

How Love Works

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Many people assume that if we only love enough, love will triumph and everything will turn out well. Experience shows this isn't true. Sometimes parents must watch helplessly as their children, although deeply loved, turn out differently than they hoped, perhaps becoming ill or addicted to drugs or tragically committing suicide. Such experiences show that, in addition to love, something else is necessary for love to succeed. What love requires is that we understand and follow the hidden Orders of Love.

Order and Love

*Love fills what the Orders contain.
Love is water, the Orders her jug.*

*The Orders are the holding,
allowing love to flow.*

*Order and Love cooperate:
Like a melody with its harmonies,
so love with its Orders.*

*Just as our ear is grated by dissonance,
even when explained,
so too our soul adjusts with difficulty
to Love without order.*

*Some treat the Orders as if they
were opinions which we can
have or change at will.*

*But they are as they are.
They work, even when we do not understand
them.
We do not create them, we discover them.
We conclude them, like Meaning and Soul,
from their effect.*

Many of these orders are hidden and we cannot observe them directly. They work deeply in the soul, and we tend to obscure them with our beliefs, objections, desires or anxieties. We need to reach deeply into the soul if we want to touch the Orders of Love.

Taking life as it is given

I'd like to begin by saying something about the Orders of Love between parents and children from the child's perspective. These observations are so fundamental and obvious that I hesitate to mention them at all, but they are nevertheless often forgotten.

When parents give life, they act in deepest accordance with their humanness, and they give themselves as parents to their children exactly as they are. They can't add anything to what they are, nor can they leave anything out. Father and mother, consummating their love for one another, give to their children the

whole of what they are. Thus, the first of the Orders of Love is that children take life as it was given. A child cannot leave anything out from the life he or she was given, nor does wishing it were different change anything.

A child IS its parents. Love, if it is to succeed, requires that a child affirms its parents as they are, without fear and without imagining it could have different parents. After all, different parents would have had different children. Our parents are the only possible ones for us. Imagining anything else to be possible is an illusion.

Affirming our parents as they are is a very deep and profound movement. It implies our agreement to life and fate exactly as they are presented to us by our parents; with the limitations that go along with that. With the opportunities we are given. With the entanglement in the suffering, ill fortune and guilt of our family, or in their happiness and good fortune as it may come.

This affirmation of our parents just as they are is a religious act. It expresses our readiness to give up false expectations which exceed or fall short of how the life our parents gave us really is. This religious affirmation extends far beyond our parents, and so, in affirming our parents, we must look far beyond them. We must see through them into that far distance from which life itself comes to us, and we must bow down before the mystery of life. When we affirm our parents as they are, we acknowledge the mystery of life and we submit to it.

You can test the effect of this affirmation in your soul by imagining yourself bowing deeply before your parents and telling them, "The life you give me comes to me at the full price it has cost you, and at the full price it has cost me. I take it with everything that comes with it, with all its limitations and opportunities." In the moment these sentences are authentically spoken, we acknowledge life as it is and our parents as they are. The heart opens. Whoever manages this affirmation feels whole and at peace.

Compare the effect of this affirmation with its opposite by imagining yourself turning away from your parents, saying, "I want different parents. I don't like how mine are." What an illusion, as if it were possible to be ourselves and have different parents. Those who secretly speak such sentences turn away from life as it is, and they feel empty, unsupported, and find no peace with themselves.

Some people fear that if they take their parents as they are, they must also take on their parent's badness, and they act as if they could choose to take only the part of life they prefer. Fearing to embrace the wholeness

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of life, the good is also lost. Affirming our parents as they are, we also embrace life's fullness, as it is.

Uniqueness

There is, however, another mystery involved. Namely that we experience ourselves as being unique, that each of us has something personal which cannot be duplicated and which is different than our parents. And this too must be affirmed, be it easy or difficult, good or evil. If we look at the world and at our own lives clearly, then we see that everything which is and everything we do, belongs. Whatever we may do or refuse to do, what we work for and what we oppose, we do because we serve a larger whole we do not understand. If we become intimate with that larger whole, then we experience this service as a task or a calling which neither adds to our personal achievements if it is good, nor to our personal guilt if it is terrible. We simply are called to serve. When we look at the world in this way, the usual distinctions become irrelevant. I describe this in a saying which is called, The Same.

