

Ch.4. Across the Great Divide

*The minute I heard my first love story
I started looking for you, not knowing
how blind that was.
Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.* Rumi

'Linking' is a set of processes and techniques that help you learn about your love. The way it works is simple. You sit with your partner by our side and both of you imagine your relationship or your love on a chair facing them. You begin to speak to your love about whatever is important for you; communicating not to each other but to the relationship or love in front of you. You refer to each other by name or "he" or "she" not "you". There are no rules for how to express yourself. You do not have to take responsibility, listen, be sensitive or empathic, be clear, say exactly what you mean or reveal anything particular. Both of you are completely free to say whatever you wish. The love will take care of what is important.

The idea is that you link into and access the third force of all relationship, the body of the relationship, which in loving relationships is the body of your love. Instead of facing each other from opposite sides of the negotiating table, you sit side by side, looking at the situation from the same viewpoint. This process, especially useful in conflicts, achieves several objects.

- It defuses some of the antagonism and confrontation that more easily surface when facing each other.
- Both are reminded that you are in this together and if you want to move forward it requires the involvement of both of you.

- It brings the relationship into play and asks the relationship to get involved in sorting out what needs to be understood and done etc. And the body of the relationship is greater than the sum of its parts.
- It re-creates a conscious connection with your love, which may have got a bit lost along the way.
- It reminds you of an aspect easily forgotten in the intensity of intimacy, which is you are creating something together.
- It gives you the chance to receive some insight and wisdom into you situation but from your love rather than your anxieties, hurts, angers and fears.

Our primary struggle is often not with our partners, but with the demands and responsibilities of love.

Linking is a powerful process, very different from looking at the two individuals and their interactions, as the relationship is seen as a whole, as a single body. One of the effects of this process is a natural and organic unravelling of any tangle and struggle between you. The struggle becomes one you are both having with your love, which is actually closer to the truth than that you are struggling with each other.

In Linking exercises, all that is needed is the truth. As you share whatever is there, this simple honesty will always take you onto the next step in the exploration. If you are not willing to reveal yourself, you can always say “I do not want to share myself”, and as this is the truth, the next step will be revealed and the process will unfold all the same. Whatever the love of the relationship needs will become clear through this exercise. Though whether you choose to pay attention or not, is up to you.

Let us look at how this works with a specific example.

A man and a woman had been together for many years. They had worked hard creating a home and bringing up their children who were now grown. He began an affair with a younger woman he met at work. The wife discovered his affair and when she confronted her husband he confessed all. He had been involved with this other woman for two years. They came to couples counselling with their relationship in crisis.

Love is more than a feeling, it is a state of being.

In this situation one of the first priorities is to find out whether they still love each other or not. This is different from whether they want to stay together. The woman may want the man to stop his affair and remain faithful to her because she cannot face making public their estrangement, though she may no longer love him. Or the man may feel so burdened with guilt he would choose to end the affair even though he no longer loves his wife, because the shame and turmoil of breaking up feels too much. But both these options will lead eventually to even deeper trouble, simply because a love that is not evolving into greater creativity, is devolving into greater destructivity. Though this is a topic we return to later.

When love has died between a couple then usually a good funeral is the best option, a good-bye that celebrates the life that has been lived, the love that there has been. It is possible for a couple to separate with their love intact because the relationship has changed and they need to move on, but there is always some grieving to be gone through for what has gone. And of course if one partner needs to move on, so does the other, though they may not realise this for some time. Why would anyone need or want to stay with someone who is no longer in love with them, when it is so painful to live like this? Unless they are so familiar with being rejected, kept at a distance or unloved, that the alternative, being alone, looks worse. In which case being alone for a while may banish that fear and lead to a deeper healing than would staying together. Love is still at

work even when relationships end. Love will always seek new forms in which to express itself and sometimes will cause a person to leave a relationship in order to remain alive in that person's life. Staying can sometimes be more harmful to love than leaving. We will go into all this later, we are merely introducing some of these ideas at this point.

