



Friend

BY **KIM K. CRAWFORD HARVIE**, SENIOR MINISTER,
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Water, shelter, food ... and a friend. A friend can save your life.

Rev. Dan Kane was cooking, I was washing, and what happened next was definitely my fault, although he says “we” broke it. Drying on the counter was a hand-painted platter

that Dan and Darin had brought home from Italy, a large, expensive piece of pottery with significant sentimental value. And “we”—that is, I—somehow unsettled it and it dropped like a little bomb onto their kitchen floor, shattering into shards and dust with a c-r-a-s-h. I couldn’t believe it.

Dan and Darin tried to reassure me, saying not to worry, but I was reeling; I felt horrible. Without missing a beat, my wife, my hero, opened her computer, Googled the artist, found their shop online, ordered a duplicate replacement, and announced that this one would have different sentimental value. All better.

Fast forward six months. A package arrives from Dan and Darin. What is it? No, not an Italian platter...well, not exactly. It’s a reincarnation. It’s a mirror, set into a mosaic of the broken pottery. It’s one of a set; they sent one to us, and kept one for themselves.

Dan wrote, quoting Terry Tempest Williams’s latest book, *Mosaic: Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, “A mosaic is a conversation between what is broken. I believe in the beauty of all things broken.”

Friend: the one who sees the beauty, even in the brokenness, and reflects that to us, like a mirror.

My very favorite words in the Bible (2 Ruth 1:16-17) were spoken between friends: Ruth to Naomi, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law:

*Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy G*d my G*d:*

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Kem and I also spoke these words at our wedding and have spoken them to each other countless times since.

Friend: devotion.

There are other beautiful words about friendship in the Bible. My friend and colleague, Rev. Susan Moran, recently told me that scholars now agree that the first two chapters of the Book of Job were originally a stand-alone story; the next chapters were a later addition, by a different author. I’m ecstatic, because I can’t stand Job’s friends; they start out like true mensches, then quickly devolve into the category of “with friends like that, who needs enemies?” So who are they in those first two chapters—maybe, who are they, really?

I don’t want to spend too much time with the details, but, in three sentences: Job is the wealthiest man in the land, with a loving wife, seven sons, and three daughters thrown in for good measure. Then somebody’s twisted idea of G*d makes a deal with the devil and decides to test Job. It all goes to hell, everyone and everything dies, and Job loses everything, including his health...except his friends. I won’t spoil the ending.



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Tell me who you love
and I’ll tell you who
you are.

—Louisiana Creole
Proverb

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT: LOVE

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But I really, really hope Susan Moran is right: if this is the end of the story, this passage about Job's friends is so beautiful:

When Job's three friends heard about all these calamities that had befallen him, each came from his own house—

Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite.

They met together to go and mourn with him and comfort him.

When they saw him from a distance, they could not recognize him, and they broke into loud weeping.

Each one tore his own robe and threw dust into his hair.

And they sat down with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights.

No one spoke a word to him, for they saw how very great was his suffering.

Friend: the one who comes and sits and remains with us, even in the face of terrible brokenness, and helps us to bear it.

Gordie is a senior at Concord Academy. He gets around in a wheelchair, although it's easy to forget, given that he swims, sails, and is the varsity lacrosse goalie. It's easy to forget Gordie doesn't have the use of his legs, until there's a fire drill.

At least, that's what I pray. I can't even imagine trying to navigate in a chair under the best of circumstances, let alone in an emergency, a flight of stairs up from the exit, with the elevator out. I pray, before we run to save ourselves, we remember he can't get down unaided.

And then one day recently, as we sat at lunch in the crowded, noisy dining hall, the fire alarm went off. For all I knew, this was the real thing. Instinctively, I looked up at the balcony, where there's comfortable seating and a little less

chaos. And there was Gordie. My heart. The siren was deafening. Fear rushed in my ears, and my mouth went dry.

But at the same moment I saw him, half a dozen guys dove toward him, and into action: two guys in front, bracing; two on either side, lifting; two in back, lifting and leaning back against gravity...and Gordie, being borne forth like a king, with a huge grin on his face. You have never seen a wheelchair come down a flight of stairs so fast.

This looking and seeing is the spiritual practice of friendship...to seek and find the spark of the sacred, and to breathe on that spark with our compassion and care.

Safely down, they pushed him at breakneck speed out of the building...so fast I could have imagined it all. Wiping away my tears, I followed them out.

