



PRINCES & TOADS

MEN WORTH KEEPING ... MEN TO THROW AWAY

NEW AND REVISED EDITION

SHARON TOBLER, PH.D.

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*“We are psychologically, emotionally, cognitively,
and spiritually hardwired for connection, love,
and belonging.”*

—Brené Brown, Ph.D.

*To all my clients,
without whom I could not have
written this book*

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 **Princes & Toads** 

Introduction

Although its title implies that *Princes & Toads* is for heterosexual women who are interested in finding and maintaining a healthy and loving relationship with a man, its content is really about how to have a healthy and loving partnership irrespective of gender or sexual proclivity. For simplicity's sake I will proceed as though the majority of people reading this book are women seeking men.

I chose to call the male player “the Prince” or “the Toad” because both genders grew up reading the same fairy tales. The toad was the undesirable male. The prince was in hot demand because if you captured him, you were destined to live happily ever after.

The “keeper ... throwaway” concept was borrowed from the sport of fishing, in which the catch is *literally* measured to determine whether or not he is a keeper. In this guide I have attempted when possible to help you measure your prospective prince. *I have taken a hard line approach with my recommendations, meaning that I am quicker to rule out than to rule in.*

I have four convictions regarding healthy and loving relationships:

1. That in order to have a healthy and loving relationship with another, you must first have one with yourself.
2. That it is your responsibility to reprogram your adult self such that you are no longer ruled by your childhood history.
3. That you teach people how to treat you.

4. That you have at your command at all times your gut. She is far wiser than any guidebook. She has all your answers. The challenge is in learning to listen and trust her. In order to be successful you must become versed at lessening your anxiety, as fear always blocks the connection between you and your inner voice.

How to Use This Guide

This reference book is intended to succinctly and pointedly help you distinguish toads from princes, as well as to answer questions regarding search, selection, and maintenance of the relationship.

There is no need to read this guide in sequence. Each page contains individual nuggets. You may read casually or focus on the section that pertains to you. If you decide to proceed from beginning to end, you will encounter an order ranging from the self-improvement necessary for a healthy and loving bond, to keeping your marriage (or long-term commitment relationship) viable.

Since many of the issues paramount in self-love are equally important in a marriage, I have a somewhat random placement of topics. The progression of a relationship from its inception to marriage and beyond is never in any exact order, nor is it clear-cut. Consider this guide a representation of this process.

This handbook addresses numerous relationship issues, as well as many of the warning bells. It is impossible, however, to cover all the challenges and concerns involved in the search, selection, and maintenance of the relationship.

As a psychologist, I could not resist including a section on guidelines for seeking professional help.

Do not get discouraged; relationships are challenging, and mastering them takes time and elbow grease. Practice the nuggets that speak to you, and you will see results!

Getting Prepared: Self-Improvement

“In healthy intimate relationships we do not seek more than 25% of our nurturance from a partner; we learn to find the rest within ourselves.”

—David Richo, Ph.D.

*“I will come to you when I no longer need you.
Then you will find a palace, not an almshouse.”*

—Henry David Thoreau

First Thoughts

Before you can experience a healthy and loving relationship with another, you must first have one with yourself.

It is important that you concentrate on learning to love yourself before you begin the hunt, since how you feel about yourself will dramatically affect your choice of partners. In other words, the more you love yourself, the greater the probability you will choose wisely.

There are no quick fixes in the realm of preparing yourself for a healthy and loving relationship. Be patient.

Love

There are many definitions of Love ... I like M. Scott Peck, M.D.'s version the best, which is found in his exquisite book, *The Road Less Traveled*:

“The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. Love is effortful.”

Of all the misconceptions about love ... the most powerful and pervasive is the belief that “falling in love” is love or at least one of the manifestations of love.

According to M. Scott Peck, M.D. “The experience of falling in love is specifically a sex linked erotic experience. It is a

stereotypic response of human beings to a configuration of internal sexual drives and external sexual stimuli, which serves to increase the probability of sexual pairing and bonding so as to enhance the survival of the species. We fall in love only when we are consciously or unconsciously sexually motivated.” Example: We do not fall in love with our children.

Peck goes on to say: “Falling in love is not an act of will. It is not a conscious choice. No matter how open to or eager for it we may be, the experience may still elude us. Contrarily, the experience may capture us at times when we are definitely not seeking it, when it is inconvenient and undesirable. We are as likely to fall in love with someone with whom we are obviously ill matched as with someone more suitable. Indeed, we may not even like or admire the object of our passion, yet, try as we might, we may not be able to fall in love with a person whom we deeply respect and with whom a deep relationship would be in all ways desirable.”

Harville Hendrix, Ph.D., adds more “meat” to Peck’s notion as he describes how romantic partners choose one another, claiming as well, that the choice is made unconsciously:

“We pick our partners based on an unconscious image of the person who can make us whole. This image is a composite of our original caretakers, especially the negative traits that were most wounding to us. We seek in our partnerships to re-create the context in which we were wounded, so that we can finish the business of our childhood. Thus we seek from someone like our caretakers what we didn’t get in childhood in order to heal old wounds, thereby restoring the joyful aliveness with which we came into this world.”

The problem is that our unconscious does such a good job of picking similar composite caregivers that not only are we not healed, but also most often we are re-injured in exactly the same ways that we were wounded as little people.

The solution to this conundrum is obvious; we must become *conscious*. We must discover our old wounds and take

action to heal them. Otherwise we are doomed to repeat the hurts of the past.

Falling in love is an unconscious act ... *staying* in love is a conscious one.

