

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Path to Love

Deepak Chopra

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ABOUT THE BOOK

DO YOU NEED TO LOVE AND BE LOVED?

In this groundbreaking and helpful book, influential teacher and physician, Deepak Chopra, explores how our hearts have lost their centre and why love so often falls short of filling a deep, aching need within us.

He also explains how we can rediscover the love we long for, one which is rich and meaningful, satisfying and lasting - by restoring to love its missing element: spirituality.

In presenting the long-forgotten, timeless laws of love, together with practical suggestions for bringing them to fruition, Deepak Chopra shows us how to transform our lives for ever - and the lives of those whom we love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deepak Chopra, M.D., has established a distinguished career as writer, lecturer and physician. He is the author of twenty-one books and thirty tape series, including the breakthrough bestsellers *Ageless Body*, *Timeless Mind* and *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. From 1996 he has headed the Chopra Center for Well Being in Carlsbad, California.

Also DEEPAK CHOPRA

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The Path to Love

Spiritual Lessons for Creating the Love You
Need

Deepak Chopra



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*EVERYTHING IN THE UNIVERSE IS WITHIN YOU.
ASK ALL FROM YOURSELF.*

—Rumi

1

REVIVING A LOVE STORY

ALL OF US need to believe that we are loved and lovable. We began life with confidence on both points, bathed in a mother's love and swaddled in our own innocence. Love was never in question, but over time our certainty clouded. When you look at yourself today, can you still make the two statements every infant could if it had the words?

I am completely loved.
I am completely lovable.

Few people can, for looking at yourself honestly you see flaws that make you less than completely lovable and less than perfectly loved. In many ways this seems right to you, for perfect love is supposedly not of this world. Yet in a deeper sense, what you call flaws are really just the scars of hurts and wounds accumulated over a lifetime. When you look in the mirror, you think you are looking at yourself realistically, but your mirror doesn't reveal the truth that endures despite all hurt:

You were created to be completely loved and completely lovable for your whole life.

In a way it is amazing that you do not realize this, because underneath everything you think and feel, innocence is still intact. Time cannot blemish your essence, your portion of spirit. But if you lose sight of this essence, you will mistake

yourself for your experiences, and there is no doubt that experience can do much to obliterate love. In an often hostile and brutal world, maintaining innocence seems impossible. Therefore, you find yourself experiencing only so much love and only so much lovability.

This can change.

Although you perceive yourself in limited terms, as a mind and a body confined in time and space, there is a wealth of spiritual teaching that says otherwise. In spirit you are unbounded by time and space, untouched by experience. In spirit you are pure love.

The reason you do not feel completely loved and completely lovable is that you do not identify with your spiritual nature. Your sense of love has lost one thing it cannot afford to do without: its higher dimension. What would it be like to restore this lost part of yourself?

Mind, body, and spirit would unite—this union creates the love you have to give.

You and your beloved would unite—this creates the love you have to share.

In our deepest nature each person is meant to be the hero or heroine of an eternal love story. The story begins in innocence, with a baby's birth into a mother's loving arms. It proceeds through stages of growth, as the young child steps out into the world. With more and more experience the circle of love widens, including first family and friends, then intimate partners, but also taking in love of abstract things, like learning and truth. The ripening journey brings us to love of giving, and the blossoming of higher values, such as compassion, forgiveness, and altruism. Finally there is the direct experience of spirit itself, which is pure love. The journey climaxes in the same knowledge that a baby began with, although it couldn't voice that knowledge: I am love.

You know that you have fully experienced love when you turn into love—that is the spiritual goal of life.

Not many people find the spiritual goal of life. The aching need created by lack of love can only be filled by learning anew to love and be loved. All of us must discover for ourselves that love is a force as real as gravity, and that being upheld in love every day, every hour, every minute is not a fantasy—it is intended as our natural state.

This book is about reviving love stories that should never have faded. The union of self and spirit is not only possible but inevitable. The spiritual meaning of love is best measured by what it can do, which is many things.

