



Love: The Supreme Emotion

3/13/2019

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Session I

What is love?

Love is mentioned in many contexts. What does it mean in terms of spirituality? What is the purpose of love in our life? In this series, we are going to explore love using Love 2.0: Finding Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection by Barbara Fredrickson.¹

There are many current of views of what love means to people. As Fredrickson notes, these can include:

- a special bond or relationship
- commitment, promise, pledge
- loyalty ritual such as marriage
- Mishmas h of shared cultural messages
- Own deeply personal experiences with intimacy
- Sexual desires
- Blood-ties of kinships
- Something “out there” that you fall into or –years later – out of
- Exclusive, lasting and unconditional

Actually, all of the above are products of love – “the results of the many smaller moments in which love infuses you - rather than of love per se.”²

One way to gain a better understanding of love is to look at the body’s perspective on love.

“When you equate love with intimate relationships, love can seem confusing. At times it feels great, while at other times it hurts like hell. At times it lifts you up with grand dreams for your future and at other times oppresses you with shame about your inadequacies, or guilt about your past actions. When you limit your view of love to relationships or commitment, love becomes a complex and bewildering thicket of emotions, expectations, and insecurities. Yet when you redirect your eyes toward your body’s definition of love, a clear path emerges that cuts through that thicket and leads you to a better life.

There’s still more ground to clear. I need to ask you to disengage from some of your most cherished beliefs about love as well: the notions that love is exclusive, lasting, and unconditional. These deeply held beliefs are often more wish than reality in people’s lives. They capture people’s daydreams about the love-of-their-life whom they’ve yet to meet. Love, as your body defines it, is not exclusive, not something to be reserved for your soul mate, your inner circle, your kin, or your so-called loved ones. Love’s reach turns out to be far wider than we’re typically coaxed to imagine. **Even so, love’s timescale**

is far shorter than we typically think. Love, as you'll see, is not lasting. It's actually far more fleeting than most of us would care to acknowledge. On the upside, though, love is forever renewable. And perhaps most challenging of all, love is not unconditional. It doesn't emerge no matter what, regardless of conditions. To the contrary, you'll see that the love your body craves is exquisitely sensitive to contextual cues. It obeys preconditions. Yet once you understand those preconditions, you can find love countless times each day."³

In summary, love is

- An emotion
- Not lasting (impermanent)
- Not exclusive
- Has a very wide reach
- Connected with bodily sensations
- Sensitive to contextual cues
- Has preconditions, not unconditional
- Renewable.

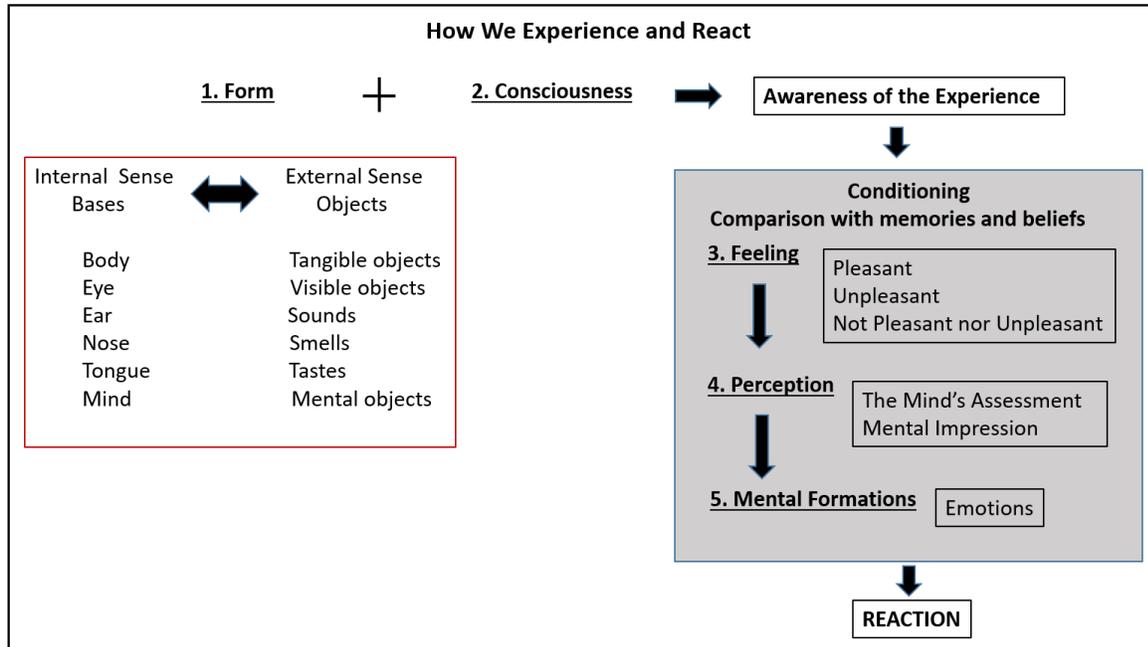
Fredrickson's approach comes from the body's perspective and integrates recent scientific findings with the spiritual and the practical. The basis for her approach is the science of emotions.

