

We all start at this level, and we all keep it within our selves as we grow. Our fight or flight reaction is always just a breath away, ready to meet danger with action – and so much of the rest of our journey is about how we relate to this reaction. Do we react by attacking it (i.e. meeting violence with violence, such as when we fight against our shadow or bodily needs)? Do we react by avoiding it (i.e. meeting fear with fear, such as when we run from our shadow)? Or do we learn how to meet it with more mature forms of love?

So with all this in mind, let’s take a look at the two primary types of love in this stage: dependence and lust.

Dependence

Dependent love is based on receiving love.

Priests, parents, and midwives agree – the arrival of a new baby is miraculous indeed. As infants, we arrive on the wings of angels, stunningly pure, breathtakingly innocent – and utterly helpless. As with the purr of a kitten, or the wag of a dog’s tail, babies evoke in us a tremendous desire to love them and care for them – and this is a very good thing, for as children we’re completely dependent on others for our survival.

In their innocent, dependent helplessness, there are few things more selfish than an infant child. From a physical perspective, they aren’t yet capable of doing anything more than striving to get their needs met; a good baby is a healthy baby, and a healthy baby is one whose many cries for help get taken care of. From the perspective of the external world, babies are absolute masters at receiving love and care – they are perfectly selfish, and perfect in their selfishness.

At the same time, something completely different is going on in their internal world. As far as we’re able to tell, infants have no separate sense of identity in their first months of life. They have no awareness of where their body ends and where the rest of the world begins. Internally, their experience is one of being one with the universe, of being one with Love – while also having all these strange new sensations such as hunger, pain, thirst and wetness. It’s hard to overstate a mother’s importance in the first 18 months of life, because as a child’s separate sense of “I” begins to emerge, some of our deepest wiring gets laid down, including our most fundamental decisions about whether or not our universe can be trusted – in a very real sense, our ability to trust is laid down in the first few years of life.

“Somewhere during the first year, the infant learns that if it bites a blanket it does not hurt, but if it bites its thumb, it hurts: there is a difference between body and matter.”

– Ken Wilber

A helpless infant provides an archetype for dependent love, a yearning to be taken care of, which we’ll carry in at least a part of our selves through the rest of our lives. Dependent love is a

beautiful, perfect manifestation of Love. And from one perspective it's simple – parents give and babies receive. However, it's also one of the clearest examples of the paradox of Love. While externally, babies are completely selfish, internally they're completely selfless. They're selfless in the most literal sense of the word, for there's no sense of separate "I," no independent sense of self, no ego for them to be concerned about. Babies call forth in us the desire to love them because, in their innocence, they haven't yet developed any sense of psychological separation from the Love that is our truest nature.

And yet, we're born completely helpless, with a long and intricate developmental journey ahead of us before we're first able to take of ourselves, and then take care of children of our own. And so with each birth, the great dance of spiritual progression, the grand challenge of integrating the physical and the spiritual, heaven and earth, survival and surrender, selfish and selfless – with each new birth, the twin games of life and love begin anew.

Lust

Lust is love as expressed through our species' biological need for reproduction.

Whether we're trying to get it, control it, avoid it, fantasize about it, use it, or prove to ourselves that we could get it if only we **really** wanted it, sex plays a remarkably pervasive role in our culture. One reason for this is that it's one of our most foundational needs; Maslow ranked our need for sex on a par with our needs for eating and sleeping.

Another reason is that **our desire for sex can be sourced out of any and all of our five levels of needs.** In its most primal form, sex is the expression of our species' need to reproduce and continue into the next generation. At the level of our safety needs, the institution of marriage was largely developed (in its original form) as a trade of sex for the protection of a woman and her children. At the level of our belonging needs, sex plays a pivotal part in our experiences of falling in love and building a family. At the level of

our esteem needs, entire industries are predicated on the notion that our sexual attractiveness (or the sexual attractiveness of our mate) is a primary yardstick for our self-worth. At the level of our spiritual or self-actualization needs, many people report lovemaking as among their highest peak experiences, and a number of spiritual traditions have canonized the highest expressions of sex as sacred steps along their spiritual paths.

When I use the word lust in this book, I'm talking about our most physically rooted sexual desires, rather than the act of sex itself. Many a couple has wrangled over the distinction between "having sex" and "making love," because in its most primal expression, lust can be a deeply selfish act. As many a beautiful young woman has learned to her dismay, many a testosterone-riddled young man will say or do almost anything to "get in her pants," including saying "*I love you*" when what he really means is "*I desperately need to get you naked so I can satisfy this crazy-making, brain-scrambling, body-curdling need inside me.*"

And while this remarkably powerful urge called lust has caused many conflicts, heartbreaks, divorces and wars, it's not a bad thing; for lust too is a form of Love, as filtered and experienced through our most physical, animalistic, basic selves.

To Mother Earth, job one is the survival and spread of the diverse life forms that populate her surface, and lust is simply a very effective tool that she uses to get this loving task done. When viewed through the eyes of an individual or a community, lust can be a very selfish act – one that often needs to be moderated and controlled. However, when viewed through a global lens, lust is also a very selfless force, through which individuals often end up placing the species' survival needs ahead of their own desires. Without the overpowering intensity of lust, it's unlikely that our species would be here today.

Dependent love is selfish when viewed externally, and selfless when viewed internally. Lust is selfish when viewed individually, and selfless when viewed globally. The physical world is one of opposites and extremes, and in its most physical manifestations,

Characteristic	Rules of this Stage
Stage of Love	Social acceptance
Types of Love	Falling in love, mutual dependence
Core Needs	Belonging
Primary Goal	Social survival
Self As	Social self (i.e. conscience, super-ego)
Voices	Inner teen, inner critic
Primary Rules	The golden rule, choose the right
Gift/Challenge	Judgment
Key	Self-discipline (of any type)

Love as Social Acceptance

Love really has its work cut out to bridge the gap between you and me, between selfish and selfless. And yet, bridge it does. While from one perspective these aspects of love are among the most selfish, they too demonstrate both the masculine and feminine sides of Love.

Love as Social Acceptance

Where dependence was rooted in our needs for physical survival, the stage of social acceptance is sourced from our needs for belonging and acceptance. It's source from our needs for **social survival** and approval.

The reason why love songs can get so dramatic is that in this stage, our whole sense of self can feel like it's dependent on what others think of us. At this stage of growth, our sense of identity and self-worth is largely based on the acceptance of others – our sense of self-esteem is actually more a sense of “other-esteem,” of being accepted and approved of by those we care about. In this stage, we don't see ourselves as we are. Instead, our sense of identity is created through the reflections of those around us. And so rejection can literally feel like a piece of us is dying.

This level of Maslow's hierarchy is often referred to as “*Love/Belonging*,” perhaps because falling in love and mutually dependent love are the most common types of romantic love, and are what people most commonly think about when they talk about love. But falling in love doesn't last, and while this level of love is more mature than lust and dependency, it's still significantly rooted in fear and judgment.

