

Is Love Real?
by Michael Taylor

If I have committed myself to the Creator, I am free to commit myself to another person in a way that creates the deepest kind of love between two human beings. Because my happiness is not dependent on you, I am free to love and serve you in the most joyous, exciting and most rewarding way. I am free to give you all my love because, through my foundation in my relationship with my Creator, I know that the more love I give, the more I receive and have to give. author unknown

After a divorce and a couple of failed relationships I was forced to ask myself this question. Is love real? For the first time in my life I had to admit that I really did not know what true love was. During the course of my six year marriage I thought I was in love. But the problem was in “thinking” I was in love rather than “feeling” in love. After weeks of self- introspection, I decided that I wanted to have the true experience of “feeling” in love. This decision took me on one of the most difficult yet rewarding journeys of my life. I came to a fork in the road and I decided to walk the road less traveled. This road would challenge me to look at all the beliefs and perceptions that I had about love. It would confront my views on masculinity and even confront my feelings of "blackness". Although it was a bit frightening to begin with, intuitively I knew that the keys to my happiness would be found along this lonesome road.

The journey began with me identifying my own emotional fears and concerns. I found that I had a deep fear of intimacy due to my lack of trust. All of these fears originated from childhood experiences, which I had suppressed. I call this period my “emotional excavation process”. I had to be willing to confront these issues if I really wanted to “feel” true love from another person. Without this process it would be virtually impossible for me to intimately connect with someone on an emotional level.

This is where my masculinity and my cultural identity was challenged. First of all, men are not supposed to talk about “feelings”. I experienced a deep sense of alienation and being alone because most men would not speak openly about what was truly going on inside of them. It was extremely difficult finding men that were willing to be “real” and drop the facades and speak openly about their joys and pain, their failures and triumphs in relationships.

The greatest challenge for me was addressing my ethnicity. During this process I found very few blacks (if any) that were willing to discuss emotional issues. I was constantly accused of trying to be white and being caught up in the “white folks mentality” of dealing with psychological issues. I sometimes questioned my cultural identity. Was I denying my blackness by being willing to go to therapy? Does this mean that I’m a sell-out because I want to experience deep levels of love and intimacy in relationships? Why aren’t more black people reading books about childhood trauma and personal development. There were so many questions yet so few answers.

As I pondered these questions I ran across a poem that would give me the courage and the strength to proceed on my journey. The poem was called The Invitation. In the poem the writer asks, "Are you willing to disappoint another in order to be true to yourself?" I knew this was the answer I was looking for. That one sentence challenged me to trust my own inner voice and proceed with my journey. I had to be true to myself despite what anyone else said or believed. I knew that I was completely responsible for my own happiness and I had to be willing to trust my gut feelings to find the peace that I was searching for. It had nothing to do with my ethnicity but it had everything to do with my humanity.

My journey helped me realize that I had always focused my attention on things outside of myself. I expended an incredible amount of energy on my career, my relationships, sex, my children, my money and my material possessions and even my physical body. It wasn't until I addressed my heart and soul that I was able to experience authentic happiness. I cannot put into words the joy and serenity I feel on a daily basis as a result of this journey. My life is filled with gratitude and contentment that transcends intellectual understanding. I now know that love is real. It has nothing to do with age, ethnicity, gender or religious orientation. It has everything to do with opening your heart and being able to "feel" the love that has always been there. It sort of reminds me of the story of the Wizard of Oz. All of the characters in the movie thought the wizard could give them the things they were looking for, but it turned out that they already had those things inside of them. I had been looking for love outside of me but when I looked inside there it was all along.

It has been a beautiful journey so far and I look forward to continuing my quest for authenticity. I have come to the conclusion that love is definitely real, you just have to know where to look to find it. You will never find it outside of yourself until you find it within. So remember, "Seek and ye shall find, ask and it shall be given to you, knock and the door will be opened to you"

I hope you choose to go on your own personal journey. I can assure you that you are never alone. If you look closely enough you might even see me along the way. Good luck. I'll meet you along the road less traveled.