

Chapter I

Unconditional Love

“You never know how much your parents loved you until you have a child to love.”– Jennifer Hudson

It's true what they say, you never truly understand the depth of your parents' love until you hold your own child in your arms. My mother once shared this wisdom with me, though at the time, I was too young to grasp its significance. Yet, in the circle of love that came with fatherhood, I found not only a profound understanding of my parents but also a renewed appreciation for the enduring power of a mother's wisdom.

Six days after my daughter's birth, a day of joyous celebration in our culture that symbolizes the child's official welcome into the family, I was struck by an unexpected wave of reflection. As I held my newborn, her tiny fingers curling around mine, I was reminded of a moment from my childhood, a moment that had once seemed insignificant but now carried profound meaning.

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A few incidents stay with us forever, etched into memory—and for me, one of them goes back to fifth grade. In a burst of childish impulsiveness, I accused my mother of not loving me—a bold and thoughtless declaration. Calmly and with a knowing look in her eyes, she replied, “One day you’ll be a parent.”

Those words, spoken so casually at the time, were a mysterious whisper that lingered in the quiet corners of my mind.

For years, that phrase slumbered in my memory, buried beneath the restlessness of youth and the distractions of adulthood. It wasn’t until 2009 that I found myself stepping into the role of a father that its true meaning blossomed. The veil of misunderstanding lifted, and I could finally see the depth of my mother’s love, the selflessness, the quiet sacrifices, and the strength it took to guide and nurture me, even when I didn’t recognize it.

That day, as I celebrated my daughter’s life, I also celebrated a revelation, a profound moment of gratitude for my mother’s wisdom, patience, and unconditional love. In the circle of life and love, I had come full circle, carrying forward the lessons she had imparted, now with a deeper understanding etched into my heart.

Reflecting on motherhood as it was fifty years ago, I can't help but feel a deep sense of respect for the women who lived those roles—often guided by the customs and expectations of their communities. To me, motherhood back then wasn't just about raising a child—it was about holding together the very fabric of the family, usually without recognition, and often in silence.

In many cultures, it was more than a role; it was a sacred duty, woven into the traditions and values that shaped daily life. For example, studies show that in the mid-20th century, especially in collectivist societies such as those in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America, extended family structures meant that motherhood carried communal responsibilities, with mothers often acting as pillars of social cohesion.

The way mothers showed love—unwavering, selfless, and often sacrificial—was deeply influenced by the world around them. Research into maternal behavior across cultures reveals that expressions of love can vary widely, from physical nurturing to acts of service and sacrifice, shaped largely by cultural norms. Their expression of care came through responsibility, resilience, and devotion, molded by the norms of their society. For instance, anthropologists have noted that in many traditional societies, the mother's role involved balancing the

demands of household labor, child-rearing, and maintaining family honor—all without much public acknowledgment.

Of course, this is just my perspective, shaped by the stories I've heard, the lives I've witnessed, and the cultural lens I carry. It may differ from others' experiences, depending on where they come from or how they were raised. But in my heart, I believe that across time and culture, the quiet strength of mothers has always spoken the loudest.

For instance, in societies where family lineage and social status were highly valued, mothers demonstrated their love by meticulously preparing their sons for specific trades or professions and their daughters for their future roles as brides and mothers. This cultural emphasis on familial continuity and societal contribution defined the way affection and care were expressed.

Mothers were seen as the custodians of culture, passing down traditions, rituals, and values through their nurturing and teaching. In some traditions, this meant weaving folk tales and moral lessons into daily life, while in others, it involved adhering to strict gender roles that aligned with societal expectations.

The cultural lens not only shaped motherhood but also amplified its significance, tying it to

the survival and prosperity of both family and community.

The survival and well-being of children in subsistence-based communities were deeply intertwined with the nature of maternal love, especially in societies where resources were scarce. A mother's love extended beyond meeting her children's physical needs; it encompassed teaching essential life skills such as food production, fostering self-reliance, and instilling resilience to navigate life's challenges.

Similarly, in traditional civilizations steeped in cultural heritage, mothers expressed their love by acting as custodians of ancestral wisdom. Through the transmission of language, rituals, and cultural practices, they ensured that the legacy of their forebears endured. This act of cultural preservation not only fortified a child's sense of identity but also symbolized the enduring link between maternal devotion and the survival of a community's cultural identity.

These varied expressions of maternal love from a few decades ago reveal the profound relationship between cultural norms and the ways love was demonstrated. They highlight how unconditional love was shaped by the social and cultural fabric of the time, varying significantly across different societal contexts.

