

**“Be My Valentine!”**  
**February 14, 2010 (Valentine’s Day)**  
**Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**  
**Rev. Bruce A. Bode**

**Poetry for Bulletin**

Always you were the reason for my existence;  
To adore you for me was religion ... (Carlos Almarain, from “*Histora de un amor*”)

In the month of May when all leaves open,  
I see when I walk how well all things  
lean on each other, how the bees work,  
the fish make their living the first day.  
Monarchs fly high; then I understand  
I love you with what in me is unfinished.

I love you with what in me is still  
changing,... (Robert Bly, from “In the Month of May,” *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds*.)

**Lighting the Chalice (in unison)**

Blessed is the fire that burns deep in the soul.  
It is the flame of the human spirit touched into being by the mystery of life.  
It is the fire of reason, the fire of compassion, the fire of community, the fire of  
justice, the fire of faith.

It is the fire of love burning deep in the human heart, the divine glow in every life.  
(Eric Heller-Wagner)

**Opening Words & Musical Response**

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun’s birthday;this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any – lifted from the no  
of all nothing – human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened) (e. e. cummings, 1894-1962)

## Responsive Reading

Our Responsive Reading on this Valentine's Day is taken from "The Song of Songs" – "the greatest of all songs" – a book that many are surprised to find in the biblical canon, since no mention is made of God, and the vocabulary is full of erotic passion.

Most biblical scholars today see these songs in their most obvious meaning as straight love songs. But historically, the love relationship has typically been interpreted in various allegorical ways: either, as in Judaism, of a relationship between Yahweh and Israel; or, in Christianity, between Christ and his Church; or again, between the individual soul and God, the soul seeking its divine mate.

MINISTER: I hear my Beloved. See how he comes leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills. My Beloved is like a gazelle, like a young stag.

CONGREGATION: See where he stands behind our wall. He looks in at the window, he peers through the lattice.

MINISTER: My Beloved lifts up his voice, he says to me, "Come then, my love, my lovely one, come. For see, winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth.

CONGREGATION: "The season of glad songs has come, the cooing of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree is forming its first figs, and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance.

MINISTER: "Come, then, my love, my lovely one, come. My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock, in the coverts of the cliff, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful."

CONGREGATION: My Beloved is mine and I am his. He pastures his flock among the lilies.

MINISTER: Before the dawn-wind rises, before the shadows flee, return! Be, my Beloved, like a gazelle, a young stag on the mountains.

CONGREGATION: On my bed, at night, I sought him whom my heart loves. I sought but did not find him.

MINISTER: So I will rise and go through the city; in the streets and the squares I will seek him whom my heart loves.

("The Song of Songs," 2:8-14,16-17,3:1-2; *The Jerusalem Bible*)

**Time For All Ages**  
**By Kathy Stevenson, Director of Religious Education**

Here we are. In our new sanctuary. Built with our own money, and lots of muscle and brain and time and enthusiasm.

Do you agree with me that it is beautiful? I have seen people's jaws literally drop when they look into this room. We not only built a place that will hold more people, but it is a stunningly beautiful place.

When we designed it, we thought about this time when you come forward. Where would you sit, where would Bruce and I sit? What would be comfortable for you?

Many adults were excited that they would be able to see you better. I think that is important. But I didn't want it to be a 'show' like you were on stage. Already sometimes I get concerned when one of you says something that is very clever and sweet, and people laugh because it makes them happy that you are wonderful. But sometimes your comment isn't really something to laugh about. I wondered if that would happen more often.

These next few weeks we will be learning a lot about how to BE in our changed buildings.

What works, what doesn't work.

What we love, what we miss.

We have to learn about the heat, and where the lights are.

How to keep it clean and where to put things.

How to keep the rows of chairs straight and the hymnals evenly distributed.

We want to be sure that anyone with a walker or wheel chair has a good place to be. Gary and Sarah have worked endlessly to get the sound system working well.