Love can heal.
Love can renew.
Love can make us safe.
Love can inspire us with its power.
Love can bring us closer to God.

Everything love is meant to do is possible. Knowing this, however, has only made the gap between love and non-love more painful. Countless people have experienced love—as pleasure, sex, security, having someone else fulfill their daily needs—without seeing that a special path has opened to them. Socially, the “normal” cycle of love is simply to find a suitable partner, marry, and raise a family. But this social pattern isn’t a path, because the experience of marriage and raising a family isn’t automatically spiritual. Sad to say, many people enter lifelong relationships in which love fades over time or provides lasting companionship without growing in its inner dimension. A spiritual path has only one reason to exist: it shows the way for the soul to grow. As it grows, more of spiritual truth is revealed, more of the soul’s promise is redeemed.

When you find your path, you will also find your love story. People today are consumed by doubts about their relationships: Have I found the right partner? Am I being

true to myself? Have I given the best part of myself away? As a result, there is a restless kind of consumer shopping for partners, as if the “right” one can be found by toting up a potential mate’s pluses and minuses until the number of pluses matches some mythical standard. The path to love, however, is never about externals. However good or bad you feel about your relationship, the person you are with at this moment is the “right” person, because he or she is a mirror of who you are inside. Our culture hasn’t taught us this (as it has failed to teach us so much about spiritual realities). When you struggle with your partner, you are struggling with yourself. Every fault you see in them touches a denied weakness in yourself. Every conflict you wage is an excuse not to face a conflict within. The path to love therefore clears up a monumental mistake that millions of people make—the mistake that someone “out there” is going to give (or take) something that is not already yours. When you truly find love, you find yourself.

Therefore the path to love isn’t a choice, for all of us must find out who we are. This is our spiritual destiny. The path can be postponed; you can lose faith in it or even despair that love exists at all. None of that is permanent; only the path is. Doubt reflects the ego, which is bound in time and space; love reflects God, eternal divine essence. The ultimate promise on the path to love is that you will walk in the light of a truth extending beyond any truth your mind presently knows.

I have structured the following chapters to lead the reader anew on the path to love, from the first stirrings of romance to the final stages of ecstasy. Falling in love feels like an accidental occurrence to many people, but in spiritual terms it is not—it is the entrance point to love’s eternal journey. Romance has several distinct phases for us to explore—attraction, infatuation, courtship, and intimacy—each partaking of a special spiritual significance.

In the dawning of the next stage, romance turns into a committed relationship, usually marriage, and the path changes. Falling in love is over; being in love begins. Spiritually, the word *being* implies a state of the soul; it is this state that a couple learns to nurture through surrender, the key word in every spiritual relationship. Through surrender the needs of the ego, which can be extremely selfish and unloving, are transformed into the true need of the spirit, which is always the same—the need to grow. As you grow, you exchange shallow, false feelings for deep, true emotions, and thus compassion, trust, devotion, and service become realities. Such a marriage is sacred; it can never falter because it is based on divine essence. Such a marriage is also innocent, because your only motive is to love and serve the other person.

Surrender is the door one must pass through to find passion. Without surrender, passion is centered on a person's craving for pleasure and stimulation. With surrender, passion is directed toward life itself—in spiritual terms, passion is the same as letting yourself be swept away on the river of life, which is eternal and never-ending in its flow.

The final fruit of surrender is ecstasy: when you can let go of all selfish attachments, when you trust that love really is at the core of your nature, you feel complete peace. In this peace there is a seed of sweetness perceived in the very center of the heart, and from this seed, with patience and devotion, you nurture the supreme state of joy, known as ecstasy.

This, then, is the path to love outlined in the following pages, although it isn't the only one. Some people do not fall in love and enter into relationships with a beloved. But this does not mean that there is no path for them, only that the path has been internalized. For such people, the Beloved is entirely within themselves from the very outset. It is their soul or their image of God; it is a vision or a calling; it is a

solitariness that blossoms into love for the One. In its own way, such a love story is also about relationship, because the final realizations are the same for all of us. To realize “I am love” is not reserved only for those who marry. It is a universal realization, cherished in every spiritual tradition. Or to put it most simply, all relationships are ultimately a relationship with God.