"Guys, that was amazing!" Gordie laughed as they all, in their inimitable, inscrutable, teenage boy way, pounded on each other and made loud grunting noises. I knew I could take "Gordie in a fire drill" off my list of things to worry about in the night. Gordie has friends.

Friends: the ones who make the world a little safer, the ones who carry us when we can't carry ourselves.

An old Hassidic rabbi was asked by his students how they could tell that the night had ended and the day had begun, for that is the time for certain holy prayers. "Is it," they asked, "when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it is a sheep or a goat?" "No," answered the rabbi. "Is it when you can clearly see the lines on your palm?" "Is it when you can see the leaves at the top of a tree?" "No," answered the rabbi each time. "Then when is it?" his students demanded. "It is when you can look on the face of any

person and see that they are your sister or brother or cousin. Until then, it is still night."

Friend: to look on all people as all our relations.

This looking and seeing is the spiritual practice of friendship: to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every being—the first principle of Unitarian Universalism—to seek and find the spark of the sacred, and to breathe on that spark with our compassion and care. In his book *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, Vipassana meditation teacher Jack Kornfield writes: "Spirituality is not about...mountaintops. It is seeing the sacred, right here.... Even our enemies show us how to awaken, if we recognize the truth."

My last story of friendship for this Valentine's Day, as told by Jack Kornfield, is from psychiatrist Stanislav Grof. Dr. Grof was working in the field of consciousness research at Johns Hopkins Medical School when a Native American colleague invited him and several other docs to his peyote circle on the plains of Kansas.

Although the Road Chief, the elder who leads the rituals in the Patawatame church, had agreed to include the Anglo visitors, the other Indians balked; this felt like an invitation to spiritual genocide. After extensive negotiations, the white men were allowed to join in, although one Native held out, furious. Seated directly across from Stan Grof, he glared at the intruder through the night of drumming and peyote and prayer, hatred pouring across the circle.

During the final round of blessings, the host psychiatrist thanked his tribe for including the white healers, especially Dr. Grof, who had been exiled by the Communists from his native Czechoslovakia. Suddenly, all the anger drained from the face of the man opposite Stan. "He leapt to his feet, crossed the fire, and fell into his lap, sobbing, [apologizing] for his misguided hatred."

His story came pouring out. In the final weeks of World War II, as the Nazis withdrew, he had flown a bomber. And even though Czechoslovakia had been anti-Nazi and forcibly occupied by Germany, his plane had bombed and destroyed Pilsen, one of Czechoslovakia's most beautiful cities. He had, in other words, participated in the destruction of Dr. Grof's motherland. The terrible tables of victim and perpetrator were turned.

He embraced Stan, begging for forgiveness. Addressing the Anglo doctors, he said, "I see now that there can be no hope for the world if we carry hatred for deeds committed by our ancestors. I know now you are not my enemies, but my brothers.... We are all children of the Great Spirit.... If we do not work together, we will die [alone]."

My spiritual companions, a friend can save your life.

Friend: the one who sees the beauty, even in the brokenness, and reflects that to us, like a mirror.

Friend: devotion.

Friend: the one who comes and sits and remains with us, even in the face of terrible brokenness, and helps us to bear it.

Friend: the one who makes the world a little safer,

the one who carries us when we can't, the one who makes us smile.

Friend: to look on all people as all our relations:

to forgive, to bear hope, and to work together for a world at peace, a world in love.

Happy Valentine's Day, my friends! ■



Standing on the Side of Love



BY ELIZABETH
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May 28th, 2008
was a beautiful

day. Tim and I were away on a scuba diving vacation. We went diving that morning and he seemed especially tender in the boat as we were riding back to shore. I was starting to think he might be gearing up to ask me to marry him, but I'd thought that before and been wrong, so I was wary of going down that path again. By any measure, after five years together, we were running out of time to figure out whether our futures would be joined or not. I was on my own in the afternoon and I spent it doing a lot more such figuring and analysis. I ended up confirming to myself that there was a chance that dinner would be one that might be life-changing.... Or not.

