

MOMENT OF SURRENDER

VALENTINE'S DAY MEANS MORE TO BUSINESS THAN LOVERS

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MODELS: TASMA KAMAL, ZAHID ISLAM PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Valentine's Day has as much to do with love as the Easter Bunny has with resurrection. For one thing, it is named after a martyr. Are we celebrating punishment or passion?

In the olden days, a typical observance involved bachelors pulling maiden's names out of a pot as in a raffle. Nowadays, Valentine's Day is a favourite of

people who buy each other expensive gifts and go out to fancy restaurants and clubs.

The manager of a popular Chinese restaurant in Dhanmondi says he is expecting twice the usual number of customers. "It's not only young couples; we get a lot of families too." SM Tipu Sultan, treasurer of the Agargaon Wholesale Flower Market

says, "On Valentine's Day, our sales of roses alone jumps up to more than a hundred thousand from 40-50 thousand pieces on a regular day." A designer jewelry store is offering 30 percent discount on diamonds.

Valentine Day is also when a billion cards

exchange hands—second only to Christmas—and 85 percent of them by women, thanks to Esther Howland, a 1847 graduate from Mount Holyoke College, USA, whose father owned a stationery store and who came up with the idea of mass-producing Valentine cards. The 'mother of the Valentine' never married but she did get very rich.

I'm skeptical about any occasion in which the greeting card business and the diamond cartel collaborate to promise happiness. Greeting cards have their place—congratulations on the new baby, or graduation, peace and harmony in 2015. But I believe love sings—or should sing—harmonies only you can hear, not the tiny pipe organ of a greeting card serenade.

Diamonds are fine too. But in the macabre series of burning people alive, it would be nice for love to be associated with something warm, soft and accessible, not cold, hard and exorbitant. Love—romantic or universal—may be too much to ask. How about a little empathy and tolerance for each other?

Bernard Shaw thought the old adage "Love thy neighbour" should have been modified to: "Tolerate thy neighbor." When the hate between two persons makes international news, perhaps that's where they can start—learn to tolerate each other.

HOW TO FALL IN LOVE IN FOUR MINUTES

Psychologists have long been trying to make people fall in love. Dr Arthur Aron, a psychologist at Stony Brook University, New York succeeded in doing just that in his laboratory. A heterosexual man and woman sit face-to-face and answer a series of increasingly personal questions. Then they stare silently into each other's eyes for four minutes. Six months later, they get married. They invite the entire lab to the ceremony.

The 36 questions* in the study are broken up into three sets, with each set intended to be more probing than the previous one.



The idea is that mutual vulnerability fosters closeness. According to Mandy Len Carton, one of the many people who fell in love after the experiment, "I've skied steep slopes and hung from a rock face by a short length of rope, but staring into someone's eyes for four silent minutes was one of the more thrilling and terrifying experiences of my life. I spent the first couple of minutes just trying to breathe properly. There was a lot of nervous smiling until, eventually, we settled in.

I know the eyes are the windows to the soul or whatever, but the real crux of the moment was not just that I was really seeing someone, but that I was seeing someone really seeing me. Once I embraced the terror of this realisation and gave it time to subside, I arrived somewhere unexpected."

Source: The New York Times, "The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness" in Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (1997).

Love should fizz without champagne and grow even in hard soil.

Valentine's Day only pretends to celebrate what we like about love while more often undermining it. Love is hope and madness and generosity; it asks for nothing in return. Valentine's Day, on the other hand, evokes duty and devotion placed through a metal detector.

A million Web sites advise men on what to give, lest they send the wrong message or are reduced to relying on a last minute purchase—chocolates from the neighbourhood store or a pair of slippers.

Restaurants cue the sitars and tablas and offer overpriced dinner-for-two. The table is so small that in between the candle and the silverware and the cell phones and her purse, there is no room left on the table to enjoy the food—or each other's company. You don't get a chance to stare silently into each other's eyes for four minutes, which is apparently