I wanted this to be a practical work as well as, hopefully, an inspiring one. Each chapter includes exercises (titled “Loving Practice”) that will enable you to ground yourself in the insights discussed in the text. Following this comes a love story (titled “In Our Lives”) to amplify the text in a more personal way. I am involved in all these stories, usually as a sympathetic listener to friends, patients, and fellow seekers. Sometimes I step beyond that role to function as counselor or adviser, but I do not set myself up as a professional therapist. I only want to open the way to insight, acting as its midwife; it is up to every person to actually give birth.

But before embarking on the love stories in this book, let me tell a bit of my own. Spirit is always leaving clues about its existence, although we may not be on the lookout for them, and I remember the first clues given to me by my cosmic grandmother. She was my paternal grandmother, married to an old sergeant in the Indian army who had blasted his bugle from the rooftops the morning I was born. To look at her, this tiny woman didn’t appear cosmic. Her idea of contentment was to pat flour dough into perfectly round bread for my breakfast or to wend her way before dawn to a dim temple where the thousand names of Vishnu were chanted. But one day, as I sat waiting by the charcoal stove for my breakfast *paratha* stuffed with potatoes and spice, she let me in on a piece of cosmic wisdom.

We had a neighbor down the street in the cantonment of Poona, a Mr. Dalal, whom nobody liked. He was stooped and gray, very thin, and he greeted everyone with a sour,

pained expression. Curiously, he had a small, vivacious wife—his exact opposite—who adored him. They were always together, and if I happened to pass them on the way to school, Mrs. Dalal would wave to me from underneath her blue sari, all the time keeping a loving eye on her husband, who would be tapping his way down the sidewalk with his cane.

“They are like Rama and Sita,” my grandmother said admiringly behind their backs. This I very much doubted, since Rama and Sita were divine incarnations of man and woman, and the most perfect lovers in Indian mythology. When Rama strung his bow it caused lightning and thunder, while Sita was beauty itself. Being eleven and obsessed with cricket, I had little time for either Rama and Sita or the Dalals, until a shadow passed over our household. Mr. Dalal lay dying just a few doors away from us.

My grandmother paid a visit to his bungalow and came back looking somber and pale. “Only a few hours,” she told my mother. Small boys can be callous about death, and I resented Mr. Dalal for the time he had poked his cane at me and ordered me to pick up a package he had dropped on the sidewalk. Years later, when I had entered medical school, I realized that Mr. Dalal had been suffering from angina, and his weak heart had not permitted him even to bend over. Severe chest pain accounted for the twisted expression on his face, and now it had brought him to death’s door.

Of course Mr. Dalal’s dying was the talk of the neighborhood. That day my grandmother informed us that Mrs. Dalal had decided to die in her husband’s place. She was praying fervently for this wish. Our family was stunned, except for my father, who was a cardiologist. He kept quiet, only assuring us that Mr. Dalal had no hope of recovery from his infarction. A week later this prediction was confounded when an extremely frail Mr. Dalal and his wife appeared again on the street. Mrs. Dalal, very much alive, waved from

beneath her blue sari, looking as cheerful as ever, if somehow changed.

My grandmother waited, and only a few months passed before Mrs. Dalal fell sick. A minor cold turned to pneumonia, and in those days when penicillin was not so readily available or believed in by common people, she died, suddenly, in the middle of the night.

“Like Rama and Sita,” my grandmother murmured, wearing a look on her face that could be mistaken for triumph. She described the last scene between husband and wife, when Mr. Dalal took off his prayer beads and laid them tenderly around his wife’s neck before she passed. “That is a real love story,” she said. “Only love can work such a miracle.”

“No,” I protested, standing impatiently by the stove. “Mrs. Dalal is dead. You call that love, but now they both have nothing.” My father had already told me, in his measured, clinical voice, that Mr. Dalal’s survival had been a fluke, not a miracle. He could be expected to die within the year.