We are making lots of lists. Anything that costs money goes on our UFO list, Unfunded Objects of our Desires. Many things we need and want will have to wait.

We want your thoughts and suggestions for what works and what doesn't. Always feel free to talk to me about the building.

Already I have been asked why the pillars are cracked. (We knew they would; it has to do with how a tree dries when it comes inside.)

And already a child was lighting the candles without an adult. Please only do it with an adult by your side.

There is so much more I could say. But for now, let's just take a look around. Both at the room, and at the faces in the chairs.

We are all here this morning because Unitarian Universalism is part of our lives. We are babies to 90-year-olds

We care about how we treat each other and the earth.

We care about peace in the world and in our hearts.

The adults want the world to be a good place for you to grow up in, and they want to be by your side as you grow.

You mean a lot to us, to me.

Please, those of you on the center aisle, would you make an arch for our children and teachers?

Go Now In Peace

## **Reading**

My reading on this Valentine's Day is from a book by Robert A. Johnson titled, We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love. In this book, Johnson views romantic love in the broad sweep of things, as well as indicating what it can mean to us in our time. My reading this morning consists of several paragraphs taken from the introduction of this book.

Romantic love is the single greatest energy system in the Western psyche. In our culture it has supplanted religion as the arena in which men and women seek meaning, transcendence, wholeness, and ecstasy.

As a mass phenomenon, romantic love is peculiar to the West. We are so accustomed to living with the beliefs and assumptions of romantic love that we think it is the only form of "love" on which marriage or love relationships can be based. We think it is the only "true love." But there is much that we can learn from the East about this. In Eastern cultures, like those of India, we find that married couples love each other with great warmth, often with a stability and devotion that puts us to shame. But their love is not "romantic love" as we know it. They don't impose the same ideals on their relationships, nor do they impose such impossible demands and expectations on each other as we do....

Romantic love has existed throughout history in many cultures. We find it in the literature of ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, ancient Persia, and feudal Japan. But our modern Western society is the only culture in history that has experienced romantic love as a mass phenomenon. We are the only society that makes romance the basis of our marriages and love relationships and the cultural ideal of "true love."

The ideal of romantic love burst into Western society during the Middle Ages. It first appeared in our literature in the myth of Tristan and Iseult, then in the love poems and songs of the troubadours. It was called “courtly love”; its model was the brave knight who worshiped a fair lady as his inspiration, the symbol of all beauty and perfection, the ideal that moved him to be noble, spiritual, refined, and high-minded. In our time we have mixed courtly love into our sexual relationships and marriages, but we still hold the medieval belief that true love has to be the ecstatic adoration of a man or woman who carries, for us, the image of perfection.

Carl Jung has shown that when a great psychological phenomenon suddenly appears in the life of an individual, it represents a tremendous unconscious potential that is rising to the level of consciousness. The same is true for a culture. At a certain point in the history of a people, a new possibility bursts out of the collective unconscious; it is a new idea, a new belief, a new value, or a new way of looking at the universe. It represents a potential good if it can be integrated into consciousness, but at first it is overwhelming, even destructive.

Romantic love is one of these truly overwhelming psychological phenomena that have appeared in Western history. It has overwhelmed our collective psyche and permanently altered our view of the world. As a society, we have not yet learned to handle the tremendous power of romantic love. We turn it into tragedy and alienation more often than into enduring human relationships. But, I believe, if men and women will understand the psychological dynamics behind romantic love and learn to handle them consciously, they will find a new possibility of relationship, both to themselves and to others.

(Robert Johnson, We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love, excerpts from pp. xi-xiv)

## “BE MY VALENTINE!”

### Introduction

It’s Valentine’s Day today ... so let’s talk about love.

More specifically, since there are many different types of love, let’s talk about romantic love, because that’s what Valentine’s Day is about.

I spoke with an elementary school teacher a couple of days ago who told me that for the Valentine’s Day celebration in her class this year each child exchanged valentines with *all* the other children in the class – no child left behind, you might say.

