

# BASICS 10

## Impersonal love: the true beloved is not a person but a presence.

The love for which man is searching exists; it is as perfect, as beautiful, as perpetual, and as healing as he can imagine it to be. But it does not exist where he wants to find it. Only the inner kingdom holds and gives it at the end of his search. No other human being can do so unless he or she has previously entered the kingdom, and then only through all the limitations and colourings of the earthly consciousness.

From the first momentary glimpse of the soul till the final rest in it, he is being led to accept the truth that the love which he wants and hopes to find outside himself must be found within himself. The true beloved is not a person but a presence. When genuine love in its most intense form utterly overwhelms him, he will find that its physical form is a mere caricature of it and that its human form is a pale reflection from it. Instead of having to beg some woman or some man for crumbs of affection from their table, he will find a veritable fountain of everflowing love deep within his heart, and therefore ever available to him in the fullest measure. This is the one beloved who can never desert him, the unique soul-mate who will forever remain with him, the only twin soul he can seek with the absolute certainty that it is truly his own.

Although we have stated in *The Wisdom of the Overself* that a love restricted to the limited circle of wife, family, or friends is unphilosophic and should be extended in universal compassion to all mankind, this should not be mistaken to mean that such a restricted love ought to be abandoned. On the contrary, it should have its fullest place within the larger one. We have also written in the same book that "love" is one of the most misused words in English. We may now add that it is also one of the most debased words. Why? Because, very often, it is based on sheer self-interest and not on the beloved's interest and gives only so long as it gets; because, not seldom, the greater the ardour with which it begins, the greater the antipathy with which it ends; and because it frequently mistakes the goading of animal glands for the awakening of human affection. True love does not change or falter because the beloved has changed and faltered or because the physical circumstances wherein it was born have become different. It cannot be blown hither and thither by the accidents of destiny.

Only when love ceases to be personal and becomes impersonal, when it passes out of the local into the universal, does it fulfil itself and attain its own unmixed and unadulterated integrity.

PB: In the ninth chapter of "The Wisdom of the Overself" I wrote: For this notion of love is a sadly limited one. To bestow it only on a wife or a child, a sweetheart or a sister, is to bestow it in anticipation of its being returned. Man finds in time that such giving which hopes for a getting is not enough. Love cannot stop there. It seeks to grow beyond the restricted circle of a few friends and relations. Life itself leads him on to transcend it. And this he does firstly, by transcending the lure of the pitiful transient flesh and secondly, by transforming love into something nobler and rarer—compassion. In the divine self-giving of this wonderful quality and in its expansion until all mankind is touched, love finally fulfils itself. >

>This last sentence may lead to misunderstanding. The paragraph in which it appears is, I now see, incomplete. For compassion is an emotion felt by one ego when considering the suffering condition of another ego. But spiritual development eventually lifts itself above all emotions, by which I do not of course mean above all feeling. The wish to help another person should not spring out of compassion alone, nor out of the aspiration to do what is right alone, nor out of the satisfaction derived from practising virtue for its own sake alone. It should certainly come out of all these, but it should also come even more out of the breaking down of the ego itself. With that gone, there will be a feeling of oneness with all living creatures. This practice of self-identification with them is the highest form of love..

What really happens is a reunion with the true "Beloved," who is none other than the Soul of the individual, his higher Self. This is a real living entity, whose presence is felt, whose words are heard, and whose beauty arouses all one's love.

## Sentimentalism: the masquerade of love.

What did Jesus mean when he enjoined his disciples to love their neighbours as themselves? Did he mean the sentimental, emotional, and hail-fellow-well-met attitude which the churches teach? How could he when in order to become what he was, he had once to hate and turn aside from that part of himself, the lower part—that is, the ego and the animal nature—which is mostly what neighbours show forth? If his disciples were taught to hate, and not to love, their egos, how then could they love the ego-dominated humanity amidst which they found themselves? The injunction "Love thy neighbour" has often led to confusion in the minds of those who hear or read it, a confusion which forces many to refuse to accept it. And they are the ones who do not understand its meaning but misinterpret it to mean "Like thy neighbour!" The correct meaning of this

age-old ethical injunction is "Practise compassion in your physical behaviour and exercise goodwill in your mental attitude towards your neighbour." Everyone can do this even when he cannot bring himself to like his neighbour. Therefore, this injunction is not a wholly impracticable one as some believe, but quite the contrary. >

