

The key to understanding the special love relationship lies in your choice of a partner. The object of the ego's "love" is always someone whom it regards as special—which is to say, more special than you. They seem to possess some quality, some ability or status, that you believe you lack. It could be anything: beauty, brains, success, a terrific family, fun friends. It could also be pain, pathos, and suffering that draw you to them. Or it could simply be that *they* see in *you* something they think *they* lack. Something wonderful. Something special. Something you never thought you had. In all instances, the ego believes that this special person possesses some attribute that it lacks and wants for itself. The relationship becomes a form of barter in the wares of specialness—*you give me what I need, and I'll give you what you need*. The ego evaluates all of its relationships as desirable or not solely on this basis: what does the other person have that I do not? And if they give me what I lack, what will they demand in return?

I recall falling in love once as a teen because an attractive girl at a party locked eyes with me and smiled. *She likes me*, I thought. *She thinks I'm special*. Which of course made her special too. A few years later I fell in love with a woman because she seemed to have so much more life experience than I did—even though that experience consisted of suffering through years of an abusive marriage. It didn't matter. It made her special—in ways both positive and negative. Her hard-won experience would compensate for my inexperience. In return, I would save her—wounded bird that she was—through my gentle caring and decency. I would love her as her ex could not.

Of course, this special something that we see in another is almost always a fantasy. Because the ego is incomplete, it never sees anyone else as complete either. It focuses only on those aspects of the other that it *wants* to see. It selects out certain positive attributes while ignoring others that do not fit the image and might undermine the lure of specialness. *She's*

amazingly sweet. Everybody loves her. I'd like to be loved that way. Or he's so confident, so sure in his opinions. He doesn't care what anyone else thinks. I wish I could be more like that. The ego believes that the best way to gain these missing ingredients for itself is to fall in love, win over this remarkable individual, and hold on to them forever. Remember the song "Some Enchanted Evening" from Rodgers' and Hammerstein's musical *South Pacific*: "Once you have found her, never let her go."

The ego's reasoning goes something like this: *If I can convince this special person to love me, then I'll be special too. I'll bask vicariously in the glow of their specialness. As long as they stay with me, no one will see what I lack. Instead they'll see how remarkable I am because this special person has chosen me as their partner.* In the romantic comedy film *Jerry Maguire*, Tom Cruise's character tells Renée Zellweger's, "I love you. You complete me." That could be the ego's motto for special love. *You complete me.*

To the extent that we regard ourselves as lacking, this notion of completion is very appealing. As fractured beings split off from the oneness of our Creator, of course we want completion in the form of union. But is specialness really the glue that repairs our damaged self? Or does it serve instead to harden the fissures in our oneness? Can anything from the ego's world knit together what the ego itself has broken?

This need for completion is rarely conscious. We don't enter a relationship thinking about what we lack and what the other might supply. That would be too obviously mercantile. Rather, it plays out unconsciously in the form of attraction. Think of it as the real "law of attraction." We're drawn most powerfully to those who seem to have what we believe we lack.

And so it is that two people fall in love and embark on a special relationship. It is exclusive to the two of them, their own private bubble world, in which they attempt to reinvent

paradise. It's an island fortress walled off from everyone but themselves. No one else may enter, because that could threaten their dream of specialness. Someone else might catch the scent and steal specialness from them. Or one of the lovers might discover that someone else is even more special; they might choose to leave.

A Course in Miracles describes the special love relationship as “*a strange and unnatural ego device*”ⁱ that's really not about the other person at all, but is rather a futile attempt to achieve completion for the incomplete ego self through sacrifice.

Most curious of all is the concept of the self which the ego fosters in the special relationship. This “self” seeks the relationship to make itself complete. Yet when it finds the special relationship in which it thinks it can accomplish this it gives itself away, and tries to “trade” itself for the self of another. This is not union, for there is no increase or extension. Each partner tries to sacrifice the self he does not want for one he thinks he would prefer. And he feels guilty for the “sin” of taking, and of giving nothing of value in return. How much value can he place upon a self that he would give away to get a “better” one?

*The “better” self the ego seeks is always one that is more special. And whoever seems to possess a special self is “loved” for what can be taken from him. Where both partners see this special self in each other, the ego sees “a union made in Heaven.”*ⁱⁱ

This model of relationship is the ego's darling. The Course tells us it is the ego's answer to the Holy Spirit's plan of Atonement. *Forget about God and all that oneness nonsense. Here is the love you really want. God can't love you as special, not ever, but this remarkable individual can and will.*

The ego longs for this specialness. Its shadowy presence is felt to some degree in every attempt at relationship, from the crassest drunken sexual hookup to the lofty ideal of pure, chaste love at a distance that medieval knights proffered to their chosen maidens. In the mind of the ego, this becomes life's ultimate achievement: to find your special love partner, sacrifice your own inferior self to win them over, and hold on to them forever.

Is it any accident that we use the expression “falling in love” to describe this romantic insanity? It is an all-consuming descent into passion and compulsion. We drown in love. We fantasize about our lover constantly; we can think of little else. It is far from elevating. No one “rises” in love. We tumble into it without much thought or choice, much as we might stumble into an open manhole. The falling part is easy; climbing back out again . . . not so much.

Whenever we consider another person special and decide that we need them to fulfill us, we affirm that we are incomplete—that we are lacking in some vital way. But God cannot lack, nor can God's creation. We were created whole, and whole we remain, even though we dream we're separate. Therefore any belief in lack will keep the separation real *for us*—in our minds—and keep the awareness of God and His love at a distance.

From Loving One to One Love, pp.48-52

i T-16.V.6:1, p. 342.

ii T-16.V. 7:1–8:3, p. 342.