

# Love

## By Jeanne Supin

I write with my eyes closed. I'm sure I look pretty weird, but my writing feels impersonal and objective, and it makes sense to close my eyes. It's not really me, not really my narrative: eyes closed, my heart starts typing and stuff just pours out. I pick the topic, but otherwise I'm just the technical editor, inserting a comma so the stream of words flows easier over the rocks. This month was even simpler: I took the magazine's theme, Love, and just started. But a funny thing happened on the way to my deadline ...

Search "love" on Wikipedia and even the most brilliant head will spin. There are a zillion types: romantic, familial, friendly, platonic, unrequited, religious, sexual, true, tragic ... There's love between people, of nature, for animals ... There's loving chocolate or rock climbing, loving that chick flick, the latest Jodi Picoult novel, or George Clooney ... we throw the word around a ton, the unspoken agreement that its weight varies with the context.

The heaviest in popular culture seems to be romantic love: Johnny pulls our hair in grade school and Zing! goes the strings of our heart, hatching a butterfly that messes with our digestion the rest of our lives. Up until a month ago I was cool with a purely scientific explanation. Anthropologist Helen Fisher compared brain MRIs of those who recently fell madly in love with those unattached or in long-term relationships. There's a rush of chemicals that thrust us lustily in those early months. Surges of dopamine flood our brain,

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giving us intense energy, attention, motivation to win rewards, and exhilaration. Try to parent a teenager in love and it's no surprise her chemistry mirrors those with obsessive-compulsive disorder. It's all-consuming, and it feels like it will never end. But inevitably it does, as Fisher points out. Some crash and burn, but other *madly-in-loves* happily transform into long-term commitment. The dopamine hare eventually overrun by the more steady oxytocin tortoise. It's a necessary shift in chemistry, to a physical state a little less exhilarating but far more durable. In fact, Fisher suggests, if we choose to remain kind, caring, and attentive, we can keep those oxytocin levels elevated and stay in love.

Up until a month ago, I blissfully intellectualized the spirituality of love, too, with its universal refrain that we *Are* love, that love is our ultimate nature and reason for being. Love distinct from changing emotions. Anger, fear, euphoria, or confusion ... they're impermanent, come and go. I can spend a whole day crying about something that feels so important, but then poof, next day it's gone. But love seems different. Love persists, especially if I am intentionally grateful, appreciative, and kind. I first saw it with my daughter – she can frustrate and anger me like nobody else, especially now at 14. But I know I love her. Deep down I always feel honored to be her mother, always believe she is a blessing I could never have imagined before her birth. Love that stays no matter what. And when I remember how grateful I am for her presence – especially when I'm angry as can be – I crack wide open.

I figured maybe I could extrapolate that to other contexts, focus that intention toward other people or things. Open my heart no matter what and see if love poured out. Turns out with practice it does. I feel strong devotion and love for many people, can nurture it, enhance it, even rustle up unconditional love when they do ridiculous things. HeartMath® ([www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)) has a slew of research demonstrating the power of an open heart: If I purposely recall a happy memory my heartbeat steadies, I feel better, and I can find the necessary patience to calmly explain (again) my software glitch to the tech support guy in Mumbai. Maybe that's not Big Love, but courtesy is a start. Keep doing HeartMath® exercises and I can feel a loving sensation most of the time. Irmansyah Effendi ([www.reikikummo.com](http://www.reikikummo.com)) teaches a series of meditations specifically designed to open a heart and *expand* love: close my eyes, touch my heart, relax, smile. Sometimes add

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some loving words. Every time I practice I realize it's that easy. Plus, intentionally smiling makes me spontaneously smile, which feels even more like love. Turn it into laughter, especially raucous, ridiculous howling for no-good-reason laughter, and I've landed in a whole love sea. Intention. Gratitude. Joy. Love. Love that just flows, no specific recipient or object of my affection. Just love, pure and sweet. And blissfully impersonal.

Yeah, well, all that intellectual analysis and *just let the love flow* worked great weeks ago ... then my best friend fixed me up on a blind date that overnight became a relationship and is quickly falling over some cliff from which I can't escape even if I wanted to which I don't although the freefall is kinda disorienting. It makes me run sentences together. I'm blushing and stammering and bumping into things when I walk. Periodically I burst into tears for reasons I can't possibly fathom. All the while smiling so wide my cheeks perpetually ache. He keeps walking through my front door in the middle of the day as I try to write this and making me feel like I live on some utterly cherry-filled planet with iridescent pink clouds and sparkling silver stars. I feel like a Hallmark card. Now when I close my eyes to write and my once-objective heart starts typing, it's all Personal. Singing my own tune, with wild new words. This was not in my original outline, and I can't get a damn thing done. What's worse, I don't care.

I do get it. I do understand – and my best friend keeps reminding me – this is love, too. I'm not exactly sure why I find it so embarrassing. Probably middle-age, protestant upbringing, a previous divorce, a brain comfortably full of rational facts, an independent single life that was perfectly fine ... and my absurdly mistaken belief that if I close my eyes when I write the result is safe and impersonal. But embarrassing or not, damn if there isn't something more than dopamine overdose and spiritual surrender to all this love stuff.

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