>Whoever imagines that it means the development of a highly sentimental, highly emotional condition is mistaken; for emotions of that kind can just as easily swing into their opposites of hate as remain what they are. This is not love, but the masquerade of it. Sentimentality is the mere pretense of compassion. It breaks down when it is put under strains, whereas genuine compassion will always continue and never be cancelled by them. True love towards one's neighbour must come from a level higher than the emotional and such a level is the intuitive one. What Jesus meant was, "Come into such an intuitive realization of the one Infinite Power from which you and your neighbour draw your lives that you realize the harmony of interests, the interdependence of existence which result from this fact." What Jesus meant, and what alone he could have meant, was indicated by the last few words of his injunction, "as thyself." The self which they recognized to be the true one was the spiritual self, which they were to seek and love with all their might—and it was this, not the frail ego, which they were also to love in others. The quality of compassion may easily be misunderstood as being mere sentimentality or mere emotionality. It is not these things at all. They can be foolish and weak when they hide the truth about themselves from people, whereas a truly spiritual compassion is not afraid to speak the truth, not afraid to criticize as rigorously as necessary, to have the courage to point out faults even at the cost of offending those who prefer to live in self-deception. Compassion will show the shortcoming within themselves which is in turn reflected outside themselves as maleficent destiny. >

>When the adept views those who are suffering from the effects of their own ungoverned emotion or their own uncontrolled passion and desire, he does not sink with the victims into those emotions, passions, and desires, even though he feels self-identity with them. He cannot permit such feelings to enter his consciousness. If he does not shrink from his own suffering, it is hardly likely that the adept will shrink from the sufferings of others. Consequently it is hardly likely that the emotional sympathy which arises in the ordinary man's heart at the sight of suffering will arise in precisely the same way in the adept's heart. He does not really regard himself as apart from them. In some curious way, both they and he are part of one and the same life. If he does not pity himself for his own sufferings in the usual egoistic and emotional way, how can he bring himself to pity the sufferings of others in the same kind of way? This does not mean that he will become coldly indifferent towards them. On the contrary, the feeling of identification with their inmost being would alone prevent that utterly; but it means that the pity which arises within him takes a different form, a form which is far nobler and truer because emotional agitation and egotistic reaction are absent from it. He feels with and for the sufferings of others, but he never allows himself to be lost in them; and just as he is never lost in fear or anxiety about his own sufferings, so he cannot become lost in those emotions or the sufferings of others. The calmness with which he approaches his own sufferings cannot be given up because he is approaching other people's sufferings. He has bought that calmness at a heavy price—it is too precious to be thrown away for anything. And because the pity which he feels in his heart is not mixed up with emotional excitement or personal fear, his mind is not obscured by these excrescences, and is able to see what needs to be done to relieve the suffering ones far better than an obscured mind could see. He does not make a show of his pity, but his help is far more effectual than the help of those who do.

## **A love that is no real help: the false sentimentality.**

The idea that ordinary people can love one another, including those they have never met as well as those they meet day after day, is a pleasant piece of sentimentalism. It sounds well when solemnly uttered by ministers of religion before their respectful congregations or when published as advice by professional psychologists. But where are the individuals who succeed in following it? Only saints can achieve complete empathy. For all others the idea is vague and unreal, although convenient to use in talk at Christmas time.

"Hatred ceaseth not by hatred," declared the Buddha, "It ceaseth only by compassionate love." This counsel is much the same as Jesus' injunction to love our enemies. Many people, who wish to do what is ethically right and feel that their best course is to follow the ethics prescribed by such great souls as Jesus or Buddha, get confused here and wallow in sentimentality under the mistaken impression that they are following these counsels.

Few people know what love really means because with nearly all it is filtered through the screens of bodily and selfish considerations. In its pure native state it is the first attribute of the divine soul and consequently it is one of the most important qualities which the seeker has to cultivate.

He will not lose the capacity to feel; in this he will still be like other men: but it will be free from false sentimentality and debased animality.

He must give out that love of which Jesus spoke. But it is not to be an unbalanced sentimentality; rather it is a serene self-identification with others without being thrown off one's own centre. That is why reason is a helpful check here. Above all, he must love the Real, the Overself.

Too often this holy and beautiful feeling deteriorates under the ego's pressure and falters into mere sentimentality.

A fuzzy sentimentality which passes for mystical feeling is only its counterfeit.

The truth crushes all the falseness and all the deceptiveness in sentimentality and emotionality but leaves intact what is sound in them. The ego eagerly wants to nourish itself with these pitiful illusions, therefore.

