

A very virtuous Valentine

Concentrate on giving love to others, not just on receiving material objects



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Here we are. Three days out from Valentine's Day and not even a peep from us on the opinion page.

Don't despair, though. I have just recently made some very interesting observations about the way we approach Valentine's Day, and what that tells us about ourselves and am excited to share it with you.

We set the day up to be a failure by being selfish when we could find happiness in less greed and self-absorption.

Overall it would seem that Valentine's Day has been designated as a day for everyone to think about "ME, ME, ME." What can you do for *me*? What about *my* happiness? Or how about, don't you feel sorry for *me*, because *I* have anyone to share the day with, and *I'm* lonely and miserable. ...

Enough of the sniveling, folks! It's time to suck it up and stop feeling sorry for ourselves.

Why not focus on the happiness of others instead of behaving as if, simply because it is the 14th day of the second month of the year, we deserve roses and romance?

Besides, if selfishness is all this day is about, how is it different from any other day?

Think about what people really do on this day.

In general, young women are doing one of two things, both of which are self-centered.

A good deal of women are plotting to revolt against this wretched celebration of love. They are unhappily single and thus determined to make all those who revel in their happiness feel wicked.

These are the same women who buy a tub of Ben and Jerry's, rent "Sleepless in Seattle" and send one another bitter cards about saggy boobs.

Meanwhile, the women who have someone to share the day with are desperately hoping their boyfriends will think of something that will warrant bragging rights to the girls when they return.

Bragging rights are, of course, granted to

the girl who received the most outrageous gift.

Roses don't really count because they're expected, but the sun isn't going to rise if the bouquet doesn't arrive. Dinner? Of course.

The meal should be in an expensive restaurant where she will see and be seen, and jewelry or some other lavish token of his affection with compliments for dessert are also expected.

And as for the young men ... it would seem as if their foremost concern on this day is to avoid the you-don't-love-me routine, while putting as little effort into the festivity as possible. The gift is the suggestion of the blonde at the department store, reservations made wherever she suggests and a shower and a shave if the girl's lucky.

If there is no special someone in his life, he probably wouldn't notice the pizza he ordered was heart-shaped.

Do you see what I'm getting at here? By serving our selfish desires, the day will never live up to its full potential. The true meaning of love will never be realized. The evidence of love is not the biggest display of affection on February 14th.

"Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud. It is not rude; it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Think of how gratifying Valentine's Day 1999 could be if you lived Sunday for others rather than yourself.

You can start by relinquishing that grudge you have been holding onto so tightly. Then afford a sincere smile to everyone you encounter. Write that note of encouragement you have been meaning to write and call your grandmother just to say hello.

Those of you who have someone to spend the day with, make an effort to brighten the day of those who do not. Here is where the heart-shaped pizza could be put to use. Those of you who are destined to spend the day alone, rejoice for your friends who have someone.

Still down in the dumps? Read 1 Corinthians; whether you're a believer or not, it will lift your spirits. Donate to a charity; spend some time volunteering with under-privileged kids. Take your little brother roller-skating. Give of yourself.

"Do everything in love." 1 Corinthians 16:14.

So this Valentine's Day, take a different approach. Spend the day trying to show your loved ones, or those who seem to need love, that you love them instead of worrying about who loves you and how they show it.



DEB LEE/DN

Pained parasites

Scabies sufferer elucidates solution to often overlooked infestation



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I celebrated my 34th birthday recently (I'm a Sagittarius, thanks for asking) by finding out that I, and about half the people I hung out with, all had scabies. In fact, that was the going rate at my birthday party: fifty percent.

I have to say, it's not the first birthday I've spent scratching where it itches.

The culprit: *Sarcoptes Scabiei*

At first you think they are chiggers, ticks, even flea bites — little red bumps that itch like the devil. At night it gets worse.

As it spreads it may seem like a rash that gets you between your fingers, on your wrists or underarms or breasts, between your thighs or along the waistband and hem of your underwear.

It's maddening.

Scabies was the first disease of which the cause was definitely known. The tiny mite that causes the condition (*Sarcoptes Scabiei*) was identified in 1687.

It's a highly contagious infestation of microscopic parasites that burrow through the subsurface of the skin depositing eggs, feces and dead body parts as they go.

As many as two months may pass before an allergic reaction (itching, rash or bumps) alerts the host — by then the parasites have gained a foothold and can be difficult to remove.

Once bitten, twice shy

Treatment is necessary and, because of the risk of re-infection, action must be taken by all members of a household together, even those who do not yet show signs of infestation.

Usually, scabies is treated with a cream of 5 percent topical permethrin, which is only available by prescription. Over-the-counter head lice medications like Nix can contain as much as 1 percent permethrin but have shown to be ineffective in treating scabies.

The medication (scabicide) is massaged onto clean skin from the nape of the neck to the soles of the feet and left on overnight.

As everyone in the household must be treated simultaneously, and all areas of the body completely covered, this may be the opportunity for a little togetherness among roommates or family members. Besides, a massage can help transform the feelings of shame, anger and dirtiness that can arise at this time.

The next step: clean house.

Vacuum the floor, the sofas and chairs.

Wash all clothes. Clothing and other items (such as children's toys) that cannot be washed must be sealed in airtight garbage bags for a week — to starve mites to death.

As long as 14 hours after medication, a shower or bath washes away the medicine but not the eggs, fecal matter and (hopefully dead) mites, as these are still beneath the skin. For this reason, itching and other symptoms will not go away immediately and may last for a week or more, during which time a wait-and-see attitude should be adopted.

Don't panic

It might be a good idea to take garlic supplements (two to four capsules or a whole clove) several times a day, as this is supposed to have antiparasitical properties. Vitamin E will help the skin heal.

The body should be kept clean and the skin healthy while you wait a full 14 days to see if reinfestation has occurred.

Only after this time period has elapsed should any attempt be made to re-medicate, as overuse of the medication (it is a poison after all) may cause other health problems.

Caveat emptor

In the interest of good journalism and in order to give you an idea of some of the alternative methods adopted by desperate sufferers of scabies, I offer this summary of illegal, unsafe and just plain inadvisable methods of scabies control. I do not recommend any of this to any-

one.

■ A young woman of our acquaintance has attempted to recruit sufferers to ask for a refillable prescription at the time they see their doctors, using refills to help friends who may not be able to afford to see a doctor. This is in violation of the law.

■ A young man, confronted with an early and minor infestation, simply heated a small wire (unwound paperclip) with a butane lighter and cauterized the little bumps himself. This method is pretty ballsy and should not be attempted in the case of a large infestation, or once a rash has developed. If attempted on another person it could be considered practicing medicine without a license.

■ A simple test for scabies (I haven't tried it myself) is to scrape away a layer of skin from an infection bump with a sterile instrument and apply a felt-tip pen to the site. Ink will fill up the tiny under-skin trail by which the mite burrowed in.

■ A certain monk suggested to us that the infected area be doused with gasoline, which would then be ignited. As the parasites flee the flames you can stab them to death with an ice pick. This is a joke.

And God forbid anyone should constitute any of this as medical advice. My major source of information was the Internet, so you can judge for yourself how accurate it's likely to be.

By all means, consult a physician and all medications should only be taken "as directed."

Me, well, I take a hard line against invaders.