What are emotions? In the teachings, emotions are called mental formations and they arise from the conditioning of what we experience in life.

We have **six sense organs** (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). These organs contact **sense objects** (tangible objects, visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and mental objects: thoughts/memories). This interaction is called **form**. All of our experiences come via one or more of these sense organs. However, although our sense organs are constantly sensing, we are not aware of this interaction until our **consciousness** makes contact with the sense organ and the object sensed. When all three factors are connected, we become **aware** of what we can call an experience.

The mind conditions that awareness by comparing it with stored memories and beliefs. Out of this comparison arise a series of three conditioning factors: **feelings, perceptions** and **mental formations**.

Feelings are what is sensed in the body about the experience. These feeling are not emotions. Emotions are mental formations. Feelings occur instantly after awareness and are either pleasant, neutral or unpleasant. After a feeling arises, a **perception** (mental impression, identification, recognition, discrimination, assessment) of the experience arises in the mind. Note that the perception is dependent on memory for identification. If we have no previous memory of what we have originally sensed, we can't identify it. Next, **mental formations** (emotions) arise as a result of the feeling and the perception. Depending on the intensity of the mental formation, a reaction might occur. Recent scientific research confirms this flow.⁴



Unpleasant feelings and negative perceptions lead to negative emotions. Pleasant feelings and positive perceptions lead to positive emotions. The Buddha taught the importance of positive states of mind in the sixth step of the Eightfold Path, Skillful Effort. Skillful effort is how we can embrace the wholesome thoughts and address the unwholesome ones. The Buddha said that we should direct our effort in four ways:

1. Prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts.
2. Overcome unwholesome thoughts which have arisen.
3. Strive for wholesome thoughts to arise.
4. Maintain those wholesome thoughts which have arisen.

Love is a positive emotion and a wholesome state of mind. Fredrickson uses the term positivity which she defines as a broad term covering a range of positive emotions and the immediate as well as future beneficial psychological and physiological (e.g. blood pressure) effects. In general, positivity can:

- Open you up
- Transform you for the better

“At every moment we choose whether to embrace wholesomeness or unwholesomeness.”⁵
 Fredrickson shows us how to practice love to embrace and maintain wholesomeness.

It’s all about connecting with others as it takes at least two to love. Fredrickson notes that positive emotions “knit you into the fabric of life, the social fabric that unites you with others, and how they orchestrate the way you grow and rebound through changing circumstances”⁶ She defines love as “pleasant yet fleeting moments of connection.”⁷ Or put another way, “that micro-moment of warmth and connection that you share with another living being.”⁸ She calls it our **supreme emotion**. “Love is our supreme emotion that makes us come most fully alive and feel most fully human. It is perhaps the most essential experience for thriving and health.”⁹

Fredrickson has confirmed another one of the Buddha’s teachings, loving-kindness or metta. Through her research, Fredrickson discovered that training in loving-kindness (metta) expanded the connectivity with others and gave positive results. “The results were abundantly clear. When people, completely new to meditation, learned to quiet their minds and expand their capacity for love and kindness, they transformed themselves from the inside out. They experienced more love, more engagement, more serenity, more joy, more amusement—more of every positive emotion we measured. And though they typically meditated alone, their biggest boosts in positive emotions came when interacting with others, off the cushion, as it were. Their lives spiraled upward. The kindheartedness they learned to stoke during their meditation practice warmed their connections with others. Later experiments would confirm that it was these connections that most affected their bodies, making them healthier.”¹⁰

Homework assignment – Life is filled with connections to other living beings. Reflect on all of the interactions that you had today with others. After each connection with someone, be mindful of what you feel in your body, not your thoughts.

