



L O V E...ALTRUISM...EMPATHY

Lecture given by Béa Aaronson, PhD

WHAT IS LOVE?
How do we begin?

Here is an Indian parable I would like to share with you:

A little boy goes to his grand father and asks:

“Grand Father, Grand father, tell me please

Why are some people kind and loving, helping, and others nasty, killing, filled with hate?

The Grand father looked at his grand son and answered quietly, calmly, with a deep voice of wisdom:

“My grand Son, he said, we, all of us humans, have 2 dogs living inside of us. One dog of LOVE, and one dog of HATE”

“But, grand father,” the little boy went on, “then they fight all the time inside of us and make us sick. And who is going to win?”

“The one you will have chosen to feed”

WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE....

And

WE CAN ALL CHANGE THE CRAZED DIRECTIONS OUR TIRED WORLD IS TAKING.

Before entering the world of LOVE, let's first see what the dictionary tells us...

LOVE, according to the unabridged Webster, is:

- A profoundly tender or passionate **affection** for a person, for all sentient beings
- A feeling of warm personal **attachment**
- A personification of **sexual affection** as Eros and Cupid
- The affectionate concern for the well being of others, otherwise known as **Altruism**
- The strong predilection or liking for anything, like the love of books, the love of music...

Two words need probing further: attachment and affection

"Attachment" means you need two independent entities in order to "attach," to link...therefore the "other" is already involved...

Distance creates the link....physical distance....emotional distance...

Friendship is a form of attachment, but so is "hate"....Indifference is the total lack of attachment...

"Affection" means "fond attachment," "devotion," "love"

But also, in **pathology**, affection is **a disease**, a condition of being diseased,

An abnormal state of body and mind...that fits Romantic love to a tee...We fall ill and we fall in love...In French too "on tombe malade, on tombe amoureux"... Descending love.... Descending toward the material, the satisfaction of bodily sensations...

Scientific research, biology, neuroscience, has demonstrated that when one falls in love, a protein molecule known as "nerve growth factor," or NGF, reaches high levels in the brain.

The brain releases a certain set of chemicals, including pheromones, dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin, which act in a manner similar to amphetamines, stimulating the brain's pleasure center

-which may explain why so many people want to keep falling in love, never committing to attachment-

The side effects are well known! Increased heart rate, loss of appetite and sleep, sweaty palms, and an intense feeling of excitement. Definitely an "abnormal" state of being...

"Affection" also means the act of influencing or acting upon which fits Altruism.

LOVE encompasses all different modalities of human attachments

Lust, a physical biological attachment, as the initial passionate sexual desire that promotes mating, a mammalian drive like hunger and thirst (which does not last long)

Leading to **attraction**, (lasting a little longer, with an individualized desire for a specific partner)

Leading to **attachment**, a bonding that promotes relationships lasting much longer.

Attachment to one's parents, to one's children, to one's brothers and sisters, to one's boyfriend and girlfriend, to one's spouse, to someone we know, to someone we do not know

But also attachment to one's dogs and cats, to nature, to literature, art, music...

One facet the dictionary definition does not touch upon is **ANIMAL LOVE**. Animals too feel love, and experience attachment, beyond biological encoded behavior.

One cannot refute the fact that LOVE exists in the animal kingdom ...look at mother elephants for example...not just instinct, but love...they remember and

cry...I have seen an hippo saving a young dear from the jaws of a crocodile, bringing the young victim ashore, licking him, taking care of him...a lion saving an orphan baby monkey, licking him, feeding him, putting him out of reach from predators....

They do not write poems, songs... they act...because LOVE is not only a noun to repeat, ad nauseum, but a verb to activate, to actualize...a verb of action... Because LOVE is not just a feeling, but an activity...

A WORD IS DEAD
AN INTENTION IS DEAD
IF WE DO NOT INHABIT THEM
IF THEY DO NOT INHABIT US

Different cultures have given different names to different dimensions of LOVE.

IN GREEK ANTIQUITY

The word **AGAPE** refers to divine Love, unconditional, self-sacrificing, thoughtful love, pure and idealized. AGAPE was then used by Biblical and Christian authors to describe the highest form of love

One that surpasses all other types of affections

Opposed to Agape is **EROS** which refers to an affection of sexual nature, with sensual carnal longing. Can be translated as the love of the body.

