

BY ANI TUZMAN

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OUR EXPERIENCE OF INNER LOVE AND WHOLENESS—THE INNER MARRIAGE—IS THE FOUNDATION FOR A FULFILLING RELATIONSHIP WITH ANYONE ELSE. THE SOURCE OF LOVE AND HAPPINESS IS NOT ANOTHER PERSON, NOR CAN LOVE AND JOY BE TAKEN AWAY BY ANOTHER. LOVE'S ABODE IS EVERY HEART. AS WE KNOW THIS LOVE WITHIN OURSELVES WE BEGIN TO RECOGNIZE IT IN OTHERS AND EVERYWHERE, EVEN IN ITS DISGUISES. OUR MARRIAGES AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS MIRROR OUR OPENNESS TO LOVE AND THE WAYS WE FEAR LOVING. RELATIONSHIP INVITES US TO LEARN TO LOVE OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER BOUNDLESSLY.

Let's start with a brief contemplation of love...

Get comfortable if you aren't already and become aware of your breath moving in and out. Slowly and gently take two or three deep breaths in and long breaths out. Think of someone you love very much. Let yourself see, hear, and feel this person. Take your time. Now focus on the love you feel inside as you imagine this individual. Gradually let go of the image of your loved one and turn your attention completely to the inner experience of your love. Bathe in this love for a



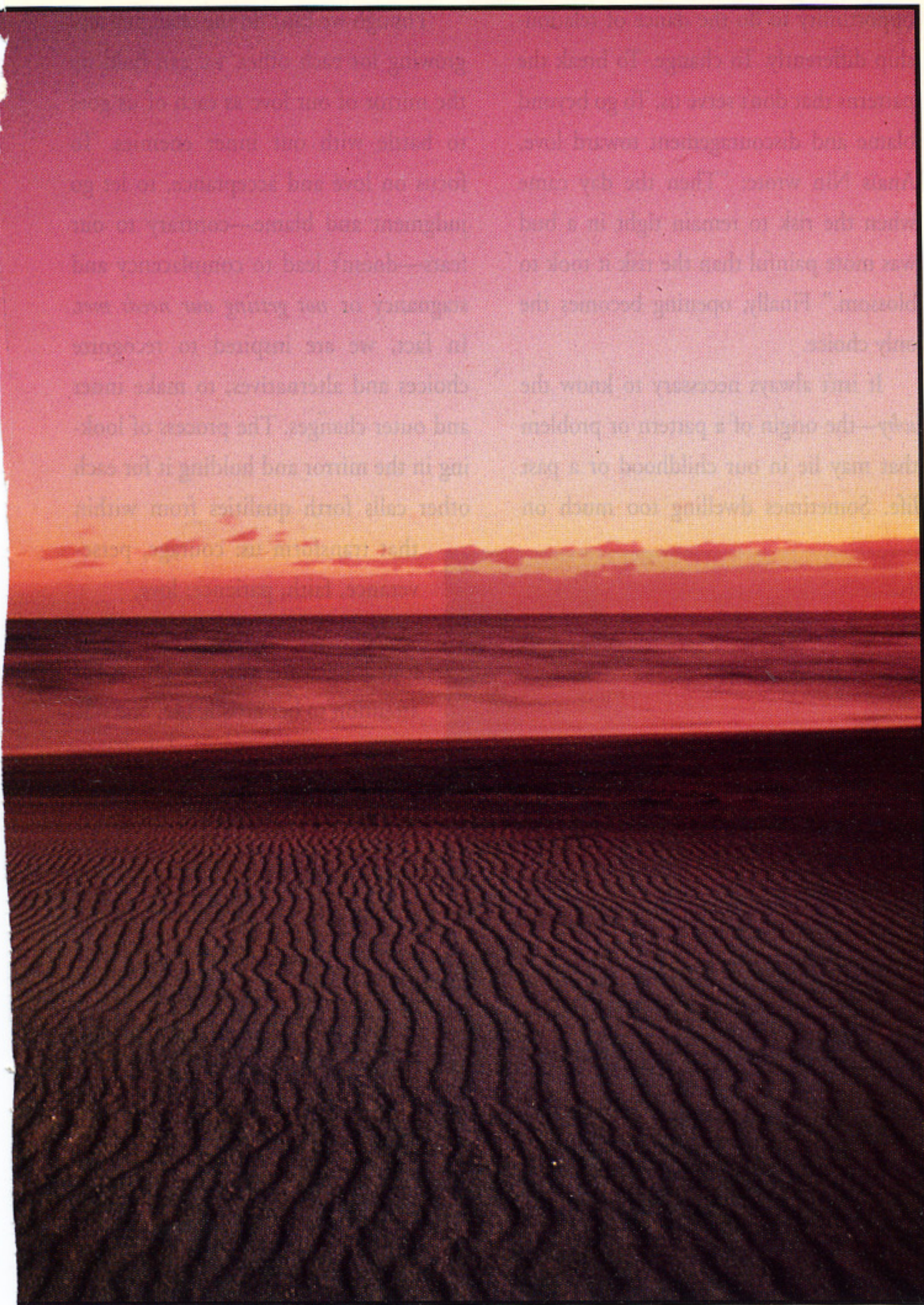
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few moments.

