

Random Thoughts -- Love

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Love!
Love,
they say,
makes the world go round.
Love!
God is love,
or so they say.
"Love,
love,
hooray for love;
who was ever to blame for love?"

"Love is the doctrine of this church."
Love is the beginning
and the end of our existence.
"Love is never having to say,
'I'm sorry.'"
Love is the hostage we give
to an uncertain future.
Pain and grief are the measures of our love.
"What we've loved and lost
we lose to find how great a thing is loving
and the power of it
to make a dream come true."
Love is the only shelter we have
against a cold,

pitiless,
indifferent
universe.
"Ah, Love, let us be true to one another...."

Love!
Love,
they say,
makes the world go 'round.
Someone has said,
"We love out of our leisure from self-concern

and we are always self-concerned
unless we know
that someone other than our self
is prepared to maintain
the significance of our being."

"We love out our leisure from self concern...."
I wonder--
if that be true--
if we only love because we are loved--
how ever did love arise?
How did the golden sequence begin?
Who first achieved
sufficient leisure from self-concern
ever to love?

When I was a child
I heard the preacher say,
in a voice like stained-glass,
"We love Him because He first loved us."
I could tell by the tone of voice
that

HE

and

HIM

were written with capital letters.
I wondered how

HE

could be impressed
by this kind of love
which was only a payment
for services rendered
a quid-pro-quo.

When I was a child,
I heard the congregation sing,
"Just as I am
without one plea...."
I heard the congregation sing,

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me...."
As the harmonies and undertones died away,
I felt, rather than heard
another definition:
Love is not a transaction--
love is unconditional acceptance--
with all the warts and blemishes showing--
of another person's worth.

When I was a child,
I watched love being defined
in the living out of every day:
two people
who could be angry with each other--
who could afford to be angry with each other;
two people
who knew how to hurt each other
because they had opened themselves,
had made themselves vulnerable
to each other--
and sometimes they hurt each other,
terribly;
two people who always drew back
from the final, fatal blow--
who saw in each other
their own limitations,
their own completion.

Love:
two people
who need each other
to overcome themselves,
to fulfill their humanity;
two people who find in each other's eyes
a promise,

a vision,
a recognition
of what each is--
flawed
imperfect,
bumbling,
hurtful,
foolish,

vulnerable--
yet loved and accepted,
ensorcelled by the fumbling compassion
of each for the other.

I never heard them say
they loved each other.
I'm not sure that concept
ever flitted through their minds.
"I love you," was something
people said in movies.
Real life was too immediate
to rest on verbal definition.
And life,

painful,
frustrating,
gritty,
grinding
life
was bearable
because love was bonded to it.
What would have been unbearable
for one alone--
the little, improbable dreams,
the modest hopes
that did not come true,
the little, improbable dreams,
the modest hopes
that never would come true;
the part of life that was broken
and forever beyond fixing--
could be accepted with a shrug
because of love,
unspoken,
unquestioned,
undemanding
love.

I don't remember hearing them say,
"I love you."
But I was loved.
It was a harder love--

more demanding,

less resigned.
It was as if they knew
I was destined to more
than a repetition of their lives;
as if they dreamed
a different destiny for me;
as if they were determined
I would fulfill a different aspect of their lives,
moving out of their orbit,
but never beyond the reach of their love.
However it came out--
win
lose,
or draw--
the love would be there,
the sense of acceptance,
without question,
without qualification;
the love beyond expression
by any words.

Over time,
I hurt them;
they hurt me--
for my own good
and for theirs
and for a thousand feeble reasons.
(There is always sufficient reason
to justify a hurt.)
But the love existed
in some other realm--
impervious to hurt and pain and disappointment.
The love remained
and made life--
all of life--
bearable.

Love is a personal matter--

a matter of touching

of holding,
a matter of caresses
and nourishment
and nurturing.
It is said

an infant,
deprived of loving touches and caresses,
cannot survive.

Without love
the human infant sickens
and dies--
and no medical wizardry
can call its discouraged, defeated spirit
back to life.

We live for smiles,
for soft words
for cooing, mewling sounds,
for gentle caresses.
Deprived of them,
we die,
or we sublimate,
direct our energies elsewhere,
seeking a substitute for love,
settling for power
for wealth
for respect,
for prestige,
all of which, unsupported by love,
are hard to distinguish
from death.

I never heard them say,
"I love you."
But they loved each other.
How do I know that?
In what did that love consist?
Love for them
was a way of viewing the world
from the perspective of the first person plural.
For them,

life,
the world,
the future,
the past
ceased to be defined in terms of me, my, mine.
For them,
two worlds were insensibly folded together
and contained in we and us and ours--
two people viewing life,

living life
from a single perspective.

Nor was there ever any hint
that either one felt lessened,

cramped
confined by this relationship.
It was hard to tell
who was dominant,
who subordinate.
It was not that they sought equality;
the concept was foreign and disruptive.
They were together,
were meant to be together,
belonged to each other.
Authority was often an issue,
struggles occurred,
disagreements and conflicts;
there were winning times
and losing times,
but none of this touched the rock
of their relationship--
their togetherness--
their love.
The two of them,
together,
were part of the *isness* of existence.

Individuality was discovered,
personality was defined
by unconditional commitment,
merging two people into one life.
Anything less was
neither freedom
nor individuality.
anything else was
loneliness
and desolation.

