

LOVE AS TRANSFORMED DOING

Just three things are important at the deepest level of life. One of them is faith, one is hope, and one is love. And the greatest of these is love. The love beyond love is happening to people today. History itself is putting a blowtorch under human love and transmuting it into something altogether unexpected that can be considered the greatest of the three aspects of profound consciousness.

First, I would like to share with you a little research I did in an attempt to locate this topic. I turned to quotations and literature with one question: "What is love?" Here are some of the answers. Love is "a many-splendoured thing," it "makes the world go round" and it's "what the world needs now." It also "goes with marriage like a horse and carriage." In addition, it is what couples do to each other, parents do to children, and children do equally to ice cream, dolls, dogs and bicycles. It is eros, agape, philios and libidos. It is "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and when added to money, the root of all evil. Love, which "alone I've waited for," "the answer and the end and all of living," "is a golden crown that makes a man a king." It is what if you search for it you manifest your lack of, but if you give it away you never have to look for it. It's what philosophers dicotomize, poets eulogize, playwrights dramatize, Masters and Johnson analyze, and the rest of us endure. Now none of that is what I am going to talk about.

Instead I'm going to talk about the active dimension of profound consciousness. Love is what happens to the action of one who experiences the Dark Night of Faith. Faith has to do with one's knowing, love with one's doing, and hope with one's being. In the deep struggle with faith in the Dark Night, and in the intense struggle with love as the Long March, there, and nowhere else, hope appeareth. The three are related in a dynamic fashion. To deal with love and the love beyond love, involves the elements of Care, and Power, and Peace. Imagine them as a triangle. As Care is intensified and Power is intensified, Peace happens.

Another way to locate this topic in rational thought and in human experience, is to go to Kierkegaard's model of the self as a relationship that relates itself to itself, and in willing to be itself grounds itself in the transparent. It is on this depth level that love beyond love or the profound consciousness is to be found.

The happening that is love in our time, the caring, power and peace that belong to everyone, have undergone a double intensification. First, the world itself has impacted us in a way that has occasioned a new

reflection. And then, history has put a blow torch to that reflection and transmuted it into something entirely different. Let me give you an example. The world, which is that external relatedness, has undergone profound changes. It's trite to talk about it. In 1969 our cultural context was exploded with the landing on the moon. And all of a sudden everybody's knowing underwent a mutation. For me, the date August 8, 1974 stands as a symbol for the transformation in our political context. That was when President Nixon resigned in disgrace over Watergate. But other events were also happening at the time. Generalissimo Franco in Spain was convalescing from the disease that caused him to turn over his power. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was being systematically deprived of his power. The wife of President Park of Korea was living her last few days before an assassin cut her down. The citizens of Marantha, Cyprus, were going about their chores a couple of days before they were to be massacred by an invading army. Mrs. Juan Peron was struggling with Argentina's government as its first female head of state. President Marcos of the Phillipines was pushing his power against the protesting forces and on and on and on around the world. That date can stand as a symbol of radical political transformation. And probably it was sometime in January, 1975, that stands as a symbolic date of our economic context undergoing a radical shift. It became apparent that the food crisis was of global scope. There were some 32 nations involved in starvation. And then, in the midst of that, ecology again became a major concern and inflation and recession were at the forefront of consciousness. All that has occasioned a shift, a kind of intensification of the care and power and peace in our time. In addition, there's been a strange fire that burns. For me the blow torch, is a helpful image.

Or perhaps the story of Atlas is appropriate. He was climbing up a mountain path with very great difficulty. It was a rocky path that he was struggling along. Then he came upon Hercules who had the world on his back. Hercules invited him to try his hand at holding it for a while. Being a proud sort, Atlas took it over and looked around and saw Hercules running down the path saying, "Give it to the next one who comes along." It's as though people of our time have experienced that Herculean trick, and you find yourself with the world on your back and it's about five days later. After you've stopped being angry, you stand there under this tremendous weight of the world, juggle it on your back a few times, and then some idiot comes along with a blow torch and turns it on your backside. Your doing is radically mutated. Something like that is the feel of the happening of love in our time.

A series of events have happened, accompanied by the interior experience of a kind of dislocation, ineffectivity, depletion, and unfulfillment. You could refer to these as the Long March. The Long March has to do simply with life itself transforming one's normal capacity of love into that which is worthy of being called the greatest of these. Now that's

the rational frame of these remarks. Let me go back through that just a bit to get a hold of the experience of it.

Everybody has his attachment. Everyone knows or can know his experience of care. There is the everyday care for the morrow and all those other good things in the paper that is familiar to some of us. I call them necessary and unnecessary cares, but then, when I try to group particular items under one of those two categories, it gets fuzzy and it is very hard to tell which is which. Everybody has attachments to food and clothing and family and friends and one thing or another--such things as stereos, golf clubs and automobiles. Your experience on this level, the everyman experience, or the natural experience, is simply that life is perpetually reminding us which is which. Which is necessary and which is more or less additional. They keep shifting and you find yourself in a perpetual tension with those objects of your care. But then every man has the experience of the collapse of those objects of care. I believe that's why the movie "Towering Inferno" has captured the imagination of mankind. People in our day know the experience of that which is absolutely necessary collapsing into a pile of blazing rubble. And that is probably as accurate a mataphor as any for what is going on in the family, in the nation and in vocation. Life itself has a way of collapsing those objects of our care.