The Same

*The breeze moves lightly and whispers,
the Storm blasts and howls.
Still, it is the same wind,
the same song.*

*The same water
bathes and drowns us,
carries and buries us.*

*Whatever is alive, uses,
preserves itself and destroys,
one the other,
driven by the same force.*

*That's what counts.
Who is served by the differences?*

These then are the fundamental conditions of life. It is a given that we have parents and that we are children. And also, that we have something uniquely personal.

Taking what parents additionally give

In addition to giving us life, our parents also give us other things. They feed us, raise us, care for us, and much more. It works well when children take what they are given, as it is given. As a rule, children get enough when they willingly accept what they are offered. Of course there are exceptions which we all understand, but as a rule, what parents give their children is enough. Children may not get all that they want and not all dreams are fulfilled, but as a rule, children get enough.

It is consistent with the orders when children say to their parents, "You have given a great deal to me, and it is enough. I take it from you with appreciation and love." A child who feels that, feels full and prosperous, no matter what may have gone before. Such a child could add, "I'll take care of the rest myself." That too is a beautiful experience. And the child could add, "Now I leave you in peace." The effect of these sentences goes very deep. The children

have their parents, and the parents have their children. At the same time they are separated from one another and independent. The parents have completed their work, and the children are free to live their lives with respect for their parents, without being dependent on them.

But feel what happens in the soul when you imagine children saying to their parents, "What you gave me, first of all, wasn't the right thing, and secondly, it wasn't enough. You still owe me." What do children have from their parents when they feel that way? Nothing. And what do the parents have from their children? Also nothing. Such children cannot separate from their parents. Their accusations and demands tie them to their parents so that, although they are bound to their parents, the children have no parents. They then feel empty, needy and weak.

This is the second Order of Love, that children take what their parents give in addition to life as it comes.

Child sized

In addition to the life that parents give to their children, and to whatever they give while raising their children, there are also gifts parents give from what they have accumulated through their own efforts. For example, a mother is a gifted painter who paints the most wonderful pictures. This belongs to her and not to her children. If her children are disappointed when they are not able to paint pictures as beautiful—although they do not have her gift and have not worked as hard as she—they violate the orders of love. That's not how life works. The same applies to material wealth. Children who feel entitled to inherit their parents' wealth, and are disappointed when they don't, damage love. If they inherit wealth, then love is well served when they treat it purely as a gift.

This is important because it also applies to our parents' personal guilt. Personal guilt is belongs to our parents alone. It often happens that children, out of love for their parents, take on their parents' guilt and try to carry it for them. But this violates the Orders of Love. Such children presumptuously attempt to do something they have no right to do. For example, when children attempt to atone for their parents errors, they place themselves above their parents and treat their parents as if the parents were children who needed to be taken care of, and as if the children were parents.

Not long ago there was a woman in a group whose father was blind and whose mother was deaf. They compensated for one another very well. But the woman felt she needed to care for her parents, and when we set up the family constellation, her representative acted as if she were big and her parents small. In the constellation, the mother told her, "As far as your father is concerned, I can take care of him all by myself." And the father told her, "Your mother and I get along just fine. We don't need you." But the woman was disappointed rather than relieved. She was reduced to child size.

She couldn't sleep that night. In fact, she had a habitual problem sleeping. The next day, she asked if I could help her. I said, "People who can't sleep sometimes believe they need to keep watch." Then I told her a

story by Borchert about a young boy in Berlin after the war. He watched over his dead brother day and night so that the rats wouldn't eat him. Although he was completely exhausted, he was convinced he was obligated to keep watch. A friendly man came by and told him, "At night, rats fall asleep." Then the boy fell asleep. That night, the woman slept as well.

The third Order of Love between parents and children is that we respect what belongs to our parents personally, and that we allow them to do what only they can and must do.