Sentimentality may enfeeble a person and mislead his impulses.

Much harm has been done by the pseudo-romantic nonsense and false suggestions put out by cinema, magazines, and novels.

[Note: and we could add today "and social networks"]

Only an unflinching devotion to truth and an unyielding exercise of reason can see through these insincerities of sentimentality.

A gushy sentimentality which refrains from saying what needs to be said or doing what needs to be done because it will hurt people's feelings, is mere weakness and cowardice, not true compassion.

A silent compassion which does things is preferable to a voluble sentimentality which does nothing.

The disciple must have no room for false sentimentality if he seeks truth. Consequently, he will not apply the phrase "a broken heart" to himself at any time, for he knows that what it really means is a broken ego, a severed attachment to some external thing which has to be given up if the way is to be cleared for the coming of Grace. It is only when he is unwilling or unable to do this for himself that destiny steps in, taking him at his word in his search for truth and reality, and breaks the attachments for him. If he accepts the emotional suffering which follows and does not reject it, he is able to pass into a region of greater freedom, and of progress to a higher level. His heart is not broken arbitrarily or capriciously, but only there where it most needs to be broken—where passion, desire, and attachment bind him the most strongly to illusion and to error.

We can harm others and ourselves by practising a sloppy sentimentality in the name of love, a misguided humanitarianism in the name of service.

Sentimentality is a disease. The sooner the aspirant is cured of it, the quicker will be progress.

Sentimentality is not spirituality. It is true we give our goodwill to all mankind, and so we give it to those who are the instruments of dark forces. But that does not mean weakness or foolishness in our dealings with them. Life will teach them.

Leave them alone.

The best way to help the other person who is in trouble is not to get swept away by his feelings and emotions of suffering. It is enough to register them at the moment of meeting, but thereafter one must stand detached if real help is to be given from a superior source. Real help is not sentimentality.

A time comes to turn from youth and become a man, to put aside sloppy sentimentality and look at the hard realities which must be lived with.

Jesus' preachment of love of one's neighbour as oneself is impossible to follow in all fullness until one has attained the height whereon his own true self dwells. Obedience to it would mean identifying oneself with the neighbour's physical pain and emotional suffering so that they were felt not less keenly than one's own. One could not bear that when brought into contact with all kinds of human sorrow that shadow life. It could be borne only when one had crushed its power to affect one's own feelings and disturb one's own equilibrium. Therefore, such love would bring unbearable suffering. By actively identifying oneself with those who are sorrowing, by pushing one's sympathy with them to its extreme point, one gets disturbed and weakened. This does not improve one's capacity to help the sufferer, but only lessens it. To love others is praiseworthy, but it must be coupled with balance and with reason or it will lose itself ineffectually in the air. Not to let his interest in other matters or his sympathy with other persons carry him away from his equilibrium, his inner peace, but to stop either when it threatens to agitate his mind or disturb his feelings, is wisdom.

Whoever thinks wills and acts by the light of, and in harmony with, these truths attains godness free from mere sentimentality, wisdom unmarred by intellectual arrogance, and strength purified from low egoism.

## Neurotic sentimentality and the emotional complexes

He should calmly recognize that suffering has its allotted function to perform in the divine plan, that other people have their lessons to learn through it when they will learn in no other way, and that the spectacle of its operation should, in such cases, be met with intelligent understanding rather than with neurotic sentimentality. He should face the fact that many people will not learn from reason, intuition, or teaching and that no one can really liberate them from their sufferings except themselves.

Every other kind of liberation is a false one. Others may effect it today only to see the same condition return tomorrow. He should not, in certain situations calling for hard decision, for instance, show unjustifiable weakness under the belief that he is showing forbearance, nor submit to antisocial egotism under the thought that he is practising love, nor abandon his highest duties for the sake of making a false and superficial peace with interfering ignorance, nor passively accept a flagrant wrong because God's will must always be borne.

Too many of these neurotics are too full of unstable egoism to have their emotional complexes soluble by any other psychological treatment than a robust and direct attack upon these complexes. A mushy sentimentality will merely prolong the life of such a complex.