In the midst of that, something that is beyond collapse happens. It is the Atlas happening. The weight of the world gets laid on your shoulders right in the middle of scrambling up that rocky path. You experience yourself trying to put together a family after a horrendous argument and suddenly realize that the only way to deal with the issue that you are arguing over is to resolve the world's economic crisis. Or you find yourself trying to help out a neighbor who is having drug problems, and realize that the only way to finally help out that character is first, to resolve the problem of organized crime in the United States, and second, deal with the economic problems of Turkish agriculture. There is no other way to handle the problems. The whole world is slapped on your shoulders in that kind of a moment.

Maybe it doesn't come like that. Perhaps you just sit down and turn on the television and watch the news some night. It doesn't even have to be the news, it can be a special. Suddenly the world is laid on your shoulders and it matters. You find yourself, quite without willing it, caring deeply. Your care is expanded to such an extent that all of your cares just don't matter. You have family problems; you have problems with your job. You experience yourself saying I don't care. I just don't care, because the world has consumed your care. You don't care about great insights. I think probably I have slept through more spirit discourses than almost anybody else in the room because I just didn't care. You get assigned to do something very active about this world and you find in the midst of that particularity you just don't care about that either. All you care about is the World, the whole thing. And anything less than that is nothing, and it can go up in a blazing inferno. That kind of passion takes sociological form, in the primal community. The

as a computer programmer and three years later everything he learned was out of date. He decided to go into something a bit more stable and took up accounting. After the economic crisis began to get well under way, he saw that that wasn't stable, so he took up political science. You and I have experienced ourselves as in that kind of a situation which is the experience of every man, but then the Atlas happening happens. A world descends on your back. My father-in-law raises wheat. We were visiting him recently and just off the cuff he made the comment, "You know, I'm feeding the world." Or, the branch bank manager finds himself suddenly reformulating the economics of the local community and with it the city and with that the world. It becomes more than he bargained for. That friend of mine who went from job to job found himself called upon to help out in auditing the books in Majuro, and it was more than he bargained for. Over against the expansion of demand for your particular skills, you are left utterly inept, unprepared and ineffective.

I've had a fair amount of experience teaching LENS courses. The other day I was assigned to be the one male presence at an all women's LENS experiment, and there's no self-depreciation to say there is a certain ineffectivity and ineptitude experienced there. That is just objective reality. You find the demand that you're over against does not allow for competent performance. It is something new, radical and total and competency is an option for nobody. At the same time, you experience yourself as totally wiped out by that kind of a demand, ineffective, inept. This past quarter I was assigned on three days notice to go to a LENS course in Nairobi and that was something shocking. I went back to pass on the good word to my office, and somebody mentioned that I was standing back against the wall with my hands behind me as if waiting for a firing squad. I wasn't even aware of that. That was the experience of objective ineptitude or ineffectivity. I knew it was going to require my whole life. That's the starting point. What you also know is that probably the ultimate change will be miniscule, yet the demand is to pour out your whole life. In the midst of that situation and no where else, the transformation takes place, and again, it's really strange what happens. Maybe the best way to come at it is again illustratively. On the Nairobi trip, I got on the airplane, landed in New York and the plan was to pick up the passport there and somebody was going to deliver it to me and then be on the way with no problem. We got to the airport in New York and my colleague was not there with the visa. I called him and the person who answered the phone said, "He's just had his car towed away while he was getting your visa. But, he found another car and we hope he makes it." Well, I was at La Guardia airport and had to go across to JFK to get on the international flight. I started the pacing bit. Finally, he came in--It was 5:00 in the afternoon in New York City and the traffic is just tremendous. My odds of getting there were incredible. The traffic at Kennedy was almost equal to that on the highways. and the New York streets. We arrived and the ticket wasn't ready. It was a PTA that came from Chicago to be picked up there. They have to stop and write your ticket, and of course, they can't put your luggage on

until after your ticket's written. I was just churning inside. "I didn't want to go on that trip in the first place, and now I'm having to fight to get there." I finally arrived, got on the plane and 34 hours later when I stepped off in Nairobi there was a cable waiting for me that said, "Mr. Epps, your luggage did not make it." In the midst of that something happens. There is a gap that takes place, and it's funny. Life is tricking you into loving it. In the midst of doing all those frantic things and trying to find out where my luggage was the most fantastic LENS I've ever been in was going on. The strange thing that starts breaking loose all around is that miracles start happening. That strange kind of infinite power emerges that you didn't know you had, and as a matter of fact you don't have. It's obvious that the effects of your action and the effects of the social demonstration that you're a part of have no relationship to the discernable causes. There is no way to account for what's going on there. It is almost as though the power of being is being its being through you. And you experience yourself riding that wave. It is a weird thing. There is no place else you'd rather be. There is nothing else worth doing. The ineffectivity that you're experiencing is probably more profound than any you have ever experienced in your life. That gap happens and that is what I'm pointing to with love, or peace.