I understand the reason for that approach in a classroom setting: you don’t want the feelings of the children to be hurt and upset.

But that’s not really what Valentine’s Day is about ... and we all know it ... and in a classroom setting are protecting against that knowledge. Valentine’s Day is not about *generalized* feelings of good will and affection; rather, it’s about *specific* attraction and

affection, and it's all about personal and individual feelings. Indeed, feelings are in danger of being hurt and upset.

To truly say, "You are my Valentine," or "Be my Valentine" is to say, "*You* are the one who attracts *me*. You are the one who has captured my heart. You are the one that I adore."

So: "Won't you let me adore you?" "May I adore you?"

And: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if you also adored me ... at least just a little?"

And: "Do you adore me? Do I attract you? Please, won't you be my Valentine?"

### **A love letter**

In anticipation of Valentine's Day and this deeper meaning, each day this past week "The Writer's Almanac" with Garrison Keilor published love letters. Each day this past week a love letter appeared in my email box from "The Writer's Almanac."

I'd like to read the love letter that came over the web this past Thursday – the very day that I had set myself to prepare this sermon.

It's a love letter that comes from what, to me at least, was an unexpected source: the military commander and future emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte, who is probably not your typical representative of Valentine's Day – at least I was not aware of his love story. But listen to this:

In December, 1795, Napoleon wrote the following words to a woman he had recently met, "Josephine," as he called her – her name before that was "Rose." Josephine was a widow with two children, her husband having been beheaded on the guillotine a year and a half earlier during the Reign of Terror in France. She narrowly escaped the same fate. Napoleon wrote:

I wake filled with thoughts of you. Your portrait and the intoxicating evening which we spent yesterday have left my senses in turmoil. Sweet, incomparable Josephine, what a strange effect you have on my heart! ...

You are leaving at noon; I shall see you in three hours.

Until then, *mio dolce amor* [my sweet love], a thousand kisses; but give me none in return, for they set my blood on fire.

A few months later, on March 9, 1796, Napoleon, at that time an ambitious Major-General in the French Army, and Josephine were married; he was 26, she 32. Then, while on his military campaigns, he wrote letters to her from throughout Europe, many of which are still in existence, including these words from the first year of their marriage:

I have not spent a day without loving you; I have not spent a night without

embracing you; I have not so much as drunk one cup of tea without cursing the pride and ambition which force me to remain apart from the moving spirit of my life. In the midst of my duties, whether I am at the head of my army or inspecting the camps, my beloved Josephine stands alone in my heart, occupies my mind, fills my thoughts. If I am moving away from you with the speed of the Rhone torrent, it is only that I may see you again more quickly. If I rise to work in the middle of the night, it is because this may hasten by a matter of days the arrival of my sweet love....

I ask of you neither eternal love, nor fidelity, but simply ... *truth*, unlimited honesty. The day you say "I love you less," will mark the end of my love and the last day of my life. If my heart were base enough to love without being loved in return I would tear it to pieces. Josephine! Josephine! Remember what I have sometimes said to you: Nature has endowed me with a virile and decisive character. It has built ours out of lace and gossamer. Have you ceased to love me? Forgive me, love of my life, my soul is racked by conflicting forces.

My heart, obsessed by you, is full of fears which prostrate me with misery ... I am distressed not to be calling you by name. I shall wait for you to write it. Farewell! Ah! If you love me less you can never have loved me. In that case I shall truly be pitiable.

Bonaparte

P.S. – The war this year has changed beyond recognition. I have had meat, bread, and fodder distributed; my armed cavalry will soon be on the march. My soldiers are showing inexpressible confidence in me; you alone are a source of chagrin to me; you alone are the joy and torment of my life.

It's all here: all the ecstasy and heartbreak of romantic love.

So we run through some of the possibilities and perils of romantic love.

### **A taste of the Golden World**

First, what is this power that can raise this future emperor to such heights of joy and happiness, then send him reeling into pits of torment and despair?

