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Aspects of Love 1

A NEW VISION OF LIFE THROUGH STILLNESS



In the stillness of meditation, we let go of our fixed ideas, judgements and prejudices, which imprison us in our relationship with ourselves, with others, and with God. In stillness comes a knowledge of the Spirit which enables us to experience life free from all conceptual reference levels of reality.

These talks dwell on three aspects of love: love of self, love of others, love of God. Meditation is the regular discipline that gradually leads us to love ourselves, others and God. Fr Laurence, director of The World Community for Christian Meditation, relates the practice of meditation to love as the very meaning of our creation and our lives.

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To meditate is to become a student of love.

The experience of love to which meditation leads us, renews our religious understanding and our spiritual vision. We come to be able to see how deeply love is the background energy of everything we are and everything we do. It is the ultimate meaning of all our experience.

Homecoming

I'd like in these talks to take three aspects of love, because love is the very meaning of our life, of our creation. It's the great healing power of our life, and it is the deepest meaning of all our experience. It gets also more and more clear for us, as we follow the way of meditation, that meditation itself is a way of love, nothing more and nothing less than a way of love.

I would like to reflect with you, in the light of Father John's teaching and in the light of our own experience of meditation over the years, just how richly we can be guided on the path of meditation by understanding this dynamic of love: love of self, love of others, and love of God.

When we meditate, we come into an experience of being at home in which we can, perhaps for the first time, really feel that we are at ease with ourselves, at home with ourselves, at one with ourselves.

The last time I was here, I had driven from Ottawa to Montreal, and on the way I had seen that wonderful sight for Canadian eyes – the Canada geese returning home, a sign of the end of winter. As I came back this time, the Canada geese were going the other way. One of the things of that wonderful sight was nature being true to itself – those geese simply being true to their own nature, following the deepest instinct of their nature and coming home. One of the things that struck me with was a sense of meaning about meditation as a way of homecoming, coming home to our deepest and truest self, our self in God in the Spirit.

When I come back to meditate with a community like this, I also feel very strongly that what home is is not just a place. Home, in the deepest sense of the word, is where we are at one with others, where we feel most ourselves, where we can *be* ourselves, where

we know others and where we are known, where we are accepted and are accepting.

I think that is really the whole meaning of meditation; it is the whole meaning of the Kingdom of God. It is the whole meaning of our life: to come home, to *know* really that we are already at home, to be at home with ourselves. You know how often and how deeply Father John spoke about meditation as the way in which we are first of all restored to ourselves, come back into touch with ourselves, so that we can move out beyond our narrow limitations to others and to God.



2

How to Meditate

I sit down, I sit still, I close my eyes. I begin to say my mantra, and I repeat my word continually, over and over again, throughout the time of the meditation.

The mantra I would recommend is the word *maranatha*. It is an Aramaic word, in the language that Jesus spoke. It is a sacred word of our tradition, of our community of faith. If you choose that word, say it as four syllables, *ma-ra-na-tha*.

As you say the word, give it your attention. Don't say it with force or violence. Don't say it in haste; you are not in a hurry. And don't say it with any desire or expectation. You are saying it in order to let go, not in order to acquire anything. You are saying it in order to come to that poverty of spirit in which we can learn to accept what is being given to us.

Meditate twice a day, morning and evening.



3

The Basic Principles of Meditation

I'd like to reflect with you upon some of the basic principles of meditation that we are perhaps familiar with and which we are going to become more familiar with, more at home with, by meditating together. I think it is always important to go back to the basics.

A well-known Indian diplomat called Apa Pant was a remarkable man – a great scholar, a great intellectual, a diplomat, and also a man of great spiritual depth. Father John and I met him together when we were in Italy in 1973 or 1974. Apa Pant was then the Indian ambassador to Italy, and we were both struck how rare it was to find a man in public life like that, who was a man of such deep spiritual awareness and practice – he meditated faithfully every day.

I was reading about him just the other day, and was surprised to read that his custom was, when he went back each year to his teacher, his guru in India, the first question he would always ask his teacher was: “How can I meditate?” Even after thirty years that was his question. And he said every time he asked the question, he would receive a deeper answer. Even if it was in the same words or the same basic response, his understanding always deepened. And I think that's true for all of us, of course, who follow Father John's teaching as well. He tells us again and again *how* to meditate.

