

JAMES R. DAVID, Ph.D.

CORPORATE PEOPLEMAP™ TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT TESTING, PERSONAL & BUSINESS COACHING,
INDIVIDUAL & COUPLES PSYCHOTHERAPY

14220 BRADSHAW DRIVE, SILVER SPRING, MD 20905-6503 TELEPHONE (301)989-9155
james519@comcast.net www.askdrdavidnow.com

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.----John 15:12

What is Love? Take a look at a rose. Is it possible for the rose to say, “I shall offer my fragrance to good people and withhold it from bad people?” Or can you imagine a lamp that withholds its rays from a wicked person who seeks to walk in its light? It could only do that by ceasing to be a lamp. And observe how helplessly and indiscriminately a tree gives its shade to everyone, good and bad, young and old, high and low; to animals and humans and every living creature—even to the one who seeks to cut it down. **So this is the first quality of love: its indiscriminate character.** That is why we are exhorted to be like God, “who makes his sun to shine on good and bad alike and makes his rain to fall on saints and sinners alike; so you must be all goodness as your heavenly Father is all goodness.” Contemplate in astonishment the sheer goodness of the rose, the lamp, the tree, for there you have an image of what love is all about.

How does one attain this quality of love? Anything you do will only make it forced, cultivated and therefore phony, for love cannot be forced. There is nothing you can do. But there is something you can drop. Observe the marvelous change that comes over you the moment you stop seeing people as good and bad, as saints and sinners and begin to see them as unaware and ignorant. You must drop your false belief that people can sin in awareness. No one can sin in the light of awareness. Sin occurs, not, as we mistakenly think, in malice, but in ignorance. “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” To see this is to acquire the indiscriminate quality one so admires in the rose, the lamp and the tree.

And here is a second quality of love—its gratuitousness. Like the tree, the rose, the lamp, it gives and asks for nothing in return. How we despise the man whose choice of his wife is determined not by any quality she may have but by the amount of money she will bring as dowry. Such a man, we rightly say, loves not the woman but the financial benefit she brings him. But is your own love any different when you seek the company of those who bring you emotional gratification and avoid those who don’t; when you are positively disposed toward people who give you what you want and live up to your expectations and are negative or indifferent toward those who don’t? Here too there is only one thing that you need do to acquire this quality of gratuitousness that characterizes love. You can open your eyes and see. Just seeing, just exposing your so-called love for what it really is, a camouflage for selfishness and greed, is a major step toward arriving at this second quality of love.

The third quality of love is its unself-consciousness. Love so enjoys the loving that it is blissfully unaware of itself. The way the lamp is busy shining with no thought of whether it is benefiting others or not. The way a rose gives out its fragrance simply because there is nothing that it can do, whether there is someone to enjoy the fragrance or not. The way the tree offers its shade. The light, the fragrance and the shade are not produced at the approach of persons and turned off when there is no one there. These things, like love, exist independently of persons. **Love simply is, it has no object.** They simply are, regardless of whether someone will benefit from them or not. So they have no consciousness of any merit or of doing good. Their left hand has no consciousness of what their right hand does. “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty and help you?”

The final quality of love is its freedom. The moment coercion or control or conflict enters, love dies. Think how the rose, the tree, the lamp leave you completely free. The tree will make no effort to drag you into its shade if you are in danger of sunstroke. The lamp will not force its light on you lest you stumble in the dark. Think for a while of all the coercion and control that you submit to on the part of others when you so anxiously live up to their expectations in order to buy their love and approval or because you fear you will lose them. Each time you submit to this control and this coercion you destroy the capacity to love which is your very nature, for you cannot but do to others what you allow others to do to you. Contemplate, then, all the control and coercion in your life and hopefully this contemplation alone will cause them to drop. The moment they drop, freedom will arise. **And freedom is just another word for love.**

The Way To Love: The Last Meditations of Anthony De Mello. Image Books, 1995, pp 105-109
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