“You just don’t understand,” my grandmother reproached me. “Who do you think gave Mrs. Dalal her wish? When she loved her husband, she was loving God, and now she is with him. Every real love story is a love story with God.”

An old woman with a cosmic mind is a good place to begin to talk about love. For this story isn’t about Mrs. Dalal. A Westerner would be skeptical that she had achieved anything of value by dying for her husband, assuming that was what had happened. The point of the story lies in my grandmother’s deepest beliefs:

A man and a woman can reflect divine love in their love for each other.

Loving your beloved is the way you love God.

Human love survives death.

If you could hold the same beliefs, your love would contain a profound power and meaning. Actually, I shouldn't deprive Mrs. Dalal of her own meaning. The neighbors whispered that she was murmuring "Rama" when she died. Anyone who can say God's name at such a moment might well be wooing her lover. Looking back, I now realize that for her, death itself was a healing. How many modern people in the West can say the same?

Despite the fact that love is important to everyone, few of us could deny that love is in a crisis—no deeper crisis exists. Either love isn't a powerful enough force to save us from our darker nature or something has happened to turn us away from love. Perhaps love was never the answer we were looking for.

Any of these possibilities could be true. If they are, however, to be human is truly tragic. In his last major work, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud painted a picture of human nature that is grimly unloving. Humans, he asserted, are motivated by an instinct for sexual gratification that society can barely keep in check. They are born to take sadistic satisfaction in the plight of enemies; they will use ruthless violence to obtain money, power, and sex; and only the threat of retribution from someone more powerful keeps this violence in check. According to Freud, Christ's injunction to love thy neighbor as thyself is a psychological impossibility.

Every adult has seen enough of life to agree at least partially with this devastating assessment, and modern psychology, by and large, is based on it. The famous Milgram pain experiments from Yale in the 1950s demonstrated that when ordered to give electric shocks to strangers in a laboratory setting, average people would follow such orders willingly, even when the subjects screamed in agony and begged them to quit. Where is love in all of this?

The direct experience of spirit is the only lasting foundation for love.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, in some profound way we were created for love to the very depths of the human soul. This spiritual vision of human nature has prevailed against all odds. Its roots go back in India more than two thousand years to the Vedic scriptures. *Veda* is Sanskrit for “truth” or “knowledge.” The hymns of the Rig Veda are considered to be humanity’s oldest devotional expression, but as it expanded into thousands and thousands of scriptures, Veda continued to emphasize the same point: the human being is a mirror of God. Our being and God’s Being are one.

In the Vedic view we are not passive observers of reality but creators, as God is. The mask of matter disguises our true nature, which is pure awareness, pure creativity, pure spirit. Like light streaming from a bonfire, reality streams from us, and our choice is to emanate love or non-love. Contrary to Freud’s dark view, the Vedas say that it is much more natural for us to create from love than non-love. They declare that humans “are born in bliss, sustained in bliss, and return to bliss again after death.” This is a drastic shift in perception from modern psychology, and yet to be truly in love always brings a new perception—everyone can validate the sudden ecstasy and bliss that makes romance so sweet. But to have a complete vision of love means being willing to undergo a much more total shift of perception.

When you perceive yourself as spirit, you will not simply feel love—you will be love.

In spiritual terms, to be love is only natural. It is our departure from love that is unnatural. The ancient scriptures recognized man’s violence and saw it clearly: one of the most important teachings of Veda is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which is set on a battlefield before a murderous war. Yet in the Vedic tradition an unbroken succession of saints, seers,

masters, and sages have seen beyond violence and expressed themselves as follows:

Life is love and love is life. What keeps the body together but love? What is desire but love of the self? . . . And what is knowledge but love of truth?

The means and forms may be wrong, but the motive behind is always love—love of the me and the mine. The me and the mine may be small, or may explode and embrace the Universe, but love remains.

