

THE BIG IDEAS

Love Is an Art

To master it requires practice.

How to Be Loving

vs. Being “lovable.”

Standing in Love

vs. Falling in love.

Love Is an Attitude

An orientation of character.

Discipline

The first requirement.

Learning to Walk in Love

Fall down and try again!

Illusions of Perfection

Let's drop them.

Faith in Potentialities

Starts with you.

To Be Fully Awake

Is key.

The Art of Loving

Fiftieth Anniversary Edition

BY ERICH FROMM · HARPER PERENNIAL © 2006 · 123 PAGES

“Is love an art? Then it requires knowledge and effort. Or is love a pleasant sensation, which to experience is a matter of chance, something one “falls into” if one is lucky? This little book is based on the former premise, while undoubtedly the majority of people today believe in the latter.”

~ Erich Fromm from *The Art of Loving*

Erich Fromm was a leading 20th century psychologist and this book has sold millions of copies. It's packed with Big Ideas on both the theory and the practice of the art of loving.

In this Note, I'm excited to share a handful of my favorites that'll (hopefully!) help us get our love on more consistently starting today. :)

Let's jump in!

LOVE IS AN ART

“The first step to take is to become aware that *love is an art*, just as living is an art; if we want to learn how to love we must proceed in the same way we have to proceed if we want to learn any other art, say music, painting, carpentry, or the art of medicine or engineering.

What steps are necessary steps in learning any art?

The process of learning an art can be divided conveniently into two parts: one, the mastery of the theory; the other, the mastery of the practice.”

Love is an art.

And, just like any art we need to invest a significant amount of time and energy into it if we intend to master it!

Reminds me of Leo Buscaglia's wisdom from his great book *Love* ([see Notes](#)) where he tells us: “If he desired to know about automobiles, he would, without question, study diligently about automobiles. If his wife desired to be a gourmet cook, she'd certainly study the art of cooking, perhaps even attending a cooking class. Yet, it never seems as obvious to him that if he wants to live in love, he must spend at least as much time as the auto mechanic or the gourmet in studying love.”

Buscaglia continues: “I would not want to form a partnership with an architect who has only a little knowledge of building or a broker who has a limited knowledge of the stock market. Still, we form what we hope to be permanent relationships in love with people who have hardly any knowledge of what love is.”

And reminds us: “It's never too late to learn anything for which you have a potential. If you want to learn to love, then you must start the process of finding out what it is, what qualities make up a loving person and see how these are developed. Each person has the potential for love. But potential is never realized without work. This does not mean pain. Love, especially, is

“Is love an art? Then it requires knowledge and effort.”

~ Erich Fromm

"Can anything be learned about the practice of an art, except by practicing it?"

~ Erich Fromm

learned best in wonder, in joy, in peace, in living."

The two elements of learning any art? Theory and practice. We need to understand how things work and then embody them in our day-to-day lives!!

Let's bring it back to you. How do YOU approach love?

As an art you're committed to mastering? Or as a nice feeling you struggle to maintain?

Here's to approaching love as an art we're committed to mastering! :)

HOW TO BE LOVING (VS. "LOVABLE")

"Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of *being loved*, rather than that of *loving*, of one's capacity to love. Hence the problem to them is how to be loved, how to be lovable."

That's a REALLY powerful distinction.

Most of us focus on being *lovable*--that is, whatever it is we think is worthy of love: attractive, successful, popular, etc.

But that's the wrong way to look at love.

Rather than focusing on being lovable, we want to focus on being LOVING.

THAT's where it's at.

And, ironically, as we focus on *giving* more and more love in our lives, we get real love back a lot more than we would if our focus was on trying to make ourselves lovable.

So, when we talk about the Art of Loving, let's keep in mind that our end goal is not to be more "lovable" per se, it's to become more LOVING human beings!!

STANDING IN LOVE VS. FALLING IN LOVE

"Love is an activity, not a passive affect; it is a "standing in," not a "falling for." In the most general way, the active character of love can be described by stating that love is primarily *giving*, not receiving."

I love this distinction: Love is a "standing in," not a "falling for."

In other words, we need to focus on *standing* in love rather than *falling* in love.

Reminds me of some really profound wisdom from Gary Chapman's great book, *The Five Languages of Love* (Notes coming soon :), where he tells us it's really quite easy to fall in love. The hard part is CHOOSING to love after the initial buzz of the relationship wears off.

I remember reading that line after Alexandra and I ended our engagement and I realized I had fallen into the trap of bailing after the buzz had worn off. I fell in love and that was grand. But, I hadn't really CHOSEN to love. Long story short, when we got back together I made the commitment to CHOOSE love. Again and again and again.

One of the best decisions I've made. :)

How about *you*? Are you standing in love and really choosing love moment to moment, day in and day out?

LOVE IS AN ATTITUDE, AN ORIENTATION OF CHARACTER

"Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an *attitude*, an *orientation of character* which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one "object" of love. If a person loves only one other person and is indifferent to the rest of his fellow men, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment, or an enlarged egotism. Yet, most people

"If one wants to become a master of any art, one's whole life must be devoted to it, or at least related to it."

