



One Has No Self To Love, by Alan Watts

Love that expresses itself in creative action is something much more than an emotion. It is not something which you can “feel” and “know,” remember and define. Love is the organizing and unifying principle which makes the world a universe and the disintegrated mass a community. It is the very essence and character of mind, and becomes manifest in action when the mind is whole. For the mind must be interested or absorbed in something, just as a mirror must always be reflecting something. When it is not trying to be interested in itself “as if a mirror would reflect itself” it must be interested, or absorbed, in other people and things. There is no problem of how to love. We love. We are love, and the only problem is the direction of love, whether it is to go straight out like sunlight, or to try to turn back on itself like a “candle under a bushel.”

Where there is to be creative action, it is quite beside the point to discuss what we should or should not do in order to be right or good. A mind that is single and sincere is not interested in being good, in conducting relations with other people so as to live up to a rule. Nor, on the other hand, is it interested in being free, in acting perversely just to prove its independence. Its interest is not in itself, but in the people and problems of which it is aware; these are “itself.” It acts, not according to the rules, but according to the circumstances of the moment, and the “well” it wishes to others is not security but liberty.

Nothing is really more inhuman than human relations based on morals. When a man gives bread in order to be charitable, lives with a woman in order to be faithful, eats with (someone from another race) in order to be unprejudiced, and refuses to kill in order to be peaceful, he is as cold as a clam. He does not actually see the other person. Only a little less chilly is the benevolence springing from pity, which acts to remove suffering because it finds the sight of it disgusting.

But there is no formula for generating the authentic warmth of love. It cannot be copied. You cannot talk yourself into it or rouse it by straining at the emotions or by dedicating yourself solemnly to the service of mankind. Everyone has love, but it can only come out when (people are) convinced of the impossibility and the frustration of trying to love (themselves). This conviction will not come through condemnations, through hating oneself, through calling self-love all the bad names in the universe. It comes only in the awareness that one has no self to love.