The voice is that of a South Indian master, Nisargadatta Maharaj, speaking to followers in the late 1970s. The expression “life is love and love is life” has such ancient roots that no idea is more venerable. Yet this is a love we have lost contact with in our own age, distracted as we are by sexual attraction, unstable emotions, and religious dogma. Love based on the experience of spirit gives rise to the possibility that we can return to our true nature, throwing aside our unloving behavior as a bad and very long dream.

A love based on “higher” values espoused by the world’s religions seems, as Freud pointed out, impossibly ideal. The scriptural injunctions to love the Lord with all thy heart, all thy soul, and all thy might are legion. Yet there is sober truth in Emily Dickinson’s mournful little poem:

Sometimes with the Heart
Seldom with the Soul
Scarce once with the Might
Few—love at all.

If all our attempts to find a spiritual foundation for love have shown themselves to be so wanting, where can we turn?

Spirit can only be called on when it is real, and it can only be real if it is real *for you*. In other words it has to *be you*. This is exactly what the Vedas teach. Rather than “soul,” they equate spirit with “Self,” not the everyday self with its thoughts, wishes, needs, and drives but a higher Self that is

silent and eternal. The difference is explained in a classic Vedic metaphor: every person is like a piece of gold. If you were a gold ring, a gold watch, a gold chain, you could say “I am a ring, a watch, a chain,” but these are temporary shapes. In truth you are just gold—that is your essence, no matter how the shape changes.

In the same way, we each have a self, defined in modern psychology as an image developed over time. It is a mysterious fusion of ego, personality, and memory that everyone amasses between infancy and early childhood. Being completely personal, your self is also completely isolated and separate from every other self. Yet, if you saw yourself truly, you would no longer identify with this haphazard, ramshackle thing, your self. In truth you are the Self, created from the same spirit that in infinite form is called God. You are one grain of gold, compared to which God is all the gold that exists, and yet you can rightfully say, “I am gold.”

We all draw upon the higher Self for identity, life, awareness, will, and love.

The Self that Lord Krishna teaches about in the *Bhagavad-Gita* is an eternal aspect of human nature that transcends all individuality, all change in time and space. Speaking of the immortal “dweller in the body,” Krishna declares,

Weapons cannot cut him,
Fire cannot burn him,
Water cannot wet him,
Wind cannot blow him away. . . .
He is eternal and pervading everything,
Subtle, immovable, and ever the same.

What is important here is that the Self is a *real experience*. It is not an ideal, far removed from ordinary reality—which is how most of us think of the soul—but as close to you as breath. The Self is love’s source, and therefore it is more real than the things that block love—

anger, fear, egotism, insecurity, and mistrust. Those qualities, however widespread they may be in society, are temporary; they grow up over time and have to be learned. The Self, by contrast, is secure in peace and safety; it knows only love because its experience is only of love.

When you interact with another person, you are free to feel anything, from the deepest hatred to the deepest love. You may be repelled or attracted; you can convey rejection or acceptance. But at the level of the Self, you always meet another person in love.

The person you love reflects your share of universal love. If you learn to look deep enough, you will see that your reality is only love.

In a famous passage the Vedas declare,

As is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm,
As is the atom, so is the universe.
As is the human body, so is the cosmic body,
As is the human mind, so is the cosmic mind.

This verse can be simplified to a few words: you are the universe. Whatever a person sees in his or her surroundings, from the smallest detail to the largest panorama, *is* that person. Reality is a mirror of the soul.

The Vedic tradition divided the world into reality and illusion. Illusion, or *Maya*, is composed of transient forces and events. Reality is formed of spirit. Thus the task set for every person was to pierce the veil of illusion in order to discover the spirit in everything. The same task is set before us now.

Materialism has no room for an assertion like that. After having written more than a dozen books about the conjunction of mind and body, which seemed radical a few years ago, I now find myself witness to the weakness of materialism on all fronts. What is a healing prayer but a successful attempt to abolish the distinction between inner and outer reality? What is a spontaneous remission of

cancer but the material body's obedience to wisps of intention entertained by the mind? Einstein's physics tells us that everything that appears solid to our senses is actually 99.999 percent empty space. The classic Eastern metaphysical description of a spiritual reality standing behind an empty material illusion suddenly seems very plausible.

