

Ep #52: Unconditional Love



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With Your Host

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One of the most important things I can share with you, my darling, is the power of unconditional love for yourself and all the people in your life. Now, unconditional love doesn't mean self-sacrifice, or condoning, or approving of behaviors or beliefs that are in line with your own. Unconditional love is a gift you give yourself on the daily because it feels so amazing to feel love and to project it out into the universe. Ready to hear all about it? Keep listening. It's going to be a good one.

You're listening to *Feminist Wellness*, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health. Here's your host, nurse practitioner, functional medicine expert, herbalist, and life coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. I am really looking forward to the next couple of weeks. I have a lot of really sweet dates planned with beloved friends. I'm going to do yoga with my friend Andrea. She's @somaticwitch on the Instagram, and she's a treasure trove of brilliance.

I'm going to Rhode Island, the greatest state in the union, for a couple of days to help my folks out with something, and I'm going to see my friends Alice, and Carla, and Costa, and Eli, and I'm just excited. I love my life, and I love my friends, and I love love, which is why we are doing this we series here this month of February all about love.

So, let's pause and define terms. Love is a feeling, the movement of energy, of vibration in your body. Love is a felt sensation. Each of us has our own understanding of what love looks and feels like that comes generally from early childhood. Our autonomic nervous systems get established ages 0 to 3 or so, and so too our root chakras where our sense of safety and stability reside. That takes form and shape ages 0 to around

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7, and our attachment styles, which I'll be doing a show about soon enough, also tend to form in childhood, early adolescence.

So, for many of us, our ideas of what love, loving, and being loved looks and feels like comes from those early childhood experiences, and the thought stories we tell about love now as adults. For example, I grew up with a lot of codependency stories and thought that trying to manage other people's lives for them, doing things for them that they could do for themselves, putting myself last, trying to keep others happy instead of making myself happy, that these were always of showing love.

I am so happy, overjoyed really, to have learned other ways to love, show love, and feel love. What I'm excited to share with you today is that we don't love people because of what they do or don't do for us. Whether they meet some certain criteria of lovability, and not because of their actions either. Not because they're taller, short, smarter, witty. Not because they do or don't take out the garbage, or get you flowers, or whatever else may be on your list.

We love people, places, and things because of our thoughts about them, which create that feeling of safety and security in your body. That feels like love. It's never a person's actions or inactions that lead you to love them. It's your stories about what their behavior means to you.

If you think that someone bringing you flowers, let's stick with that one, is a love worthy act, you'll feel love. If you have allergies, or don't like the carbon footprint, or human cost of the current flower trade, well, then you are unlikely to feel more love for someone because they bring or send you flowers.

As in the previous few episodes all about self-love, what you are looking for, you'll find. If you're looking for reasons to love yourself or others, you'll find them, and vice versa. If you decide that someone is annoying, or

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frustrating, or whatever, if those are your thoughts about them, then everything they do will continue to grate on you, annoying you, and ruining your morning because of your thoughts that that person is terrible.

When thinking about how different experiences and acts that one might think is loving and one might think is not, it brings up an example from my own life. So, a decade ago. What is time anyway? Some years ago, I dated someone whose love language was giving gifts. While sure, I love getting a gift, my thought habit about what makes me love, my love language as it were, and we can problematize that and look at it through the thought work protocol, but let's not. Just stay with me for a second. Let's keep this simple and clear.

So, my historical love language as it were, has been acts of service. For example, when we were in Tulum the other weekend, my friend Elia stayed at our apartment. Elia is oh, my goodness, one of the most thoughtful and amazing humans and understands that my thoughts about acts of service make me feel incredibly loved.

So, they took out all the recycling, they took out the compost, they scrubbed the sink. They left the house spotless, and they left flowers. So, this ex of mine that I was talking about didn't quite get it and was always bringing home very thoughtful gifts, and I could appreciate them. I'm not a jerk you all, but they didn't make me feel more love because I wasn't thinking about those actions as love actions.

So, I could feel these multiple emotions at once. Like love in general for this human, annoyance that certain tasks weren't getting done, and neutral about the gifts. Whereas someone else for whom gifts equal love could be like, "Wow, I feel so much love right now because you brought me home this amazing garlic press."

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I will say, a decade later, I totally use that garlic press. It's actually a really great machine. Thank you so much for that. Also, a decade later, I would pick different thoughts about the tasks and the gifts, and that's okay. Right?