Session II

The Love Connection

As noted in the previous session, love is an emotion, a momentary state that arises from an experience of connection. “As for all positive emotions, the inner feeling love brings you is inherently and exquisitely pleasant—it feels extraordinarily good, the way a long, cool drink of water feels when you’re parched on a hot day. Yet far beyond feeling good, a micro-moment of love, like other positive emotions, literally changes your mind. It expands your awareness of your surroundings, even your sense of self. The boundaries between you and not-you—what lies beyond your skin—relax and become more permeable. While infused with love you see fewer distinctions between you and others. Indeed, your ability to see others—really see them, wholeheartedly—springs open. Love can even give you a palpable sense of oneness and connection, a transcendence that makes you feel part of something far larger than yourself.”¹¹

In summary, love as an emotion:

- Is a pleasant feeling
- Changes your mind
- Expands your awareness of your surroundings and sense of self
- Relaxes your boundaries
- Allows you to see others with fewer distinctions
- Give you a palpable sense of oneness and connection
- Makes you feel part of something larger than yourself.

Making this connection consists of three stages, all which Fredrickson calls **positivity resonance**:

1. The experience of sharing of one or more positive emotions between you and another living being
2. The resultant synchrony between you and the other’s biochemistry and behaviors
3. The reflected intention to invest in each other’s well-being that brings mutual care.

In summary, the three stages are:

1. The experience: Sharing
2. The outcome: Synchrony
3. The Intention: Mutual caring

As with all phenomena that arise, this positivity resonance is impermanent. This pleasure cannot last. **But it is renewable.**

This connection is extraordinary because of the synchrony. Each of you mirrors the other, “to some extent, you each become the reflection and extension of the other.”¹²

As opposed to other emotions, love is not a private event. “More than any other positive emotion, then, love belongs not to one person, but to pairs or groups of people. It resides within connections. It extends beyond personal boundaries to characterize the vibe that pulsates between and among people. It can even energize whole social networks or inspire a crowd to get up and dance.”¹³

In order to make this connection, there are two prerequisites: **(1) safety and (2) true sensory/temporal connection.**

Regarding **safety**, your brain has been developed to detect threats. In the *Buddha's Brain*, Rick Hanson and Richard Mendius note that over time, our ancestors developed three strategies for security (survival and protection):

- creating boundaries between themselves and the world,
- maintaining stability, and
- approaching opportunities and avoiding threats.¹⁴

Although these strategies are protective for self, they are isolating and inhibit the love connection. That is why it is necessary to deal with any threats and so that we can feel safe.

Regarding **true sensory/temporal connection**, real time contact with one or more of the senses (touch, voice, visual (body postures, gestures, eye contact) is required. "You no doubt try to "stay connected" when physical distance keeps you and your loved ones apart. You use the phone, e-mail, and increasingly texts or Facebook, and it's important to do so. Yet your body, sculpted by the forces of natural selection over millennia, was not designed for the abstractions of long-distance love, the XOXs and LOLs. Your body hungers for more. It hungers for moments of oneness."¹⁵

In the first stage of sharing, eye contact may be the most powerful observer. Eye contact can detect other's smile to discern if there is true reciprocity. "Once you have made eye contact, your conclusions about your co-worker's smile¹⁶, conscious or not, inform your gut and your next move. Without eye contact, it is much easier to experience misunderstandings, crushed hearts, and exploitation as you over- or under-interpret the friendliness of other people's smiles. You can also miss countless opportunities for life-giving connection. Eye contact helps you better detect the sincere affiliative gestures within a sea of merely polite or decidedly manipulative smiles that bid for your attention. Love, then, is not blind."¹⁷ If there is true shared positivity, then the second stage, synchrony is reached. This leads to the third stage, a feeling of mutual care.