My cosmic grandmother was the person who taught me that the angels eternally pull against the demons. In her worldview the angels always win—the world of love is ultimately the one we are born to live in. My experience has also given me hope that this is true, and out of that hope I decided to write this book about love.

Darkness, however terrible, never fully extinguishes the spark of light. One of the most moving love stories I've ever read happened between two enemies in the Holocaust. A devout Catholic was suffering in a hideous medical "experiment" being conducted at Auschwitz. She was a young woman, and as it happened the doctor who presided over her clinical torture was also a woman, which somehow made her sadism all the more horrifying. Death came slowly, but at last it came. The young woman whispered unintelligibly, and the doctor, assuming she was uttering a curse, drew back. The young woman reached out. She struggled to lift something from her neck and managed at the last moment to hold it out to her tormentor. "For you," she was whispering as she handed her rosary to the doctor, a last blessing as she departed the world.

Such a story arouses a surge of hope amidst the tears. We would all like to believe that one redeemed soul can help redeem another, even in the depths of terrible darkness. If that is true, then love's power is as great as spiritual teaching tells us it is.

I am not proposing in this book that we simply go back in time and adopt Indian metaphysics—that would be

impossible, given the vast changes in culture over the past few thousand years. Instead I propose that the Vedic sages were the first to map a path to love, which they called a *Sadhana*. A path implies a beginning and an end. In this case the beginning is a reality in which love is longed for but uncertain, swamped by fear and anger, overwhelmed by the counterforce of hatred. The end is a reality where nothing exists but love.

What remains now is the deepest healing of all, the healing of love.

LOVING PRACTICE

Making a Soul Bargain

HEALING THE SPLIT between love and spirit is the goal of this book, and periodically I will give practical suggestions to that end. Usually these “loving practices” are directed to the reader, but I recommend, where possible, that you and your beloved both try them.

The first loving practice addresses doubts you may have about whether a “higher” love has any kind of accessible reality. To someone who has never fallen in love, you cannot prove that the experience exists. There is no power in words to evoke passionate romantic love, just as the fragrance of a rose is meaningless however beautifully you describe it. How much more alien, then, is the love promised by union with spirit? Look at the following list of things that love is supposed to accomplish, expanded from the list that appeared earlier in the text:

- Love is meant to heal.
- Love is meant to renew.
- Love is meant to make us safe.
- Love is meant to inspire us with its power.
- Love is meant to make us certain, without doubt.
- Love is meant to oust all fear.
- Love is meant to unveil immortality.
- Love is meant to bring peace.
- Love is meant to harmonize differences.
- Love is meant to bring us closer to God.

Even if this list strikes you as unrealistic, or wildly overblown, I want you to make a bargain with love—a soul bargain—*that any or all of these things will come true for you.*

Take a piece of paper and write down what you want from love. If it is a real force, if it is attuned to who you are, love will respond. Make your list as complete and specific as you can. I suggest writing down every entry from the preceding list and beside it just what you want. For example:

Love is meant to heal.

I want to heal my anger toward my father. I want to heal the love I couldn't give to my children when they needed it. I want to heal my hurt over losing my friend X.

Love is meant to renew.

I want to feel renewed enthusiasm for my work. I want to renew the sexual feelings I have for my wife. I want to renew my sense of being young.

Love is meant to make us safe.

I want to feel safer with other people. I want to feel safe when I go outdoors for my morning run. I want to feel safe from having X reject me if I tell him I love him.

Love is meant to inspire us with its power.

I want my love to be powerful. I want to use all my own power with love. I want to express love when I feel it and not give in to lower emotions like fear and anger.

Once you are satisfied that you have detailed everything you want—and don't feel afraid to ask too much—the bargain is complete. Put the piece of paper away in a safe place. You have announced to your soul what you want, and it is up to love to respond. Love is intelligent and aware; it knows you better than you know yourself. Therefore it has the power to fulfill its side of the bargain. Rest easy and be attentive over the next few months. Don't dwell on your list

or try to make it come true. There is nothing you need to do except this:

When you feel love, act on it. Speak your heart. Be truthful. Remain open.