~ Erich Fromm

believe that love is constituted by the object, not by the faculty. In fact, they even believe that it is a proof of the intensity of their love when they do not love anybody except the "loved" person. This is the same fallacy which we have already mentioned above. Because one does not see that love is an activity, a power of the soul, one believes that all that is necessary to find is the right object--and that everything goes by itself afterward. This attitude can be compared to that of a man who wants to paint but who, instead of learning the art, claims that he has just to wait for the right object, and that he will paint beautifully when he finds it. If I truly love one person I love all persons, I love the world, I love life. If I can say to somebody else, "I love you," I must be able to say, "I love in you everybody, I love through you the world, I love in you also myself."

Wow. How beautiful is THAT?!

First, let's take another look at this gem: *"Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character..."*

Love is an ATTITUDE, an ORIENTATION OF CHARACTER. A way of being. The book is essentially all about helping us cultivate that perspective.

Let's explore some more Big Ideas on how to rock that.

DISCIPLINE: THE FIRST REQUIREMENT

"The practice of any art has certain general requirements, quite regardless of whether we deal with the art of carpentry, medicine, or the art of love. First of all, the practice of an art requires discipline. I shall never be good at anything if I do not do it in a disciplined way; anything I do only if "I am in the mood" may be a nice or amusing hobby, but I shall never become a master in that art."

LOVE that.

Reminds me of how Steven Pressfield puts it in his CLASSIC book, *The War of Art* ([see Notes](#)): *"The amateur plays part-time, the professional full-time. The amateur is a weekend warrior. The professional is there seven days a week."*

The word amateur comes from the Latin root meaning "to love." The conventional interpretation is that the amateur pursues his calling out of love, while the pro does it for the money. Not the way I see it. In my view, the amateur does not love the game enough. If he did, he would not pursue it as a sideline, distinct from his "real" vocation.

The professional loves it so much he dedicates his life to it. He commits full-time."

And here's how Michael Beckwith puts it in his great book, *Spiritual Liberation* ([see Notes](#)): *"The gift of self-discipline is that it has the power to take you beyond the reasoning of temporary emotion to freedom. Think of how empowered you've felt on occasions when you haven't given in to the 'I don't feel like it' syndrome and honored your commitment to yourself. What does not feeling like it have to do with it? The combination of love for something with the willingness to do what it takes to practice it—discipline—results in freedom."*

Discipline.

It really is the secret sauce.

When we're committed to something--whether it's living with love, meditating daily, creating consistently, or whatever--we need to move beyond only doing it when we're "in the mood" or when we "feel like it," to rockin' it WHETHER WE FEEL LIKE IT OR NOT.

As Beckwith tells us, *"What does feeling like it have to do with it?"*

Jack Canfield captures this attitude perfectly in *The Success Principles* ([see Notes](#)) where he tells us: *"Successful people adhere to the 'no exceptions rule' when it comes to their daily disciplines."*

*" Love of the helpless one,
love of the poor and the
stranger, are the beginning
of brotherly love. To love
one's flesh and blood is no
achievement."*

~ Erich Fromm

Once you make a 100% commitment to something, there are no exceptions. It's a done deal. Nonnegotiable. Case closed! Over and out."

Canfield tells us that 99% is a bitch while 100% is a breeze. Fact is, if we don't TOTALLY commit, that little whiney voice within each of us is given a chance to pipe in with lame excuses--telling us why today's the day we should give ourselves a break. But when we make a 100% commitment, we don't even allow that voice into the equation.

And that makes things SOOOOO much easier.

How 'bout you? With what level of commitment do you approach things that are important to you?

Let's get this out of the abstract and make it real. What's something that you KNOW would be REALLY REALLY good for you and that deserves a 100% commitment from you?

I am now 100% committed to: _____

P.S. Fromm goes into detail on these other conditions of practicing an art: concentration, patience, and making the mastery of the art a "supreme concern." Great stuff.

LEARNING TO WALK IN LOVE

"If one does not know that everything has its time, and wants to force things, then indeed one will never succeed in becoming concentrated--nor in the art of loving. To have an idea of what patience is one need only watch a child learning to walk. It falls, falls again, and yet it goes on trying, improving, until the day it walks without falling. What could the grown-up person achieve if he had the child's patience and its concentration in the pursuits which are important to him!"

Patience. It's an essential attribute to developing our mastery of love. (And, of course, to developing mastery in anything in our lives!)

I just love the power of a child learning how to walk. We touch on this a few times throughout these Notes. I love the way Dan Millman puts it in *Body Mind Mastery* ([see Notes](#)), where he tells us: *"If babies held the same tendency toward self-criticism as adults, they might never learn to walk or talk. Can you imagine infants stomping, 'Aarggh! Screwed up again!' Fortunately, babies are free of self-criticism. They just keep practicing."*

(Hah. Imagine that! :)

As we embrace that image, he encourages us: *"So be gentle with yourself; show yourself the same kindness and patience you might show a young child--the child you once were. If you won't be your own friend, who will be? If, when playing an opponent, you are also opposing yourself, you will be outnumbered... You probably would find it cruel and unnecessary to say to someone, 'You are really stupid; you keep making the same mistakes; you should give up; you'll never be any good!' Yet we think it's okay to say the same things to ourselves."*

So, back to the Art of Loving.

