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**The Wairua of Self:  
A Path of Love, Simplicity, and Connectedness**

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### Abstract

Love is an action of freedom until something else steps in – often fear – that insists we create a box of survival. Whether self-imposed, forced, or chosen, it is interesting to notice how we limit ourselves with love. This thesis examines love; love in its purest intent and creation as the simplest way to live. An analysis of personal experiences, illuminated by psychological, mythological, philosophical, and spiritual literature, suggests that living from a place of love can be accomplished through a dedicated journeying back to the Self. The Māori myth of Tāne-Mahuta and Hine-Tītama shows the significance of releasing shame, as well as how a tragic situation might offer a catalytic possibility that shifts a core belief about one's self.

The complications of love that are self-created through loss and grief can easily mask the barely underlying truth of love in its nakedness. Reconnecting with this underlying truth, aroha in its purest sense, is essential for healing and allows for increased connection with the Divine. Doing so is often a difficult task, as hypocrisies fueled by fear and perpetuated by blame are bountiful. When love is used as an instrument and convenience in order to defend a closely held idea, person, or way of life, one often moves further from their true Self, thus surrendering their deepest power and knowing of love. The silent assault of expectations, power, will, and control can turn love into a complication. The complications of being utterly human only serve to further obscure love.

Within families, how one initially learns love is often complicated by interrupted attachment, causing rebellion and the need to look for love elsewhere. The components of Tikkun Olam, aroha, mikveh, and wairua of spirit, are intertwined and interconnected, such that the delineation between cultures and spiritual beliefs cannot be divided as oppositional forces. The denominator lives in the magnitude of love for all that has been created; beginning with the Self. In setting the foundation of self-love and allowing it to settle into the fractures and rifts of porousness, love may then be extended without attachment. When freely proffered without agenda, love will seep into every curve of the universe; thus, changing the world. Through the practice of mindfulness and loving-kindness, perception can change. It is this change in perception which can return love to its origin of simplicity. This thesis is a story of love.

**Acknowledgement**

**Samuel Ezekiel Frishman**

**My heart.**

**My namesake.**

**My smirk.**

**My humour.**

**My manner.**

**My love.**

**Gifted to us April 4th, 1928.**

**Returned home December 22nd, 2010.**

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### **1. Opening the Door, Emerging into the Light**

It is time to leave again and this is how I love; I leave. In the act of leaving there exists the declaration of love everlasting, love forever, and love infinite, thus breaking the shackles of union in an explosive fury. Yet, also allowing for the unrepentant self-inflicted sorrow and heart estrangement that couples the departure. Perhaps it is an addiction to the idea of the 'greatest love story never told' where the audience is left to wonder how it will end. As a leaver, the end is already written. However, this dance of intimate love is strictly enforced only if of a sexual nature. The exchange of love among family and friends must be introduced, given it plays a role in the story of love. This exchange provides the sticky vapors to a sense of belonging, no matter what new world the exit door opens into. In the love of family, both self-created and biological, there is relative safety in the confines of a chosen, assumptive relationship. Whereas, in companionable exclusivity, the expectations and hopes of a future shared, deftly, silently, and discreetly slither in.

Given the prevailing cultural reflection of the storied magnificence of love, my experience has not mirrored the preaching. Although I have had glorious, sweeping, passionate oneness with another, the overarching thematic belief of love is to disappear before the dreaded discovery of the truth of me. And still, love abundantly displays itself as a constant throughout my life as if single-mindedly intent on proving me wrong. Love that holds, comforts, strengthens, leads, and follows, is both my touchstone and greatest resistance and has led me to this thesis topic. But in the spirit of being forthcoming, it is through an extremely close friendship I was instructed, 'You need to write about love. You know everything about it, and you know nothing.' So what does love have to do

with living? Does love conquer all? What is there to fear? Does love offer connection to others as one? Is this done through religion, prayer, or spiritual practice? Obviously, to even consider approaching love as a topic takes moxy; for is it not love in all forms of attachment the bane of powerful empires throughout mankind? Friendly love, romantic love, estranged love, abusive love, unrequited love, religious love, and spiritual love all ignite the dormant passions to covet and rule in the name of an idea outside of the Self. However the act of conquering another is evidenced with lengthy explanations, a temporal staccato burst of ancient information will find its way back to the Self and its own formulations of love.

