

Choosing to Love: Basic Needs and Significant Relationships

Elijah Mickel and Cecilia Hall

The first author is chair of the Department of Social Work and the second author is Director of MSW Admissions; both at Delaware State University, Dover Delaware

ABSTRACT

This article is a continuation of the article that appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of this Journal

Need fulfillment is a process which is operationalized through behaviors. Each person must meet his or her basic needs. A significant relationship is need fulfilling and expressed through the strength of the connection between mind, body and spirit. The more balanced these components, the more reflective of need fulfillment is the relationship. In order to be loving, one must love oneself. In order to love oneself, one needs to responsibly meet one's needs. In order to develop the significant relationship, one must contribute to the other's picture of significance. The relationship if it is to succeed must be need fulfilling.

Optimally, need fulfillment considers each partner. Although the process of meeting one or more needs is continuous, the relationship must fulfill each need. That is, you meet each need concurrently with the other. The personality is, in the final analysis, the method by which each person fulfills needs. According to Glasser (1998), "The personalities of some couples are different but complementary, that is, the differences enhance the relationships. But in my observation, the best marriages are ones in which the husband and wives have similar personalities" (p. 92). One of the most outward expressions of similar personalities is friendship. The most important gift is the giving of friendship. At its pinnacle, loving is a journey which leads to the destination of close friendship. According to Glasser (1995), "Close friendship is built on a lot of comfortable hugging, kissing, and caressing, talking to each other easily and enjoyably, sharing common interest, and, especially, doing things together where there is some learning and improvement" (p. 119). This friendship is both the precursor and the sustainer of significant relationships. Each of the basic needs must be fulfilled to develop a close friendship. Developing close friendships can lead to developing loving behaviors.

The objective of loving behaviors is to prepare for the moment that transforms into a significant relationship. The significant relationship is holistic. The whole relationship is both physical and spiritual. The spiritual component is operationalized in loving that is not only for this life (physical), but also for the eternal. Many are con-

fused in the sense that they believe that what has been joined physically is never to be disconnected. The physical is but one component of the relationship. It is that part that is observable and obvious. It is a series of seemingly small events that join together to make a chain. This chain is a series of steps that lead to the end point. The end point, it must be remembered leads to the satisfaction our total need for love. According to Glasser (1965), "When we cannot satisfy our total need for love, we will without fail, suffer and react with many familiar psychological symptoms, from mild discomfort, through anxiety and depression to complete withdrawal from the world around us" (p.10). In the relationship, each needs to express and behave as if the other is needed. If you give up on one another, you begin to do more without the other. Giving up behaviors reifies that one can manage alone. The longer you engage in activities without others, the more likely you are to end up alone. It is possible to discover that joy and acceptable need fulfillment can be found in solitude. Alone behavior is unbalanced belonging. The longer we are unbalanced, the less successful in relationships we become. This is unhappiness.

A successful search for happiness can be blocked by non need fulfilling behaviors. When partners don't share pictures in their quality world, they experience frustration. It is to note that noncongruent pictures can be expressed as frustration. This frustration is framed as being out of love. The more pictures partners share, the deeper partners may perceive themselves as being in love. When they share these pictures, they usually share many of the total behaviors required to meet their basic needs. This is not to posit that having different pictures precludes the development of a loving relationship. It is to proffer that having different pictures require partners to work harder at developing and keeping the loving relationship.

The search for a balance within the loving relationship is blocked by non need fulfilling behaviors. In a non need fulfilling relationship, one or both partners choose to focus on the external. They resort to injustice inherent to the relationship. Balance requires a need to act when we become aware of unbalance. This does not mean that loving cannot be rekindled, it simply means that to be in love again requires commitment. Both partners must be committed. Admittedly it is easier to just get along and be cordial than to rekindle the loving. In order to rekindle

the loving, one must be willing to tolerate the fire, the annealing fire of self evaluation and rebirth. This fire may sear and burn while it recreates. Underlying the relationship is love but loving has abated.

The search for significant relationships must be based on a realistic self evaluation (Mickel, 1996). In order to act lovingly, one must be aware of how one's behavior impacts each person in the relationship. Awareness allows self evaluation. Self evaluation may not result in action but does place one in a position to act upon the results. According to the Dalai Lama (1999), "It is far more useful to be aware of a single shortcoming in ourselves than it is to be aware of a thousand in somebody else. For when the fault is our own, we are in a position to correct it" (p. 153). Without self evaluation, it is highly likely there will be no action. The focus must be self correction rather than partner blame. The outcome is to understand why we feel, act, think and have physical conditions the way we do. What are the pictures in our quality world? Where are the error signals emanating from? What is the corrective action? Out of conflict can and must come at a minimum a desire for consensus, if the relationship is to work. Self evaluation requires each partner to do at least three things: Be aware of their own pictures, become aware of the significant other's pictures, and develop joining pictures. When these three activities are accomplished, the relationship tends toward significance. Significant relationships require that each partner place the relationship above individual wants.

Marriage/partnership is a present or a problem.