Then, we have **PHILIA**, a concept developed by Aristotle. It denotes a non sexual affection...a dispassionate virtuous love, loyalty to friends, family and community. Can be translated as love of the mind.

STORGE depicts natural affection, like the love felt by parents for their offspring.

And we must not forget **XENIA, hospitality**, as a form of ritualized friendship between a host and his guest, an extremely important practice in Ancient Greece. Xenophobia, or the fear of the other, is a disease that still kills all around the world.

IN ANCIENT ROMAN

AMARE is the verb TO LOVE.

AMOR, the noun LOVE

It is interesting to note that the city of ROMA is an anagram of AMOR, which was the secret name of Rome...

Amans, the lover, the professional lover too

Amicus, boy friend,

amica, girlfriend

Amicitia, friendship

Cicero wrote his treatise on friendship DE AMICITIA, which discusses all levels of friendship, indebtedness, influence, mutual advantage

OVID wrote his ARS AMATORIA (the Art of Love), which explains everything, from conjugal love, extramarital affairs to over protective parents, with explicit suggestions of love making positions to attain the best pleasure possible.

in Ancient Rome there was also CARITAS, which was used by the Christian Bible to mean "charitable love". This altruistic dimension of LOVE/CARITAS did not exist in Pagan Rome.

IN JEWISH CULTURE

The Hebrew word **AHAVA** means intimate or romantic feelings and relationships, including of course the sexual dimension. But AHAVA can also be used to denote divine love.

Alongside **CHEN**, describing grace

And **CHESED**, loving kindness and compassion, that is altruism and empathy, which impregnates the commandment of treating your neighbor as you would want him to treat you. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR LIKE YOURSELF (Leviticus 6:5)

Ah Ah... So we must first love ourselves in order to love others..

Self-hatred can only produce more hate...

TZEDAKAH, or "charity" is part of Chesed...

DEVEKUT represents spiritual orgasm, a mystical experience one cannot learn in a book...

The Biblical SHIR A SHIRIM, SONG OF SONGS, The Book of Solomon is an extremely erotic book of love, passionate, sensuous, but it is a metaphor for divine love. From the earthly to the divine...

IN CHRISTIAN CULTURE

Christianity used the Greek AGAPE to mean charitable, selfless altruistic and unconditional love.

Christians also used PHILEO to mean "brotherly love".

EROS, or sexual love was never used in the New Testament.

Christianity has somewhat succeeded to sever the link between the body and the soul. And all earthly pleasures have been condemned as dirty and evil.

Christians used the Roman CARITAS to mean CHARITY.

It is the unlimited loving-kindness toward all others, the ultimate perfection of the human spirit. It reflects the glory of G-D, being divinely infused into the soul. Self-sacrificial, Charity is considered the only way to salvation.

IN ISLAMIC AND ARAB CULTURE

The Islamic view of life as universal brotherhood refers to God as the AL WADUD, The Loving One, and also sees God as being "full of loving kindness."

IN THE ISLAMIC MYSTICAL TRADITION OF SUFISM

God is THE LOVER, THE LOVED ONE, and THE BELOVED.

Through Love, humankind can get back to its inherent purity and grace.

We encounter **TARIQAT**, the spiritual path to Love, as the intention to go towards the Truth by means of love and devotion. Isn't it uncanny that the word TARIQAT sounds like CARITAS...you just change the order of the consonants....

MAHABBA is Divine Love.

HUBB is romantic love.

The Sufi believe that LOVE is at the core of the universe and that we need to feel love in all we do.

A Rumi poem says: "When I come to Love,
I am ashamed of all that have said about Love"

And a Sufi saying warns us against material greed:

"The one who dies for the love of the material world, dies a hypocrite."

IN PERSIAN CULTURE

The Persian word for LOVE is **ESGH**.

In the Persian culture, everything is linked to ESGH, from earthly love -loving one's friends and family, husbands and wives,

To divine love which is the ultimate goal.