No-one other than the couple themselves knows the truth about whether they love each other or not. The couple, both of them, always know. Though they may not admit it, even to themselves. If you sit side by side with your partner facing the body of your love on an empty chair in front of you, you will know the truth about whether you love each other, or not. You may be too afraid to admit it, even to yourself, but you will both know. Maybe you feel anxious or afraid that your partner no longer loves you, or shame that you no longer love them in the way you once did, and these feelings make it hard to face up to the reality. Or you may feel nothing, a kind of depression, an alienation, a flatness which is hard to define or articulate. Or you may feel so angry that you can feel no love whatsoever, yet underneath the anger, you are very much in love. Our feelings are not the best guide for whether we are in love or not. Love is more than a feeling, it is a state of being.

Being in love with someone is different from simply loving them.

You can love someone but not want to make love with them. Loving someone means you have welcomed them into your heart and let them live there but it does not necessarily involve a physical intimacy. In sexual love however, we are literally making love, creating a body of love that grows to surround us. This love can then become available for many other aspects of life, especially for any children that may result, but sexual love is the crucible in which it is made. Living in this love is being in love. A couple may begin making this love through their sexual intimacy and create a body of

love that is then fed through their emotional intimacy, but it originates in the sexuality of their love.

If a couple stay together when they are no longer making love, either physically through sexual intimacy or emotionally through an intimacy of their inner experience, then slowly they will fall out of being in love though they may still love each other. They may continue to live together in a comfort and familiarity they both value. Then again they may decide to move on. This may not be a conscious choice. One or other may simply find themselves falling in love with someone else without any conscious intent. The sexual instincts, like all life, will seek to remain alive and can find someone to make love with whether the person is conscious of this process or not. That this happens is simply life trying to bring about its continued incarnation through the sexual instincts, an “expression of life’s longing for itself”, and is not really in the realm of choice at all. The freedom lies in what we decide to do.

Instinct, not knowledge, reveals the ways of love.

The love-body of a relationship is of energy and is therefore experienced through our energy and feeling rather than our intellects. One way to attune to love is through the way our bodies relate with our partner, the body language, the unconscious shifts in posture, the way we sit, eye movements, tone of voice and so on. Another way is through our actual *behaviour*, what we actually do rather what we say. In the case described above if the man is saying he wants to rebuild the relationship with his wife but is continuing to meet the other woman, what he is actually *doing* is a truer reflection of his energy than his stated intentions. Or if the woman says she loves her husband yet attacks him every time he approaches her. To attack him some of the time, while she is feeling so hurt and angry, is natural, maybe even most of the time, but *every* time indicates a different reality

from her statements of loving him. But by far the most important way to attune to the energy of love, is to pay attention to the sensations in our own bodies.

The instinctual knowledge lying in the subtle sensations within our body, can give us information about the energy of situations long before they are revealed externally in behaviour or words. Even deciphering the meaning of behaviour and body language requires us to think, whereas our feeling and instincts can sense immediately a level of reality not available to more conscious modes of analysis. Other animals, using these same instincts, will often sense events long before we do. I used to live in the middle of a forest that was devastated by a hurricane. Three days before the storm, which human weather forecasters categorically denied was coming, all the deer, birds and animals that lived there, simply left. No-one knew where they had gone. Three nights later the storm came and uprooted and felled most of the old trees. The next day the animals began to return, again following their instincts.

Attuning to your instincts and the hidden levels of what is going on, involves actively listening to the subtle feelings and sensations within our own bodies, which most of us have learned to ignore or control rather than pay attention to. I will go into all this in later chapters.

Our relationships are our teachers and guides into the ways of love.

Let us return to the example of a couple struggling to save their relationship from the fall out after an affair.

This couple clearly loved each other and, although there was much ambivalence, they wanted their relationship to work, though did not know what to do. However, when the man made a move towards her, the woman often rejected him with anger and bitterness at the betrayal she felt. She was so hurt and wounded that her rage and hurt flared up continually. The man withdrew from these attacks and withdrew into himself. The situation was critical.

