

The American Oxonian

Spring 2009

VOLUME XCVI

NUMBER 2

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WHAT IS LOVE?

REFLECTIONS OF AN I.C.U. PHYSICIAN

BY K. J. S. ANAND*
(India and Jesus '82)

HATRED creates sensational news bombarding our psyche, but little attention is focused on love. Following such news, hate seems prevalent and powerful; in comparison, love appears weak and ephemeral. Are we just doomed to endure violence? Will our society continue producing trigger-happy, impulse-driven maniacs armed with “a grudge and a gun”? Is hatred the sole motivator of their actions? Our minds churn these thoughts over and over, until intuition comes to our help. Deep in our psyche, a thought or a feeling persists—that love is more powerful than hate. But what is love and why don't we hear more about it?

A recent article in the scientific journal *Nature* concludes that “reducing love to its component parts helps us to understand human sexuality.”¹ What a travesty! To assert that the highest of human emotions can be “reduced” to explain sexuality takes scientific reductionism to a new extreme. Love is not just a mental state that leads to physical bonding; to assert that “biologists may soon be able to reduce certain mental states associated with love to a biochemical chain of events” is both myopic and misleading!

Deep down, below the incessant chattering of the mind or supercilious arguments of the intellect, our heart refuses to accept human sexuality as the only purpose for love—it longs for deeper, more enduring meanings of love. If animal instincts are overcome, human consciousness will intuitively seek more subtle or sublime meanings of love.

We would do well to reflect on the myriad of ways human beings have experienced and expressed love for each other, to meditate—unscientifically according to some, perhaps, but reflectively, empirically, unreduc-

1. L. J. Young, “Love: Neuroscience reveals all”, *Nature* vol. 457 (January 8, 2009), p. 148.

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tively—on the way in which gifted beings have attempted to describe the attributes of love through eulogies, poetry, drama, or fiction, based on feelings or fantasy, or fable or folklore. Philosophers or scientists were puzzled by the question of “What is Love?” and came up with simplistic answers that were unsatisfactory, even to themselves! Love can be experienced but is difficult to convey through words, just like the taste of honey. Great eloquence about the source, ingredients, composition, farming, manufacturing, or marketing of honey cannot create the indelible experience gained from a drop of honey placed on the tongue. An experience of love has the same result—no amount of talk about can supplant the beauty, the inner joy, or fulfilling aspects of that experience, one that has inspired the greatest achievements of mankind:

Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And men below, and saints above:
For love is heaven, and heaven is love.
(Sir Walter Scott)

Neither a lofty degree of intelligence nor imagination
nor both together go to the making of genius.
Love, love, love, that is the soul of genius.
(Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart)

Though all parts of creation can experience love, arguably only human beings are equipped to understand the essence of love from three perspectives, seeing it from the spiritual, the mental, and the practical aspects of human experience. Whereas the first affirms that the manifest universe with all its myriad forms cannot be created without love, the second reveals love as a powerful force within Nature, and the third shows how love weaves and holds the current fabric of human society together. Yet, one must be consciously aware that all these are simply the aspects of one entity, love. Just as a statue photographed from different angles remains one, similarly, a description of the different aspects of love will not alter what it is.

Love as an ingredient in Cosmic Construction

“What is love” from a spiritual perspective? Even towards the end of his life, Albert Einstein continued searching for what was intended for the manifest universe by its Creator, trying to formulate a scientific theory

that could unify all the known forces in nature. "I want to know God's thoughts," wrote Einstein, "the rest are details. . . ." Einstein had realized the apparent existence of the universe, also eloquently stated by another great physicist, Sir James Jeans, who wrote: "The stream of knowledge is heading toward a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears to be an accidental intruder into the realm of matter . . . we ought rather hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter."² Thus, investigating what appears to be a product of the mind, using the tools of the individual or collective mind—like reason, or logic, or deduction, by constructing and rejecting hypotheses—is almost like a fish (or an army of fishes) trying to map the extent of the ocean! Surely, a futile and never-ending endeavor! The human mind, which exists within and functions through the faculty of consciousness, can never truly fathom the extent of consciousness and beyond.