Taking and challenging

The fourth Order of Love between parents and children is that parents are big and children are small. It is appropriate that children take and parents give. Because children receive so much, they have a need to balance the account. It makes us uncomfortable when we take from those we love without being able to give in return. With our parents, we never can correct the imbalance because they give far more than we can ever return.

Some children shy away from the pressure toward reciprocity, from the felt obligation or guilt. Then they say, "I'd rather not take anything and feel free from guilt and obligation." Such children close themselves to their parents and they feel empty and impoverished. Love would be better served if they were to say, "I will take all that you give with love." Then they could look lovingly at their parents, and their parents could see how happy their children are. That is a way of taking which achieves balance, because the parents feel acknowledged by this kind of taking with love. And they give even more willingly.

When children demand, "You must give me even more," then the parents' hearts close. Because the children demand, the parents can no longer voluntarily flood them with love. That's all that demands achieve, they prohibit the natural flow of love. And demanding children, even when they get something, do not value it.

Reciprocity

Between parents and children, reciprocity in giving and taking is achieved by giving on to others what has been taken. It makes parents very happy when children say, "I take everything you give, and when I'm big, I'll pass it on." Children do not look back when they give in this way, they look ahead. That's what their parents did, they took from their own parents and gave to their children. Because they have taken so much, they feel a pressure to give abundantly, and are able to do so.

So that's what I want to say about the Orders of Love between parents and children.

The extended family

We belong not only to our parents, but also to our extended family, to a larger system. Our family system behaves as if it were controlled by a higher function which all members share in common. We can compare this to a flock of birds. Suddenly all the

birds fly off in a new direction, as if the individual birds were moved in common by the flock's decision. In a family system, this higher order group function acts like a shared, family conscience. This common conscience is primarily unconscious, and we can recognize the orders it serves by what happens when we obey it or violate its requirements.

We can tell who belongs to the family system by observing who is affected by this common conscious, and who is not. As a rule, the following persons belong to a family system:

All children, including the deceased and the still born;

The parents and their siblings;

The grandparents belong;

Occasionally one or another of the great grandparents, including even more distant relatives who suffered a particularly difficult or unjust fate;

Non-relatives belong to the system as well when, through their death or misfortune, someone else in the family benefited, for example, previous partners of the parents and grandparents.

The right to membership

A fundamental principle applies to a family system which determines that all members have an equal right to belong. In many families and clans, certain members have been excluded, an uncle perhaps, who was the black sheep of the family, or an illegitimate child no one talked about.

Or some members may say, "I'm Catholic and you're Protestant, and as Catholic I have a greater right to belong than you." Or the reverse, "As a Protestant, I have a greater right to belong, because I belong to the true faith. You're less faithful than I, so you have less right to belong." Religion isn't as important as it used to be, but other things still are, like profession, nationality, skin colour, gender.

Or, sometimes when a child dies young, the parents give the next child the same name. They effectively tell the deceased child, "You don't belong any more. We have a substitute for you." The deceased child can't even keep his or her own name. In many families such children are neither counted among the children, nor are they mentioned. Their fundamental right to belong is injured and denied to them.

Much so called morality, especially when some members believe they are better than the others and place themselves above them, is really the message, "We have more right to belong than you do." Or when we speak badly of other members and treat them as if they were bad, we are telling them, "You have less right to belong than we do." In such situations, "good" means only that I have more right to belong and "bad" means that you have less right to belong.

Excluded members are represented

The fundamental dynamic in family systems that all members have an equal right to belong does not tolerate injury. Whenever someone in a family system is excluded, a need arises in the system for compensation. This compensatory dynamic leads to

the excluded or disdained member being represented by a younger family member who is unaware of and helpless against the identification.

For example, a married man fell in love with another woman and told his wife that he didn't want to have anything more to do with her. He invented superficial and capricious reasons to justify his actions, compounding the injustice done to his wife. He later had children with his new partner, but his daughter fought him tooth and nail for no apparent reason. It turned out that she unconsciously represented his first partner and felt toward her father the same hate his first wife must have felt, but she didn't even know of the existence of the first woman. In this, we can see a hidden systemic compensatory force at work, avenging the injustice done to the earlier member by unconsciously enlisting a younger member.