This stage is marked by a focus on developing a healthy conscience, and by a fairly black and white sense of morality. It involves learning how to reward ourselves when we “choose the right” and how to punish ourselves when we “choose the wrong.” It's the stage of learning how to act in a “civilized fashion,” of putting on faces and masks in order to fit in, and of learning how to use the Cattle Prod of Guilt to tame our baser instincts. This stage is illustrated by chivalry, Hollywood romance, fire and brimstone, and discipline as punishment. It typically has a strong focus on behaviors and actions, and its “golden rule” is often stated as “*do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*”¹⁴ Where in the later stage of interdependence, we see a deeper cut of this teaching, with its focus on “*love thy neighbor as thyself.*”¹⁵

One of the biggest tasks of this stage is to learn how to master our sense of judgment, in order to build a healthy conscience and sense of guilt. Again, this is one of our greatest gifts, which then becomes one of our greatest challenges in later stages of development. For this stage is also where we learn to associate discipline with punishment, and where we become addicted to pain.¹⁶

Falling In Love

While falling in love is often held to be the ultimate goal of love, this is an illusion. For while it provides a taste of coming attractions, **falling in love is based on a temporary collapse of ego boundaries, rather than on a stable, integrated experience of mature love and interdependence.**

Our sense of self doesn't really start until sometime in the first year after birth, when we first develop our initial sense of having an identity that is separate from the rest of what is. This is when we first start drawing a line in the sand between where "I" ends and "you" begins. And with this, it's also where we first start constructing psychological barriers to protect our fragile sense of "me" from the harsh world outside.

As we first start developing our individual ego, we also begin our experience of perceived separation and with it the deeply yearning pain of loneliness. While the first half of the spiritual journey requires growing and barricading our sense of self behind the masks, walls, defenses and beliefs of our ego; in our core, we yearn for that oneness with Love in which we were conceived; we continue to crave that perfect connection with Mother from which we were born.

As we grow from childhood into adolescence, not only do our physical bodies take a huge leap in development, so do our minds. The mass chaos politely termed as "high school" is characterized both by raging hormones, and by a radical new mental ability – the capacity for abstract thought, and with it the ability to take the perspective of another. Where a 10 year old sees the world in very concrete terms (i.e. "*my name is Jill, I am the daughter of my parents, and I live in a small suburb of Chicago*") a 14 year old is suddenly aware of – and acutely concerned with – how others might see them (i.e. "*my name is John, and I'm cool because I like the same bands as my friends, and because they think I can really thrash on a skateboard.*") With this stage of ego development comes a whole new level of self sufficiency, a whole new level of insecurity, a whole new level of perceived separation and loneliness – and a whole new way of filling our yearning to be loved.

In [The Road Less Traveled](#), M. Scott Peck explains that falling in love is based on the psychological process of "*cathexis*," the temporary collapse of ego boundaries. When we fall in love, some of our psychological walls suddenly fall away – if only for a time. After years of yearning for "the one" who will "complete me," after

years of loneliness behind the ever-larger barriers we've been creating between ourselves and the world, falling in love is like a temporary "get out of jail free" card. Suddenly, the world is right, we are one with our beloved, they are perfect and can do no wrong, we've found the one who will always love us and never leave us – suddenly, the world has turned around, and we **belong** with someone. And while from one perspective, falling in love is an illusion, a regressive disconnection from reality; from another perspective, falling in love is a spiritual gift – a glimpse of Love and a reminder that who we really are is much, much more than what our minds can imagine.

The challenge, of course, is that sooner or later we fall back out of love, and at this point we have a choice. We can either decide that this wasn't "the one" after all and go out looking for the rush of falling in love again, or else we can try and make the relationship work. One of the highest purposes of marriage is that it can create a structure that supports a couple in their commitment to Love – in their commitment to growing into ever higher and more integrated ways of Loving.

Falling in love could also be called "half-puzzle love," as it's characterized by "one half of a puzzle" finding what they perceive to be their "other half." This is more independent and self-sufficient than dependent love, while still being significantly based in lack and "not enoughness."

Similarly, if you look back at the **Ten Types of Love** picture, you'll notice that the two sides of the pyramid are a step closer together for falling in love than for dependence or lust. This form of love is more integrated than the last two, while still clearly showing huge swings between the "me" and "you" polarities of the paradox we call Love. People who fall in love have developed a much stronger sense of "who I am as a separate being" than children can (a sense of me), while also developing an initial ability to take the perspective of others (a sense of you). They are both more independent and more able to care for others than they were.

And yet, while the pendulum has a shorter distance to swing from me to you, from selfish to selfless, it's still quite the swing. Before falling in love, our egos keep us feeling fairly separate from others, and the majority of our caring is sourced out of our needs for belonging and social acceptance. Much of the process of becoming a healthy adolescent involves learning the things we "should" do in order to be a "good girl," and learning the things we "should not" do in order to avoid being a "bad boy." Sharing and selflessness are typically put very high on the "good" list – and rightly so. Learning to focus on others is a huge step in developing out of our dependency needs, and becoming a productive and acceptable member of society. At the same time, at this level of development, most of our motivations for acting selfless are still sourced in our selfish needs for acceptance. Whether we realize it or not, most of our actions at this level are deeply sourced in our concerns about what other people will think about us, in our desires to do and say the "right" things so that people will like us, and in our needs to belong.

When we fall in love, this selfishness then snaps to the other side as, at least in one area of our life, our masks and walls come tumbling down and we feel the euphoria of selfless union with another. However, because we have not yet developed a complete sense of independence and self-love, the experience of falling in love is still largely based on fusion (all we and no I) rather than Love (a paradoxical integration of both you, me and we). And so, after a taste of bliss, the walls come back up, the honeymoon ends, and the pendulum swings back more towards the selfish side of love.

Mutual Dependence

Mutually dependent love is based on a combination of dependent and independent love – **it's what happens when two "half-puzzles" find the other half that "completes" them.**

A great truth is that "*we must learn to love ourselves before we can truly love another.*" The mature love of interdependence happens between two "whole puzzles," who are already so happy

with themselves that while they want to be in relationship, they don't **need** to be in one. And yet, to a greater or lesser extent, we all feel like "partial puzzles" when we fall in love. We all come in to relationship with unresolved issues, wounds, fears, and other "stuff." We all have holes in our self-love, places where we haven't yet become fully independent, and aspects of ourselves that still just yearn to be taken care of by someone else. In fact, it's our wounds and our walls that create the opportunity to feel the joys of falling in love – if we were fully self-loving we wouldn't need to "fall" in love, because we'd already be there.

Interestingly, a large part of falling in love actually comes from finding someone whose unconscious wounds and insecurities compliment ours. Have you noticed how, after the honeymoon period ends, we inevitably discover that the partners we've attracted to us are also the ones who most "trigger us" and bring up our unresolved issues and childhood wounds? It's uncanny. Harville Hendrix describes this process in [Getting the Love You Want](#). "*But, no matter what their conscious intentions, most people are attracted to mates who have their caretakers' positive **and** negative traits, and, typically, the negative traits are more influential.*"¹⁷ Not only do we fall in love with those who have complimentary strengths – so too do we fall in love with those who have interlocking weaknesses.

If we think that the purpose of falling in love is to always be happy, then this makes no sense. For many of us, when we discover that we've attracted someone who triggers our deepest issues, we assume that we must have chosen the wrong partner. However, if we view love as being more about growth than just happiness, then we can see another option. By pulling people to us who trigger our deepest "learning edges," falling in love provides us with some of our greatest opportunities for our practice of acceptance, discipline, healing and growth.

We all feel like partial puzzles when we fall in love, and we all have unresolved issues which draw us into relationship. And so, to a greater or lesser extent, when we fall "out of love" and then make the decision to continue with the relationship, we all get to

experience at least a taste of a form of love I call “mutual dependence.”

Where dependent love typically happens with children, mutually dependent love involves adolescents or adults. Where children are still dependent on adults for their survival, couples who get married have usually demonstrated at least a basic level of self-sufficiency. But while we may or may not need to rely on our romantic partners for physical survival, there are usually places inside of us that feel like we depend on them for emotional survival.

