



Real
LOVE

AND FREEDOM
FOR THE SOUL

Eliminating the Chains of Victimhood

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By the author of *Real* LOVE

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and
Freedom of the Soul**

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Chapter One

Victimhood and Real Love

In our daily, ongoing quest for healthier and happier lives, one powerful tool we have come to enjoy regularly—a tool we almost take for granted, in fact—is the wealth of information available to us literally in the blink of an eye. We can access the Internet, for example, and learn all about the incidence, distribution, and causes of cancer, AIDS, malnutrition, heart disease, crime, and many other diseases or problems that might have a negative effect on our lives. Armed with this information, we can then make much better decisions about where to invest our time, energy, and resources in order to protect ourselves and our families, and even to contribute to the health and happiness of the world as a whole. Over the history of mankind, knowledge has been extraordinarily powerful in our efforts to eradicate disease and other problems.

There are some diseases or disorders, however, that have remained resistant to diagnosis and treatment because they have thus far been “secret.” Although I call these disorders “secret” because they carry on their work of injury and death essentially undetected, they are certainly not *silent*, because there’s nothing quiet about the wake of devastation they leave behind as they destroy the happiness of individuals and families and even entire nations. You can’t go online and read about the incidence and distribution of these secret disorders, nor is there any urgent discussion in the media or in state or national legislatures about identifying or treating them. The damage they cause is every bit as real and painful as that resulting from cancer, AIDS and heart disease, but these secret disorders often spread unchecked and unresisted, because they are poorly understood, often to the point of being completely mysterious.

Let me illustrate the effects of one of the worst of these secret disorders as we observe the following interaction between a man I once counseled, Mark, and his wife, Susan. I do so in the hope that at least by *naming* a scourge—by holding it up to the light to some degree—we might thereby gain some measure of power over it.

With obvious exasperation, Mark walks into the kitchen where Susan is working and throws his keys on the table. They slide across the hard surface with that unique screeching whine, somehow miss every glass and plate, sail into space when they reach the other side, and crash to the floor, where they slide several more feet before coming to a crunching stop against the wall.

“So what’s wrong with *you?*” asks Susan.

“Oh, so that’s all the thanks I get?” Mark shoots back. “I should have known.”

“Thanks for what?” asks Susan with exaggerated irritation. “You expect me to read your mind? What am I supposed to be grateful for now?”

“You can’t even remember? Typical. You said you were busy here, so would I please go to the store and pick up some bread for you. Remember *now*?”

“Geez, make a big deal of it. It’s just a loaf of bread.”

“*Just a loaf of bread*? You didn’t think it was ‘just a loaf of bread’ when you were all in a panic and asked me to get it for you. And then I looked all over the store for you—for that one kind you always make a fuss about—and after all that, now you say, ‘it’s just a loaf of bread’?”

“So? Did you get it? Did you get the Seven-Grain Nature’s Wonder?”

“Like I *said*,” Mark snaps at Susan, “I looked all over the place. I did everything I could—except bake it myself—but I couldn’t find it. What did you expect I’d do if they didn’t have it? So I got the Six-Grain Economy Substitute.”

“You’re kidding, right? You know I hate that stuff. How many times have I told you that?”

“No, stop, stop, you’re killing me with your gratitude. You probably meant to say, *‘Thanks so much, Mark, for going all the way to the store—in the hundred-degree heat—finding a parking space, fighting your way through the crowds, hunting all over the store for the one stinking brand I like and doing your very best to find it, even though this stupid brand doesn’t seem to exist anywhere in the world. Thanks for doing all you did. I really appreciate it.’* That’s probably what you meant to say, right?”

“I ask you to do *one* thing, and it always turns into a big production that you can’t handle. Do you *ever* bring back what I ask for? Ever?”

“And no matter how hard I try, when do I ever do *anything* that’s good enough for you? Exactly, so why even bother to try?” And then Mark stomps out of the room.

THE DISEASE OF VICTIMHOOD

If someone has a fever, nausea, headache, chills, and a positive microscopic hematologic examination for *Plasmodium falciparum*, we can make a diagnosis of malaria with considerable certainty. It’s a disease we’re familiar with. We can identify it, label it, and treat it. But the disease that is infecting and poisoning the interaction between Mark and Susan, and which is causing incalculable misery and death all over the world, has largely managed to escape

identification, discussion, and treatment for countless generations.

It's time we named this disease. It's time we discussed its causes, its manifestations, its complications, and how we can effectively approach its treatment. The name of the disease is *victimhood*, and this secret killer is causing more unhappiness than almost anyone recognizes—certainly more than cancer, AIDS, and heart disease combined.

It is the disease of victimhood—more than any other single cause—that separates us from one another and causes pain in our individual lives and in our relationships. It is victimhood that

- causes the majority of relationships—friendships, marriages, and so on—to become mired in conflict and even to break down entirely.
- leads to rebellion, anger, and withdrawal in children.
- causes alcohol and drug abuse.
- is the real cause of racism all over the world: whites hating blacks, blacks hating whites, one tribe of blacks hating another tribe of blacks, and so on.
- keeps black people in bondage to poverty and a lack of education.
- keeps gays and lesbians feeling separated from the majority of the population.
- causes the majority of contention in the world.
- is the real cause of the conflicts between and within nations and other groups: between the Hutus and the Tutsis, the Israelis and the Palestinians, the Islamic world and the West, and so on.

