

DISCOVERING LOVE¹

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Love is a very ancient topic. Gods, playwrights, musicians and poets have glorified the meaning of the word 'love'. But love is not like other emotions. It is not that there are many emotions of which one is love. No, it is the only emotion. In certain forms it is called compassion, empathy and sympathy, but it is the same love alone. It is that love which also provides you the space to understand another person. It is that love, too, that really turns into hatred. It is love that turns into your dislike, anger and so on. It is one emotion, which has these various expressions. This is not something that is to be swallowed, as we have swallowed many things. Love has to be discovered.

Emotions have neither nationality nor culture nor history, neither gender nor age. Such factors do not inhibit the nature of a given emotion in any way. Anger, for instance, whether it is the anger of a king or his subject, of a child or an adult, its nature does not differ; it is anger. Emotions such as anger, hatred, compassion, sympathy, love, in their simple forms, have been always there. Even animals have emotions. A human being is the most self-conscious of all living beings. Naturally then, in a self-conscious human heart, emotions are very well pronounced.

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When you encounter the world, you do not remain a mute witness; you actively respond to persons, objects and situations. The response is not always dispassionate or totally objective. The emotional person that you are always inhibits the response. Emotions, therefore, form the basic theme of an individual's biography.

Emotions drive you to accomplish, and they also subject you to a sense of failure and depression. There are times when you just want to quit. In short, emotions drive you crazy. To have a complete mastery over one's emotions always remains a dream. Emotions make the person, much more than even cognition does. In fact, they sweep aside the cognitive person and take over. Emotions are what you are, what you have. The emotional person is the core person and it is this core person who feels that he or she is useless. It is also the very same person who complicates his or her life as well as that of others.

If you look into the *MahĒbhĒrata*, you will find that the individuals' behaviours, which were the causes of the war, were all emotional. Duryodhana, for instance, did not have a father who could see him, who could applaud him and make him feel good about himself. His father was blind. The child, the human child, is self-conscious. This self-consciousness naturally results in self-judgement. From the child's standpoint, everyone around is bigger, more capable and therefore better. With its limited knowledge therefore, the child judges itself to be insignificant and useless. This is how every human being starts his or her life—with the conclusion that he or she is useless. Whether the child is a prince or an average citizen, this is the starting point. But this sense of inadequacy is neutralised to a large extent by the parents, who are gods for the child. Their approval, their welcoming the child as a blessing, as a gift, enable the child to handle this feeling of being useless. The child needs the express approval of its parents. The father has to look into the

child's eyes and make it feel that it has brought joy to the home; that it has enriched their life. It is this approval that, to a large extent, offsets the child's sense of inadequacy. If a child jumps from a ledge or a table, no matter how low, it has a sense of achievement. It looks to its parents for approval. In their approval and applause, the child's sense of inadequacy decreases and it visibly flowers. Duryodhana was deprived of such parental care and approval. Even if his father was not available, his mother could have stepped in. Unfortunately, she did not. A misguided sense of loyalty made her blindfold herself. I cannot understand this action. Some people praise her. Perhaps there was some good in it, but as a result poor Duryodhana was denied a mother's appreciation. She was a good wife; that is true. In fact her husband approved, 'I cannot see and now you too cannot. I am very happy.' What kind of man was he? He should have said, 'Be my eyes'. She should have been his eyes and ears. Blindfolding herself was a mistake, a mistake born of emotions. In fact, the entire Mahabharata is a tragedy because it is a series of mistakes that people committed out of emotions. Karna is a prime example.

He was born a prince, the son of Kunti, gifted, brilliant, and blessed by the Lord Sun. Because of certain circumstances, he was brought up as the son of charioteer, a *suta-putra*. But Karna never felt at ease with his foster family. He knew that there was something different about him. He always felt different, that he was better than any of the *ksatriyas* around. So he could not bear to be called a *suta-putra*. He thought it was unjust and seethed with suppressed anger. Therefore, he desperately wanted to make a mark, to be better than anybody, to achieve so that he could overcome this feeling. He says in one place, 'I give because I want it said that no one can give like Karna.' It became an ideal for him. Like compulsive eaters, he became a compulsive giver. The reason was the pressure within to

prove himself to be different, entirely different from others. The inner pressure that compelled him to give also made him responsible for the war. Even if Duryodhana wanted to listen to the elders' advice, it was Karna who refused to yield. He made sure that Duryodhana did not heed their advice.

