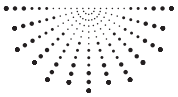
Lessons on Love

Sacred Stories on Relationships, Balance, and Becoming Your Authentic Self



By Adam Guzman-Poole

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LOVING OTHERS



Humankind did not weave the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

— CHIEF SEATTLE

After we've done the initial work of cultivating the gold within, we are better equipped to extend that love outward—to our family, friends, community, and the world as a whole.

Nearly every religion and wisdom tradition worldwide encourages us to reach out and offer love and service to those around us; perhaps that's because it's not just good for others but because it's also good for the soul.

Confucius said true virtue is achieved by serving others and that living a virtuous life will lead one to peace. This same principle is echoed in the Stoic writings, which say a happy life is found through virtuous activity. The Sikhs tell us to help others without seeking reward, and that acts of selfless service purify us. Again, the Hindu and Christian philosophies preach the same doctrine, and the Bodhisattva ideal found in Buddhism encourages us to engage in

selfless acts of service, which result in the byproducts of good merit, inner peace, and joy.

Moreover, many findings in modern science have shown that altruistic behavior increases happiness and life satisfaction, lowers depression, raises self-esteem, reduces stress, improves physical health, and results in a greater sense of purpose in life.

Put simply, do good + be good = feel good.

Hang on a second. Can it really be that simple? Yes. The research and wisdom traditions from time immemorial suggest it absolutely can be that simple.

Now the next question is, "Why?"

Why does serving, caring, and loving others support our overall well-being so much?

Perhaps that's because we are not as separate as we may think. Ubuntu, the Zulu African philosophy, is a perfect example of this principle. Directly translated, Ubuntu means "I am because we are." Put simply, we are interconnected. So if you thrive, so do I! Many Indigenous traditions in North America call this interconnectivity "The Great Web of Life." The Ancient Romans called it the *Cosmopolis* (World City). Understanding our interconnectedness, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus put it this way: "What is bad for the hive cannot be good for the bee."

Thus, the more we recognize our interconnectedness, the more we see that every act of service touches the whole community and, consequently, ourselves. This is because when you really break life down to its essence, there really is no "other."

All the great religions preach this same interdependence. Jesus said, "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it for me." In Taoism, all things are part of the Tao, which is the ultimate source of everything that unites all beings into a single cosmic flow. Interestingly, this idea of a unified whole is not just a religious belief. It is a verified scientific truth. Look at the study of ecology and observe how a change to one part of an ecosystem affects the whole. Or study quantum physics, and you will find that everything in the universe, when broken down, is energy, and despite our seeming separateness, we are really just part of the same stuff.

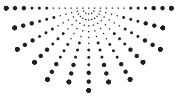
When you truly look at the mechanics of our universe, the concept that we are all connected is not just a warm and fuzzy idea. It's a fact. Like cells in the body, we are in this together. But the question is, are we working together to help this universal body thrive?

Interestingly, cancer cells only think about themselves. They take and take and take, and in turn, destroy their host and eventually themselves in the process. This is the cost of the illusion of separateness. It makes us only think and fend for ourselves, an attitude which, unchecked, will eventually break us and destroy our world in the process.

But if we realize we're all in this together and start reaching out to help others, in the very same way we would help ourselves, then we as a community can and will create a more beautiful world. As we explore this idea of love for others, let's remember the far-reaching effects of our actions. Because since we are all connected, that means every good deed and every act of kindness, however small, forms a ripple that expands and extends to the whole. This means that by loving one person, we are really loving the whole world. How powerful is that? Thus, perhaps one of the greatest acts of self-love we can offer ourselves is reaching out and loving another.

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SAVING YOURSELF THROUGH SERVICE



"What stood out for you most about the video?" I asked my client in our second session. Her eyes were aglow as she reflected on the inspirational story of Dick and Rick Hoyt.

If you're unfamiliar with it, here is the short version.

Rick wanted to run. The only problem? He was born with cerebral palsy. But rather than shutting his dream down, his parents made a decision to find a way. That's when Team Hoyt was born, the dynamic father-son duo where Rick's father would push him in his wheelchair as he ran.

After their first race together in 1977, Rick turned to his father and said, "Dad, when I'm running, it feels like I'm not handicapped." These words struck a chord in Dick's heart and inspired Team Hoyt's thirty-seven-year journey of marathons, triathlons, and Ironman races spanning thousands of miles.