There was a terrible price to pay
for this love which merged two lives.
they needed each other
with a desperate need.
For each of them
the other was simply irreplaceable.

Their love was large enough
to encompass their children,
to reach out to friends,
but no one else could replace either of them
for the other.

When he died,
as all must die,
her death began--
a terrible, long and lingering death--
the death of half a whole--
of beginning a sentence
and discovering there is no one there
who can complete it;
of remembering joys and griefs

dreams and dreads
no one else remembers;
of feeling a desolation
no word can communicate;
a desolation utterly beyond explanation,
a hurt revealed only by the eyes;
a terrible, long and lingering death,
retreating down the winding corridors
of her own mind,
listening to hidden voices,
hearing distant echoes,
revisiting a private past,
concluding unfinished conversations,
and daily inviting death
to complete its work,
while neighbors cluck their tongues in pity
and a family of dear strangers
struggles to act responsibly,
trying to fill a void
only death can fill.

It was a quaint,
old-fashioned love,
this merging of two into one
without loss,
with symbiotic enrichment.
It was an unselfconscious, mystic kind of love;
quite out of step with modern concerns

for individuality,

for personal integrity,
for not losing the self
in another's embrace.
It was an unselfconscious, mystic kind of love,
quite out of step with modern concerns
for self-fulfillment
for self-actualization,
when the self is defined
as an irreducible,
impermeable unit
and love consists in a clanging together
of calcite outer shells
with no spiritual penetration.

Perhaps that is why love
is so difficult for us;
perhaps that is why love
seems so utterly irrelevant
to world problems and global challenges:
We have lost the aptitude for mystical union;
we are left with a formless yearning,
for what, we know not.
We busily guard
the fortress of our uniqueness,
failing to see ourselves in others
or others in us;
forgetting the fact
that we receive our very selves
as gifts from the hands of others,
that we are sustained in life
by the faithfulness of others,
that we understand ourselves
only as we see ourselves
reflected in the eyes of others.
We busily guard ourselves
from the imperative of love,
the injunction that until we are prepared
to lose ourselves
we shall never truly find ourselves.
We busily guard ourselves
from the full implication of love--
that all people under the sun,
regardless of time
and death,

and the space between the stars
are one kin,
flesh of our flesh,
bone of our bone,
bound together in inescapable unity,
destined to the same end,
bound together in a mystic oneness
the origin of which we may never know;
the reality of which we can never escape.
We guard ourselves against the radical truth
that it is our separateness
which is the great illusion.

To believe in the possibility
of mystic union--
an incorporation of self and other
so that each is enhanced
and nothing lost--
to believe in the possibility of love--
that is the precondition of love:

for an individual,
for the world,
for the self.
It is not that we "love
out of leisure from self-concern;" we love
out of an enhanced conception of the self--
a recognition that we are all
permeable beings,
a recognition that we all share
the same substance of life,
a recognition that at the margins
we merge and are one.

Whatever glory or pain human beings have created

at any time,
at any place,
defines our minimal capacity to this moment.
Whatever potential
lies fallow in the human brain
in the human spirit
defines the promise of our future.
Love is rooted in the recognition
that nothing which happens

in the human family
leaves any member of that family untouched.

Love is a private matter
with public overtones,
with corporate imperatives.
When one human being is exalted,
all are enhanced.
When one human being is belittled,
all are diminished.
To see the world in human perspective
is to see the world
in the first person plural:
not me and mine,

not he and hers,
not they and theirs
but we,
and ours,
and us.
To affirm we,
ours,
us
feeling undiminished,
feeling enhanced;
to acknowledge the underlying unity
in which our unique diversity floats
is to share the pain and joy of all others
the globe around--
to make love possible
in matters large and small,
in matters public and private,
in relationships global and personal.
On this small planet,
hurtling through the vastness of space,
bearing its precious cargo of life,
there is not room for me-them;
there is only room for us,
living together, symbiotically,
risking the short-term advantage,
the narrow self-interest
for a future together,
for the interests of the larger self.

Love is always risky.
To love is to risk hurting

and being hurt.
To love and to lose love
is to risk death itself.
To love is to gamble
that in losing the self we know
in the embrace of another,
we may find the self
for which we have yearned
all the long millennia.

God is love,
so they say.
The god who is love
is the urgency in us
to risk ourselves in search of our larger self--
the god who is love
is the urgency in us
to gamble the obvious on the just barely possible--
the god who is love
is the temptation we so stubbornly resist
to open ourselves,
to allow ourselves to be vulnerable,
to reach past the barriers
we have erected
to keep us from love.

We talk too much of love;
examine it too closely;
analyze it too finely.
We talk to avoid the necessity of love--
we isolate ourselves behind a wall of words
--love songs, poems, romances--
and in contemplating the image of love,
evade its demand.

Love is two people,
or an entire species,
so conscious of their mutual involvement
that the world can only be seen
in terms of
the first person plural,
and life can only be defined
by that mystic union
the origin of which we may never know,
the reality of which is beyond doubt.
We love,

not out of leisure from our self-concern.

We love
out of the sense of our largest self--
the self encompassing
the entire human venture,
those with us now,
those who have gone before,
those who shall follow after,
the offspring and inheritors
of all our living and loving.

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