

Integral Love Story: Love and the 8-fold Path That Led Me Here

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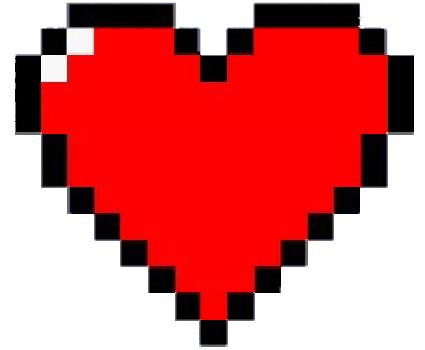
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I am in love. Humbly, overwhelmingly, completely.

This is new for me. After decades of desire, longing for that special one, dating amazing women, and learning from deep relationships, I have arrived at that mythic destination I often lost sight of, spent immeasurable effort unconsciously avoiding and almost lost all hope for the possibility of it coming into my life.

Love songs sound different, long term plans are springing to mind spontaneously, and my world is being rocked...daily.

Reflecting on this curious state I find myself in, I realize that it is no coincidence. I actively made this possible in my life with at least 8 important shifts. I share them here in hope that they might serve.



1. I started doing (and still do) my own “work”

I always thought that I just had not found the right person yet. I learned that I was not being the right person yet. I was not open to the love I thought I wanted in my life and not able to see it, even if it was right in front of me. My journey of opening to love required me to turn inward and do some work on myself.

What I mean by “work” is the act of getting on a path toward wholeness by taking a look at the darker, subtler, shadow parts of myself I had, as yet been unable or unwilling to see. These shadows, when unexamined, can have tremendous and subconscious power in our lives.

For me, this work started with meditation practice in Zen Buddhism. Zen meditation became foundational in my development and allowed me to stay present when intensity, fear, and other surprises arise. I also studied a lot of eastern, western and Integral philosophy giving me a solid framework to understand how the pieces of myself fit together as I uncovered the hidden ones.

The real work, the hard psychological stuff, started with a men’s personal development workshop that cracked my heart wide open. I revealed a pattern(shadow) that had been unconsciously running my life the whole time. I saw how I was subconsciously not opening my heart, not letting people really “in” for fear of being hurt.

With this realization, I dove in to self discovery with both feet, hoping to uncover more of my “shadow” and discover more of who I really am. I created The New Man podcast with Tripp Lanier and we talked to dozens of experts in the personal development field. I worked with a therapist, a somatic therapist (body and energy focused,) Life coaches, more relationship workshops. I also discovered the healing plant medicine ayahuasca and began an ongoing practice in sacred ceremony.

Through this work I uncovered all manner of shadow and ways shadow was running my life. Paramount in these discoveries was the revelation of a deeper fear of not being good enough. I have learned that I never want to feel like I am not good enough, and that is a deep underlying emotion that is with me often, if not all the time. Part of my path to greater wholeness is acceptance of “not good enough” and appreciation for the creative energy it can bring to my life.

I continually put the insights I received in this work to practice in all the relationships in my life...with mixed result, but always learning.

2. I cultivated “Presence”

Another side-effect of Zen meditation and personal work is an increased capacity for presence. What I mean by presence is an ability to be aware of what is arising, moment to moment in myself and others.

Since my first Authentic Man Program(AMP) course, I began practicing this kind of presence as much as I could. I found that this presence allowed for, even encouraged, greater connection between myself and others. It also helped me to notice my own internal states and quickly identify triggered behavior and opportunities for self-exploration. Presence became the foundational practice for all of this “work”

Presence was key.

3. I created a support network, and I use it.

Life is challenging. I was(am) not always on the top of my game. Things happened that were out of my control. Humble recognition of this was a great place for me to start. Bringing all of life’s challenges into one relationship, especially with my romantic partner, would place a heavy burden on that relationship, not to mention draining the sexual charge from it. I couldn’t have that 😊

I knew I needed support in my life so that I could show up fully, especially with a romantic partner.

Three years ago, out of curiosity for what was possible and a sense of need for it in my life, I created a men’s group full of amazing, challenging and supportive brothers.

This group was(is) pivotal in my ability to really show up for my life. My group challenged me to step up, held me accountable to my commitments, demanded clarity and offered gentle support. I can’t say enough about how important my men’s group has been along this path.

I also cultivated a network of therapists and healing professionals I could count on for any variety of challenge that arose and I called on them when the big stuff came up. Body work, acupuncture, therapy and coaching were all a phone call away.

This support network was and has been essential in keeping me on the path in a healthy way.