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Raising a child in a collectivist, subsistence-based society was not just about ensuring survival but also about nurturing the continuation of cultural traditions, preserving a legacy for generations to come.

Cultures had/have different expectations for mothers regarding discipline, independence, and sacrifice. The concept of a mother's love and its expression vary across cultures, even though the core idea of strong emotional attachment is common.

Time flows like a river, never pausing, always moving forward, carrying with it the stories of those who came before. In the same way, the essence of motherhood flows through generations, shaping the present while nurturing the future. Just as a river carries nutrients to the soil, sustaining life along its banks, a mother transfers values, wisdom, and unconditional love, ensuring the continuity of life's lessons and the persistence of cultural identity.

Mothers much like rivers, are anchors of change and constants of stability. They adapt to the demands of time, guiding, protecting, and flowing tirelessly to ensure the next generation finds its way. In every bend of life's journey, their nurturing influence acts as a gentle current, pushing us toward resilience, growth, and self-discovery.

As one generation passes its torch to the next, mothers serve as both the carriers and the creators of light, connecting the past to the future in an unbroken chain of care and purpose. In their embrace, the tide of shifting time finds a sanctuary, a timeless reminder that love and nurture are forces as enduring as the river's flow.

The guidance and upbringing provided by my mother went beyond typical gender stereotypes to make me a better parent, not just a better father. She cultivated a viewpoint that emphasized equality and shared responsibility, instilling in me the values and abilities necessary for accepting the responsibilities of parenthood. Her innovative strategy for shattering the myth of motherhood was much ahead of its time, establishing the groundwork for a more accepting and progressive conception of what it means to be a parent.

I don't recall my mom ever saying, "I love you." Yet, her love was evident in every action she took, especially through her passion for cooking. Preparing meals wasn't just a chore for her; it was her way of nurturing us and expressing her devotion to me and my siblings. She poured her heart into crafting balanced, homemade breakfasts like fresh parathas with some green vegetables, poha, and other classic North Indian dishes. Store bought breakfast options even the breads were almost

unheard of in our home. For example, a small pack of cookies, commonly known as biscuits in India, would last us nearly two weeks, cherished as an occasional treat. Today, it's not uncommon for such a pack to be consumed in one sitting. This simple yet significant difference highlights the values my mother instilled in us— mindful consumption, appreciation for homemade nourishment, and the love woven into every meal she prepared.

Her passion for cooking extended to the school lunches she meticulously prepared for us every single day. Each lunchbox was thoughtfully packed with wholesome meals designed to keep us nourished and energized. Most often, it contained puris or parathas, homemade Indian bread, paired with stir-fried vegetables.

At the time, schools didn't have canteens, and every student was required to bring lunch from home. We were given just 30 minutes to finish eating and still squeeze in a quick play session. Those 30 minutes often felt rushed, a blur of eating and laughter with friends, but they also magnified the significance of what was packed in our lunchboxes.

I remember, though, feeling a pang of shame during my elementary and middle school years, embarrassed by my homemade lunch. It seemed to pale in comparison to the snacks my classmates

brought, packaged and unhealthy but somehow 'cooler' in the eyes of a schoolkid. Perhaps it was my introverted nature or the silent pressure to fit in at the lunch table that made me wish for something different.

Looking back, I see my lunchbox for what it truly was, a treasure of love and care. Each bite was a reminder of her thoughtfulness and dedication.

Cooking wasn't just a duty for her; it was a source of joy, a way to nurture and provide, and an unspoken expression of her love. Through her food, she gave us so much more than sustenance; she gave us warmth, comfort, and a legacy of care that I hold close even today.

Perhaps this is why, as a father, I took it upon myself to prepare breakfast for my kids every morning, just as healthy and nourishing as possible. I wanted them to feel that same warmth, that same sense of being cared for, that I once felt when my mother packed my lunch. It's not just about feeding them; it's about offering them my love and care in the same way she did for me, through the simple, powerful act of food.

Her willingness to perform unpleasant tasks and run errands without being asked revealed her deep commitment—consistently placing our comfort and welfare above her own. Her unwavering support

showed itself time and again, especially on nights when she stayed up late, sacrificing her own rest to help us finish a project or prepare for an exam, ensuring we had the best chance to succeed. These selfless and tender acts were quiet testaments of her boundless love—love we all too often, took for granted.

What is Love?

“If your love is there to help others, nobody can destroy it. But if your love is to get something from the other – sooner or later – it will be broken into pieces.”

–Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the spiritual leader and founder of the Art of Living Foundation.

The voyage of love begins even before the first breath is taken, and it is based on the protective and nurturing instincts of a mother. This first tie, created in the holy cocoon of pregnancy, lays the groundwork for a loving and devoted relationship that lasts a lifetime.

