

Chapter 8

The Angels of Love

Spirit Love, like Spirit Trust and Spirit Freedom, is one of the three major aspects of our Spirit Being. Spirit Love is not an emotional state, a project of thought, nor a program of action. Emotions, thoughts, and actions may attend our participation in Spirit Love, but Spirit Love itself is a deeper dimension of human experience. Spirit Love is an angel that moves up the ramp of soul from here to Eternity. Spirit Love is a response of Awe to the Awesome. Spirit Love, as described in the Christian heritage, has three major headings: love of self, love of God, and love of others. These three can be understood as the three inclusive subparts of the one overall Spirit aspect called “agape” or “Spirit Love.”

Spirit Love of self, God, and others can be described as three families of angels in the overall clan of Spirit Love. Here are the names I will give these three families of angels: **The Self Affirmation of Autonomous Strength, The Joy of Enchantment with Being,** and **The Realism of Out-flowing Compassion.** Perhaps these angels can go by these shorter names: Autonomous Strength, Enchantment with Being, and Out-flowing Compassion. These names encourage a fresh understanding of the more familiar categories: love of self, love of God, and love of others.

Autonomous Strength is the knowing pole of Love. Enchantment with Being is the being pole of Love. And Out-flowing Compassion is the doing pole of Love.

The Self Affirmation of Autonomous Strength

Autonomous Strength is a name for that aspect of Spirit Love that manifests as the love of self. Spirit Love does not indulge the whims of our personality nor give license to egoism. Discovering our Autonomous Strength is being and affirming our true nature. It means finding our own deep strength of soul as we participate in and affirm all things. It means finding our own strength of soul for our own specific journey toward Spirit realization.

This love of self manifests as a vast confidence, a deep faith in ourselves, a sureness that part of the true nature of every soul is profound strength. This strength includes the strength of standing alone before the whole of living; the strength of standing forth as an autonomous being; the strength of breaking the cord with parents; the strength of seeing beyond our native culture; and the strength of independence from lovers, spouses, friends, and fellow workers.

“Autonomous” means alone but not alone in the sense of being withdrawn. It means alone in the sense of being our own person, making our own decisions, knowing our own wants and feelings, choosing our own values and purposes, designing our own presentation of our self to others.

This Autonomous Strength is a flow of felt energy bubbling up within the soul. This is not an idea nor an ideal; it is a force, a capability, a spontaneous power to act differently than we act when our identity is rooted in being an anxious cautious person or an anxious reckless person, or a person who is pretending to act in a fearless manner. Autonomous Strength is an anxious-less, fearless, rest in the absolute assurance that we are supported completely by the invincible Ground of our actual Being.

Autonomous Strength is sometimes confused with a stubborn independence that is actually a defense from accepting our weaknesses. On the finite level of consideration every human being is weak, not strong; limited, not invincible; struggling, not confident; fearful, not courageous. Courage is a Spirit quality that swims against the stream of fear, dread, anxiety, horror, and downright despair. Strength, as a Spirit quality, is paradoxical. It begins with the admission of weaknesses. Spirit Strength includes the courage to admit weaknesses. Nevertheless, this Strength is beyond our weaknesses; it is an inexhaustible confidence that no weakness can even touch, much less conquer.

Here is a poem that may help us see more deeply into the nature of Autonomous Strength:

He would not dance
except to his own music.
He would not read
except his own theories.
He would not act
except in his own good time.

Such independence may mask deep hurt.
Perhaps some caretaker of his innocent child
refused to celebrate his essential independence.
Perhaps now he labors
to defend obsolete habits of
self-constructed independence.

Though unintended,
self-constructed independence is slavery.
True independence
is open to truth
wherever, whatever, whenever
it appears.

Ah!
Death!
Death to all achieved and defended habits,
How liberating is your sternness!

Ah!
Void!
Void of boundless unachievement,
How strengthening is your presence!