So, I was where I was in my growth a decade ago. This human would bring home gifts and wouldn't do the task that I, in my mind, associate with love. Acts of service, taking out the garbage, emptying the dishwasher. So, I didn't feel love with the gifts, but did feel love when Elia took the garbage out. Listen, I can love and accept past me for being where she was, and being a little harsh about this, and I can acknowledge that I would do it differently now without beating myself up about it.

I digress, but come on. What's new? Right? Okay. Unconditional love. Let's refocus here. Kittens. So, kittens. Well, that's a good segue. Let's think about someone you love who hasn't done a darn thing for you in the world. Yes, I'm thinking about kittens, or puppies, or a newborn human. Picture one of those creatures, one of those little animals.

What did that animal, that human, that baby of another animal species, what did they do to earn your love, to prove themselves lovable? Literally nothing, right? They actually probably peed on you, or barfed on your shoulder, or pooped in your shoe, and yet you and I feel so much love for them. You feel that love because you are thinking, "I love you, tiny creature."

I also find myself many times a day saying how much I love an inanimate object that has often literally not done anything for me, like my crystals. I guess they kind of do a lot for me, don't they? Okay. A cup of tea, and that's delicious, but I think it's delicious, which is why I love it. I'm having a thought, "Oh, this tea is delicious." Or the ocean. I love the ocean.

I can feel a swell of love in my heart for these beings and these things because I'm having the thought that they are lovable. So, I feel that love in

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every cell of my body. When it feels hard to love someone, when they constantly get under your skin as it were, when you keep having the same repeated judgmental thoughts about someone or decide that you want to stop loving them because of an action or a statement of theirs. All of that is coming from a cognitive fallacy, an incorrect understanding about what love is and what it means to love someone.

Your love does benefit the world, the universe, all of humanity, and acting in a loving way towards someone is a gift. Absolutely. But thinking someone has to earn or deserve your love. My sweet one, that is wrong thinking. It doesn't serve you because you loving someone has nothing to do with that, but rather with your own desire to feel love for your own benefit in your mind, body, and spirit. Not for that.

So, why choose love? Why bother? Well, the number one reason is because love feels amazing. Love is one of the most magnificent emotions any of us can feel. Take a little breath. Put a hand on your heart and think about someone or something you love. A friend, a partner, a family member, a baby penguin you saw on the internet.

Notice what happens in your body. Pretty amazing, right? I feel like this warmth in my chest, this openness in my throat, my head feels light. Love feels great. In your relationships, literally all of them, that feeling of love is always available to you. Truly. You can love the post office worker, the barista you don't know, the person next to you on the elliptical at the gym, someone who did something hurtful in your past.

So, often we decide not to feel that wellspring of love and compassion that is within us, and my darling, it just doesn't make any sense to me anymore. I used to walk around the world quite grumpy, which may feel hard to believe if you know me now. I was very protective, very guarded.

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I had been through a lot, and I was expecting the world to do me wrong. Since I've realized that I have the choice to always feel love, well, why would I not want to feel love towards someone or something? Why would I deny myself that delicious feeling that's always possible?

I want to feel love always, even and maybe especially for folks I've had challenging or painful experiences with in the past. I know this is challenging. I get it. Just keep breathing, keep listening. We'll speak in a minute to the most common objections I hear to this simple paradigm, this concept of being a vessel of love for all.

First, let me do what I do. Going to get all nerdy up in here. All right, nerd alert, my darlings. We are most able to feel love for ourselves and others when our nervous systems are in the ventral vagal state. So, this is part of the parasympathetic system and the ventral vagus nerve runs along the front of our mammalian bodies and is always looking and listening for safety.

When we get those signs of safety we're on the lookout for, we relax. We're able to let down our defenses and to allow for connection with self and others, to open up our hearts. Think for a moment about when you're telling a judgmental, blaming, or shaming story about someone else, complaining about someone using adjectives that we might call negative.

When you're telling a story from a place of emotional childhood, Episode 23, such as "He's a jerk. Oh, she ruined everything. I would be X if only they hadn't done Y to me. I'm not feeling love for her because of what she said yesterday," or, "Yeah, I'm not feeling love for him because he doesn't do his chores. I'm always cleaning up after him."

Take a moment and think about someone in your own life you feel challenged to love. Just to say it, we're only going to stay here for a

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moment, nothing to worry about. So, take a deep breath, feel into it. Check in with your shoulders, your jaw, your facial muscles, your belly.

Are you tightened up when you think these thoughts? Likely. Maybe not even in a super obvious way. Maybe in a more subtle or gentle way. Your body is likely going into some tension when you think these kinds of thoughts. Just clue into it. Just check in. Scan your body. Maybe start at your little toes and work your way up and see what you find. You probably don't feel all relaxed, and calm, easy, peaceful, emotionally generous.