Before we talk about the causes and treatment of victimhood, let's put more of a floodlight on what victimhood is. Let's drag it all the way out of the closet and reveal its hidden secrets.

We've all had conversations that involved some of the elements of the interaction we just witnessed between Mark and Susan, where we have vigorously tried—and failed—to make another person to listen to us. We've tried reason. We've tried persistence. We've tried pleading, intimidation, sarcasm, and more. And with these efforts, we've discovered what Mark and Susan found as they tried these elements: that our interactions have been twisted and perverted by *victimhood*, by beliefs we hold deeply, by beliefs that all victims share. Anytime things are difficult, as victims we believe that

- we personally are being inconvenienced.
- we're being injured.
- we're being treated unfairly.
- what we want or need is being withheld from us.
- any mistakes involved are not our fault.

When we feel and act like victims, not only do we always hold some or all of the above beliefs, but we make it one of our primary goals in life to convince the people around us to

believe as we do.

Why do we act like victims? Because if we can convince people of the above beliefs we

- gain a position of untouchable self-righteousness.
- can make people feel guilty, and then they'll stop hurting us
- can manipulate people for sympathy and attention.
- can manipulate people for support and power.
- completely avoid responsibility.
- create a place in the world where we can belong.

I'll be explaining each of the above "rewards" of victimhood in detail in Chapter Four.

As victims we exhibit a pattern of speech and behavior that reflects the set of beliefs and hopes for rewards we described above. When we act like victims, we

- say "Look what you did *to* me."
- say "Look what you should have done *for* me (and didn't)."
- say "It's not my fault."
- often say, "It's not fair."
- make excuses for everything.
- blame everyone but ourselves for our own mistakes and unhappiness.

We've all acted like victims at various times in our lives. We've all made excuses, inappropriately blamed other people, and whined about things aren't fair. Whenever we're confronted with a mistake we've made and say, "I couldn't help it," we're acting like victims. Some of us make victimhood the primary behavior of our lives, but whether we dabble in victimhood or become fully immersed in it, it has a very negative effect on our lives. It robs us of personal happiness and steals the joy and fulfillment from our relationships.

We need to learn more about victimhood: why it begins, how it grows like a cancer, how it affects us, and how we can prevent and eliminate it. Let's begin our study by examining the real meaning of the words and behaviors used by Mark and Susan in their interaction above.

What Mark or Susan Said or Did

Mark threw his keys on the table.

The Real Meaning of What Mark or Susan Said or Did

1. "Everything has been so inconvenient for *me*."
2. "Nothing is *supposed* to be inconvenient for *me*, because I am the center of the universe."
3. "How *dare* all this have happened to *me*?"
4. "Because you have been such an inconsiderate witch *to me* in the past, I'm going to blame you for

how I feel about everything that's going badly right now."

5. "If you cared about *me* at all, you'd know what is bothering me without my having to tell you in words. You'd just *know*. So as I throw my keys on the table, I expect you to figure out why I'm unhappy—or at least ask me about it."

"So what's wrong with *you*?"
asked Susan.

"Oh great. Here I had the attention of the world focused on *me*—as it should be—and then you come in having a little fit, demanding that everybody look at *you*. Now, I ask you, how in the world can everyone pay attention to both of us at the same time? Surely you don't expect *me* to figure out what you want and actually *do* something about it, do you?"

"Oh, so that's all the thanks I get?"
Mark shot back.

"*I* go out of *my* way to do something for you (well, really for *myself*, come to think of it), and what do *I* get out of it? Where's the payoff for *me*? There's no sense my doing anything good unless *I* get paid for it—with gratitude, respect, favors, sex, something."

"Thanks for what?" asked Susan.

"Why should *I* be grateful to *you*? After all you've done *to me*, and all you've failed to do *for me*, why would I owe *you* gratitude? If anything, you would owe *me* service and be glad for the opportunity."

"You expect me to
read your mind?" (Susan)

"You big baby. You're such a drag. If you had any sense, and if you understood how incredibly important I am, you'd go out of your way to communicate clearly anything I needed to know. You'd never inconvenience *me* by making me guess what *you* want. In fact, you'd never make me wonder if you wanted anything at all, because only *my* needs really matter."

"You can't even remember?"
(Mark)

1. "I keep telling you that you don't care about me, that my needs don't matter, and this proves it. If I were important enough to you—which I am to anybody that has any brains—you'd never forget any conversation we have."

2. "You really are as stupid as I've always told you."

“Geez, it’s just a loaf of bread.”
(Susan)

“You always make everything more important than me, and now here’s more proof. You’re all upset over having to get a simple loaf of bread, like I’m not worth the effort. Thanks a lot. Thanks for nothing.”

“*Just a loaf of bread?*” said Mark. “After I looked all over the store for you?”

“After *I* inconvenienced *myself* for you, how could you possibly fail to give *me* the recognition I deserve? You always demean *my* contributions.”

“So? Did you get it?” (Susan)

“After throwing your keys and after all you’ve said, the answer to this question is pretty obvious, but I have to ask, because there is really only one person here whose needs matter: *me*. I don’t really care how much you were inconvenienced. Did you get what *I* want?”

