

On Love

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In the present day, many of our young people are oriented strongly to what they call the principle of love. Here we find an orientation to *Eros* as contrasting to the orientation to *Logos*. It may very well be a reaction to an overemphasis of the principle of *Logos* in the past, combined with a heavy repression of the principle of *Eros*, and it is, therefore, understandable. But what do we mean by *Eros*, or as otherwise designated, the aesthesis or aesthetic side of life and consciousness? Here, as well as in the *logoi*c side, there is a very lofty aspect and one that is also very dark. For remember, that where there is light, there is also shadow; and there can be a mixture of these two. Love can mean something that is not so beautiful, as well as something of the highest beauty possible. I think I will approach this subject in the ascending way, and consider first the dark possibilities and finally those most luminous possibilities at the other extreme.

One may mean by emphasis of love an orientation to that which is soft and comfortable—a kind of indulgence. For in the most common expression of the principle of love, we have the relationship between the sexes—a part of life itself and by no means necessarily an ignoble part; it can be very fine indeed. But it can be manifested in the sense of sheer self-indulgence. And we could find it also manifesting, as we do in the world, as an orientation to the intertwining, promiscuously, of bodies in a sort of Dionysian orgy, a letting go of all discipline, and of letting oneself become merely self-indulgent in what is an unlovely lust. This is one meaning that may be attached to this word, and it is a very ignoble meaning; for if there is anything darker in this world than a full-blown Dionysian orgy, I do not know what it is. That is one possibility, but above this there may be just simply an indulgence of the lighter side of life—a seeking toward an enjoyment which could be quite selfish in its motivation, or it could be a mixture of selfishness and self-giving. This is very common in life as we know it.

But this is not by any means the whole of the meaning of love, as was pointed out in the lecture on *bhakti* yoga.¹ Love can also mean a vast sympathy for the suffering of mankind. And, in addition, it can mean an orientation to the love of God or the love of Buddha; but here there is a lesser and a higher possibility also—both of them now good, but very different in their level of development. One may think of himself as a bambino in the arms of God where all loads are dropped and the Otherness bears one as an infant. This is normal for the infant soul. It is a seeking of a comfort and an enjoyment for oneself that is not by any means necessarily improper, but it is not the expression of maturity. To have comfort for oneself may be necessary at certain stages of evolution and is not, therefore, to be regarded adversely, but to linger in such a state, to wish as someone in India's past expressed it, "I do not wish to *be* sugar; I wish to *eat*

¹ See the audio recording, "Yoga of Love."

sugar,” is not the expression at all of spiritual maturity or of real manhood.² There is the fact of a suffering humanity, and love can mean a will, a wish, and a determination to alleviate this suffering in such ways as he can; and this is love coming to maturity. In that case, he seeks not to become simply the bambino in the arms of God, but he seeks to become identical with the Divine, and pick up his portion of the load of the Divine. This aspiration is highly noble. There is no question about that. But let us see what is here involved.

In the Buddhist picture, the aspirant on the *way* seeks to attain that Realization which admits him to the vestibule of *Nirvana*. And then he is told that he has the right to enter in and to know the surpassing delight, and wisdom, and utter comfort of this state, but he would shut himself away from this suffering humanity and would not be in any way able to help in relieving that suffering if he so entered into the *nirvanic* state. It is then suggested to him that having reached this point, he may renounce that delight for himself and then go forth among the members of the human race to do what he can to relieve them of their suffering lot, to liberate them from their bondage, to do what he can to transform their perverse wills; and that to do this he must give up the hope of his own enjoyment for countless ages, laboring among mankind so that they may become closer to the *nirvanic* Liberation, to help them enter in, to become one who follows the multitude as they enter into that glory, and enters, himself, only as the last one. This is for him to become one of the stones in the wall that helps to shelter humanity from evils far greater than now exist. It is a great sacrifice, a great renunciation. And his motivation must be that he does this without the hope of any compensation, even though he may be wise enough to know that the law of compensation is never violated. There must be no part in his motivation that seeks something for himself as a result of his sacrifice. The only thing that would lead to such a decision, the only attitude or quality that could make this possible is a true and pure love; and at this level, love becomes among the greatest of the great of all facets of our consciousness.