### Philosophic love

We have been told by well-meaning ministers of religion and counsellors in psychology to practise Jesus's words, "Love thy neighbour." Now there are two different ways in which we can do so, because there are two different interpretations of these words—the religious and the philosophic. According to the first, we have at least to be amiable toward our next-door neighbour, or at most to throw our arms around him and express our warm feeling for him in a gushy, sentimental, hyper-emotional manner. According to the second and philosophic interpretation, we have to understand that every person who crosses our path is our neighbour, everyone with whom we are thrown into momentary or continuous contact is our neighbour, whether at home or at work. It is in these immediate contacts that irritations are bred, differences are noted, and dislikes appear. It is much easier to love humanity as a whole or in the abstract than it is to love humanity in the individual and in the concrete. In spite of the instinctive urge to manifest irritability, dislike, anger, resentment, or even hatred against those with whom you are thrown in contact, you can steel your will and resist the negative feeling. If you can take all these negative feelings and sublimate them into understanding, tolerance, and goodwill based on the teachings of philosophy, you are actually loving your neighbour in the sense that Jesus meant it. You will then see that such philosophic love is far removed from and far superior to the hyper-emotionalism which blows hot and cold.

The religious feelings of a philosopher are not less existent than those of the outwardly pious; they are deep and delicate: yet they are untouched by sentimentality.

Those who cannot make the leap and rise above human love to their higher self—with its impersonality and immateriality—may continue to draw a happiness from it. But the limitations will be there, inexorable, unconquerable, of time and body, relativity and change.

We may divide these different kinds of love conveniently into animal-physical love, emotional-mental love, and impersonal-spiritual love.

### Love enemies?

Noble indignation and just resentment are on an immensely higher level than grossly selfish indignation and greedy resentment. But in the case of the disciple, for whom the scale of moral values extends farther than for the "good" man, even they must be abandoned for unruffled serenity and universal goodwill. To the definitely wicked and the evilly obsessed he need not give his love. But he must give them and all others who wrong him his forgiveness, for his own sake as well as theirs. Every thought of resentment at another's action against him, every mood of bitterness at the other's refusal to do something he wishes him to do, is a crude manifestation of egoism in which, as disciple, he cannot indulge without harming his own self and hindering a favourable change in the other person's attitude towards him. The man who burns with hate against an enemy is, by the fuel of his own thoughts, keeping the fire of the other man's mutual hate alive. Let him remember instead those glorious moments when the higher self touched his heart. In these moments all that was noble in him overflowed. Enemies were forgiven, grievances let go and the human scene viewed through the spectacle of tenderness and generosity. Only by such a psychological about-turn towards goodwill and forgiveness will he open the first door to abatement of his enemy's feeling.

If he is to keep his inward peace unruffled he must live above the level of those who have it not. This can be done only if he obeys the practical injunctions of Jesus and Buddha, only if he keeps out of his emotional system all the negatives like resentment, bitterness, quarrelsomeness, jealousy, spite, and revenge. These lower emotions must definitely be outgrown if philosophic calm is to be the supreme fact and philosophic wisdom the guiding factor in his life. When other men show their enmity and meanness toward him, he is to retaliate by showing his indifference and generosity. When they falsely assail his character or enviously calumniate his work, he is to forbear from harsh feelings and not let them forfeit his goodwill. He is not to succumb to the human temptation to retaliate in kind. For he is engaged on a holy ascent, and to succumb would be to slip grievously back. Indeed, out of the base actions of others, he may kindle noble reactions which assist his upward climb.

Why should he let resentment drag him into the same error? On the contrary, they offer a chance to deny his ego, to exalt his ethical outlook, and to shift his emotional centre of gravity from the negative pole to the positive one. Let him regard them as his tutors, possibly his benefactors. Let him take these episodes as chances both to do needed work on himself and to refuse to identify himself with negative emotions. They are to be used for present instruction and future guidance. Thus he lifts himself out of his personal ego, actually *denying himself* as Jesus bids him do.

## **Genuine compassion**

Some students have expressed disagreement with my use of the term "compassion" when describing the enlightened man's loftiest social quality. They believe the common term "love" would be more correct. Now one of the fundamental terms of the New Testament is, in the original Greek, "agape"—which is always translated as "love." But this is unsatisfactory because man's love may be selfishly motivated whereas "agape" has the definite implication of unselfish, or better, selfless love. And the only English word which I can find to express this idea is the one which I have used, that is, "compassion." If we cast out its selfish, sentimental, or sensual associations, the word "love" would be enough to express this attitude, but because these associations thickly encrust its meaning, the word "compassion" is better used. The kind of compassion here meant is not condescending toward others. Rather does it stretch out its hands through innate fellow-feeling for them. It puts itself in the shoes of others and intellectually experiences life from their standpoint.