Whereas the scholars and intellectuals, scientists and philosophers were only able to gain partial success, the saints and seers made greater headway through revelations about the nature of the manifest universe. They realized and proclaimed an Absolute Reality, one that exists eternally, without undergoing any change or modification, that which remains beyond time and space. The human mind, using the five organs of sense, which are capable of recognizing sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell, can only comprehend or experience the *properties* of this reality, but cannot know the absolute reality itself. Einstein referred to this "perceived reality" as an illusion, preferring to remain silent about the nature of the absolute reality: "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."

So, to examine spiritual aspects of love, the spiritual seeker must understand the process of Creation, of how the uncaused Cause behind all this kaleidoscopic reality effortlessly creates the universe. From popular science, the Big Bang Theory appears to be the commonly accepted and best supported cosmological model of the universe. The term "Big Bang" generally refers to the idea that the universe initially existed as a primordial, extremely hot and extremely dense nucleus at some finite time in the past (around 13.73 ± 0.12 billion years ago). Georges Lemaître (1894-1966), a Belgian mathematician and Catholic priest, first propounded the theory of the Big Bang, although he called it the "hypothesis of the primeval atom." This cosmological model was built on Einstein's Theory of General Relativity, but to gain acceptance it needed Edwin Hubble's (Illinois and Queen's '10) discovery in 1929 that galaxies were moving away at high

2. R. C. Henry, "The Mental Universe", *Nature* 436: 29, 2005.

speeds. Almost six years after it was proposed, Einstein finally accepted Lemaître's theory after a series of seminars in January 1933, saying, "This is the most beautiful and satisfactory explanation of creation to which I have ever listened."

The Big Bang theory does not provide any explanation for such an initial condition, though it may explain the general evolution of the universe after that instant and onwards. It also does not explain the origin of that dense, primordial nucleus or the conditions that triggered the initial rapid expansion and cooling of the universe. From the Big Bang theory have emerged other Inflationary Universe Theories, and, being competitive, the scientific community proposes fifty different variants, although it is widely known that all the current theories have serious flaws and cannot explain the mysterious origins of our universe.

To explain why the "Big Bang" occurred, physics or astronomy are inadequate, the mind and the intellect are powerless, space exploration or technology cannot help, thereby forcing us to look at a metaphysical explanation of the universe, perhaps using spiritual tools, like intuition or revelation. Einstein affirmed: "My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind. . . . That deep emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God."

Before the universe comes into creation, nothing exists—there is no Time or Space, no galaxies, no Milky Way, no light, no sound, no matter—not even the "dense matter" that could make up Lemaître's "primeval atom". Yet, the spiritual traditions discern an Absolute Reality, a Divine and Blissful Awareness, which remains absorbed in itself as Pure Being. To know itself, this awareness creates a primordial energy that starts expanding in all directions, according to the inherent kinetic or propulsive nature of energy. But the innate nature of this Pure Being is Love, which attracts, which brings close to itself, which abhors any separation. Between this expansion and attraction, there occurs a vibration which becomes the source of all of creation.

This primal vibration is described in the scriptures of various religions. Christian texts describe this vibration as the Word of God, or Amen:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. . . . All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything

made that was made. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. (*John I: 1, 3, 14*)

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. (*Revelation 3:14*)

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth but the Word of God shall stand forever. (*Isaiah 40:8*)

Ancient Hindu texts identify the Word of God by various different names, such as "AUM" or "Nad Bind" or "Shabd Brahman":

. . . the Sound principle AUM becomes manifest as *prakrithi* or Nature. (*Hatha Yoga Pradipaka*)

He hath taken the support of the Word, the melodious tune. (*Chandogya Upanishad*)

Let the Yogi sit on Sish Asan and while practicing the Vaishnavi mudra, he should hear the sound AUM through his right ear. (*Nad Bind Upanishad*)

By communion with the Word he will become deaf to the external sounds, and will attain the Turiya Pad or a state of equipoise within a fortnight. (*Nad Bind Upanishad*)

Islamic texts speak of *Kalma*, the Word of God, or exalt this vibration "Amin" and its role in creation, calling it the *Sultan-ul-Azkar* (the king of prayers) or *Saut-i-Sarmadi* (the divine song) or *Nida-i-Asmani* (sound from Heaven):