Over 7 centuries ago, the poet SA'Di wrote:

**"If you have no sympathy for the trouble of others
You are not worthy to be called by the name of "man."**

IN CHINESE AND SINIC CULTURE

There are 2 philosophical traditions of love:

1- **Confucianism**, which emphasizes action and duty,

A core concept of Confucianism is REN, or benevolent love.

"ren" also means "man" or "woman"

WO FAGUO REN "I am a French woman"

Which means that being a man, being a woman includes the dimension of benevolent love

and

2- **Mohism**, which extols universal love.

In Chinese, the word "love" is "**AI**"

How uncanny again, that the same phonetic sound **AIE**, in French,

Is something you say when you get hurt

Aie ! when you fall, aie! When you get bruised, Aie when you prick yourself with a needle

"Aie Aie Aie" when you have problems...

Coincidence...or the magic wisdom of language!

I LOVE YOU = I AM HURTING FOR YOU!

WO AI NI means "I love you " but is not often said in a romantic way...

When a Chinese person says "Wo ai ni" it carries a very specific sense of responsibility, commitment and loyalty...

The calligraphic character for **AI** is made of three interconnected designs.

The outer design is the character for PERCEPTION
The second inner design is the character for ACCEPTANCE
And the inner core design is the character for HEART
The 3 together mean LOVE

Perception...acceptance...heart....LOVE...What a journey....!

AI is seen in Buddhism as selfishness or selflessness...

Selflessness is the key to enlightenment...

IN BUDDHISM

The word **KAMA** is sensuous, sexual love, and it is an obstacle on the path of enlightenment. We've all heard of the KAMA SUTRA...the ancient Sanskrit text on human sexual behavior, offering practical advice on sex. SUTRA means "a line or a thread that links things together." It links the body and the soul, pleasure and spirituality.

KARUNA is compassion and mercy, it reduces the pain of others.

Uncanny again that "karuna" sounds like "carina," ROOT "CARE", somebody dear, somebody we care for, which comes from "caritas"

ADVESA and **METTA** are benevolent LOVE

Notice the near homophony between ADVESA and ADVICE, AVIS in French

The word **METTA** comes from the Sanskrit **MAITRI**, which means "loving kindness, friendliness, benevolence, good will"

Love of friends, family, but also strangers, enemies and all sentient beings

METTA is against greed, against anger and violence

The aim is to attain LOVE without attachment,
without UPADANA

META BHAVANA is a meditation that helps calm down a distraught mind,
METTA BHAVANA is an antidote to ANGER

There are six stages in the practice of this love meditation
Cultivating loving kindness towards

- 1- yourself
- 2- a good friend
- 3- a neutral person
- 4- a difficult person
- 5- all 4
- 6- the entire universe

“May all beings be free from enmity, affliction and anxiety, and live happily”

IN HINDUISM

KAMA is pleasurable, sexual love, personified by the god Kamadeva, holding a bow of sugar cane and an arrow of flowers, riding on a parrot...

PREMA or **PREM** refers to elevated love.

KARUNA is compassion and mercy.

BAKHTI describes a loving devotion to the supreme God.

IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

The word **AMOUR**, love, shares the same root as **AMI**, friend.

The sound root **AM...** means **AME**, THE SOUL

AM also recalls the English AM, to be

We can fully be only when we love. Love is the quintessence of being.

AM also resembles the Buddhist "OM"

The consonant M represents the matrix, the mother of all, the maternal care, the openness of birth and life, giving birth and life to another being

THE SAME HAPPENS IN SPANISH

AMOR...love

AMISTAD...friendship

AM is the tuning fork to harmony...

Already...

With this very succinct cross-cultural and etymological trans-linguistic journey

We can see that LOVE is indeed a multi faceted "thing"

Clearly divided, in all cultures, between the

Earthly pleasures of the flesh, and the

Spiritual pleasures of the soul

Always involving the OTHER,

The first other being ourselves. We have to love ourselves in order to love others.

A little bit like in an airplane. When there is an oxygen problem, we must first put the oxygen mask on ourselves, and then we can help others...

We all come from an other, from two others in fact...papa and mama

LOVE is a polarized word

conciliating the spiritual and the physical

harmonizing our dreams and our appetites

One last language game...using the process of phonic sliding and permutation of letters, practiced in Midrashic interpretations...