Interestingly enough, after a mild heart attack in 2003, Dick went to his cardiologist only to discover that one of his arteries was 95 percent blocked. It was at that point his doctor told him if he had not been in such great physical condition, he would have likely died from heart disease fifteen years earlier.

Which really makes you question, in the end, who was helping whom?

How Helping Heals Us

After my client recalled how inspiring this story of self-transcendence was for her, I reflected back that this was exactly what she was doing herself. Because when this woman came to me, her intention was to foster a better relationship with her son, which had grown rocky as he approached his teens. Yet, the great mother she was did not want to leave their relationship to chance, and instead, just like Rick's parents, made a decision to take fate into her own hands and see what she could do to remedy the situation.

This decision led to much internal reflection, highlighting that she was parroting many patterns her parents had passed on to her in her relationship with her son. Patterns of perfectionism and unnecessary pressure which, as a child and now as an adult, created self-critical tendencies that brought her nothing but strife.

But the beautiful part was that as she worked to untangle the knots that kept her from connecting to her son, she created a deeper, more loving connection with herself. Standing face to face with those overly critical parts, she was inspired to meet them with compassion and love rather than trying to change or fix them. This freed up massive energetic space and brought more peace into her day-to-day life, which in turn brought greater peace into her relationship with her son. Thus, just like Dick was healed through serving his son, her spirit was renewed through her intention to connect with hers.

A Universal Truth

What my client experienced isn't unique to her—it's a fundamental truth about life. Like Dick Hoyt discovered his own health transformed through serving Rick, she found that by focusing on her son's well-being, it was the very path to her own healing. This pattern repeats again and again and can be found everywhere we look. If you examine your own life and every time you have selflessly reached out to serve another, you will know this to be true. And in the end, you'll see it's actually you who's getting the most help.

The Science of Service

Now, even modern science is confirming this. Researchers at Harvard and UC Berkeley found that acts of service light up the

brain's reward centers, releasing dopamine and oxytocin—the very chemicals that help us feel joy, calm, and connection.

This is what psychologists call the "helper's high," and can explain why we often walk away from serving others feeling more energized than depleted. Remarkably, we are actually wired to help. Even our biology reflects this great truth.

Studies on caregivers and volunteers have found their blood pressure was lower, they had stronger immune systems, and were less prone to stress. Additionally, long-term studies have found that people regularly engaged in service are happier, healthier, and ultimately, tend to live longer.

Perhaps it's why Viktor Frankl, the great psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, said, “Self-transcendence is the essence of existence.” He understood it was in helping others that we bring out the best in ourselves.

Ancient Wisdom Across Traditions

Spiritual traditions across the world echo this same truth. In Christianity, Jesus told us it “is more blessed to give than to receive.” In the Buddhist tradition, generosity, or Dana, is considered the first perfection and a portal to deep awakening. Hinduism also echoes this wisdom in the Bhagavad Gita, with the path of Karma Yoga—suggesting that through selfless action, we liberate our souls.

Again, many Indigenous traditions highlight this universal principle, too, and they actually see the whole dance of life as one big act of service. See how the tree gives its fruit, its shade, and its nutrients to the earth. In turn, the soil, the sun, the rain, and the animals all give back to the tree. In the end, it's all one beautiful offering of giving and receiving.

Dick and Rick Hoyt's story reminds us that the line between giving and receiving is not as clear as we often imagine. A father runs to help his son feel whole, only to discover that the act of service quite literally saves his own life.

Modern science tells us this is no accident—our brains and bodies are wired to flourish when we step beyond ourselves and support another. And the great spiritual traditions around the world remind us that service is the gateway to awakening our soul's great nature.

Self-Care and Service

Note, this does not in any way mean that we negate self-care. As mentioned before, we are all well aware of the airplane metaphor of putting on your mask first in times of crisis. The same is true as we serve. We need to eat well, sleep, rest, and recharge. And if necessary, do deep inner work like therapy so we are better equipped to serve another. While self-care is critical, it's best not to stop there.

So the next time you find yourself struggling with your own challenges—whether it's anxiety, loneliness, or feeling stuck—consider this: perhaps the path forward isn't found in endless self-analysis or trying to fix yourself.

Perhaps it's found in asking a simple question: "How can I serve someone else today?"

It might be listening deeply to a friend, helping a neighbor, or, like my client, showing up more lovingly for your child.

Ask that question, and follow through on whatever response you receive from your conscience. For at the end of the day, you'll find one of the greatest ways to help yourself is to help another.