This is illustrated in many of the common themes and phrases of love songs, such as Michael Bolton’s *“how am I supposed to live without you,”* Toni Braxton’s *“I would die if you decide you won’t see me again,”* and Whitney Houston’s *“I can’t live if living is without you.”* As a more extreme example, when battered women are asked why they won’t leave their husbands, a common response is *“I can’t – I love him too much”* or *“I can’t – I need him too much.”* And the responses from those who do the battering are remarkably similar to the responses of those who are battered.

If I’m half a puzzle, and you’re my other half, then the relationship we create is one of mutual dependence. In this, it often feels terrifying for us to even think about losing the aspects of our partner that accommodate, compliment, cover up, or “fill in” our holes. If my sense of belonging, affection and social acceptance comes primarily from being with you, then our relationship will naturally develop a *“I need you no matter what”* quality to it – and this is not a bad thing. The strength of mutually dependent love relationships is that they can be very stable – we may divide our roles in two, smooth out the rough edges where the pieces didn’t quite fit, create a single “whole puzzle,” and raise a “model family.” In order to protect ourselves from our fears of abandonment, we’ll often even cultivate areas of dependent helplessness in order to “lock” our partners more closely to us, such as when one of the partners finds themselves “unable” to balance their checkbook, make money, make dinner, or deal with the children’s teachers.

The challenge that comes with this strength is that our mutual dependence can make any changes to the status quo particularly frightening. If my partner starts growing in radical new ways, or starts filling in some of the holes in her self-love that bind her to me, in my fear I will often find myself unconsciously sabotaging her growth.

However, when it’s time for us to grow, the voice of Love tends to be very insistent, continually upping the ante until we master the lessons that we’re here to learn. As the earlier quote from Robert Quinn pointed out, we’re always either growing or dying, and one of our most fundamental decisions each day is whether to choose deep change or slow death.

Mutually dependent love supports the process of deep change by drawing us into relationships that bring up our deepest issues. And yet, it often makes this deep change all the more frightening. This dynamic can be seen in many marriages.

When it works well, the strong commitments formed by marriage can help create the safety and support necessary to face these fears, embrace the holes in our self-love, and do the growth and healing work required to move forward into the more mature and spiritual aspects of Love. In the more challenging cases, particularly for couples who as children experienced excessively poor parenting, deep wounding, neglect or abuse, mutual dependence can turn in to the addictive cycle of codependence.

Codependence creates addictive relationships, where both partners are unconsciously preventing the other from growing, but neither can leave the relationship. Caught between our needs for growth and our fears of change, one partner will often develop a physical addiction such as alcoholism, while the other partner spends ever more time and energy “covering” for and supporting them, confusing self-sacrifice and fear-based dependency with mature love. While the addict gets cast as the abusive “bad guy,” their partner ends up engaging in a series of subtle patterns which **enable** the addict’s behavior, and contribute to their inability to break free of their addiction – or of the relationship.

In this case, the statement “*I love them*” may be true, while also becoming ever more overshadowed by the greater truth that “*I’m too scared to leave them or to risk deep change in the relationship.*” And while the notion of an abused wife enabling her husband’s addiction may seem inconceivable to some, this common pattern is just a more extreme and out of balance example of the mutually dependent love that all of us experience at different times and to different degrees.

Like with falling in love, mutually dependent love strives to merge you and me through the use of **fusion**. Where infants are fully dependent and fused with their environment, with mutually dependent love the partners are partially independent (the whole pieces of the puzzle) and partially dependent (the missing pieces). While not as dramatic as the boundary shattering fusion of falling in love, much of the connection of mutual dependence comes from the “locking together” of the places where we feel we aren’t enough. This too is a natural and perfect stage, and the way forward into deeper closeness and more mature love lies not through becoming more enmeshed with each other (which leads to relationship addiction and codependency) but paradoxically, through becoming more independent. It involves each member developing a more complete sense of their self-love.

Love as Independence

Where the previous two stages were primarily about survival, independence is about success. This level is where the mind truly comes into its own, and learns how to question its own programming. “*I think therefore I am*” would make little sense to most 10 year olds, but to many independent adults, it sings in celebration of reason, self-determination, and free will.

Halfway between physical dependence and spiritual transcendence, this stage marks the pivotal fulcrum between building an ego and releasing it. This peak is seen in The Enlightenment, science, democracy, modern education, and capitalism. After decades of growth where our primary task was to

Characteristic	Rules of this Stage
Stage of Love	Independence
Types of Love	Self-love, mutual partnership
Core Needs	Self-esteem
Primary Goal	Success
Self As	Conscious self (i.e. reason, mind, ego)
Voices	Inner achiever, rationality, personal will
Primary Rules	Science, democracy, capitalism
Gifts/Challenges	Pride, belief
Keys	Personal responsibility, self-awareness

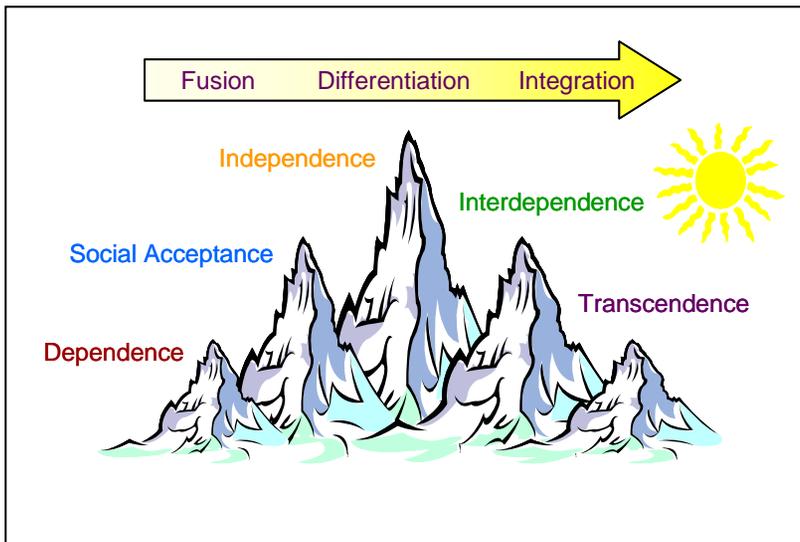
Love as Independence

develop ever more capabilities and self-control, this stage marks the pinnacle of the ego’s sense of importance – a powerful but fragile precipice that much of our society currently sits on the edge of.

This is illustrated in the figure **The Ego’s Perspective on Growth**. From the small self’s perspective, life is about physical, social, and psychological achievements. Where we started life in a pure but helpless state of fusion, the first half of our journey is about developing an ever-stronger sense of differentiation and self-determination. While this necessarily includes some “dips in the path” as we transition between stages, it’s easy for our mind to assume that future growth will simply be about finding ever higher peaks to climb. And this is where we often get stuck, when it turns out that this assumption just isn’t accurate.

This was the pattern I so enthusiastically demonstrated during my period of over-achievement and burnout (while leaving Brian-shaped holes in the brick walls I met along the way). In fact, even when we hit a spiritual crisis or awakening, our mind tends to see Love as another object to be conquered or achieved. Hence my ironic battle-cry, “*I will be the most humble person ever!*”

This peak marks perhaps the most radical transition in our entire path, from one of differentiation to one of integration. It marks the transition between science and traditional psychology,



which holds reason as its god, and spiritual psychology, which recognizes something More.¹⁸ It marks the turning point from the land of either/or to the ocean of both/and; from the Game of Life to the Game of Love; and from a focus on building to releasing. This is where we shift from **getting** love to **opening** ourselves to love, and from **receiving** to **giving**.

It's where we shift our focus from **finding acceptance** and **creating self-love** to **connecting with our Self-Love**. It's where we start shifting our identification from our personality to our Authentic Self. In doing so, our ego is not the enemy. Just as our body was not the enemy of social acceptance, and our conscience is not the enemy of independence, our ego is not the enemy of interdependence and transcendence. However, our ego is both a gift and a challenge.