Following the lead of author Robert Johnson, what is at work in romantic love is that here we get a taste of what he calls "the Golden World," an ecstatic world in which we are lifted outside of ourselves and inhabit, if only for a time, a world of luminosity, radiance, fulfillment, wholeness, happiness, beauty, and joy.

You might think we are talking here about a religious experience. And if you are thinking this, you would be right ... for, in Johnson's understanding, romantic love is, indeed, a divine visitation.

As a matter of fact, romantic love is about the only place where the gods and goddesses visit us anymore ... for what has happened in our time is that the gods and goddesses

have left the temples and have migrated into the streets where they wear the faces of men and women.

The fire, the fascination, and the fear that you would expect to find in the presence of a god or goddess is rarely found in the temples, tabernacles, and houses of worship in our time. Rather, the religious fervor and fire in our age is found in romantic love.

Here is where one is lifted up or comes crashing down. Here is where ecstatic union takes place. Here is where one surrenders oneself, loses oneself, is beside oneself. Here is where one goes wild; risks everything, throws over the whole world one has built up.

Romantic love is the fire that has swept the Western world, and, increasingly, the Eastern world as well. It is romantic love that rules the day. It is the real religion of our times, that which pulls us out of ourselves, that to which we are ultimately devoted ...

... as, it appears, was the case with Napoleon Bonaparte ... for his heart, mind, body, soul, and spirit were with his beloved Josephine (or with his image of her) even in the midst of his military duties ... though later in his life, as we shall see in a few minutes, Napoleon was not an entirely faithful worshipper at Josephine's shrine. Indeed, he was to say, "Power is my mistress."

### **What is romantic love?**

So what is romantic love, and how does it operate?

Psychologically speaking, romantic love or "falling in love" has to do with an interior image of beauty, wholeness, and perfection being projected outward from one's inner being and "falling" upon another person.

The person upon whom this interior image falls is lifted out of the everyday, ordinary world and becomes, as it were, a god or goddess for you. Here, in the presence of this deity with whom you are connected, you are ushered into a realm of beauty and wonder where the whole world lights up, ordinary time loses its significance, hours slip by in a flash.

In the presence of the Beloved you are exalted; you feel completed; you feel whole. It's an experience of being taken over, captured, and possessed ... wherein your ego's boundaries are invaded and dissolved, and you are taken over by larger life ... an experience in which you so deeply join with your Beloved that, as the poet Pablo Neruda puts it:

...there is no I or you,  
so intimate that your hand upon my chest is my hand,  
so intimate that when I fall asleep it is your eyes that close.

(Sonnet XVII, Pablo Neruda, tr. Stephen Mitchell)

And what happens when the Beloved separates from you?

In the absence of the Beloved, there is longing, suffering, despair, and desolation. Without the connection to the Beloved, the light is taken away and life is drained of its meaning; one wonders if it is even worth going on.

### **The gold exchange**

When two people “fall in love” and taste the Golden World, experience a little of heaven on earth ... when two people mutually see in the other an image of wholeness, beauty, and perfection, an exchange of gold is taking place, a gold-exchange of the following sort:

First, your Beloved reflects and mirrors back to you a golden image of your own self so that you shine and are lifted up. Your Beloved is attracted by your strengths and what you have developed.

And, turning it over, if your Beloved criticizes you or pulls back from you so that you don't see the radiance of your self reflected back to you anymore; then you are hurt, even crushed, and may become depressed, angry, bitter, and resentful.

Secondly, your Beloved completes you, shines for you as an image of what you yourself might yet potentially be. In romantic love you are attracted to the very person who fills in the potential but as yet undeveloped parts of your self. You are uncannily and unconsciously attracted to the very one who has a sense of your wounds, and who thereby has to power to heal or wound you further.

In romantic love, your Beloved carries your own gold, the potentialities in yourself not yet recognized or developed, the wounds to your being that could be healed in the encounter with the Beloved, or further lacerated.

