

"How to Stay in Love?"

Keith Floyd

Charlie, in response to your vitally important question, may I suggest two ancient-yet-ever-new principles which are really one and the same: YOU ONLY GET TO KEEP WHAT YOU TRY TO GIVE AWAY and/or IT'S ALL DONE WITH MIRRORS.

When you love someone, it means you want for that person whatever will bring the greatest joy, happiness, pleasure, fulfillment—all the good stuff. Is this very unselfish of you? Of course not; for the happier your loved one is, the happier you are. When his or her happiness means as much to you as your own, then that reflected happiness not only enhances your own, it is most truly your own.

To illustrate: Let's say my wife grills two steaks for dinner, and you can tell at a glance which is the superior steak. Well, knowing that she loves me (see above definition), I don't have to tell you which steak she puts on my plate; for more than she enjoys eating a good steak (which is considerable), she enjoys my enjoyment of a good steak. The one is largely a physical pleasure, which is fine, as far as its goes, of course—but the other is enjoyment of an entirely different order. For want of a better word, it is, shall we say, a "spiritual" enjoyment, gratification somehow belonging to a deeper, higher, wider dimension.

But say I notice what she has done and the moment her back is turned, I switch plates. I'm sure you understand by now that far more than I enjoy eating a good steak (which is considerable, to be sure), I enjoy her enjoyment of a good steak. Now, suppose she discovers my little "mis-steak"; yet I persist in overriding her protestations and end up insisting that she have the better steak. "My, how unselfish of you," you might say—but only if you're stuck in a lopsided, non-reflective mode of awareness. The merest moment's reflection quickly reveals that that which masquerades as my unselfishness is obviously the most selfish act I could possibly perform under the circumstances. By insisting that she have the better steak, I have grasped for myself the higher enjoyment of her enjoyment of the better steak, which can, of course, only be accomplished by depriving her of the higher enjoyment of my enjoyment of the better steak. As Robert Frost insisted, "We

must learn to see the doubleness of things."

Just a little reflection goes a long, long way—clear into the infinite, in fact. You see, it is as if two people in a relationship are every bit as reflective as two mirrors facing (interfacing?) each other. The instant two mirrors are opposed, each reflects the other (which is also itself reflected back and back and . . .) into an infinite regression of reflective depth. Each loses itself in the depths of other and, so, finds itself reflected back at successively deeper levels in the depths of itself . . . etc., *ad infinitum*, quite literally. With each reflective letting go to lose oneself in the depth of other, one finds oneself yet more deeply reflected back in the depth of oneself, and so forth, and so back. This is that "losing one's life that one may find it" that is so near the hidden center of all religions.

The miracle and the mystery is that just a few reflections deep into the process and one loses all track of who's who—who's self and who's other—and quickly finds it far simpler simply to give up making distinctions between such arbitrary categories as "self" and "other". The Judeo-Christian Scriptures have put it rather well: "Behold, I show you a mystery, the two have become one!" Every marriage has the potential for no less than infinite reflectivity in the depths of that relationship. When the primary concern of each partner becomes the joy, happiness, pleasure, fulfillment—all the good stuff—of the other, and each is perfectly content to give it away, to "lose" it, for the other, what comes reflecting back into the depths of oneself is all the stuff multiplied by itself. By trying to have it for ourselves, we lose it all; content to give it away for the sake of another, we get it all back, "pressed down, shaken together and running over."

One more aspect of the paradox must be touched upon before the picture will be complete: One can let go to give fully only when one has also let go to receive fully; for only in receiving fully can one freely give that higher joy the other gets in giving fully and freely . . . etc., *ad infinitum*, once again. The giving is the receiving and the receiving is the giving. In the twinkling of an "I", there is no longer any distinction between giving and receiving, just as

all distinctions between giver and receiver dissolve and disappear, leaving not a trace. Were there any words for it, the experience itself might be called "Union, Oneness, Wholeness," the by-product of which is ecstasy. To express it in the form of another principle: ECSTASY IS THE HIGH REFLECTING THE DEPTH OF ONE'S BEING, AND THOSE DEPTHS ARE ACCESSIBLE ONLY THROUGH REFLECTIVITY IN RELATIONSHIP.

How does one stay in love? Perhaps a better question might be: What's the point of doing anything else? Now, if the reader will be so good as to reread the opening paragraph, we shall have come full circle and it will be a good time to sign off.