

## **Powerful word ‘love’ often squandered on amusements**

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*London Free Press, Sept. 21, 2019, page A 11*

Nearly 65 years ago the movie *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* won an Academy Award for the best original song. The lyrics of the song — of the same name as the movie — still hold true about the complexity of love.

In its simplest terms, love often refers to our likes and dislikes. Sometimes — perhaps too frequently — we hear people say “I love ice cream” or “I would love a cool drink of water on this hot day” or “I love to shop.” We know this is an overuse of a word. Love can mean so much more in different circumstances.

Love is a special term that deserves more respect. It ought to mean more than whatever pleases me, more than saying I am interested or amused by such events as watching sports or observing new fashions.

Romantic love elevates the everyday level of the word. As we grow from childhood to adolescence, if we are fortunate enough to have parents who respect and admire each other, we may notice that romantic love has a reciprocal component, a giving and taking for mutual reward. Our understanding of good marriage begins to form, perhaps unconsciously, in our brains and it becomes a framework or map for future use.

And then when we meet a prospective partner, we observe our new acquaintance fits the map we have already formed. There is a grand awareness that our new friend is right for us. It is a eureka moment! We are ready to become romantically in love.

Of course there is love in marriages that goes beyond reciprocity — as when one partner becomes terminally ill or permanently injured. In marriage there is also sexual attraction, which can enhance love but which sometimes unfortunately can complicate the best feelings of closeness and complexity. Love relationships need not always depend upon sexual compatibility.

There is still a more elevated concept of love. It goes beyond experiencing what pleases us and beyond a give-and-take that satisfies both ourselves and others. It exceeds reciprocity. Humans can go further than thinking “I will give you this if you give me what pleases me.”

Love can be given without rewards for oneself by those who have good concepts of self-

worth. They are confident people who have a feeling of self-dignity without being jealous or judgmental of others, nor do they have feelings of narcissistic grandeur.

Such exceptional people are concerned about fulfilling the needs of others. They are people who look at the value of the whole human species without judgments regarding ethnicity, education, wealth, sexual orientation or the geographic location of one's birth.

Such special people encompass an inclusive overview of humanity. They may find their generosity of spirit and their view of humanity because they are rational, caring individuals. They may hold secularist roots or they may hold deep religious persuasions.

In my list of special people whose lives were driven by a deep love of humanity, I include Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. For balance let's include Confucius, Thomas Jefferson and Tommy Douglas. The list could be much longer, but all of the above cared deeply about humanity and they were willing to sacrifice much for the care, love and welfare of all humans.

Let us respect the term love by using it with reference to caring and a depth of meaning that encompasses overall human welfare.

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