For while our mind is a remarkable tool, in order to move forward, it must surrender its need to be the master. Our beliefs are essential to our worldly success, and yet mature love requires us to "get off our position," and surrender our ego's need to feel right about its beliefs.^{19-orange}

So this stage challenges us to learn how to deeply **question**, starting with our social masks and inherited dogmas, and then

moving on to the contents of our unconscious shadow. It pushes us to take 100% Personal Responsibility for our emotional reactions, eschewing the powerlessness of victim consciousness for the authentic power of emotional ownership. It requires us to move from pride to humility.

And as we do so, it requires us to develop our capacity for self-love and mutual partnership.

Self-Love

Self-love is based in learning to love ourselves, so that we can give to others from our overflow.

We first must learn to love our self before we can truly learn to love another, and so the road from dependence to the mature love of interdependence must necessarily travel through independence. If we look at Maslow's hierarchy again, we can see that this stage of love is sourced out of our "esteem needs." This raises a whole new set of ways we can get confused about what we think love means, for the relationship between self-esteem and self-love is often less than obvious.

While in hindsight things may not have been as bad as I thought, as a teenager I was absolutely **sure** that I was a desperately unpopular and unworthy nerd with very few friends, and even fewer prospects of dating the beautiful women who filled my dreams and carbonated my hormones. While my physical world was filled with an incredible family, a strong work ethic, and reasonable grades; my emotional world was filled with feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. I felt that I was "less than" those around me, and so my natural conclusion was that in order to fix this, I needed to prove that I was "better than" my peers. However, that didn't seem right either. I remember struggling to understand the relationships between self-love, self-esteem, insecurity, arrogance, and humility; and finding both insight and confusion.

So I threw myself into the one thing that seemed to help – my mono-maniacal quest to prove my self-worth through achievement and accomplishments. And while I was busy climbing the different

ladders of success, it seemed to help, at least for a time. However, my biggest crisis came not from failure but from success; from getting a glimpse at the top of these ladders; and realizing how ultimately empty each of them were.

Self-esteem refers to our self-image – how we think and feel about ourselves. And the most important key I discovered after many years of profound insecurity, achievement, addiction and burnout is that there are two sources of self-esteem – the practice of self-love, and the practice of superiority. So

“Interdependence is a choice only independent people can make. Dependent people cannot choose to become interdependent. They don’t have the character to do it; they don’t own enough of themselves.”

– Stephen Covey

much of our society is based on competition, and while this brings with it many gifts (such as the technological and material abundance that flows from capitalism, and the opportunities to hone our skills that come from competition) the challenge it comes with is the temptation towards superiority.

In the face of our feelings of insecurity, the easiest way to prop up our self-concept is to find ways of judging ourselves as superior to others. When in our innocence, we confuse success with self-worth, we naturally assume that self-esteem comes from winning more than everyone else (or being liked more than everyone else). So we often believe that if we just get more money, or another degree, or another promotion, then we’ll finally be better than the rest, and finally feel that we’re good enough. If we can just “win over” a more attractive spouse, “win over” another five friends, or “win over” the attention of those around us, then we’ll finally feel worthy.

The challenge is that we rarely ask “*worthy of what?*” And the unspoken answer is that our search for self-esteem is really a quest to prove ourselves worthy of Love. Yet love is all about connection, and whenever we create judgments that we’re better or worse than

others, we create perceived separation from the very thing we most crave. When we judge ourselves as superior we get a quick “hit” of superficial self-esteem, followed by a hangover as an even greater sense of separation kicks in, and we feel even more insecure and lonely that we did at the beginning. This addictive, vicious cycle is the essence of arrogance, where we keep seeking to put ourselves ever further above others in order to stave off our ever growing fears and feelings of unworthiness.

To different degrees, we often intuit the dangers in this pattern – arrogance is widely seen as ugly and unattractive. And so when someone offers us a compliment we may flip to the other side, and deny our greatness (“*oh no, that was just a fluke, I’m really not like that.*”) We naturally tend to assume that humility must be the opposite of arrogance, and so instead of trying to put ourselves as one-up, we put ourselves as one-down. While the easiest way to get a quick hit of **self-esteem** is to hold ourselves as **superior**, the easiest way to get a quick hit of **other-esteem** is to hold ourselves as **inferior**. In response to our cries that “*I’m not worthy,*” “*I’m helpless,*” or “*I’m a victim,*” our friends naturally try to reassure us by either commiserating with us (“*oh, you poor thing*”); by contradicting us (“*oh, no you’re not*”); or by complimenting us (“*oh, but you have so many great qualities*”). And while this feels

“It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.”

– Edmund Hillary

good for a moment, it too comes at the price of increased insecurity and pain – for the Light of God is great beyond imagining, and each time we deny our authentic greatness (that we all share, as spiritual beings having a human experience) we move ourselves a step further away from our awareness of this Love, rather than towards it.

False humility is the same as false self-esteem – the arrogance of judging that our minds know better than Reality. **True self-esteem and true humility both come from self-love** – from simultaneously accepting that we’re absolutely doing the best we

know how, while also practicing the loving self-discipline of learning how to do better.

In the stage of independence, we start out focused on climbing ever larger peaks, and on building a sense of **self-esteem** – usually through creating achievements, other-esteem, and judgments of superiority. Then the second half of this stage is also about self-esteem, but this time as sourced from a sense of **independent self-love**.

While beautiful and profound, this is still the love of our small self, by our small self, and for our small self. It's our ego and personality that's doing the loving. Then in the last two stages, as our ego surrenders control, this moves into a sense of **Authentic Self-Love**. As we remove more and more of our shadow, we release more and more of our negativity and ego-attachments, until we find ourselves resting in a Love Beyond Belief.

Exercise: What Do You Want?

Let's take a look at our drive for achievement, and what's underneath it.²⁰

In brainstorm fashion, quickly list some of the things in life you presently want to achieve or acquire.

I want to have...

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Now, go back and circle any items which meet the following two criteria. First, it matters a lot to you. Second, it's an external thing which you seek to have or acquire (i.e. a house, more money, marriage, a promotion, better health, etc.)

Take one of these circled items, and fill it into the "I want" blank below. Then, fill out the exercise, in rapid, free-association style. Each question refers to the answer above it.

For example, "I want \$1,000,000," would be followed by the question "what's the experience you're looking for (in getting \$1,000,000)?" This answer might be "feeling valuable," in which case the next question would be "what's another way you could get this (feeling valuable)?" This answer might be "accept myself." And "what's the experience you're looking for (in accepting myself)?" could lead to "not feeling insecure" At the end, your answers to the experience question may start to repeat, in which case you know you've gotten to your "bottom line" desire.

I want _____ (i.e. I want \$1,000,000)

What's the experience you're looking for?

_____ (i.e. feeling valuable)

What's another way you could get this?

_____ (i.e. accept myself)

What's the experience you're looking for?

_____ (i.e. not feeling insecure)

What's another way you could get this?

_____ (i.e. let go of my judgment)

What's the experience you're looking for?

_____ (i.e. self-love)

What's another way you could get this?

_____ (i.e. release my shadow)

What's the experience you're looking for?

_____ (i.e. love)

What did you learn from this exercise?