“Like I said,” Mark snapped at Susan, “I looked all over the place.”

With his anger, Mark screamed that when he looked all over the store he wasn’t motivated by a genuine interest in Susan’s happiness. His anger proved that he went to the store primarily for his own purposes—in this case to avoid Susan’s disapproval—which is a long way from being motivated by unconditional love. (More about this subject later in the chapter)

“You’re kidding, right? You know I hate that stuff.” (Susan)

“The effort you put into anything is a complete waste if you fail to satisfy *my* needs. It doesn’t matter how hard you have to work or how much you are inconvenienced. The real issue is what *I* want, and—pathetically—you failed to supply that.”

“No, stop with your gratitude.” (Mark)

1. “I simply can’t believe that you’re actually maintaining here that there is a possibility that you might be the most important person in this relationship. That’s insane. It’s clear who the most important person is—*me*—and you should live in perpetual gratitude that I even live with you.”
2. “You are obviously too stupid to speak the proper words of gratitude, so let me supply them for you. I demand that you recognize what a great charitable act I have performed here, and I demand that you express you gratitude for it right now.”

“Do you ever do what I ask?” (Susan)

“Will you ever, ever understand how important *I* am? Will you ever place *me* appropriately on the throne at the center of the world? Until you do exactly what I ask, and recognize *my* importance, nothing you do counts for *anything*. Until that day, you are worthless.”

“When do I ever do *anything* that’s good enough for you?”

“I kill myself for you, and what do I get? Nothing. I try to give you everything, but if anything isn’t perfect, all you do is complain. Without the proper appreciation, why should I bother to try to please you by doing anything at all?”

Mark stomped out of the room.

“When you’re this hateful, I can’t even stand to be in the same room with you. Who could? I simply can’t believe that you could treat *me* in this way. When you can be a decent, civil human being, maybe I can be around you again.”

It should be apparent that the core message of everything spoken and done by these two was the same:

- *I* have been inconvenienced, misunderstood, and hurt the most—*I* am the victim here—and therefore have the greatest needs.
- You are not giving *me* enough attention, sympathy, understanding, and support. In short, you are not loving *me* enough.
- You must love *me* right now. I deserve it, and you’re doing a lousy job of it so far.
- *Me, me, me.*

Although neither person realized he or she was communicating these central messages, they were nonetheless *felt* by both of them. How can a loving, productive conversation possibly occur in an atmosphere of complete selfishness, where each person is demanding that he or she be the center of attention? In such an atmosphere—which always prevails when people feel and act like victims—the only possible results are wounds and more wounds.

Most of us have been surrounded by victimhood so thoroughly and for so long, that we scarcely notice it. It’s so common in our lives—and in our society in general—that we accept it as *normal*, like a kind of background noise, so we don’t even see it as a problem or pathology.

Throughout the remainder of the book, we’ll be discussing the various manifestations of victimhood, as well as how we can eliminate it, but for now we just need a brief picture of what kind of destruction this disease can cause in a single conversation, like the one above.

THE CAUSE OF VICTIMHOOD: The Lack of Real Love

Where does victimhood come from? Why do so many of us fall into this pattern of behavior that has such uniformly disastrous results? Before we can answer these questions, we must first understand what we as human beings require for our emotional health and happiness.

In order to be happy, what we all need more than anything else is love. I have made that statement as I have spoken to hundreds of audiences—to hundreds of thousands of people—and I have never heard a single objection to it. Intuitively, we know it's true. That's why the majority of our literature, our movies, and even our commercial advertisements use love as a principal or secondary theme. We talk about love, fantasize about it, and search for it as a kind of Holy Grail.

But not just any kind of love will do, and as I say that, again most of us intuitively understand it. Most of us have had a number of negative experiences with what we thought was "love," so we know that everything labeled "love" won't necessarily fill our needs.

The only kind of love that will make us genuinely happy and whole is what I call Real Love.

*Real Love is caring about the happiness of another person
without any thought for what we might get for ourselves.*

It's also Real Love when other people care about *our* happiness in a similar way. Real Love is unconditional. It's not Real Love when I do what you *want* and you like me—frankly, that's worthless. It's Real Love when I'm stupid and flawed and inconvenient, and when I make mistakes, but you're not disappointed or angry. We'll discuss the importance of these two conditions—disappointment and anger—in a few paragraphs.

When I use the word *happiness*, I do not mean the brief and superficial pleasure that comes from money, sex, power, and the conditional approval we earn from others when we behave as they want. Nor do I mean the temporary feeling of satisfaction we experience in the absence of immediate conflict or disaster. Real happiness is not the feeling we get from being entertained or persuading people to do what we want. It's a profound and lasting sense of peace and fulfillment that deeply satisfies and enlarges the soul. It doesn't go away when circumstances are difficult. It survives and even grows during hardship and struggle. True happiness is our entire reason to live, and it can be obtained only as we find Real Love and share it with others. *With Real Love, nothing else matters; without it, nothing else is enough.*

Sadly, few of us have sufficiently received or given that kind of love. From the time we were small children, we observed that when we were clean and quiet, when we got good grades, and when we were otherwise obedient and cooperative, our parents and others smiled at us, patted our heads, and spoke kindly to us. With their words and behavior, they told us what good boys and girls we were.