Made for love

The capacity to love is not something to be acquired. It is already present embedded in your DNA through the evolutionary process of bonding that enhanced survival. "Human culture tempts you to turn away from your animal origins, to divorce yourself from the rat pups that wrestle playfully with one another by day and then later drift peacefully to sleep in one heaping pack, piled one upon the other, or from the zebras that groom each other during quiet moments of safety on the savanna. Yet these ancient, animal forms of love, enacted through touch and mutual care, still live on in you, in your cells. Your thirst for positivity resonance emerges from deep within. Bids for love, to be sure, take new heights in humans. Creatively using uniquely human forms of communication, you can caress your beloved through the spoken words of a poem or inspire him through the rhythms of song and dance. You've got more resources for connection to draw on than does a rat pup or zebra. **Yet your need for love is one and the same.** Resting in this wisdom you can see past even abundant bickering, nastiness, greed, and fear. You can spot and hone in on life-giving opportunities for positivity resonance.science now

reveals that when you become attuned to your body's definition of love, your cells get the message. They defend you from illness and enable you to grow healthier and thrive.

The world you face each day will forever present you with a wild mix of good and bad news. By nature's design, your body is equipped to handle it all—to defend against true threats and to uncover and create nourishing micro-moments of love, not just with mates and kin, but perhaps most consequentially, with those outside your family circle. More than any other time in human history, after all, your own genetic survival may well hinge on the love you share—and the bonds you form—with complete strangers.”¹⁸

Love becomes possible, then, with any human connection. The difference between the love you feel with close friends (intimates) is the sheer frequency of positivity resonances. “Whereas the biological synchrony that emerges between connected brains and bodies may be comparable no matter who the other person may be, the triggers for your micro-moments of love can be wholly different with intimates. The hallmark feature of intimacy is mutual responsiveness, that reassuring sense that you and your soul mate—or you and your best friend—really “get” each other. This means that you come to your interactions with a well-developed understanding of each other's inner workings, and you use that privileged knowledge thoughtfully, for each other's benefit. Intimacy is that safe and comforting feeling you get when you can bask in the knowledge that this other person truly understands and appreciates you. You can relax in this person's presence and let your guard down. Your mutual sense of trust, perhaps reinforced by your commitments of loyalty to each other, allows each of you to be more open with each other than either of you would be elsewhere.”¹⁹

“Seeing love as positivity resonance motivates us to reach out for a hug more often or share an inspiring or silly idea or image over breakfast.

Summary

Prerequisites

- Safety
- True sensory/temporal connection.

The Three Stages of Connection:

- The experience: Sharing
- The outcome: Synchrony
- The Intention: Mutual caring

Homework Assignment

As you connect with others this week, reflect on the successful connections where you experienced positivity resonance. Compare these to those which were not successful and see what prerequisites and stages of connection were missing. Be nonjudgmental; just observe.

Session III Love's Biology

Love's Biology

The body is impermanent as we have learned from experience and the teachings. It is always changing. This is good news as otherwise the love as positivity resonance would not be able to positively affect our body and mental state. There are three mechanisms that have been studied that support and build on our connections with others:

- neuro (brain) coupling
- the production of oxytocin
- the enhancement of vagal tone.

Neuro-coupling

A conversation experience consists of input from our ears (voice) and eyes (visual contact). As we listen to the other, we have feelings (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral) and perceptions (mental impressions) that arise. Our perceptions are based on our memories and beliefs. A positive connection can occur when one or more positive emotions are shared and our feelings are positive and our perception based on our memories and beliefs is compatible. This causes the emotion of love (positivity resonance) to arise. The neurologic basis for this is called neuro-coupling. As we continue to engage in this sharing conversation, our perceptions actually mirror what is being said. In this way, the mind's perceptions are predictions of what will occur. All of this process can cause lasting positive changes in the brain. The degree of synchrony or neuro coupling that occurs depends on the depth of listening and the compatibility of each other's perceptions.