And, thus, turning it over, when your Beloved changes and no longer reflects for you the inner image of perfection that you had visualized, or your Beloved gets tired of carrying your gold for you and says, “Time for you to carry your own gold now,” then that also will be upsetting and painful, and you may turn on your Beloved.

I was particularly struck by the words in Napoleon's love letter where he said: “Nature has endowed me with a virile and decisive character. It has built ours out of lace and gossamer.” With his beloved Josephine, Napoleon was able to experience a world that he had not yet been able to bring into being.

### **Do love and marriage go together?**

Now let's look briefly at how romantic love and enduring relationships, like marriage, work, because there quite a difference between “being in love” and “loving.”

As Robert Johnson indicates, in our world romantic love is typically understood as a necessary pre-requisite for marriage, a necessary entry-point for marriage. In other words, you don't marry unless you're "in-love;" and, conversely, when you "fall-in-love," you think you ought to get married.

But romantic love and marriage are two very different systems, and putting the two together is challenging at best. I believe in taking up the challenge – I don't know that we have much choice in our time – but still it's a challenge, and that's because the order of interests and priorities of romantic love and marriage are exactly reversed.

The order of interests and priorities in romantic love is as follows:

first, the self and its ecstasy, passion, completion, and fulfillment;  
secondly, the other person, whom you need as a vehicle in order to complete yourself;  
and, thirdly, the relationship, which you can and probably should dissolve if it no longer serves to complete and fulfill you or to lift you in ecstatic experience.

On the other hand, in marriage, as traditionally conceived – that is, as a life-long commitment and relationship – the order is the exact opposite. Here the order is:

first, the relationship that each person serves and that holds fast through good and ill;  
secondly, the other person, your partner, whom you care for through thick and thin;  
and, thirdly, yourself, for you have to maintain your individuality and integrity as a human being to both care for the well-being of your partner and to serve the relationship.

### **The problem of romantic love and relationship**

Thus, romantic love as a *basis* – not the *entry-point* now, but the *basis* – for a life-long marriage commitment has some difficulties ... because it's not really about a relationship with the Beloved; it's about a relationship with your beloved image of beauty, wholeness, and perfection – the other person, your Beloved, being a vehicle, screen, or mirror for that projected image of perfection.

And that is the challenge of our age with regard to romantic love and marriage – how to make these two systems work together.

As I say, I believe in the task of trying to put the two together. It's what we have in our world. It's here, and we can't really avoid this collision of forces, even if we wanted to. But we should try to understand and become more aware of what's going on.

And in attempting to understand some of the challenges involved in trying to bring these two systems together, I would recommend the book by Robert Johnson from which I drew this morning's reading, titled, We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love.

I have also tried to get at the essence of that book in a previous sermon I gave three years ago and then repeated again this past summer. That sermon is titled, “The Psychology of Romantic Love.” You can find it on our website.

But, to conclude my sermon on this Valentine’s Day, let’s take a quick look at how Napoleon and Josephine tried to bring together romantic love and marriage.

### **The marriage of Napoleon and Josephine**

Days after Napoleon and Josephine were married in early March of 1796, Napoleon left to command the French army near Italy. In the months that followed, he begged her to join him on his military campaign. But she, perhaps because of an overwhelming fear of carriage travel, did not come to see him as much as he wished; nor, however, did she write as much as he wanted.

Here is one of his entreaties to her from that summer:

Verona, July 17, 1796

I write you, my beloved one, very often, and you write very little. You are wicked and naughty, very naughty, as much as you are fickle. It is unfaithful so to deceive a poor husband, a tender lover! Ought he to lose all his enjoyments because he is so far away, borne down with toil, fatigue, and hardship? Without his Josephine, without the assurance of her love, what is left him upon earth? What can he do?

We had yesterday a very bloody affair; the enemy has lost many men, and has been completely beaten. We have taken the whole country around Mantua.

Adieu, adorable Josephine; one of these nights your door will open with a great noise; ... and you will find me on your arms.

