

Love Is an Inside Job

As Valentine's Day approaches, many of us may be thinking about chocolates, flowers and a candlelit rendezvous with our special someone. But others may be feeling the pangs of loneliness and despair more sharply than ever.

Some members have been chanting and making efforts for five, 10, even 20 years to create a fulfilling, romantic relationship — seemingly to no avail. Even if we have a sense of mission, a successful career, a nice home, good friends and good health, without someone special to share joys and sorrows with, we may feel that something important is missing.

When you're feeling lovelorn, there's almost nothing that another person can say to lift your spirits — except, maybe, "I love you and want to marry you." But even that may compound your misery, depending on who says it.

The bottom line is that love — like happiness — is an inside job. It's really about you and how you feel about yourself.

Nothing external, or outside ourselves, can bring us true happiness. Likewise, if we want love, we must give it to ourselves first rather than seek it from other people.

We can grow to love ourselves by coming to know who we are in the most fundamental sense: Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It could be said that when we deepen our appreciation for our life — deepen our understanding of and respect for our Buddha nature — our relationships with others will come to reflect this self-development.

But that's not to say that we love ourselves only so others will love us. And it's not to suggest that when we love ourselves, creating a happy relationship is a snap. Many painful obstacles can arise, from unrequited love to illness to the death of a spouse or partner.

The fact is, love and relationships aren't easy, no matter what your "love karma" may be. As Valentine's Day approaches, we'd like to take this opportunity to reprint some of SGI President Ikeda's advice about love and relationships. The following quotes were published in the Jan. 31, 1997 *World Tribune*.

- Real love is not two people clinging to each other; it can only be fostered between two strong people secure in their individuality. A shallow person will have only shallow relationships. If you want to experience real love, it is important to first develop a strong self-identity.

- [Regarding the poet Dante and his unrequited love:] Dante never stopped loving her. Ultimately, that love enabled him to strengthen, elevate and deepen the capacity of his heart into something truly noble and sublime.... I think there are many things to be learned from this great poet who stayed true to his feelings, whether they were reciprocated or not, and transformed them into his guiding inspiration in life.

- Please don't let a broken heart discourage you. Tell yourself that you're not so weak or fragile as to let such a minor thing bring you down. You may think there is no one who could possibly compare to that person [you love], but how will they compare to the next 100, the next 1,000, the next 10,000 people you will meet? You cannot declare with any certainty that there will not be others who far surpass him or her. As you yourself grow, the way you look at people will change as well.

- If there's someone you like, what's wrong with holding onto that feeling inside your heart for a while and resolving to polish yourself so that you can become the kind of person he or she, or anyone, would be proud to be with? Such a spirit of self-development is most admirable, I feel. Whether or not that person ever learns how you feel in your heart, with

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time those feelings will grow and mature like a fine wine.

- Whether you are happy, sad or suffering, if you chant honestly to the Gohonzon with the feelings in your heart, your life will naturally proceed in the right direction.

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