
Loves Me, Loves Me Not

by Johanna Atman

The Fires of Beltane kindle the night
reflected in the Green Man's glance.

His Lady, the Queen of the May
delights us all in a spiral dance.

"Follow me to the Source of All," he
said.

"I am Eternal Fire."

"Come with me to the Source of All,"
she said.

"I am your heart's desire."

—*Traditional Celtic May Day Song*

Nature is bursting forth into its full spectrum of vibrant colors. From the pinks and whites of flowering fruit trees in spring to the fiery orange Tiger Lilies of mid-summer, the days are sunnier and longer, and our energy moves increasingly outward into a more external relationship with all things.

In the old tradition of nature's wheel of the year, May Day represents the adolescent "Coming of Age", the child energy of Spring progressing to full maturity of the adult at the Summer Solstice. This is the period in our life cycle in which our relationship to

We may be in relationships we have chosen for unconscious reasons and that we live in with unconscious agreements or unspoken ground rules that correlate with the earliest levels of moral development.

The question of trust expands from the old paradigm's "Do I trust you?" to the emerging paradigm's "Do I trust life?"

everything—to nature, to family and children, to our creativity—is really lived out and visible. Just as our dreams and visions of winter may become manifest in summer, often in this part of the life cycle whatever patterns we learned unconsciously about relationship as children are revealed in the light of the present as adults.

Sometimes those patterns may be clearly abusive and/or self-destructive, but many patterns contain much more subtle or complex ways we have learned to manipulate our surroundings to get what we want without owning our choices. We can look at our current relationships as excellent mirrors of what those patterns are. For instance, if your childhood contained an experience of abandonment, you may unconsciously have chosen a relationship in which that issue reoccurs. If we choose, we can become more conscious of what we elect to change in ourselves to create a relationship that better reflects what we desire.

As children pulling flower petals from a daisy and chanting "loves me, loves me not," we had a pretty black and white idea about relationships, with ourselves at the center. Relationships in school often reflected that "on/off" quality as best friends one day were not speaking the next. The focus from the beginning was on who "loves me"! We weren't asking ourselves who we love and what we love and why we love.

There is no more powerful experience and influence upon who we are than relationship. In a sense, all is relationship in that no thing has definition and meaning other than in relation to something else. Light and dark, for instance, or foreground and background; they are relative terms as we only can know one in relation to the

If we acknowledged that relationships live inside us forever and therefore must be healed in order for us to be healthy, perhaps we would choose to transform our relationships into what they need to be rather enduring the unhealed wounds and emotional toxins.

other. Although not exclusively, we learn to know ourselves in large part through our relationships with others and to the whole of life. Because our relationships are capable of such profound impact upon us they are also the source of our greatest pain and suffering. Yet we live and grow up and enter into life-long relationships often without any conscious focus on what it is, or what we want it to be.

To distinguish different levels of relationships we can refer to a scale of moral stages created by Lawrence Kohlberg and based upon Jean Piaget's look at the development of moral values in children at different stages. Kohlberg defined three basic levels: "Pre-conventional", "Conventional", and "Post-conventional, autonomous or principled level". Within each one of these exist two stages.

In the Pre-conventional level (which is developed from age 0-9), the orientation is toward physical consequences of an action, thus good behavior is chosen to avoid punishment (Stage 1). The "might makes right" stage is followed by the notion that "right" action is that which produces rewards and satisfies one's needs (Stage 2).

In the Conventional level (ages 9-15) behavior is highly influenced by conformity pressures, expectations, and the desire to avoid disapproval (Stage 3). In the second stage of this level, right action is based upon rules and authority, "law and order", and maintenance of the social order for its own sake (Stage 4). (In Kohlberg's study, the majority of adults never develop beyond Stage 4 in moral thinking.)

The Post Conventional level (moral reasoning) includes the acceptance of universal and personal moral principles

Just the simple act of acknowledging the divine in each other changes our experience of relationship.

If you want to improve your relationship

such as “Do unto others...” that are valid apart from authority. While the orientation of Stage 5 is legalistic and contractual in regard to general standards that have been examined and agreed upon, there is the possibility that personal values and opinions can rationally change these rights and standards and there are procedures for reaching consensus. The final stage is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles such as justice, equality and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons (Stage 6).