A thousand loving kisses.

BONAPARTE

Then, Napoleon began to hear rumors of Josephine’s unfaithfulness, which at first he did not believe, and which he tried to counteract in his letters:

November, 1796:

I don’t love you anymore; on the contrary, I detest you. You are a vile, mean, beastly slut. You don’t write to me at all; you don’t love your husband; you know how happy your letters make him, and you don’t write him six lines of nonsense...

[But] Soon, I hope, I will be holding you in my arms; then I will cover you with a million hot kisses, burning like the equator.

A year and a half later, Napoleon learns that Josephine had been unfaithful, and though she denies it, he threatens suicide:

I'll kill myself. Yes! I want to end a life which from now on can only be burdensome to me if it cannot be consecrated to you.

It appears at this point that Josephine realizes what it would mean if Napoleon divorced her, and she changes her behavior and becomes more amiable, even traveling with him on his military campaigns.

But Napoleon, no longer trusting her, also changes his behavior, and begins taking mistresses, even flaunting them, saying, at one point:

I am not a man like others and moral laws or the laws that govern conventional behavior do not apply to me. My mistresses do not in the least engage my feelings. Power is my mistress.

In 1804, Napoleon and Josephine were crowned Emperor and Empress of France. For a time, they lived peacefully together, but Josephine was not able to produce any heirs to the throne. And by this time Napoleon knew it was not his fault because one of his mistresses was pregnant with his child.

At dinner on November 30, 1809, Napoleon let Josephine know that – in the interest of France – he must find a wife who could produce an heir. From the next room, Napoleon's secretary heard Josephine's screams.

However, at a solemn and public divorce ceremony, each read a statement of devotion to the other. Said Napoleon:

Far from ever finding cause for complaint, I can to the contrary only congratulate myself on the devotion and tenderness of my beloved wife. She has adorned thirteen years of my life; the memory will always remain engraved on my heart.

And Josephine, for her part, replied:

With the permission of our august and dear husband, I must declare that, having no hope of bearing children who would fulfill the needs of his policies and the interests of France, I am pleased to offer him the greatest proof of attachment and devotion ever offered on this earth.

Napoleon then searched for a new wife for the kingdom, and, on March 11, 1810, married the Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria, daughter of his old enemy, Emperor Francis I of Austria, who did produce an heir to the throne.

Nearly four years later, in 1814, the Allies invaded France, and Napoleon left for war on January 25. Defeated in the spring, Napoleon abdicated his throne and was forced into exile on the island of Elba. He would never see his second wife or his son again.

In mid-May, 1814, Josephine caught a cold, and despite a doctor's care, grew steadily worse, dying on May 29.

Napoleon, learning of her death by means of a French journal while exiled on Elba, stayed locked in his room for two days, refusing to see anyone.

When Napoleon returned from his exile on Elba, he immediately visited the house where Josephine had lived and died. There, from her garden, he gathered violets, the flowers with which Josephine had always surrounded herself. These flowers Napoleon put in a locket that he would wear around his neck until his death in 1821, a reminder of their tumultuous love.

(Note: The foregoing account of the relationship of Napoleon and Josephine is drawn from a PBS script found on the web: "Napoleon: Napoleon and Josephine" at [www.pbs.org/empires/napoleon/n\\_josephine/.../page\\_1.html](http://www.pbs.org/empires/napoleon/n_josephine/.../page_1.html).)

### **Benediction**

May the Love that overcomes all differences,  
that heals all wounds,  
that puts to flight all fears,  
that reconciles all who are separated,  
Be in us and among us,  
Now and always. Amen.

(Frederick E. Gillis)

### **Extinguishing of Chalice**

We extinguish this flame,  
But not the light of truth,  
The warmth of community,  
Or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service given by The Reverend Bruce A. Bode at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on Valentine's Day, Sunday, February 14, 2010. The spoken service, available at the Fellowship, may differ slightly in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)