In Relationships, Respect May Be Even More Crucial than Love | ...
ideas. They talked down to their children, as if their short stature meant that they were stupid, even though they often told their children how smart they were.

Of course, in any discussion like this, we are to some extent playing with semantics. You might want to define love in such a way that it includes respect, and includes the ability to let go, in which case I would have to agree with you that love trumps everything. But if we define the terms in such a way that love can exist without respect, and respect can exist without love, then I would say that bliss lies in the combination of the two, but if I had to settle for just one or the other I would choose respect.

It is useful, I think, to compare and contrast parent-child relationships with husband-wife relationships. In both of these, respect is absolutely essential for the relationship to work. Love without respect is dangerous; it can crush the other person, sometimes literally. To respect is to understand that the other person is not you, not an extension of you, not a reflection of you, not your toy, not your pet, not your product. In a relationship of respect, your task is to understand the other person as a unique individual and learn how to mesh your needs with his or hers and help that person achieve what he or she wants to achieve. Your task is not to control the other person or try to change him or her in a direction that you desire but he or she does not. I think this applies as much to parent-child relationships as to husband-wife relationships.

Love brings bliss to both types of relationships, but only if tempered by respect. Love adds joy and provides the emotional bonds that help carry the relationship through hard times. The attachment aspect of love is even more valuable in our relationship with our spouse than in that with our children, because marriage, at least in principle, is forever. My children have moved on, and I had to be prepared for that right from their beginning; but my wife and I will be together until death do us part. It is not unseemly to speak of my wife as my “better half,” but it would be unseemly to speak of my child in such terms. Our children do not and should not see themselves as part of us; their job is to move on, beyond us, into a future that we will never know. And if we see them as part of us, we will be torn apart when they leave.

Love is not all you need, nor all your wife or husband needs, and certainly not all your children need. We all need respect, especially from those who are closest and most intimately connected with us.

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And now, what are your responses to this little essay? What have been your family experiences with love, or respect, or the absence of one or the other? If you had to choose just one or the other, which would you choose; or does the the question even make sense? I’ve read elsewhere of studies indicating that women want love more than respect and men want respect more than love. It fits an old stereotype, but I find it hard to believe. It seems to me that women, even more than men, have suffered when love directed toward them is not accompanied by respect. This blog is a forum for discussion, and your views and knowledge are valued and taken seriously, by me and by other readers.

As always, I prefer if you post your comments and questions here rather than send them to me by private email. By putting them here, you share with other readers, not just with me. I read all comments and try to respond to all serious questions. Of course, if you have something to say that truly applies only to you and me, then send me an email.
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