Ah!
Strength!
Strength supplied by the Ultimate Supplier,
How satisfying is your aliveness!

The strengths we attempt to construct for ourselves all turn out to be limited, and thus they are also weaknesses of one sort or another. Are you a strong athlete? There are athletes stronger than you. Are you a strong scholar? There are scholars stronger

than you. In many areas of your life and mine, we are weak compared to most people. And even our greatest strengths are fragile aspects of our passing lives. Spirit Strength is a strength supplied by the Invincible Ground of Being. We do not have to construct it. We simply have to access it. And no person, thing, or event can undo this Strength. It is established by the Infinite.

Spirit Strength is like a hot energy, fiery red in color, active, living, outward moving. It is rooted in the personal experience of Reality. It is a passion to slay all falsehood. It does not knuckle under to lies and misrepresentations or to intimidations and moralisms. This Strength slashes through all opposition and laughs at rejection. It does not wait nor hesitate nor postpone, it blurts out self-initiated responses without fear of consequences. This is the self we love, and the only self we can truly and fully love. This fearless, autonomous "Me" is the true "me" that exists in the very midst of all our weaknesses which we can freely admit because none of them limit our ability to be this strange, deep, wonderful strength. Indeed this strength is an angel, a messenger sent by Final Reality to be our own actual potential.

This Strength is the capacity to wrestle the roaring lions of our own biological nature into submission and to ride those beasts into an energetic living of our lives. This Strength is the capacity to lift high and drink the chalice of blood that represents our own death – our own courage to meet whatever challenges may come. This Strength means the capacity to take the two-edged sword from the Goddess Kali and slay all the falsehood in our lives and in the world in which we live. This Strength means a type of wisdom our minds cannot encompass but which, nevertheless, guides us into confident action, action that comes from our true self. This Strength means a place of Infinite Stillness from which raw creativity can flow. This is the self we love with a Spirit love.

The Joy of Enchantment with Being

Curiosity may have killed a few cats, but curiosity has made the feline species one of the great survivors of mammalian life. And the human is even more curious than the cat. A small child, if not beaten or shamed into rigid carefulness, is curious about everything. Such a child is open to Mystery, to the unknown, to the unexperienced, to the fuller experience of whatever has enchanted him or her. The adult human – unless restrained by fear, rigid doctrines, lethargy, or grogginess – is also incredibly curious. We are curious about the structure of the cosmos, the origin of all things, the composition of matter, the dynamics of time, the origin and nature of life, the workings of the human psyche, the workings of a human society, the history and destiny of the human species, and on and on and on. We are curious about the people, animals, and plants in our daily lives. We are open to know Reality in depth – to participate, dwell, and act in the Mystery of the All.

This enchantment with Mystery as it matures will arrive at ever fuller awareness that Final Reality is a Mystery that never goes away, a Mystery that cannot be solved, a Mystery that is unfathomable. All our ideas and solutions crash on the shore of a Final Reality that is infinitely beyond us. This Reality is not a final explanation or a unifying theory. Final Reality is a wall of blackness, the unknowable unknown. This can be frightening, but our dread can also be balanced by fascination. It is like passing by a serious automobile accident. We are not only repulsed by the horror of it, we are also drawn to look at it, to explore it, to experience it. Though our dread tends to incline us to flee from the fullness of life and the emptiness of death, we are also enchanted with both. Our dread and our fascination can balance each other, leaving us in a state of cool, courageous curiosity.

And our Spirit Being is more than being curious. In the depths of our Being we are enchanted. We sometimes speak of finding our bliss. We can speak of adoring Mysterious Reality as our God. We can make Ultimate Reality our touchstone for appropriate living, the ongoing, quiet joy of our lives. Here is a poem that may assist us to notice this state of Spirit:

Seers advise: "Find your bliss,"
as if bliss were a far way off –
at the top of some mountain,
at the end of some arduous journey.