If you change the vowel "o" for the vowel "i"

You transform LOVE into LIVE

And here we go again

LOVE AND LIFE two facets of the same "thing", or one and the same thing?

And I would like to posit here that LOVE is LIFE

And that LIFE without LOVE is not life...and I do not mean romantic or sexual love...

QUESTIONS?

Is LOVE a physical adventure where the heart does not have much to say...

or

A spiritual adventure where the body does not have much to say?

It is both, separately and simultaneously

Is LOVE a word that lies...?

Or a word that tells the truth...? IT DEPENDS WHO INHABITS THE WORD...

Used, Misused, Abused, a word that may hide other agendas than kindness, care, and compassion...

It is a word that celebrates the marvelous diversity of life, the complex array of human emotions in all their bivalence...

Don't we say: **A love declaration...a War declaration...**

Remember the Hippies from the Sixties?

MAKE LOVE NOT WAR

LOVE became a political force, a social tool for PEACE

Did you know that in 450- 380 BCE, Aristophanes wrote a timeless play, *Lysistratus*, a story of sex, love, war, social upheaval, political strife, violence, in which an Athenian woman, *Lysistrata*, organized a sex strike to stop the wars among the Greek states. But also, Athenian women were asked to make love to the enemy soldiers.....and there was no more time nor energy to wage war!

In any case...

ROMANTIC LOVE

the companion of whom the heart is never sure...

this invasion of the self by another...

This kind of love has tormented, tortured millions...

Because **Romantic Love plays on all polarities**

Kindness, nastiness

Faith, doubt

Joy, sadness

Bliss, Hell

Anger, jealousy, hatred

Violence,

Danger, safety

Happiness, Sorrow

Pain, Pleasure
Harmony, discord
War and peace

An infinite of possibilities

Most of the time, when you ask people what love is, they all speak of romantic love and sexual attraction.

Romantic love as an ideal of fusion, a hedonist self imposed servitude, serves the flesh and dictates a new psychic economy in which orgasm is the supreme goal. Millenaries of love poetry, love songs, novels, operas, theatre, music, movies, books...- all tending toward a long story of mostly deceived, hurt, wounded, betrayed, disappointed lovers-

Millenaries of human artistic creations have made ROMANTIC LOVE
THE ULTIMATE HUMAN AFFAIR

And we did not talk of passion crimes, killing for love! Number one cause, world wide, of homicide!

NO. ROMANTIC LOVE IS NOT THE FORM OF LOVE THAT CAN SAVE US.

We need another kind of love to live and survive life. A love that is not a pathological affection

I MEAN ALTRUISM and EMPATHY

Altruism comes from the French "autrui" which means "other people", from "autre" meaning "other", from the Latin "alter"

Unselfish regard or devotion to the welfare of others

In the animal world, altruism describes the behavior of an animal that is not beneficial to or may be harmful to itself, but that benefits others of its species....But we know now, that this kind of behavior goes beyond and across the barrier of species...

ALTRUISM IS AN ENERGY WE CAN ALL HARNESS

The most powerful one

It can move mountains, like romantic love, but it does not kill, it does not imprison, does not make you feel sick, or insane, like romantic love.

IT REPAIRS!

ALTRUISM IS THE ENERGY WE NEED MOST TODAY

to fight greed, and prejudice,

to repair, to mend our torn society

Like one trains one's body, lifting weights to work the muscles

Our soul can be exercised too

Because it is a question of AME, a question of soul

We can cultivate altruistic love if we choose to

And quench the thirst of our wounded humanity

ALTRUISM IS A COSMIC TRANSFORMER

BOTH ALCHEMY AND ALCHEMIST

Altruistic love can indeed transform a negative into positive and allow us to reach harmony.

ALTRUISM IS A MEDIATING FORCE

Between the physical and the spiritual, between the flesh and the soul...

Altruism does provide a DEVEKUT, a spiritual orgasm

It does feel good to help... If people can be addicted to anger, as science has demonstrated, why can't we train ourselves to get addicted to do good...