Much serious dysfunction in families-behavioural disturbances in children, but also illnesses, proneness to accidents and suicidal behaviour-occur when children unconsciously represent an excluded person and seek to satisfy that person's need for restitution. This shows a second characteristic of conscience of the family system. It secures justice for the earlier members and causes injustice for the younger.

Resolution

Younger family members can be released from such entanglements when the fundamental order is re-established, when the excluded members are taken into the family again and given due respect. For example, the second wife can say to the first, "I have this man and you pay the price. I respect your loss, and I acknowledge that injustice was done to you. I ask that you please be friendly to me and to my children." When they are authentically spoken, such sentences honestly name what has happened and pay the first wife due respect. In family constellations we often observe how the first wife's face then softens and she all at once does become friendly because she is respected. Her reaction shows that she too belongs.

Resolution also requires that the child representing the first wife say to her, "I belong only to my father and my mother. Whatever is between all of you is none of my business." She can also say to her father, "You are my father and I'm your daughter. Please look upon me as your daughter." These sentences too, authentically spoken, restore the fundamental order. The father can look at his daughter and need not see his first wife in her, and need not meet in her the hate and grief that his first wife must have felt. And if he still loves his first wife, he need not see his lover in his daughter. He can look at her and see and love his daughter. The daughter is freed to be merely a daughter, and the father, a father.

The child can also say to him, "This is my mother. I'm not related to your first wife. I claim my mother. She's the only one for me." And she can say to her mother, "I'm not related to the other woman. I'm not connected to her in any way." As long as she represents the first wife, her mother may unconsciously see the other woman in her, and she and her mother may get into conflict with one another as if they were rivals. When the daughter

says, "You are my mother and I'm your daughter. I have no connection to the other woman. I claim you as my mother. Please, take me as your child," she restores the basic order.

Injuries to the equal right to belong are also the cause of much more serious entanglements. For example, when a child dies young in a family, the other children tend to feel guilty that they still are alive while their brother or sister is dead. It's as if they believe that they have an advantage because they are alive and that their sibling is disadvantaged because he or she is dead. They are tempted to compensate by unconsciously arranging to fail, by becoming ill, or in extreme cases, by wanting to die themselves, although they don't know why.

In situations like this, some children have been able to restore the order of love by telling their deceased sibling, "You are my brother (or sister). I respect you as my brother (sister). You have a place in my heart. I bow my head to you and to your fate, whatever that was, and I accept my fate however it comes." These sentences pay respect to the deceased sibling, and the living child can turn toward life without guilt.

Magical belief systems and their consequences

Behind the need for reciprocity which causes illness, a magical belief system works its mischief. Namely, that we can release those we love from their suffering and misfortune when we take it upon ourselves. For example, the child's soul often tells her terminally ill mother, "I'd rather be ill, than have you suffer. I'd rather I die myself than have you die." Or when a mother is being pulled away from life by systemic forces, it sometimes happens that a child commits suicide in the magical belief that her sacrifice will free mother free to stay.

Anorexia often has this dynamic. An anorectic child slowly shrinks away, until it dies. It quite often turns out to be the case that in the souls of such anorectic children, they are saying to their father or mother, "It's better if I disappear than if you go." This is a deep, innocent love, but when the child dies, what does it accomplish?

When I work with an anorectic child, I let them speak these soul-sentences out loud. They can look the representatives of mother or father in the eye and tell them, "I'd rather disappear myself than let you go." When a child looks at her mother or father until she really sees them, she can't say the sentences, because she sees that her parents will be devastated by her death. The child's magical belief system totally ignores the fact that the parents also love, and that they would vehemently reject such a sacrifice. And it also ignores the fact that such a sacrifice would be useless.