But what happened when we fought with our sisters, made too much noise, got bad grades, or dragged mud across the clean living room carpet? Then did people smile at us or speak gentle, loving words? No, they frowned, sighed with disappointment, and often spoke in harsh tones. Just as the positive behaviors of other people communicated to us that we were loved, the withdrawal of these behaviors could only have meant that we were *not* being loved. Although it was unintentional, our parents and others taught us this terrible message: “When you’re good, I love you, but when you’re not, I don’t—or certainly I love you a great deal less.”

In short, the “love” we were given—perhaps 99% of us—was *conditional*, and to this day we are still “loved” in this way. This conditional love can give us brief moments of satisfaction, but we’re still left with a huge hole in our souls, because only Real Love can make us genuinely happy. When someone is genuinely, unconditionally concerned about our happiness, we feel connected to that person. We feel included in his or her life, and in that instant we are *no longer alone*. Each moment of unconditional acceptance creates a living thread to the person who accepts us, and these threads weave a powerful bond that fills us with a genuine and lasting happiness. Nothing but Real Love can do that. In addition, when we know that even one person loves us unconditionally, we feel a connection to everyone else. We feel included in the family of all mankind, of which that one person is a part.

Without sufficient Real Love, we can feel only empty and alone, which is our greatest fear. In any given negative interaction with another person—spouse, lover, child, parent, friend, co-worker—it is the longstanding lack of Real Love in *your* life that determines how you feel, not the behavior of any one person in that moment. In any given moment, you’re reacting to the amount of love you feel from everyone, past and present, not just from the person you’re interacting with.

Conditional vs. Real Love

Conditional love is distinguished from Real Love by the presence of *disappointment* and *anger*. Let me illustrate this distinction with a hypothetical interaction between you and me. Imagine that I’m your supervisor at work, and you’ve made a mistake that has cost the company time and money. I come to you and say, “The way you did this task didn’t work out very well. It will cost us a couple hundred dollars to fix and will also require that some people work overtime for a few days. But don’t worry about it. We can take care of it. Now, let’s talk about how you could handle this task in the future. If you’ll consider doing it another way—I’ll show you how in a moment—the benefits will be considerable:

- You’ll find it much easier to do the job.
- It will take less time.
- The job will be done more effectively.
- The task will become more profitable for the company.
- Best of all, you’ll *enjoy* it a lot more. It will just be more fun.”

Most important, as I describe these benefits to you, you can see, hear, and feel in my words, my tone of voice, my facial expression, my posture, and other mannerisms that even though you've made a mistake, my primary concern here is *your* welfare. How do you feel about my comments regarding your mistake? Almost certainly you feel accepted, relaxed, and even connected to me. There is virtually no stress associated with our interaction.

Now let's suppose that on a different occasion you make another mistake, but this time I immediately respond with impatience and irritation. I sigh with exasperation, frown furiously at you, fuss and fume about the mistake, and criticize you and berate you for inconveniencing me. The instant I become irritated with you, what am I saying with my behavior and my words? I'm saying,

- "Look at what you did *to me!*"
- "Do you not see what you *should* have done *for me?*"
- "How could you have failed to recognize and remember the true center of the universe: *Me!!*"

Notice that when I am disappointed or irritated at you, all my words and behavior essentially boil down to a single expression: *Me-Me-Me*. And while I'm standing over you screaming *Me-Me-Me*, is there any way you can feel my unconditional concern for *your* happiness? No, none at all.

It is imperative that we recognize that the instant we are disappointed or irritated at anyone—a spouse, lover, friend, child, co-worker—that other person hears us say only four words: *I don't love you*. Disappointment and anger are absolutely incompatible with Real Love, and that is the reason so few of us—probably less than 1-2% of us—feel unconditionally loved with any consistency. We have seen disappointment and anger so often on the occasions when we've made our mistakes—from the time we were small children—that we've come to believe that all love is conditional. We've come to believe that this is how "love" is supposed to be. We've come to accept a definition of *love* that is simply not true.

WHAT WE USE WITHOUT ENOUGH REAL LOVE—IMITATION LOVE

Without sufficient Real Love in our lives, the pain and emptiness of many years—even decades—are intolerable, and in order to reduce or eliminate these feelings, we're willing to do almost anything. Everything we use as a substitute for *Real Love*—to temporarily make us feel better in the absence of what we really need—becomes a form of *Imitation Love*, and all these substitutes are one or more variations of four things: *praise*, *power*, *pleasure*, and *safety*.

Praise

When people give us their approval, we feel praised and worthwhile, and if we can't get the Real Love we need, we'll do a lot to win that approval. Regrettably, however, we almost always have to *earn* it. In order for people to smile at us, compliment us, and want to spend time with us—all

signs that they accept or “love” us—we have to be talented, beautiful, wealthy, witty, cooperative, grateful, successful, or otherwise worthy of acceptance. That kind of acceptance is conditional, because all the signs of it—the smiles and kind words, for example—disappear when we make mistakes, inconvenience people, and fail to live up to the expectations of others.

