

Unification Thought on Love

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Reflections on the Path of Love

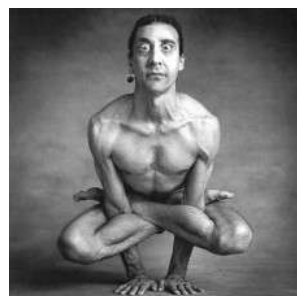


When I was growing up, the idea of love was of the romantic relationship between a couple. That was the primary focus of all the TV, music, movies, books, magazines and ads. Sure, there was an acknowledgement of the other types of affection available in a family, but the one that really occupied my mind was romantic love. And so, after a childhood heavily immersed in this perspective, I inevitably ended up with a pretty one-dimensional concept of “love”.

So it wasn't surprising that by the time I was ending my college years, many young people were already disappointed with “love”. Many were looking into ways of disengaging themselves from a life of emotional turmoil; even looking into Yoga and Zen forms of meditation and their related practices of asceticism.

In these views, celibacy was considered an important condition, if one was serious about approaching enlightenment and liberation from illusion and suffering. Romantic love was considered a distraction, an impediment to achieving true understanding; it was

something indulged in by lesser people, those who weren't strong or elevated enough to walk a strict, spiritual path.



I recall a Hindu ideal of life that impressed me in my college years: when young, one studies; when older, one works, marries and raises a family; and when one's children are grown and familial responsibilities are completed, one leaves those things behind and devotes oneself to the spiritual life.

So I meditated, did yoga, attended classes and sessions at the local ashram and was inspired by the Bhagavad Gita. But the peace that enlightenment promised me was still elusive, so I continued searching. And I eventually found the Divine Principle and soon after, Unification Thought.

The Dimensions of Love

A different kind of spirituality was presented here; a different path to enlightenment. Rather than abandoning the powerful, intimate relationship, I had to commit to it and thereby grow my heart. And here, all this time, I had been trying to rule myself by my will, controlling and limiting my emotion, in the effort to end all desiring and thereby eliminate the troubles that attended it.

Heart, the Divine Principle said, was the most fundamental, God-given characteristic of the human soul and the only way to happiness and peace was to immerse oneself in living with a true heart.

Heart was defined by Unification Thought in a new, very specific way. According to it, heart is the inner, irrepressible, emotional impulse to experience joy through love. That is, joy comes from giving love to another (or others) and from receiving it back. But it is not simply romantic love between two young people. In fact, there are four realms of heart: the realm of parents, the realm of spouses, the realm of siblings and the realm of children.

Words in the Realms of Love

I'm not sure what the Chinese character for the word realm is, but in English, a realm refers to an entire world, complete unto itself. Which means that the realm of romantic love, as powerful and profound as it is, is yet but one of four realms in our human experience, each one full and deep in its own way.

In Unification Thought, I read about the realm of Parental love and learned that it is the form of love that flows downward from parents towards their children. The virtue that is most expressive of this love is 仁 (pronounced ren in Mandarin) and the English approximation is benevolence. Another is human-heartedness.

The Chinese ideogram combines the characters for human and two, to indicate that it is the natural feeling that a person should experience when they are with another. I think the English word benevolence reveals a similar intent. It too is made of two Latin words: bene and volens, the former meaning good and the latter meaning will (or also word). So it would indicate a feeling of wishing goodness for another. In my mind, if I take volens to mean word, then I am reminded of the word benediction, which is a blessing one bestows upon another.

Unification Thought mentions secondary virtues that are extensions of benevolence. Some are protection, guidance, education, forbearance, fortitude, dignity, authority and clemency, all of which can characterize expressions of love that parents feel towards their children.

Learning about love in the dojang

In my own life, these concepts of the parental realm of heart became clearest through — of all things — my experience in the martial arts. It's as if heaven conspired to educate me by letting me feel benevolence and all its forms by putting me in one of the most clearly ordered, structured and strict traditions of relationship in the East: the student-teacher relationship.



In the dōjang (dō means path; jang means room), we students were absolutely subordinate to our teacher. And in that tradition, our teacher was absolutely responsible to support and guide the development of not only our defense skills, but more importantly, the development of our character and heart. On this path — as on any path with a Zen master — we students are confronted with our own limitations and taught and brought by our teachers to

meet and overcome them.

Carefully led by them, we students thereby proceed with increasing confidence to strive for goals that we had initially thought unattainable. And over the course of years of study — years of benevolence, really — we each can gain the black belt, as long as we exert ourselves to hold on to our teacher.

When I attained my own black belt, I felt a sense of indebtedness to my seniors in the class, and we all felt this towards our teachers. It was far more that the ability to perform difficult moves, sequences and breaks, but it was the gift of confidence and of having been taught and guided with consistent care for years that made the deepest impression on me.

That realm of heart became deeper yet when I became a teacher myself and found that — as I cared for my own students the way that my teachers had cared for me — my students took a special place in my heart as I did in theirs. Growing up, I had no idea that such a powerful realm of love and happiness even existed.

And as the lessons in the dōjang are meant to illuminate life experience beyond it, I realized that the course of life that Rev. Moon had been leading me on was for the same purpose and towards the same end: my approach to “perfection”, to *a life lived by a mind and body united and guided by a heart for others*.

That in turn led me to the deepest appreciation of my own father; for the first time really, I began to realize and appreciate how much he had done for me, dreamed for me, and sacrificed for me.

God is the origin of all love

I suppose that the culmination of these realizations was coming to a better understanding of God — the import of Jesus' teaching that God is our Father in Heaven; and the extension of that by Rev. Moon that God is the origin of all the love that fathers and mothers have felt for their children since the beginning of time.

In this short article, I've attempted to explain my own path to discovering one of the four immense realms of love which the Divine Principle and Unification Thought — teachings of Rev. Sun Myung Moon — have helped me realize.