As life unfolds, love evolves and deepens, transcending mere transactions or exchanges. It is not a commodity to be bartered but rather a boundless reservoir of compassion, empathy, and understanding. Unlike fleeting transactions that seek reciprocity, genuine love flows unconditionally, enriching both the giver and the

receiver. Through the lens of motherhood, this profound truth becomes even more evident. A mother's love is unconditional and transcends all concepts of give and take. It is an enduring, selfless energy that shapes the very fabric of existence while empowering, nurturing, and guarding against harm.

In exploring the essence of love, I come to realize that its essence lies not in transactions but in the pure, unadulterated expression of the heart, a timeless, boundless wellspring that sustains and uplifts us on life's journey.

My mother's wise words often echo in my mind, especially during moments of reflection. She taught me that when we look back on a situation, it's easy to pass judgment on whether it was right or wrong. However, in doing so, we often lose sight of the context of time.

One morning, during my usual call with my mom, our conversation unexpectedly turned to one of my aunts. I quickly interjected, expressing my dislike for her and my unwillingness to even discuss her. My reasoning was simple: I always felt overlooked by her, as if I didn't exist in her world. My mom, unaware of the bitterness I harbored, was taken aback by my outburst. Her response, however, was both insightful and profound.

She gently probed further, trying to understand the root of my feelings, and eventually uncovered a naive incident from my childhood. I reminded her of a time when I wasn't allowed to play with my cousin. As a child, I had assumed the reason that my aunt didn't want her son to associate with me, likely because I wasn't good at studies. This assumption had cemented itself in my mind, feeding my resentment over the years. However, my mom explained that my cousin wasn't allowed to play because his mother had her own unrelated concerns, something completely different from what I had imagined.

We both laughed at the absurdity of my long-held belief. My mom then offered me a piece of wisdom that struck a chord.

She said, "This is all in your mind. Everyone else has long since moved on, except you. Don't seek forgiveness from others, rather, forgive yourself and let it go."

Her words reminded me of the power of self-reflection and the importance of releasing unnecessary burdens, especially those rooted in misunderstanding.

She said that while assigning blame for the behavior of others may seem easy, it often overlooks the intricate settings that shaped their

decisions. People act in response to specific situations, encountering obstacles and challenges that influence their decision-making. It's essential to take a step back and evaluate the larger picture—the context in which those decisions were made. What was the person going through at that very moment? What obstacles or limitations were they up against? Comprehending these variables enables us to develop empathy for others and acquire a more profound comprehension of their behaviors.

Her words stayed with me long after our conversation ended, reminding me of the importance of looking beyond my own perspective. Time and again, Mom kept reminding me in her own subtle way that as we navigate life's reflections, remember to take a moment to understand before judging others. Dive deep into the complexities of human experiences with empathy and a keen eye for context. Through this lens, uncover invaluable insights about yourself and others, nurturing a path of wisdom and compassion. Embrace each discovery with an open heart and a curious mind, for therein lies the essence of true understanding.

“Those who are free from anger and all attachment, who are balanced in pleasure and pain, and who are forgiving, constantly focused, contented,

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and self-controlled, are said to be established in intrinsic love.” –(Bhagavad Gita 12.13)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” – John 3:16 (NIV)

This verse emphasizes the depth and selfless nature of God’s love, which is considered intrinsic and unconditional.

Even though my mom’s metaphors appeared superficially simple or meaningless, they frequently had deep meaning and thought provoking insights.

My mother once reminded me of a profound question that was posed to Buddha: “What is the difference between saying ‘I like you’ and ‘I love you’?” His answer was beautifully simple – “When you like a flower, you just pluck it. But when you love a flower, you water it daily!”

As I reflected on this analogy within the context of motherhood, I realized that the essence of a mother’s love transcends mere affection; it embodies a continuous act of nurturing that begins long before a child is born. It starts when a woman first harbors thoughts of motherhood in the depths of her heart and soul. From that moment onward, love takes root and blossoms, evolving into a lifelong journey of care, sacrifice, and unwavering devotion.

A mother's nurturing love is characterized by innumerable moments of kindness, selflessness, and tenacity, which are what truly define the link between a mother and her child. With each tender gesture and comforting embrace, it is a love that shapes a child's own essence. It fosters not only their physical health but also their emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development.

In our heartfelt conversation about the essence of motherly love, I raised a counterpoint to the notion that everything originating from within is inherently good. I compared this subtle phenomenon to cancer, emphasizing that both have internal origins and have the potential to spread uncontrollably. My illustration was meant to illustrate the intricacy of internal workings and their capacity for both beneficial and detrimental results.