Because the absence of Real Love is painful, we’re willing to do a lot to earn the approval that temporarily makes us feel good, even if it’s conditional. For example, we make ourselves look good physically with exercise, clothing, make-up, starvation, and plastic surgery, all in the hope that someone will say, “You’re looking good.” In another arena, we work hard to succeed at school and in our jobs so we will be complimented for our intelligence, creativity, and diligence.

But consider how you feel—after working hard for hours, days, even years—when you finally get that precious morsel of praise. How long does it last? In just a moment or two, the feeling is gone, and then you have to work to earn it all over again. Buying praise with our behavior is a lot of work, and because it’s usually not given unconditionally, we’re left with an empty feeling even when we get it.

Another reason praise is often unfulfilling is that when most people praise us, they’re rarely saying something about *us*. They’re saying that when we’re cooperative and perform according to *their* expectations, they like how we make *them* feel. But we’re still quite willing to keep on doing whatever it takes to earn the sensation of praise, gratitude, and acceptance, because these feelings—however superficial and fleeting—are much better than the emptiness that accompanies a lack of Real Love.

Power

Although it’s mostly unintentional, any time we successfully manipulate or control someone, we enjoy a sensation of power over that person. We use money, authority, sex, flattery, and personal persuasion to influence, control, and even hurt people. When we do all that, we don’t get Real Love, but when we control the people around us, we feel less powerless; we feel less of the emptiness and helplessness that are always associated with a lack of Real Love. In addition, when we control someone, we actually feel more connected to him or her in a brief, shallow way.

We tend to deny our efforts to control people—it’s not a flattering behavior to admit—but whenever we try to *get* people to do anything, we’re controlling them and using power as a form of Imitation Love. If you doubt that you control people—your spouse, your children, your co-workers—consider how you feel when they *don’t* do what you want. Your feelings of disappointment or anger indicate that at the very least you *want* to control the behavior of others—however unconscious your desires or efforts may be.

Pleasure

When we don’t feel unconditionally loved, we often use pleasure—food, sex, drugs, shopping,

gambling, driving fast, and many other forms of entertainment and excitement—to feel better temporarily. Certainly there’s nothing inherently wrong with pleasure, but when we compulsively seek it, we’re using it to fill a deep emptiness.

Safety

Without sufficient Real Love, we’re already experiencing an insufferable pain, and we’ll go to great lengths to keep ourselves safe from anything that might prolong or worsen our pain. To minimize painful disapproval, we stay away from unfamiliar situations, tasks, and relationships, and then we confuse that feeling of relative safety with real happiness. I’ve known many couples who believed they had a “good marriage,” for example, until they discovered that their “happiness” was only an avoidance of conflict, not a sharing of Real Love.

By no means are praise, power, pleasure, and safety always unhealthy. In the presence of Real Love, money, authority, sex, and praise, for example, can all add to our genuine happiness. These things are dangerous only when they’re used as *substitutes* for unconditional love.

The Addictive Power of Imitation Love

People who consistently use addictive drugs soon discover that the effects of these drugs become increasingly brief, and more of any specific drug is required in order to achieve the same pleasurable or distracting outcome. All the forms of Imitation Love become like addictive drugs. Despite all the effort required to earn Imitation Love, the beneficial effects of praise, power, money, and sex, for example, become increasingly brief. In addition, we have to work harder to get more and more, and we can tolerate being away from them for shorter periods—all exactly like an addictive drug. Eventually, we discover—exhausted and frustrated by our efforts—that no amount of Imitation Love can give us the effects we once experienced. And no matter how successful we are in obtaining Imitation Love, we never get the feeling of connection with other people that comes with Real Love, so we’re still painfully alone.

*Regrettably, Imitation Love **does feel good**, so good that it’s easy to confuse that temporary satisfaction with genuine happiness. That self-deception distracts us from pursuing the life-giving steps that lead to Real Love. The temporary satisfaction—and distraction—of Imitation Love is perhaps its most injurious characteristic.*

When we see the role and effect of Imitation Love, we can more easily understand why relationships often fall apart. As I have counseled with thousands of couples, I have been impressed with how consistently and quickly people travel the emotional spectrum from a place of being “in love” to a place where they’re willing to disembowel their partners. This same “falling out of love” occurs between friends, family members, co-workers, co-workers and their bosses, and even entire countries, and we’ll be talking more about that in subsequent chapters.

Let's take a more in-depth look at the relationship between Mark and Susan, the couple we introduced on pp. 000. When Mark met Susan, he found her physically attractive—which gave him immediate pleasure and suggested the possibility of more physical pleasure in the future—and he sensed that she accepted him and was willing to behave in certain ways to win his approval, which gave him feelings of praise and power. She was attracted to him because he was good-looking, funny, smart, and kind to her, and because he had a good job—all of which gave her feelings of praise, pleasure, and safety. Unwittingly, they were both *trading* Imitation Love with one another. In the absence of sufficient Real Love, we're all strongly attracted to anyone who gives us Imitation Love, and the more the better.

Susan and Mark *fell in love* because they found in their partner the qualities that would entertain them, make them feel worthwhile, and give them safety, not because they unconditionally loved each other. They *married* because they wanted to guarantee that their supply of Imitation Love would continue forever. Most of us pick our partners for the same reasons: We look for someone who has qualities that will temporarily make *us* feel good, and in return we're quite willing to do the same for that person.