Neither could change how they felt or stop their reactions to each other, despite both wanting something more productive to happen. This dynamic had to be released in order for love to begin flowing again. I suggested they tap into a higher power than their own selves - their love.

The couple sat together on a sofa and imagined the body of their relationship facing them. They began to speak to their relationship. The man spoke first, and without the immediate attacks from his hurt wife, he began to speak about how he felt guilty, powerless and hopeless. When the woman spoke to the relationship-body, she focused less on her husband and connected more directly with herself. She talked about how she hated feeling so hurt and angry.

One aspect of the struggle with love that emerges in all intimate sexual relationships is that love keeps trying to teach us how to love and we don't realise how much we have to learn. We think we know how to love, but there are depths and dimensions to love far beyond what we know or can even imagine, and love keeps trying to teach us these deeper truths. Another aspect of our struggle with love, which we all engage in until we don't, is that love makes demands of us to let go the defensive positions of our egos and discover the realities of life beyond our fear. And we resist this. Many struggles between partners are really each one's struggle with the demands of love rather than with each other. But more about this later.

Once he no longer needed to defend himself from direct attack, the man began to feel how underneath his guilt there was a deep hurt and sadness. The woman heard him speak of this and became even more angry at what she described as his selfishness and lack of sensitivity, why should he feel so hurt, when it was he that had betrayed her not the other way round.

Love can transform struggle, confusion and pain into more love.

The situation between them remained critical, but rather than the woman working through her process and the man with his, Linking focuses on the *relationship*.

The body of love in the relationship needed to be healed and supported if the couple were to begin to build their lives together again. To focus on the relationship we first need to take the pressure off the two individuals to change. This reduces whatever pressure they put on themselves to somehow sort it out, explain themselves, be more loving, get it together, be reasonable, listen, not be so angry, be patient etc.

It helps to recognise that neither partner can really help what they are doing and feeling, and anyway, it is likely that if they could do it differently, they would. Though the Linking process would say there is no need to be doing it differently anyway. Love is operating according to a deeper wisdom than we can ever fully know. The only option is to switch focus away from the anger and pain and to tap back into the love directly. Then to bring all the anger, pain, frustration, grief, fear, whatever, to the *love*. Again and again, I have witnessed in my personal life and my work as a relationship counsellor, that when either partner or both simply lay everything they think and feel at the feet of the relationship, all their contradictory hopes and fears, resentments and appreciations, hostilities and love, then something profoundly revealing and healing happens. There is nothing that you need to do other than be as honest as you can be with all the different aspects of yourself. By simply bringing yourself to the relationship, love transforms the situation. And what is more, it only requires one of the couple to do this.

In my experience in most relationships, if one partner sincerely turns to love for help, then the other responds, even if they were not present. A genuine turning to your love means you are open to something other than your previously polarised positions, which encourages your partner to correspondingly move .

Love always makes us vulnerable to heartbreak.

Asking our love to work for us does not mean we develop a detached, non emotional way of relating that protects us from the vulnerability of loving. On the

contrary, the more we develop a relationship with our love, the more we realise not only its power but also its vulnerability. A relationship can be destroyed and killed just as can a weed, a species of bird, an enemy, a habitat, a person or the spirit of a child. All these can die and so can love in a particular form. Love may be eternal in some aspects, but in the form of a particular relationship, love can die. Yet we are usually more aware of our own vulnerability to love than love's vulnerability to us.

To dare to love someone is to be vulnerable to them, literally we are “able to be wounded”. Because we naturally fear this, we develop defences that protect us by reducing the power of love over us. Without meaning to, we diminish our capacity for loving and being loved, in order to save ourselves from heartbreak. In a variety of ways we reject, attack, undermine, ignore, or run away from love, usually without knowing what we are doing, that is until we realise that when we harm love there is heartbreak anyway. And often we only reach this through having our hearts broken. Ancient Chinese tradition has it that our hearts have to break seven times before we can find wisdom. That's a lot of love needed before we become wise.