The study points out that while the higher stages can be reached developmentally, this does not mean that everybody will reach them. As children develop, they understand only one level beyond their own and prefer this next stage. The work of Carol Gilligan in “In a Different Voice” adds another dimension to the issue of moral development. Noting that the Kohlberg study was based completely on the study of young boys, her investigations point out significant differences between the moral concepts of men and women. For women the issues were understanding responsibilities and relationships and for men morality and fairness was tied to right and rules. When presented with moral questions, men answer in terms of a “live and let live” and “personal rights” perspective which emphasizes separation. Women define their values in terms of relationship: their challenge was how to do what was best for all without abandoning oneself. They felt responsibility to the world.

Using this scale, which defines levels of moral development, we can look at our relationships in terms of what levels of moral agreement we are operating on, consciously or unconsciously. We can also begin to see how the inclusion of feminine values opens new dimensions in

there are thousands of books and workshops for better communication skills, listening techniques, dealing with our power struggles and family patterns, healing the inner child, balancing our masculine and feminine aspects—all basically strategies for getting better at an old, and exclusively psychologically defined, game.

relationships, namely the spiritual.

In what we could call an unconscious or old paradigm of relationship, we may be in relationships we have chosen for unconscious reasons and that we live in with unconscious agreements or unspoken ground rules that correlate with the earliest levels of moral development. (“I won’t threaten you with my independence if you won’t either.”) Or you may do things because someone tells you to. Or perhaps it’s a more invisible manipulation of “If I do this for you, then you’ll do that for me.” (These are all in the first three stages.) Or we may follow the collective agreement by saying “Our society defines marriage a certain way and so we must follow that definition (4).”

It is often within the first few interactions with a person that all these unconscious “deals” are made without our having any idea what they are. It may be interesting to go back and see what you talked about first, what message you put forth energetically and what the response was. Invisible seeds are planted that we don’t recognize when they sprout!

As time goes on, we may sacrifice parts of ourselves for the sake of “the relationship”. In “The Ship That Sailed into the Living Room” Sonia Johnson develops this image of how the “relation-ship” becomes like a huge ship that literally sits in our living room so we can hardly see each other around the bow or over the deck or make any direct contact with each other. As we each feel we are giving up ourselves for the other, resentments build. And when we don’t feel we are getting whatever we expected from our sacrifices or “good deeds” this resentment grows to hurt, anger, blame and rejection.

In divorce, the extreme form of the breakdown in a relationship, we often

Relationship,
our connection
to everything, is
essentially
spiritual and
about the space
between us as
individuals, not
as “objects”
contained in or
by something.

This approach
might be only
for those
spiritual

enter the “loves me, loves me not” mentality in which people who once agreed to share a life together are now committed to making each other’s life as miserable as possible through revenge. If we acknowledged that relationships live inside us forever and therefore must be healed in order for us to be healthy, perhaps we would choose to transform our relationships into what they need to be rather than enduring a painful divorce which leaves unhealed wounds and emotional toxins that must still be healed as the relationship continues to live inside each person.

The conventional framework has us working out all our problems in a context of “live, suffer and grow” and “stick to it, no matter what.” Or, if it’s too painful, we just give up and move on to most likely repeat the same patterns in a new relationship. Many people say they get married in order to be committed, especially when the going gets rough. From another perspective, that is backwards. Commitment comes from inside, from the heart and one’s integrity (6).

In exploring the emergence of a new paradigm for relationships, it is not a question of committed and uncommitted relationships but rather commitment to what? What is the commitment? Commitment to mediocrity and “lives of quiet desperation” or commitment to drawing forth the highest in each other so that the world can have the full benefit of each of you in it? The question of trust expands from the old paradigm’s “Do I trust you?” to the emerging paradigm’s “Do I trust life?” Am I willing to trust that whatever unfolds is for the greatest good? This emerging paradigm brings us to higher levels on the scale, beyond even Kohlberg’s sixth.

In the old paradigm there is little or no

adventurers
who are willing
to risk
emotional
comfort and
security for truth
and greater
consciousness.

People don't
love us for the
reasons we
think they will or
should.

psychological or spiritual room for two individuals. Generally, we give away our power as individuals in favor of an abstraction, "We", that may, in actuality, not represent either of us! Rather than bring the creative energy of two whole people into a new form that reflects and encourages whoever those two individuals are—emotionally, mentally and spiritually—our culturally conditioned expectations may make us think our job is to support the relationship, to keep "it" going.

