

[Click to Print](#)[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Posted on Thu, Dec. 24, 2009

Stop the soulmate insanity

Madonna's list of soul mates is starting to look like the Thanksgiving parade. Ditto Jennifer Aniston, Kate Hudson, John Mayer, Tom Cruise, Tony Romo, Drew Barrymore, Nicholas Cage, Tom Arnold, Donald and Ivana Trump. They make Zsa Zsa Gabor and Elizabeth Taylor (note to young people: Google or BING them) look like convent girls and Cary Grant and Frank Sinatra look like celibate monks.

What is a soul mate anyway? The most perfect person in the world for you, the yin to your yang, the one who completes you?

As a couples' therapist for over 30 years, the whole concept makes me want to throw up. My students learn quickly that to even mention the term in my class as a serious topic threatens their academic credibility.

Am I against love? Certainly not. It's a grand notion and a lot of fun, but to think that Love is Enough when it comes to marriage is beyond naïve. It's stupid. How many Love Matches end in divorce (see paragraph #1)? The math is simple enough but the concept prevails despite all the evidence to the contrary.

Let's look at the sheer infeasibility of the basic premise.

The population of the world is almost seven BILLION people. The population of the United States is over three hundred million people.

And yet… most people find their soul mate in their own Zip code. Or in high school, at college, or in their workplace. Don't you find that amazing? Astounding? Astonishing?

I surely do.

I also find it unbelievable, not as in "It's freaking unbelievable!" but as in "I don't believe it". Yet, the notion persists, especially at this time of year when so many people get engaged, and in the late spring and summer when the wedding marches begin in earnest.

Today's ideas about love survive from the era of courtly love five centuries ago. One royal

would see another at a jousting contest, and then write an ode to said love interest&hellipmail being what it was, it could take years for the missive to arrive at her castle.

And years later for the return emotion-laden reply. And why not? There was no television then, nothing but a morality play or a Gregorian chant here and there to interrupt the tedium of ordering about the servants. Or waiting for the Plague.

Besides, it had nothing to do with marriage. That was arranged for political and economic advantages. So write away, young erstwhile lovers&hellipknock yourselves out. You'll probably never see each other again. Real estate and alliances being much more valuable than lust and ardor.

And the common people? They couldn't write and they mostly bred with the people in the hut next door, certainly within the same village. Not a poem or even a saucy limerick. It's time to marry, you're here, I'm here, why not?

Yet, today with all the varieties of instant communication, we have to fall in love, feed the beast with multiple IMs and texting and sexting, then expect that level of passion to survive burps, farts, and actual throwing up. Not to mention children and in-laws.

It's a crock. We love the myth of the perfect love because, when you get down to the nitty gritty of living day in, day out, day in, day out with one other person, it gets boring. Yup. Even the sex. No matter how agile and flexible you are, there are a limited number of orifices and appendages.

How many times can you play "Sailor, sailor, new in town?"

To keep the zing in, you have to work at it. Love is important but if you think that's the whole tamale, let me sell you some swampland in Florida.

Falling in love at first sight? Fageddaboutit. It's means you're unstable. You have to stand up for yourself and be interdependent with your significant other, not dependent and clingy with that special someone. Otherwise, you'll push them away because there's no room to breathe. Unless you find someone equally as needy and isolated as yourself, which is not the foundation for a viable relationship that promotes growth and change.

What often passes for love is an incredible neediness and a fear of being alone. No one completes you. That is what you have to do for yourself and find not just that one person to complement (and compliment) you but a network of friends to support you. Love exists and flourishes with an abundance of nutrients.

Staying in love&hellipfor years and even decades&hellipthat's the real deal.

Soulmates? No. Teammates&hellipyees.

Ann Rosen Spector is a clinical psychologist in Philadelphia and an Adjunct member of the Department of Psychology at Rutgers-Camden.