Is this what is meant when the young of our day orient themselves to love? Is it a will to take on and participate in the suffering of humanity in order that they may do something to alleviate it, to know anguish and agony in order that delight, and fulfillment, and the state of being redeemed may come to others? If this is what our young people mean when they orient themselves to love, then I cannot too greatly honor them. They have taken the greatest way possible. They have taken the road that leads to working with the company of the redeemers, and there is no higher vocation open to man. But this is the most austere of all ways—not an artificial self-imposed austerity that may be applied by the individual traveling the path of will, or *karma*, or the path of knowledge, or *jnana*. It is an austerity that comes out of the very circumstances of his life. It means the *way* of taking on the suffering of others to experience them as though they were his own—a suffering that he need not experience, for he has risen superior to this condition in his own proper person; but he takes it on because his love will not let him do otherwise. When there is the shattering force of disintegration that would cast apart and disseminate this human whole, he places himself within the breach and feels all

² Ramakrishna often said, “I don’t want to become sugar, I like to eat it. I never feel like saying, ‘I am Brahman.’ I say, ‘You are my Bhagavan and I Your servant.’”

the agony of the tearing apart, but by the strength of his own psyche, contributes to the power that would hold together; and in this, be assured, he feels the pain as though it were his own. And only the great lover could have the will to face this. If this is the way he chooses, there is no course worthy of greater respect, honor, and even reverence.

Now, there are certain important points that seem to be neglected—a tendency to view love as all sufficient and that it needs no help from either wisdom-knowledge or the principle of a divine power. This is a great mistake, for love by itself without wisdom-knowledge and without power can contribute to the suffering of humanity only the capacity to participate in that suffering, to take upon itself the agony of others that by his own power he may transform what he can, and this limits him very greatly indeed. To illustrate the point, I will read from a section of *Savitri* a portion that deals with just this situation. This is in Part II, Book 7, Canto 4 and is entitled “The Triple Soul-Forces.”

Here from a low and prone and listless ground
The passion of the first ascent began;
A moon-bright face in a somber cloud of hair
A Woman sat in a pale lustrous robe.
A rugged and ragged soil was her bare seat,
Beneath her feet a sharp and wounding stone.
A divine pity on the peaks of the world,
A spirit touched by the grief of all that lives,
She looked out far and saw from inner mind
This questionable world of outward things,
Of false appearances and plausible shapes,
This dubious cosmos stretched in the ignorant Void,
The pangs of earth, the toil and speed of the stars
And the difficult birth and dolorous end of life.
Accepting the universe as her body of woe,
The Mother of the seven sorrows bore
The seven stabs that pierced her bleeding heart:
The beauty of sadness lingered on her face,
Her eyes were dim with the ancient stain of tears.
Her heart was riven with the world's agony
And burdened with the sorrow and struggle in Time,
An anguished music trailed in her rapt voice.
Absorbed in a deep compassion's ecstasy,
Lifting the mild ray of her patient gaze,
In soft sweet training words slowly she spoke:
“O Savitri, I am thy secret soul.
To share the suffering of the world I came,
I draw my children's pangs into my breast.
I am the nurse of the dolour beneath the stars;
I am the soul of all who wailing writhe
Under the ruthless harrow of the Gods.
I am woman, nurse and slave and beaten beast;
I tend the hands that gave me cruel blows;

The hearts that spurned my love and zeal I serve;
I am the courted queen, the pampered doll,
I am the giver of the bowl of rice,
I am the worshipped Angel of the House.
I am in all that suffers and that cries.
Mine is the prayer that climbs in vain from earth,
I am traversed by my creatures' agonies,
I am the spirit in a world of pain.
The scream of tortured flesh and tortured hearts
Fallen back on heart and flesh unheard by Heaven
Has rent with helpless grief and wrath my soul.
I have seen the peasant burning in his hut,
I have seen the slashed corpse of the slaughtered child,
Heard woman's cry ravaged and stripped and haled
Amid the bayings of the hell-hound mob,
I have looked on, I had no power to save.
I have brought no arm of strength to aid or slay;
God gave me love, he gave me not his force.
I have shared the toil of the yoked animal drudge
Pushed by the goad, encouraged by the whip;
I have shared the fear-filled life of bird and beast,
Its long hunt for the day's precious food,
Its covert slink and crouch and hungry prowl,
Its pain and terror seized by beak and claw.
I have shared the daily life of common men,
Its petty pleasures and its petty cares,
Its press of troubles and haggard horde of ills
Earth's trail of sorrow hopeless of relief,
The unwanted tedious labour without joy,
And the burden of misery and the strokes of fate.
I have been pity, leaning over pain
And the tender smile that heals the wounded heart
And sympathy making life less hard to bear.
Man has felt near my unseen face and hands;
I have become the sufferer and his moan,
I have lain down with the mangled and the slain,
I have lived with the prisoner in his dungeon cell,
Heavy on my shoulders weighs the yoke of Time:
Nothing refusing of creation's load,
I have borne all and know I still must bear:
Perhaps when the world sinks into a last sleep,
I too may sleep in dumb eternal peace.
I have borne the calm indifference of Heaven,
Watched Nature's cruelty to suffering things
While God passed silent by nor turned to help.
Yet have I cried not out against his will,

Yet have I not accused his cosmic Law.
 Only to change this great hard world of pain
 A patient prayer has risen from my breast;
 A pallid resignation lights my brow,
 Within me a blind faith and mercy dwell;
 I carry the fire that never can be quenched
 And the compassion that supports the suns.
 I am the hope that looks towards my God,
 My God who never came to me till now;
 His voice I hear that ever says, 'I come':
 I know that one day he shall come at last."

