

Everyday Heroes of Love

October 7, 2012 (Feast of St. Francis/Blessing of the Animals)

I've been giving the topic of LOVE a lot of thought.

All of the great spiritual teachers ask us to live a life of love. Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus, Mother Teresa -- they treated everyone they met with equal love, from the most exalted leaders to the poorest citizens. They turned the other cheek. They made great personal sacrifices. Where we see criminals, they saw God's children. Where we see squalor or disease or evil, they saw heaven.

In the bible, one of the teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

The most important thing we are asked to do is LOVE. Love God, and love one another. On paper, it doesn't seem that hard right? But I asked myself the other day if I even know what love is.

Many people have tried to describe it. Maybe, as in Love Story, love means never having to say you're sorry. Though I never really got that, to tell the truth. It seems to me if you love someone, saying you're sorry -- and meaning it -- is a really important part of a relationship. Maybe I don't know what love is.

In the New Testament, Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. I'm not sure I've experienced that -- so maybe I don't know how to love.

If that's what love is, how does one DO it? This seemingly impossible act, love, that is historically demonstrated as painful or involving great privation or sacrifice. Sometimes even losing or giving up your life is held up as an ultimate act of love.

Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus, Mother Teresa -- the greatest expressions of love; human beings who embody Love with a capital L. Love's heroes.

But look what happened to them? Gandhi embodies the "turning the other cheek" kind of love by allowing himself to be beaten without fighting back, by starving himself, and by bucking his entire culture. Buddha abandons his family and a life of wealth and the opportunity of leading his father's kingdom, and all the good that he could have done there. Jesus is mocked, tortured and executed. Mother Teresa lives in abject poverty and squalor.

I don't know about you, but I don't want to do that! I don't want to live in poverty, filth, and violence. And if these heroes of Love are held up as what we should aspire to, I'm honestly not going to be that motivated. If extreme discomfort is the reward of Loving, I'm going to have to pass.

But God directs me to Love. Tells me if I obey no other commandment, I should Love God, Myself and My Neighbors.

So where does that leave me, us, the average human, struggling to live a Godly life? To love one another?

If our heroes embody what love is, sometimes I think love is impossible for the average person. My sweetheart -- and all my ex's, for that matter -- can tell you I'm pretty flawed at the romantic love thing. As for family love, well, there's my mother, God bless her. That sure turned out to be a lot of work for not much reward. I think I love my friends, but sometimes I don't pick up the phone when I see it's one or the other of them because I just can't deal with another round of this one's cheating boyfriend or that one's horrible work situation.

As for loving my neighbors as myself, at least one of my neighbors can take a long walk off a short pier, and the thought of loving myself seems to always bring me back to that self-centered ego feeling I've been warned away from since childhood.

That's the kind of human love that I've experienced, and I know deep in my heart there is a limit to how much pain I'll endure as a consequence.

So how is someone like me supposed to aspire to love? How on earth can I feel worthy of God's love, or follow his directive to **Love One Another**, if I can't even figure how to do it properly? I've actually been meditating and praying on this subject for *years*. I read all the quotes and definitions I could find about it. I asked and prayed and meditated for help. If love is patient, kind, always trusts, always hopes, never fails, never means having to say you're sorry -- well, then I don't have it! I don't know it! I can't do that!

But one thing I kept coming back to over, and over in my meditation and prayers was this, the only phrase that rang really true for me: GOD is Love.

I believe God is real, so I have to believe Love is real. I believe that I am a creation of Almighty God's, I am a part of God. So that must mean that Love is something I AM, right now.

I can't speak for God, but I can speak about my experience with God. I believe that God loves me. You know how I know that? Because of the way I feel when I look at my dog. Those of you who have pets or children probably know what I'm talking about.

