

An abridged and more spiritually-extemporized form of this segment was presented to the congregation of the Creative Life Church in Hot Springs, AR, on Sunday, February 14, 2010. Your comments are welcome; please feel free to contact me through my website: www.creationspirit.net. (Previous commentaries about The Inward Way can be found in the “Free Monthly Presentations on The Inward Way” section on the left-hand side of the same website.) Succeeding presentations regarding other aspects of The Inward Way will be made on the second Sunday of each month at the 10:30 AM service of the Creative Life Church, 229 Bayard Street, Hot Springs, AR. The public is invited. In addition, meetings of The Aristotle Group, formed for purposes of metaphysical exchange, are held on the second Saturday of each month from 10AM-noon at the same location. These meetings and services are open to the public and participation is encouraged.

WHAT KIND OF LOVE IS THIS?

HAPPY VALENTINE’S DAY to one and all! I hope you are connecting with loved ones in special ways—from that very special place in your heart of hearts.

For the Valentine’s Day aficionados, here are a few facts about Valentine’s Day, the holiday we celebrate once a year, on February 14th. According to Wikipedia, Valentine’s Day is named after two early Christian martyrs named Valentine. When the tradition of courtly love flourished during the Middle-Ages, the day was associated with romantic celebration under the influence of Geoffrey Chaucer. In the Western world, St. Valentine’s Day is a day when people express their love for one another by sending Valentine’s cards, presenting flowers and/or candy, and dining out in restaurants publicizing special menus, offered just for lovers. Children and adults alike mutually exchange love notes in the form of valentines and tiny candies, usually shaped as a heart, a pair of doves or a winged Cupid, bow and love-tipped arrow in hand. The popularity of Valentine cards began in 19th century America, where love messages began to turn largely into greeting cards rather than personal declarations of love. It’s not difficult to see that this led to the future commercialization of holidays in this country. To complete this brief synopsis, here’s a couple of facts to put in your nonessential diary: according to Wikipedia and the U.S. Greeting Card Association, an estimated one billion valentines are sent each year worldwide, making Valentine’s Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year, behind Christmas. It’s also estimated that men in the U.S. spend, on average, twice as much as women celebrating this holiday—so much for equality between the genders!

To sharpen the focus a bit, essentially we use a single word to convey feelings of a warm friendship or our deep affection for others: “I love you,” we say. Or we close an email, letter or phone call with “love you,” without even so much as injecting the more personal “I” into the expression—as though we are afraid to really commit such emotion to another—perhaps out of fear that someone will hold us to it. Even these expressions occasionally gather fear around them, like when I said, “I love you,” while concluding a telephone conversation with a friend, and she responded with, “I wish you wouldn’t say that, it makes me feel uncomfortable.” Makes me wonder what she feels about *herself*...

Quite unlike us, the Greeks at least make an attempt to be precise about their declarations of love, so that relations are more clearly defined—and emotionally clear. Often communication, particularly written ones, terminate with expressions like Agape, meaning that I love you in a Godly way, deeply and spiritually, as I do all of life. Or they say, “filia,” meaning that I love you as I would my family or close friend; or latria, I worship you—my lover—like I would God, religiously; then there’s sagapo, meaning that I love you as if you are my lover; or eros, I lust for you. Unlike most of us, Mary Baker Eddy spiritualized eros into Eros, with a capital E, conveying the depth and breadth of love exhibited by the totally consuming commitment between God and mankind. I think I like this last one best, Greek or not.

So far, what this brief contextual foundation describes is what we’ve made out of a holiday created to celebrate the intention of sincerely declaring love for others in very personal ways. Yet, as we can see from the brief history of this holiday, many of us practice Valentine’s Day by giving ourselves to works, regardless of intention, thereby spiritualizing ego consciousness—not at all unlike the religions that dedicate themselves to works as the way to gain a sweet seat in Heaven. What kind of love is this? It’s not that loving works fail the test of goodness, at all. Of course, exchanging loving intention is a good thing. There is a larger perspective to consider, however—the spiritual perspective. As you know so well, the spiritual perspective—engaged in *any* and *every* circumstance or condition, refers to bringing order to our lives and the life of our planet by connecting with the still, small voice inwardly, and following only its guidance for the highest good of one and all.

In a related sense, where, for example, at Thanksgiving we have the reminder to give thanks every day and not just one day a year, we would be far better off using Valentine’s Day to remind us to love our neighbor as ourselves during *each* moment of *every* day. True, some may complain that they couldn’t afford to buy expensive flowers or take a loved one out for a fashionable dinner every day, or even buy and send a greeting card every day. To complain about such superficial layers of habit and works of “make nice” is to miss the real essence of loving.

Certainly, the things we do and say around Valentine’s Day are nice things to do and say. Yet doing and saying things, even nicely, is not necessarily being loving. Doing nice things nicely, is, simply, being nice. It’s akin to calling infatuation or lust real love—both miss the point. There are a thousand kisses deep that separate infatuation and lust from real loving ways, just as there are a thousand kisses deep that separate the difference between doing nice things and being loving. Frankly, I sometimes think I’d settle for “make nice,” given some of the ways we treat one another, generally disrespecting human dignity and another’s right to live their life as they feel called to live it. But then, what kind of love is this?