Thus, I find that in the Mahabharata, each character has a particular emotional problem. In fact, the epic is a treasure trove for psychological study, a veritable gold mine. The variety of characters enacting their roles on the epic's vast canvas, reflect the depth of Vyasa's knowledge of psychology. Each character is an archetype. You can understand from a study of these characters, that history was made of emotions.

Emotions make your life, your family's life, and your children's. Hence you cannot afford to be ignorant of the dynamics of the emotional life. It is unfortunate to hear people say that you should have emotions but not be emotional, that emotions are good but emotionalism is bad and so on. It is not a question of good or bad. If people say that emotions are good but emotionalism is not, who is to decide? Everyone is emotional. Who is not emotional?

Life is made of emotions. Emotions make marriages; they also break them. Emotions create sane people and insane ones too. Therefore, it is very important to understand the nature of the emotional person in us. It is this emotional person who makes or mars our life. When I look into the various forms of emotions, I find that they are merely different manifestations of one single emotion and that is what we call love.

Love is the dominant theme in music, particularly modern music, because you are always going to talk of the thing that you crave. From ancient times, the problem

has always persisted. I want to be loved. The reason for this want is that I have no love for myself.

When somebody expresses love for me, I must have the emotional infrastructure to absorb that love. If I do not have some love for myself, some self-acceptance, I cannot absorb love even if it is lavished on me. As a result, when someone professes love for me, I constantly question and doubt the person. 'Do you really love me? Why do you love me? How much do you love me?' The person has to invent stories to reply to my questions. What else can he or she do? If I continue, 'Why do you love me?' the best I can expect is, 'Because I am an idiot, that's why.' There is no other answer, because there is no calculated love. Love is reckless, naturally.

A lack of love for myself also makes me misunderstand love as control. No one really knows what love is, therefore love becomes control. In fact, the love of our parents is often control. It starts when the child is barely one month old. When we only know love as control, we cannot enjoy what we love because it is not possible to control situations. They do not always go the way we want and the story of love turns into a story of woes.

Every tragedy is unassimilated love, misunderstood love or obsessive love. Thus, you cannot afford to be ignorant of what love is. If you do not have a healthy image of yourself, if you do not have love for yourself, love translates into control and then obsession. When someone accepts you for what you are, just as you are and declares love for you, because it is the truth, that person becomes an object of your obsession, which is not healthy either. Therefore, love is not the ordinary topic that we usually understand it to be.

Our scriptures, particularly the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, discuss the topic of love. Sage Yājñavalkya helps his wife Maitreyī discover that it is love for the self that makes anything beloved. When I say love for the self, it is not the ordinary unhappy self that I am talking about. No one is interested in that. We are only interested in the happy self, the self that is pleased, that is contented. Thus the Upaniṣad analyses love and unfolds the vision of what love is, what every emotion is.

What makes a human being so unique is that he is the most self-conscious among the various living organisms on this planet. This gives him the capacity to be conscious of himself and a freedom to explore, to discover, to know, to choose, to feel and so on. Basically, a human being is cognitive. We call this capacity *jñāna-śakti*. Not only is a human being a conscious person, with a capacity to know, he is also a dynamically emotional person. He is endowed with a capacity to emote, to feel, which is another *śakti*, *icchā-śakti*.

Although a human being is cognitive, the emotional component inhibits the cognitive person. Even the capacity to know is inhibited by certain emotional upheavals. I have found my students, who were otherwise very brilliant, at sea when it came to facing themselves. The reason was the core person, the emotional person. Unless this problem is resolved, it is almost impossible to assimilate the vision of the *śāstra*. In daily transaction, the cognitive person can be completely overpowered and paralysed by the overwhelming emotions.

Emotions such as anger, *krodha*, completely deny wisdom. Anger dissipates whatever knowledge one may have. It is not just anger; any overwhelming emotion takes control of the person. This is not something unique to modern man; it is an age-old problem. According to our *purāṇas*, the sages, despite their

knowledge, used to get angry. In addition, they were powerful people, which made it worse. Ordinary persons cannot do much harm, but when it came to powerful sages, yogis, and others, they could curse those who displeased them. A little later, the very same person would also help to release his victim from the curse. From this we can understand that before and after anger, the person is in control. It is only in between that anger takes control. It can happen to anybody. It is just that we have to pay attention to the emotions.