When he joined me we settled into beach chairs and looked at the white sand and the sky shot with color and the sailboats in the water and I went off on a spiral in my head. Tim was talking and I was sort of listening, and sort of lost in the beauty, and sort of wondering whether he would ask me later, and what I would do to handle it if it he didn't. Right about then, I caught a few words of what he was saying and I actually heard them and I realized that they sounded sort of like the preamble to a marriage proposal. So I tuned all the way in fast and looked at him, and listened.... And it was exactly like the preamble to a marriage proposal. And after the preamble...the proposal. No, I didn't actually say yes right away. Instead I said "I can't believe you finally asked me." And he laughed and said

"Do you want me to ask you again?" And I said "Yes." And he did, and then I accepted, laughing and crying. Later that night we went to dinner and the emotion between us was so charged and I was weepy so often that our waitress was clearly worried for us—worried in fact that maybe the exact opposite of our reality was happening—so we explained the situation and she was thrilled and we got desserts from them as our first engagement present.

I share this story with you because implicit in it is one of the reasons why I am passionate about marriage equality. We could share our story with the waitress and count on her congratulations. We could struggle over whether to get married knowing that the only impediment was our own emotional baggage. Most of all, we could struggle with marriage, knowing that we shared the same understanding of it not only with each other but with much of the western world—except for the gender angle.

I want to be clear in defining marriage that it is one of the greatest human undertakings because it is a leap of faith in the face of all the imperfections we all possess. It is a commitment to commitment that doesn't always succeed. As the country singer Brad Paisley tells us, "If love was a plane, no one would get on." We all know what it feels like to fail in some form of faithfulness, and we also know what it feels like to be betrayed. Some marriages that have been challenged in terms of respect or love or faithfulness can overcome those challenges and live truly into what marriage should be—this can even be part of how it is a great adventure of the soul. And some cannot meet those challenges, or overcome them, and we all know divorce is a shattering experience. Those are not reasons marriage is an illusion, they are reasons marriage deserves great care and respect, the greatest care and respect, because nothing less is enough.

And it is because marriage deserves the greatest care and respect that I am committed to marriage equality—giving all people, regardless of gender, the opportunity to be married. I work for marriage equality on two levels. I work as a citizen of this country who knows well the risk marriage involves. After 43 years of life as “me,” there is an ultimate risk in choosing “us.” But it’s nothing compared to the amount of risk involved in loving someone of the same gender and changing “me” to “us” with them. The risks of loving

If love is like God, denying or condemning love is a desecration.

someone whose hand we cannot hold in public, someone we cannot sit too close to in public, someone we certainly cannot kiss laughingly or carelessly—knowing in some places we could be killed for showing that kind of love and happiness in each other.

The day I got engaged, the day I got married, each day of my life in love, all are privileged in terrible, unacceptable ways simply because I don’t have to worry about defending or justifying my love. No one will kill me for loving Tim. No one will hit me or stare at me or curl their lip or swallow their words or spew their words. Instead, starting with the waitress at the restaurant that first night, it’s all been cake.

But this isn’t just a social or a civil issue, which is why I work for marriage equality as a religious person. There is a religious justification, and it goes back to my belief in marriage as a sacred institution, a blessing and a sacrament, full of beauty, possibility, and that adventure of the soul. Love is the most powerful, beautiful, spiritual, human quality there is. All love—between family members, between friends, between lovers, it’s all ultimate and precious and spiritual. Because it is

with each other that the divine spark can be most fully experienced and expressed. Our longing for love is also our capacity for love, and there is a kind of fulfillment in love, all love, that is worth everything. Find those who deserve and return your love, and love them with everything you have.

We think of personhood as an individual experience, as being fully who we are. But this is a mistake. We are individuals and in many ways we do live, and die, alone. But it is always relationships that grow us, that try us, that teach us, and that sustain us. In that way, our personhood is absolutely dependent on relationship, and none of us is alone, nor can define who we are separate from our relationships. We are the sum of those who have shaped us, especially those who have loved us and whom we have loved. And while my focus is marriage, I include all kinds of relationship—even that between a writer and a reader, or an artist and a viewer, across centuries. All relationships grounded in love offer us opportunities to grow ourselves and each other, to live into the potential of our spirits and our persistent capacity to seek meaning, to praise and to seek the divine. This happens regardless of whether the love is romantic or not, whether lovers wish to marry or not. Love is not all about marriage.