True bliss is, indeed, a lofty destination.
And it takes a journey to get there.
Yet "there" is not a far way off;
it is here and now.

The long, hard journey takes us
through our reluctance
to be here and to be now
what we always were, still are, and will be.

Bliss is not adding something
to my ordinary life.
It is taking something away:
my flight, my rebellion.

Who is the real me?
Underneath all the dross, I am:
Awesome liberty, compassion,
trust, tranquility, and joy.

This real me is my bliss,
and this bliss is not far away,
though I may be far away
from my bliss.

Yet my case is not hopeless.
I can return to my bliss.
I can admit my waywardness.
I can accept my Welcome Home.

I can celebrate.
I can feast,
here and now,
at the table of forgiveness.

Bliss, joy, rapture, and other such words are found in every religious heritage. Yet the deepest meaning of these words remains hidden from us by our preoccupation with lesser states. We have become absorbed with not having something we want, or with having something that we do not want. Such preoccupation with passing realities eclipses our true bliss. We have somehow unlearned the simple truth that joy is given with life itself. Our true joy comes not from changing something but from simply noticing that life is joy in the same ordinary way that life is breathing. We have simply lost contact with that joy. We have perhaps sought substitutes for it in some shallow

peace or unconscious fogginess. Or perhaps we have sought substitutes for it in pleasures that we can more effectively control and understand. Perhaps we hide our joy in some habitual funk, about which we complain, but with which we are also comfortable. Our true joy is a deep awareness but also a deep intention by means of which we rise from our fogginess and grogginess and jump up and down in some fashion. Here is a poem that challenges us in that direction. This poem needs to be read aloud, slowly, and with vigor.

Happiness is vigorous:
not one, not two,
but three hallelujahs.

Don't hold back!
Take the whole moment!
Let it fill with life!

Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!

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JAH!

Such emphasis on joy may strike us as odd, even offensive and unrealistic. If we have lived beyond the naiveté of adolescence, we know that life is at least half death, suffering, and destruction. For every star that is born, another explodes into billions of fragments. For every great tree that magically grows from a small nut or seed, there are other trees that are burned to ash in some great forest fire. In our daily lives, there may be as much pain as pleasure, as much sadness as gladness, as much grief as relief, as much death as life.

Enchantment with Being takes place at a deeper level than these considerations. We are exploring a human potential for joy that can exist in the midst of both halves of life: birthing and dying, security and insecurity, pleasure and pain, affection and loneliness, knowledge and ignorance, success and failure, and all other such pairs of opposites that express the wholeness of our lives. A joyous sunlight can be seen to shine on everything. To notice it and appropriate it, we have only to sweep away the dark clouds that we ourselves have created.

When we are established in this joy, we are aware that the course of events not only kills our old selves, it also promotes perpetual rebirth. Reality is an unending launch into a new era of living. Every death of the last moment is the birth of the next moment. Every old ledge of living becomes a stepping stone for the next adventure. Perhaps we can feel (however vaguely or keenly) our potential to be curious about this next adventure; perhaps we can sense some openness to whatever may be next for us. Perhaps we can take joy in shedding what must be shed and accepting the new birth that lies ahead. Surely, we can each remember times when we have been enchanted by the overwhelming Mystery that embraced us. Perhaps we can imagine living in this "place" always. Perhaps it is not so strange that our bliss, our joy, our fulfillment are

here already waiting for us to simply surrender to them. Though it may at times seem that we must go very far to arrive at our bliss, we can take joy in simply realizing that joy is already here, characterizing the deepest aspect of the deepest aspect of our Spirit being. Spirit Love, as the Joy of Enchantment with Being, is an angel sent by Ultimate Mysterious Reality to move up the ramp from here to Eternity, the ramp that is our soul, our true Being.