The fourteen regions were made by the *Kalma*. (*The Holy Qu'ran*)

Take the stopcock from thy ears, and hear thou the voice of emancipation, coming to thee. Attach not to material world, the elixir of life is showering from above. (*Khawaja Hafiz*)

Grow not skeptical, but attune thyself to the sound coming down from the Heavens. Thy soul shall have revelations from afar. What are these but glimpses of the Unrevealed; were I to speak of these sweet melodies, even the dead shall rise from their graves. (*Maulana Rumi*)

. . . the Voice of God comes unto my ears as any other sounds. (*Prophet Mohammed*)

The Sikh scriptures also speak of *Omkaar* (the Word) or *Shabd Gurmata* (the Divine Counsel) or describe it as immanent in all of creation:

The Word is both earth and ether. These had their being through the Word. This Word expressed itself in other aspects as well. The whole creation sprang up after the Word . . . O Nanak, that endless Word is reverberating in each heart. (*Guru Nanak*)

The all-pervading Word has attracted my entire mind. What else have I to think of? Communion of my soul with the Word creates everlasting Bliss. (*Guru Nanak*)

The mind hankers after evils; through the Word, the Master restrains it. (*Guru Teg Bahadur*)

Semantic differences may exist between religions, but one is struck by the common identification of a Primal Vibration at the beginning of Creation. Whether it is called "Amen", or "AUM", or "Amin" does not change the true essence of what is described—an eternal, invisible vibration from which countless streams of creation sprang up, still reverberating in the manifest universe.

Within this vibration, which is eternal and essentially changeless, the idea of *change* arose from within the Pure Being. Out of this idea, which is nothing but an imaginary concept, the powerful construct of "Time" was born. Thus, Time is measured by change and change is linked inexorably with Time. Without Time, the human mind is incapable of comprehending the manifest Universe. All of Creation happens in one glorious moment, all of the past and all the future (*ad infinitum* in both directions) occur in the present moment of Now, but the feeble mind cannot make sense of this and therefore needs the assistance of Time in order to experience or interact with Creation. C. S. Lewis reminds us that "this moment contains all moments." No wonder then, that Time stands still when the mind is quiescent, or slows down when we are suffering, or speeds up when we are happy! All these experiences show that Time is just an imaginary concept, a mere idea, it exists only in the mind, like a moving mental frame that allows it to make sense of eternity.

Within this vibration, which is eternal, continuous, and essentially indivisible, the idea of *division* arose from within the Pure Being. Out of this idea, again, being nothing but an imaginary concept, the powerful notion of "Space" was born. This Space is filled with primordial energy, which is why the universe continues to expand at an accelerating rate (first deduced from the observations of Type Ia supernovae in 1998 and later

corroborated by independent measurements of the cosmic microwave background, gravitational lensing, measurements of red shift change and large scale structures). To scientists, it is amazing that the universe continues to expand even after fourteen billion years and that the massive gravitational forces postulated within black holes have not swallowed it up! But, to students of spirituality, it is no surprise that the primordial energy creating this universe is inexhaustible and it will continue expanding infinitely until the Pure Being brings it back into nothingness again.

These four entities (Word, Energy, Time, Space) acted on the cosmic consciousness to make it appear as if it was particulate, just like a ray of light illuminating an object appears as discrete photons hitting that object. The consciousness contained in each particle creates, for each particle, an illusion that it is somehow "separate" from the rest. This illusion is persistent and widespread, but it is important to realize that, just like a hologram, each part represents the whole, and that Love and Energy are the only ingredients that manifest the Universe.

For the spiritual traditions, love is, therefore, *at the core of all creation*; even beyond Time, Space, and the Word of God! Love is the very nature of the Pure Awareness that supports Creation in the manifest universe! Just as a flame has two aspects—heat and light that cannot be separated from it, similarly, the Divine has two inseparable aspects—Truth and Love. Truth is the static aspect of God, Love is the dynamic aspect of God. When viewed from this perspective, the entire universe is simply an expression of love, all its myriad forms are suffused with this love; our being is filled with love—actually, in essence, each of us is a manifestation of love walking on two feet.³ If we can stay with this thought for a while, Creation around us will start revealing the innumerable ways in which it is loving us and receiving our love.

