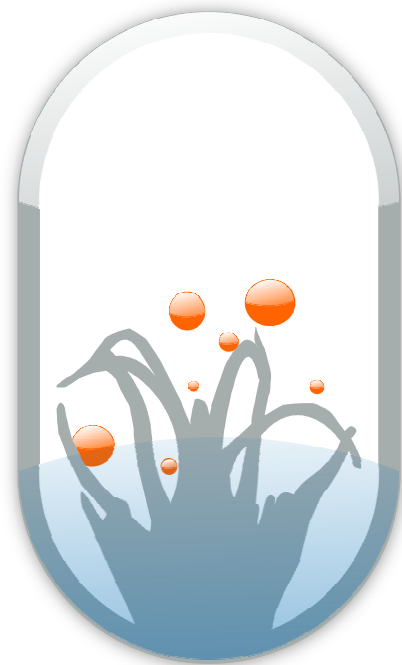


LOVE, LIFE AND IMMORTALITY



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LOVE, LIFE & IMMORTALITY

When the subject of love is mentioned, we probably think about it more in terms of personal relationships than anything else but in this article I would like us to think about it in terms of action and our environment. To love really means to give fully from the very depths of our being and involves something akin to surrender. For example, in the case of the love of a parent for a child, the parent will be willing to sacrifice all self-interests, even life itself, for benefit of the child; if we truly love someone, we will be willing to do anything for their happiness and wellbeing. Thinking about love in this way, it is easy to see that love is about letting go of self and that for love to flourish, there has to be total trust – a trust that everything is ok and will be ok, no matter what the outer circumstances are. So the parent surrendering everything for the child must expect nothing in return, for there is no need of any return or reward. Surrendering all for a loved one must be without any condition or proviso. Eventually, we may reach the stage of understanding where we realise that love isn't about the other person at all; it is about the extent to which we can let go and surrender our whole being without reservation – just giving from the heart.

How does love translate in terms of action and the environment? Is it a question of surrendering all to whatever we do and to wherever we happen to be? In a sense it is but to put it so simply runs the very strong

risk of misinterpretation. What we are going to consider is how love can make everything about us and our lives flourish. This is a real skill that takes self-discipline and application over a long period of time but the rewards are immense. Even when we are beginning, from hidden depths within us great energy comes that gradually blows the cobwebs away from our eyes and over time helps us to achieve total dynamism and stillness simultaneously.

To love what we do, using the term literally rather than in its more familiar sense, means far more than enjoying what we do. After all, fulfilling a desire can be highly enjoyable but it doesn't necessarily mean that love is involved. To love what we do involves giving fully and surrendering fully – yin and yang in balance and totally satisfied. If, for example, someone loves gardening, they may say that when they are tending their plants they have a resonance in the heart – the heart almost “sings”. Energy flows from their hands, giving them the euphemistic green fingers, their eyes sparkle and their skin is radiant; all this is because their inner self is finding expression in outer activity. But the same person may cringe at the prospect of housework, cooking a meal or washing up. That means that in those activities, as their enjoyment level takes a nosedive, the wonderful balance of yin and yang is gone. The previous level of energy isn't radiated at all and the connection with the soul – the inner connection – is temporarily lost.

Of course, we may accept that not loving much or all of what we do is the norm and say, “That's the way it is and that's the way I am.” That type of attitude deprives us of realising our potential as human beings and we then give in to a form of mental inertia

that affects our emotional and physical wellbeing. Positive thinking is replaced by indifference and negativity which totally smother our inner happiness. Instead of maintaining that state of mind, though, we can relatively easily choose happiness and fulfilment. We can choose the path of love, not as some fanciful, airy-fairy state of mind or mood-making, but as a state of immense strength which gives us inner invincibility.

How can we do this? Where can we start? Do we need any special equipment, training or techniques? Do we have to subscribe to some belief that really we are not sure about anyway?

The first important point is that there is no other time than now. We never live, will live or have lived in anything other than the present moment. Life is simply the present moment. Within the present moment life unfolds as it should. However, how we enjoy life and become fulfilled isn't a matter of outer circumstances unfolding but is entirely dependent on our awareness and our state of mind. The biggest problem we all share is maintaining our awareness in the present because for most of us the mind is partially absent most of the time and completely absent for some of it.

When the mind is absent, our activity is done in "autopilot" mode. It becomes purely mechanical. Love cannot flourish in that state. Our body is performing its functions in the present but the mind has gone elsewhere. If we were describing someone else and said that for much of the day he was doing things without being fully aware of what he was doing, one might well think he had a problem. But that in fact is what most of humanity does

most of the time. For example, when we eat, are we fully aware of every mouthful, every nuance of taste? Do we love what we are eating and love the nourishment that the body is receiving? Or are we busy putting the next mouthful on the fork while chewing the previous one? Worse, are we reading, listening to the radio or, horror of horrors, watching the television while eating? When we are walking, is our awareness on our walking or on the destination? Or perhaps our mind is going over various things while we take a stroll. These are simple examples of how the mind strays off what we are doing. The body is doing one thing, the mind is doing another.

If we are going to bring love into our activity, we have to bring mind and body together. We have to let go of inner tension so that the mind is not propelled into other directions. So the second important point is that we have to learn to let go. Let go of what? It is learning to let go of everything that we cling to mentally and emotionally. That is a tall order but is in fact what we need to do. It is, of course, a process that takes a very long time indeed, probably the rest of our lives. But one of the wonderful things about letting go is that as soon as we begin, we feel better. Some of what we cling onto is in the past, which we may look back on with all sorts of mixed emotions – sometimes nostalgia or longing, at others regret, sadness or even anger. We also cling onto the future or, rather more accurately, what we perceive the future might hold for us – again with mixed emotions. Yet a moment's thought will make it clear that our thoughts of past and future are simply pictures in the mind. Neither past nor future exists. There is a wonderful

Buddhist sutra in which it is said, “Do not dwell on the past nor hold onto the future for the past no longer is and the future has not yet come. The person whose mind dwells fully in the present moment enjoys stability and freedom.” Stability and freedom are states of mind that allow our innate qualities of happiness and joy to arise and fill our being.

Letting go of past and future are the main things and we also need to let go of anything we cling to in the present. In general, though, what we cling onto in the present is something, someone or circumstances that we do not want to lose or we do not want to change. Fear of loss or change may have many traceable historical causes but the essence of it is a fear of a possible future event. So, if we can take care of letting go of past and future, we should find that we cling less to things in the present and that we are taken over by a great sense of ease. Then we are in a position to truly love what we do and to love the environment.

When we are riddled with doubt, fear, jealousy, anger and all manner of unpleasant emotions, we cannot be comfortable with ourselves. These emotions cloud our self-perception, and then our perception of others and of the world is distorted. Love is a natural state that occurs when how we see ourselves is positive and good and we feel free. Then we can generate genuine respect and reverence for the world in which we live and so think and act accordingly. Spontaneously, we will act with love.

To love our environment and to love what we do requires true presence of mind – full awareness. Then we know that everything *is*

all right. Things may need to change or be developed – in other words we will need to act – but we can do so wholeheartedly and fearlessly. Then we become a type of warrior – a peaceful warrior – whose main traits are love and skill in action, full accomplishment in the art of living.

This is the immortality spoken of by the sages of the past; it is not some fanciful occupation of a physical body that goes on forever. The immortal is one whose spirit or innermost nature becomes the real expression of life and for whom ageing, illness and death hold no fear. Immortality comes from the simplest thing – love in the present moment – and the wisdom and freedom that naturally and spontaneously arise from it. It is available in all good hearts now.

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