





*John Bradshaw*

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# CREATING LOVE

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*The Next Great Stage of Growth*



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CREATING LOVE

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# CREATING LOVE

ALSO BY JOHN BRADSHAW

HOMEcomings

*Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child*

HEALING THE SHAME THAT BINDS YOU

BRADSHAW ON: THE FAMILY

To my mother, Norma, whose soul shines brightly through it all.  
Thank you for my life.



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I thank the late Ronald Laing for his penetrating analysis of modern patriarchal culture and for his term *mystification*.

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I'm especially thankful for all the courageous people who have confronted patriarchy by battling for equality and fighting for the rights of people of color, women, children, gays, and lesbians.

Many more sources are cited in the text and bibliography.

While I stand on the shoulders of giants, I take responsibility for my interpretations of all the sources I have mentioned.

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My son, John, who challenges me to love soulfully.

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## PROLOGUE

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In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone.

—SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

Wanting to please my lady friend was the only reason I bought two ridiculously expensive tickets to see *Miss Saigon*. I am not fond of serious musicals—and *Miss Saigon* was purported to be a tearjerker. I have had enough sadness in my life. I do a lot of work helping folks grieve their unresolved childhood pain. I hate sad shows, especially on my vacation.

But my lady wanted to go, so here I was in the theater, trying to make the best of it. One thing for sure, I was not going to cry!

The story is an adaptation of *Madama Butterfly*, set during the war in Vietnam. In the first act, a Vietnamese bar girl falls in love with a GI. They get married and vow eternal love. He is forced to leave her but he promises to return from the States when the war is over. She is simple, innocent, and endearing. Her love is intense and unconditional. Unknown to him, she bears their child, a boy. She hides and fiercely protects the child while she endures a dehumanizing life in a brothel.

At the intermission, I started fantasizing about the sad stuff that might be coming. I imagined Miss Saigon dying as she gives up her child to Communist authorities. I can handle that, I thought! I fantasized the GI coming back for her and getting killed. I can handle that too! Nothing could get to me tonight.

The second act introduces an agency devoted to finding the GIs who fathered children by Vietnamese mothers. As the story unfolds, our GI has married again. Although he dreams of Miss Saigon, he is basically happy. Then the agency finds him. He must tell his wife about Miss Saigon and the child. He and his wife go to Vietnam in



order to handle the matter honorably. In a cross up, Miss Saigon meets the GI's wife. She is crushed beyond words. (*I'm losing it! Tears are running down my cheeks.*) Miss Saigon begs the new wife to take the child and give him the life she cannot give him. (*Sobs! I am now trying to hold back audible sobs.*)

In the last scene, Miss Saigon dresses her son (the most adorable child you've ever seen), preparing him to be given to his father and stepmother. In the tenderest of moments she kisses her son and tells him that he will understand later and asks that he not forget her. (I have given way to unobstructed abdominal sobbing.) The child walks out; his father and stepmother open their arms to him. Miss Saigon disappears behind the curtain. Bang! A gunshot is fired. She has killed herself; the GI rushes in and holds her, moaning his lamentations.

The entire audience is crying profusely. I am a mess. I am thinking that I am glad she killed herself. I could not have handled her standing there in her poverty and degradation while her husband walks away with their child. Her suicide somehow eases the pain.

Suddenly, I'm moving into my own story of love and hate, my parents' broken marriage, my childhood pain. I am identifying with the innocent child caught in the fateful vagaries of his parents' love. I think of my own passionate loves—the woman I loved and left, *the one who left me. Especially the one who left me!* I remember *that* pain. It was like someone had hammered a huge iron nail in the middle of my chest. Just for a moment I feel the traumatic shortness of breath I felt during my rejection. I remember how I obsessed about her, how I cried, raged, felt incredible remorse.

I think of my mother. How at twenty-six she was raising three children all alone. She labored for a pittance to support us. She is a devout Catholic. Her faith would not allow her to remarry. From the time my dad left her, she never touched another man. What an incredible faith! What commitment to one's beliefs.

My mother is human. She had her unconscious rage over all of this. I have often written off her love as being severely codependent. But tonight I long to hold her and tell her I love her. Tonight I want her to know that I honor the tragic and heroic sense of her life. Tonight I see its terrible dailiness and seeming triviality redeemed by the courage and passionate tenacity of her commitment to her children.

The question I ask myself as I dry my eyes is, what is this mysterious power of love and why can it be so overwhelming? Is a mother's love innate? If so, why do some mothers leave their children on someone's doorstep, or beat their children to death, or sell them



into prostitution? Is giving up one's life for another always an act of love? Could it be an act of selfishness—a way of being elevated to the grandiose heights of saintliness in order to *feel* lovable?

How can we know the difference? Does love always have to be self-sacrificing and painful in order to be considered love? Are there different kinds of love? Do we know how to love naturally, or is love learned? What does it mean to love God? How do we know that God loves us?