As Jesus said, “No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.” (John, 15:13). This same admonition is found in other world religions and flows from the pens of our beloved poets. Many take this literally to mean that laying down our physical lives for our friends is the greatest form of love. Taken this way, even this, believe it or not, is not the ultimate gift of love. Although a noble and generous act, giving up one’s life is not necessarily what’s called for, even in the dire most circumstances. It could *well*

be what is called for, but not *necessarily* so. Besides, even the gesture of giving up one's life is a work—a most noble work, to be sure; but it is still a work, after all.

Some would say that a sure sign of being “true to love” is experiencing a deep sense of intimacy with a loved one, both on the conversational and sexual level. This level of thinking keeps us stuck essentially in the superficiality of belief and opinion surrounding physical intimacy—which places reliance for intimacy on our relationship with another, a person outside of us we think can fulfill our need for intimacy. What kind of love is this?

How does one come to a decision of this magnitude—to love authentically—and what criteria should we use in discerning the best path to follow? Solving the riddle from the same level that presents the problem is definitely not the way to go. So let's continue looking at love from a spiritual perspective.

Personally, I like what A Course in Miracles says about what releases fear, so we can live in the fullness of love:

“If you send forth only the messengers
the Holy Spirit gives you,
wanting no messages but theirs,
you will see fear no more.”

Spiritually, intimacy speaks to our relation with our highest self, the essence of divinity that is our inherent birthright. Plainly put, when we are in communion with the still, small voice heard only inward—Christ consciousness, the Holy Spirit made aware—this is the most intimate of intimacies, fear be damned. Being at one with Christ consciousness is at-one-ment demonstrated, resonating with the full awareness of our divinity. Bringing order to our lives from this spiritually sensuous silence affords us with the infinitude of loving opportunities to fulfill, simply for the listening. The consummate demonstration of this ultimate form of intimacy is to *be* the guiding light, in order to glorify its rightness for the world we live in, as well as for ourselves.

The loving conclusion we come to by fully resonating with our Truth of being is that living True to our inherent divinity is, indeed, the most powerful form of loving we can demonstrate to the world. The magical thing about loving this way is that authentically expressing our inward calling also fulfills our very own need to be loved at the highest level of being. Discerning and Being our Truth in the world can be no less. We are expansive Beings: we long to demonstrate and thus expand our True loving nature out into the Universe. You may jump to the conclusion that this act of giving is tantamount to doing works. On the contrary, it is simply *being* our Truthful self.

Spiritually comprehending the loving practice of *being true* to our divine nature keeps our decisions about when and how to love simple. And it also keeps us from repeating past habits related to some of the more superficial ways of celebrating love for one another. When we live from the inside out—no matter how living that way appears on the outside—is the purest gift of spiritual integrity one can send out to the world. When coming from our heart of hearts, our demonstration of being love *may* indeed take the form of giving candy and flowers, or joining another for a lovely dinner. If our decision

were also to emanate from what calls us inwardly to be, then we would at least know, without question or doubt, that the inner calling absolutely *is* the proper thing to do—the Being we are to demonstrate—in that and every situation. When we see and act from spiritual sensitivity, such demonstrations exemplify *being* loving, *being* generous of Spirit, *being* thoughtful, and *being* loving, all from the deepest Source. Living from such authentic quarters and direction, truly, is the loving way. Perhaps Shakespeare’s poignant comment finally comes to roost: “To be or not to be. That is the question.”

When we have come to live Valentine’s Day in the loving way day-to-day, moment-by-moment, we will have done how we used to celebrate it even one better—superbly better. We will have learned once and for all what it really means to be and demonstrate love for one another and for all mankind. In one loving commitment, we will have witnessed the teachings of Jesus, just as he refined the ten commandments to a precious few: Love God with all your mind, heart, soul and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself. Loving in a way that aligns us with the Truth of our earthly walk in the fullness of *all* we are—as the single-minded approach to Life—*is* loving our neighbor as ourselves. By giving up living from the roots of ego consciousness and instead being loving to the core, we are laying down our (former) lives for our friends—aligning thus our divine intention with the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ proclamation about the highest form of love.

Let this be the time we commit to setting a new standard for making love. Let us, here, today, right now, join in asserting the inner voice as the guiding light that shines authentic love on all, by simply and completely being loving. Let us be the loving example for the entire community—indeed our planet—so that all may become entrained with the same outpouring of True love’s healing power.

I’ll close now with two simple questions: If you were to give yourself a Valentine, what would it look like? What would it say? Or, should I ask the questions this way: If you were to give yourself a Valentine, what would *you* look like? What would you *be*? I think I’ll go for Eros, with a capital E, thank you.

I love you—I really do!