Yet, where do our ideas and behaviors around love originate. Is it not initially with the family we are birthed into where the teachings of love are imprinted as the 'how to, or how not to' love? Regarding the plantings of love, Rabbi David A. Teutsch, (2006) of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College located in Wyncote, Pennsylvania has written extensively on the union of family, love, spirituality and religion. He states:

We learn of our own significance through the love that is freely offered to us first by parents and later by others as well. We learn our ultimate worth in this love, which is rooted in the divine love. This is truly essential teaching! This love teaches us what to do with our lives, how to serve others, how to do the divine bidding. Thus loving and learning are inseparable parts of our tie to the divine (Teutsch, 1996, 273).

All my life I have been hiding in love. And the operative word is hiding, not love; for in hiding there are tangled borders of secrets, deceptions, and lies. It is hard to track where one begins and another takes over. In some camps it has been labeled a social anxiety disorder. Rodebaugh developed the Core Extrusion Schema (CES) to “Measure aspects of self-concealment that should be related to social anxiety, including perceived present rejection, belief that one’s true self would be socially rejected, attempts to hide one’s true self, and attempts to avoid scrutiny” (Rodebaugh, 2009, 90). Although I take personal exception to considering wearing a placard announcing a long-held social anxiety, his evidential findings are hard to dismiss. He reports:

The degree to which people believe they would be rejected if they revealed their true selves, as well as consequential attempts to hide the self, should relate to social anxiety. This belief may sometimes be based on subjective rejection experiences, and sometimes on impressions not directly tied to personal experience, but based instead on understandings of social standards. Nevertheless, a fair number of people who believe they would be rejected are likely to believe they actually already have been rejected in some form. Such expectation of rejection should further generate attempts to hide the self and avoid social errors that would generate scrutiny and negative evaluation (92).



His findings do support my innate ability to hideout whenever possible. Discomfiting as it is, his report can be paralleled to my personal behavior. Additionally, there are other succinct ways involving family dynamics that point to the salvation of hiding oneself. Hiding after-all, may be a source of protection from anything or anyone that might pose a threat. This behavior does not necessarily lead to a professionally diagnosed syndrome and might just indicate the quickest means to survival of the Self. Dorothy Allison, a prolific writer and proud survivor of familial sexual abuse reveals:

I did not know that I was hiding, blending in for safety just as I had done in high school, in college. I did not recognize the impulse to forget. I believed that all those things I did not talk about, or even let myself think too much about, were not important, that none of them defined me.... Change your name, leave town, disappear, make yourself over. What hides behind that impulse[to hide] is the conviction that the life you have lived, the person you are, is valueless, better off abandoned, that running away is easier than trying to change things, that change itself is not possible (Allison, 1994, 16-20).

Possibly she experiences a societal anxiety; but, more apparently, she lives a gratified and present life due to having shared her secrets out loud. Her struggle to come forward and face life, rather than succumb to her demons, is just one story of inspiration. Hiding oneself remains an option, just as does heeding the urge to seek.

There is no finite clarity to point to in the rooting of a lifestyle of hide and seek. To patiently follow each unearthed tendril only leads to another chaotic mass of blacks and browns and grays and greens; a very differently colored rainbow. Each time I pick one mutation of color to track to an end, to a new beginning, to an unforeseen choice, I quickly accept and negate – there is no end to the rainbow. However, it does not stop me from seeking. Once, I found the end of the rainbow, except that it was on private property. So, I stood in disbelief wondering: should I commit an unlawful act for the pot of gold on someone else's land, or drive on with the faith there would be another rainbow to follow. I drove on. And in leaving felt exactly as I feel when I begin to think on the moments of having developed a secretive way of maneuvering in my family. The feeling of being suffocated, clamped down, and always behind a closed door. In silence, my refuge lay behind the closed door. There was always a peaceful, quiet, fury in my room that declared no noise, no hurt, no more questions, and no more lying. And all that one could do in that instance was to lick the wounds of destruction.

A closed door though literal, is also metaphoric. The framework of a door, or any structure that allows for visual disappearance, accomplishes the same intended outcome. I have delved to determine the origins of hiding; or shutting down, or checking out, or orbiting away as fast as possible from any kind of destructive contamination of the heart. It begins with the tiniest of occurrences that begin to effectively layer themselves unto enormous heights. And there they remain; deftly balanced until the slightest breeze violently crashes the grounded pillar of hurts and sorrows. And although I am not qualified to reach ground zero of my self-destructive fading into the shadows, it is easy to recall that the summertime was a season for hiding. One beautifully, fluid, inviting door