There is always an equality in relationship, though this is often hidden.

Linking helps develop an understanding that is neither judgmental nor prescriptive and involves, amongst other techniques, exploring the history of the relationship, not so much the separate histories of the two individuals. When exploring the relationship, themes emerge that have usually been present from the very beginning. Difficulties that may manifest twenty or thirty years later, were usually present in some form or other from the time the couple fell in love. In fact it is usually the very aspects of each other that initially attracted the couple that are later at the root of the deepest trouble.

One of the principles behind the way loving relationships work is that whatever dynamic can be seen operating from one person to the other will have a similar dynamic

(though this is usually hidden) working the other way. So whenever there is a direct accusation, such as in this example, where the woman says that the man has betrayed her but she has not betrayed him, the Linking process takes a deeper look. In what way might the woman have betrayed their love? In the exploration of their history together this is likely to come to light. It may be that there were repeated small betrayals of love on a daily basis. It may have been something that happened periodically, for example he might have on occasions tried to talk with her about being unhappy at work but because he was earning such a good salary, the wife ignored his need and would not discuss this. This is also a betrayal of their love. Or an exact equivalent may be found some time in the past. If you look deeply enough, this is what you will usually find, a hidden reciprocity or symmetry - in this case a more intimate betrayal.

It emerged that for two years after they had been married the woman was closer and more intimate with her mother than with her husband. She had revealed private aspects of their life together to this third party, telling secrets that he gave her for safe keeping, and revealing intimate details of their sex life. The level at which this hurt him had been buried because he did not know why he had felt so abandoned and betrayed. He had judged it as inadequate or irrational to feel this way, and when he tried to talk with her about his distress, she had defended herself and told him he was being controlling and possessive. The wound could not be dealt with as both were in their different ways ignoring it. It then went underground where it lay neglected and unattended for many years.

This much later affair was not a conscious attempt on the man's part to put the relationship to rights, but it could be seen as love's way of bringing to the surface a deep wound that had never healed and which needed to be addressed for their love to grow. There was the potential at this point in their lives, now the children had grown, for deeper intimacy between them, and their love was doing all it could to bring about the right conditions for this. Freed from the demands of parenthood there was also more

emotional energy available for the relationship, which would be needed to digest all this from their past. Love had chosen its time well.

Both partners are equally responsible for the love in a relationship.

By bringing this reciprocity to light the couple could begin to move into balance again. This is a complex process that I will describe in detail later, but one of the key things here was they began to acknowledge that *both* had played a part in what had happened. Neither was therefore the victim of the other. This is extremely important. By each taking responsibility for what happens in a relationship, a couple is no longer divided. They can no longer simply blame each other and can become instead co-detectives uncovering together the source of their difficulties. By taking responsibility for what is happening you stop trying to change your partner, and there is relief all round at this. Though in a traumatic relationship, you might decide to change your situation instead and leave.

I have often observed when working with couples that both will take a deep breath, a sort of sigh of relief, which neither may notice, at exactly the moment they recognise a reciprocity in the relationship. It is as if the body of the relationship relaxes and both feel immediately safer and more at ease.

Love may be at work even when we feel anything but loving.

As soon as we acknowledge that the relationship and the love has been created equally by both partners, something new can begin to reveal itself. In this example, even if the woman continues to think what he did to her was worse than anything she did to him, her body has already begun to relax and absorb the deeper reality. The woman may well feel compelled to keep punishing the man, resisting his overtures, lashing out at him, refusing to open up to him, but once they have acknowledged their love for each other

and each has taken responsibility for the relationship, this can be seen as love operating again to bring their relating back into a healthy balance, by balancing out the hurt. As an old proverb tells us, “If you would forgive your enemy, first you must wound him”.

