



Creating Affinity₁

By Carlynn McCormick

“A loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge,”

—words penned by Scottish Writer, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881).

Beautiful words, kind words, but is a “loving heart” truly the key to all learning? And if it is, then shouldn’t it be the first lesson we teach our children?

And so it is: mother’s tender kiss, father’s gentle caress welcoming their child to the world. It is found in sharing sunsets, star-lit nights, the sweet smell of nature; it is found in words of endearment, encouragement and support. Lessons of the heart are indeed the solvent that washes away our tears and pain. Life is such a sunny affair when we love the people and things that surround us.

But like rusting metal love too can tarnish. It happens when unkind words escape our lips, when we tolerate gossip, or feel impatience for our fellows. It happens when we are “too busy” to notice a friend in need. Everyday newspapers unleash stories of crime, drugs, gang violence, war, politics gone awry — we read them and our affinity drops. And *these* lessons, our children learn from us as well.

Such lessons, however, were forged in Hell and ***not*** the knowledge Thomas Carlyle wrote about. How then can we create the loving heart he so gallantly praised?

Fortunately there is no ceiling on *how much* a person can love. The ability to acquire an ever-increasing quantity of love in our lives is inherent in each of us. It can in actual fact be drilled. We can raise our own affinity for *any* person, *any* place or *any* thing no matter how great our dislike is to start with.

To do so requires only willingness and a wee bit of discipline and presto a distaste for anything — from math to “Aunt Bessie” — can be undone.

Here’s how it works: simply *find something* about a person, place or thing *to admire*. Find something, anything to begin with, no matter how small, minuscule or infinitesimal and build from there. If you have the discipline to do this, after a while you will find yourself not only capable of tolerating other people’s foibles but of confronting the woes of the world.

Over the years, I have used a variation of this drill hundreds of times as a way to settle children’s squabbles. After each child has gotten a chance to express his or her upset, I ask “Mary” to find something she likes about “Joey.” Sometimes it takes her a long time to concede that “Joey” has *any* good quality whatsoever, but with encouragement, she always finds something she likes. Then I ask “Joey” to find something he likes about “Mary.” If one is patient and continues the drill long enough, both children end up happy and full of admiration for each other.

A similar result occurs in school when we find ways to stimulate children’s interest and admiration for subjects. By helping them to establish affinity for *everyone* and *everything* in their environment, we give them the key to knowledge.

Loving hearts beget loving hearts.



1 Affinity- A natural personal attraction. (The American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition)

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