One evening, many years ago when my partner and I had lived together for about three years, I experienced the difference between these two attitudes in a way I never forgot. I had been coming home from work every day tired, depressed, sometimes almost in tears and usually starving and impatient to eat dinner. The pace of my job at the County Welfare Department also meant that when I arrived home, my energy was at a much higher rpm than my partner's, who had been meditatively building our house at a craftsman's pace all day without talking to a soul.

All week I had entered the house in a disagreeable mood, and that night I finally broke down, saying, "I don't know how long you will put up with this, if I can't come home and be sociable and happy (like I'm supposed to be)." I'd been worried that too many days in a row I'd been pretty down. I wasn't being a "good partner" so he would probably reject me for not "supporting our relationship" by being "nice". When I was finished blurting it out, the room was quiet and warm.

"What makes you think that?" my partner gently said. "Whose relationship is this? Our relationship is whoever you and I are. That's it! It is not something you're supposed to fit into. You can't. Neither can I. We are

For those who feel lonely and isolated, the rate of pre-mature death and serious illness is three to five times greater than those who feel a sense of community.

exactly, at every moment, who we are.”

Silence. As I wiped my tears away, the room glowed in a moment of magic. I felt throughout my body that something important had just happened between us. I had been given a tremendous gift: permission to be as I am, unconditionally. From that night on I felt that it was really us creating our lives through moments like these, that we were in charge of our own relationship in a way that freed us from the tyranny of trying to conform to our roles in an imaginary ideal. When we give and receive that permission to be as we are, not the roles we expect ourselves and others to be, we are on our way to new and real relationships.

Culturally, the focus of our exploration of this realm of relationship is almost entirely psychological. Today if you want to improve your relationship there are thousands of books and workshops for better communication skills, listening techniques, dealing with our power struggles and family patterns, healing the inner child, balancing our masculine and feminine aspects—all basically strategies for getting better at an old, and exclusively psychologically defined, game.

While all of these areas help us work through our human experiences, they do not deal with the spiritual dimension of our relationships. After we have read hundreds of books and experienced many personal healing exercises, we will still be human no matter what! We will still have conflicts, hardships, even tragedies. We will still have our fears, our self-centeredness, our defensiveness, our angers and we will not have become “perfect” or “ideal” people (fortunately). We may accept our humanness more graciously, be more conscious of what it means to be human and be more comfortable with being “perfectly imperfect”. But isn’t

there something beyond that?

What is missing is a spiritual context for relationships that, when included, offers a whole new dimension in which to understand and live out our relationships with much less pain and suffering and much greater fulfillment and joy. As a society, we do not enter into relationships with any clarity about the nature of a spiritual commitment. We do not understand relationship, of any kind, as sacred. When we meet in public places, we do not bow to each other to greet and honor each other as sacred. In some spiritual circles the Sanskrit word "Namaste" is used in a greeting of the eyes and hands to mean "The God or Goddess in me honors the God or Goddess in you." Just the simple act of acknowledging the divine in each other changes our experience of relationship.

The word "Soul" gained a new cultural acceptance with Thomas Moore's book "Care of the Soul", and subsequently a few books have been published that do explore relationship as a spiritual path or journey of the Soul. Before this popularization of "Soul" in 1992, there was virtually no concept of relationships beyond the psychological level. But relationship, our connection to everything, is essentially spiritual and about the space between us as individuals, not as "objects" contained in or by something. A desire for a greater, and more spiritual, possibility for relationship has always been with me and was expanded even further for me by a kind of inner vision, almost like a dream. Slightly before dawn one hot summer morning in 1980, I awoke from a vision of the Earth with a message about how she was healing herself through us, through human relationships. The message was that all the problems the Earth was having were because the energies on the earth were out of balance with too much emphasis on "Logos" and not

enough experience of "Eros".

The Greek word "Logos" is logic and reason, the controlling principle as in "The Word" (in Christian theology "the word of God"), as dictum, discipline and wisdom, and carries the "Masculine Principle". The word "Eros" is the energy, that attracting force, love, and the relatedness of something rather than the thing itself and expresses the "Feminine Principle". These two words, Logos and Eros, represent the nature or quality of masculine and feminine principles (not necessarily gender).