The first thing that we begin to grasp, if we are listening to this teaching, is that meditation is a discipline, a learning process, something we must be faithful to, because in our meditation we are entering into the deepest relationship of our life. We must come to our meditation as if we are approaching the person we love most in the world, and what is needed in all relationships is fidelity. So we

enter into meditation with fidelity knowing that in the discipline of it, we are becoming true disciples, true learners.

We are always learning; we are always in the learning mode; we are always open to experience. We are not judging our meditation; we are not comparing it. We are allowing it to be integrated into our daily life so that it becomes a normal and natural part of our life. The simplicity of that commitment, the simplicity of that discipline, opens up a path in which everything in our life can be channelled.

Meditation is non-competitive. We are not competing with our previous performance; we are not competing with anybody else. We are not competing with St John of the Cross; we are not competing with the other person in our meditation group. That is something we do need to remind ourselves of, because the ego is naturally competitive and also naturally divisive. Where there is division there is competition, and we can even divide from ourselves and, as it were, compete with ourselves on our spiritual path. It is important to remember, as we enter into the silence of this retreat, that we are letting go of this competitive tendency of the ego. We are not competing with anyone. We are not trying to come out number one.

Meditation is also non-acquisitive. We are not trying to acquire anything; there is nothing to acquire. The dynamic of meditation is not trying to get anything but to lose, to let go. It is in the losing and the letting go that we will find everything that we have, everything that we are given.

I was very much struck, and taught this recently, by two meetings that I had. One was with a man who had spent five years in prison. He lived in the Philippines under Marcos. One day, he was sitting in his office – he was a businessman – and the police came in and said, “We’d like you to come down to the headquarters. We have some questions we’d like to ask you. You’ll be there only a couple of hours.” He went, and it turned out to be five years! For those five years, the worst part of it all was that he didn’t know when he would be released, or if ever. In fact, he eventually escaped. He had been imprisoned under trumped-up charges. But in those five years, he said, he discovered things about himself for which he will be always grateful. He said, “They were the five best years of my life. There is

nothing that I have now that I would trade for those five years.” He said four years would have been too short, and six years would have been too long. Five years was just right!

What he experienced was a total letting go of his life. He was a man in control; he was always the boss. It was an enforced renunciation. The grace of it, and the transformation that took place in him and his whole approach to life is very similar, in some ways, to the kind of transformation of life that one reads about or hears about in people who have come very close to death.

The other meeting that I had recently was in New York when I was giving a retreat. I met a woman who had lived in New York for much of her life and had been meditating for about eighteen months. She said that, about eighteen months ago, she left New York because she found it was just too much to endure; she felt too isolated, too lonely, too alienated and the pressure of life was too great, and so on. She moved a little bit out of the city, and her life became very complex for a number of reasons. But, she said, as she started to meditate, and she would come back to the city and have to work in the city, she suddenly began to see everything around her differently. All the same relationships, all the same routines that she had been doing before now took on a completely different meaning. And, she said, as the months went by, she began to discover a new view of life. A new horizon of life began to appear for her, a new meaning. The feeling of alienation and isolation just began to crumble; it began to dissolve. Instead of feeling isolated and alienated, she began to feel in touch. She realised she had a great network of relationships, professional and personal relationships and, she said, they were no longer threatening to her. They were relationships in which she could move out and expand if she chose to, if she felt called to, in whatever way. Life became no longer a threat or a problem, but more and more of a mystery.

We don’t all have the same kind of experiences, but we all go through the same kind of transformation. For all of us, there has to be this radical letting go, whether it’s enforced by being picked up and thrown into prison for five years and having your life suddenly interrupted dramatically, or in some other way – maybe it’s an

illness, maybe it's a new view of life, maybe it's just the phases of one's life unfolding. In some way, we have to learn to let go if we are to be able to live freely. And we have the great gift in meditation of being able to let go, at the very centre, of our acquisitiveness and our competitiveness. That's where we need to let go. One way or another, it is what we *have* to learn. And in learning it, we learn to see everything differently; what seemed like a prison becomes a school, what seems like alienation becomes relationship.

On this journey, we often feel discouraged because of our distractions. I heard a wonderful description of this the other day by somebody who said that they had been meditating for so long and were still distracted. They had come to the conclusion that the best approach they could have to their distractions was just to treat the distractions like an old man watching his grandchildren play. It was a wonderful image, I thought. A kind of compassion but also a certain detachment: letting them play, letting the thoughts, letting the images and the fantasies run around if that's what they're going to do; not to get in there and try to fight them off, but to remain faithful and consistent in the work of the mantra. In other words, not to be judging our meditation.