Why do relationships that begin in ecstasy often end in hatred and bitter divorce? How can an evening, a vacation, start out so wonderful and end in anger and isolation?

Why are so many of us at times completely baffled by a relationship? How can we think we know someone so well and admit in the end that we hardly knew that person at all? Why do so few seem to find the love we all say we want more than anything else? Why do many people who work diligently and strenuously to gain wholeness and balance still feel so frustrated about having a fulfilling relationship? Why have many people given up on love, saying that it's only for the lucky or that it's just not worth the struggle?

Just one month after that night at *Miss Saigon*, I was sitting miserably in a hotel room in Philadelphia. I had just finished putting on a two-day inner child workshop. I had walked out amid a standing ovation and signed autographs in the elevator going to my room. The cleaning lady had left her copy of *Homecoming* to be autographed. As I closed the door, I felt the pervasive aloneness of the room. I thought to myself how exciting this used to be in the early days of 1985. This was right after the PBS series *On the Family* was starting to attract interest. Requests for talks and workshops were coming in from all over the country. I started traveling everywhere. People recognized me in airports. I was drunk with the excitement of it all.

But now, in my hotel room in Philadelphia, I was faced with the fact that my lady friend had told me she was losing herself in our relationship. She told me she had to take care of her own life and her own needs. I admired her for that. *But she was leaving me!!*

I loved to call her at night when I was on the road. It was so wonderful to have *one special person that you matter to more than anything*. And to have a person that matters to you more than anything. I realized that I was letting a whole lot of things matter to me more than her. I was falling back into my old patterns of power and control.

I thought I had changed these ways of false loving. At forty-two



I had awakened to the fact that I was failing at love. I was married then. I had a son and a stepdaughter.

One day, after I had yelled at my stepdaughter about her failure to do her chores, she confronted me with my selfishness and my ways of manipulation. She really got my attention. Somehow her courage and honesty forced me to face up to myself. At that point I had been sober in a 12-step program for twelve years. I thought I was doing just great because I no longer addictively used chemicals. I felt entitled to everyone's love and respect because I had stopped my crazy behavior. At times I also felt deeply depressed and even wondered whether life was really worthwhile.

My stepdaughter's confrontation led me to begin what I now see as the second stage of my recovery work.

In my book *Homecoming* I called this stage "original pain work." It involved feeling the feelings I had avoided since childhood—the feelings of pain, sorrow, shame, and rage. Doing this work helped me to love and accept *myself* more fully. I embraced myself in the image of a wounded little boy. By so doing I embraced my rejected and disowned feelings, needs, and wants. This was essential for me because I did not know what I actually felt, needed, or wanted at any given moment. This was one reason I *couldn't really have an intimate relationship* with anyone else.

My original pain work culminated in a deeper and more loving relationship with myself. But it left me with a great uncertainty about how to be intimate and loving with others. I recognized that every relationship I had was characterized by control and emotional repression. I had to admit that *even after years of recovery and working on myself I still felt a baffling despair about love and fulfillment*.

The reclaiming of my inner child was the *beginning* of learning to love, not the *end*.

I found that many others were in the same quandary. At my workshops, people flooded me with questions and statements like:

- What does it take to have a good relationship?
- After all the changes I've made, how come my marriage is still a mess?
- I've left my rigid religious upbringing and now I'm left with nothing. How do I find my Higher Power?
- I'm getting my own life together, but my kids are totally screwed up.



- My job is driving me crazy. I'm in recovery, but my boss isn't. He shames me every day.

The list could go on. The unsolved mystery in recovery was about loving relationships. This book is the fruit of my own struggle with these issues.

As I searched for an answer, I came across three books that provided key pieces of the puzzle I was trying to solve. The first, written by psychiatrist Scott Peck, had the very fitting title *The Road Less Traveled*. I learned two important things in Peck's book that confronted my family of origin teachings. I learned that love cannot happen unless I am willing to commit myself to making it happen. And I learned that love is a process that requires hard work and courage.

This may not be news to you, but it was revolutionary to me. I was brought up to believe that love is rooted in blood relationships. You naturally loved anyone in your family. Love was not a choice. The love I learned about was bound by duty and obligation. You could never *not* love your parents or relatives, and loving them meant you couldn't ever disagree with them or want something they disapproved of.

To question any of these teachings was to risk being labeled a "black sheep" or just plain crazy. To actually go against them was to feel *cellular guilt*, the price of breaking a sacred promise you never knew you made.

At the same time, love was supposed to be easy. When you grew up and the time was right, the "right person" would come along. You would recognize this person immediately. You would fall in love and naturally know what to do to develop that love.

I'm thankful to Scott Peck for challenging these notions of love, but I do not blame my family for passing them on.

