

# Attraction, Obsession, Longing and Love

By: William Van Vechten

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For quite some time, I have wanted to write an article about the difference between Love and Longing. But the words weren't coming, and I was busy with other things. So the article didn't get written. But such an article seemed much needed. So many people are desperately yearning for, or clinging to, someone who no longer loves them (or never did love them). Sometimes, one is in longing after a person who is, in turn, longing for someone else. Almost without exception, the people who describe these feelings use the words "I am so totally in love," when they really mean, "I want the opportunity to experience love with this person, including being loved back."

I had an opportunity recently to attend an afternoon workshop. I got a wonderful, but unexpected gift -- a reminder of what so many others are struggling with -- which I'd like to share with you. The workshop participants sat in a circle on the floor. I sat between my wonderful wife, Kathryn, and another woman that I didn't know. I had only met her briefly for a moment the night before. At first, all I noticed about her was that she was kind of quiet, and very attractive. I'll refer to her as "Rachel."

As the workshop proceeded, we each shared openly and honestly about issues that were important to each of us. When it was her turn to share, Rachel began to cry quietly... her words causing her pain to surface. Now, I'm a very sensitive guy. When I feel another's pain, I tend to reach out to offer comfort and support. I touched her lower back, as a supportive gesture.

That was the first of many physical encounters that Rachel and I had that afternoon. I didn't feel sexual excitement, but I did unmistakably feel her acknowledgment, her acceptance, and her appreciation of my presence. I felt a surge of positive energy within me... I felt supportive, but also attractive, desirable, and truly valuable in this interchange. I was feeling attraction to her in a big way.

At the end of the afternoon, Rachel and I held each other in a close embrace, looking in each other's eyes and talking for several minutes. After saying our goodbyes and thank-yous to everyone, Kathryn and I left, and I expected to drop right back into my wonderful life. But I got a little surprise.

Over the next day and a half, I found Rachel constantly in my thoughts. It felt like the initial attraction was becoming an obsession. I didn't mention it to Kathryn at first, because I fully expected it to wane quickly. After waking on the second morning to Rachel on my mind again, I decided it was something I needed to talk about with Kathryn. Over breakfast, I explained what I was feeling, and how surprising it was to me. As she always does when I reveal a withhold (something which needs to be said, but hasn't been said yet), she listened patiently and dispassionately until I finished.

We talked about this for a good part of the day. Applying my own knowledge and experience, as well as some valuable insights from Kathryn, I realized that I had been given an intimate look at Attraction, Obsession, and Longing. I knew afresh what they were. I really appreciated the reminder of how strong feelings of longing can be.

I was fully aware that this was a brief infatuation. After all, I know nothing about Rachel other than that afternoon workshop. Throughout this process, I was always aware of the tremendous level of conscious love that Kathryn and I share. What a gift it was to be able to discuss this with her, without being blamed, judged, or criticized.

I realized that the obsession with Rachel occurred because when I was interacting with her, I had felt different from usual. I had felt more attractive and more valuable when I was in her presence. This feeling was intoxicating, and my nervous system kept dredging up her memory in order to try to regain the intoxication. If I didn't know the difference, it would have been easy to think it was love, because the feelings were so strong.

The process of talking through it has released the obsession. I'm not thinking of Rachel all the time any more. I must admit that I am curious about what will happen the next time we encounter each

other... whether the feelings will resurface or not. At this point, I just don't know!

Why am I sharing all this with you? Because I think there are lessons in this, not only for me, but hopefully for you as well.

How can you tell the difference between love and longing?

- The person you long for is not available. They are married to another, not interested in you, not able to be intimate with you, etc.
- The person you long for is someone you don't know deeply, honestly, and openly (or you have not accepted who they honestly are.) You could be longing for a dream of who you want this person to be.
- The person you long for may have needs that your strengths can provide, or strengths that can provide for your needs.
- The person you long for may make you feel extraordinarily desirable.
- Longing is often for what one desires to experience with another, rather than the real experience.
- Longing is mood altering, and can be addictive. You always want more time with the person than you can really get.
- Longing is one-sided, not shared equally.
- Longing is other-person based. You give your power to them, rather than taking it for yourself.
- Longing is not rooted in reality.