It is because of our inner love that we can love one another. This love is not given to us by anyone, nor can it be taken away. It is always in our heart. What we gain and lose is our awareness and connection to this love—we never lose the love itself. It can't be diminished or harmed. It is a

power greater than any other.

St. Francis said, "The one you have been looking for is the one who is looking." The love we are seeking is inside us. The more we experience this wellspring of love within us, the more we can recognize and delight in it everywhere. We offer our love more joyously. We are our



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own *beloved* and begin to love others and the world as our own Self.

Many years ago I went to see a marriage and divorce counselor reputed to be one of the best in New England and said to have great insight into the challenges and blessings in creating a happy marriage. She was a nun. I have never forgot-

ten what she said while a mature red maple rustled outside her window: the strongest, most fulfilling marriages are those in which each partner feels married within himself or herself. Each partner knows an inner wholeness, and the relationship is built on that foundation. More often she saw partners seeking their

other half, looking to each other to fulfill and complete their lives. She counseled me to focus more on experiencing my wholeness than on expecting or demanding it from my partner or my marriage. I wouldn't find happiness in my marriage unless I knew it in myself.

The image of the inner marriage plucked a chord of deep longing. At my wedding some years earlier I had read a passage about marriage from Kahlil Gibran's book, *The Prophet*, that had offered similar guidance: "Let there be spaces in your togetherness... Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music." This was not my experience in my marriage. I was spending sleepless nights beside the man I had married, feeling a loneliness I couldn't understand or make go away. It didn't seem that it should be there, but it was. Something so beautiful that we had known and shared was eluding us—but how could the love be gone? Some nights it seemed I lay next to a stranger, who had been so familiar, with whom I had united my body and life and born a child, but from whom I felt painfully distant now. I felt far from myself. In the midst of all this I was so afraid of losing him. We were together but not together. Separate but not really separate.

Neither of us had learned yet about being complete in our own Self. How could I be intimate with another person if I was not yet intimate with myself? How could I fully respect another and ask respect if I wasn't rooted in respect for myself? It just wouldn't work to expect someone else to be my constant source of love while I remained out of touch with the source of love within me. How could I

give love—except for a fragile kind that cracks easily when it's looked at the wrong way or is under the slightest pressure?

Through both sublime and painful experience, love leads us to itself, brings us closer to the truth of loving. We experience the heights of surrendering to love and come up against our fear and our holding back. Kahlil Gibran also wrote: "For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth, so is he for your pruning. Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun, so shall he descend to your roots and shake them clinging in the earth." Love changes us, giving and taking away, at times stripping us of everything so we learn to find it inside, to know our inner strength.

The mystic poet Rumi said that love causes "a hundred veils to fall each moment." We come to our relationships with limiting patterns, fears, and concepts of who we are and who we are not. Both harmony and conflict help us face and free ourselves from reactions that bind us and keep us caught in the same groove even when we don't want to be. In intimate relationship, whatever is in the way of love eventually is mirrored back to us. When we gaze in that mirror we may meet "the thieves of the heart:" fear, envy, anger, doubt, jealousy, etc. Our partnerships provide a context in which issues arise, but they are seldom the sole source of our problems. Just as we can't expect our partners to be the source of our happiness, we lose out if we designate them the cause of our pain. Our pain invites us to face our *stuckness*, to step back and look into ourselves. We are given the

opportunity to do the dance of relationship differently. To change. To break the patterns that don't serve us. To go beyond blame and discouragement toward love. Anaïs Nin wrote: "Then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." Finally, opening becomes the only choice.

It isn't always necessary to know the *why*—the origin of a pattern or problem that may lie in our childhood or a past life. Sometimes dwelling too much on



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why keeps us identified with the pattern. Change doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen through the sheer power of our will or result from our mental analysis. With compassion and willingness as companions, we can make the effort both to turn within and to communicate with each other. Through our efforts and the grace of love itself we gradually experience the truth of who we are. We come to identify with the unlimited love at the core of our being rather than with smallness or lack, separateness and fear.