This is how you align yourself with love. At the end of a few months, take out your list and read it over. Ask yourself how much has come true. I won't say that you will be amazed at what love has actually done—although many people are—but you will certainly be surprised. Actually asking for love is one of the most difficult things for anyone to risk, and by risking it first in your heart, you open a door that will never close again.

IN OUR LIVES

There's Somebody Out There

"I KNOW WHAT you're thinking," Delaney said. "You think I'm too choosy, right? But I don't think I'm asking that much. It's not that she has to be drop-dead gorgeous or a Ph.D."

"You just have standards," I suggested.

"Right. I think of it as a package. If the whole package is right, the details don't matter all that much."

"Assuming that she, whoever she is, likes *your* package," I said. Delaney nodded. He was amazingly immune to irony, and I knew it wasn't fair for me to aim it at him. He really did want to fall in love—it was his biggest goal in life—and since Delaney had succeeded at all his other goals, it was frustrating how elusive this one was turning out to be. Once he and I had done a residency together in Boston, where he had been raised in a working-class family, and we later moonlighted at the same suburban emergency room to make ends meet. It had been fifteen years since he set up his cardiology practice, and only now, in his midforties, did Delaney feel he could make time to find a mate. It was hard for him to hide how confused about it he was in his own mind.

"Thank God I'm not one of those guys who's dumping his wife of thirty years for a sexy twenty-something girlfriend," he said. "For me this is a fresh start. I'm optimistic, I'm patient, but I guess—"

"What?" I asked.

Delaney looked away, a faint cloud of doubt on his face. "I don't know. Maybe I'm too old," he muttered.

“Or too demanding,” I said. “Isn’t a sexy twenty-something part of the package you’re looking for? Be honest.”

He shrugged sheepishly. “A guy can hope.”

I felt a sudden uneasiness about Delaney and his newest project, immediately followed by a wave of sadness. The fact that our culture teaches us so little about love was staring me in the face. We had been talking about a man’s “love life” for an hour, and yet we hadn’t touched on anything even remotely resembling love.

“Have you ever fallen in love before?” I asked. “Really fallen?” Delaney looked startled, apparently not expecting our conversation to get this personal. He hesitated.

“Well; I’m not coming from nowhere on this thing,” he said. “I’ve had some really sweet times, and lots of women want to go out with me.” I nodded.

“Listen, we don’t have to go anywhere you don’t want to go,” I said quietly. “But I think you’re feeling a little lost.” He stiffened, and I could see him retreat inwardly. I said, “That wasn’t an accusation. It’s natural to feel lost. Especially if you’re not looking in the right places.”

“I hate the places where I go,” he said angrily.

“The bars? Everyone hates those places,” I said. “But that’s not what I meant. You’re not looking in yourself—that’s the place where she is, whoever you hope to find.” Delaney stared at me as if I was indulging in paradox, but I pressed on. “You’ve had a lot of accomplishment in your life, and basically you’ve used the same approach every time. You see a challenge, you muster your resources, and with enough confidence and self-assurance you win what you’re after. That’s right, isn’t it?” He agreed. “Accomplishing anything important involves risk,” I said, “and therefore fear. But if you let the fear dominate, you’d never take any risks, and therefore you wouldn’t accomplish anything.”

“Are you saying I’m afraid to fall in love?” he asked. “Then why would I be looking for it?”

“No, I’m not saying that,” I replied. “But love and fear very often touch, and people like you, who have undertaken very difficult things—going to medical school on a shoestring, opening your own practice, raising money for expansion and new ventures—have to learn how to keep fear out of the picture. And not just fear—self-doubt, confusion, despair, hopelessness—most of the common human frailties, in fact. Keeping your frailties out of sight becomes extremely important if you want to amount to anything in this world, but that is exactly the opposite of what love demands.”