But marriage is all about love. So the issue of marriage equality is fundamentally religious because of the foundational relationship between love and soul. And it is also religious because at the heart of marriage equality are the issues of what is sin, and what is grace. That’s right, sin. We don’t use that word a lot, but you can’t talk about marriage equality without it. So here’s my definition. Sin is what works against humanity’s capacity for compassion, commitment and communion. Sin is choosing me over us, even when the “us” is humanity, or the planet, or the future. And what puts us in sin is never love, but all those things which

deny or reject love. Selfishness, jealousy, laziness, prejudice, and, of course, hatred. Grace is what flows from life and the tapestry of all that exists in this world, to uplift us and renew us, reminding us that we are not alone, that we are linked to life in many and beautiful forms, that there is always an us. Love is not God, but it is akin to God in that love gives us strength, hope, happiness, belief in ourselves, relief in grief, endurance in despair. For those of us who do not believe in God, love fills many of the same roles.

And if love is like God, denying or condemning love is a desecration. Such negation has sinful effects not only on a person but also on the soul. Who is anyone to condemn what gives another strength, hope, happiness, belief in themselves, relief in grief and endurance in despair? If you cannot see the humanity in a person because of where they find love and hope, then it is your own humanity that is in jeopardy.

I agree with the Religious Right that faithful, traditional marriage between two believing and committed souls is a social cornerstone and a sacred institution. And I believe that love is sacred because of its transformative power. But sacredness doesn’t belong as an exclusive privilege, bottled up like spring water or reserved on high for members of an exclusive club which gets to decide who can join them and who can’t. That kind of elitism has no place in faith, no place in justice, certainly no place sticking its nose into love.

We have started a change and every single one of us needs to bend our shoulder to this task. We cannot be complacent, we cannot be tired, and we certainly cannot be bored by this issue. We have never said all there is to say and never done all we can do until the day, the shining day everyone deserves for their wedding, when all people can marry their great love, regardless of gender. ■

Giving Generously



How lucky we are that so many contribute to sustain the CLF. True—money can't

buy love, but what it can provide is a solid foundation that fosters the growth of caring and community. Giving generously opens our hearts and broadens our spirits.

People make generous contributions to things that hold great value, importance and meaning to them. Evaluate the CLF in those terms, and then remind yourself that this congregation is made possible through your support.

Visit the CLF online or use the enclosed envelope, and help to extend our loving faith by giving as generously as you can. ■

Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

Most of us look for love in only the most obvious places, and as a result, most of us come away disappointed. It's as if we are still grade school kids, counting valentines as a measure of what matters. The love that matters is not typically the subject of sonnets or love songs.

There can be love in being told we are wrong. There can be love in sharing a regret. There can be love in asking for help. There can be love in communicating hurt. There can be love in telling hard truths. Most of us find it painful to live at this level of love, but it can be there, even in these most unlikely places. It isn't the kind of love we've been promised in the fairy tales of princes and fairy godmothers, but it is the kind experienced by frogs and dwarfs. It's the sort of love that can bring us closer to finding the missing pieces of ourselves that we need to make us whole.

Some of the most loving things I've ever experienced I haven't been ready for, wasn't looking for, and nearly didn't recognize. A few of them I didn't want. But all of them have changed me, transformed some part of me, filled in a place that I didn't even know was empty.

When the valentine has been tucked away in a drawer, the candy eaten, the flowers faded and gone, there will be other legacies of love that will last as long as we do, because they have brought us to know an element of life—part feeling, part idea, part mystery—that once known, is ours to keep.

by **David S. Blanchard**, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canton, New York, from his meditation manual *A Temporary State of Grace: Meditations*. Published by Skinner House Books in 1997, this book is available from the CLF library (www.clfuu.org/library or 617-948-6150). ■



Love First



What we need is a revolution in our values, a revolution that turns our attention more reverently and responsibly to the interdependent, relational character of life. What we need is a spiritual and practical revolution that embodies love for neighbor and for the world through sustaining structures of care and responsibility....

Loving our neighbor implicates us in loving the whole network of life. Science has given us photographs of the earth from space. We can see we are one blue globe, wreathed with clouds. We know the crust of the earth floats on a core of fire. Even the rocks are part of a complex flow of elements that fold down into that molten core and rise again. We dwell in our cities and towns on a living, breathing planet molded by transforming fire, flowing waters, the

exhalations of trees, and the inbreathing of animals. This interconnectedness of all things calls for wisdom and reverence. We cannot trample this landscape of life as ignorant fools and expect to be safe. We cannot turn from our bonds and obligations for and with one another and expect everyone to be okay. We cannot love after the fact and expect love to be able to save life. Maybe in the end love will save us all, but it has a lot better chance at the beginning. We need to love from the start—not as an emergency strategy when everything has gone wrong.

by **Rebecca Parker**, president of Starr King School for the Ministry (Unitarian Universalist), from her book *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now*. Edited by Robert Harvies and published by Skinner House in 2006, this book is available from the UUA bookstore (www.uua.org/bookstore or 800-215-9076) or through the CLF Library (www.clfuu.org/library or 617-948-6150). ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

In a book I read years ago, called *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis describes the ancient Greeks' understanding of love.

