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Why Unconditional Love Is Bullshit

**Love means that we practice loving ourselves, too
— by letting go of toxic relationships so that we
can make room for relationships that give us life.**

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August 17th, 2019

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“Most psychologically and/or physically abused children have been taught by parenting adults that love can coexist with abuse. And in extreme cases that abuse is an expression of love. This faulty thinking often shapes our adult perceptions of love. So that just as we would cling to the notion that those who hurt us as children loved us, we try to rationalize being hurt by other adults by insisting that they love us.” — bell hooks

Last week, one of our members had a long and painful conversation with one of their siblings. We were reminded that there are all types of family and that our biological connections are often a source of deeply painful memories. This week we want to remind ourselves that there is no such thing as unconditional love — there are ALWAYS conditions. Some peo-

ples conditions revolve around centering themselves and making excuses for their own toxic behavior, while for others, like us, relationships built on love require a commitment to challenge oppression and to be transformative and regenerative with each other.

Too often we are told we have to hold onto abusive relationships because “it’s family,” because we’ve been friends for a long time already, or simply because the people in our lives now are the only people we’ve ever known. They’ve cared for us at some point, so we grow scared to let go of them for fear that nobody else will show up and we’ll be left with our pain, alone. But these same people are regularly the causes of our pain. It’s the people we are told are supposed to love us who gaslight us and dismiss our experiences with white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism.

One of the most painful forms of gaslighting is when somebody we love tries to convince us that we are overreacting to the oppression we experience everyday. It hurts when our loved ones give the people who harm us the benefit of the doubt before they believe our own experiences, and it hurts more when we stop making excuses for their gaslighting only to hear them tell us we are too soft, too negative, or too hateful. This cycle of gaslighting and victim blaming is destructive to our own well-being.

To anybody who says we are hateful because we won’t make excuses for keeping capitalists and racist, homophobic, transphobic, misogynistic people in our lives, we say fuck that! We are not motivated by hate; we are motivated by love. Don’t ever let somebody make you apologize for pursuing justice. There is no greater act of love than being committed to the collective struggle against oppression.

There is also a misconception that movement builders need to sacrifice ourselves to evangelize “the masses” rather than existing in “bubbles”. But these so-called bubbles don’t exist. There are no truly safe spaces in a world of hierarchy and dom-

ination. The majority of our time is spent navigating, interacting with, and finding small ways to push back against violent people and perspectives. Family, co-workers, people on the street — most of these people have beliefs that are opposed to ours, that are actively hurting us. But we're forced to engage with many of them daily. The alternative is to be punished, to lose our livelihood, to be outed and targeted.

Family, co-workers, people on the street — most of these people have perspectives that are opposed to ours, that are actively hurting us. But we're forced to engage with many of them daily because the alternative is to be punished, to lose our livelihood, to be outed and targeted.

Yes, we want our chosen family to be as solid and trustworthy as possible. We want spaces that affirm us for who we are, and that share our need for a just world — one where we can survive.

How does creating boundaries not make sense for our safety and sanity? What's wrong with being intentional with the people we truly want to build with, who honor our time and our full selves, who bring meaning to our lives, who spending time with is generative rather than depleting? These are the people who've shown us that mutual compassion is a more sustainable form of resistance than convincing apathetic people why they should care.

If a person cannot treat BI&POC like human beings, we don't want them in our lives. If they cannot show empathy to poor and disenfranchised peoples, we don't want them in our lives. If they cannot strive to love without domination or abuse, we don't want them in our lives. Love always has conditions, but too often those conditions are to make excuses for hurtful people. It's okay to flip the script, to love yourself and say no to people who hurt you.

We recognize that love cannot exist without struggle. There will always be struggle precisely because love is an action not a destination — and it requires practice. It means that we release

ourselves from the idea that love means constantly re-engaging the experiences, places, memories, and people that wound us most. It means that we try to intentionalize who we spend time with, that we stop forcing ourselves to maintain relationships with people who do not see or seek empathy with our pain.

Love means that we practice loving ourselves, too — by letting go of toxic relationships so that we can make room for relationships that give us life.

We want to remind ourselves (and you) that the world is still full of possibility, that some of the most joyful relationships in our lives are yet to come. We want to be ready, to have the space in our hearts to nourish those relationships and let them nourish us.