

# KEEPING YOUR SANITY WITH LOVE AND VISIBILITY

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The ideal is that it's mutual

When we love someone, and they enter a room, that room gets a little brighter for us, like the lights have been turned up a notch. What brings that glow, that brightness from another fellow human being?

Love is too rich and complex to boil down to some single facet or data point; but one of the essential elements that goes into feeling love for one another, is *the experience of being seen*.

When we fall in love with someone, we aren't just seeing who they are, we're seeing the *best* of who they are; and to see and be seen in this way is one of the greatest, deepest joys of life. One of the central qualities of happy marriages is that both partners continue to see each other that way over time.

Researchers have found that happy romantic partners always rate their partner more highly than other friends or observers do.

This is not some fantasy pretense or delusional wishful thinking. We are complex beings. Within every person is a rich world that takes time to understand. We are each full of aspirations and abilities and courage that aren't obvious to just anybody.

It takes getting to know somebody deeply to see what they're made of; and in that knowing, a loving mate will choose the best of possibilities to focus on, to reflect back towards, and in that way, to encourage more of.

In contrast, when love dies, that focus turns toward criticism and disappointment, and the gaze moves to see those very same qualities that once inspired and delighted now as weaknesses or irritations. This is a choice that each of us can make at any moment in time; we can choose to see the best in another person... or the worst. If you want love to grow, choose the former.

Of course, sometimes people do objectively bad things, harmful things... even despicable things. Regardless of what our *potential* may be, it matters very much what we *do*. Love is not founded on denial or pretense; and as with all enduring goodness, it does not grow through disconnection from reality.

Nothing grows *from* disconnection from reality but *more* disconnection from reality. The light of love dims in the presence of despicable behavior; it also dims in the presence of deceit.

So what I am advocating is not simple, really. On the one hand I am saying to see the best within your mate, your kids, your friends, the people you love and care about. On the other hand, I am saying that this does not include being delusional or dishonest.

It's also not about perfection.

To see the best within another person is to, somewhat paradoxically, also be aware of their shortcomings and weaknesses – and to accept these for what they are. If you're seriously looking for perfection in your partner... let me be blunt, you will never be in love. Perfection is a silly, childish, ridiculous thing to look for in another human being.

Let's examine this a bit:

First of all, your idea of perfection will be different from my idea of perfection; and I can guarantee you that your idea of perfection will be different from your partner's idea of perfection (and, by the way, you probably don't want to know what your partner's idea of perfection is for *you*, either).

Beyond that, I strongly suspect that your vision of perfection today is different from your vision of perfection from ten or twenty years ago. So you would be expecting that your partner would not only fit your perfect vision of the past, but that they would somehow continually scramble to meet your perfect vision for them as you grow and change? Not likely; most of us have much better things to do.

Furthermore, if we're looking for our mate to be perfect, then by definition we are looking for an ideal within our own mind, and we are not seeing the living, breathing, feeling, and magnificent human being right in front of us!

If we are expecting our partner to be "better" than they are, then we are really expecting them to be *other* than they are. And this is not love; it's more like it's opposite.

Over the forty some years of my counseling and coaching career, I have seen couples expect some abstract vision of one another many, many times; I have yet to see anybody succeed at it. We're not put on this earth to live up to somebody else's ideal; it's enough trying to live up to our own aspirations.

This is no less futile with kids. We can influence them, inspire them, and above all love them, but we are not Pygmalion carving them out of stone into our vision of beauty and greatness. If you want to be an effective parent, see your children for who they are – much of that is already present at birth. Guide them, yes; influence them, certainly. But listen to them, pay attention to them, get to know them, and love them for who they are *first*.

Love is fundamentally about seeing, hearing, and knowing another human being deeply. We cannot do that from within our own idealistic fantasy. We have to come out and look into the eyes; listen to the voice, the thoughts, the dreams; and feel the heart of another. That's when we get to feel that great resonance; that sublime emotion of being touched with love by the soul of another; and reciprocating that love back in a benevolent cycle of visibility and trust.

Love begins with attraction, is made possible with empathy, kindness and respect, and grows into deep admiration and trust through giving and receiving the greatest gift that one human being can give to another: the experience of being seen.

If you want love to grow, pay attention to your partner. Listen to her, ask him questions about his experience, spend time with each other. Do you remember how you met? What drew you to one another? Do you know what your partner did today? What her plans are for the day? What moves him? What makes her happy?

What brings the biggest, most glowing smile to his or her face? What matters to her? What inspires him? What is exciting, enjoyable, delightful?

If you want love to grow, spend more time getting to know each other; even if you've been together for decades, there's still more to discover if you let yourself be curious. This takes not just "quality time," but time itself.

Love grows and is nurtured through the little things, the many benevolent points of contact each day, that reputation that we build with each other of trust and caring and delight... and that greatest of gifts, the desire to be curious, to wish to understand more and more deeply this dear one you've chosen to love.

PS: My new course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you with this part of your life in much greater detail, with deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well. You can get it now with a deep discount, for \$99, if you use this code: LB99.

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