The Realism of Out-flowing Compassion

The word compassion is composed of two parts: “com,” meaning with, and “passion,” meaning an out-flowing energy. We can be *with* others *energetically*. Being *with* someone is something more than merely filling the next chair. Being *with* someone means finding resonance with the vital self that lives behind the eyes, the smile, the frown of the other. Being *with* someone requires the courage to be with ourselves, with those feelings in ourselves that allow us to notice the feelings of the other. Being *with* the suffering of another means willing to be with our own suffering and willing for suffering to be part of the ongoing actuality of human lives.

Being *with* someone is much more than an exchange of thoughts, though thoughts may be included. Being *with* someone in Spirit love is an exchange of soul; it means noticing that our separate ramps from here to Eternity are also the same ramp with all the same angels. If the person we are with is in despair, we do not have to be in despair to be with them, but as persons who have moved through despair to Spirit Love, we know that despair results from a refusal to be some aspect of this ramp that is the soul of each of us.

Being *with* someone in true compassion means being and living beyond the facades and roles we pretend to be in order to be acceptable to others or to ourselves. Being *with* someone means allowing honesty and truthfulness to move through or around our customary lies. Being *with* someone means making contact, connection, resonance with that person, with his or her humanity. This we can only do if we are willing to make contact, connection, resonance with the humanity that exists within ourselves.

Being *with* others in their pain, their dread, their anxiety, their despair is challenging, but equally challenging is being *with* others in their pleasure, their fascination, their lightness, their joy. The latter list could bring up within us responses of envy that distract us from enjoying their joy and their fascination. The former list might engender within us an aversion to such tragedy or a compulsion to fix something. Compassion means simply being with others in full harmony with them, in full resonance with them, in effective mirroring of their actual experience. Such compassion is an inclusive Realism that includes a union with our own depth of being. The Realism of Out-flowing Compassion is an angel that moves up the ramp from our inner core through all the neighboring aspects of reality to the Eternal Wholeness that provides the situations and the other people with whom we are resonating.

Out-flowing Compassion includes finding the creative balance between being with others where they are now and yet at the same time assisting them to understand how they might more fully be themselves and actualize the potential of their lives. On the one hand, we tend to hold others in contempt by not being willing to be with them, not honoring them with attention, and not forgiving them for being exactly where they are on their journey of living. And on the other hand, we tend to indulge people and disrespect them by not challenging them to move beyond their current blockages and

take those appropriate next steps on their journey. No person can tell another how to choose specific actions that hold this balance, but Out-flowing Compassion includes the wisdom to operate within this creative balance. It is a creative balance that is needed in each situation, and each situation is different. Spirit Love requires creativity, creation out of nothing. Continually, we face challenges that cannot be minimized by thinking we know what usually works. The habit-addicted mind will not be able to make appropriate decisions toward the lives of specific others. Each moment is a fresh challenge. We cannot lean on certainties. And we cannot focus on how we are coming off or how good we may or may not be. The Realism of Outgoing Compassion focuses on the other person and responds to that person without distractions.

Out-flowing Compassion encompasses enemies as well as friends. Both Buddhist and Christian teachings have strongly witnessed to the existence of this strange quality of Spirit Love. Both traditions call for loving kindness toward both enemies and friends, both intimates and strangers, both pleasing and appalling persons. With whomever we might be living, the Realism of Out-flowing Compassion is called for. The specific actions with enemies may be different from those with friends, but we can be with our enemies with the same intensity that we are with our friends. We can see in our enemies the same humanity that we see in our friends and in ourselves. We do not have to demonize an enemy in order to be firm with him or her when defeat is called for. We do not have to demonize an enemy in order to resist and even kill that person. Our being with the enemy may even make it easier to realistically defeat him or her. Our being with an enemy also makes it possible to learn from that enemy what we need to learn. And the experience of being with both friends and enemies will teach us that every enemy is also a friend and every friend is also an enemy.