“Neural coupling, then—really understanding someone else—becomes all the more likely when you share the same emotion. Even more so than ordinary communication, a micro-moment of love is a single act, performed by two brains. Shared emotions, brain synchrony, and mutual understanding emerge together. And mutual understanding is just steps away from mutual care. Once two people understand each other—really “get” each other in any given moment—the benevolent concerns and actions of mutual care can flow forth unimpeded.”²⁰

Oxytocin Production

Oxytocin is a neuropeptide that acts within the brain and has a key role in social bonding and attachment. It has been shown to modulate fear and to build trust. Oxytocin “can jump the gap between people such that someone else's oxytocin flow can trigger your own. A biochemical synchrony can then emerge that supports mutual engagement, care and responsiveness. This has been shown in studies with infants and their parents. “When an infant and a parent—either mom or dad—interact, sometimes they are truly captivated by each other, and other times not. When an infant and parent do click, their coordinated motions and emotions show lots of mutual positive engagement. Picture moms or dads showering their baby with kisses, tickling their baby's tiny fingers and toes, smiling at their baby, and speaking to him or her in that high-pitched, singsong tone that scientists call motherese. These parents are superattentive. As they tickle and coo they're also closely tracking their baby's face for signs that their delight is mutual. In step with their parent's affectionate antics, these attentive babies babble, coo, smile, and giggle. Positivity resonates back and forth between them. Micro-moments of love blossom.

It turns out that positive behavioral synchrony—the degree to which an infant and a parent (through eye contact and affectionate touch) laugh, smile, and coo together—goes hand in hand with oxytocin synchrony. Researchers have measured oxytocin levels in the saliva of dads, moms, and infants both before and after a videotaped, face-to-face parent-infant interaction. For infant-parent pairs who show mutual positive engagement, oxytocin levels also come into sync. Without such engagement, however, no oxytocin synchrony emerges.”²¹

Vagal Response

The vagus nerve (10th cranial nerve) modulates certain organs including the heart. “Keeping in mind that love is connection, you should know that your vagus nerve is a biological asset that supports and coordinates your experiences of love. Completely outside of your awareness, your vagus nerve stimulates tiny facial muscles that better enable you to make eye contact and synchronize your facial expressions with another person. It even adjusts the minuscule muscles of your middle ear so you can better track the other person’s voice against any background noise. In these exquisitely subtle yet consequential ways, your vagus nerve increases the odds that the two of you will connect, upping your chances for positivity resonance.”²² The vagus nerve can also regulate the heart rate. Vagal tone is a measure of the parasympathetic system which works in opposition to the sympathetic system. Frederickson has discovered that vagal tone—which is commonly taken to be as stable an attribute as your adult height—actually improves significantly with mind training.

“For it was those study participants who had been assigned at random to learn loving-kindness meditation who changed the most. They devoted scarcely more than an hour of their time each week to the practice. Yet within a matter of months, completely unbeknownst to them, their vagus nerves began to respond more readily to the rhythms of their breathing, emitting more of that healthy arrhythmia that is the fingerprint of high vagal tone. Breath by breath—loving moment by loving moment—their capacity for positivity resonance matured. Moreover, through painstaking statistical analyses, we pinpointed that those who experienced the most frequent positivity resonance in connection with others showed the biggest increases in vagal tone. Love literally made people healthier.”²³

In summary, the mechanisms of neuro (brain) coupling, the production of oxytocin and the enhancement of vagal tone as noted above are some of the ways that positivity resonance have been shown to benefit your life. “Everyday micro-moments of positivity resonance add up and ultimately transform your life for the better. You become healthier, happier, and more socially integrated. Your wisdom and resilience grow as well. Having more resources like these in turn equips you to experience micro-moments of love more readily and more often, with further broaden-and-build benefits. Your body, as biology has it, energizes and sustains this upward spiral. The unseen and heretofore unsung biology of love affects everything you feel, think, do, and become.”²⁴

Session IV

Love’s Ripples

The effects of positivity resonance are widespread and include the following areas:

1. Perception

2. Body
3. Connection with others
4. Resilience
5. Wisdom
6. Health

Effects on perception

Negative emotions narrows our perceptions. This is like being in a trance and not letting outside experiences in. With positive emotions, the mind picks up more of the contextual information that surrounds you. This effect can occur even if the positive emotions are not intense. For example, just viewing inspiring images works. The result is that widened perception allow you to better able to connect with others and care about them. It helps you to be a bodhisattva, one who has devoted their life in service of others.