Emotions and their nuances are many, but all of them have their basis in one emotion and that is what we call in English, love, and in Sanskrit, prema. Love is the basic emotion. Our Upaniṣads, the Gītā, and other scriptures have analysed this emotion to some extent. The love, the desire for an object arises because a person feels that the object will make a difference to his or her life. A desire to possess, to experience, to win, to succeed, all these forms of desire for various ends exist because there is an element of liking towards them. The word 'kāma' reveals that the object of desire is fascinating, pleasing or going to please. The objects of your desire are objects of kāma. Kāma does not mean lust or passion as is commonly understood. It is love for the desired objects.

Yājñavalkya explains to his wife that love for anything is for your own sake, ātmanastu kāmāya, and not for the sake of the other. You love an object, person or situation because it evokes the pleased you. Love is, therefore, the emotion that connects the pleased person and an external object. If an object evokes the displeased person, love turns to dislike. In addition, your poor self-image prevents you from accepting another's love. You have so many complexes, your looks, hair, colour, qualification, wealth and so on. If mere looks can create complexes in you, where is the question of intellect and talent?

When someone loves you, it means that he or she accepts the whole of you, including your limitations. You cannot love partially; you love the whole person. It is a package that includes the entire person and all that he or she stands for. The fact that there is another person who loves you is a wonderful thing. That someone in the world accepts you as you are, does not judge you, what more can you ask? The simple sentence, 'I love you', implies a complete acceptance of the other. In your acceptance, the other feels accepted. Despite the person's illnesses, complaints, feeling of lack, despite all of this and more, he or she is acceptable, completely acceptable to someone. Nothing is comparable to this feeling, which is what we call relative love. I use the word relative to differentiate it from the absolute. You can now understand why love is so important for a healthy emotional life.

You cannot afford to underestimate the feeling of complete acceptance. Criticism, pointing out others' mistakes, these are our habits. In fact, the most commonly heard mantra today is 'Didn't I tell you?' We go on holidays, pilgrimages, organise events, 'Didn't I tell you?' is the mantra that relentlessly follows us. Didn't I tell you to bring the water? Didn't I tell you to pack the woollens? Didn't I? Didn't I? Well, we can see why love is the least understood of emotions. There is love and trust, but it is inhibited by our agenda for others. Let us try and understand love, relative or otherwise.

Whatever or whoever evokes the pleased person in you becomes an object of love. *Ātmanastu kāmāya*, for one's own happiness alone, a person becomes beloved. Love is for your sake alone, whether the object of love is a person, an object or a situation. Your love for this or that sometimes makes you unmindful of others' happiness. You are oblivious to them. You fight for things to evoke the pleased self. It is not the displeased self that you fight for. The displeased self is the one

who is unhappy with the situation and wants to change the set up. The change can be simple, such as rearranging the furniture at home, the carpet, the painting and so on, but it is only for your sake. It is not for the sake of the furniture. It is always *ātmanastu kāmāya*. When an Upaniṣad makes a statement, it is final. You cannot touch it. *Ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati*, everything is beloved for the sake of the self; it is a watertight statement.

When someone says, 'I love you', you accept yourself for the time being through the eyes of the other, because he or she totally accepts you. That is why love seems to produce happiness. At that time there is complete suspension of the wanting, smarting self. The petty person is given up for the moment. This is also what happens because of an overwhelming experience, either of music, of a joke, of something beautiful, or of something profound. It captures you, and you find that you are the whole. This is what is called happiness, and you experience this happiness in different degrees. Wherever there is love, there is wholeness. You love the wholeness through another object that makes you discover wholeness about yourself. Therefore, that object becomes an object of love.

Further, love itself undergoes changes. It becomes compassion when the object of love requires consideration, some consolation or help from me, and I respond because that person deserves help. From compassion, love turns into service. If compassion is not there, service will invoke it, creating a condition within that will help you understand yourself. There can be love only where there is understanding, otherwise love cannot be sustained.

Love requires that you free yourself from your agenda for the other. Unless you drop your agenda, you cannot understand another. Love paves the way for this understanding. Unfortunately, we do not understand what is love, not even

relative love. Due to our lack of understanding, love turns into obsession. When this happens, love not only gets hurt, it also causes hurt. When I cannot control the object of my love, I begin to dislike the very object that I profess to love. In extreme cases, you can destroy that which you love. Love is now hatred. In fact, there is no such thing as hatred. It is only unfulfilled love, love that has gone sour.

