

Love: Life's Greatest Gift by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

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All of us want, or need, to be loved. The need for love is one of the most basic human impulses. We may cover this need with patterns of self-protection or images of self-reliance. Or we may openly acknowledge this need to ourself or to others. But it is always present, whether hidden or visible. Usually, we seek for love in human relationships, project our need onto parents, partners, friends, lovers. Our lack or denial of love often causes wounds that we carry with us. This unmet need haunts us, sometimes driving us into addictions or other self-destructive patterns. Conversely, if our need for love is met, we feel nourished in the depths of our being.

Love calls to us in many different ways. Yet while most people seek for love in the tangle of human relationships, the mystic is drawn deeper under the surface—in Rumi's words, "return to the root of the root of your own being." And here we begin to discover one of life's greatest secrets: how love is at the source of all that exists, is the source of all that exists. Love is not just a feeling between people, but a substance, an energy, a divine spark that is present within everything. And it is this deepest essence—this substance of love—that we need to nourish us.

Love speaks to our soul and to our body. Love includes all the senses—taste and touch, smell, sight and sound. Love by its very nature includes everything. It does not just belong to a human relationship. It can be found anywhere, because it is everywhere. The mystic uncovers the simple secret that in truth love flows through all that exists—sweet, tender, aching, knowing, as well as dark and passionate. And as this primal energy, this greatest power, awakens within us, within our heart, our soul, and even within the cells of our body, it draws us deeper into its own mystery. Love draws us back to love.

And here we discover the oneness of love—that the source and answer to our primal need is not separate from us, but part of our own essential nature, our own true being. Again, to quote Rumi:

The minute I heard my first love story
I started looking for you, not knowing
how blind that was.

Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.

The mystical truth of the oneness of love is something both simple and essential: the real nature of the love that we all seek is not other than us. I remember my first direct experience of this love. I was in my late 20s when one afternoon while I was in meditation, I felt what I can only describe as butterfly wings touching the edge of my heart. And in that instant my whole being and body were filled with a love I had hardly known existed. Every cell of my body was loved, tenderly, gently, and completely. Love was present in all of me. And this love came from within me, from my own heart. There was no other.

Love is life's greatest gift. We seek for love, and yet it is all around and within us. It belongs to the oneness of life, to every dewdrop on every leaf, to the spider spinning its web, the child looking at the stars. If we open our senses and open our hearts, we can feel its presence. Love is life speaking to us of its real mystery. And in that conversation so many things can happen, so many miracles can be born, the small unsuspecting miracles that we often do not notice—like momentary sunlight from behind a cloud, a flower where a seed unexpectedly sprouted, a smile from a stranger. Despite all of its distortions, pain, and suffering, this world belongs to love, just as each of us belongs to love. And just to know that we are part of this love is enough.

Learning to love is learning to live, to become part of the great love affair that is life. And just as love is life's gift, so is love the one true gift we each have to give. I was brought up in a family where love was unknown, where nothing real was given. And so I have come to appreciate this simple gift and how precious it is. Love is all we really have to give, and love is free, even if it costs blood and a broken heart.

Sadly, we live in a culture where so much is distorted, caught in the shadowlands of ego and greed. We are fed endless desires, manipulated by advertising and the media, no longer knowing what to trust. We have almost forgotten that life is sacred. At such a time it is especially important to return to what is essential and true, what cannot be bought or sold. Simple acts of loving kindness, an open heart that listens, hands that care—with a friend, a stranger, with someone in need. These are the true currencies of our shared humanity, which easily break through barriers and remind us of a unity deeper than our surface divisions. In our true nature we are not consumers but lovers, and life is not about economic prosperity or getting more stuff, but is a love affair waiting to be lived.

And at this time it is especially important to give the gift of love back to the earth, the same earth that we are poisoning and polluting. Return love with simple acts: planting some herbs with care and attention; walking, our feet touching the ground with love every step; seeing spring blossoms, aware of her beauty. The earth is so generous, she has given us life and yet we desecrate her, attack her fragile web. It is time to fall in love again with the earth, to remember that she is sacred and help in her healing, to listen to her and love her.

And what is revealed within the heart of the lover, of the one who has given himself or herself to love, is the great secret of creation: that love is always present. Love is present within our own heart, within every breath, within every cell of our body and the whole of creation. The whole of creation is a continual outpouring of love, of lover and beloved needing each other, meeting each other, merging with each other. The great mystery is then not that this love is always present, but that it appears hidden from us, that we have forgotten how we are made of love. That we are love seeking love. And life's greatest gift is love waiting to be lived.