My mother, much to my astonishment, accepted my viewpoint. Anything in excess, she said, might cause imbalance and unfavorable effects, whether it be love or cellular proliferation. She made an affecting comparison between the unbridled spread of cancer cells and the unbridled blooming of love. Abnormal affection for a person or thing can become an obsession or a kind of madness, just as unchecked cancer spreads and upsets the body's equilibrium.

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Our conversation emphasized the need for love to be balanced and moderated, pointing out that although love is a strong force for healing and connection, an unchecked excess of it can have negative effects. It reminded me that love needs boundaries, careful attention, and a thoughtful approach to grow without overwhelming the heart and soul, just like taking care of a fragile garden.

She shared with me a timeless truth– “Your children do not belong to you; they are born from life’s deep yearning to realize and reflect itself...” These words, resonant with wisdom and humility, spoke volumes about the profound nature of parenthood and the interconnectedness of life’s journey.

In that moment, I felt a surge of gratitude for her wisdom and guidance, realizing that her role as a mother transcended mere ownership or control but encompassed a deep-seated nurturing of life’s essence. Her words echoed with a gentle reminder that while I came through her, my path and purpose were uniquely mine, intertwined with the universal longing for growth and self-discovery.

My Mother encouraged me to embrace my journey with sincerity and purpose, understanding that even though I walk with her, my presence is a monument to Life’s unending need for itself. Her message was one of great release and responsibility.

“Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself...”
Kahlil Gibran, a Lebanese-American writer, poet, and philosopher.

I learned that a relationship with my mother is not just a biological process but a spiritual and emotional journey. It was an exploration of the heart’s capacity for unconditional love, a theme that resonates with the essence of my mother’s prophecy. The tapestry of love, woven between generations, revealed a path to understanding, forgiveness and appreciation.

In the corporate world, the principles of unconditional love translate into valuable business lessons that foster trust, loyalty, and enduring relationships.

- **Leadership Through Nurturing:** Growing up, I witnessed my mother’s unwavering dedication to our well-being. This taught me that leadership isn’t just about directing but nurturing. In business, I’ve learned that nurturing my team, understanding their strengths, offering support, and fostering their growth, is essential. Just as my mother’s love helped me flourish, a leader’s support can help employees reach their full potential.

- **Cultural Sensitivity And Adaptability:** The cultural nuances of maternal love taught me the importance of understanding and respecting differences. In a business context, being culturally sensitive and adaptable is crucial. Whether dealing with international clients or diverse teams, appreciating cultural differences can lead to more effective communication and stronger relationships.
- **Embracing A Long-term Vision:** Just as my mother prepared us for the future, I've learned to focus on long-term goals in business. This involves looking beyond immediate profits and considering sustainable growth, future market trends, and the long-term well-being of the company and its employees.
- **Empathy As A Cornerstone:** Reflecting on my mother's empathy has shown me its power in understanding others' perspectives and actions. In business, empathy helps in managing teams, resolving conflicts, and building a cohesive work environment. Understanding the personal and professional challenges of employees fosters a supportive and collaborative workplace.
- **Striking A Balance:** The analogy of love and cancer taught me the importance of balance.

In business, it's vital to balance ambition with ethics, innovation with tradition, and growth with sustainability. Just as unchecked growth can be harmful, businesses must ensure balanced and sustainable practices.

- **Empowering Others:** My mother empowered me to be independent and confident. In the business world, empowering employees, giving them autonomy, trust, and resources, leads to a more dynamic and innovative organization. Empowered employees are more likely to take the initiative, contribute ideas, and drive the company forward.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** The emotional intelligence my mother displayed in her actions has been a crucial lesson. In business, emotional intelligence, understanding and managing our own emotions and those of others, enhances leadership, team collaboration, and client relations. It's about being aware, empathetic, and constructive in interactions.
- **Preserving Core Values And Culture:** My mother's emphasis on cultural preservation resonates with the need to maintain core values in business. As companies grow and evolve, staying true to foundational values and culture ensures consistency, integrity,

and a sense of identity, which attracts loyal customers and employees.

- **Fostering Resilience And Adaptability:** The resilience my mother instilled in me is a vital trait in business. Companies face constant challenges and changes, and fostering a culture of resilience and adaptability is key. Encouraging a mindset that views challenges as opportunities and adapts swiftly to changes can lead to sustained success.

Through these reflections, I realize that the lessons of unconditional love and the wisdom of my mother provide a profound framework for business leadership and management. By integrating these principles, we can create more humane, effective, and enduring business practices.

I wish I had taken the time to truly listen to my mom and cherish her wisdom while I had the chance.