I think that there are probably dozens of kinds of love—I have been wishing for a new word just to describe how I feel about my iPhone, or the particular way baby animals makes me feel—but the four from the Greeks certainly are a good place to start to flesh out that big old English word LOVE.

The four that Lewis' book describes are *agape*, which is love between God and people; *eros*, which is the bond between lovers; *filia*, which is literally translated as brotherly love, as in Philadelphia; and *storge*. *Storge* is the love of what is comfortable and comforting.

It's a good book, and I recommend it. I have read it several times, and even led adult education classes about it, for it provides rich opportunity to talk about love. Just to spend time thinking about when what is comfortable and comforting becomes love, and what this means for different people, is fascinating. I personally think *storge* is highly underrated—I have never seen it as the motive in a murder mystery, for instance.

I also like to use these four words to poke around at ideas in my own mind such as, if we aspire to Stand on the Side of Love, are we edging up next to *agape* or to *filia*? For UUs for whom justice-making is the primary spiritual practice, what is the difference?

Many years ago, at the end of one adult education class exploring these concepts, a man said, his voice shaking with vulnerability, "I mean, how much love does everybody experience? I have good friends, my wife and I are

still kind and interested in each other after 26 years—is this it? Is this what everyone else thinks is good enough?" He was genuinely not sure.

Are you? Is there enough love in your life? I think many of us, whether we are alone and rarely interact with others, or are surrounded by people and animals and tasks that we enjoy, might wonder that sometimes.

For me, the path to knowing that there is enough love in my life has led to spiritual practice focused on a kind of love which is not laid out in C.S. Lewis' book. Only recently did I wonder if the Greeks also have a word for self-love.

Luckily, I have a handy-dandy friend, a CLF member who is an ex-pat in Greece. I called her to ask this. She replied that she wasn't sure, but would ask someone who is a birthright Greek. Then she emailed me this:

Just had an interesting conversation with C. about self-love and she said the correct word is probably auto-ektimisi. I think the closest translation is self-esteem, but C. thinks this sounds too superficial to the meaning in Greek. She says it's a very deep, very proactive concept—something not everyone can reach but which gives us (through accepting our own mistakes) the energy for life.

My friend continued:

I could be wrong, but both "self-esteem" and "taking care of myself" in English sound like therapy-speak. C. and I often talk about how Greek culture is essentially Eastern, with lots of value placed on self-knowledge. So ideas like auto-ektimisi run deep, whereas they might not in English/Anglo-Saxon approaches.

I don't know about you, but I think the concept that the only people who achieve real depth of self-love are the ones who accept their own mistakes is an intriguing one. As I struggle with daily imperfections so striking I don't even need my fourteen year old to

point them out—trusty Greek chorus though teenaged children be in this regard—I like thinking that all my mistakes give me extra spawning ground for something good, namely extra opportunity to practice *auto-ektimisi*.

Years ago, I had the privilege of sitting in a ten day meditation retreat with Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg. Salzberg's definition of meditation was the kindness we show to ourselves when our mind wanders, yet again. Such systematic re-teaching of kindness and interest in our mistakes, in our imperfections, is deep practice indeed.

On that retreat, the fact that I had the attention span of a gnat on my zafu cushion could be seen as a strength, not a liability—I could practice this kindness and interest over and over and over (if I could remember to do it).

I imagine *auto-ektimisi*
as the hub of the wheel
that is all kinds of love.

I think my Greek friend is right, that "taking care of myself" in English can mean anything from narcissism to shallowness. I am much more interested in swimming in the deep waters of self-love. And I suspect that this is where we can each know, or not know, that there is enough love in our lives. I suspect that this is where loneliness or a sense of "not enough love" most resides—in lack of *auto-ektimisi*. I suspect that more marriages fail because of the lack of *auto-ektimisi* in one or both partners than from anything between the two. There is no love we can offer to or receive from others, finally, which we are unable to give or receive to ourselves.