When you're thinking thoughts about someone that would generally be called negative, or judgmental, or not love thoughts. Here, I'll try one on. Let's go with, "He's a bad person, and I could never feel love towards him because of what he did. Okay. So, I'm breathing, and I'm feeling it, feeling into my body. My eyes are closed. Oh, okay. So, that makes my throat chakra. That makes it clench right up. My chest feels really constricted and kind of hot, and heavy, and yucky.

Okay. If I keep breathing with it, keep repeating that thought and staying with it, my belly starts to feel a little queasy and kind of quivery. Oh, my. That doesn't feel good at all. Okay, I'm going to literally stand up and shake my little body. That felt yucky.

My beautiful nerds, it's amazing. This bi-directional process that happens with our thoughts, and our bodies, our neurological state. They feed into each other, and understanding this, we can use one to support and shift the other. See, it's hard to feel love when your thoughts aren't loving, and when you're scared, or defensive, or protective, it's hard to feel love or to think loving thoughts as well. Ruminating on those upsetting thoughts keeps you in that neurological state, dorsal vagal shutdown, or sympathetic fight or flight.

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The states where your digestion hormone, the immune system, the thyroid, mood aren't doing the tasks you want them to do. The thriving tasks, not just the surviving tasks. So, we can shift our neurological state to shift our story, and then we can shift the story to shift our sensations, our emotions, our feelings, all for the benefit of your perfect physical health and mental wellness.

Isn't that so amazing? Choosing love benefits you on all planes, mind, body, and spirit. There's actually quite a bit of science, like literature and evidence, that shows that a loving kindness meditation practice supports improvements in blood pressure, pulse rate, in all of these different markers of human wellness. How mind blowing is that? What a gift.

Okay, my darlings. Let's shift our state. All together, close your beautiful eyes if it's safe to do so, and take a slow, deep belly breath. I want to encourage you to actually let your belly get bigger and smaller with your breath because that starts to engage the ventral vagal system. All right. So, in and out with a sigh. One more in and out.

Okay, my sweet one. Let's body scan. Where are those shoulders at? Is your jaw still clenched like a snapping turtle? If so, no worries. I'll keep talking. You keep breathing nice and deep and slow into your belly. All is well. Let's do one more step to reset.

Put a hand on your heart and think of someone, or something, or somewhere that you unequivocally and unconditionally love. Picture that loved thing or person and let the feeling of love that comes from thinking about it flood your perfect body. Isn't that lovely? Stay with that love thought and love feeling as long as you'd like. Remember, it's just a deep breath and a thought away, my beautiful one.

As you just experienced through that exercise, you, yes, you, get to feel love whenever you want to. Nothing that anyone does or doesn't do can

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ever deny you that feeling, which is phenomenal news. You get to choose how you feel about other people. That is, you never have to feel disappointment, anger, frustration.

Those are optional feelings and the result of your own powerful thoughts. They will likely come up, certainly, you're a human, and you get to feel them because that's what we do in this family. We feel all the feels, pushing none away. You get to feel them, and then decide if you want to keep feeling them. You get to decide if they serve you. If given a choice, most of us would choose to feel love towards someone over any other emotion. Yet, so often, we don't consciously choose to feel love.

We allow our habitual thoughts to go to those judgmental states about how others have wronged or failed us, and to stay in the feelings those thoughts provoke. See, every time you dislike someone, you grump at or about them, we are choosing that feeling, and it doesn't feel good, and it's a choice. Your brain may be saying it isn't, that their actions make them someone you cannot feel love or compassion for. I just don't agree with that because I want to feel amazing.

When I step back and recognize that I never have to have judgmental or negative thoughts about someone, that is profoundly empowering. That is the work of managing your mind, recognizing that you do always have a choice in the thoughts you're going to think on repeat and create the way you feel.

As always, feminism first, which means that I honor and respect you and your choices for your own life. I'm not here to convince you of a darn thing. I'm just sharing my opinion. If you want to feel hate, or anger, or disappointment, or frustration towards someone instead of love and compassion, then you go right on ahead, my darling. Do it. See how it feels.

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Listen, we're all in different stages of our processing, of our healing, and if you still feel anger at someone for something from the past, you get to feel it for as long as you want to. When you want to choose love, you get to do that. Remember, you can feel them both at once.