Just looking at my dog makes me feel like my heart is capable of tremendous things. I look at him and think I could be a better person if I just acted like he did. I feel uplifted when I'm connected to my dog with that feeling of love. And I feel that *every time* I look at him! This may sound crazy, but sometimes I think we're one person. I swear I know what he's thinking, and I'm certain he knows what I'm thinking.

God answered my prayers when he sent me this dog. He knew I had trouble reconciling my human experiences with the ideal of Love, and so he showed me another way. He knew that for years I studied and prayed to feel as God feels, to Love as He loves. Because Divine Love is not romantic love, or parental love, or community service. It's above all that involves the ego; it's above all that involves the concept of separation.

It hit me like a ton of bricks. Love has been right under my nose. Living in my house with me. Hiking with me and sleeping at the foot of the bed.

Last week I tried an experiment. In an effort to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, I attempted to call up the only kind of love I really know: the love I feel for my German Shepherd. I put post-it notes with his name all over the house. Every time I saw his name I was filled with love that can only be described as Divine.

And I had an *awesome* week. I was even better at romantic love -- if my sweetheart were here he'd tell you! *I was* more patient, kind and hopeful. It was easy to be friendly to my neighbors, to live and let live. I had sort of warm thoughts about my mother, sort of, God bless her. That may take more work, but you get my point, right?

Love has been here all along.

As a medium who is primarily clairsentient and clairvoyant -- meaning feeling & seeing -- I struggled for a long time trying to *hear* what the spirit people were telling me. At times I felt like I was failing, because I don't *hear* the messages. The patient guides and spirit people kept showing me that I could still do their work, just in a different way. I can still feel and see a spirit person or message. They've always told me: there are many paths to God.

And so also there are many paths to Love. For me, the most direct route to Love is my German Shepherd, Memphis.

Many congregations are celebrating the Blessing of the Animals this Sunday. I can see why. Our animal companions are extraordinary; how they help us with their unconditional love! Hundreds of studies have shown how the company of an animal lifts depression, lowers blood pressure, eases social anxiety, does wonders for the elderly in nursing homes, helps us heal more quickly, and on and on. They help the blind, find lost children, and alert us to danger.

If you have a pet, or if you had one who has since passed away, see if you can recall that loving connection several times throughout the day. It will change you. Then it will change the world around you.

Just a quick story: Years ago I was giving messages at Spirit Communication event when I brought through the grandmother of a woman in the audience. The grandmother had lived alone in Maine, far from other family members and distant in her relationships with them anyway.

Apparently she'd been a hard woman to feel affection for. Nevertheless, the family was saddened to learn she had died alone and her body wasn't found for a few days -- all of which was confirmed by the sitter. What the grandmother said next astonished us all. First, she acknowledged that she didn't engender warm feelings, but then she began to talk about her transition to the spirit world. She showed me an elegant collie dog, and gave me "Queenie" as the dog's name. The sitter knew immediately which pet I was bringing through; Queenie was the long-deceased, beloved dog of the spirit grandmother. According to this spirit, Queenie was the first to meet her as she left her physical body and when she saw her collie, the grandmother felt awash in the love of God. She felt safe and welcome immediately, and confidently followed the dog where she needed to go.

That is the only time I've ever begun to cry when bringing through a message. The way this grandmother described her love for this dog confirmed for me that *all* creatures are precious to and beloved of God.

If not a pet, maybe you have a child who fills your heart with that kind of love, or someone in your past who did. Whether he or she is in your life right now doesn't matter. We Spiritualists know that people and animals never really die. They are alive in spirit, they are alive in our hearts and in our memories. Recall the fiercest love you can remember having and put reminders around your house, or in your car. Let Love become a habit throughout your day.

Maybe you and I can be everyday heroes of Love. We don't have to give up all comforts to be expressions of Divine Love. As we practice that, our priorities may change and we may realize we don't *need* that extra television or pair of shoes or summer home. Maybe we'll find that Love is enough. A simple life that frees us to Love, that focuses our attention on God.

Amen.