After doing this exercise enough times, many people discover that underneath their external, physical desires (the things we want to **have**) what they most want are internal, emotional or spiritual desires (how we want to **be**). Common “bottom line” answers include joy, freedom, peace, acceptance, and love – some of the many fruits that come from connecting with this mystery we call Love. A key step in choosing up, particularly at this stage of love, comes in moving from “*have, do, be*” to “*be, do, have*.” In the first half of our growth, we tend to focus on **having** the things we want, in order to be able to **do** certain things, which in turn we think will let us feel the way we want to **be**. For example, “*I want to find ‘The One’ (have) so I can get married (do) and experience the love I want (be).*” Then in the second half of our journey, we learn to go directly for what we want – to focus on how we want to **be**, recognizing that this will naturally empower us to **do** and **have** the things we want. It comes from shifting our focus from the means to the ends. And it comes as we shift from an **outside-in** to an **inside-out** approach to life.

Mutual Partnership

Mutual partnership is about an even and fair exchange of love.

The two most physical levels of love primarily involve a focus on **what we can get**. The two most spiritual levels focus more on **what we can give**. In this middle level, the way we love others is marked by a sense of **how we can trade** with others. Where this level of love still sees the world through the eyes of scarcity, with its either/or, win/lose perspective, mutual partnership strives to seek fair deals. It creates partnerships where we get our needs met in return for meeting the needs of others.

Interestingly, one of the clearest examples of this form of love is in the realm of ethical business. While business leadership comes with its own set of challenges and temptations, and there are many people who try and get ahead in business by cheating; the most fundamental currency of business is trust. The value of a brand such as McDonald's or Coca-Cola is equal to the total amount of trust consumers have; their trust that each time they walk in to a McDonald's restroom or open a can of Coke, they will consistently get the positive experience they're expecting. And as Steven M. R. Covey explains in *The Speed of Trust*, businesses pay a “trust tax” wherever trust is compromised – a tax that directly and dramatically impacts the bottom line.²¹

While advertisers often resort to “interesting” practices in their attempts to connect us to their products, notice how quickly and thoroughly the biggest brands recall their products on the occasions when they become tainted, and how much influence the threat of trust-eroding bad publicity has over their actions.

When played according to the rules of the game, the primary competition in capitalism is over who can deliver the most value to the most consumers in a profitable way. As Fred Kofman explains:

“There are those who see the free market as an enemy. But the market is an invaluable instrument for human development. Every act of commerce is an act of mutual service. Even though it can be motivated by personal interest, the market system channels that selfish energy towards assisting others.”²²

If a product doesn't provide value, then the more it's marketed, the faster people learn not to buy it again. And while the competition between sellers can be ferociously selfish, something magical happens in the marketplace – this self-interest is turned into service. Nordstrom's is legendary for their customer service, and it pays. Their average customer spends \$5000 a year with them, and lasts 20 years – that's \$100,000 they receive for each loyal new customer that their impeccable service creates.²³

Mutual partnership is based on “enlightened self interest,” the realization that one of the best ways to consistently get what we want over time is to make sure that we respect others' needs equally with our own. This is the love of intelligently independent people, all seeking to maximize their own long-term happiness in the most efficient ways. Anthony Robbins describes this form of love as “horse trading” – and it works. For all their challenges, capitalism and democracy have generated more economic wealth, freedom, and political stability than all other political-economic systems combined.

Where romantic relationships in the previous stage are primarily about falling in love, in this stage they're more about getting a “good deal.” We work to construct and improve our “dating resume” and then search for someone whose marriage qualifications are at least as good as we think ours are. Dating can feel like a job interview, and relationships can feel more like a corporate merger. And this is not a bad thing. Consciously choosing who we want to be with will often produce better long term results than the relatively unconscious process of falling in love with someone whose wounds match ours. However, most of us also yearn for passion, which comes more from the stages that either precede or follow this one.

More than any other, this stage is defined by our independence and autonomy, and so it offers less yearning to be in relationship than does mutual dependence or interdependence. Healthy partnerships are understandable, respectful, honoring, and predictable. At the same time, sexual chemistry comes from the

tension of unresolved polarities, and a risk of mutual partnership is that it can turn a steamy romance or passionate marriage into a close but platonic friendship.

This provides a major challenge for many of the single “30-somethings” in our culture today, who after building their self-esteem and career now want to get married – but find that their relationships are always missing that “special something.” Luckily, relationships are not sourced out of only a single stage of love at a time.

Relationships, and romantic relationships in particular, often include many different forms of love at the same time – this is part of what makes them so interesting. The challenge is that the rules and dynamics of each form of love are radically different, from the raw need of lust to the desire to give that comes with service. Plus, we usually don't understand what's happening, or when the rules change.

One day a couple may be sharing the fair and respectful love of mutual partnership when a fearful piece of one of them gets “triggered” and they drop in to place of defensiveness and mutual dependence. All of a sudden, it's like we're in a whole different relationship, and it seems like our partner is violating all the implicit agreements we've created together. Wait, we scream – “*that's not the deal!*” It is – but it's not the deal we're thinking of, it's the deal our mutually dependent aspects made. And so when we talk about “lust,” “mutual dependence” or “mutual partnership,” it's important to realize that while a given relationship may spend the majority of its time in one or two forms of love, we carry a wide range of capacities to love within us.

In the dance of Love, our steps and costumes may stay the same for years, or they may change five times in a night. And if we wish to devote ourselves to the art of loving, we would be well served to take lessons in all the different styles of Love. For each is an important part of the Great Dance, and each will be featured during its own sections of our grand journey Home.

Characteristic	Rules of this Stage
Stage of Love	Interdependence
Types of Love	Growth, service
Core Needs	Self-actualization
Primary Goal	Fulfillment
Self As	Higher self (i.e. heart)
Voices	Intuition, wisdom, voice of the heart
Primary Rule	Love thy neighbor as thyself
Gift/Challenge	Spiritual experiences
Key	Releasing our unconscious shadow

Love as Interdependence

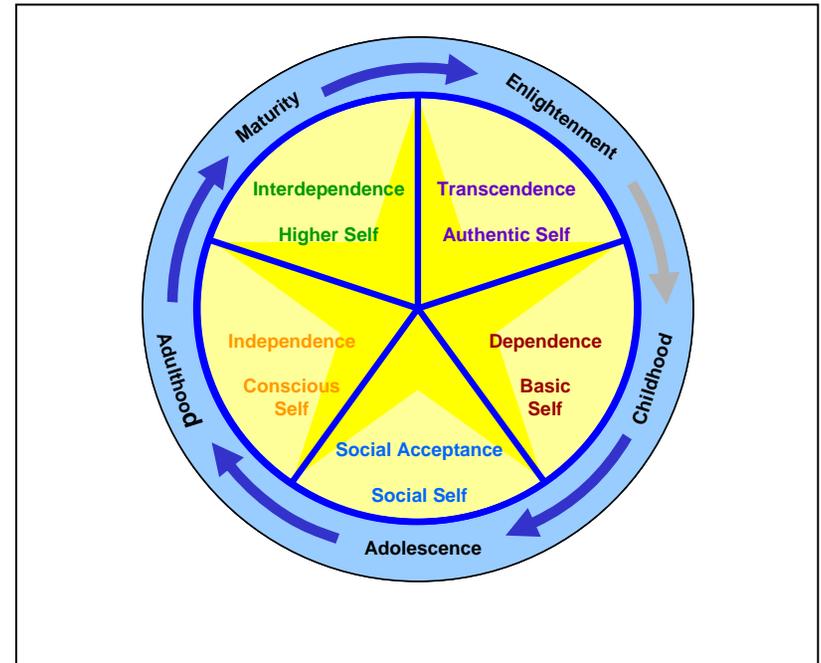
Love as Interdependence

While independence is where we first start the shift from building an ego to releasing it, interdependence is where this process of integration, shadow release, and surrender really gets under way. Where independence was primarily concerned with success, interdependence is primarily concerned with fulfillment – with questions of meaning and purpose. And its process is largely one of putting our conscious and unconscious minds in service to Love.

