

# Teaching Love



TULI PATEL  
*still and always  
in formation*

Love.

Just four letters.

Inspiration for artists and musicians, poets and dancers, an elusive, harkening, echoing, beckoning promise of what is and might be, no multi syllabic synonyms are needed to evoke Love's deep complexities. A foundational influence from the time we are born, if we are lucky to have it, binding us to its mysteries and intricacies, some might even think of Love as God.

Minstrels and sonnet writers praise its wonders. "All you need is love," sang The Beatles. "Love is all you need."

Some spend an entire lifetime unraveling the enigma — is love a social construct or something that is hardwired into our physiology? Does it belong in the spiritual realm? Whatever form or shape it takes, one can be certain that an examination of love is not likely to make an appearance on a standardized test. Many of us devote decades to exploring Love's many facets through the prism of our own understanding and experience.

For me, love means commitment and consistency, devotion and dedication. Love is present in the joy that results when understanding and transformation occur. Love is at its

best when it gives rise to that other four letter, equally powerful word that makes us or another say: "Free." And when it does not, we can know that Love is being mis-used.

For me love takes the form of sexuality education; offered freely, offered with commitment and consistency, devotion and dedication. For me sexuality education is offered through Our Whole Lives (OWL), a comprehensive values based sexuality education program developed by two religious groups, the UUA and the UCC (and yet completely secular).

Sexuality education is much more than learning about sexual intercourse and all it's inherent dangers; it is about body image, self esteem, friendships, intimacy, whom we chose to love, how we see ourselves, within or beyond gender binaries, how we consent to love and loving; it is an exploration of what makes us who we are, the most fundamental of human questing.

I've been an OWL facilitator for almost two decades — and I have to ask, "Am I getting complacent?" What if I were asked to double down on love? What would that look like for me and how I offer sexuality education?

I know that I have work to do in widening the circle to include

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# Quest

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"Where  
there is  
love there  
is life."

MAHATMA GANDHI

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# LOVE

## *What does love look/feel/sound like to you?*

JASON

*CLF Member, incarcerated in IL*

That has always been a difficult question for me. As a kid, when I was being abused, I was told it was for my own good and because my dad loved me. My mother told me she loved me, then ran away to the other side of the country. As a teenager, my stepmother said that she loved me, then cut all contact with me for fear my father would find her after he got out of prison.

The only person who has told me that loved me and not abandoned or abused me is my aunt. Through all of the institutions and all of the trials and pain I have had to deal with, my aunt has supported me. Though she didn't and doesn't condone the behaviors that got me institutionalized, she has stood behind me. That, to me, is love.

I have never had a girlfriend and never had a date, so I don't know what that kind of love is like. I have experienced the love of a pet. I had a dog as a child named Alfred. He made the nightmare of my childhood a little less dark. He could always make me smile and even make me laugh when all I wanted to do was cry.

Once I began to walk the pagan path and began to understand who and



PHOTO BY ERIC WARD ON UNSPLASH

what I truly am, I have felt a serene love when communing with nature, and an unconditional love from my brethren in the pagan services here.

Now, as for loving myself: that has also been a difficult road. As a child, I was made to believe that I was nothing, that I was worth nothing, that I would never amount to anything. It has been very difficult for me to overcome that. It has taken years, a number of people helping me, and a lot of self-reflection and growth for me to get to where I can love myself

and accept myself. As it has been said over and over, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

So love to me is supporting someone when they need it most, even if you don't like what they did. It is making someone feel better, making them smile or laugh when they are hurting. Love is accepting someone for who they are, without judgment or reservations. Love is casting away negative external and internal perceptions and truly figuring out who you are and accepting that person. ■

## What is Love?

RYAN

*CLF Member, incarcerated in FL*

L-O-V-E. Probably one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. Mostly due to the fact we only have one word for it. The Greeks however have multiple words to describe different types love. Here are four of them:

*Eros*, the easiest, is physical love. This is where we get words like erotic. It's the love of how things look/feel/smell/taste or any other physical property.

This might be an initial feeling towards someone we're attracted to.

*Philia* is brotherly love. Think of philanthropy, coming together to raise money for a cause. This describes the love towards friends, co-workers and even humanity as a whole.

*Storge* is familial love. Not a common root word in the English language, but this is the love one typically feels towards parents, children, siblings or cousins.

The most powerful form of love is *agape*, or unconditional love that continues despite and perhaps even due to our flaws.

This is sometimes the hardest to achieve because as humans we put conditions on so much, usually unconsciously. This is what we as UUs strive for, especially in our acceptance of the LGBTQ+ and incarcerated members. This is the love to strive for.

What about your love? ■



PHOTO BY ILEANA SKAKUN ON UNSPLASH

DONALD

*CLF member, incarcerated in CO*

Love is a simple yet complex emotion for us to truly describe. However, we seem to know it when we feel it. Problems arise when we grasp at, try to control or desire love. Problems also happen when we reject or do not reciprocate love.

Love is at its best when we just allow it to be, and in turn, when we just "be" in it. Love exists outside of us, sometimes with, sometimes without us. We are not necessary for love, but love is a necessity for us. ■

# LOVE

ROBERT

*CLF Member, incarcerated in MA*

To put into words that which transcends words is something the greatest poets all throughout time have tried to do (with varying success). Since I consider myself to be a bit of an amateur poet and writer, this is something that I have thought on many times.