My family taught me our culture's rules and beliefs about love. Over the last few years, it has become obvious to me that everyone I knew growing up was either raised by parents who followed these cultural rules or by parents who were reacting against them. In this book, I will have much more to say than I have in the past about the culture that shaped our families. I will suggest that these cultural rules created a deficient form of love, and that even *with the best intentions* our parents often confused love with what we would now call abuse.

I ultimately named this defective love *mystification*. I took this



word from one of my college heroes, the existential psychiatrist Ronald Laing. Laing spent his life exposing the destructive identity confusion that results when we become acceptable to others only by denying our own truth. He called this identity confusion *mystification*.

As I was developing my notion of mystification, another important book came to me in manuscript before publication. Called *Trances People Live*, by Stephen Wolinsky, it helped me understand exactly how mystification occurs and why it is so powerful. Wolinsky's book is a fascinating synthesis of modern hypnotherapy with the insights of Eastern philosophy. It shows how we create *protective trance states* in response to painful experiences in childhood, and how we later *continue to use* these trances to protect us even when they are no longer necessary. "Trance" is a wonderful way to describe the frozen and out-of-touch state of mystified love. There is also a hopeful element in Wolinsky's thesis. If we actually created our own trances in childhood—even if we have no memory of doing so—we can learn to break through our trances as adults. In other words, we can demystify ourselves.

I still needed a way to describe the state of being that fosters healthy love. I first thought of calling healthy love relationships "realistic" in order to contrast them with mystified relationships. That didn't seem to work. Somehow being "realistic" has the connotation for me of life without magic or passion. I didn't want a love like that.

One day I received another manuscript entitled *Care of the Soul* by Thomas Moore. Moore has a background similar to mine, and he spoke deeply to me. His book outlined a new approach for bringing depth and value into ordinary life. He called this approach the restoration of *soulfulness*. Here was the word I was after!

As it developed, my notion of soulfulness became quite different from Moore's, but I'm very grateful to him for giving me a way to talk about healthy human love. My notion of soulful love flows from the inborn potential of all human children. Children are by nature wonder-ful—filled with wonder and curiosity. This wonder and curiosity move them to explore and investigate all that is in their field of perception. They do this exploring with great courage, resiliency, and imagination. These traits of wonder, joy, curiosity, exploration, exuberance, courage, imagination, and resiliency are often thought of as childish, to be given up as we become rational and mature adults. But in fact they are basic human traits and form the core of soulfulness. And soulfulness is the source of genuine and abiding human love.



\* \* \*

The Book of Genesis describes the fall of humankind in terms of four broken relationships. The story tells us that Adam and Eve, who symbolize our first parents, were given all the resources they needed to live a blissful life in Eden. They were at one with God, with themselves, with each other, and with all of creation. This joyful state of bliss had one restriction: They were not to “eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Adam and Eve violated this limit, and their fall severed their relationship with God, with self, with each other, and with the world. Conflict, blame, and punishment were born. Childbearing became torment; work became an endless daily struggle. And their children inherited their pain.

This story, like all great theological myths, must be personalized. The Fall takes place psychologically the moment we are born. Our state of wholeness does not last. The more wounded our parents, the greater the possibility we will grow up mystified. This mystification extends to all the relationships in our lives.

The Genesis story also tells me that human relations will always be imperfect, an admixture of soulfulness and mystification. But we can grow in soulfulness, we can become more whole, and we can create a more human and fulfilling love in all our relationships.

In what follows I will look at the creation of love in the four areas described by Genesis:

- I. Your relationship with a higher power—beginning with parent-child relationships and extending to God as you understand God.
- II. Your relationship with yourself. As you looked into your source-figures’ faces, you were psychologically born. Your original oneness with yourself was either soulfully mirrored and validated or rejected and invalidated. If your source relationships were soulful, your relationship with yourself became soulful. If your primary caretakers were wounded adult children acting out of their trancelike mystification, your relationship with yourself became mystified.
- III. Your relationships with lovers, friends, and, if you’ve been married, your spouse or ex-spouse. If your self-relationship is mystified, your loves, marriage, and friendships will be based on mystified love. If your self-relationship is soulful, you can create soulful love relationships with friends, lovers, and spouse.

IV. Your place in the world. Our life work can be mystified or soulful, and so can our relationship to the earth itself.

As you read the following pages, I hope I can stir you to your own soulful depth. Be aware that you are free. Choose to love yourself. You may struggle with mystified love. I certainly do. But the trance you created saved your most vulnerable self from being violated. Love yourself for creating your trance. Love yourself for being willing to see how you created it and how you may still be creating it. You can stop doing it now. The danger has passed. You saved a child from dying. You saved yourself!

Love yourself now for the hope you have. You wouldn't be working on yourself if you didn't have hope.

# CREATING LOVE