

#6 Balance

Empathy and caring for others must be counterbalanced with the same depth of care for oneself. Such a balance of potentially competing virtues requires amazing skills of perception and prioritization. For instance, one needs courage in the face of danger, but this must be tempered with the wisdom to know when to turn and flee.

Every relationship is a constantly changing mix of needs, from petty to profound and balancing them all is a most intricate dance. An example would be a relationship in which one person consistently gives while another wants to be the one who receives most of the time. A relationship based on, "What can you do for me?" tends to dissolve when the needs, advantages and usefulness no longer exist. If the only basis for the relationship is pleasure, then, when pain inevitably arises, both the pain and the person are to be avoided. Mutual balance is required of all involved.

Our instinct is to avoid pain and to seek pleasure. However, in a true kindred spirit friendship, pain and struggle can be used to develop an even closer bond. This deepening bond results from a creative response to adversity and can be a pleasurable learning experience for both parties. Multiple levels of pleasure become available to us when we balance our needs and the needs of our friend.

When someone we care about behaves in a hurtful way because they are in distress, we do not have to react in kind. In fact we can feel good when we choose a virtuous response. To love the whole person, even during times of weakness, is a profound act of compassion. When someone hurts, they may treat us in a manner that mirrors our own wounds. Not to turn away or attack contributes to the establishment of an enduring friendship. It is a wonderful feeling when we succeed in compassion.

Our resolve to be virtuous will be tested. It's easy to be virtuous when others are loving, but when the relationship struggles, our good intentions are challenged. Relationships expose both our virtues and our vices.

Sometimes we will be esteemed for virtuous acts and other times are condemned for the same deeds. Ultimately, outside opinions have little influence when we act based on our own principles. Goodness is the capacity to act in a caring manner even when virtue is not recognized or esteemed.

This test by fire tempers and strengthens our skills. Being virtuous can be a challenge, like climbing to the top of a mountain, while vice is an easy slide down.

Create community where wounds can be healed and virtues will thrive. Virtue is its own reward. Being virtuous feels expansive and any praise for our good deeds is just a bonus.

Virtuous love between kindred spirits is our goal. The more we love, the larger capacity we have to love. The stronger your virtues are, the stronger your love. The deeper the

bonding, the deeper the kindness, the deeper the respect, and the deeper the love will be.

The definition of love is elusive. Virtues are the perfect way to understand the meaning of love. Each virtue represents a different kind of love. Virtues provide a practical way to examine how we love. Using virtues as a model has helped me to better identify the type of love I want, and which forms are inadequate or missing in me. Now I can name which attributes of love I am seeking.

Usually when people talk about love, they are making a reference to what love feels like. But love is more than a feeling; it requires expression. Virtues are that expression: they're what love looks and acts like. If virtues are acts of love, love is defined by our actions.

Virtues are love skills. If you want to learn how to be loving, practice being virtuous. As your capacity to be virtuous expands, so does your ability to love. Virtues are expressions of love; for self, friends, family and indeed, the world.

Our virtuous actions define our love.

I believe the source of our feelings of love originates from our attitudes and actions. And there is nothing like a good relationship to bring forth these attitudes and actions.

It is pleasurable to give and to receive virtues. The bonds of our relationship are strengthened each time we express our love. Without virtuous acts, we would not feel the love.

Seek love, be love, give yourself to love.