Imagine how patiently the baby learns to walk. Each time she falls she giggles. She falls down and gets up AGAIN and AGAIN and AGAIN until she can finally walk without falling.

What would happen if we approached our relationships with the same patience and focused concentration as that child learning to walk? We wouldn't even contemplate failure. That wouldn't be an option. We'd just take the next step forward each time we fell--celebrating our tiny improvements and seeing how we can get just a *little* bit better until, eventually and after MANY (!) falls, we would be able to "walk" through our relationships without falling down!!!

"To love means to commit oneself without guarantee, to give oneself completely in the hope that our love will produce love in the loved person. Love is an act of faith, and whoever is of little faith is also of little love."

~ Erich Fromm

Sign me up for that!! You in? :)

ILLUSIONS OF PERFECTION

"One other frequent error must be mentioned here. The illusion, namely, that love means necessarily the absence of conflict. Just as it is customary for people to believe that pain and sadness should be avoided under all circumstances, they believe that love means the absence of any conflict."

Do you labor under the false Idea that a really good relationship should *never* have any conflict? I used to. Eek.

As Fromm says, that attitude kinda goes hand in hand with the idea that a really good life should *never* have any ups and downs. But that's a dangerous perspective to hold!

I love the way José Silva and Burt Goldman put it in *The Silva Mind Control Method of Mental Dynamics* (see Notes) where they tell us: "Unremitting happiness, of course, is not a possible—or desirable—state. According to the principle of rhythm, there is always an inflow and an outflow, an ebb tide and a flood tide. You'll always have highs and lows—there's no way to avoid that. However, your highs will be higher and your lows will be higher. And you'll find that what is a depressive state for you might be a moderately happy state for someone unaware of the Five Rules of Happiness."

And, I've mentioned this [Maslow](#) quote a number of times throughout these Notes and I'm gonna do it again because it's THAT important: "There are no perfect human beings! Persons can be found who are good, very good indeed, in fact, great. There do in fact exist creators, seers, sages, saints, shakers, and movers... even if they are uncommon and do not come by the dozen. And yet these very same people can at times be boring, irritating, petulant, selfish, angry, or depressed. To avoid disillusionment with human nature, we must first give up our illusions about it."

Again: There are NO perfect human beings. And: There are NO perfect relationships. So, let's embrace the challenging times in our lives and in our relationships and see them as opportunities to grow!!!

FAITH IN POTENTIALITIES

"We have faith in the potentialities of others, of ourselves, and of mankind because, and only to the degree to which, we have experienced the growth of our own potentialities, the reality of growth in ourselves, the strength of our own power of reason and of love."

That's powerful.

In short: If we want to see the potentialities of others, we must see it in OURSELVES. If we want to love and respect others we must love and respect ourselves. Period.

Buscaglia puts it this way: "To love others you must love yourself... You can only give to others what you have yourself."

While Dan Millman offers this wisdom in *Everyday Enlightenment* (see Notes): "One of the strangest delusions believed by many of us is that it is good to love other people but bad to love yourself. I suggest that the more you are able to see, love, and accept the one facet of Spirit gazing at you from the mirror, the more you will be able to love Spirit within others. If we are the same awareness shining through a billion separate forms, then all love begins with self-love. For the heart to awaken, it cannot exclude a single soul, including yourself. If you do not love yourself, how can you find the space to love others?"

And back to Fromm who tells us: "These ideas on self-love cannot be summarized better than

"Without love humanity could not exist for a day."

~ Erich Fromm

by quoting Meister Eckhart on this topic: "If you love yourself, you love everybody else as you do yourself. As long as you love another person less than you love yourself, you will not really succeed in loving yourself, but if you love all alike, including yourself, you will love them as one person and that person is both God and man. Thus he is a great and righteous person who, loving himself, loves all others equally."

TO BE FULLY AWAKE

"To be fully awake is... one of the main conditions for loving. To be active in thought, feeling, with one's eyes and ears, throughout the day, to avoid inner laziness... is an indispensable condition for the practice of the art of loving. It is an illusion to believe that one can separate life in such a way that one is productive in the sphere of love and unproductive in all other spheres. Productiveness does not permit such a division of labor. The capacity of love demands a state of intensity, awakens, enhanced vitality, which can only be the result of a productive and active orientation in many other spheres of life. If one is not productive in other spheres, one is not productive in love either."

Reminds me of another Buscaglia gem: "A total immersion in life offers the best classroom for learning to love." Also reminds me of the wisdom that how we do anything is how we do everything.

And, of course, that all begs the question: How are YOU doing everything?

We've gotta know that our moment to moment decisions to either show up or check out are influencing every other moment of our lives.

Here's to choosing wisely and growing in life and love!

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[Love](#)

[Motivation and Personality](#)

[Man's Search for Meaning](#)

[Spiritual Liberation](#)

[Body Mind Mastery](#)

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.