You can say, "I choose to love the human who is this human while still having anger about their actions." As you grow, and heal, and change, you can watch and see how that balance shifts. It's been amazing in my life. While it's always available to you to choose love, or hate, or anger, your choice not to feel love is only hurting you.

A lot of us think that when we love someone, it somehow benefits that person directly. Like you're giving a gift to someone who's bad or doesn't deserve it, and that will somehow take something away from you. We then get locked into the idea that we can't love that person because of what they did. They don't deserve that from us. But we don't love other people for them. We do it because it's healing, and beautiful, and amazing for our own selves and for the collective unconscious.

I don't feel love for my exes for their benefit. I do it for mine. They're off wherever they are living their own lives. They may never think of me, or they may think of me in a negative light, or they may still be behind for me. All of that is okay.

When they come to mind for me, I choose to think loving thoughts because why not? I can name and own my part in the mutual harms that may have occurred in our relationship. Absolutely. That's emotional adulthood, and I'm not happy. I'm not going to pretend I'm happy or positive vibes only kind of energy about an ex of mine who cheated on me about, when was that, like 473 years ago.

I'm not happy, and I'm not going to pretend to be that another was super controlling and borderline abusive. What does that even mean? Or that I

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dated an alcoholic who did really objectively dangerous and scary things. I don't lie to myself. So, I'm not like, "That was perfect, and amazing, and great, and I loved it all." But I'm also not out here to stay mad about it. I can and have done the work to heal from those relationships and their endings, and it's a process, not a one and done.

I can recognize that those relationships aren't the right one for me now but served me that. That they were then painful and intense lessons, and for that, I can choose to not look back with rancor, or anger, or anything other than love for myself, myself and that other human, that person I dated, who was like 22, or 26, or 30. I can hold love in my heart for my ex's who I maybe haven't even had contact with since like high school or for like 10 or 20 years, and I do that.

I choose love because I want to feel love in my life today. By doing so, I can repair it, those previously hurt parts of myself today, in the present moment, the only moment that's real and tangible. Every time I choose love in my life, I choose to feel that, that is actively healing and a repairing myself.

I want to pivot here to talk about an objection. I often hear to this idea of loving all the world, and it's based in scarcity thinking versus abundance. A lot of our suffering comes from denying ourselves the feeling of love because we're afraid of losing it. Afraid the other person will leave us, cheat on us, break up with us, not be our friend or our lover anymore, that they'll die, or fire me, or whatever your fear is, often some form of abandonment.

I want to say there is unlimited love to go around, and love is never lost. Someone can break up with you, and you can still love them. Have you ever felt that one? Oh, I sure have. Someone can die, and you can still love them. I've definitely felt that one both personally and as a former hospice nurse. Gosh, I really do love so many of the people that died while I worked in the Zen Hospice.

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Yeah, powerful to love people knowing like they're literally fixing to die in the next days, or weeks, or months, but those relationships would have been so different had I not just chosen to unconditionally love them. Right? Had I said, "I'm not going to give this person my full love because this is a hospice, and they're here to die."

Gosh, I feel like that's the literal opposite of what hospice provides, and I loved working hospice because yes, my job was to provide medical care and dole out morphine, etc. My main job was literally to love these people, and I love feeling love, so it was a pretty great job for me.

Okay, back to scarcity thinking. So, trying not to love someone, not allowing yourself to fully feel love for another person because you want to somehow protect yourself or not put your heart at risk, it doesn't serve you because you can always choose to feel love. Your feeling love for another person has nothing to do with them and their choices with whether they love you back or not. How relieving is that?

I find this whole concept to be a huge exhale. No one has to prove their love to me. I just get to choose to love them. Likewise, I never have to prove myself worthy of anyone else's love. I just get to be my weird, little, witchy, nerd, Leo self, and if someone wants to choose to love me, then that's a great. While also recognizing that they're loving their own thoughts about me.

If someone wants to choose a different thought about me to not like or love me, then that's theirs to think and feel. It literally does nothing to me because I'm not thinking or feeling it. They are. Another common objection I hear is this, "They hurt me, so I can't love them," or, "They have political thoughts or stances that I find repulsive. They're a terrible person. I can't love them," and other thoughts in the same vein.

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I want to be so clear here before I say anything else, that loving someone, holding love for another human being because they are a human part of this universe, is not the same as condoning their statements, actions, views, etc. It's not aligning yourself with them in those ways. Let me say clearly, I'm not ever saying that abuse, hatred, violence are okay, or that you need to love someone's choices to be abusive, or violent, or hateful.

