

Five *on* Friday

Musings on Mental Health

To Love

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Valentine's Day is right around the corner. It is a day devoted to love - that magical mix of emotion, psychology, physiology, and pixie dust. Poems. Songs. Biographies. Novels. Films... Love features prominently in every form of storytelling.

love

[Photo Credit](#)

Love resides at the core of human connection, healing, hope, and meaning. As we approach the day of the year devoted to love, the wisdom espoused in the quotes below adds weft to the weave of what it means to love - and love's intimate ties to mental health.

1. “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.” These are the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered on June 23, 1963, at the Walk to Freedom March in Detroit. It was the largest civil rights demonstration in the nation’s history to date and drew crowds of 125,000 people or more. [Dr. Bernice A. King](#) founded [Be Love](#) to carry forward her father’s fight for a more just world. In her words, “Every day, we have the chance to drive out darkness with light and hate with love.” As individuals and societies, our health, including our mental health, depends on light and love triumphing over darkness and hate.

2. “Which wolf wins?” There’s a Cherokee parable in which a grandchild sits at an elder Cherokee’s feet as the elder tells of a battle that goes on inside all people. “My child,” he says, “life’s battle is between two wolves inside all of us. One is selfish, argumentative, arrogant, angry, and jealous. The other is generous, loving, humble, and serene.” After a moment of pause to take it all in, the young Cherokee asks, “Which wolf wins?” The old Cherokee smiles, “The one you feed.” In the lore of this story lies the truth of choice and the idea that our mental health is enhanced when we hone our mind’s focus and intention – principles that sit at the crux of ancient meditation practices and modern psychotherapy.

3. Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.” Sigmund Freud missed the mark on a few things, but he got a lot right in his analysis of the human condition. He did not shy away from the meaning of love and its role in attachment, development, and neurotic angst. And although most of his writing focused on our development and dynamics as individuals, his concise critique of society in [Civilizations and Its Discontents](#) captures well the way in which loving is central to our human experience and the social collective. His focus on productive labor and positive human relationships in *Civilizations and Its Discontent* might even be understood as a precursor to today’s focus on social determinants of health, including mental health.

4. “A true partner or friend is one who encourages you to look deep inside yourself for the beauty and love you’ve been seeking.” Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who passed from this earth three weeks ago at the age of 95 (1926-2022), wrote these words in [How to Love](#), the third book in his nine part series, [Mindfulness Essentials](#). He was a prolific author, poet, and teacher who championed what he called “engaged Buddhism.” He inspired people around the world with his practice of meditation, his wise and patient manner, and his commitment to bringing peace to the world by starting with deep introspection that yields understanding and compassion for oneself. He speaks with a clarity that is paradoxically simple and profound. We can only create the world we want when we begin by cultivating that world for ourselves, and it begins with love.

5. “Two of the hardest words in the language to rhyme are life and love.” Among the most important figures in 20th-century musical theater, Stephen Sondheim wrote the lyrics to a multitude of award winning shows, including *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Into the Woods*. He has rhymed hundreds, if not thousands, of words. He speaks with authority in [The Art of the Musical](#) about the challenge of rhyming life and love. Sondheim knows that love – the word – is hard to rhyme in his Broadway lyrics. He also knows, as do all of us, love – the verb – can be hard to rhyme with the challenges and complexities of real life. A poetic truth that somehow doesn’t stop us from trying.

Social activists, psychoanalyst, Cherokee elder, Zen Monk, Songwriter. You and me. Pursued with care and intention, love connects us, helps us heal, cope, and find meaning and joy. Good on Valentine’s Day. Good everyday for our mental health.