Because this is such a shift, and because our shadow's repression is so powerful, we tend to fight this transition. It can be greatly facilitated through our service practices, including our service as parents. Yet for many of us, it takes a major crisis before we're ready to even begin looking at the deeper issues in our shadow.

Like the others, this stage can involve a lot of work and challenges, but it also comes with a much greater experience of happiness, love, joy, and peace.²⁴ The more we evolve, the better we tend to feel.

Where the ego tends to see things in terms of linearity, ladders, and separation, the heart tends to see things more from a perspective of holism, cycles, and connection. Where the ego may see growth



as a series of mountains to climb, the heart is more likely to see it as a set of pieces to connect. This is shown in the figure **The Heart's Perspective on Growth**. We are multi-dimensional beings, with many different aspects, voices and sub-personalities. You have a Basic Self (i.e. your body) Social Self (i.e. your conscience) Conscious Self (i.e. your mind or ego) Higher Self (i.e. your heart) and Authentic Self (i.e. your soul or Spirit). And you have the potential to connect with each aspect at any time. Yet somehow, in a way that's hard for the mind to understand, our growth involves a process of first fragmenting our awareness of these pieces, and then bringing them back together in Love. We first build an ego, while shoving our unacceptable pieces down in our shadow. Then we bring those pieces back in to the Light, love them, and integrate them in to a Whole.

As we do so, we start becoming aware of the miraculous. We may connect with a sense of spiritual intuition and direct knowing. We may experience remarkable synchronicities, where the world feels like it's conspiring in our favor. We may experience

spontaneous healing, paranormal events, or other events that transcend science's understanding.²⁵ We may have mystical or spiritual "peak experiences," where we suddenly "Get It."

While we can have spiritual experiences at any stage, they become a particular gift and challenge at this stage. For they also come with the tendency towards **spiritual pride**, where our smaller selves try to take credit for our Authentic Self's greatness. Our mind regularly tries to use our greater **awareness** of Love to claim that it's more **worthy** of Love. Put another way, it confuses the self-love of the personality with the Self-Love that comes from resting in who we most Are, as spiritual beings having a human experience. Our ego regularly tries to turn our spiritual experiences into a tool for its own exaltation, rather than as an opportunity for surrender and humility.²⁶ This is not wrong. It's an opportunity. Our tendency towards spiritual pride presents us with consistent opportunities to continue coming back to the Question of Love, to continue releasing our shadow, and to continue surrendering our ego's attachments into Love.

And it gives us the opportunity to practice mature love, in the forms of service and growth.

Service

Love as service is about giving from our overflow.

Where each of the prior forms of love contained an aspect of deficiency, service stems from abundance. For as we master the more physical forms of love, and learn to fill our own cup of self-love, eventually our love jar begins to run over – and in that overflow, we're naturally called to give our excess away. As we do so, a miracle happens, for we find that the more love we give away, the more we receive. Whereas mutual dependent love gives because we "should" do so, even though it

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

feels like a sacrifice, and the love of mutual partnership gives because we realize it's in our best interest, service gives for the joy of giving itself.

For most of my life, one of my deepest self-judgments was that I was too selfish. I believed that if I was truly a good person, I would be out feeding the homeless rather than selfishly focusing on my own needs. I constantly compared myself to my Mormon family and their community (which is **amazing** in their commitment to service) and consistently came up short. Even when I did take actions that served others, a piece of me was worried that there wasn't enough love to go around, and so was always looking for what I was going to get in return. However, as I selfishly learned how to take care of my needs, heal my wounds, release my self-judgments, and develop my own sense of authentic self-love, I began to have tastes of what it means to truly serve. Wow! Talk about joy and fulfillment! Now, my selfless service practices are among the most selfish things I do in my life. And my selfish practices of self-nurturing are among my most important tools for being able to selflessly give from my overflow.

Service is the place where love first starts crossing over into Love, for this is the place where I and We first truly demonstrate the miracle of merging while also remaining separate, and where the most selfish things we can do are also the most selfless. Service from a place of abundance is a primary hallmark of mature love; something the Mormon women in my extended family "get" exceedingly well. When my mother Zina dropped everything to move to an unknown town with an unknown man to raise two unknown children, she knew in her huge, overflowing heart that her choice was less about what she could get, and more about what she could give. As a doting grandmother of eleven (and counting), she wisely points out that our choice of spouse, just like our choice to raise children, is ultimately about selecting who we want to spend our lives serving. And while we'll naturally have times where our younger aspects come forward, and service feels more like a sacrifice, these challenges are among our greatest opportunities to

grow in our practices of love. For when we develop a practice of being of Service (Power Tool #20) something magical happens. Our heart expands and we grow. And while Service can cause challenges if we seek to use it as a **substitute** for self-love, it can be a tremendous gift when we use it as a **compliment** to self-love.

Mutual partnership practices looking for win/win opportunities, while still seeing the world through our physical eyes, with their perception of scarcity. Service begins to see through the eyes of Love. And in this place, everything changes. For while our mind and body see the world in terms of opposites – in terms of win/lose, right/wrong, good/bad, and pleasure/pain – to our spiritual heart, all is One. When seen through our spiritual eyes, everything we see is here to support us, everyone is doing the best we know how, we're all perfectly spiritual beings having a human experience, and everything is an opportunity to serve the Highest Good.²⁷

Growth

Love as growth is the hand of Evolution, as Spirit-In-Action, pushing, pulling, and calling us Home.

If we look at science's understanding of our physical universe, from the Big Bang to present, from the smallest particles to the largest galaxies, and from the simplest components to the most complex societies, the two most fundamental things we can observe about our physical world is that it exists – and that it evolves.²⁸

Defying all common sense and decency, this stardust from which we're crafted has proven remarkably frisky. And while many of us scientists continue to worship at the Altar of Chance, the beautiful little secret behind the scientific theory of evolution is that while it can explain the little steps of evolution within a species, it boggles the mind to imagine how naked chance could explain the grand leaps between species – or how there came to be any species at all.²⁹ Einstein, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Planck, Pauli – there has been a long and

"Evolution is the hand of Spirit-In-Action."

– Ken Wilber

suspicious trend among many of our greatest physicists, that the deeper they've gone in to their understanding of our universe, the more miraculous, mysterious and spiritual they've found it to be.

Similarly, if we look at religions' understanding of our spiritual universe, from the east to the west, from the ancient to the modern, and from the most liberal to the most conservative, the two most fundamental things we can observe about our spiritual world is that we were created – and that we're here to learn how to love.

Simultaneously embracing and defying the chaos and suffering which permeates our world, the great wisdom traditions unite in their astonishing exclamation that *"All Is Well, All Is Well."* And while our history is scarred with page upon page of religious wars and conflicts, the beautiful little secret behind our theological arguments is that if we strain the great wisdom traditions through the intention of mutual understanding, what emerges is a set of common, core metaphysical claims about the greater nature of Reality.

As described by the Perennial Philosophy, this includes the core assertion that:

*"All humans possess a capacity, however unused and thus atrophied, for intuitive perceptions of ultimate or absolute truth, and the nature of reality. This perception is the final goal of human beings, and its pursuit and flourishing are the purpose of their existence. The major religions try to (re)establish the link between the human soul and this higher and ultimate reality. This ultimate reality, in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), is called God; God is the Absolute principle from which all existence originated and to which all existence will return. Non-theistic religions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Taoism, may characterize the ultimate or absolute somewhat differently than the Abrahamic religions, but the fundamental concept is the same."*³⁰

In other words, **our ultimate purpose is to grow in our awareness and expression of Love.**

While in our battles between “creation vs. evolution” we may disagree on the details of **how** evolution works, we’re really arguing about two sides of the same coin. Where science has focused primarily on the **external** aspects of evolution, spirituality has focused primarily on its **internal** aspects. Yet whichever side of this coin we concentrate on, one of the most fundamental things we all seem to agree on is that the most important, most meaningful, most fundamental aspects of life involve growth. And this makes sense, because growth is one of the most fundamental aspects of Love.

