

# Some questions are very tough to answer

During a lull in a recent phone conversation between me and my daughter, she asked simply, "Mom, how do you know when you're in love and will that love



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last forever?"

After a few minutes of awkward silence on my part and her slightly concerned, "Mom, are you still there," I sighed and said, "Let me think about this for a minute."

Her question was one undoubtedly asked by each one of us at least once in our lifetime and, for many, probably more than once. Frankly, I would have preferred a question along the lines of, "Mom, which came first ... the chicken or the egg," knowing full and well that I was no authority on that either, but at least Wikipedia had a full page devoted to the chicken/egg controversy.

So, I did what most parents do and preface my answer to a difficult question with stall tactics. "Well, you know the answers to those questions are a bit complicated," I began, followed by more awkward silence. I rebounded with, "I think it depends on the decade of one's life, like it would be one thing at 20 and another thing at 50."

right to me, but the "uh-huh" response from my daughter showed that I needed something with a little more meat to bolster my slippery answer. One, can't be too vague in comparing a flutter to a pang when dealing with challenging questions about the heart's second most difficult function.

What I was trying to convey, although poorly, was that the flutter of love in one's 20s is poles apart from the boom in one's 30s, the pang in one's 40s, the tickle in one's 50s, and the contentment in one's 60s and beyond. And it's not that true love can't last a lifetime because I think it can, and I've got my own set of parents to prove that theory.

But a Reader's Digest article caught my eye in response to, "Can love really last a lifetime?" RD's answer said simply, "Absolutely — but only if you chuck the fairy tale of living happily ever after. A team of scientists

found that romantic love involves chemical changes in the brain that last 12 to 18 months. After that, you and your partner are on your own. Relationships require maintenance."

Wow! Eighteen months of flying high and then splat — the dreamy rose-colored glasses aren't clear anymore. Throw in a demanding job, the flu, an empty gas tank in the middle lane of traffic, a checkbook that won't balance, a gaggle of kids that need daily taxi service, dogs that always push you to the edge of the bed, an air-conditioner that conked out in August followed by the death of the heat pump in January, and it's no wonder that the Queen Mary Ship of Passionate Love quickly whittles itself down to an uncomfortable, agitated life raft built for two.

Scholars insist finding true love requires that you learn to love yourself first. That sounds like an easy thing to do, but the

problem is that it takes decades of practice before you get to that treasured goal. In this age of quick fixes, unfortunately, there isn't any magic potion to instill a sense of self-love in one's life. It takes lots of work to build that relationship, too.

So, I did what we all do in this electronic age, turned to Google, and found hundreds of articles and 53 uplifting quotes on practicing self-love. I was

able to narrow down all the practices to one that I thought was the most valuable and two quotes that might help.

The practice of setting boundaries was my favorite and something that seems to steamroll me every once in a while. According to experts in the field, setting limits or saying no to work, love, or activities that deplete or harm you physically, emotionally and spiritu-

ally, or express poorly who you are, is a giant step on the yellow brick road to self-love.

My favorite quote was from Buddha: "You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection," and a close second was from Oscar Wilde: "To love one's self is the beginning of a life-long romance."

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