Love as the Primal Force in Nature

Taking Love and Energy as the primary ingredients that create the cosmos and which form the basis for all the manifest reality in this Universe, we can start to unravel the secrets of Nature, or perhaps even posit an answer to Einstein's dilemma. Einstein and other scientists were baffled why every nucleus, packed with positively charged particles (protons) in extremely close proximity, does not fall apart simply because of the

3. This may appear preposterous to those who are cynical or skeptical; but keep reading, later we will discover how only love exists—that hate does not even exist!

intense repulsive forces generated between similarly charged particles. Even towards the end of his life, Einstein was puzzled by this anomaly. He wanted to expound a theory explaining all the known forces in Creation, but could not explain the forces binding the similarly charged particles within a nucleus. Given the source of all attractive forces in Creation, it is easy to conclude that the force holding these protons together in the nucleus is Love. Atoms come together to form molecules, their chemical bonds signifying strands of Love, physically manifested as a sharing of electrons or ions, and dancing in unison with all of Creation. In the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: "Driven by the forces of love, the fragments of the world are seeking each other, so that the world may come into being."

Fritjof Capra, an Austrian-born American physicist, who performed ground-breaking research on subatomic particles and systems theory, describes his experience in a preface to *The Tao of Physics*: "I was sitting by the ocean one late summer afternoon, watching the waves rolling in and feeling the rhythm of my breathing, when I suddenly became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance. . . . As I sat on that beach my former experiences came to life; I 'saw' cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I 'heard' its sound. . . ."

Undoubtedly, in meditation, he experienced the cosmic vibration. When this cosmic vibration slows, it transmutes into the subtle element of Ether (its special property being the transmission of sound), greater slowing creates the element of Wind (its special property being a sense of touch, but it also carries sound), further slowing creates the element of Fire (its special property being visual form, but it also carries sound and touch), still greater slowing forms the element of Water (its special property being taste, but it also carries sound, touch, and form), and finally, the grossest transmutation of this vibration creates the element of Earth (its special property being smell, but it also carries sound, touch, form, and taste). These were the five classical elements that Aristotle referred to as the building blocks of the Universe, but without Love and Energy creating the primal cosmic vibration, these five elements cannot manifest Nature around us. Human beings, as the highest form of creation, were given all five of the organs of knowledge, to allow us to perceive the objective reality manifested from these five elements.

All of Nature participates in a loving play between creation and consciousness and the ways of Nature reveal the underlying ingredient of

love: (a) Love always expands—and so does Nature, overcoming all obstacles through the power of love; (b) Love is selfless—and so does Nature provide her bounty for all beings to share; (c) Love is forgiving—human beings may exploit Nature for personal benefit, but Nature repairs the damage perpetrated by selfish beings if she is treated with love and respect. . . .

(a) Love expands . . . not only is our physical universe expanding, but all around us, Nature is constantly expanding as well. As a tree grows it expands from within, as a flower opens—nothing forces it to blossom—it just expands from within, as a leaf grows it expands from within—nothing is added to

Love lives by giving and forgiving, self
lives by getting and forgetting . . .

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

it from the outside, but all the change comes from within. Life is expressed through expansion, death is expressed through contraction. This is also the underlying principle behind evolution and survival of the fittest. When forces within Nature align to create an obstacle for the expansion of life forms, these life forms develop adaptations anew through the power of love, thus allowing the species to expand. The expansive power of love caused the earliest proto-organisms to escape the confines of oceanic life and evolve into air-loving plants, or snails, or reptiles; the expansive power of love taught the dinosaurs to fly and the nightingales to sing; it is expansive love that drove chimpanzees to start walking on two legs or humans to transcend the frontiers of space and time. Again, it is that expansive power of love that drives each one of us to aim for the best, to excel in our skills, to touch many lives, to break down barriers or overcome difficulties that were once considered insurmountable. Love is limitless and therefore penetrates all boundaries. "Did you ever see the Law that causes a plant to grow?" wrote Ernest Shurtleff Holmes. "Of course, you did not, and yet you believed in the hidden Law of growth. Why did you believe? Simply because, every year, out of the seed time comes the harvest. To these souls who have dared to believe, has come a definite answer."