Though we can't do the changing and growing for each other, we can hold up the mirror of our love as each of us goes to battle with our inner enemies. To focus on love and acceptance, to let go judgment and blame—contrary to our fears—doesn't lead to complacency and stagnancy or *not getting our needs met*. In fact, we are inspired to recognize choices and alternatives, to make inner and outer changes. The process of looking in the mirror and holding it for each other calls forth qualities from within that transform us: courage, perseverance, faith, patience: love.

A woman who is the mother of four longed for years to give more attention to her artistic life. She was waiting for permission while living with chronically low levels of anger, frustration, and discouragement that she often aimed at her family, making it harder for her to share her enthusiasm and creative energy with them. Finally, after seeing what wasn't working, she prayed for change. She began to meditate and practice self-inquiry. She realized that she had to find the permission she was seeking in herself: nobody would be able to give it to her. This awareness initiated a major shift, both within her and in the outer circumstances of her life. She knew that she had to love herself and her art enough to change. She became willing to take responsibility for her own life. Energy that was tied up in blaming and despairing was freed up and available as joy. Her conviction in herself invited the support of others; time and space opened in her life.

Love beckons to us in both the hardships and the joys of relationships to exceed what we thought were our bound-

aries. Rumi wrote: "What I most want is to spring out of this personality, then to sit apart from that leaping. I've lived too long where I can be reached." Giving ourselves to love and following love where it leads takes us beyond our contracted sense of our self, expands our ability to love. What we think is the risk of loving is often the call to be broken open to love.

My youngest child, Emmanuel, born with a rare and severe heart defect, was admitted to cardiac intensive care within hours of his birth. My fifteen-year-old son first came to the hospital when his brother was already three months old. With a pained look on his face, he sat on an orange stool as far from the baby's crib as he could get without landing in the next child's area. It looked like a storm was about to break. Soon it did. After sobbing into his hands for some time, he lifted his head. Looking directly at me, he said, "Mom, I'm afraid to love him. I might lose him."

We talked about the choice to love, about *not knowing*, about love never being wasted. In a college essay a few years later, my son described that day in the hospital as a turning point in his life. He decided that day to stop holding back from loving, not to be afraid to love.

Following the course of love can lead us out of a particular relationship as well as more deeply into one. My former husband and I—staying close to our love—let love change its form in our lives, as we chose to separate and divorce. Although it was not easy to end a marriage of many years, it has been a harmonious, not a traumatic, experience, which has taught us and continues to teach us and our children a great deal about love. We realized that though our marriage was ending, that didn't mean our love for each other had to

end. We kept returning to the faith that love and respect would guide and support us instead of relying on anger and blame to fuel us and give us the strength to go forth and separate our lives and homes.

Our young son Emmanuel, a lover of routine who likes the exact same breakfast every day, did not welcome his mom and dad deciding to live in different houses. We acknowledged that, supporting him in knowing and expressing his feelings. We also shared with him what have almost become mantras in his life. We said: *Some things change, and some things stay the same. The love stays the same. Mom and Dad love you very much and always will. That love won't change.*

Yes, one can!
"Love is. One cannot practice is-ness. One can, however practice the decision to love," says the spiritual guide Emmanuel. To practice focusing on love rather than lack, I have a blank book with a shiny purple cover in which, each night, I list things in the day that brought me closer to love, making sure to include the smallest of incidents or experiences. Before going to sleep I contemplate my day, amazed at its treasures—the actions, words, and moments I would have ignored or taken for granted without this practice. I recall the way the morning sun felt on my cheek, a cashier's kind word, a tenderness exchanged between my daughter and son. I find myself taking the time to give thanks for a delicious lunch, a vigorous walk, my friend's kindness. I feel like I am gathering jewels and stringing them on a breathtakingly beautiful necklace. This simple nightly practice opens my heart, awakens me to the power and beauty of even the smallest gestures of love. I find less fault, less to criticize, more in life to celebrate. I see love more readily. And there is endless delight.

Emmanuel, the spirit guide, said:

A leaf holds together for love.

*Love can turn the world
around, and it does.*

*What did you think was
spinning your planet*

if it wasn't love?

*and what do you think the
fires of your sun consist of*

and the cells of your body

and the stars in your sky

and the consciousness in your heart?

It is all love.

There is nothing but love. ♡

Having found the abode of this love within us, we can see it in each other. We are able to experience our marriages, our homes and our world as dwelling places of this love. We welcome love, look for it, and begin to see it everywhere we turn. With it comes so much joy. ❖

Ani Tuzman's work has been published internationally, and she has received several prizes for her poetry. She is also the founder and director of The Dance of the Letters Writing Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, which offers writing groups and individual sessions for women, men, teenagers, and children.