As matter and spirit, active and passive, as individual and relatedness, or object and space, they are the roots of the "Tree of Life", and the "Tree", our intimacy and community, grows from the heart of each individual. As humanity falls "in love" (in the state of love) with the whole world, we will give birth to a planet living in harmony and love.

The Earth had somehow communicated that what we are doing in relationships is balancing the energies of Yin and Yang, creative and receptive energies, so that the imbalance that has caused the waters to be polluted, the air to be poisoned, and the land to be depleted will be corrected. The Earth is dependent upon us to right the balance of these energies through our relationship. We, each one of us, are the way the Earth has to come into balance. We are the Earth coming into balance by re-balancing the energies in ourselves through our experience of relationship, especially our most intimate ones.

As we individually become Whole through the mirror reflections of our partners, we will embody this balance of Masculine and Feminine energies. Gaia will be healed as we, the cells of Her body, learn to use our

relationships in this way, to transform who we are and, therefore, how we are. In the process of our own evolution, the experience of our love and relatedness will expand beyond our human world to animals, sea creatures and all sentient beings.

As I described all I had understood to my partner, it became even clearer to us how a relationship can be a path for spiritual evolution personally and planetarily. I felt vulnerable, shaky, and excited as I realized that relationship was not just a matter of balancing male and female energy between two people but also within each of us. I sensed that in my partner lay qualities, both positive and negative, that I had not yet claimed in myself. I understood that as we each reclaimed whatever we had projected on each other, we would be more Whole, and we would see each other more clearly. I felt a deep appreciation of how our joys and, more importantly, our struggles could be the vehicles for our own personal transformation. Inspired and exhilarated, I felt expanded by the realization that what I was involved in was a process that went beyond our personalities and was bigger than whatever we thought we were doing together. It was awesome to comprehend. Every cell in my body resonated to the realization that my personal transformation and that of the globe were inherently related. As our relationship could be used for our own personal transformation, the process also transformed our ideas about what relationships can be.

For me, it's a matter of living the question (not the answer) of a new approach to relationship in which we can whole-heartedly acknowledge our partners as allies in a profoundly transformational journey—a process in which our relationships become vehicles for our own growth rather than a means of self-gratification or a battleground for two egos. Each

relationship is unique because it grows out of who the individuals are and what they create rather than a definition into which we must fit and conform. It is much more about discovery than definitions.

This approach might not be for everyone. It may be only for those spiritual adventurers who are willing to risk emotional comfort and security for truth and greater consciousness. Sometimes there is a choice between an unconscious peace and a conscious unrest. It may require us to love the questions and mystery more than the answers and the known. There is no blue-print for how it should be. Each one of us would have a different journey with perhaps some universal experiences.

We might see ourselves more as “awarenesses” through conversation rather than objects in harmony or conflict. The focus on who we are through our words (identities) might shift to who we are as the energies between us. What happens in the space between us? How do we create in that space? It may not be something we conceive of as much as something we allow to arise into being. We are “holders of a space” together.

When two people begin to hold their experience in this way, there is much less pain and suffering because there is less judgment and rejection, and more acceptance and embracing. When conflicts arise, we might explore it to see what is seeking to come to consciousness and what its message is for both of us, rather than getting hooked into the bind of who is right and who is wrong and the accompanying condemnation.

Along this path we may acknowledge that on one level it is all Self. We could regard whatever struggles we are having on the outside as a

representation of a struggle we are actually having on the inside. Your partner is really just a stand-in for the unacknowledged internal conflict seeking to emerge into consciousness. We can be truly grateful for whatever comes up and take things less personally—and more peacefully. Less personally in the sense that whatever is happening is not usually about you—neither the praise or the criticism. More personally, in the sense that your reaction is about you and not your partner. For example, if you do a lot of things to earn approval, be praised, or feel valued, you will feel unappreciated if these things are not expressly acknowledged. You may feel hurt and eventually turn it completely around until you are accusing the other of being ungrateful. It is in owning what you are doing for yourself and feeling the value in the act itself that our need for response vanishes and we are more fulfilled. Whenever we take responsibility for ourselves, we are instantly empowered and our actions are transformed from ones of unconscious manipulation to the joy of genuine service. And in relationships service can be as much an attitude as an activity.