Everyone knows experiences of deep satisfaction--Walter Mittys, we used to call them. It is usually in a discontinuous place and time. For me it would be something like being in an isolated house beside a secluded lake with a boat and several good books and background music playing. One of our colleagues made a remark the other day that he didn't even have enough energy to go on discontinuity. Somebody else asked when the world and the social process is your operating context, where can you go to get away from it? You experience yourself exhausted all the time, and then suddenly that strange blow torch starts setting off fireworks again, and the significance of your work begins to break loose like popcorn here and there. One of our colleagues who participated in the Majuro consult told the story of waking up at 1:00 a.m. and finding himself working at a drawing board in a hot, dark, windowless room. He asked himself, "What am I doing Here?" His only answer was, "Having the time of my life!" There is something that flips in the midst of that kind of engagement in the issues of the world that brings a strange kind of a peace beyond peace that is quite the opposite to what our society and our Walter Mittys tell us that peace is all about. At moments like that you can genuinely sing the song "There's no place else on earth that I would rather be." There is another piece of poetry that expresses the profound love of the world.

"Having received as a symbol of his distinction the title of Prince Five Weapons, the prince accepted the weapons as his teacher gave them to him, bowed, and armed with his new weapons, struck out on the road that leads to the city of his father, the king.

On the way, he came to a certain forest and the people at the mouth of the forest warned him, 'Sir Prince, do not enter this forest,' they said. 'An ogre lives here named Sticky Hair. He kills every man he sees.'

But the prince was confident and fearless as a maned lion and he entered the forest just the same. When he reached the heart of it, the ogre showed himself. The ogre had increased his stature to the height of a palm tree and created for himself a head as big as a summer house, bell-shaped eyes as big as bowls, two tusks as big as giant balls. He had the beak of a hawk, his belly was covered with blotches, his hands and feet were dark green.

'Where are you going?' he demanded. 'You are my prey.'

Prince Five Weapons answered without fear but with great confidence in the arts and crafts he had learned, 'Ogre,' said he, 'I knew what I was about when I entered this forest. You would do well to be careful about attacking me, for with arrows dipped deep in poison I will pierce your flesh and fell you on the spot.'

Having thus threatened the ogre, the young prince fitted his bow and arrow, dipped in deadly poison and let fly. It stuck right to the ogre's hair. He let fly one after another fifty arrows. All stuck to the ogre's hair. The ogre shook off all the arrows letting them fall right at his feet and approached the young prince.

Prince Five Weapons threatened the ogre a second time and drawing his sword delivered a masterly blow. But the sword, thirty-three inches long, stuck, right to the ogre's hair. Perceiving that the spear had stuck, he smote him with a club which also stuck right to his hair.

When he saw that the club had stuck he said, 'Master ogre, you have never heard of me before. I am Prince Five Weapons. When I entered this forest infested by you I took no account of bows and such like weapons. When I entered this forest I took only account of myself. Now I'm going to beat you and pound you into powder and dust.' Having thus made known his determination, he struck the ogre with his right hand. His hand stuck to the ogre's hair. He struck him with his left hand. That also stuck. He struck him with his right foot. That also stuck. He struck him with his left foot. That also stuck. Thought he, 'I'll beat you with my head and pound you into powder and dust.' He struck him with his head, which also stuck right to the ogre's head. Prince Five Weapons found himself snared five times, stuck fast in five places, dangling from the ogre's body. But for all that he was undaunted.

As for the ogre, he thought, 'This is some lion of a man, some man of noble birth, no mere man, for though he has been caught by an ogre like me, he appears in no way to tremble or shake. And all the time I've harried this road I've never seen a single man like this. Why is he not afraid?' Not daring to eat him, he asked, 'Young man, why are you not afraid? Why are you not terrified by the fear of death?'

'Ogre, why should I be afraid? For in one life, one death is absolutely certain. What's more, I have in my belly a thunderbolt for a weapon. If you eat me you will not be able to digest that weapon, you'll tear your insides into fragments and will kill you, and in that case we'll both perish. That's why I'm not afraid.'

'What this youth says is true,' said the ogre terrified by the fear of death, 'with the body of this lion of a man, my stomach would not be able to digest a fragment of flesh even so small as a kidney bean. I'll let him go.'

He let Prince Five Weapons go, and Prince Five Weapons trained him as a servant.

I think somehow that has to do with the profound love beyond love, because the Prince was clearly caught by the mystery. It was only the power of his own being that allowed him to outwit the ogre and what you know is he was having the time of his life!

--John Epps

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