If you are longing for someone, you probably don't yet know his or her true essence. By essence, I mean whom the person REALLY is, not just how they seem to you. You tend to remember only the good about your encounters with them, and not even be aware of their faults or difficult personality traits (if you are aware of them, you probably tend to discount or minimize them.)

If someone is not available to you, your mind will keep reminding you of them as a way to bring back the good feelings you had when the two of you were together. This accounts for the obsession.

Keep in mind that attraction can be based solely upon physical beauty, or upon other issues. In my case, Rachel was beautiful to my eyes, but the real hook for me was that she was very receptive to my positive and supportive male energy. That made it much more powerful for me than a purely physical attraction would have been.

### **Why stop longing?**

Because it wastes precious time and energy yearning for that which you cannot have. If you can stop longing, then you can devote that time and energy to making yourself into the person who can find and build a wonderful partnership with the Right Partner. If you make the choice to stop longing and look for love, you will begin to change your life for the better.

### **How can you stop longing?**

Well, one very big key is clear communication... WITH YOURSELF. And one of the easiest ways to do this is with a good friend. Preferably with the person you trust most in the world (not the person you're longing for!) Ask your friend if they will listen to you, and honestly mirror back to you what seems true and what does not. As you tell them about the person, and the relationship, they can help point out to you any inconsistencies and fantasies. You need to hear yourself expressing what's real and what's not, so talk about that.

Expressing your feelings openly and honestly will help your mind to see what is really happening, and to defuse the seductive power of the feelings. Often, getting to know someone better, seeing their real self (warts and all), will help you release the obsession as you become aware of the difference between the prince and the frog.

### **What if your partner is longing for someone else?**

This can be really difficult, especially if your partner mistakes longing for love. First of all, be calm... It's a natural thing that everyone feels now and then. Don't jump to conclusions. Don't blame or judge. Just listen as a true friend would. Look together at your relationship to see if there is a void that you can work on filling. Be supportive. Mirror back, as honestly as possible, the realities and the fantasies for your partner. What if someone is longing for you?

One other uncomfortable situation is when a person starts longing for you, and you don't believe that he or she knows you well enough yet. Or you don't feel a similar attraction. This is best handled by talking openly with the person who is longing for you. Tell them the absolute truth. Don't try to spare their feelings. The biggest gift they can get from you is understanding the fact that you don't feel the same way about them. Tell them the reality.

### **And what about Love?**

True love is about knowing someone completely and fully trusting them. True love is feeling love for yourself and feeling loved by your partner. True love is really knowing, accepting, acknowledging, and appreciating yourself and your partner. Because there's an EASE that comes with true love, often it's not as exciting or dangerous as longing. But it's much more secure, and more valuable in the long run.

### **Can Love turn to Longing?**

If you have felt very loved by your partner, but they decide to complete the relationship, it's very likely, and certainly understandable, that you will want them back. As they become unavailable, it's easy to become trapped thinking about them all the time, yearning for them, obsessing for them... longing for them. Will longing bring them back? Probably not. As a matter of fact, it will very likely push them further away. The sooner you can recognize the longing, and begin moving away from longing, the sooner you can get your own power back, and move on with your life.

## What have I learned?

I've learned that feelings of Attraction, Obsession, and Longing are natural parts of life. We all feel them occasionally. Being attracted to someone does not mean you love your partner any less. Identifying that you are in obsession or longing gives you the opportunity to see the reality, deal with it, and move on in more productive ways.

I feel like the luckiest man in the world. My dear Kathryn is generous, considerate, empathetic, and incredibly wise. Our love is mature. We are no longer in the "attraction" stage of our relationship. We have passed through "power struggle, " and "cooperation" and are now in "synergy." \*

We've spent the several years getting to know our own and each other's essence. We've both committed to supporting our own and each other's essence. We do our best to share "withholds" whenever we are aware of them. And we have a standing agreement that we will talk about any attractions before acting on them. I know and celebrate the value of this fabulous relationship. I wish all of you the joy and happiness that I live every day!

Love,  
William

\* If you'd like more information about the phases of relationship, please read the wonderful article "Five Stages of Partnership" by Layne and Paul Cutright.