To love is good. To be loved is better. To love and be loved is best. Loving as a constant becomes real through acting, thinking, feeling and physical aspects (total behavior) of a shared quality world. In the loving quality world, there are usually many more shared pictures than the couple will use. As we live our lives, we accumulate our loving pictures. These pictures prepare us for our perception of in loving. . It is the building of a loving reserve in the quality world. The accumulation of more pictures than we currently use (negative entropy) is necessary for that moment when in loving is threatened. These are the problems (Mickel and Hall, 2008) of loving. Presents are available to counter problems. Presents lead to loving behaviors. In terms of love and belonging, each of us can acquire any number of pictures.

We are born with the ability to love unconditionally. We are reared to love within conditions which are socially and/or culturally structured. We can re-learn to overcome our social and cultural restrictions and strive for perfect loving. The question is what type of love exists? One can transition from in loving behaviors to love behavior. When one encounters problems in the relationship, one can move from agape loving to philia (Felder, 1989 and Washington, 1986). Here the relationship is based on reciprocity. When one uses the presents (Mickel and Hall, 2008), one can

move from philia to agape. The loving system will always seek homeostasis. This is a balance of love within or outside of the relationship. Ideally, the system will seek balance in a healthy need fulfilling manner. A healthy relationship is not about how much you have. It is about how much you believe you have. The more we believe it, the truer it is. Loving relationships are the perfect model of the concept of constructivism (Mickel and Liddie-Hamilton, 2002). The world of loving is socially constructed around what we believe. That is, poverty or deprivation is not the key to building poor relationships. The key is disappointment. If one or both parties believe that they could or should have more than they possess, they are/feel deprived. If the balance is unhealthy, intervention is necessary. Self evaluating for loving is required in the significant relationship. The definition of love maybe is elusive. We may not be able to define the loving relationships but we all know when we have it. The authors posit that one can determine love. It is a measurable, qualitative variable. The couple can operationally define love. For our purposes, you have a loving (or tending to in loving) relationship if you have more presents than problems. Whether or not the behavior is loving or not, balance will be the outcome. The system will not judge the behaviors but acts to achieve balance. It is up to the perceptual system to interject judgment into the type of balance achieved. When one encounters presents in the relationship, one can regain agape loving. The more presents, the more homeostatic (loving) the relationship. Self evaluating will determine through the valuing filter if the behavior is loving.

Spiritual Loving

Spiritual loving is the transforming component of perfect loving. Perfect loving is timeless, no beginning and no end. One cannot remember the moment of transformation to perfect love, that is when it begins or ends. Spiritual loving has staying power. Perfect loving includes mind, body and spirit. It is the love that is both convergent and triangular in the practice. Spiritual loving is need fulfilling. Spiritual loving is pure love. This is the love that is beyond the physical and the mental. It is love based on the existence of the perfect within the imperfect (Mickel and Hall, 2008). The struggle toward perfectibility is the physical attempting to be congruent with the spiritual. The spiritual is that which lasts forever, while the physical is temporary and limited. Spiritual love is loving without boundaries. Its residual exists on the physical plane, but it is in reality on a spiritual plane. The integration of those planes raises the level of consciousness of the participants. A holistic approach widens the sphere of influence and concern. The presents and problems of loving exist on both the physical and spiritual planes. To love physically is limited. It requires only the here and now. To be concerned about meeting today's needs is the foundation of physical love. To love spiritually requires one to be absent from the confusing body/physical needs and move to a higher plane.

Those who love are connected beyond space and time. Loving spiritually can be overwhelming, if not in the appropriate context. Choosing to love perfectly requires that one practices at fulfilling each of the needs. We must practice fulfilling these needs in the past, present and future. The ability to love outside of time when properly understood is completely satisfying. Practice does not make perfect but perfect in loving practice makes in loving perfect. This is especially true in the realm of spiritual loving. This perfect practice is required to reach perfection. Perfection requires a focus on loving. To be perfect in loving, one must aspire to be perfect in behavior. To be perfect in behavior, one must focus on total commitment to self as well as to the significant other. It is the opinion of these writers that what has been joined spiritually is the most difficult to disconnect. Thus, the loving journey to build significant relationships must focus on what actions are required to be spiritually connected. It is the spiritual loving – love of the Creator, love of self and love of others. This loving, that is spiritual, is not selfish, but is transformative. Transformative loving is beyond the physical.

Many confuse physical needs with the total behavior of loving. In fact, a satisfactory physical relationship is important but not the most important component of loving. In some relationships, one partner may protect and hold onto the physical needs but allow others to provide non physical basic needs. This process can be seen in relationships where friends and acquaintances become just as important as the significant other. Because the relationship is not physical, the significant other fails to realize that the loving is leaving. If one tends to focus only on satisfying the physical, one compartmentalizes loving. Compartmental loving gives rise to afflictive behaviors.