Effects on the body

Opens your torso and expand your chest making you more inviting to others.

Draws you to smile and carry yourself with a more open posture.

Elicits four distinct nonverbal cues

more smiling

more friendly hand gestures

more leaning in toward each other (bringing hearts closer together)

more head nodding (affirmation and acceptance)

Causes mirroring with synchronized movements occurring not only on a one to one basis but as a group (e.g, the wave at football games)

Effects on connection with others

Studies have shown that couples “who capitalize on each other’s good fortunes, by responding to their partner’s good news with their own enthusiasm and outward encouragement, have higher-quality relationships. They enjoy more intimacy, commitment, and passion with each other, and find their relationship to be more satisfying overall. In other words, when one partner’s good news and enthusiasm ignites to become the other partner’s good news and enthusiasm as well, a micro-moment of positivity resonance is born. Studies show that these moments of back-and-forth positivity resonance are not only satisfying in and of themselves, providing boosts to each partner’s own mood, but they also further fortify the relationship, making it more intimate, committed, and passionate next season than it is today. Another person’s expression of positivity, from this perspective, can be seen as a bid for connection and love. If you answer that bid, the ensuing positivity resonance will nourish you both.”²⁵

So sharing your good news and celebrating the other’s good news fortifies the relationship.

Also expressing gratitude to each other has a beneficial effect. “Genuine feelings of appreciation or gratitude, after all, well up when you recognize that someone else went out of his or her way to do something nice for you. Another way to say this is that the script for gratitude involves both a benefit, or kind deed, and a benefactor, the kind person behind the kind deed. Whereas many people express their

appreciation to others by shining a spotlight on the benefit they received—the gift, favor, or the kind deed itself—we discovered that, by contrast, the best “thank-yous” simply use the benefit as a springboard toward shining a spotlight on the good qualities of the other person, their benefactor. Done well, then, expressing appreciation for your partner’s kindness to you can become a kind gesture in return, one that conveys that you see and appreciate in your partner’s actions his or her good and inspiring qualities.”²⁶

Effects on resilience – building equanimity

Those who are emotionally agile. “They neither steel themselves against negativity, nor wallow in it. Instead, they meet adversity with clear eyes, superbly attuned to the nuances of their ever-changing circumstances. This allows them to effortlessly calibrate their reactions to their circumstances, meeting them with a fitting emotional response, neither overblown nor insensitive. When the circumstances warrant, they can be moved to tears or shaken. They don’t defend themselves against bad feelings like these. Yet neither do they overly identify with them. Rather, their negative emotions rise up, like an ocean wave, and then dissolve. Strong emotions move through them, which allows them to move on in their wake.”²⁷ Emotional agility can be strengthened by a steady diet of positive emotion. This is improvement through experience and training.

Effects on Wisdom

Because as noted above, positivity resonance widens your awareness, you have increased access to the wisdom of your past experience and your intellect sharpens. This allows you to better arrive at appropriate courses of action for yourself and others in nearly any situation. “studies show that positivity resonance unlocks collective brainstorming power, making it easier for you to solve difficult problems when working and laughing together with others, compared to when you face those problems alone. Love, then, defined as positivity resonance, momentarily expands your awareness, which boosts your IQ and unlocks your wisdom.

Beyond these momentary effects, however, positivity resonance also triggers enduring, long-term gains in cognitive abilities and wisdom. The more frequently older adults connect with others, the lower their risks for cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s disease. Yet love isn’t just about staving off age-related cognitive decline. Scientists have also demonstrated clear links between how often people connect socially with friends, neighbors, and relatives, and their lab-tested cognitive functioning, even in far younger people who are in their twenties or thirties. One way that your recurrent connections with loved ones make you lastingly wiser is by giving you inner voices to consult. Suppose you’re called on to navigate some particularly difficult life dilemma, your own, or that of a close confidant. You yearn to talk matters over with your mentor, spouse, or best friend. Yet, for whatever reason, you can’t get a hold of these valued others—perhaps they’re traveling, busy, or even deceased. Research shows that simply imagining having a conversation with them is as good as actually talking with them. So consult them in your mind. Ask them what advice they’d offer. In this way, a cherished parent or mentor, even if deceased, leaves you with an inner voice that guides you through challenging times. Your past moments of love and connection make you lastingly wiser.”²⁸

