

Summer 2006

Josh,

I have read two books on love, one by CS Lewis, and one by Fromm. Both were interesting. But the best book I ever read about love wasn't about love at all. It was Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. (call number at BYU should be the same as at your school : BM 732. B753) Essentially, what he says is that when we treat people like objects we are only objects ourselves. One cannot be a real person unless one recognizes that others are also real people, and treat them accordingly. I recommend you read the book. Not because you "need" it, but because it will help you to explain interpersonal relations to other people.

As far as I can tell, there are three kinds of love. Only the first two are emotions. The third is something much deeper and more real than that. It is an expression of the soul.

The first kind of love is "I want you." It is primarily selfish, though may express itself in tender and caring ways. It is "I want you for a decoration, so others will think I'm hot stuff, because I am taking the prettiest girl in town to the dance." I want you for your money, family connections, prestige, sexual pleasure, social or political advantage—any number of things. But it is essentially "I want to possess you," and the other side of that coin is jealousy or (when the need is passed) indifference.

The second is "I want you to be me." It is a form of co-dependence. It is the father who pushes his son to be a great basketball player, and chides him for just sitting around reading books. It is the doctor who wants his son to be rich and successful and belittles him for always having a basketball in his hands. The piano teacher who has discovered a greater talent in one of her students that she had—and who wants the glory of having taught that child when he becomes a success. It is the husband or wife who wants to re-shape the other to fit the preferred mold to help achieve maximum political or financial success. The flip side is that "I" get to have the credit for any success you may achieve, and "I" feel contempt for any success except the ones "I want you to have." And "I" feel betrayed if you don't succeed my way.

The third is close to Buber's idea of being a real human being. It is "I want you to be you." It is either of those fathers I just described when he is willing and happy to pay for, and encourage, his son in art school. It is Heavenly Father's insisting we have our free agency notwithstanding the fact that it is his work and glory is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. It is as close to charity as one can get in this world without the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Charity is (I am convinced) knowing another's truth in sacred time. When one can recognize the other person as he really is, and love him for that rather than for the artificial reasons I have mentioned above, then one has charity. If I may give you a personal example (which is about as good as I can do to be a charitable person): I was frequently criticized at BYU for not treating students like my equals and not demanding from them the respect a person of my status deserved. I thought that was an asinine approach to life. I saw my young friends as the people they were, and now that they have matured and become greater than I, they treat me as their equal. But they have little respect for the professors who had little respect for them.

Another personal example. Each of my four children have told me that except for their spouse, I am their best friend. That friendship has always been there, even when they were teenagers. The reason is that I always treated them like they were mature people—not mature adults, but mature 2 year olds, or 10 year olds, or 16 year olds. I respected them, admired them, and treated them accordingly. I didn't have to fake that (just as I didn't have to fake it with my student friends) because I recognized that they are fundamentally greater and smarter people than I am. I acknowledge that I may know more than them about some things just now, but that does not make me either better or innately smarter than they.

I think the best scriptural key to all this is:

26 And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not *esteeming* himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; *and thus they were all equal*, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength.

27 And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely. (Alma 1:26-27)

The operative word is “esteemed.” “They were all equal,” even though there were “the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted” among them. Esteem is the key. It's back to Buber, but more especially, it is seeing and knowing others as they are in sacred time.

The interesting thing is, esteeming others as our equal is the easiest approach we can take toward other people. Otherwise we have to create masks to hid our Selves behind, and create constructs to define them as being something different from what they really are, then we have to build little pigeon holes we can squeeze them into so we won't have to think of them as real people. That is inefficient because it takes time and work, but even more so, because it creates a false world in which we have to navigate. When we deal with them as though they were something they are not, we must also be something we are not. People who do that loose sight of their own reality, and cannot love themselves, just as they cannot love other people.

That's why you and I are such good friends. We don't wear masks around each other. You don't see me as an old fuddy duddy, and I don't see you as a lowly student. We perceive each other as equals—and when you get to be an old fuddy duddy and I am teetering on the edge of senility, we will still be equals. So will we be when we both get dead. “And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.” (D&C 130:2)

I do love you, and I am so very glad we get to be friends while we are in this world.  
LeGrand