

## Into-Me-See

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Beacon UU Congregation

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Someone told me that the definition of intimacy is “into-me-see.” Intimacy is more than just closeness. It is having someone else look into your heart and soul.

At Beacon, each week we affirm that “Love is the spirit of this church.” We express love through compassion, social justice, and acceptance of others. We create intimate relationships with each other. One of the best reasons for being a member of this congregation is that we are intimate with each other. We see each other’s hearts and souls.

Dr. Robert Sternberg at Yale developed the Triangular Theory of Love. After decades of research, he found that people felt loved when they experience intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy is being seen for who you truly are.

Intimacy is much more than romance. In romance novels, two people meet, find that they are emotionally and sexually attracted to each other, and fall in love forever. Of course, the people are always straight, they are young and attractive, and their personality quirks are adorable to each other. For most people, romance lasts about eighteen months. Then the real adventure of intimacy begins.

Intimacy begins with emotional safety. We learn safety in our families of origin. It begins with caring touch. In a healthy family, children learn that their parents will attend to their needs, encourage their individuation, and respect their boundaries. They won’t be punished when they start saying “No” when they are two years old. If children learn that they are safe, then they begin to trust themselves and others. Trust is the foundation of intimacy.

Intimacy develops when parents show an interest in their children. Parents put their finger paintings on the refrigerator. Parents want to know all about their new discoveries in the world. Children are seen and heard.

As adults, we still need those same things. Adults are really children in larger bodies with more sophisticated psychological defenses. We still need to be touched, have someone pay attention to us, and have someone respect our boundaries. In psychological learning theory, we know that attention is the most powerful reinforcer that there is for human beings. We want to be seen. We want to be loved.

As you know, some children, teens, and adults grow up without positive attention and caring. They experience neglect, abuse, and trauma. For many gay, bisexual, and trans teens, their parents are unable to accept them for who they are. The suicide rate among gay teens is four times the national average for other teens. We all need to be seen, accepted, and affirmed.

Even in healthy adult relationships, intimacy is not a constant state of being. Couples usually have some secrets that they keep from each other. In normal relationships, we feel closer to our partners at sometimes than at others. Intimacy is more like an accordion. Sometimes people are very close together and at other times they are further apart. The challenge is to come together when there is emotional stress and not pull further apart. Intimacy requires both the capacity to be close and the capacity to be independent. It's complicated.

Intimacy requires relationship skills. For example, a person needs to be assertive about what they want and need. That means that you need to tell your partner what you want emotionally, sexually, socially, and financially. Being assertive means that you let yourself be vulnerable. Intimacy always involves the risks of being rejected or disappointed. A person puts their heart on the line when they are intimate.

Intimacy requires negotiation skills. For most couples, the honeymoon period lasts about three years. Then healthy couples begin to negotiate power issues within the relationship. For example, how will financial decisions be made? Who is the final authority on parenting? How frequently will the couple engage in what kind of sexual activities? How will the couple exercise normal influence and control over each other? Power and control are usually the major issues between the third and seventh year of healthy relationships. Those are also the years when couples are most likely to separate and divorce. Negotiation requires give and take. Good communication skills allow healthy couples to make decisions together.

Intimacy takes tolerance. You will need to tolerate when your partner is clueless, defensive, and annoying. Every human being is annoying if you spend enough time with them. For example, my wife leaves things in piles all over the house. From her perspective, I'm too much of a neatnik and very obsessive. She's right. When I get stressed, I want to organize and clean things. That can drive my wife and daughter crazy. I had to learn to tolerate my wife's flaws and idiosyncrasies. I'm a fortunate man that she tries to tolerate mine.

Many people, especially women, tell me that they want to be seen by their partner as something more than a collection of roles. Please see me as more than the person who used to be your girlfriend who became the mother of your children. "See me in relation

to myself instead of just in relation to you.” Those women want their partners to be curious about them. They want their partners to ask about their hurts and dreams. They want their partners to be truly “into” them.

As a Unitarian-Universalist congregation, we establish covenants with each other. That is different than creedal faiths, which base their affiliations on commonly held theological beliefs. Our covenants are based on how we treat each other and the planet. We covenant that we will treat each other with respect, acceptance, and compassion. For example, a person is welcome in our congregation no matter what their race, sexual orientation, disabilities, or theological beliefs may be. We don’t just tolerate diversity. We invite diversity.

Our covenants encourage us to be intimate with each other. When I joined Beacon, Dave Brimhall told me that people come for the minister and stay for the congregation. We have a new interim minister who will educate us, challenge us, and nurture us. But it is the members of the congregation who create lasting intimate relationships. We have a foundation of trust and authenticity. We have “into-me-see.”

I invite you to see into me.

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