



Cultivation of that Dormant Love, by Radhanath Swami

Mother Nature is always speaking. She speaks in a language understood within the peaceful mind of the sincere observer. Leopards, cobras, monkeys, rivers and trees; they all served as my teachers when I lived as a wanderer in the Himalayan foothills. They shared the kind of lessons that elevate the spirit.

One particularly illuminating lesson from the forest comes in the form of the Himalayan musk deer. The musk deer is referenced in Sanskrit poetry and philosophy owing to its peculiar behavior. Prized by the perfume industry for its exceptional aroma, musk is one of the world's most expensive natural products, fetching more than three times its weight in gold. The aroma of musk is so alluring that when the stag's sensitive nose catches wind of it he roams the forest day and night in pursuit of its source. He exhausts himself in a fruitless quest, never realizing the bitter irony: the sweet fragrance he was chasing resided nowhere but within himself. Musk, you see, is produced by a gland in the stag's very own navel: it was searching without for what was all along lying within.

The sages of India found in the musk deer an apt description of the human condition. We are all pleasure-seeking creatures wandering a forest of some sort -- replete with pleasures and perils alike. Moreover, we are prone to the same type of folly as the deer: we seek our happiness externally. Misconceiving our true needs, we wrongly equate our fulfillment and self-worth with possessions, positions, mental and sensual thrills. We are often drawn into superficial relationships which hold the promise of lasting satisfaction, yet leave us feeling empty.

The true treasure lies within. It is the underlying theme of the songs we sing, the shows we watch and the books we read. It is woven into the Psalms of the Bible, the ballads of the Beatles and practically every film ever made. What is that treasure? Love. Love is the nature of the Divine. Beneath the covering of the false ego it lies hidden. The purpose of human life is to uncover that divine love. The fulfillment that we're all seeking is found in the sharing of this love.

The power of love is most profound. It has various levels. In its crudest sense, the word love refers to acts of physical intimacy, and its influence over society is obvious. But on a deeper, more emotional level, not simply of the body but of the heart, there is no greater power than love. For the sake of money and prestige, one may be willing to work long hours, weekends, even holidays. A mother's love,

on the other hand, is selfless and unconditional. There's nothing she won't do for the well-being of her child, and she asks for nothing in return.

When love is pure, it has the power to conquer. Lover and beloved conquer each other by their affection. [We are] willing and eager to not only be touched by love, but to be conquered by it. The cultivation of that dormant love is called the path of devotion.

--Radhanath Swami

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