Any of us can get discouraged because of our distractions. Sometimes, years after people have been meditating, they feel they've made no progress, because when they sit down to meditate they just feel their minds, heads, are full of the same nonsense, the same problems, the same obsessive thinking and imagining that's been going on for years.

That may also call us to reflect upon our lifestyle, upon whether there are activities or practices in our life which we could perhaps change or give up, which are the cause perhaps some of the distractedness.

Meditation is constantly showing us how much it is a way of life, not just a way of prayer. And if we are consistently finding ourselves distracted, we may also be being asked to look at some aspects of our lifestyle, some of the ways in which we spend our time, some of the ways in which we encourage this distractedness. "What you want to be like at the time of prayer," the Desert Fathers used to say,

"you should be like that the whole time." So there's a question there which everyone has to face and answer for themselves on the kind of life, the kind of habits, that we may have got into.

But ultimately, we have to be able to face those distractions with a sense of detachment. With that detachment, comes the essence of prayer which is *attention*, learning to pay attention with our whole being: not just thinking, not just with our minds, but with our *whole being* – body in stillness, mind in still fidelity, and spirit.

One of the things we have also to remind ourselves of as we learn to meditate day by day (it's always a learning experience) is to be aware of this danger which John Cassian in the fourth century, and Father John also, called the *pax pernicioso*, the pernicious peace, when stillness becomes something static. Stillness of the spirit is a very dynamic and energising power. This is why when we meditate, we feel renewed, refreshed. We find a new energy and a new clarity emerging in our lives, a new depth and a new vitality. But there is a false stillness, which is something we can easily slip into. It is a danger which even experienced meditators can fall into.

That's why the teaching embodied in a group and in a community is so important. Even when we have been on the path for some time, it is very easy for us to slip into some form of self-deception or self-indulgence. What John Cassian called the *pax pernicioso*, what he also called the *lethal sleep*, is something that people can remain in for many years, or slip into.

We all perhaps are familiar with it. You find, sometimes, the mantra guides you into a state of peace, tranquillity, harmony and a deep sense of well-being. And at that point, many people say, "The mantra now is no longer necessary. I no longer need to let go because I've been given what I have been looking for, and I don't have to let go of this because this is the very thing that I've been trying to acquire."

We have to remember that the poverty of meditation, which we accept in our fidelity to the mantra, has no limit. It goes all the way. So the danger of the *pax pernicioso*, the pernicious peace, the dangerous peace, the false peace in fact, is only really overcome,

we can only really get out of this danger, by reminding ourselves of the wonderful and absolute quality of poverty which the mantra invites us to and which we freely accept by saying it.



The Stillness of Meditation

We know from meditation what a wonderful teacher stillness is, and we learn this renunciation and this new vision through learning to be still. Being who we are – it's all we have to do – and seeing what is.

There is a great awakening in this stillness. Sometimes, seeing who we are, being who we are, and seeing what is all around us, comes as a shock. Sometimes we resist it; our images of ourselves are so strong and our judgments of other people are so strong that we won't let them go. We have created a view of the world usually with ourself in the position of judge and jury, and it's very difficult for us to let go of that hold over the world and that vision of the world. There is a shock involved – a shock of conversion, a shock of liberation, in some way or other.

In the stillness comes knowledge: "Be still and know that I am God." And in that knowledge, we come not only to know God of course, but to know ourselves.

The stillness of meditation, which is the discipline we practise day by day, is the stillness in which we stop doing, we stop thinking, we stop judging, we stop planning, we stop analysing. In that stillness, as we learn to be still, a knowledge arises, a knowledge of the Spirit arises, and it is in that knowledge that we find our way forward. In that stillness we discover that we can experience life free from all conceptual reference. In other words, we don't have to *think* about life in order to live.

So often, our concepts, our ideas, get in the way and actually block us from experiencing the fullness of life. In meditation, we are radically, and very simply, letting go of the conceptual frameworks in

which we try to imprison life and reality. As we become free of this conceptual prison in which we often live much of our lives, we begin to taste the freedom of the Kingdom, the glorious liberty of the children of God.

It's an amazing discovery, which is so simple that it is impossible to describe: when you are able to see something, to be in relationship with something, which previously you had fixed ideas about and now you are able to know directly, because you have been able to let go of those ideas, those judgments and those prejudices, those preconceived ideas. That is what meditation allows us to do in relation to ourselves, in relation to others, and in relation to God.