Relational Problem Solving

The unintended consequences of focusing on afflictive behaviors are that we transmit more problems than presents in the relationship. A relationship built on problems is a disconnected relationship. Partners tolerate rather than invest and continually develop the relationship. Tolerant is one form of giving up. Tolerators are estranged lovers. The choice not to communicate is a choice to disconnect. Silencing behaviors are expressions of angry thoughts, afflictive emotions. It is operationalized aggression. It is acting out behavior. The message may be interpreted as “I don’t like you, or your behavior; since I don’t like you or your behavior, I will punish you.” Out of silence comes anger. I will make you sorry because I will withhold verbal intercourse. The answer to angry silence is restraint. According to the Dalai Lama (1999), “Nowhere is the uselessness of afflictive emotion more obvious than in the case of anger. When we become angry, we stop being compassionate, loving, generous, forgiving, tolerant, and patient altogether. We thus deprive ourselves of the very things that happiness consists in” (p. 95).

It is through need fulfilling communications that we transmit energy for ourselves to another. If we choose to withhold communications (verbal), we open our nonverbal behaviors to other’s interpretation without the connective of truth. Each partner’s beliefs are based on values and knowledge. Silence is an irresponsible choice when used to communicate unhappiness. Although some silence can be effective in the relationship, one must know when to be quiet.

How do you change your situation? Focus upon needs. Remember that we need all of the needs all of the time. Also that the ability to fulfill the needs differ among people. In the relationship, attempt to be complementary with one’s significant other. Therefore, meeting any of the needs is helpful and strengthening to the relationship. Use the presents (Mickel and Hall, 2007) every day. To use the presents is to look beyond the mere appearance and look at the causative factors. It is not specific events (wants) but the underlying causes (needs). One must always fulfill each need and the presenting behavior in our best attempt to accomplish this task.

We can choose a more effective behavior. We put labels on people and things, we can remove them. Because it is different, does not mean it is “bad”. Although we cannot always get what we want, we can always get some of what we need. In order to get our needs met, we must communicate in a need fulfilling manner. In order to communicate, one must be willing to listen. In order to listen constructively, one must be loving. If one is loving, one can build a loving relationship.

In order to change the current situation, one should focus on the presents as well as the present. As one’s focus is on the present, one can immerse one self in the journey (smell the flowers) and not be as concerned with the destination. It is the journey toward perfect loving which makes life worth living. This is the ultimate meaning of life. The presents and problems (Mickel and Hall, 2008) are ever present even as one reaches toward perfection within imperfection. Identify your area of gifts. Strength of gifts and problems tend to lead you to believe that you may only have that issue/strength. Forever is in the journey to the destination of perfect (spiritual) based loving these are the imperfections within perfect loving, These imperfections within perfection requires efforts at significant relationship improvement.

Conclusion

When two are in love, each acts lovingly. Sharing of loving is expressed in related behaviors. The most significant practice of acting lovingly is to be open to love. According to Glasser (1965, p. 10), “To either love or allow ourselves to be loved is not enough, we must do both.” Basic needs that are infused with spirituality are holistic. The more interconnected one is with another, the

more aware they are. Involvement is a process manifested through awareness. Awareness is the coming together of those with like minds.

One must choose to be aware of the other's behavior as well as the choices made in an attempt to reframe our awareness to give meaning to our life. All behavior is our best attempt to choose our perception. These are the visibly present manifestations of the spirit of loving.

Love is and isn't at the same time. It is everything and nothing. It is the all but it fails to meet the any. Love is the joining of extremes. It is a union of opposites. This evidences a commitment to the process and practice of loving. It is both presents and problems.

Perfect loving develops within the significant relationship. Perfect loving motivates partners to go beyond the possible and act lovingly beyond individual ability. This loving is stronger and more lasting than unifocal loving. Loving transforms two into one. That is, each partner brings a vision of loving into a reality based on the five presents.

In the loving relationship, participants choose to be a present. This is both on the spiritual and physical levels. In this relationship, we choose to be obligated to one another. When we fulfill these obligations, we provide the foundation upon which to build the need fulfilling loving environment. We choose to provide a foundation for loving. This is the foundation required to reinvest in the loving process. This foundation is basic to significant relationships.

REFERENCES

- Dalai Lama (1999). *Ethics for the new millennium*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Felder, C.H. (1989). *Troubling biblical waters*. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York.
- Ford, E. and Englund (1986). *For the love of children*. Scottsdale, Arizona: Edward E. Ford.
- Glasser, W. (1995). *Staying together*. New York: HarperCollins
- Glasser, W. (1998). *Choice Theory: A new psychology of personal freedom*. New York: HarperCollins
- Glasser, W. (1965). *Reality therapy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Glasser, W. (2003). *Warning: Psychiatry can be hazardous to your mental health*. New York: HarperCollins
- Mickel, E. and Hall, C.D. (2006). Family therapy in transition: Love is a healing behavior. *International Journal of Reality Therapy*, 25(2), 32-35.
- Mickel, E. and Hall, C.D. (2008). Choosing to love: The essentials of loving (presents and problems). *International Journal of Reality Therapy*, 27(2), 30-34.
- Mickel, E. and Liddie-Hamilton, B. (2002). Family therapy in transition: African centered family healing. *International Journal of Reality Therapy*, 22(1), 34-36.
- Washington, J.M. (Ed.). (1986). *A testament of hope*. New York: HarperCollins

The first author may be contacted at
esmickel@msn.com

Copyright of International Journal of Reality Therapy is the property of International Journal of Reality Therapy and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.