Jealousy also is love. When someone gets the thing that you love and want, you become jealous. In the Gītā, this emotion, mātsarya, is specifically mentioned. When talking about a jñānī, a wise person, he is said to be vimatsaraḥ, free from jealousy. In Sanskrit, jealousy is defined as anguish at others' success, particularly if that success is conjoined with your failure. Jealousy, another ramification of love, is in fact the most illegitimate of emotions.

Anger also is love. When your love for something is thwarted or denied, you are hurt and there is pain. It is this pain, duḥkha, which manifests as anger. Anger is not the pain of the present; it is always some old anger resurfacing. The current situation merely evokes the latent feeling. Everyone has his or her vulnerable area. There is already anger inside. All it requires is a trigger, someone to touch the right button, and there is an outburst. We need to be aware of ourselves; we need an insight into our inner world.

Thus, there is only one emotion, which is real, which is your nature, and that is love, love as compassion, as sympathy, as understanding, as giving, yielding, and as friendliness also. People often say, 'You should be friendly, you should be accommodating, you should be this and that.' It is not a question of should or should not; it is what you are. You do not ask a sugar crystal to be sweet or a chilly powder to be spicy. It is its nature to be sweet, to be spicy. We are misled to have ideals without understanding that these are not ideals; these are ourselves,

our nature. It is a question of understanding; it is not something to be commanded or demanded. That is why we are all mediocre, mediocre not in our professions or achievements, but in our living. It is not that we are incapable of living intelligently; it is just that we are misled. Compassion is our nature, as is sympathy, and empathy is the key that unlocks these emotions.

Empathy is not the quality of a special heavenly individual. It is a natural human trait. When you see suffering, any suffering, you pick up the pain. This is empathy. You can see this clearly in a tennis match; look at the expression on the faces of the two players after the match. The winner, when he comes up to the net to shake hands with the opponent, after a hard won final, picks up the disappointment of the other. His earlier euphoria is quickly replaced by sympathy for the other's defeat. This is empathy. The world enters you through empathy and invokes compassion. Compassion, in turn, moves you to act, to reach out and help.

The subject matter of Vedanta is the fullness, the wholeness that is your nature. It is what you want to be. You will not and cannot settle for anything less.

But a person has to grow in maturity before he or she becomes eligible for this knowledge. This growth is not natural, unlike biological growth. You can live to be ninety and not be mature. You will age but not grow. The inner person remains a child, a child that cannot face disappointments in life. From losing a balloon to losses in the stock market, the person cannot handle the downside of life. You have to grow, and that means you have to make the required effort for that growth. If it is simple biological growth, you need not do anything; nature will take care of it. On the other hand, inner growth requires initiative and effort on your part. It does not happen naturally.

You do not learn anything without effort on your part. Experience does not teach unless you actively learn from it. People often say that experience teaches. I wish it did. People are what they are, not for want of experiences. There is experience enough in everyone's life. If we had to learn only from our own experience, human civilisation would not be where it is today. It is not for want of experiences that people do not know; it is because they do not learn from them. Learning comes with initiative. When you make use of an opportunity to learn, it is taking the initiative. In order to know a particular subject, you have to make an initiative. Discovering love is no different. You have to make the initiative to know, to discover what love is.

If you can command a degree of love that is free from division, then I would say that you are mature. The loving person will be naturally compassionate, naturally sympathetic, understanding, giving, and yielding. It undergoes various changes as the objects you relate to differ.

I am happy when I see myself as a loving person. If you are not happy, you can neither love nor be loving. Since we do not often come across such loving persons, we look upon a very loving person as a saint. That person becomes special, a holy person. However, the fact is that everyone has the potential to be a saint. Saintliness is one's own nature. It is characterised by love, compassion, understanding, sympathy, giving, a readiness to help and much more.

In day-to-day life, the opposite seems to be the norm. People are more prone to hatred, jealousy, dislike and so on. These opposing traits inhibit the natural ones. Consequently, we do not need to cultivate love; we have to neutralise the inhibiting factors. That is why our *śāstra* completely differs from theologies and religious preaching.