As I've tried to be more conscious of my own expectations attached to whatever I do, I've discovered the power of taking full responsibility for my choice to do something for the joy of doing it instead of for someone else. I experience an increase of energy and freedom when my own personal value is not dependent upon another's response. People don't love us for the reasons we think they will or should. The book title, "What You Think of Me is None of My Business!" expresses this wonderfully.

We can move from an identity solely interested in our own needs being met (getting) or that of a partner trying to fix a problem in a relationship to a Soul who lives and creates out of who we

are as a life purpose or possibility (giving). Relationship is the most powerful fire and heartfelt ground for the evolution of one's Soul. There is no more profound teacher in our lives than our relationships, especially our closest ones. And there is no deeper human need than connection.

Even within the medical field, scientific research (by Dr. Dean Ornish, Dr. Joan Borysenko, Dr. Larry Dossey, Dr. Deepak Chopra and others) is demonstrating the healing power of love and connection. For those who feel lonely and isolated, the rate of premature death and serious illness is three to five times greater than those who feel a sense of community. Our need for connection is so basic we don't acknowledge it as our greatest human resource or perceive our relationships as personal works of art.

In attempting to describe new ground for our relationships, I began to contrast some of the principles of our conditioning from old paradigms which might be emerging. The list (which could go on) below is not to say that "this is the way it is", or that we are all one or the other, or that one is good and one bad, or even that they are, at present, all attainable. Let them be more like vibratory sounds that you resonate to if you wish and see what may arise inside or in the space of your relationships.

(Johanna Atman, Ph.D, is a Certified Massage and Somatic Therapist and Certified Firewalk Instructor. She as a Transformational Bodywork™ practice in Calaveras (at the Holistic Health Center in San Andreas) and Marin Counties and also facilitates an ongoing women's group, workshops in healing and personal growth, firewalks and sweat lodges throughout the year. You can reach Johanna at 209/728-

3113)

Old Paradigm

Purpose of relationship is an end in itself.

Purpose is about getting something: a mate, married, kids, approval, acceptance, emotional support, etc.

Love is exclusive, limited and scarce

Love is directional. (I give love to you.)

Relationships are initiated on the basis of sexual attraction.

A relationship will make me happy.

Goal: To get my relationship to be how I think it should be.

Jealousy is inevitable and a sign of love.

Convenient lies are okay.

Relationship is about getting my needs met.

I love if... (Conditional love.)

Relationship is self-consuming.

Relationship can empower me.

We compromise for each other.

Sex is to satisfy self and partner.

Your partner is your "other half".

Responsibility split 50/50. (Guilt/blame continuum.)

Emerging Paradigm

Purpose of relationship is the support of both partners development and service for the well being of all life.

Purpose is greater than the individuals involved and in alignment with real needs of life.

Love is inclusive and unlimited. Love is infinite. Love begets love.

Love is a space, a state of being. I am "in" love with you.

Relationships are recognized as a function of shared values and larger purpose.

I can bring my own happiness to my relationship.

Goal: to live my relationship as it is.

Jealousy is a conditioned reaction rooted in fear and insecurity.

Relationship requires absolute integrity.

Relationship is about giving love.

Love, then... (Unconditional love.)

Relationship is self-generating and re-generating.

Relationship can empower others.

Being true to oneself elicits the highest in each.

Sex is a union and a celebration of the presence of love.

Your partner is your mirror.

Each partner takes 100% responsibility

for quality of relationship. (Give up right to blame.)

Fun and Empowering Problem-Solving Questions

- 1) What is the highest thing I can do in this situation? (My personal favorite.)
 - 2) What am I not seeing that makes this look like a problem?
 - 3) From the perspective of love, what does this look like?
 - 4) How could this be worked out to be perfect for everyone?
 - 5) What would it take from me for this problem to disappear?
 - 6) How can I provide what I think is missing instead of demanding it?
-

Some of the ideas in this article and on the list were derived from *In Context, a Quarterly of Humane Sustainable Culture* (No. 10 Summer 1985)

Other References

Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, Illinois Free Press 1948.

Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking and Choice in the Years Ten to Sixteen*, University of Chicago, 1958.

Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, 1982.

Reference to research of Dean Ornish, et al, *Yoga Journal*, June 1998. Deena

Metzger, *Tree*, Wingbow Press, 1978.