When a mother dies in childbirth, her child has a hard time fully embracing life. It helps when such a child can look her mother in the eye and say, "Mother, I see the terrible price you paid that I may live. I accept the life you gave me, and I will make something good out of it. Rest in peace, knowing that I will live so that your sacrifice is not in vain." Accepting life in this way is love at a higher level than the blind love

that has the child-soul say, "Mother, I can't live fully because you died. I feel too guilty." Love at a higher level demands that we relinquish the magical belief that we can change the course of our parents' lives for the better when we sacrifice ourselves. It demands that we transform the blind love which creates and perpetuates suffering into a love which heals.

Magical belief systems and the child-love that goes with them are coupled with inflated feeling of power and superiority. A child really does believe that its illness and death can liberate mother or father from illness and death. True humility is what makes it possible for us to lay down such inflation.

Men and women

I'd like to turn now to the Orders of Love in relationships between men and women. This is a theme which is very close to us. Many people are ashamed, as if this were something to be kept secret. What makes men and women different, really different, is often carefully hidden. Or, we could say that it is protected. It is a point where we are most easily wounded. It is the home of shame; the shame which protects a treasure from defilement. It is also the point where we feel most vulnerable.

Sometimes people talk disparagingly about "the human sexual drive" and they forget that this is the fundamental force, the deepest force, that guides life and guarantees its continuation. It is a force that enlists us in its service whether we choose or not. If the decision marry and have children really were a rational decision, no one would do it. People do so because of the power of nature's creative force expressing itself in our sexuality. Through this drive, we are in deepest accord with the soul of the world. The sexual drive is the greatest reason. All other motives and rational considerations pale in comparison to the force behind this drive.

The first requirement of the Orders of Love between men and women is that the man admits that he is missing and needs what the woman is, and that no matter how hard he tries, he cannot achieve what the woman already has. And love requires that the woman admit that she is missing and needs what the man is, and that no matter how hard she tries, she cannot achieve what the man already has. That means that both feel incomplete, and that they acknowledge that.

When a man admits that he needs a woman, and that he becomes a man through her, and when the woman admits that she needs a man and that she becomes a woman through him, then their mutual need binds them deeply, one to the other. Precisely because they acknowledge their need for one another. And this bonding between man and woman allows the man to receive the feminine from his partner as a gift, and the woman to receive the masculine from her partner as his gift to her.

Bonding between men and women

When a man and a woman take one another in the full sense of man and woman, then the consummation of

their love creates a bond between them which cannot be dissolved. This bond is very different from the moral teachings of various churches about the indissolubility of marriage. The consummation of love in this sense creates a bond irrespective of marriage and irrespective of any rituals or ceremonies.

We recognize the existence of this bond through its effects. For example, if people how frivolously leave a partner with whom they are bonded in this way, then have difficulties holding any new partner. The new partner senses the bond and is neither free to lay claim to the new partner, nor to become completely open and vulnerable. For example, a woman secretly felt that she was better than her new husband's first wife, and was convinced she could make him much happier than the first wife had done. Nevertheless, after a few years, she became incapable of intimacy with him. In this way, she unconsciously acknowledged his bond to his first wife, and her own loyalty to the first partner as well. She too lost her husband, just as the first wife had done before.

In family constellations, we often observe that a second wife keeps a little distance from her new husband, as if she cannot take him fully because he is already bound to another.

We also can recognize the depth of the bond by its effect. As a rule, the end of the first love is the most difficult, and it is the most painful. Separation is usually easier with the second bond, and still easier with the third.

This bonding is not the same as love. It sometimes happens that the bond is very deep, even though there is little love, or that there is great love and little bonding. Bonding is created by the physical act of sex. For this reason, it very often occurs with incest and rape. If a victim of rape or incest later hopes to bond deeply, he or she must deal with the first bond in a good way. The negative effect of the first bond softens when it is acknowledged and the first partner, although perhaps a rapist, is given due respect. When the first bond is hated and treated as something vile, it impinges on the ability to bond again later in better circumstances.

