

February 17, 2003

**More Red Roses**  
**By Kenneth A. Sprang**

*Where love is concerned, too much is not even enough.*

–Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais

Last week, as I surfed the web looking for reasonably priced roses to send my wife for Valentine’s Day, I found an article explaining why red roses dramatically rise in price in February. Apparently there is not much demand for them the rest of the year.

Maybe that phenomenon highlights the problem with Valentine’s Day. For one day of the year florists are overwhelmed, restaurants are fully booked, and for a brief day we pause to remember the someone special in our lives. Those who desire a romantic relationship but do not have one, are sadly reminded of the fact at every turn.

It’s nice to pause on Valentine’s Day and savor romance, just as it is nice to enjoy the warmth of the Christmas season or the excitement of a wedding day. But what about the day(s) after? How do we keep the romance going or find it in the first place?

I am still very much in love with my wife, after eight years together. We were recently reflecting on our relationship and how we have gotten from the storybook romance of courtship, through some challenging times in our early years together, to this time of really being *in love* again. A therapist once said to me that I should ask what I can *give* to a relationship, not what I can get. I realize that is the heart of what has worked for Carol and me.

Dr. John Gottman, who has done years of empirical study of couples, has observed that couples in good relationships give each other innumerable “appreciations” each day—words of affirmation, an unsolicited hug or kiss, a thank you for an enjoyable meal or an errand run.

In Imago work with singles and couples, we focus on claiming our “wholeness,” the “relaxed joyfulness” we experienced when we came into the world. That wholeness is slowly reclaimed as our partner stretches beyond his or her comfort zone to give us what we most want or need. The transcendent part of the process is that as we stretch to give to our partner, we grow and enrich our own lives. When I stretch to give to Carol, whether stopping to hold her when I am really tired and distracted, or helping her to pursue her dreams, I raise my self-esteem another notch and look in the mirror with a little more affirmation.

This concept of asking what we can give rather than what we can get, is not limited to those already in committed relationships. It is equally applicable to singles looking for a life partner as well. I invite you to:

- Take a long look at yourself. Make a list of all your strengths, talents, and gifts, as well as the places where you know you need to stretch and grow.
- Now ask, “What do I bring to a relationship? How will I give to a partner?” Ask your date or your partner what he or she brings to a relationship. Listen carefully to the answer.
- Look at where and how you need to stretch and grow—whether it is in listening, increased patience, being more accepting, restraining criticism, controlling your temper, or simply learning to articulate affirmation. In sizing up a prospective partner, explore whether he or

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she can nurture you in that growth.

- Finally, whether you are in relationship or just dating, give appreciations and give them often. Don't take one another for granted.

I really think we should send more red roses--even to ourselves now and again. We should celebrate our own gifts, and share our gifts and appreciations with the ones we love. In fact, over the next week or two I invite you to give your partner or someone you are dating no less than five appreciations every day—ten is even better—25 would be terrific. Email me and let me know how it goes.

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