Effects on health

Positivity resonance works to benefit your health by increasing your vagal tone as described earlier. “Insight into how everyday moments of love register and resonate within the human body helps make sense of the groundswell of evidence that links experiences of positive social connections to health and longevity. Mountains of research have documented that people who have diverse and rewarding relationships with others are healthier and live longer. A more recent wave of longitudinal studies specifically ties positive emotions to healthy longevity. These studies suggest that a lack of positivity resonance is in fact more damaging to your health than smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol excessively, or being obese. Specifically, these studies tell us that people who experience more warm and caring connections with others have fewer colds, lower blood pressure, and less often succumb to heart disease and stroke, diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease, and some cancers. Many of the key conditions that threaten to set you back or shorten your life can thus be staved off by upgrading how and how frequently you connect with others.”²⁹

Session V

The Practice of Love

Now that we have explored what love is as positive resonance, how it works and its benefits, what practices can we adopt to cultivate this supreme emotion?

“For one human being to love another human being:
that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us,
the ultimate task, the final test and proof,
the work for which all other work is merely preparation.
Rainer Maria Rilke

In her book, Fredrickson suggests two types of practices – micro-moment and meditation.

Micro-moment Practices

Micro-moment practices “describe consequential shifts in attention and awareness you can make within a micro-moment.”³⁰

Micro-moment practice I: End of day reflection

Reflect at the end of the day, on the three longest social interactions you’ve had that day and ask yourself how connected and in tune you were in the interactions. Answer both questions on a scale of not true to very true

- During these social interactions, I felt “in tune” with the other person/s around me. (not true – very true)
- During these social interactions, I felt close to the person/s. (not true- very true)

Micro-moment practice II: Daily social interactions

Set a goal of having at least 3 social interactions that hold positivity resonance (sharing, synchrony, caring). Reflect on these using the micro-moment practice I questions.

Meditation Practices

Because Fredrickson’s own research has uncovered considerable evidence on the benefits of meditation, she offers a several meditations. These are based on the four Brahma Viharas or the divine abodes.

These divine abodes are loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Nyanaponika Thera, a noted Buddhist scholar states that “These four attitudes are said to be excellent or sublime because they are the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings. They provide, in fact, the answer to all situations arising from social contact. They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. They level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revive joy and hope long abandoned, and promote human brotherhood against the forces of egotism...”

“They are called abodes (viharas) because they should become the mind's constant dwelling-places where we feel "at home"; they should not remain merely places of rare and short visits, soon forgotten. In other words, our minds should become thoroughly saturated by them. They should become our inseparable companions, and we should be mindful of them in all our common activities

These four — love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity — are also known as the boundless states (appamañña), because, in their perfection and their true nature, they should not be narrowed by any limitation as to the range of beings towards whom they are extended. They should be non-exclusive and impartial, not bound by selective preferences or prejudices. A mind that has attained to that boundlessness of the Brahma-viharas will not harbor any national, racial, religious or class hatred.”

Generally speaking, persistent meditative practice will have two crowning effects: first, it will make these four qualities sink deep into the heart so that they become spontaneous attitudes not easily overthrown; second, it will bring out and secure their boundless extension, the unfolding of their all-embracing range. In fact, the detailed instructions given in the Buddhist scriptures for the practice of these four meditations are clearly intended to unfold gradually the boundlessness of the sublime states. They systematically break down all barriers restricting their application to particular individuals or places.”³¹

Below are some phrases for each abode that can be used during meditation. You can also make up your own.

In your meditation session, you can practice one or more of the abodes. Also, at the conclusion of each meditation, you can recall yourself and other beings who might benefit from your offering the phrases of one or more of the abodes to them.

Loving Kindness

Loving-kindness is wishing happiness and peacefulness to others. The phrases below can be repeated for yourself, those close to you, neutral persons, and those persons for whom you might feel ill-will.

May _____ be happy and peaceful.

May _____ be safe and protected.

May _____ be filled with contentment.

May _____ be free from suffering.

Compassion

Compassion is the intention to relieve the suffering of yourself and others. The phrases below offer this intention.