in particular was the entrance to the underwater of the community pool. That summer, for the first time, we had a membership that afforded unlimited visits to the pool, where I discovered the silence of going under. The quiet of being deeply below the surface brought me a stillness I had never known. Everything begins to move so slowly, activity feels stopped in motion. I could stay underwater for a very long time. The naked legs that trollop by as prehistoric animals make no noise, and leave no imprint. The screams of ‘Marco...Polo...’ above the water-line reverberate towards the eternal blue above. The threats of being forcibly dunked eliminate all anxieties. Eventually, there is nothing left to listen to except your own heartbeat. And sitting in the far corner at the bottom of the pool – where it is easy to think you cannot be found – escalates the safety that accompanies hiding. It is a place where you cannot be seen for as long as you wish. I should note that this pool, which I did not know at the time, was a place for those privileged enough to have the surplus income. I have looked up the current rules of membership and they read as follows: “There is a waiting list for membership. Time on the waiting list is approximately 3 to 5 years, depending on the number of registered wait-listed applicants seeking annual membership vacancies... A bond currently costs \$1,500” (Palisades Swimming Pool Association, 2010, 2). Clearly, it is still as exclusive as it was, with an even heftier price tag for a summer of fun. This matters as a point of contention given the commodities of money.

Money cannot supply love. Low esteem had already been implanted; but feeling unloved was nearer to its beginning stages than a fixed, immovable, certainty. And membership affords a specific break from parenting as their money has purchased lifeguards as babysitters. In turn, this allowed me to further withdraw as the schooling of

love enlarged my capacity to hold breath. I became alive and profoundly comforted through submersion into water and its movement. At that time, the soothing strength of water made no sense except that I knew it offered me love.

There is a vast portfolio on the positive effects of water and body, specifically through two different theories that are fascinating: the extraordinary work of Dr. Masaru Emoto, and the principles of Watsu. Additionally, it is important to note the healing of mind-body connection through the therapeutic benefits of hydrotherapy. When Emoto's book, *The Hidden Messages in Water* debuted outside of Japan in the movie *What the Bleep do we Know?*, his years of scientific study with the freezing and photographing of water crystals captivated the viewer's imagination. We were shown, in dazzling images, the results of his experiments using words and music on frozen water. As a scientist, he had spent the majority of his time studying water given his personal fascination with the concept and properties that live in water. He notes that "As fetuses we are 90 percent water, and by the time we reach adulthood we are down 70 percent. If we die of old age, we will probably be about 50 percent water. In other words, throughout our lives *we exist mostly as water*" (Emoto, 2004, xv). Due to his utter absorption in the notion that not only are we made mostly of water, as is the universe, he was determined also to find a correlation between the effects of the environment on water, and the hidden messages that might be available within the examination of water. We are further informed that in the treatment of certain illnesses, for example, lead poisoning, the ingestion of water with a minute amount of lead will remedy the poisoning. In conclusion, he determined that "Water has the innate ability to *copy* and *memorize* information" (Ibid, xviii). Armed with his theory, he likened it to the profound truth that our planet, which is mostly made

of water, holds information linked to the very creation of our universe. Water, in its inherent free-flowing nature and characteristics of movement, could possibly be proved as a master mimic in how words and music deeply affect the ‘way it feels and responds.’

We inhabit the world as beings of vibrational frequencies. Each and every thing, human, animal, plant, object, contain energy, a very specific vibration that belongs only to itself. Thus: “All things vibrate, and they vibrate at their own frequencies. The fact that everything is in a state of vibration also means that everything is creating sound” (Emoto, 2004, 42). However, our energetic fields interact and affect one another. Thus, in having the experience of an extraordinarily good day, the positive outcome on those who come into contact with that higher energy will no doubt be alerted to suddenly feeling lighter, happier, or inexplicably drawn to the person. On the other hand, it could possibly have the adverse affect if one who is committed to being angry steps into the same space; they might become more furious due to the goodness around them. Regardless, it does not change the properties of the energetic, vibrational exchange. This too, is what urged Emoto forward in his exploration. The final moment in his decision to proceed with his theory was very simple, and presented itself in the magical way the universe has of validating our thoughts:

When your heart is open to possibilities, you start to notice small things that can lead to enormous discoveries. And one day I casually opened a book to words that jumped off the page: “No two snow crystals are exactly the same” (Emoto, 2004, xx).

