

## WHO DO YOU SAY YOU ARE?

A woman in a coma was dying. She suddenly had a feeling she was been taken up to heaven and stood before the Judgement Seat.

“Who are you?” a Voice said to her.

“I’m the wife of the mayor.” She replied

“I did not ask you whose wife you are but who you are.”

“I’m Anna, the mother of four children.”

“I did not ask your name nor whose mother you are, but who you are.”

“I’m a schoolteacher.”

“I did not ask you what your profession is but who you are?”

And so it went. No matter what she replied, she did not seem to give a satisfactory answer to the question, “Who are you?”

“I’m a Christian.”

I did not ask what your religion is but who you are.”

“I’m the one who went to church every week and always helped the poor and needy.”

“I did not ask you what you did but who you are.”

She evidently failed the examination for she was sent back to earth. When she recovered from her illness she was determined to find out who she was. And that made all the difference.

Our duty is to be. Not to be somebody, not to be nobody – for therein lies greed and ambition – not to be this or that – and thus become conditioned – but just to be.

Thomas Merton, a Cistercian monk and Mystic, often talked about the “True Self”. He says:

At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak “God’s” name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our “birthright”. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely....I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.

Most of us spend our entire lives living up to the mental self-images of who we think we are, instead of living in the pure original “I” that is already good in the eyes of God. Perhaps this is why we seek “love” and the “fullness of life” in so many external ways because what Merton describes above is too simplistic, too natural and feels utterly unadorned. There is nothing there to congratulate ourselves for. We cannot prove any worth, much less any superiority. There we are naked and poor. But when we are nothing, we become open to receive everything from God and the centre of that nothingness is “the pure glory of God in us.” It’s no wonder that the Buddhist tradition speaks about “emptiness” and Jesus advises us in the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”. Some people search for love in others, but love is not an object; it cannot be given nor taken away. Love is

not a feeling, a state, or even a peak experience, but is the essence of who we are – Presence itself. So we should not confuse love with attraction, for attraction comes and goes, can fade over time, can diminish or surge like a volcano, unexpectedly. We should not confuse love with longing, which is impermanent and transitory. Neither should we confuse love with feelings of bliss or pleasure as these are passing states that do not last – it is not in their nature. Even promises, given with such certainty today, with the best of intentions, can fade tomorrow, or be broken and forgotten.

True love, which is our True Self, does not fade. Love cannot diminish over time; it is not a commodity or a shifting form. Love is like a field, a field within and without and in between us all; a field, in which thoughts, feelings, even the most seemingly solid plans for the future, can appear and disappear. Love holds hope as much as loss, excitement as much as boredom, crushing disappointments as much as bliss. Love is the field for the shifting forms, the ground that holds us as we walk, sit, talk or do not, feel what we feel in one another's presence, and go about the business of our day, plan, eat, hope, say good-bye. We do not generate love with words or deeds, or even intentions, but we are continually embraced by it, held in its vastness, no matter what we do, or do not. Whether we are married, divorced, bereaved, single – we are friends, we are at heart lovers; we break up, we break together; we are born, we die; the field of presence endures.

No one has ever given us this love – that's the great illusion. We have simply remembered the field of presence in each other's company. We sometimes recognise this eternal presence in the midst of everyday life and mistakenly credited each other. When two people get to know each other and one says to the other that they feel comfortable in their presence, it is often mistaken that they believe the other person is making them feel comfortable and will seek to have more of this "joy". Yet, the truth would be that they are simply recognising their own loving presence within them, which has been "triggered" by the other person. But love never came from outside of us; we simply got in touch with the field of presence and fell into the love that we are – and cannot not be. Nobody ever took love away from us; we simply forgot the field of presence, and "blamed" the other, and looked for love elsewhere, feeling its absence, lost in the narrative of "lost love" and caught up in the drama of being the lonely one. Yet, love was always there, even in its own apparent absence – ever present – it cannot be broken; a wave cannot crush the ocean.

So, we do not need to seek love, but to be it, to offer it; for the joy of loving another is infinitely greater than the joy of fearfully seeking or clinging to another's love. For deep down we know it is only an illusion that what we have always longed for could ever have come from outside our own heart.

On every page of a book, behind the words – no matter what the words are describing, no matter what is going on in the story – there is the whiteness of the paper. Rarely noticed, even more rarely appreciated, but absolutely essential, so that the words can be seen. The paper itself is not affected by the story that is being told – it is only there to hold the words, without condition. A love story, a war epic, a gentle comedy – the paper itself does not mind.

The paper does not fear the ending of the story, nor does it need to know how the story ends, and the final page does not mourn when the main character dies. The paper doesn't even know that the story is over. The paper holds time but is not bound by time.

Now, you do not know how many pages are left in the book of your life. You do not know how this autobiography will end. From the perspective of the mind, "your life is not yet complete, and thought is constantly trying to work out how to end your story in the best way. How to solve things, neatly? How to resolve the unresolved problems? How to tie up all the loose ends? How to fix everything?

But from the perspective of the paper – that is, from the perspective of your true self – your life is forever complete as it is, and there is nothing to resolve, and the unknowability of things is their resolution. The story does not need to be "completed" in the future for your true self to be fully present now. The paper simply meets the words exactly as they are. From the perspective of the paper, even if the story is an epic one, from the first page to the last page, the entire story has unfolded in perfect, unchanging stillness. The most incredible story and - You are that story.