May I, together with all those who suffer [this], find peace.

May you find safety, even in the midst of pain (or misfortune, difficulties).

May you find peace, even in the midst of pain.

May you find strength, even in the midst of pain.
May you find ease, even in the midst of pain.

May your difficulties [misfortune, pain] fade away.
May you find peace [ease, strength].
May your burdens be lifted.

May you be free from pain and suffering.
May you take care of yourself.
May you be open to feel the pain in and around you.
May all beings be free from suffering.³²

Sympathetic Joy

Sympathetic joy is sharing in the joy of the success of others. The simple phrase below expresses this intention.

May your happiness and good fortune continue.

Also:

May all beings be happy.
May joy fill and sustain you.
May your wellbeing continue.
May you feel joy in your wellbeing.³³

Equanimity

Equanimity is seeing things as they are.
Equanimity is a perfect, unshakable balance of mind, rooted in insight.

The simple phrases below express this intention.

All of us are the heirs of our karma.
Everyone must face his or her own situation.
Your happiness or unhappiness depend upon your actions, not my wishes for you.
May you accept things as they are.³⁴

Summary

Says the Master:

“For one who clings, motion exists; but for one who clings not, there is no motion. Where no motion is, there is stillness. Where stillness is, there is no craving. Where no craving is, there is neither coming nor going. Where no coming nor going is, there is neither arising nor passing away. Where neither arising nor passing away is, there is neither this world nor a world beyond, nor a state between. This, verily, is the end of suffering.

¹ Barbara Fredrickson. *Love 2.0: Finding Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection* Plume 2013

² Fredrickson p. 5

³ Fredrickson p. 6

⁴ Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*.

⁵ Gunaratana, Bhante, *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha's Path* (p. 149)

⁶ Fredrickson p. 8

⁷ Fredrickson p. 8

⁸ Fredrickson p. 9

⁹ Fredrickson p. 9

¹⁰ Fredrickson p. 11

¹¹ Fredrickson p. 16

¹² Fredrickson p. 17

¹³ Fredrickson p. 18

¹⁴ Hanson, Rick, and Richard Mendius. 2009. *Buddha's Brain: the practical neuroscience of happiness, love, and wisdom*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications. P. 26.

¹⁵ p. 19

¹⁶ So what's a smile for? Traditional views hold that smiles have evolved to reveal the inner state of the person who smiles. Indeed, when you call a smile a facial expression, you unwittingly subscribe to this view—that certain facial movements universally express a person's otherwise unseen emotions. An opposing view shifts the spotlight onto the recipient of a smile and argues that smiles evolved not because they provided a readout of the positive emotion that the smiling person feels, but rather because they evoked a positive emotion in the person who meets the smiling person's gaze. More recently scientists have taken this alternative view a step further, arguing that smiles have evolved to give us an implicit understanding—or gut sense—of the smiling person's true motives. Building on these and other evolutionary accounts, I think it's appropriate to widen the spotlight further still, to illuminate not just either the smiler or the smilee, but instead the emerging connection between the two people who come to share a smile. One person's sincere, heartfelt smile can trigger a powerful and reverberating state between two people, one characterized by the trio of love's features: a now shared positive emotion, a synchrony of actions and biochemistry, and a feeling of mutual care. Put succinctly, smiles may well have evolved to make love, to create positivity resonance.

p.24

¹⁷ Fredrickson p. 22

¹⁸ Fredrickson p. 28

¹⁹ Fredrickson p. 30

²⁰ Fredrickson p. 45

²¹ Fredrickson p. 51

²² Fredrickson p. 54

²³ Fredrickson p. 56

²⁴ Fredrickson p. 60

²⁵ Fredrickson p. 74

²⁶ Fredrickson p. 75

²⁷ Fredrickson p. 78

²⁸ Fredrickson p. 82

²⁹ Fredrickson p. 85

³⁰ Fredrickson p. 91

³¹ [The Four Sublime States](#): Contemplations on Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity by Nyanaponika Thera

³² <https://www.upaya.org/dox/Meditations.pdf>

³³ <https://www.upaya.org/dox/Meditations.pdf>

³⁴ <https://www.upaya.org/dox/Meditations.pdf>