

Your Valentine

February is a month when seeds of the ground and of animals begin to stir in preparation for Spring. It was in this context that the Christian Church appropriated a Roman fertility festival giving rise to modern day Valentine's. The holiday's history is marked by a series of Christian clerics named Valentine. One legendary Valentine was beheaded for marrying couples in secret after Emperor Claudius II banned marriage for younger men (believing single men made better soldiers). Here, a tale of sex, religion, love and war has transformed into an annual billion dollar industry of romantic expectation for candy, jewelry, flowers and engagement.

Expectations

Holiday and expectation: two words that have become progressively fused. Valentine's Day is fertile ground for expectation; expectations we hold over ourselves, where our lives should be, how we should feel, and how we want others to feel, communicate or perform for us. The immanent math of Valentine's: attempt to appraise worth by a factor of perceived lovability: who loves me, how much, and how do I know? Commercialized days leading up to the 14th can act as bright pink highlighter emphasizing the have and have not's. If you are feeling loved and cherished, lost and forgotten, sad and nostalgic, separate and longing, giddy and hopeful, or disenchanting and numb, those feelings can have particular poignancy on Valentine's Day.

What circumstance will Valentine's find *in you* this year- delight, loneliness, confusion? Perhaps assessing your standing based on Facebook posts? Maybe building Hallmark fantasies to the temporary satisfaction of chocolate chews? Or inducing cynical laughter with netflix comedies about the drawbacks of relationship while going through the excitement and discomfort of joining a dating website? Christmas has Santa's naughty or nice list, Halloween has the haunt of trick or treat, and Valentine's imagines cupid's whimsy darting arrows in the shape of love or misery. Cupid's archery leaves many with the trailing sentiment: "I wish I had..."

SomeOne to Love

Valentine's has held a spectrum of experiences for me. Sometimes I feel full of Love and enjoy the sweetnesses of making, giving, and receiving tokens of friendship and care. Other years I've felt the pain of reflecting on lost or distant Love, recalling the numerous experiences of feeling left behind and out, commiserating with retail and food therapy. Sometimes the Holiday passes with little awareness or acknowledgment on my part, perhaps a clever avoidance tactic. Whether Valentine's is a day that you will celebrate or avoid, I invite you take a moment for your Self. What can you do for your Self this Valentine's? Does this idea seem silly or strange to you? I would imagine so. Although the idea of Self Love is lauded into cliché, I continue to see people struggle with the How and the Why of Self Love. Love is a theme that consumes my thoughts and I absolutely struggle with the How and Why of Self Love.

You're Valentine

Valentine's can mark a time where you start basic with getting to know your Self Love style setting the groundwork for future elaboration. How do you show care, thoughtfulness and Love to others? What forms do you give and receive love through: kind words, thoughtful actions, gifts, quality time, touch? Are these the forms that you deeply need and seek? Turn your attention inward and observe the thoughts and images that spring up when you ask Self: *What do I need in this moment?* The inner caregiver and pleaser struggle to respond since they have worked tirelessly to direct attention to the needs of others. If it helps to give examples, I've learned that Self rather enjoys soft blankets wraps, releasing expectation and obligation through mindful stretches and silly noises, tea, a good book, interesting movies, car singing, sitting, breathing, tall glasses of cool water, dark, warm showers, and a good night wish. Sometimes, when I have trouble sleeping, I use my phone's notepad to write Love poems and letters to my Self and imagine that I am also writing them for all other Beings; a therapeutic and spiritual activity. Here is a letter I wrote:

For YOU

Hello Beauty,

Wherever this note finds you, I hope it serves as a reminder that you are Loved this Valentine's Day.

Thank you for all of who you are. Thank you for your efforts to care and contribute to Life. I know you are good. May you endure blunder and pain as it becomes the mill for learning and growth. Within you, I hope unnecessary suffering will dissolve by learning about the subtle patterns of avoidance, perfectionism, defensiveness, self-criticism, misattribution, over-working, anger walls, and emotional fusion recycled since childhood. May you have the time and support necessary to invite out exiled parts of Self that hold pain, shame, fear, shattered hopes, disappointment, guilt, raw feelings and burning memories. I know you have been growing the clarity and strength for years to do this work, to see Truths with your inner eyes. May you experience wholeness, Joy and wild equanimity.

Let us support each other to go towards what we Love and try to not compromise Self in the process. May we follow our heart more and question or justify it less. May we be open to the form and timing our Being's need to unfold, even when different than our expectations. May we find creative and genuine ways to generate Love towards Self, not to become self centered, but rather Love centered. Envision a free flowing internal channel of Love down the body center. Forged in the heat of self revelation, it opens wider to the compassionate inquiry: *What would love do?* Love grows out of loneliness and desperation, reaching beyond expectation, towards its inborn state. Begrudging Self Love freezes life energy.

Our new lovers have old names: Simplicity, Compassion and Wisdom. Let's learn these arts from the inside out, falling asleep and waking by their sides each day. Perhaps they will ask you to understand your beauty at least as much as you harbor on imperfections; to include Self in the care that you offer; to protect Self from imminent exploitation and abuse; to practice awareness of your motives and methods no matter how subtle or uncomfortable; to imbue old ways with new intentions through attention; and invest attention into body, emotions, thoughts, spiritual being with gentleness and patience.

Let's go in and go deep with inquiry:

Why do I not want to be alone?

What is the pain of loneliness?

Why do I seek Love outside of my Self?

What am I avoiding? What do I fear?

Am I not good enough?

Why do I reject what I could understand beyond all else (Self)?

Do I understand my Self?

What do I need?

Who am I?

I will whisper messages of support as you traverse this Life: I Love you, thank you, I forgive you, I'm sorry for your pain, It will be OK, you are beautiful, I'm proud of you, you are a great friend, you're good, you are so strong, you are worthy, you inspire me, you are my rock, you satisfy my soul, it's good to see you, I missed you, let it out, cry, you are wise, you are divine, let me help, what do you need, I understand, I hear you, I'm with you, you work so hard, you can rest now. At first these messages may feel uncomfortable, unnatural or even inauthentic. As you allow them to echo back and forth between the cavern of Self, I am doubtless they will inspire and energize you. As you absorb these echos, they will become your reality, and we will revel in peace, I and I. We (Self and Self-Awareness) are the original relationship. I am always here with you, and you can be here with me.

Consider yourSelf Loved, Forever,

Indwelling Kindness & Mindful Balance

P.S. If you were to write a three word Valentine's Letter to your Self, how would it read?