The wonderful and deeply Christian insight into this is that that knowledge that arises from stillness, as we let ideas go, is love. It is *only* in love that we are able to know anything fully.

In this stillness of meditation, free from concepts, free from prejudices, we are able, as Father John said, to enter the experience directly. We are no longer trying to experience the experience, which is how most of us get so messed up. We get into something, then we start wanting to watch it, analyse it; we want to be in control of it; we want to be able to use it: to experience the experience. What we are learning in meditation, through the utterly simple practice of stillness and of letting go of all thoughts, is that we are able to enter into the experience of being as a whole person, and therefore, the experiences that happen don't matter.

This is another basic element of what we already know about meditation: What happens during your times of meditation is not important. It is a difficult truth for us to swallow, especially at the beginning of the journey, because we are looking for something to happen. We are investing the valuable time we have into meditation, so we want to be able to judge from immediate results what is happening. It is only gradually that we learn to let go of that greedy, rather technological, approach to meditation.

We learn that what happens in meditation is much less important than what happens in our life as a whole, and that it is in a new view of life, a new vision of life, and above all in our

relationships with one another and in our perception of the priority of love, that the real experience bears fruit.



Letting Go

One of the great connections that meditation makes for us is a connection with a sense of our own death, of our own mortality. In this spirit of detachment and attention, meditation greatly transforms the quality of our life.

Meditation is simply an acceptance and an entry into the mystery of dying. Dying is nothing less than letting go. All our life is really a lesson in learning to let go, and we learn to let go by stages, in different ways. All our life is a preparation for this ultimate letting go, the moment of death, in which we are meant to be ready, to be prepared. Anyone of you who has ever been with someone when they have died will know that that moment is a moment of tremendous significance. The whole of our life is focused in that moment.

Father John often used to say that our life is a preparation for that moment of death. What we are like at the moment of death is of great importance. Our daily meditation is an experience of letting go, an experience of dying to our acquisitiveness, our competitiveness, our prejudices, our self-centredness and egotism. It is a preparation for that moment of total encounter with reality, that moment of total liberation.

What we learn from our daily meditation is to “keep death constantly before our eyes”. That is how St Benedict described it to his monks. We might say it is to be able to face the impermanence of life, the fact that things are always passing away – we have no abiding city.

The great teachings and parables of Jesus keep reminding us to live in the present moment, not to try to build false securities, false empires, to face impermanence not with fear or despair or rage, but to face impermanence with confidence and faith, so that in *facing* it we can discover what is changeless.

That is one of the great gifts that meditation brings us: to be able to see how impermanent, precious but also impermanent, everything in our life is. Everything, even the things we hold most precious in our life, are impermanent. What we need to be able to do is to look directly and fearlessly into that impermanence, and to be able to see what is still, what is changeless, what is real in the midst of it.

This requires only great simplicity, the simplicity that the mantra teaches us. If you are too clever, you miss the point; you have to learn to be simple. The mantra is the great gift of simplicity.



The Central Reality of Love

I'd like to begin with these words of St John from the First Letter:

Dear friends, Let us love one another, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God. For God is love; and his love was disclosed to us in this, that he sent his only Son into the world to bring us life. The love I speak of is not our love for God, but the love he showed to us in sending His son as the remedy for the defilement of our sins. If God thus loved us, dear friends, we in turn are bound to love one another. Though God has never been seen by anyone, God himself dwells in us if we love one another; his love is brought to perfection within us. Here is the proof that we dwell in Him and He dwells in us: He has imparted His Spirit to us. (1 Jn 4:7-13)

Love is the first and the highest gift of the Spirit. When St Paul is talking about the gifts of the Spirit he tells us to pursue the highest gifts, and the highest gift is love, higher than any phenomenon that might happen to us, any wonderful, extraordinary, experience that might befall us. Love is the highest gift. In the fruits of the Spirit that St Paul describes in Chapter 5 of Galatians, love is the first: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control. And Jesus, of course, sums up his whole teaching in one single commandment, which he says is a new commandment: "Love one another." "Whoever loves knows God." That does not mean whoever loves God knows God, but whoever loves knows God.