In order to get the Imitation Love that temporarily makes us feel better in the absence of Real Love, we *buy* it with whatever forms of Imitation Love we have to offer. As I've said, however, the effects of Imitation Love always fade, and Mark and Susan experienced that. They really enjoyed the initial exchange of Imitation Love, but it wasn't long before that level of praise, power, and pleasure wasn't as rewarding as it once had been. When people say the "excitement has worn off" in a relationship, they're just describing the fleeting effects of Imitation Love.

As we experience less "happiness" with Imitation Love, we naturally turn to our spouses to supply what we're missing, and understandably our partners feel resentful of our increased demands. They married us based on an unspoken understanding of how much Imitation Love they'd be required to give us to make us happy, and then we changed the rules. As the effects of Imitation Love fade, we begin to demand more attention or praise or sex or time or power or whatever. Understandably, our spouses don't like that.

When they were married, what Mark and Susan both needed was Real Love, but from their childhoods neither of them had ever felt much unconditional love, so there was *no way* they could have loved each other as they needed—we simply can't give what we don't have. But they did offer one another what they had—Imitation Love in its various forms—and they gave as much as they could. Imitation Love does feel good, and because they were both giving it with all their hearts, and because they were both receiving more than they ever had, they were satisfied in the beginning of their marriage. When the effects of Imitation Love wore off, however, they felt enormously disappointed, even betrayed. They were both faced with the horror that they were not going to get the happiness they'd wanted all their lives. That is a terrible moment in any relationship.

This experience where there is an initial peaking of temporary "happiness" from

Imitation Love and then a subsequent disappointment when the effects of Imitation Love wear off doesn't happen only in marriages or other intimate relationships. This let-down also happens between family members, friends, business associates, and so on. When we are aware of this phenomenon, we can finally make sense of the disillusionment and even bitterness that have been baffling us in many relationships.

It is common in the corporate world, for example, for a new boss to take over a company or division, and initially the employees are often thrilled with his or her new leadership style. In most cases, however, what they're feeling is only the infusion of a new combination of Imitation Love, which is always exciting. Then when the effects of Imitation Love wear off—as they always do—the employees begin to find fault with the new boss. This initial exhilaration with a new combination of Imitation Love is what motivates a man or woman to have an affair after being married to the same spouse for years. But in the affair, as with the new boss, the new lover loses his or her fresh luster with time. Then the straying spouse or the employees want more of this and less of that from the lover or the boss, not realizing that no amount of Imitation Love will ever make them genuinely happy.

WHAT WE DO WITHOUT ENOUGH LOVE (REAL OR IMITATION): GETTING AND PROTECTING BEHAVIORS

Insufficient Real Love creates an emptiness we cannot ignore, especially when we also don't have enough Imitation Love to make us feel better temporarily. Our subsequent behavior is then often ruled by our *need* to be loved and our *fear* of not being loved. Without Real Love, we do whatever it takes—Getting Behaviors—to fill our sense of emptiness with Imitation Love. To eliminate our fear, we use Protecting Behaviors. The Getting Behaviors include lying, attacking, acting like a victim, and clinging. The Protecting Behaviors include lying, attacking, acting like a victim, and running.

Lying

We're using lying as a Protecting Behavior when we make excuses, shade the truth, or do anything else to avoid the disapproval of others. We don't lie because we're bad; we lie because we've learned from countless experiences that it *works*. People really do disapprove of us less when we hide the truth about our flaws, and we'll do almost anything to keep from feeling that painful withdrawal of acceptance.

We're using lying as a Getting Behavior when we do anything to get other people to like us: when we tell people about our accomplishments but not our flaws, communicate positive feelings that are not true, change our physical appearance to attract people to us, or tell people what they want to hear so they'll like us. We don't think of these behaviors as lying, but they are, because we don't tell other people we're manipulating them. We lie so often that we don't even realize we're doing it most of the time. If you watch almost any two people in conversation, for example, you'll usually see that each of them is carefully and unconsciously studying the other for any hint of disapproval—a forehead wrinkling into a frown, an eyebrow lifting into an

expression of doubt, a change in tone of voice—and when that happens, the speaker immediately modifies what he or she is saying until those signs of disapproval disappear. Again, although we do this unconsciously, it's still lying, because we don't tell people we're trying to get them to like us.

From the time we were young, we were told by our parents and others, "Put your best foot forward." That sounds like good advice, but the results are usually undesirable, as illustrated by Mark and Susan's dating experiences, long before they married. When they went out on their first date, they were both nervous about being accepted, so they put their best foot forward. Susan prepared for hours—make-up, hair, clothing—to look good so Mark would like her. Mark too made himself as physically attractive as possible. In addition, they were each careful to talk and behave in a way they thought would be pleasing to the other.