(b) Love is selfless and Nature teaches that constantly. Does a tree bear fruit for its own consumption? Do the rivers bring water for themselves? Does the lion kill only for itself? Out of love, each aspect of Nature shares its bounty and even sacrifices itself to support higher and higher forms of life. Plants offer themselves to insects or herbivores or man, worms sacrifice themselves for birds, birds and fish offer themselves (or their eggs) to sustain mammals, mammals serve or provide sustenance to

man. From oxygen to food to shelter, there are myriad ways in which Nature supports the well-being of mankind. Being the highest form of life in the universe, all aspects of Nature are eager to serve the needs of mankind. The song of love is the song of pure consciousness:

Like the sunlight, like the moon bright, always, always I am with you
Like the ocean, like a river, always I am flowing to you;
Like the sky above, so is Divine Love, always, always surrounding you,
Like the earth so fair, like the birds of the air, always I am caring for you.

The tendency to garner the benefits of Nature or the products and services of society for oneself, or one's extended self (in the form of family, friends, clan, race, or country), though considered normal, is a learned and unnatural habit. Self-interest appears as a primary driving force, the highest motivation, and perhaps, the first consideration that determines our choices and actions today. Very few can overcome this conditioning process that starts from infancy, is confirmed during childhood, and becomes ingrained during youth and early adulthood. This conditioning leads us to believe that somehow the individual is "separate" from the rest of creation, and therefore, it must "protect" itself and its interests from the rest of creation. The relentless pursuit of greater personal benefits, coupled with the constant exploitation of Nature, has resulted in an increasing frequency of natural disasters, global warming, epidemic diseases, internecine struggles—all bringing mankind to the brink of disaster!

(c) But, love is forgiving and so is Nature. All the damage perpetrated by selfish beings can be repaired quickly if we start treating Nature with love and respect. Great environmentalists have recognized this aspect of Nature, of how it quickly forgives our excesses or exploitations. For example:

My fourth reason for hope is the incredible resilience of nature. I have visited Nagasaki, site of the second atomic bomb that ended World War II. Scientists had predicted that nothing could grow there for at least 30 years. But, amazingly, greenery grew very quickly. One sapling actually managed to survive the bombing, and today it is a large tree, with great cracks and fissures, all black inside; but that tree still produces leaves. . . . I have seen such renewals time and again, including animal species brought back from the brink of extinction. . . . Let us develop respect for all living things. Let us try to replace impatience and intolerance with understanding and compassion. And love. (*Dame Dr. Jane Goodall*)

Stories abound of recovery and repair in ecosystems that were thought to be damaged beyond restoration because of human greed. The Caribbean reefs were degraded by massive disease-induced mortality of the herbivorous urchin *Diadema antillarum* in 1983. Declining reef health was characterized by progressive increases in microalgae. Despite the doomsday scientific predictions of irreparable damage and despite the desultory efforts to rescue it, recent discoveries showed that the reef has rebounded much faster than predicted! If humans show sincere love and respect for Nature, it will respond by repairing the damaged ecosystems with remarkable speed—again, teaching us how Love can be giving and forgiving. Could these virtues, so beautifully manifested by Nature, also help us to repair the ills of human society?

Love as the Glue that holds Family, Community, and Society together

A loving person lives in a loving world.
A hostile person lives in a hostile world.
Everyone you meet is your mirror.⁴

At a sports meet for handicapped children, nine contestants assembled at the starting line for the 100-meter dash. At the gun, they all started out with a relish to run and win the race. One little boy, however, stumbled and fell, and began to cry. The others heard him cry; they slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back to him. One girl bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine children linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood up, cheering for several minutes. . . . People who witnessed this event are still telling the story. Why? Because deep down, intuitively, we all know this one thing: when one of us falls or fails, we all lose. What matters in life is more than just winning for ourselves. What matters in life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down or changing course. Being together is more important than being better. In the words of Sri Sathya Sai Baba: "Live in love; love is life. Without loving or being loved, no being can exist on earth. Love sustains, love strengthens; love is the urge behind all adventures, all sacrifice, all success."⁵