Like the other forms of love, growth straddles the gap from selfish to selfless, as Love calls to us, sings to us, yearns for us to grow, to evolve, to walk the path from focusing on the most physical to the most spiritual aspects of Love. When we help another to grow on their path, we’re practicing love. When we step into our own growth, we’re practicing love. Our need to grow is both one of the highest manifestations of Love, as well as the strong current rushing through each stage of love, ever pushing us upwards and onwards. And while it often feels hard, painful, and even terrifying, ultimately our growth is one of the greatest measures of a life well lived. In the words of Kahlil Gibran:

"The process of the good life is not, I am convinced, a life for the fainthearted. It involves stretching and growing, becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be."

– Carl Rogers

*When love beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.
And when he speaks to you believe in him,
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind
lays waste the garden.*

*For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.
Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun,
So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.*

*Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.
He threshes you to make you naked.
He sifts you to free you from your husks.
He grinds you to whiteness.
He kneads you until you are pliant;
And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast.*

All these things shall love do unto you that you may know the secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment of Life's heart.

*But if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure,
Then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness and pass out of love's threshing-floor,
Into the seasonless world where you shall laugh, but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears.
Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself.
Love possesses not nor would it be possessed;
For love is sufficient unto love.³¹*

Love as Transcendence

As we enter this “final stage” of Love, we find language to be less and less useful. We may use words like mystic, saint, Enlightenment, “heaven on earth,” or savior. Or we may look to the lives of our greatest spiritual teachers, in the hopes of getting a glimpse of our spiritual opportunity and destiny. Love is a mystery, and as we surrender into the arms of our Authentic Self, we find ourselves peering through fresh eyes – brand new eyes that have

always been. James Fowler called this the stage of “Unitive Faith,” and described it as follows.

“Persons best described by [Unitive faith] typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy. Their heedlessness to self-preservation and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent and moral and religious actuality give their actions and words an extraordinary and often unpredictable quality. In their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice. In their penetration through the obsession with survival, security, and significance they threaten our measured standards of righteousness and goodness and prudence. ... And their leadership initiatives, often involving strategies of nonviolent suffering and ultimate respect for being, constitute affronts to our usual notions of relevance. It is little wonder that persons best described by [Unitive faith] so frequently become martyrs for the visions they incarnate.”

“[Unitive faith] is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. ... The rare persons who may be described by this stage have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us. ... When asked whom I consider to be representatives of this [Unitive faith] outlook I refer to Gandhi, to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the last years of his life and to Mother Teresa of Calcutta.”³²

In embracing our Authentic Self, we release the greatest of our gifts and challenges – our sense of duality, with its polarities of good and evil, you and me, physical and spiritual, and even existence and non-existence. We surrender our final attachments and release our

Characteristic	Rules of this Stage
Stage of Love	Transcendence
Types of Love	Compassion, peace
Core Needs	Love
Primary Goal	Love
Self As	Authentic Self (i.e. soul, Spirit, Love)
Voices	The Witness, Spiritual Will
Primary Rule	Love
Gift/Challenge	Duality
Key	Surrender

Love as Transcendence

identification with anything less than Love. And as we move towards this place, we experience compassion and Peace.

Compassion

Compassion is a Love based on the simultaneous embrace of the majesty of our inherent divinity and the suffering of our human experience.

Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi – compassion has been the defining feature in the lives of many of our most inspiring spiritual figures. There’s something about compassion that resonates so deeply inside us that even witnessing it in others can shake us to our core. But when we try to talk about it, things get much muddier – what exactly is compassion? My favorite dictionary definition for compassion is *“deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it.”*³³ Looking at the two words it’s made from (“com-“: meaning with or together, and “passion“: meaning an intense emotion) gives us another definition, *“to suffer with another.”* When we think of compassion, we often think of someone sacrificing their inner peace in order to help someone less fortunate, or we may think of a painful experience we “should” be having more of.

Similarly, I've long been struck by the quote from a spiritual master that *"the only emotion left to a fully realized being is infinite, unbearable compassion."*³⁴ When I hear this quote it tends to bring up feelings of both inspiration and fear – a desire to open my heart more fully, coupled with a fear of the intense pain that I worry would come with it. So I asked one of my teachers the question *"does compassion hurt?"* This led to some beautiful conversations, along with a discussion of how hard a question it is to answer.

As we move from the more physical manifestations of love to the spiritual majesty of Love, we naturally find it harder and harder to describe what we're talking about in words. For underlying our words is our experience of opposites – that for there to be happy there must be sad, for there to be good there must be evil, and for there to be right there must be wrong. And yet Love is where the opposites meet in ways our mind cannot fully comprehend. Discussions of compassion must necessarily be shrouded in mystery – and yet let us still make an attempt to "point towards" the Love that the great spiritual masters praise with such clarity and communion.

In doing so, a key distinction that comes forward is between **compassion** and **sympathy**. At its spiritual core, compassion is a "sitting with" rather than a "standing over." Compassion is devoid of judgments, pity, or superiority. When we're in sympathy, we're both opening our heart to someone in love; while also judging (usually unconsciously) that *"I'm sure glad that isn't happening to me."* Sympathy is a beautiful form of love, and at the same time it "stands over" those we bestow it on. It offers care and charity on the one hand, while subtly claiming the separation of superiority and "rightness" on the other.

"One measure – and perhaps the best measure – of a person's greatness is the capacity for suffering. Yet the great are also joyful. This, then, is the paradox. Buddhists tend to ignore the Buddha's suffering, and Christians forget Christ's joy."

– M. Scott Peck

Sympathy is compassion combined with judgment – compassion combined with the judgments that naturally come from seeing the world through the eyes of scarcity. Sympathy is a desire to help relieve others' suffering, combined with the belief that their suffering is wrong, that God shouldn't let this happen, or that in their suffering they are somehow "less than" us. For as beautiful as sympathy is, in unconsciously holding another as a victim, we're innocently chaining them to their smallness, and attempting to strip them of their personal power. And when in our humanity we judge others as less than Love, in the same breath we also deny our own True Name.

In contrast, when Mother Teresa walked the streets of Calcutta ministering to the dead and dying, when she cradled lepers in her arms that others wouldn't even approach, she didn't do this from a sense of obligation, a sense of pity, or a sense of burden; for her life was filled with joy. Mother Teresa was acutely aware of the suffering in this world, profoundly called to do what she could to help alleviate it, and ecstatically fulfilled in her path of service. Yet simultaneously, her journals reveal her extended struggle with what has been called a "dark night of the soul."³⁵

"The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God."

– St. Teresa of Avila

Where others saw objects to be pitied or scorned, Mother Teresa saw radiant, perfect spiritual beings whose human experiences were filled with pain. And while we may judge the heights of her compassion as out of our reach, we're only able to see greatness in others when we carry that same greatness as well.

In talking about compassion, another key distinction is between **care** and **over-care**. When we care for others, we're naturally called to serve them, and to offer our assistance in helping them in

their process of lifting themselves out of their suffering. Yet while we can love another, while we can sit with them in their pain, and while we can offer them our help, none of us have the power to save another. While our pain is often larger than we can handle on our own, at the same time, no human being can take it from us.