She ceased and like an echo from below
 Answering her pathos of divine complaint
 A voice of wrath took up the dire refrain,
 A growl of thunder a roar of angry beast,
 The beast that crouching growls within man's depths,—
 Voice of a tortured Titan, once a God.

"I am the Man of Sorrows, I am he
 Who is nailed on the wide cross of the universe;
 To enjoy my agony God built the earth,
 My passion he has made his drama's theme.
 He has sent me naked into his bitter world
 And beaten me with his rods of grief and pain
 That I might cry and grovel at his feet
 And offer him worship with my blood and tears.
 I am Prometheus under the vulture's beak,
 Man, the discoverer of the undying Fire
 In the flame he kindled burning like a moth;
 I am the seeker who can never find,
 I am the fighter who can never win,
 I am the runner who never touched his goal;
 Hell tortures me with the edges of my thought,
 Heaven tortures me with the splendor of my dreams.
 What profit have I of my human soul?
 I toil like the animal, like the animal die.
 I am man the rebel, man the helpless serf;
 Fate and my fellows cheat me of my wage.
 I loosen with my blood my servitude's seal
 And shake from my aching neck the oppressor's knees
 Only to seat new tyrants on my back:
 My teachers lesson me in slavery,
 I am shown God's stamp and my own true signature
 Upon the sorry contract of my fate.
 I have loved, but none has loved me since my birth;
 My fruit of works is given to other hands:
 All that is left me is my evil thoughts,

My sordid quarrel against God and man,
 Envy of the riches that I cannot share,
 Hate of a happiness that is not mine.
 I know my fate will ever be the same,
 It is my Nature's work that cannot change:
 I have loved for mine, not for the beloved's sake,
 I have loved for myself and not for others' lives.
 Each in himself is sole by Nature's law,
 So God has made his harsh and dreadful world,
 So has he built the petty heart of man;
 Only by force and ruse can man survive:
 For pity is a weakness in his breast,
 His goodness is a laxity in the nerves,
 His kindness an investment for return,
 His altruism his ego's other face:
 He serves the world that him the world may serve.
 If once the Titan's strength could wake in me,
 If Enceladus from Etna could arise,
 I then would reign the master of the world
 And like a God enjoy man's bliss and pain.
 But God has taken from me the ancient force.
 There is a dull consent in my sluggish heart,
 A fierce satisfaction with my special pangs
 As if they made me taller than my kind;
 Only by suffering can I excel.
 I am the victim of titanic ills,
 I am the doer of demoniac deeds;
 I was made for evil, evil is my lot;
 Evil I must be and by evil live;
 Nought other can I do but be myself;
 What Nature made me, that I must remain.
 I suffer and toil and weep; I moan and hate."
 And Savitri heard the Voice, the echo heard
 And turning to her being of pity spoke:
 "Madonna of suffering, Mother of grief divine,
 Though art a portion of my soul put forth
 To bear the unbearable sorrow of the world.
 Because though art, men yield not to their doom,
 But ask for happiness and strive with fate;
 Because thou art, the wretched still can hope.
 But thine is the power to solace, not to save.
 One day I will return, a bringer of strength,
 And make thee drink from the Eternal's cup;
 His streams of force shall triumph in thy limbs
 And Wisdom's calm control thy passionate heart.
 Thy love shall be the bond of human kind,

Compassion the bright king of Nature's acts:
Misery shall pass abolished from the earth;
The world shall be freed from the anger of the Beast,
From the cruelty of the Titan and his pain.
There shall be peace and joy for ever more.”³

Here we have, from this quotation from *Savitri*, a presentation of the goddess of love who is unsupported by the divine wisdom and the divine power, on one hand, and on the other, the dark shadow of love which dwells as a titanic force in humanity so much of the time. The helplessness of love unsupported by wisdom and power means that it can solace but not save, and the darkness of love as it is perverted so much of the time in this humanity of ours. What is it that the student means when he speaks of love? Does he aim at the *way* of suffering of the goddess of love, of the Christ? Or does he mean the sordid Dionysianism so common to this humanity—an indulgence for personal self, not an offering for others. Which is it? It makes all the difference in the world. He who goes the higher *way* is a candidate to become a Christ; but it is the Via Dolorosa—the acceptance of the crucifixion, of participating in the suffering of this humanity. And if love alone is the *way* he goes, then he too may know that he can only solace but cannot save. Therefore, the wise man will join unto his *way* of love, also the *way* of wisdom and the *way* of power; and then he may not alone solace, but also has the power to save. It makes all the difference in the world. Love is not all. Wisdom is also a fact, and so is power.

³ Aurobindo Ghose, *Savitri*, vol. 28 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 503-508.