

views: Love Is, Love Is Not: A Primer

As Valentine's Day nears, one truth rings clear. Love has no single, simple meaning.

Still, poets, pundits, philosophers and social scientists probe the heart for answers. Shakespeare, most notably, explored love's tragic downside. Love gone wrong. He viewed love as a raw and potent emotion, while New Agers now insist is no feeling, but an action. Huh?

Efforts to explain love in the media and pop culture fall far short. S-E-X, a bigger selling item merely masquerades as love. Hollywood refuses to shake its celluloid notions of love as the sultry, heart-pulsating, hormone-racing, rush of "falling in love" on behalf of horniness run wild. Even The Beatles tried, lyrically reaching with

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ous, exhilarating and depressing, a mind-numbing drug that uplifts, addicts, exalts and wounds, dulls and bombards our senses, bowls us over, knocks us out cold, leads to insanity, blinds us, the most powerful force for change.

Yet grasping what it generates in us brings us no closer to knowing what "it" is. So, we are left with sex mimicking love, Lifetime TV, Oprah, and therapy. Love, never rational, nor sex orientation specific,

love puzzle. Here's hoping this helps, before you take that mad, mystifying leap into this Twilight Zone called love.

LOVE IS: Being consistently mindful of someone else's welfare – spiritually, emotionally and physically, a strong human tendency, self-renewing.

NOT: Bells ringing, whistles blowing, rockets blasting, infatuation, newness, excitement, a good time, a warm body, desire, attachment, obsession, lust, biology, chemistry, great sex, unbridled ecstasy, heady conversation, from the waist down.

IS: Affection, touch, intimacy, hugs and caresses.

NOT: Offering him sex when he needs the above.

IS: Allowing your partner the freedom to set his own life course, to grow at his

because you've chosen a deeper vow over cheap, frivolous sex.

NOT: Rationalizing cheating because you think everyone does it, we're just animals after all and you read "Monogomy: A Myth" twice.

IS: A genuine willingness to work together when things go awry. Seeking counseling.

NOT: Bolting at the first sign of conflict or a "revenge" quickie with the mailman.

IS: Deep, caring, kind, compassionate, creative, comforting, trusting, considerate, tender, respect, understanding, empathy, loyalty, forgiveness, open and unfiltered conversation, honesty, spontaneous, steady, sustaining, sensitive, sensible, selfless, surrendering, investment, profound, contagious.

NOT: Manipulative, insensitive, indifferent, selfish, distrustful, isolation, deception, lies, betrayal, withholding thoughts and emotions, secrets, walls, grudges, verbal or physical abuse, arrogance, dredging up the past, unforgiving.

IS: Pretending to like his family, those in-laws from hell, none of whom you can stomach and visa versa.

NOT: Forcing him to choose between you and them.

IS: Difficult, hard work, heartache, tears, sweat, effort, belonging, commitment, risky, devoted, dedicated, persistent, active, exasperation, disappointment, struggle, scary, cruel, hurtful, loss, thoughtful, obligation, nurturing, a choice, costly.

NOT: Easy, forever, fairy tales, appearances, image, a Hollywood script, knights in shining armor, a Barbra tune, a fling with a male stripper, long-stemmed roses, diamonds, a wedding band.

IS: Listening to and attending to him fully, spending quality time, just being there, mild suggestion, telling him what he needs to hear as opposed to what he wants to hear, confronting self-destructiveness, affirming.

NOT: Judging, blaming, criticizing, preaching, ordering, commanding, demanding, dispensing advice, fixing, enabling, appeasing, demanding he do it "your way," possessive, "brutally honest."

IS: Not arguing when angry, upset or impaired, but fair and constructively.

NOT: Fighting, yelling, throwing things, slamming doors, hissy fits.

IS: Total acceptance of him warts and all, which is not the same as approving of his actions. Unconditional.

NOT: Conditional nor judgmental. Molding him into the person you wish he'd become.

IS: Not liking all his friends, but respecting his right in picking them.

NOT: Demanding he choose other friends.

IS: Allowing him the last Dove Bar even though you hate his love handles. A trip to 7-11 at 3 a.m. cause he's out of Doritos.

NOT: Badgering him about his weight or guiltting him into joining a gym.

IS: A huge heart.

NOT: Perky pecs, ripped abs, massive shoulders, striking eyes, top or bottom or anything else to do with appearances or performance categories.

IS: Sharing in each other's successes and failures.

NOT: Being there only to celebrate the triumphs. ■

"Love is the answer, but while you are waiting for the answer, sex raises some pretty good questions." – Woody Allen

"All You Need is Love" and outdoing "Just Say No" for sheer simplicity.

Yet, gay or straight, love and its chase can get ugly and grave. By news accounts, love-struck laymen confirm their love by dying for it and worse, kill those who can't or won't love back, though no major wars have been waged over love. Others risk status, health, and self-respect for it, without agreeing on what "it" is. Love has been exposed as nourishing and draining, needy and danger-

trumps all logic, cleverly overstated at Valentine's Day on sappy cards, with gooey chocolates and pretty bouquets, cupids and hearts. Sweet romantic tokens that suggest, but are not really love itself.

Lest you think I fancy myself as lucky-at-love, think again. Having failed the "love" game more times than Madonna has altered her image and Michael Jackson his plastic surgeon, I find myself inching closer, yet so far away at cracking the

own pace, to maintain his individuality and identity. **NOT:** Desperation, clinging, dependency. Keeping him submissive so that you can control and dominate him.

IS: Nursing him to health, catering to his every whim when he's ill like his mother used to.

NOT: Urging him to sleep on the couch because you cannot afford to miss work by catching whatever bug he's got.

IS: Denying your primal urges with a willing stud

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