

Ninety-six Words for Love by Robert Johnson

The first difficulty we meet in discussing anything concerning our feelings is that we have no adequate vocabulary to use. Where there is no terminology, there is no consciousness. A poverty-stricken vocabulary is an immediate admission that the subject is inferior or depreciated in that society.

Sanskrit has ninety-six words for love; ancient Persian has eighty, Greek three, and English only one. This is indicative of the poverty of awareness or emphasis that we give to that tremendously important realm of feeling. Eskimos have thirty words for snow, because it is a life-and death matter to them to have exact information about the element they live with so intimately. If we had a vocabulary of thirty words for love ... we would immediately be richer and more intelligent in this human element so close to our heart. An Eskimo probably would die of clumsiness if he had only one word for snow; we are close to dying of loneliness because we have only one word for love. Of all the Western languages, English may be the most lacking when it comes to feeling.

Imagine what richness would be expressed if one had a specific vocabulary for the love of one's father, another word for the love of one's mother, yet another for one's camel (the Persians have this luxury), still another for another's spouse, and another exclusively for the sunset! Our world would expand and gain clarity immeasurably if we had such tools.

It is always the inferior function, whether in an individual or a culture, that suffers this poverty. One's greatest treasures are won by the superior function but always at the cost of the inferior function. One's greatest triumphs are always accompanied by one's greatest weaknesses. Because thinking is our superior function in the English-speaking world, it follows automatically that feeling is our inferior function. These two faculties tend to exist at the expense of each other. If one is strong in feeling, one is likely to be inferior in thinking -- and vice versa. Our superior function has given us science and the higher standard of living -- but at the cost of impoverishing the feeling function.

This is vividly demonstrated by our meager vocabulary of feeling words. If we had the expanded and exact vocabulary for feeling that we have for science and technology, we would be well on our way to warmth of relatedness and generosity of feeling.