This symmetrical wounding, which may look like revenge, is not necessarily harmful, it is happening for reasons we may not be able to see. Yet knowing that love is at work, even when it looks very unlike what we have been taught is loving, means we will stop interfering with the workings of love with our ideas of what should be happening. E.g. that the woman should forgive and forget; or that she should never forgive and forget and should leave. It may be that without her attacks, the woman would never be able to open to her husband again, and this would leave her with no option other than leaving or spending the rest of her life unable to make love with him. When the hurt has been at such a deep instinctual level, our instincts are usually a far better guide as to what is needed than our intellects.

The man and the woman began to build their life together again. It was often difficult but there were also moments when they were closer than they had ever been. Sometimes it felt like when they first met. What also happened was that many other aspects of their relationship became clearer and more harmonious, without them doing anything particular to address them. He began to buy her presents and he had not done that for a very long time. She began to cook wonderful meals for them both and she had not done that for a very long time either. They went to the theatre, out to dinner and on holidays together, all aspects of their life that had been lost for some time. (Romantic love was a large part of their loving.) Love began again to work its magic between them.

When love is greater than fear, it naturally continues to extend itself.

When the love between a couple grows to include more and more of each other, then whatever happens between them takes place *within* the love. The love is then greater than whatever anger, fear, pain, feelings of betrayal, guilt, hatred, shame, wish to punish

or run away or whatever else might be going on. This means that alongside resentments, anger and pain there is also room for other things - understanding, laughter, vulnerability, self revelation, forgiveness, closeness etc. But these other possibilities enter the picture in a natural and organic way, not because they are forced or imposed. Eventually there is the space for everything in the love. And when everything is in love, an even deeper magic can begin.

In this case the man began to understand that his wife had to periodically attack him, it was love's way through her of bringing their relationship into balance. Because of the depth of their denial about the earlier hurt, this crisis had to emerge in a very flamboyant form to bring attention to the hidden wound. He also felt less guilty about his affair, which, in contradiction to many people's intuitive sense that it is right to feel guilty about these things, was helpful. He was more willing to engage his wife when he no longer felt he had to defend himself. She felt his presence in the relationship more and as a result felt safer and able to share her underlying hurt and vulnerability more easily. This brought them closer and what had been a spiral into deeper alienation and misunderstanding became a movement towards more intimacy and trust.

They also began to value their love as an intricate and subtle source of wisdom in their lives. With their re-newed connection with their love, this couple also reached out and became available to their children in a new way, and their love not only nourished their own relationship, it became a source of support to others.

The ten steps of Linking into the relationship when love is in crisis.

The Linking processes described in this example involves the following steps:

1. An exploration of the love in the relationship, the degree to which the love-body is out of balance. This is an energetic process not an intellectual or verbal exercise, a

- kind of diagnosis. The two individuals always know the state of their love, though may not admit it, even to themselves.
2. A shift of perspective away from seeing what is happening as being between the two people and to one of focusing on the relationship and the body of love.
 3. Bringing together the separate individuals to explore side by side their relationship and their love.
 4. Taking the pressure off the individuals to change.
 5. Expressing freely to the body of the relationship without any rules as to what to say or how.
 6. Exploring the history of the relationship.
 7. Finding the key areas of imbalance.
 8. Understanding the meaning of what has happened/is happening rather than judging it as right or wrong.
 9. Each recognising the relationship is a creation of them both, and that both are therefore responsible for both the imbalance and the rebalancing.
 10. Trusting love again. Which is not the same as trusting the other *person*.

Fear of love is in all of us, in some form or other.