The first inhibiting factor is ignorance and this is not easy to remove. Even if you have had the opportunity to study the *śāstra*, emotional problems can hold the cognitive person hostage. The emotional person appears to have the power to decide how loving I can be or how happy—even how cognitive. It is very important, therefore, to understand the emotional person. In order to understand our emotions, we need some inner space, for which we need a cognitive change. We have to learn to relax in the awareness, in the understanding, of our emotions.

By relaxation I do not refer to the many techniques that are offered in the 'spiritual' market today. Every newspaper carries announcements of various workshops peddling techniques of how to relax, breathe, meditate and so on. I am not talking of such a relaxation. Any technique wears out. It is useful only for some time. Later, it becomes mechanical and you grow out of it. You start looking out for newer and newer techniques. It becomes an endless, futile search.

The relaxation I am talking of is born of understanding the reality of the world. We have seen elsewhere that things are given, and are not separate from the giver, *Īśvara*, who is in the form of one total order consisting of many orders. It is your own anxieties, fears, your agenda for others that separates you from the world, from understanding. Without this appreciation of *Īśvara*, you cannot enjoy your family, much less your children. You are unable to share their childhood, their growing years, the friendship of their adulthood. Your anxiety for their future, providing for their security prevent you from reaching out to them freely, wholeheartedly. The problem does not lie in the planning for the future. Every prudent person will definitely plan. The problem is that you want them to obey you implicitly. You do not think that your child is an independent person. You think that your child is an extension of you, and this is where the problem lies.

If you understand, you appreciate that a child is born of you, yes, but it is not a part of you. It is like a candle lit from another candle; it is not half a candle. Similarly, from life is born another life. The child has its own body, mind, senses, ātmā; it is complete, pūrṇaḥ. It is whole from a whole, pūrṇāt pūrṇam. Please understand that a child is a growing whole. It is a beautiful fact. The child is given to you, born of you; you are a nimitta. It is the same Īśvara's order and you are merely an instrument.

It is because of a lack of understanding that you cannot enjoy your children. It is not because you cannot love. Which parent does not love or care? The problem is that you consider that the child is a part of you. What you think is good for the child, the child must also think so. Often when I visit people's homes, the parents want their child to chant or sing for the Swami. 'Come, chant śuklāmaradharam. Come on.' The child protests. It is asserting its independence. The parents cannot understand and are disappointed. They have not understood that the child is not a part of them. Please understand this well. A child is independent; it is whole. Learn to enjoy the whole. You can never enjoy a part, but you can enjoy the whole. Your love for your child is inhibited by your agenda if, for you, love means control.

If you can learn to relax in the order that is Isvara, you will understand that love is not control. Do you know why you control? It is part of the psychological order. You control because you could not trust your parents. You could not communicate with your parents. Perhaps it was a problem caused by alcohol. Whatever the reason, between the parents and you, the child, there was neither communication nor understanding.

As a child, you had to figure out how to win your parents' approval, your gods'

approval. Hence, you had to ensure that you were right all the time. You had to draw lines within which alone there was predictability; there was no vulnerability. Outside the lines, you were vulnerable. You had no control and it became a problem. You tried to manipulate situations as well as you could, but things always got out of your control. Therefore, you need to be aware that you tend to control. If you can say it out aloud, 'I tend to control. I think that control is love', it can help you understand that control is control, that it is not love, although behind the control there is love. That is why there is so much pain, the pain of a child that was not understood.

It is important to understand that control is not love; possessiveness is not love; ownership is not love. Often, we think that anything that I love, I should have, should own. I love this flower and at once I reach out and pluck it. No, it is not necessary. Let it be where it is. Let the stars be where they are; I love them as they are. You just love, nothing more. It does not have any other connotation. It is simple.

As you look into yourself, you will see the presence of Īśvara in the form of your emotions. You accept them as valid because you accept that they have a background. It makes you normal in every way. You must understand this well. Every one of you should say that. You are normal. When you say, 'I am normal', you will find that there is nothing inhibiting your love. What is love? It is nothing but compassion, which is sympathy and which, in turn, is understanding. The more loving you are, the easier it is for you to understand what the śāstra says. It says that the ātmā, the self, is the whole. The wholeness naturally comes to manifest; it does not remain as an ideal. It is this wholeness that you love. When all that is here is the whole, where is the question of your not loving? When you understand this, you have discovered love; that there is nothing here but love.