The experience of falling in love is always temporary ... Sooner or later we fall out of love. The honeymoon always ends. The bloom of romance always fades.

The most positive reason for falling in love ... is that it provides the opportunity to transition from the love myth to genuine love.

 **Self-Love** 

“Be yourself, that’s all there is of you.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Self-soothing ... is the ability to comfort *oneself* when unhappy or distressed. Many people look outside of themselves for this emotional relief, either by asking a person to make them feel better or through over-indulgence in things like food, alcohol, or drugs. None of these methods is sustaining or reliable. What often works best is to not allow yourself to *obsess* about what is troubling you, and to immerse yourself in one or a combination of your five senses. Go to a spot in nature that fills you; enjoy its beauty, fragrances, and sounds; remove your shoes and feel the ground. Touch a tree. Take a bubble bath. Light a candle and gaze at it. Pet a dog. Listen to music or a guided meditation that pleases you. Take a nap. Stream a movie. Prepare, or have prepared for you, a favorite food and eat it slowly. If you want to blow off steam, take a brisk walk or go to the gym. If you don’t have the time to *do* one of these things, make it happen in a visualization.

Perfecting the self-soothing skill ... takes lots of practice, failures, perseverance, and patience. So, be kind to yourself.

The most important person to love is you ... A perfect illustration of this important principle is the flight attendant who instructs that, if the oxygen masks drop, passengers must *first* put the mask on themselves, *then* help their neighbors.

It really is true that you won't love or be loved ... until you love yourself.

How much you can love another ... is in direct proportion to how much you love yourself.

Self-love is ... applying M. Scott Peck's definition of love to you.

How do I develop self-love (and lift depression)? ... By setting baby-step self-love goals and accomplishing them. I cannot emphasize enough that starting with *attainable* (as opposed to lofty) goals is paramount, since the key to developing self-love is the successful completion of these goals. These goals must be measurable, time-specific, and behavioral. "I want to be happy" is not an attainable goal. However, walking for forty-five minutes, three times a week, for three months may make you feel happier about yourself—and that is a measurable, time-specific, and behavioral goal. The other necessary component in developing self-love (and lifting depression) is positive self-talk.

When you love yourself ... you respect yourself. You will not accept disrespect from anyone.

Who you choose to be your prince ... has a lot to do with how much you value yourself.

When you love, value, and respect yourself ... you are better qualified to love, value and respect a partner.

When you love, value, and respect yourself ... you are better qualified to teach your partner how to treat you.

You will have significantly more respect for yourself ... if you resist becoming involved with someone you *know* is not good for you.

You are significantly more likely to pick a toad ... if you do not love and value yourself. Human nature dictates attraction to what is familiar. So if familiar is self-loathing, you are doomed to repeat this pattern in your choice of partner. You will select a man who will treat you the way you are used to treating yourself. You will choose whom you believe you deserve. If you do not love yourself, how can you expect your prince to love you?

How *capable* you are to treasure your prince ... is *equal* to the amount you treasure yourself.

Wholeness is developed through the attainment of self-love ... *not* through conquest of the prince.

A clue to whether you are a hole or whole ... Generally, if you hear yourself saying you *need* a man, you are a hole; if you hear yourself saying you would enjoy having a man, you are whole.

In the realm of romantic relationships ... two halves equal two halves.

Hearts have to be open to be broken ... cherish your broken heart.

You cannot fully love ... if your heart has never been exposed enough to be crushed.

The more your heart has loved and lost ... the better she loves.

Integrity and vulnerability ... are vital when it comes to loving yourself or another.

Self-love and narcissism ... are not synonymous. Narcissism is a mental disorder in which the sufferer lacks the ability to experience empathy and is wholly and totally self-absorbed, often to the point of exploitation of others in order to achieve his own ends. He expects constant admiration and attention. He feels absolutely entitled. These features are *not* conducive to the establishment of a healthy and loving relationship. Yet most women have at some point fallen in love with a narcissist, since many of them know how to make you feel special, are quite charming, charismatic, exciting, and financially successful.

I have described the classic (overt) narcissist; unfortunately there are 250 variations. This means that a narcissist may be harder to identify if he doesn't fit into the classic description.

The biggest hint that you may be dealing with a narcissist is if you feel put down, criticized, or self-doubting while interacting with him or after you have walked away. All of the narcissist variations share the common thread of an inability to experience empathy, which is the primary reason for healthy partnership incompatibility. As is the case for all the personality disorders, there is a spectrum ranging from the benign to malignant. It is up to you to determine where he falls.

Do not be a woman who makes a career of falling in love with narcissists ... As long as you are attached to one, you will not be happy.

The self-love journey is an arduous one ... patience, perseverance, courage, discipline, and practice are necessary traits to exercise on this path.

Singlehood

Singlehood is not a second-class position ... Singlehood and marriage are not comparable states. They are simply different life paths. Each path will offer some life-lessons that are not available on the other one. Your attitude affects your experience, so if you believe that you are a second-class citizen because you are single, you will feel like one and your prospective prince will pick that up on his radar.

Singlehood offers an excellent opportunity ... to discover who you *really* are outside of your roles as daughter, mother, wife, grandmother, aunt, etc.

A desire to be connected with a man in a primary way is healthy ... This desire becomes problematic if you become consumed by this wish.

When you are *ruled* by the desire to be in a relationship ... it is easy to overlook the road signs indicating that you are on a path of self-destruction. A desperate person will often put up with demeaning interactions. At the very least, settling is a strong possibility. Since life is so precious and your time on the planet so short, do you not deserve to maximize your experience?