An over-simplification is that love is just a basic chemical reaction, impulses that are instinctive. Perhaps you can say that of lust, but not love, for love is not a physical reaction, but a social construct, a characteristic of thinking beyond the self.

When I think on love, an old Greek story comes to mind. There was a creature that walked the Earth that was so powerful, it could overthrow the Gods themselves. It had four arms, four legs, and two heads. Zeus, being fearful of what these creatures could do, rendered them in half; to this day, these now split creatures look for their other half, so that they may once again be as one.

What this story is talking about is humans and the concept of soulmates. I always liked the idea that when you are with your soulmate, that the love you have, is the greatest power in all the world.

Another way of looking at it is a puzzle, composed of two pieces. On their

own, you have a slight understanding of the image. Maybe two pieces that are not truly matching can be put together, but the story told is disjointed, and doesn't make much sense. But when they match up, a story for the ages is told.

Nearly 20 years ago, I found that one, the missing piece, my missing half. With her, I felt at peace. The best way I can describe that feeling is

with a smile. It's a special smile, one that only came across my face when I looked at her. It drove her crazy, because one could consider it a "I have a secret" smile.

In a way, I did, and I'll let you in on it. Now come close, for not everyone can handle this, so they shouldn't hear it: my love for my wife is the power that makes the Gods themselves tremble. Forever & Always. ■



PHOTO BY VARDAN PAPIKYAN ON UNSPLASH



*Teaching Love, continued from page 1*

people beyond those who “find themselves in our group.” I am called to engage the large community, whether through schools, neighborhood programs, adult schools,

justice systems, or families. I need to work more intentionally with communities of the global majority whose access to and engagement with sexuality education might be compromised.

What of you, Beloved? What if you

were asked to double down on love? What would you do differently?

With blessings for each of your journeys of exploration and discovery, deepening, questing, and questioning,

— Tuli ■



PHOTO BY SAM MGRDICHIAN ON UNSPLASH

## Butterfly

GARY

*CLF member, incarcerated in SC*

In the beginning  
 it was all darkness and fear  
 I saw no way out  
 no end to my anguish  
 a place that conveys death  
 yet, can offer life?  
 to become new  
 I entered into this cocoon,  
 a target of transformation,  
 the time out in darkness  
 becomes a metamorphosis  
 death and life working together  
 to bring about a transformation  
 from the ruins of the old  
 like a butterfly, to emerge  
 forever changed  
 a person I have never been,  
 but the world, this life  
 isn't all rainbows and butterflies,  
 for you can't change the mind  
 if you have not touched the heart

# Interminable Affinity

## (an intermission of love's omissions)

CHASE COLE

*CLF member, incarcerated in MA*

this memory unfolds  
spilling over my shoulder  
with Hyacinth coolness  
shades of hair  
spiral downward  
rose and sweet a meadow's breath  
—lingering—  
tickles my tongue  
tingling red wine kisses  
little sips of you

pale fingers caress shadows  
cinders spear lambent gazes  
never wandering eyes  
tease my vibe  
you are the bee  
who robs my hive  
unfolding myself beside you  
will this last?  
you ask  
shivering autumnal sun  
folded legs tucked under mine  
petals of fallen white  
holding me  
shaping your outline  
a nimbus of startling height  
passes above us  
our love  
falls before us

we are a tangle of consciousness  
steep and wild  
merging rivers crashing together  
hidden in veils of light  
small wild fruit grows upon your  
banks  
stop and speak  
to me  
your silk-blue eyes  
purple crescent skies  
plum blossoms inhale you  
I steal your smiles  
cup them inside my heart  
trap them inside your warmth  
hold me lovely tell me I'm yours

you will come dazzling beside me  
risen from jelly shaking your soul  
I calm your tremors  
kissing you lightly on night's wind  
this world hints of you  
your rise and fall  
inhaling a life we built together  
exhaling empires we destroyed  
forever promises eternity I  
ove demands it  
—we rise mountains  
smooth summits—  
sail thermals  
energy



## UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY MULTIPLATFORM / PORTLAND • 2022

**Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly (GA) this summer?** The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA's General Assembly, which will be held both online and in-person in Portland, OR from June 22-26, 2022.

You will be able to attend online or in-person workshops, programs, and worship services. Proof of vaccination for COVID-19 is required to attend in person.

As a delegate you will be able to vote during General Sessions. General Sessions will be held from 9:30-12:30pm PT on 6/23-6/25 and 12:30-2:30pm PT on 6/26. Delegates should be able to be online or in person to attend the majority of these General Sessions. CLF delegates vote their conscience on matters related to the denomination of Unitarian Universalism, and are responsible for their own expenses.

If you'd like to participate in GA 2022 in this role, please fill out the online application at [clfu.org/delegate-application](https://clfu.org/delegate-application). Visit the UUA's General Assembly website at [www.uua.org/ga](https://www.uua.org/ga) for details.

## FOR YOUR REFLECTION

*In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.*

**From Tuli Patel:**

*What if you were asked to double down on love? What would you do differently?*

*If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.*



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