As they each put their best foot forward, they succeeded in winning one another's acceptance, but without realizing it they had then started on a path that often has disastrous consequences. When I show you only my best foot, and you indicate that you like me, I clearly hear, though unconsciously, that you like me *because* of my best foot—and that's almost invariably exactly what you mean. When people tell us *why* they like us, they're also telling us that if we *didn't* have those characteristics, they almost certainly would *not* like us as they do. Moreover, when someone tells you that he or she likes your best foot, there's a strong implication that you must hide the rest of you from that person so you won't lose his or her affection and attention. But despite all the disadvantages of that conditional love, we *still* love to hear people say, "I like you because . . ." Why? Because we're just dying to hear what comes next: ". . . because you're witty, intelligent, handsome, beautiful, strong, responsible, whatever." We really get a high out of that moment of Imitation Love.

Early in their relationship, Mark was careful to project only his good-natured, sensitive, and loving side. And why wouldn't he? All his life he'd been taught to do all he could to win other people's approval—including his parents' approval—and with Susan he was just applying the lessons he'd learned from childhood. Of course, Susan was delighted to see that side of Mark. We all want our partners to have the positive qualities that would make a relationship enjoyable.

Susan was also trying to buy *Mark's* approval with *her* best foot. That approach really does seem to work in the beginning— Mark and Susan were both thrilled to find someone who "made them happy"—but then they discovered what we all do, that our partners have more than just a best foot. There's that other foot, and often it stinks. We discover that he doesn't smell nearly as sweet after a long day at work as he did on the first date, nor is he as entertaining or accommodating. We learn that her hair and smile don't have quite the same glow after a rough night's sleep, nor is she quite as eager to please after a year as she was when we first met.

We don't *intend* to deceive one another early in a relationship, but we're willing to do it because we're so anxious to be accepted. If our lies succeed in gaining us the acceptance we want, a serious problem then arises, because our partner *will* eventually discover the rest of us.

After Mark and Susan were married, they began to see the qualities they hadn't noticed while they were dating, and they were sorely disappointed.

We often complain that after we get married, our partners change. You may think, He or she is just not the person I dated. Yes, actually, he is, but you didn't see him clearly in the beginning. After you got married, however, you saw more of him, not just the parts he wanted to show you—which were also the parts *you wanted* to see. The real reason relationships fail is not that our partners change. Relationships fail because we came to them without enough of the one ingredient—Real Love—essential to individual happiness and to our ability to participate in a healthy relationship.

Over time in relationships, our partners do change in some ways. They become less willing, for example, to work hard to earn the Imitation Love we gave them initially, because the exchange becomes less rewarding than it once was.

When we lie to a spouse, or potential spouse—however unconscious it may be—we establish a foundation that cannot support a healthy and happy relationship. Later in this chapter, and in following chapters, we'll discuss how we can change that.

The Problem with Lying

Although our “little lies” may often seem innocent, they almost always have a very serious effect on what we all want most, which is to feel unconditionally loved. Let me illustrate this with a simple diagram and brief discussion. This discussion is important to remember throughout the remainder of the book, so take your time as you read it.

What we want is Real Love. We want to feel loved unconditionally, as represented by this part of the diagram:

Loved

Before we can believe that people actively care about our happiness—the definition of Real Love—we need to know that they *accept* us. Feeling accepted precedes feeling loved, which we'll represent in the following way:

Accepted → Loved

We can't know that people accept us as we really are unless we know that they *see* who we really are. We must feel seen, therefore, before we can feel accepted, and we must feel accepted before we can feel genuinely loved, which we can represent as follows:

Seen → Accepted → Loved

Finally, we can't feel seen for who we really are unless we actually *tell* people the *truth* about ourselves. The entire process can be represented in this way:

Truth → Seen → Accepted → Loved

Finding Real Love is absolutely dependent on the first step, which is telling the truth about ourselves. When we lie in any way, we make the entire process impossible. *When we lie, we cannot feel loved.* For most of us lying is almost always an unconscious affair. We're lying when we do anything to get other people to like us or to avoid their disapproval. We're lying when we alter our appearance to earn the approval of others, when we're careful with what we say so that people will like us, and when we change our behavior to win the acceptance of others. One recent study found that the average person lies *four hundred times* a day. That's how eager we are for acceptance, and yet the moment we lie, we *cannot feel loved.* How ironic, how ultimately tragic really, that with our lies we cause the very condition we're trying to cure.

Attacking

Attacking is any behavior that motivates another person through *fear* to behave in a way we want. We're attacking people when we criticize them, physically intimidate them, withdraw our approval, make them feel guilty, or use our positions of authority at work, at home, and elsewhere, all to get Imitation Love—usually in the form of power—and to protect ourselves from fear. With anger, for example—the most common form of attacking—you can often make people sufficiently uncomfortable (afraid) that they'll do whatever you want in the hope that you'll then stop being angry and stop making them feel bad. With your anger, you can get people to give you attention, respect, power, money, flattery, approval, and even sex. But of course, if they're giving you these things not because they're genuinely concerned for your happiness, but simply to avoid your anger, all you're receiving is Imitation Love.

As the relationship between Mark and Susan began to deteriorate, they attacked each other more, which is well illustrated in their interaction on pp. 000. Attacking involves disappointment, anger, and shaming, all for the purpose—however unconscious—of motivating others with fear. When Mark entered the room and threw his keys on the table, he was attacking Susan with his behavior. Why did he do that, rather than simply discuss with her the results of his trip to the store? Let's look at how Mark's use of anger evolved over time.