So, I imagine *auto-ektimisi* as the hub of the wheel that is all kinds of love. May your own wheels keep rolling. May you spend your days discovering and naming new varieties of love. And may your life be rich in this most valuable currency of all. ■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR
LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF
THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

What with Valentine's Day being in February, we decided that this issue of *Quest* should be on the theme of love. It's a topic with plenty of room for things to say. For instance, back in 1986 Whitney Houston released a song called "The Greatest Love" that spent three weeks at the top of the charts. Which means that anyone in the age group this column is designed for probably has never even heard the song, but hang in there with me—or check it out on YouTube. It's a good song, but one that has always left me pondering the topic of love.

The chorus of this song ends with:

*The greatest love of all
Is easy to achieve.
Learning to love yourself
It is the greatest love of all.*

That sounds good and encouraging, but is it really true? For starters, I think there are a lot of people who would say that loving yourself really isn't easy at all. Honestly, who among us hasn't spent time bashing ourselves over the head with our stupid mistakes, our physical imperfections, the ways we don't live up to our own expectations or the expectations of others? If learning to love yourself were really that easy, would Whitney have even bothered to sing about it?

But I have a bigger question that comes along with the last two lines: is learning to love yourself really the greatest love of all? It seems to me that when we think of people who are truly great, people like Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr., what was inspiring about them was not just that they loved themselves, but that they managed to promote love for all people. They stood up to hatred with love, they preached love, they practiced love and they used love to bring more justice into the world. I don't think *just* loving yourself is enough to



transform the world like that.

On the other hand, in a world that wanted to tell both men that

they were worth less than white people, both Gandhi and King knew in their very centers that this prejudice was a lie—that they had just as much inherent worth and dignity as anyone else. They did love themselves, and they were willing to do the work to change the world so that they could be treated with respect for that worth and dignity.

Maybe the greatest love isn't one or the other, loving yourself or loving those around you—maybe it's putting the two kinds of love together. Of course, the most famous statement of this idea comes from Jesus, who said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It's all there in five words. The greatest love of all isn't just for yourself. If you just love yourself then you might decide that you deserve to have everything you want, ignoring the costs to other people and the planet. We've seen what happens when the heads of companies like BP and Enron just love themselves, and it isn't pretty.

But the greatest love also isn't based in loving everyone else because they're so much better and more deserving than you. If you just love other people then you are likely to end up as an exhausted doormat (Do doormats get exhausted?), someone who runs around trying to make other people happy without any core sense of who you are and what you need.

It's all there in five words.

Recently I've stumbled on a new favorite phrase, one I'd like to have on a button or a bumper sticker. You might want to use it too. Here's my new favorite: "You're unique, just like everybody else." I think the world would be better off if people would just remind each other of this great

truth on a regular basis. You are unique. There is no one quite like you in the world. You deserve to be treasured—your particular gifts and abilities and experiences have never been seen before and will never be seen again. But the world will also be better off if you remember that everyone around you is just as special, just as precious, just as deserving of love and respect as you are. You're unique, just like everybody else.



The greatest love isn't loving yourself. The greatest love also isn't loving everyone *but* yourself. The greatest love is living from the certainty that every person, every animal and plant has its own inherent worth and dignity, just like you. Some people would describe this as God being inside of all beings. We love God through the way we treat everyone and everything we meet. We decide how to treat others based on the understanding that how we treat them is how we are treating God. Or, if the God idea doesn't work for you, you can go with the idea shared by religions around the globe: treat others as you would like to be treated. Not just because life works better that way, although it certainly does. Treat others as you would like to be treated because loving yourself and everyone else is the greatest form of love, and love is the heart of everything good.

Happy Valentine's Day!
Love,

Lynn



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Love Dogs

by **Rumi**

One night a man was crying,
"Allah, Allah!"
His lips grew sweet with the praising,
until a cynic said,
"So! I have heard you
calling out, but have you ever
gotten any response?"
The man had no answer for that.
He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.
He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls,
in a thick, green foliage,
"Why did you stop praising?"
"Because I've never heard anything back."
"This longing you express
is the return message."
The grief you cry out from
draws you toward union.
Your pure sadness that wants help
is the secret cup.
Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
That whining is the connection.
There are love dogs no one knows the names of.
Give your life to be one of them.



*Translated by Coleman Barks, from The Essential Rumi,
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