Delaney flinched. I could tell he didn’t like the word *demand*. “I have weaknesses, like everybody else,” he said grudgingly. “What do you want me to do—go around parading how vulnerable I am so that some woman will take pity on me?”

“You’re exaggerating because you hate the idea so much,” I said. “No, you aren’t out to attract pity. What I’m trying to get at is that ‘normal’ life requires everyone to appear as strong as possible, and this tactic, which may work in other areas, fails miserably when it comes to love.”

Like most people, Delaney had never considered how his inner world was constructed, but everyone creates psychological divisions as a means of survival. We wall off inner compartments, and into them we shove all the undesirable things about ourselves—our secret fears, weaknesses, and flaws, our deep sense of doubt, our belief that we may be ugly or unlovable. Everyone has these dark chambers of the soul.

“Do you think you’re lovable?” I asked Delaney.

“My God, what a question!” he blurted. “It’s not anything I think about. I just want to get married, you know, like everyone else.”

“That question would take most people aback,” I said, “but why? Is it embarrassing to feel lovable? The discomfort arises because love can feel too personal, even for ourselves; it pokes into those compartments where our

negative self-image is stored. Unfortunately, to fall in love means going there—that's what love demands."

True love is more dangerous than most people are willing to admit. It arouses the same discomfort as in dreams where you find yourself naked in a public place. If falling in love meant going into all the dark chambers of the soul, none of us would risk it. On the other hand, to love another person involves opening up your whole being. What makes the risk possible is the ingredient of spirit.

Spirit is the real you, beyond all divisions into good and bad, desirable and undesirable, lovable and unlovable. Love exposes this reality, which is why falling in love is a blessed state. For many people it is the only one they will ever know in a lifetime. The spiritual overtones of romantic love are unmistakable. First there is a tremendous emotional opening, a liberation. Your whole being flows toward your beloved as if the two of you share the same feelings, the same likes and dislikes, almost the same breath. The secondary effect of this inrush of delight is a release of cares and anxiety; the cloud of infatuation swallows up worries over such trivialities as money, career, and the fate of mankind. Even if you had no spiritual background at all, you would have tasted the soul's sweetness by falling in love. As the great Persian poet Rumi says,

When love first tasted the lips of being human,
It started singing.

This blessing of falling in love comes from spirit, but it can be blocked by ego. Ego is responsible for protecting your self-image; it creates the compartments where everything undesirable about you has been hidden. What blocks love is not the presence of these shadow energies but the division of the psyche that came about when your ego started building inner walls. Love is a flow, and walls keep the flow out.

In spiritual terms, this is the problem of duality. By dividing good from bad, right from wrong, we essentially insist that parts of ourselves are unlovable—why else would we keep them out of sight? We turn ourselves into packages, exactly the kind Delaney talks about. The package seems to contain only good and worthy things, but if another person ventures to love us, the whole package spills open, and a lot of what it contains isn't so nice.

The cruelest consequence of duality is that we believe in the rightness of shutting love out. "Being open" is equated with "being weak." "Being closed" is equated with "being strong." And society reinforces these dualities by reminding us, day in and day out, that this is not a world where love is safe.

As with most people, I don't encounter much love except inside my home. On waking I see my wife's face beside me, and many mornings I marvel at the ineffable love this sight inspires, something far more delicate and moving than I can put into words. Yet beside my bed also lies the newspaper I read to get to sleep, and in it is all the hatred anyone could imagine. On every page I confront the catastrophic failure of love. There is personal failure in the overwhelming amount of divorce, litigation, and social bitterness we've learned to live with. There is public failure in the war, street crime, and oppression we all go to bed praying will not strike us.

Although no one can say where love went, it is a dangerous sign that we are surrounded by so many images pretending to be love. Every day we are saturated, drowned with images of romance from books and films, bombarded with sex from advertisements, and goaded on all sides to become more attractive in order to win attention from a "perfect" lover. Delaney was struggling in the swamp of non-love, as we all are, trying to find something he really couldn't name.

"What if you sat down and imagined the perfect woman waiting out there for you," I told him. "You've probably done