The definition of an addict is someone caught in a negative pattern that is more powerful than their personal will to stop it. Without a greater Love to support them, no addict can break free from their addiction; and at the same time, no one but an addict can make the choice to become free. We're each addicted to our own patterns of negativity, to our own cycles of suffering; we all need Love before we can become free, and yet no one can force us to accept this Love in to our hearts. We can't force our love on anyone, and we can't save anyone from their suffering. When in our innocence we forget this, we naturally fall in to over-care, where we attempt to take on the burdens of others that are not our own.

Compassion comes from a place of deep awareness of others' suffering; from a place of wanting to serve others' in our Love for them; while also avoiding a sense of over-responsibility, or of needing to take on their suffering as our own. The empathy that comes with compassion always maintains an "as if" quality, where we're able to deeply resonate with another's emotions, without mistaking them as our own. Sympathy, on the other hand, springs out of more dependent forms of love, and often becomes linked with enmeshment, enabling, and codependence. I can not stress too many times that this is not a bad thing. Sympathy is a beautiful manifestation of Love; and at the same time, compassion vibrates at a higher octave, it sings with a clearer voice, it dances to a drummer that is even more divine.

Compassion exalts in its dance along the razor's edge. And in our core, we all carry the seeds of this compassion, for like a clear mountain stream, compassion emerges from the wellspring of Love that is our deepest essence. When we rest in this place of compassion, we're able to open our hearts to others' suffering, without mistaking their pain for our own. When we rest in this place

of compassion, we're able to devote our lives to assisting others, without clinging to whether or not they "get" the gifts we offer them. When we rest in this place of compassion, we're able to embrace the perfect authentic greatness of each spiritual being we meet without invalidating the suffering that comes with their human experience. We're able to accept the awesome responsibility that comes with our greater awareness, without seeking to rob others of the spiritual learning opportunities they've come here to master. We're able to Love the abused, without it diminishing our Love for the abuser. We're able to hold to our profound understanding of how in our innocence and humanity we create suffering, without pretending that our little minds are capable of judging the spiritual purposes of what we see.

When we rest in this place of compassion, we're able to transcend the seeming differences between happy and sad, between joy and pain, between I and We; and connect with an open-hearted pain so exquisitely ecstatic that we never want it to end.

Please Call Me By My True Names

*Don't say that I will depart tomorrow-
even today I am still arriving.*

*Look deeply: every second I am arriving
to be a bud on a Spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings,
learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.*

*I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
to fear and to hope.*

*The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death
of all that is alive.*

*I am a mayfly metamorphosing
on the surface of the river.*

*And I am the bird
that swoops down to swallow the mayfly.
I am a frog swimming happily*

*in the clear water of a pond.
 And I am the grass-snake
 that silently feeds itself on the frog.
 I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
 my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.
 And I am the arms merchant,
 selling deadly weapons to Uganda.
 I am the twelve-year-old girl,
 refugee on a small boat,
 who throws herself into the ocean
 after being raped by a sea pirate.
 And I am the pirate,
 my heart not yet capable
 of seeing and loving.
 My joy is like Spring, so warm
 it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth.
 My pain is like a river of tears,
 so vast it fills the four oceans.
 Please call me by my true names,
 so I can hear all my cries and laughter at once,
 so I can see that my joy and pain are one.
 Please call me by my true names,
 so I can wake up
 and the door of my heart
 could be left open,
 the door of compassion.*

- Thich Nhat Hahn³⁶

Peace

Love as Peace is an infinitely glorious, infinitely integrated, infinitely indescribable Presence.

As we look at the last of the ten forms of love laid out in this section, it's important to note that this list is not meant to be either comprehensive or "correct." When a beam of light turns into a rainbow, who can say exactly where blue ends and green begins?

The intention of this chapter has not been to define the exact frequencies and colors of Love, or to capture the Infinite and reduce it to words. Rather, the intention has been to paint a picture with these colors, a picture which inspires and informs. There are many more types and colors of Love than we've discussed here. Indeed, in its broadest definition, everything we experience is Love – reflections from the Light of the Infinite as viewed through the finite filters of our humanity. And if the reports from the many saints and mystics are to be believed, the highest reaches of Love are far, far, far beyond what our minds can imagine.

However, while the **destination** of Love may literally be beyond belief, perhaps we can discern a **direction** to Love – a gradient or pattern we can use as a tool on our diverse paths. In fact, Huston Smith, the great wise man of comparative religion, has already laid out three. In *The World's Religions*, after taking his readers through a remarkably loving, even-handed and respectful journey through the essential truths from each of the world's major religions, he concludes his book with eight of the most breath-taking pages I've ever read.

He starts by asking three key questions.

*“First, how are we to **gestalt** or pattern the religions we have considered? Having listened to them individually, what do we now take to be their relationship to one another? Second, have they anything to say collectively to the world at large? Third, how should we comport ourselves in a world that is religiously pluralistic where it is religious at all?”*

He then both allows for and touches on the challenges inherent in two polarized responses to these questions – on the one hand that one religion is superior to all others, and on the other that there are no essential differences between the different faiths. As a third alternative, he offers us a middle way, which walks between and integrates these two extremes.

“But if we pass a strainer through the world’s religions to lift out their conclusions about reality and how life should be lived, those conclusions begin to look like the winnowed wisdom of the human race.”

After summarizing the key points this distilled wisdom offers us in regards to **ethics** and **virtues**, Huston Smith then turns to **vision** – to the ultimate nature of reality. And here his love and discernment of the great wisdom traditions brings forward three core, shared themes, which run through the heart of Reality.

“The religions begin by assuring us that if we could see the full picture we would find it more integrated than we normally suppose. Life gives us no view of the whole. We see only snatches here and there, and self-interest skews our perspective grotesquely. Things that are close to us assume exaggerated importance, while the rest we view with cold dispassion. It as if life were a great tapestry, which we face from its wrong side. This gives the appearance of a maze of knots and threads, which for the most part appear chaotic.”

*“The second claim the wisdom traditions make about reality is implied by the first. If things are pervaded by a grand design, they are not only more integrated than they seem, they are also better than they seem. ... If the upshot of astronomy is its verdict that the universe is **bigger** than human senses disclose, the conclusion of the wisdom traditions is that it is **better** than our sensibilities discern. And better by comparable degree, which means that we are talking about the value equivalent of lightyears here. T’ien and the Tao, Brahman and nirvana, God and Allah all carry the signature of **ens perfectissium** – perfect being. This causes the wisdom traditions to flame with an ontological exuberance that is nowhere else to be found. ... The sheer immensity of the human self as envisioned by the world’s religions is awesome.”*

*“Beyond the unity of things and their inestimable worth is the wisdom traditions’ third report. Reality is steeped in ineluctable mystery; we are born in mystery, we live in mystery, and we die in mystery. ... A mystery is that special kind of problem for which the human mind **has** no solution; the more we understand it, the more we become aware of additional factors relating to it that we do not understand. In mysteries what we know, and our realization of what we do not know, proceed together; the larger the island of knowledge, the longer the shoreline of wonder.”*

“Things are more integrated than they seem, they are better than they seem, and they are more mysterious than they seem; something like this emerges as the highest common denominator of the wisdom traditions’ reports.”

If we look back at the painting of Love spread across the preceding pages; as we consider how the dynamics of Love change during its evolution from the physical to the spiritual; these same three trends emerge as three of the greatest hallmarks of Love. As we evolve in our experience and practice of Love, things become more integrated, more wonderful, and more mysterious; for we can see that the direction that Love points towards is marked by an increasing level of **integration, improvement, and mystery**.^{37-orange} Together, these directions point to something amazing – towards a Love Beyond Belief.^{38-yellow}