Love, we know from the teaching of Father John, is the fruit of meditation. If we want to discern our progress, our growth in meditation, we are able to see it in our developing capacity to give and receive love, and to be able to see with our own eyes that love is the central reality of our lives. There is no greater gift, no greater power; and it is the source of all meaning in our life.

Love is the great pervasive energy of creation. One of the great scientific discoveries of modern times was made only recently when scientists, who were scanning the cosmic skies for years trying to find the source of the background radiation of the universe, stumbled across it, or finally found it. It was the proof that they were looking for, that the universe, as we know it, came into being in a single moment, a single act of creation which they call the Big Bang, very poetically. They say that everything that we can possibly know, including time and space, came into being out of this primal unity, out of this concentration of energy, of matter, which exploded at this moment of creation. From that moment of creation an energy, radiation, was emitted that has pervaded, and pervades, the entire universe. It bathes the universe. There is nowhere in the universe, no atom even, that doesn't contain something of that original energy of the act of creation.

It is a most wonderful image for us of love, which in the deepest understanding of creation, is the origin of creation. God, who is love, is the creator.

I met a woman some time ago in London who, to her own great amazement, is going through a remarkable series of 'revelations' (as I suppose Julian of Norwich might call them) – deep understandings of God and of life, of humanity. She has come to these understandings with very little religious background, so when she expresses these intuitions, these understandings that she has come to, she speaks with a tremendous directness and freshness. One of the remarks she made, that I thought proved the authenticity of what she was going through, was when she said that it seemed to her that before creation came to be, before what the scientists call the Big Bang, there was just love, nothing anywhere but love – a great ocean of love. And the best way that love could devise to

express itself was to create, to bring creation as we know it into being. It's a very simple idea, but it's an idea of startling implications.

If in the spiritual vision, the deepest vision of which human beings are capable, which is a deeper vision than the scientific vision, love is the creative source of the universe, then love is everywhere. Love also pervades every human being, every atom, every relationship, every thought, every act.

Love is the great pervasive energy of creation, and it is this universal energy of love that unites the inner and the outer worlds of our existence: the inner world of our private, solitary selves and the outer world in which we live and relate and create and destroy, love and hate and fear, and so on. The inner and the outer worlds are united by this pervasive energy of love. The same love that is in our own deepest core, in our heart, is the love that surrounds us and pervades all external reality, the external dimension of reality. So, love is the great uniter, unifier, and it is the true nature of consciousness. It is the secret.

Love, we know, is the strongest and the most human of our needs. We need love even to grow physically. Scientists and doctors seem to agree now that if a child, an infant, lacks the basic necessary affection, tenderness, love, and concern, at the human emotional level, even the best physical treatment will not allow that child to develop, even physically. So our need for love is deeply embedded even in our biological nature. We need love to grow; we need love to be.

And because it is our deepest and most human need, it is also our most painful wound. Where we experience an inadequacy of love, we don't get enough love, we experience our most painful, our most interior wounds. These may be unconscious wounds; we may not be conscious this is why we hurt, this is why we are in pain interiorly, but our deepest wounds arise out of this need for love. And we all know, although we often act as if we don't know it, that love decides the quality of our life.

Depending upon the presence of love in our life, we are happy or unhappy, we are free or unfree, we are joyful or we are depressed. If

love is flowing in our life, if the inner and the outer dimensions of our life are united by love, then we are fully alive.

There's a wonderful description of this in Tolstoy, I think in *Anna Karenina*, where one of the characters who is in love goes out into his carriage, and as he looks out on the world through the carriage window, everything is bathed in beauty and richness and excitement and vitality – everything is fully alive. And there's another description, of somebody who is depressed and isolated and unloved and unloving, and the world looks completely the reverse.

We see the world either with the eyes of love or with the eyes of a painful absence of love. It is a very simple element that transforms or renews our life.

We'll end with a few words of St Paul about the centrality of love in our life, the understanding that meditation brings us to. The mystery of love is the central mystery of our lives; love is the creative and the healing power in our life. One of the great sayings of St John is: "Whoever loves, lives in God." What is very significant is that he doesn't say "whoever loves God lives in God" but "whoever loves lives in God". St Paul says:

With this in mind, I kneel in prayer to the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, that out of the treasures of his glory, He may grant you strength and power through his Spirit in your inner being so that, through faith, Christ may dwell in your hearts in love.