Hierarchy

The fruit of the love between a man and a woman are their children. There is also a hidden order which supports love among children, their order in the family hierarchy. The family hierarchy follows the flow to time, that is, those who were there first come before those who come later. In a family, the parents were there before the children. Their love for one another as man and woman founded the family, and came before their love for their children as parents. In some families, the children attract the full attention of both parents. In such families, the parents are no longer first and foremost a couple, but rather first and foremost parents, and their children usually suffer.

When parents' love for one another as man and woman retains its priority, children usually feel very comfortable and satisfied. In families like this, the father is implicitly communicating to his children, "I see you as you are, but I also see your mother in you,

and in you, I love and respect her more than ever." And the mother communicates to the children, "I see you as you are. But seeing you reminds me how much I love and respect your father, because I see him in you as well." And the parents communicate to one another, "When I see our children, I love you and respect you more than ever." Then the parents' love for their children is a continuation of their love a couple, but the parents' love for one another retains its precedence, and the children feel free.

Many families today are second or third families. For example, when the man and the woman were in previous relationships and bring children into the new relationship. What is the order of priority then?

The parents were the parents of their children before they were a couple. Their love for their children is not a continuation of their love for one another as man and woman, because they were parents before they were a couple. In situations like this, the new partners must recognize that the love to the children came before the love to the new partner and that the greatest love and the greatest attachment flows to the children-and naturally in the children, to the previous partner as well. Only then, at the end of the chain, does the love and attachment flow to the new partner. If both partners accept this hierarchy of love, then their love can flourish.

But when one or the other of the new couple says to the other, "I want to come first, before your children," then their new love is jeopardized and cannot long endure.

When a couple bring children into their new relationship and then have children together, the sequence is that they were first parents of the original children, then a couple, then parents of their children together. Couples who respect this natural sequence of time and its relevance for their relationships can avoid and resolve a great deal of conflict in partnerships.

So, I have briefly outlined a few of the more important orders of love that we have observed operating in relationships between men and women. In passing, it may be useful to say that there are also orders of love for couples without children, including homosexual couples.

In conclusion, I want to tell you a story about love. It is called Two Good Fortunes.

Two Good Fortunes

Long, long ago, when the gods still seemed close to us, two singers named Orpheus lived in a little town.

One of them was the Great Orpheus. He invented the Chithara, a kind of guitar, and when he plucked the strings and sang, the whole of nature around him was spellbound. The wild animals lay at his feet, the tallest trees bent down to hear. Nothing could resist the power of his music. And because he was so great, he courted the most beautiful of all women. That's when his trouble started.

The beautiful Eurydike died during the wedding festivities, and Orpheus' cup, raised high, broke

in his hand. But for the Great Orpheus, death was not the end. With the help of his great art, he found the entrance to the underworld and descended into the realm of shadows, crossed the river of forgetting, passed the hounds of hell, and appeared alive before the throne of the god of death and touched him with a song.

Death set Eurydike free, but with a string attached. Orpheus was so happy that he didn't notice the malice in this boon.

He started back and behind him he could hear the footsteps of his beloved. They safely passed the hounds of hell and crossed the river of forgetting and began to climb toward the light which they could see in the distance. Suddenly, Orpheus heard a cry-Eurydike had stumbled. In panic, he turned and saw the shadows of the night fall, and he was alone. Beside himself from pain, he sang his parting song, "Now I've lost her. My happiness is gone forever."

He managed to get back to the world of light, but his experiences in the realm of the dead made life seem strange. As drunken women invited him to go with them to the festival of the new wine, he refused, and they tore him living limb from limb.

So great his unhappiness, so useless his art. But, he is known in all the world.

The other Orpheus was a smaller man. He wasn't a great musician. He sang at little parties and played for simple people. He wasn't very successful, but he made them happy and he had a lot of fun. He couldn't make a living singing, so he got an job that wasn't very special, married a woman that wasn't very special and had children that weren't very special either. He committed small and ordinary sins from time to time and was just about as happy as everyone else. He had a very ordinary life and died old and satisfied with life.

But, no one knows him -- except me..