

# On Holding Onto Yourself While Staying Close

*Different voices, across centuries, converging on the same idea.*

This isn't a new idea, and it isn't only a clinical one. Poets, monks, novelists, and therapists have been circling the same difficult truth for a long time: that real closeness depends on two people who are each still, stubbornly, themselves. What follows is a small collection of voices saying that, each in their own way.

*“Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other.”*

**Rainer Maria Rilke**

*Letters to a Young Poet, 1904*

*“Love rests on two pillars: surrender and autonomy.”*

**Esther Perel**

*Mating in Captivity*

*“Anxiety is extremely contagious, but so is calm.”*

**Harriet Lerner**

*The Dance of Connection*

*“Loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is richness of self.”*

**May Sarton**

*“Only when one is connected to one's own core is one connected to others.”*

**Anne Morrow Lindbergh**

*Gift from the Sea*

*“The need to become a separate self is as urgent as the yearning to merge forever.”*

**Judith Viorst**

*Necessary Losses*

*“Knowing how to be solitary is central to the art of loving.”*

**bell hooks**

*All About Love: New Visions*

*“Love is a battle; love is a war; love is a growing up.”*

**James Baldwin**

*“You must love in such a way that the person you love feels free.”*

**Thich Nhat Hanh**

*How to Love*

*“No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.”*

**Nathaniel Hawthorne**

*The Scarlet Letter, 1850*

*“To be nobody but yourself in a world that is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.”*

**e.e. cummings**

*Widely quoted; original published source uncertain*

## The Thread Running Through All of These

None of these voices are describing distance. They're describing a particular kind of closeness — one that only holds up because both people are still standing on their own two feet inside it. That's the whole idea behind differentiation, and behind this practice: not less connection, but a sturdier kind.

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