Human brains are only three times larger than those of the great apes, closest to us in evolution, yet they have evolved many skills that are not

4. Ken Keyes Jr., *Handbook of Higher Consciousness*.

5. Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Speaks*, vol. 12, p. 60.

seen in other primates, from dexterity and balance, to complex languages, to mathematics and scientific reasoning, to music and art, and culture. Most of these advances can be linked to social interactions and human values. Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology tested 106 chimpanzees, 32 orangutans, and 105 two-year-old children (who had used language for only one year, before literacy or schooling). They found that children and adult chimpanzees had comparable cognitive skills for dealing with the physical world, but children had far more sophisticated cognition for dealing with social constructs than either of the two ape species.⁶ We cannot ignore the unique human ability to build social relationships that have nothing to do with procreation or the struggle for survival. Early mother-infant bonding becomes the template with which a child views the world. It not only enhances their cognitive development and exploratory behavior, but also forms the basis of emotional regulation. Any derangements of these early experiences in infancy have dire consequences for the child's ability to form mutually supportive relationships, or friendships with peers, or develop the social skills to live in society. Love within the family shows up as concern for the well-being of others, a sensitivity to their needs, a willingness to happily sacrifice one's self-interest. From affectionate interactions in the family emerge altruistic motives in society. Unlike material goods or worldly credits, love grows when it is shared.

Love is the basis for character. The highest human qualities: patience, forbearance, truthfulness, charity, soft speech—are the different manifestations of love. Verily, love is at the core of all human values!

Great leaders have realized and propagated these values. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. realized the “web of mutuality”; President John F. Kennedy recognized “our common humanity” and used it to fight injustice.

Love as thought is Truth,
 Love as action is Right Conduct,
 Love as feeling is Peace,
 Love as understanding is Non-Violence.
Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Love is literally the glue that holds a family, a community, or society together—because it allows humans to rise above the motives of self-preservation and self-interest. Love manifests as “random and senseless acts

of kindness” all the time and allows us to experience a higher calling than other creatures. Selfishness, on the other hand, ultimately grows to an unquenchable greed and blunts our ability to act with discrimination.

Today, as the current economic, environmental, social and political

6. Esther Hermann and colleagues, *Science* (Sept. 7, 2007) vol. 317, pp. 1360-1366.

problems seem to overwhelm even the most powerful of all governments and corporations, can the power of Love help us heal the wounds of greed and selfishness and hatred? Families, communities, societies, and governments will have to rise above their selfish motives, to cooperate, collaborate, and collectively solve the problems that threaten life on our planet. When our leaders are making decisions, they may do well to ask "what is the most loving option?" Emmet Fox writes:

Duty without love is deplorable,
Duty with love is desirable,
Love without duty is Divine.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

There is no difficulty that enough love will not conquer, no disease that enough love will not heal, no door that enough love will not open, no gulf that enough love will not bridge, no wall that enough love will not throw down, no sin that enough love will not redeem.

It makes no difference how deeply seated may be the trouble, how hopeless the outlook, how muddled the tangle, how great the mistake—a sufficient realization of love will dissolve it all.

Just as the body's cells are organized into tissues, organs, and organ systems, each of which contribute to its overall well-being, so too, all individuals, groups, and organs of society must contribute to its well-being. Cells or tissues that garner additional resources leading to unbridled growth are cancerous, threatening the survival of the body they arose from. Similarly, the organs of society (like health care, or banking) that gain excessive influence or resources and disregard their responsibility for the well-being of society can threaten its survival. What is called for, to solve the current economic, environmental, social, or political crises, is our ability to rise above our narrow self-interests. "Greed layered upon greed, frosted with recklessness" has brought us to the brink of disaster! To reverse this, our emphasis must shift from an accumulation of wealth to a sharing of wealth. But the motive for this must come from Love, not from a desire for power or privilege or self-aggrandizement of any sort. So says Kahlil Gibran: "Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself. Love possesses not nor would it be possessed; For love is sufficient unto love." The underlying intent is as important as the actions performed.⁷