Trusting love is not easy. Most of us know that love can lead to heartbreak and to some degree, are naturally afraid of this. The fear may show itself in different ways, e.g. some for example may shy away from commitment, some may demand too much commitment, though both are ways to avoid the real vulnerability of loving and being loved. We have therefore developed a variety of ways to protect ourselves from love. Some we have learned from our parents, school, our friends, from the cultural climate around us; some we have uniquely designed and created ourselves. However we acquired them, every tactic we have created to avoid being hurt by love will be triggered in

intimate sexual relationships. When our partner challenges the ways in which we are avoiding the vulnerability of love (and they will!), this is love's way of teaching us, through the relationship, how to love whole heartedly again. Just as we will challenge our partners. In the heat of a fight however, we are unlikely to be open and available to learn from love. And anyway it can be more important to have the fight, releasing tension and pent up feelings, and then later in a cooler climate, to learn from it. We will go into all this in greater detail later.

However fearful we may be of the potential woundings of intimacy, of our partner rejecting us, of being overwhelmed by demands, of being abandoned or used or whatever is our particular fear (and we all have many of these!), our love is not a force that will ever actually harm us. Love does not, for example, ever interfere with our freedom, undermine our authority, control our spontaneity, limit our self expression, or in any other way prevent us from having what we need. Neither does it judge us, frighten us, reject us, attack us or bully us. Love simply does not do these things - fear might, but not love. Linking into our love helps us trust the process of relationship, even when we cannot trust our partner. And we cannot always trust them as they do not always know what is going on any more than we do. Yet we can always trust love.

Love can bring into our life everything we need, if we let it.

Linking works on many levels.

- It brings you together on the same side not as enemies opposing each other.
- It empowers each in the recognition that both have created the situation.
- It stops blame and righteous judgments.
- It unlocks the conflict from the polarised positions it has assumed.
- It opens up deeper levels of what is really going on.

- It provides a safe place where you can explore these.
- It does not interfere or harm your relationship because it *is* the relationship.
- It feeds your relationship by bringing you into alignment with the reason you are together in the first place, because you love each other even when you don't feel it.
- It helps you trust love again.

Linking is useful for many other purposes not only when a relationship is in difficulty. Learning to use the energy of your love to create understanding, happiness, healing, insight, pleasure and more love, is the most powerful process many people have found, not only for their relationship, but in the creation of a good life on every level. This does not mean love is the ultimate consumer dream. It means that love will bring into our life what our love needs, such as a home close to nature, work that is fulfilling spiritually and emotionally not only financially, that we eat well, that our children are happy, we are surrounded by beauty and ease and whatever else love needs in our lives.

We tend to think in our advanced capitalist society that only money can give us these things, and so suffer in the pursuit of financial wealth, forgetting the wealth that love can bring. We have lost the art of using the power of love to create the good life for ourselves and our children. One way to rediscover it is to sit in front of the body of your love and simply lay all your concerns, hopes, worries, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, whatever at the feet of your love. Letting it simply lie there, in front of your love, while you do nothing but wait. You can do this together side by side, or alone, imagining your partner next to you. Something will always happen. Slowly it begins to dawn on you that you have tapped into a primal source of magic, that has a power beyond what we can ever understand. All I can say is try it and see for yourself.

Some couples who work together have special business meetings where anything and everything is spoken to the relationship-body, and through this process it gradually becomes clear what needs to be done. Others have regular times when they share

anything they want to with the body of their love, as a routine which supports the on-going challenges of living together, creating a home, caring for children, managing finances and so on. Out of this process, decisions emerge naturally. Rather like what once may have happened in tribal meetings where elders spoke until the right course of action revealed itself. We may have lost this facility in our modern communities, but it is absolutely possible in our families.

When the love between sexually intimate partners grows, this body of love becomes the energy field within which both live. They live in love; but a love that is inclusive not exclusive, as it continually grows to embrace more and more of life. Anyone who comes into the energy field of such a love is affected by it and receives some benefit, especially of course their children.

For the couple themselves there is a deeper goodness. When with the one you love and who loves you in this complete way, frustrations at work, loss of a friend, moving house, financial trouble, storms at sea and even death, as well as the inevitable anguish, have a goodness in them too. This is because such a love is a greater force than even death. And around it everything is beautiful.