Once he received his personal message from the universe that he was on to something, the next part of his journey began. Emoto started by taking bottles of frozen water and wrapping them in a typed word or two, or a phrase, or a demand, or an insult, and started taking pictures. The results, rather, the reaction of the water crystals, were astounding. The water was responding to the words just as anything that contains energy would respond. If the word was kind, the formation of crystals would present themselves as a form of beauty. If the phrase were complimentary, the crystals would respond in kind with an exquisite display of itself. If water could show itself off, this is what was happening. When the typed words were unkind, or forceful in anyway, the crystal formation looked ill, or diseased. Sometimes, there was the complete absence of any crystals. What was most evident is they looked as if they had been injuriously harmed and abused. To this he captions, “When words that indicated harm to humans were shown to the water, no crystals formed” (Ibid, 8). Through no coincidence, it was the words ‘love and gratitude’ that caused the most overwhelm; not just for the scientists, but also in the response of the public. The crystals appeared to feel absolutely stunning and displayed themselves as the most perfectly, beautiful, essence. Emoto’s caption below the picture reads “This crystal is as perfect as can be. This indicates that love and gratitude are fundamental to the phenomenon of life in all of nature” (Ibid, 5). Over and over he exclaims the unparalleled replication of the cosmos, nature, the Divine, in the crystals. His passion may be likened to one of the core concepts of Taoism. Simply stated:

Because of the Tao, all things are linked. Thus we have within ourselves the microcosm of the universe. Thus is the interrelatedness of all living

things taken to its ultimate conclusion, that we are all each within each other. The fundamental unity of all in and through the Tao is what lies at the centre of Taoism (Palmer, 1991, 6-7).

Additionally, in viewing the photos, it is irrefutable, specifically from a quantum physics position, as an answer to the formerly unanswerable questions in life.

Soon thereafter, they decided to play with sound to see if there would be similar results. By placing the bottle of water between two loudspeakers there would be the exposure to vibration and words. Initially, the samplings were classical pieces such as Beethoven's, *Symphony No. 5*, and Mozart's, *Symphony No. 40*. To this music, the crystals appeared to format themselves exactly as the composer behaved in life: for Beethoven the crystals responded with "great detail and exactness" (Emoto, 2004, 17), and to Mozart "seemed to indicate the unreserved way that Mozart lived his life" (Ibid, 18). When exposed to Elvis Presley's, *Heartbreak Hotel*, the crystals have very clearly split into two separate designs, as if experiencing their own individual heartbreak. But it is the overarching response to their exposure of heavy metal music that cinches any remaining doubts to the sensitivity and receptivity of water. There are no crystals. There are no forms of any kind. The picture resembles a flat, pool of lifeless mud. Emoto similarly compares its response "To that created by 'You fool!' indicating that water responds more to words than to music" (Ibid, 25). And just as water reacts differently to words and music, so does water from alternate sources such as from a mountain stream, or distilled, or chemically treated water. Every single choice we make, and every single thought we think or speak, influences a response. This is largely what Emoto wants us to

know. Our thoughts and words matter; they cause the distinction and quality of our lives. As it is known that everything carries a vibration, and vibrations interact and react off of one another, our intimate worlds, and entire universe, are the results of our own creation.

He comments:

Our emotions and feelings have an effect on the world moment by moment. If you send out words and images of creativity, then you will be contributing to the creation of a beautiful world. However, emitting messages of destruction, you contribute to the destruction of the universe. If you become aware of this, you will no longer be able to speak words of anger to those around you, or blame others for your own mistakes and weaknesses. You have the capacity to change the world within a moment. All you must do is make a simple choice (Ibid, 84).

In making my choice to spend my summers underwater, rather than on top of water, it has become clearer than ever before how it came to be such a consoling place for me. In my thoughts, in my refuge, water was love. Under the water, I was safe, cradled, wrapped, and privy to my thoughts only. Although chlorinated water is not the purest form of water, not to mention the 'accidents' of those playing in the water, it can still be categorized as such. Water, in its multitude of carnations, symbolisms, and metaphors, is still one of the primal sources of elements that still exist...though barely, given the earthly arrogance towards its assumptive presence. With its womb-like texture, and soul soothing characteristics, it continues to represent love and nurturance to many. And my memories



of being held and protected, while the sounds of muted voices wafted around me, are soundly intact. My musings were held by the water, as it fashioned itself and responded in movement around me, enabling me to emerge into the light, loved.