With deep roots and firm foundations, may you be strong to grasp with all God's people what is the height and length and depth and breadth of the love of Christ, and to know it though it is beyond knowledge. And so may you come to fullness of being, the fullness of God himself. (Eph 3:14-19)



Our Understanding of Love

As modern people, our understanding of love has become so limited. Our modern idea of love is culturally limited to erotic love. By erotic love, I don't just mean sexual love, but erotic love in the sense that that phrase was used by the early Christian writers, a love that is centred upon ourselves only.

It's easier to describe it in terms of examples. It's the kind of love which was expressed in the film *Fatal Attraction*. It's this obsessive, highly erotic, personal, desiring love that has a tragic dimension – love that ends in death. It's the kind of love that we see in Wagner's operas as well, and in much of Western literature; the kind of love that is described often in popular songs, popular music.

Erotic love is seen as something tragic because it is impermanent, because it arises and dies in passion. Therefore, it is something that makes us lonely, something that is so individualistic that it traps us in its own impermanence.

That modern, culturally bound idea or understanding of love needs to be touched and broadened by our religious tradition, by a spiritual understanding of love that sees love as creative and redemptive, that sees love in a 'trans-personal' way. Trans-personal doesn't mean that it is *impersonal*; that would be a contradiction in terms; you can't have an impersonal love. Love must be of the person, between persons, uniting persons; but it is trans-personal in the sense that it transcends, it isn't limited by the individuality, the narrow egotistical individuality of those who are experiencing that love.

This is the religious vision of love that comes to us, of course, through all spiritual traditions. It is the religious, deeply spiritual

vision of love that we find in St John and the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel. "God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in God and God lives in him." (1 Jn 4:16-17)

When we meditate, as we transcend and move beyond the limitations of our own desires and fears, of our ego, of our individuality, we break out of this culture-bound understanding of love only as an erotic, egotistical force that leads to tragedy, to loneliness, to disappointment, to despair even, when it fails, when it dies. We break out of that into a vision of love that is of God, a vision of love that we find in the New Testament, a vision of love that enables us, incredibly, to equate God and love: "God is love." (1 Jn 4:8) And I think this can only happen through our experience.

This is why John Main insists so often that meditation is a way of experience. And it is the experience of love to which meditation leads us, that renews our religious understanding and our spiritual vision.

To meditate is to become a student of love. We come to be able to see how deeply love is at the centre of every activity; how it is the wavelength of every communication; how love is the background radiation, the background energy of everything we are and everything we do. It is the ultimate meaning of all our experience.

Because love is our deepest human need, we seek it. But because it can so often lead us to pain, we also fear it, because it is so closely associated with the loss of our familiar sense of identity.

When we love, we change, we become a different person, we become a different form of the same person. Because of that, and because there is death involved in that loss of our fear, and of our desire, of our complex defence mechanisms, we often evade what we desire. We long for love and we run away from it. We set up the circumstances for it to flourish, and then we destroy those circumstances. We enter into relationships and then turn on those relationships. We give and then we take back. We open up and then we contract. So the human being discovers, through love, just how complex we are and how self-contradictory we can be. We discover through meditation how many inner conflicts and inner tensions we have.

We project outwards, on to others and into situations in which we are involved, and in relationships, the very conflicts and tensions that are going on inside us unconsciously, unknown to us – the conflicts and tensions that arise out of our pain and our woundedness, out of consciously long forgotten experiences of feeling unloved, unwanted, neglected or abused.

We seek, and we fear love; and yet love draws us on. Love is greater than our own capacity for it. It is the same love; there is only one love, one creative energy. The same love is manifested at different levels of reality.

As we grow from infancy to childhood, to adulthood, to old age, we move to different levels, different planes of existence. Physically, mentally, and psychologically, we change. The way we pick up signals, the way we relate to the world, what we do, changes. But the same love is manifested at every period of our life.

Our capacity to receive love changes. Our capacity to respond to it changes, but the same love is constant. We see the same love present, for example, in the simplest organism – the life of a single cell. We see it, the same love at work, in the power of sexual attraction throughout nature. We see, the same love involved in the meeting and the marriage of minds, persons; and we see the same love fulfilled in the union of hearts.



When we meditate, we transcend and move beyond the limitations of our own desires and fears, of our ego, of our individuality. We break out of the culture-bound understanding of love only as an erotic, egotistical force that leads to disappointment when it fails or dies.

We break out of that into a vision of love that is of God, a vision of love we find in the New Testament, a vision of love that enables us, incredibly, to equate God and love: 'God is love.' 1 Jn 4:8

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