Only selfless love will enduringly resolve the Israeli-Palestine conflict,

7. K. J. S. Anand and R. W. Hall, "Love, pain, and intensive care", *Pediatrics* 121(4): 825-7, 2008.

or heal the naked wounds of Darfur, or unravel the unseemly tangles in the Middle East. Returning violence with violence only escalates the conflict and increases human suffering. It is love alone that can build trust in the stock market, safeguard the rights of factory workers, or strengthen the moral fiber of corporate America. A health care system driven by love, not reimbursement, will make the right decisions for each patient and eliminate waste, enabling universal health care for all. The leaders of today must harness the most sublime of human emotions, the underlying cause of creation, the most powerful binding force in Nature, to solve the pressing problems created by greed, distrust, or self-interest. Sathya Sai Baba wrote: "Whenever there is a vacuum in any heart, love flows into it. It is glad that it can fill the emptiness. Love is never held back; it is offered in abundance without guile or deceit. Love does not wear the cloak of falsehood, flattery or fear. The tendrils of love, aspire to cling only to the garments of God."

The German poet and playwright, Goethe, referred to the world as "the living visible garment of God." This garment is woven with love, maintained by love, and can be repaired through love. We can choose, however, to use love only for understanding human sexuality or other animal instincts, promoting a steady march to anarchy and destroying humanity in its wake. Or we can choose to synchronize our hearts to the pulse of this planet and reap the enormous benefits of sharing our love with all of Creation. How do we do that? Every human being can do that by progressing through the four stages of love.

The four stages of Love

Just as pure white light passing through a prism breaks up into the entire spectrum of colors, similarly pure love, when passing through the prism of the mind, manifests the entire spectrum of human emotions. Then what about hate? Does that also come from love?—the skeptics would ask. The physical world helps us understand this paradox. Just as darkness is defined as the absence of light, or cold is simply the absence of heat—in reality, darkness and cold do not really exist as separate entities. Similarly, hatred is simply the absence of love—when love is focused intensely or passionately in one direction—the opposite direction perceives an absence of love. Extremists are obsessed with extreme love for some aspect of creation, whereas other aspects of creation are considered far inferior, thus dispensable. Under the right conditions, this feeling, this obsession, can overwhelm the rational faculties of the mind and crystallize

as a hate crime, or justify the Holocaust, or lead to attacks like those on 9/11. Ostracizing these individuals simply hardens their stance—instead, they need to know the impact of their misdirected love. Again, Sathya Sai Baba helps: “The best spiritual discipline is Love. Foster the tiny seed of Love that clings to ‘me’ and ‘mine’; let it sprout into love for the group around you, and grow into love for all mankind, and spread out its branches over animals, birds and those that creep and crawl, and let that love enfold all things and beings in all the worlds. Proceed from less love to more Love, from narrow love to expanded Love.”

The expansion of love occurs in four stages, outlining the natural progression of human love. In the first stage, widely prevalent human love is like a lamp kept in a room. A particular lamp only illumines that room. The glow of this love illumines a small group of people, like family and friends, and does not extend to others. The second stage is like the moonlight. This love goes beyond direct relationships and bathes everyone (inside and outside the room), but is not very effulgent or intense. The third stage of love is selfless, like the sunlight—it brilliantly illumines those both inside and outside the room. But, it is not constant in the sense that the sun is not visible at night. Of course, this is not a permanent absence, because the sun rises each morning. Likewise too, selfless love may appear to be absent at some times, but inevitably appears again.

The fourth and final stage is reached when human love is intense and always present, beyond the confines of worldly relationships, in all places, at all times, under all circumstances. For such a person, all experiences and perceptions are suffused with love, all thoughts, words and deeds emanate from this love, all relationships and interactions are based on love. Indeed, this stage of love is imperishable, it is eternal. This degree of love is immanent in everyone—as human beings, we all have the potential to attain the fourth stage of love. When a person develops such love, they will experience a peace that passes all understanding. These are the people who will be remembered by generations of sincere men and women. They will be living answers to the question of “what is love”.