Altruism is a mediating force between human beings, a language, a conversation, an exchange...so we feel less lonely, less anonymous,

Like a caress on a wounded body, on a wounded soul

ALTRUISM IS A BINDING CEMENT

To build anything

A roof, an irrigation system, a school, an hospital, but also human bridges, to facilitate the dialogue

But to feel and exercise Altruism one must first understand and feel EMPATHY

In our fundamental quest for HAPPINESS and HARMONY

EMPATHY is a primordial ingredient...

How is it possible to keep one's honor
While our world loses its humanity?

WE MUST REBUILD OUR HUMANITY

Based on EMPATHY

The word "empathy" comes from the Greek "em" meaning "with"

And "paschein" meaning to suffer

To empathize...."To suffer with"

Empathy is the identification with, or experiencing of another person's feelings, thoughts, and suffering.

The Webster unabridged dictionary states that
"Empathy is more enduring and valuable than romantic love."

"Compassion" comes from the Latin "compassion" meaning "suffering with"
In Latin, "con" means "with", and
"Passion" from "patere" and "passio" means to suffer
The "patient" suffers and goes to the doctor.
Patience comes from there too...

If you can put yourself in the place of the other, and feel his joy, his pain, feel
how he feels, you might be able to act differently... and make this person
better...

By making one person feel better, you change the course of things....you save
one person and you save a whole world.

We need to re-create a balance....so many human actions are taken solely for
personal benefit dictated by greed... empathy can cure this narcissist onanist
disease.

Instead of ME ME ME, instead of feeding this insatiable never satisfied ego of
ours, let's say US US US,

How can we be together and help one another.

Imagine our society is like a human body...

Believing in our arrogant western civilized ways, that we are the head...

What insane heresy to think that what happens to the foot is of no importance...

Let's imagine your foot hurts, it's been cut or something

You do not take care of it, it's just down there...

If you let the foot go bad..."necrosed" by lack of blood/oxygen, gangrene invades, then you have to cut the foot, so it does not contaminate the rest of the body...

Then, you cannot walk

And slowly the whole body goes...

This blood/oxygen life essence is love/empathy

**THE ULTIMATE FORM OF LOVE IS INDEED ALTRUISM,
ACTIVATED BY EMPATHY**

TO LOVE THE OTHER IS AN UNCONDITIONAL IMPERATIVE

If we cannot do that...we are doomed...

THE METAPHOR OF THE CARESS

WE MUST LEARN, RE-LEARN TO CARESS

**A CARESS IS AN ACTION OF ROMANTIC LOVE,
BUT ALSO AN ACTION OF ALTRUISTIC LOVE**

TO CARESS IS A FORM OF CARING.

Same root! CARE

**THERE IS A FORM OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE CALLED HAPTIC
MEDICINE**

"Haptic" comes from the Greek **"haptikos"**

"able to grasp or perceive"

It comes from the verb **"hapterin"** to sense

Haptics is a branch of psychology that investigates cutaneous sense

Haptic medicine investigates the role of maternal touch to support human health. A study, known as MAVAN, is undergoing in Canada right now, and scientists have discovered that the effects of maternal touch include:

- modifying the expression of genes
- regulating stress
- helping neurons in the hippocampus region of the brain to develop

tactile sensory stimulations, like caressing, change hormonal patterns...

There is such a thing as "pet therapy" too. For highly stressed persons, to caress a pet help them soothe their hyperactivity...

Charity is a form of caressing... soothing somebody's life
Remember...CARITAS in Latin...

If we had loved our planet, if we had caressed her, cared for her, instead of pillaging her, ripping her apart, polluting her, we would not be in the mess we are in today...

It is greed, hedonism, and ignorance that have created the murderous disequilibrium in which we live today.

We must re-create an equilibrium

And for that...

WE MUST CHANGE OUR NOTIONS OF SUCCESS.

Success does not equal dollars, euros, pesos, yens...

SUCCESS IS HARMONY...

It is being able to get up in the morning looking forward to the day and all the opportunities to help something or someone get better, and then going to bed, able to shake your own hand, knowing that you have indeed brought some joy to some... That is success.

Altruistic love can and will help us survive the world crisis brought upon us by greed and lack of care.

SO... WHICH DOG ARE YOU GOING TO FEED?