Oh, Dios Santo. Nope. Not at all. Never. I'm really just talking about choosing to love the human themselves. This is about a Metta practice, the Buddhist practice of loving kindness, choosing to love all the world because love is possible in your heart. That's the work here, and that's the invitation.

By doing so, by feeling more love for yourself in the world, you're reparenting, nourishing, nurturing the parts of you that were once hurt, and you're rewriting that hurtness in your life. The lens of love can be a powerful healing lens, and the more love you put out, the more you can see yourself loving someone else because you are a vessel of love, not because of them. Then it is more evident to your own mind that you too are inherently lovable just because you exist.

Again, you don't have to share time or space with anyone. You can keep your distance, set healthy boundaries, etc., and you can choose to love them, and love feels better than anger or hate. I'm reminded of the Maya Angelou quote, "Hate. It has caused a lot of problems in the world but has not solved one yet."

Again, if anger or whatever not love feeling is working for you, and it truly in a real way feels good in your body, go for it. But for many of us, anger and not love is a dead end thought and feeling that keeps us stuck operating from a place and an energy that doesn't feel good, that doesn't serve us, that leads us into burnout. From being able to continue to be part of the activism, or the education, or the other whatever work motivates and drives

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you in this world. Fueling it with something other than love, maybe fuel that's not sustainable, and to repeat.

Loving someone doesn't mean you condone or support their beliefs, or behaviors, or pretend that challenging things didn't happen. Not at all. Because it's not loving to lie to yourself or others. It does mean that you're choosing not to spend your time and energy hating them, being angry at them, or ruminating about what a jerk they are because that only harms you. Other people don't feel your feelings. So, your anger and hatred have no impact on them, but they do impact you, and it's you I want you to focus on first, my darling.

Okay, my angels. I hope this is helpful for you. Feeling love feels so amazing, and I want that for you. Your homework, my nerdlet, is to notice your language, your thoughts about the challenging people in your life, and the feeling those thoughts create in your body. While you're working on that, I'll remind you that we must attend to both body and mind together.

So, before you start jumping to trying to think a new loving thought, hold space for the hurt or the annoyance, get clear on why you want to choose unconditional love. My reason is because it feels amazing. Also, remember that just thinking the new thought, like trying to jump to that before really processing the hurt, the anger, the sorrow through your body, is a form of spiritual and emotional bypassing, and I'm never here for that either.

Feel your feels, babe. Feel them all the way through, and before you try to pick that new thought, engage and recruit your nervous system to support your goal of feeling, connection and peace in your body. So, before you start to work on your thoughts to bring more love in, do a little body scan, orient yourself to your surroundings and yourself, and find your way into that ventral vagal place, and that place of feeling safe and secure with yourself. Connect with a loved one or a pet, if that helps.

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Because I love you, I made you a present. So, this is like I'm doing something new, and I'm really excited about it. I love music, and I have an upcoming day-long breathwork workshop from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on February 22nd, and so I spent hours and hours making this amazing playlist for the day, and it's so much fun. So, I made one for you.

I did some thinking about the ventral vagal system and what it might feel like to connect with and engage with it through music. I've been paying a lot of attention to when I feel that safe and secure connected feeling in my body and the songs that I'm listening to at the time. So, I'll put a link in the show notes so you can sign up, and we'll email that to you. Or if you'd rather just hop onto your little email app. I'm really not like a million years old, you guys. I don't know why I say things like hop on your email app, but whatever, brains are hilarious, and I love my ridiculous brain.

Send me an email. That's what I meant to say.

Podcast@VictoriaAlbina.com, and we'll reply with a little playlist for you to use during your meditations, during your daily thought work, your future self-planning, which oh, I talked about that a hundred years ago, Episode 9, or anytime you want or need a little extra ventral vagal support.

All right. I hope you enjoy it. Will you send me an email or DM and let me know because I'm really excited? Yeah, I love giving you all presents. All right, darling. In closing, love is always yours to choose, and love feels so good. It's so much better for me than rolling around in disappointment, aggravation, or anger. Try it on. Beam love from your heart to the human who makes your morning beverage. Beam love to your co-worker who has historically annoyed you. Try it out, see how it feels.

Hop on over to my Instagram @VictoriaAlbinaWellness. Comment on a post. Tell us all about it. I can't wait. I want to hear about it. Love feels amazing. All right. Let's take another deep breath in and out. Sighing is a way to reset the nervous system. It helps calm your system, which is why

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you often hear me sighing after one of those big breaths. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved, and when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. I love you.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to VictoriaAlbina.com to learn more.