Early in their relationship, Susan usually gave Mark what he wanted quickly and willingly, in great part because he gave her what *she* wanted. It was a fair trade, which characterizes relationships where people are in love. But when the effect of Imitation Love began to wear off, Susan responded less quickly and willingly to Mark's desires. If he increased his positive attentions toward her, she was more responsive, but the ever increasing level of attention that Susan unknowingly required of him became inconvenient for Mark, even exhausting. So he began to experiment with ways where he could get what he wanted—and protect himself—with greater reliability and with less effort.

From past experience, Mark had learned the motivational benefits of anger. As a child, he discovered that when his parents were angry, he could hurry to do what they wanted and

thereby avoid more of their displeasure. In time, he learned that he could become angry himself and motivate other people to do what he wanted. In the schoolyard, for example, he noticed that he could persuade his peers to do what he wanted if he raised his voice and physically intimidated them, and in business he discovered that when he became irritated, fellow employees would often hurry to do what he wanted in order to make him happy and thereby cool the fires of his anger.

Having learned the power of anger, Mark increasingly used it to motivate Susan, and that's what he was doing when he threw his keys on the table and when he spoke sharply to her. Although he was not consciously aware of his intentions, on many other occasions he had nonetheless hoped that if he spoke in anger, she would more likely—and more quickly—respond by leaving him alone or otherwise giving him what he wanted (attention, respect, and so on).

Earlier in their relationship, whenever Mark attacked Susan, she had become afraid—afraid that he was withdrawing his love (which in fact he was)—so she did whatever it took to make him happy. Eventually, however, she realized that pleasing him was exhausting and ultimately futile, so she began to protect herself from his anger with the Protecting Behavior *she* had also learned as a child—her own anger. All her life she'd felt the painful emptiness and fear that result from a lack of Real Love. In that condition, Mark's attack in the conversation above was more than she could bear, so when he attacked her—with his overall attitude and with the throwing of the keys—she protected herself by attacking him in return, saying, “And what's wrong with *you*?” To protect himself in turn, Mark then responded with another attack. Had he stayed in the room, they would have continued to attack each other, adding yet more wounds to their bleeding relationship.

Although anger can be an effective way to protect yourself and to manipulate others to do what you want, you need to consider these questions: Have you ever been angry at your spouse and at the same time felt more loving toward him or her? Or felt more loved? Or enjoyed your relationship more deeply? Of course not, and yet we continue to get angry at our partners. Something is terribly wrong with this picture.

Acting Like a Victim

We've already begun a discussion of this particular Getting and Protecting Behavior, and we'll be addressing it a great deal more throughout the remainder of the book.

At this point I do wish to clarify a point of terminology. There is a difference between being actually *being* a victim and *feeling* or *acting* like a victim. Allow me to illustrate this by slightly modifying a metaphor I have used in other Real Love books.

Imagine that you're starving, and you're preparing to go out and get some bread with your last two dollars. So this is a big moment of anticipation for you. Suddenly, I dash into the room, snatch the two dollars off the table, and run away before you can stop me. Almost certainly you'd feel that you were a victim of my behavior, and you'd likely feel hurt and angry.

In this case, are you a victim? *Yes*. Anytime anyone does something to you that inconveniences you or hurts you or frightens you—or threatens to do so—without your permission, you are a victim, what I call a *true victim*. I took money from you without your permission, so you *are* a true victim in this case. *But*—and this is a huge *but*—*your being a victim does not mean that you have to feel like a victim or act like a victim*. This is a very important concept that requires further illustration with a continuation of the metaphor that we just began.

Now imagine that the day after our interaction above I do exactly the same thing—I steal two dollars off the table as you're getting ready to go out and buy some bread—but this time you have *twenty million* dollars in the bank. You are still a victim—I still took money from you without your permission—but do you *feel* as much like a victim? Of course not. The loss of two dollars matters very little when you have twenty million.

In both situations, you lost exactly the same sum: two dollars. You were *victimized equally* in each situation, but in the second situation you didn't *feel* victimized. It is therefore obvious—and we must always remember—that whether we are victimized, or the degree to which we are victimized, *does not make us feel like victims or act like victims*. In short, we always have a choice about how we feel and behave. No one can make us act like victims. So how do we take control over that choice?

Having sufficient Real Love really is like having twenty million dollars all the time, emotionally speaking. Having twenty million emotional dollars doesn't stop people from taking two emotional dollars from us. In fact, they can still do that rather easily, by lying to us, criticizing us, failing to keep promises, stealing from us, being angry at us, and so on. We simply can't stop people from victimizing us. When we have twenty million dollars, however—when we feel unconditionally loved—we don't *feel* victimized by the loss of two dollars here and there, or by the loss of twenty dollars, or forty. When we have sufficient Real Love, everything else becomes relatively insignificant, so we can easily afford to lose two dollars. That is a powerful way to live, and it is accessible to all of us.

In later chapters, we'll be talking in much greater detail about how to eliminate victimhood with Real Love, but for now the important point to remember is that although we may be victimized—and therefore be true victims—we do not have to feel or act like victims.

To continue reading about the elimination of victimhood and the resulting peace and happiness, purchase the [Real Love and Freedom for the Soul ebook](#).