4. I got really clear on what I wanted.

I always had an image of love in my mind. I knew a few things I really felt were important to me in relationship. I knew what I stood for as a man, but I really wasn’t all that clear on what I wanted in a partner. I would just sort of go about my life and react to what showed up.

Essential on my path to love was my getting clear on what I wanted in a partner. I mean I got really clear. I am not sure where I picked up this exercise, but someone suggested I literally make a list of things I wanted in a partner. I did, and I got really specific. I am talking specific—down to hair color, what she smells like, how she handles conflict and what parts of my life I wanted to share with her.

From this place of clarity, I had options on what to include in my life and what to let go of. I could see the things that were core values of mine, essential things I wanted to share in partnership. I got really clear on what the green lights and red lights would look like and I started paying attention to that when I met new people. It wasn’t like I was checking boxes off a checklist, but more an orienting to where my core values would line up in relationship.

5. I cleared the decks.

I started to notice all the things in my life that were distracting me from the relationship I truly wanted. I got serious about making the real thing happen, and started feeling the pain of being out of integrity with this. It was time to clear the decks.

I had heartfelt conversations with the women in my life that I had close connection with, but knew were not the relationships I was looking for. One of these was intimate and sexual, others were emotional connections, flirtations, past relationships and friendships with grey areas.

I cleared up the grey areas and made real space in my life for what I truly wanted.

This was not easy. I had to face my integrity faults directly and clean them up. I sat with tears, both mine and theirs. My shadow triggers of “caretaker” and “not good enough” were pushed but I could see them arise and not be driven by them. My heart was wide open and I was clear in my intention.

In the end, in each case there has been mutual appreciation, gratitude for the connection we shared and open clarity about where the boundaries now stand.

In my personal experience this clearing made space for that real relationship to happen. The universe responded almost immediately. I met my love soon after.

6. I followed my heart.

“If there is something you want to do, do it.
If there is something you don’t want to do, don’t do it.”

These are the first two rules of an authentic relating game I learned from Robert MacNaughton after spending time with Decker Cunov and the Authentic World crew in San Francisco. These rules can make for very interesting social interactions but for me they point to something deeper than just wants.

Sometimes I am drawn to things or people without knowing why in any conscious way. I notice that when I let myself follow this “heard wisdom” I am usually led into amazing, rewarding, or at the very least educational experiences.

When I met the woman I came to love, I was following my heart. I took a risk, moved towards what I was drawn to and did not get into why. From this place, I was not really attached to any outcome, just curious and present. Our first encounter was easy, exciting and deep.

I trust that deep inner voice and am open to the mystery that it comes to from here. I give myself permission to follow this force without knowing why.

7. Open. Open. Open.

“The older I get the less I know”

Somebody wise, and probably older said that and I really identify with it lately.

Life is more complex and mysterious than I will ever comprehend. My illusion of control is so limited it would be laughable, if it weren’t so pervasive. If I was really in control, I would not have any desires at all. Isn’t it more fun this way?

I opened to the mystery. To the reality that I had no idea where that special person would walk into my life (or anything else for that matter). She could have been the barista at the coffee house near my office, or the bohemian folk singer who’s voice kept distracting me from my buddies political conversation.

I dropped my expectations and just opened up. I opened to everybody I could and tracked (with presence) how open I felt. It became an awareness practice for me and seemed to have a positive effect on everybody I encountered.

8. I am abandoning the maps...and the expectations.

Philosopher Ken Wilber, a master of mapping human consciousness is fond of saying "The map is not the territory." No one makes a better map than Wilber, so this advice seems especially poignant coming from him.

There are enough green lights in my current relationship that I am ready to go for it. I have no idea what this will look like and I am loving it. I am throwing away the maps and doing my best to drop expectations. I want to be completely present to what is arising in the moment.

Sure, a part of me is keeping an eye out for major red flags or deal breakers, but keep my focus on what is there, what is working. If something is not quite working, I set the intention to work together to get closer to synergy in that area. The love in my heart is literally creating a "container" for the relationship; a safe place, where anything can be explored and worked through.

Any map, no matter how detailed or high tech is only a semblance of the territory it describes. I am in the wilderness now and I am paying attention.

I may refer to the map occasionally if I need to get oriented, but I'll hold it lightly...very lightly.

That is the view from where I am right now. For me, this path has been incredibly rewarding and I wouldn't have had it any other way. I am on to the next adventure, deep authentic and committed relationship and look forward to the challenges and opportunities this next part of the journey will undoubtedly reveal.

It feels good to share this journal in service. I am totally open to feedback in the comments section below.

Sincerely,

Casey Capshaw

Resources:

Jun Po Dennis Kelley
Integral Life
Ayahuasca.com
The New Man Podcast
Mens Group 101
Megan Eggers
Authentic Man Program