Some have erroneously taught that we do not have enemies, but we do. Anyone who is actively opposing us, resisting what we are doing with our lives, is our enemy. And the more deeply we embody our Spirit being, the more enemies we will have. The challenge of Spirit Love is not to avoid having enemies nor to deny that we have enemies. The challenge of Spirit Love is to love the enemy with the same intensity that we love the friend, and to love them both with the same intensity that we love ourselves. This does not mean, however, going along with our enemies or doing what they wish us to do. It means being ourselves even during genuine conflict with persons who are at this time opposed to us.

The Realism of Out-flowing Compassion relates us to social structures as well as to individual persons. Social structures are necessary creations by human beings for the benefit of human beings. This is a different orientation than relating to social structures as definitions of rational duty or manifestations of ideological views. Social structures are carriers of Spirit Love to the extent that social structures sustain, protect, and enable real persons – self, friends, enemies, strangers, and those not yet born. Our compassion with regard to social structures can express itself as peaceful political action, vigorous social reform, thoroughgoing revolution, and even warfare. The test of genuineness for this Love is not the form of the action but the underlying Spirit. Are we promoting social ideas for the sake of being right or patriotic or noble, or are we genuinely concerned with the well being of all those among whom we dwell? A program of social action that is based in Spirit Love will differ in vision, strategy, and means of action from programs of social action that are based differently. The full elaboration of a Spirit-based social ethics is beyond the scope of this chapter. My aim in this chapter is to describe briefly some of the essential qualities of that family of angels I am calling “the Realism of Out-flowing Compassion.” These angels enrich our actions both in our interpersonal relations and in our sociological actions.

Spirit Love, especially in its love-of-others aspect, is often confused with other types of "love." For example, sexual desire or union is often called "love." Spirit Love can exist simultaneously with the sexual arousals of the body, but sexual experience, no matter how grand, is not the same thing as Spirit Love. Similarly, we must distinguish Spirit Love from those emotional bondings that we call love. Emotional attachments, feelings, longings, satisfactions are an important part of human living, but we need to recognize that they are finite operations each of which has a polar opposite. Our desire for pleasure when denied becomes a sort of pain. Our emotional bonding with others, when broken, becomes sadness or grief. Our feelings of satisfaction are matched by disappointments and fears of disappointment. For every delight there exists an aversion. For every hope there is a fear. For every appreciation there is a resentment. Our popular love songs bear witness that our emotional loving is matched by emotional blues. All these feelings are wholesome dynamics of human life, but they are not Spirit Love. Spirit Love transcends our emotional feelings. When we make emotional love our ultimate definition of loving, we condemn ourselves to hatred toward those who disappoint us. And since everyone disappoints us from time to time, we end up hating everyone and life itself.

Spirit love may be attended by feelings, for each living moment includes feelings. But Spirit love is not those feelings. Spirit Love is an affirmation of all feelings and all situations and persons who occasion those feelings. Spirit Love affirms self and others in a manner that is infinitely deeper than the feelings involved.

Spirit love must also be distinguished from mental and moral actions. Spirit Love is not a noble action of the mind, and Spirit Love is not proved or disproved by whether its results are measured "moral" by our moral standards. The results of Spirit Love may violate our most prized principles and all our "moldy virtues." And Spirit Love is not a mental ideal, goal, or aim. We use our minds in Spirit Loving, but Spirit Love is more than mind. Spirit Love is an action of soul; it is our deep affirmation of Reality put into action with help from the mind. Spirit Love is visible in the outward world to those who have eyes to see it, but Spirit Love cannot be contained in our mental and moral boxes.

The Realism of Out-flowing Compassion, like all the aspects of Spirit Love, is not a quality that we need to achieve. It is not an ideal that can be realized through hard work. Like all the other angels, this angel is part of our true nature. Spirit Love in all its dimensions is not a hard climb up some craggy hill; it is a surrender to the true nature of our own Being as that Being is being given to us by the Wholeness of Reality.