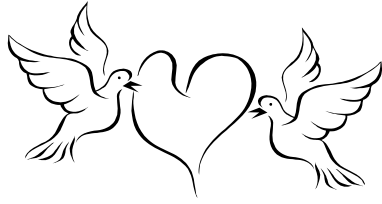


THIS IS LOVE



When we begin to feel something's wrong in a relationship, whether it be with a friend, lover, partner or whomever, somewhere, somehow, some need is not being met.

The ultimate solution is to get the need fulfilled. The complex reality of life though, is that this is not always possible. No one gets all their needs met all the time. We sometimes have to make compromises and sacrifices. We have to assume an attitude of goodwill and engage in the delicate art of negotiation. We have to learn how to find balance between what we can have in this present moment, and what will have to wait.

It isn't always easy to communicate what we need. Sometimes we just don't know what's missing. All we know is that something is not right. We experience this as a feeling - a nagging irritation or annoyance, a tugging of vague frustration that seems to come and go, a bewildering loneliness hovering on the edge of our awareness.

Relationships are complicated dances of reciprocity, a constant exchange of statements of need and responses to those statements. Sometimes we miss a beat and fall out of step. When a need is misinterpreted, misunderstood or just plain missed, we are inclined to let it go. We carry on, dipping and swinging and twirling at all the wrong times, until a statement of need and a response connect again. We fall back into our shared rhythm and sail smoothly across the dance floor.

It's when we can't seem to get back in step that we have to stop. The more we try to continue the more out-of-sync we become. Aggravation begins to erode the joy of the dance.

When irritation and annoyance persist, they start to insist. Frustration begins to feel like an undertow. Loneliness starts to take up more space. What were once vague feelings begin to transform into unmistakable anger and resentment. Our friend, lover or partner becomes the cause of our discontent and the issue that is the true cause gets lost in the missteps along the way.

When we feel this happening, this is love asking us to be attentive to its needs. This is love asking us for our care. This is love asking us not to back away and withdraw, but to step up and speak.

It takes courage to stop and ask “Why aren’t we dancing anymore?” It takes courage to rise to the challenge of going back to that moment when the dance went awry and to try to understand, and help each other understand, why we fell out of step. We are afraid it will hurt.

It takes courage to seek answers that may be hard to find. Sometimes they are not where we think they are, and we have to search deeply and go to places as yet undiscovered within ourselves. It takes courage to harness our defenses and hurt feelings, to reach back to the respect and caring we remember and open up to each other honestly again.

It takes courage to find out if we can dance together again.

Learning to be aware of your needs and to communicate them well and with caring is a first step toward expanding your infinite ability to love. When you hear love asking you to speak, reach into the vast reserves of courage you have, and answer.

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