The second theory, Watsu, is an amalgamation of water and Shiatsu, and was developed in 1980, by Harold Dull, as a way of healing people through the use of water. It is explained as

...floating people while applying the stretches and principles of the Zen Shiatsu. In the Orient, stretching as a way to open channels through which our Chi energy flows is even older than acupuncture. Stretching strengthens muscle and increases flexibility. Warm water, which many associate with the body's deepest states of waking relaxation, is the ideal medium. The support of water takes weight off the vertebrae and allows the spine to be moved in ways impossible on land. Gentle, gradual twists and pulls relieve the pressure a rigid spine places on nerves and helps undo any dysfunctioning this pressure can cause to the organs serviced by those nerves. The Watsu receiver experiences greater flexibility and freedom. During Watsu a range of emotions can come up and be released into the process of continuous flow. This reprograms receivers to face life out of the water with greater equanimity and flexibility (Dull, 2010, 1).

I first encountered Watsu from a flat-mate who was a practitioner. It was exactly one decade after Dull's creation, so it was quite new in the healing arts community. The explanation seemed logical, but translated as radical. Conceptually, the proposal to relax into a stranger's arms, half naked, in a body of water, was a contradiction. Anything involving touch, skin, water, and another person, was not going to happen for me. It took nearly 15 years until I was willing to be handled in such a way; and everything Dull wrote about the intent of Watsu, was completely true. The healing properties of water, though innate and apparent, were never so obvious until plunging into the waiting arms of a Watsu practitioner.

It may seem evident and approachable in a conversational exchange; but until surrendering into such a situation, the experience remains stuck as a concept. To venture into cradling arms with instructions to breathe and let go, while being manipulated and moved towards health, stands apart from any other kind of water therapy. The truths and value of time, as known in the Western world, become meaningless and shapeless as serenity begins to lay its blanket of peace across the body. Incidentally, the body of water may be located inside or outside as it is irrelevant as the relaxation process begins. The goal remains the same; to accept and relinquish the body and mind. Journalist Eller, (2001) shares her first time encountering Watsu:

She slipped one arm under my neck and the other under one of my legs.

She also placed a foam cylinder under my other leg to keep it afloat.

During the next sixty minutes, as I lay prone, she stood next to me and massaged my arms, shoulders, feet and back. Sometimes she would

gather me up into a near-fetal position; occasionally she'd gently arch my back and stretch my languid limbs in various directions – the yoga part of the therapy, I presume. At other times, she'd slowly swirl me through the water... The shifting of the sunlight, for instance. And brilliant colors that danced beneath my lids. I could see what seemed like visions of my past too. Although I don't really remember my mother bathing me when I was a child, when Denise cradled me and pushed my water-logged hair back from my face, I had a mental picture of my mother doing the same thing. It was then that I realized that Watsu's real appeal is not that you are massaged but that you are held – both by a nurturing human being and by the water (7 & 10).

Water transports the body back into the womb, where all was safe. Safer, certainly, than before our eruption out of the tomblike environment of fluids that hold and protect each of us while being carried by another. Albeit, a different angle on the notion of hiding in water; nevertheless, one that provides the loving comfort of protection from the world. The loving-kindness and innocence of water is solely dependent on our mindful approach. It has been shown that water responds to affectionate and tender thoughts. Thus, the water will always give back love if presented with love. It is so simple.

But returning to the origins of simplicity in love, and the influences that determined complication, is not a simple assignment. I have carried this idea for over a year now without striking a word. When asked the topic of my Master's thesis, I said love. That is all, as that is all I had. I received no direction, and no guidance, as to what to

say and where to begin. And I welcome the oft experienced vacuity of silence as response. Eventually, everyone has a comment that reveals their attitude or idea about love; yet, surprisingly, only one person named it immediately in exchange. It sounded so simple coming from her mouth, and so shocking. I have been unearthing angular observations for months, and in one swoop, she hacks the spirit of my struggle to the ground. But to reference the ground is not gritty enough; it is the earthiness the ground brings with it...the dirt, the roots, the potato bugs, the weeds, the soil, the heat, the fire, the taste of iron in the irony of groveling in mud. The word spoken was 'connection'. Yes, of course it was a word on the list of possibilities, and one I was deeply considering as the source of all love, but it seemed too simple, and far too obvious; and something seemed off with simple and obvious. I have not lived a life fraught with simplicity, for I habitually choose the most difficult, hidden bush to traverse. Eventually, almost always, it becomes obvious that that choice was there all along; yet, I was the one appointed to clear away the brush. And she made it so very clear and affirming that in my musings, a required connection to something, is the primal condition that occupies a life filled with love and meaning. Most often, that something is called family, with all the definitions and reactions that may accompany it. There is the family we are born into, and the family we create. Though primarily the evidence for the rooting of love points to the family of origin, this paper will also include stories linked to familial extensions of self-creation.

I then found myself getting angry at another friend who is at fault for suggesting I write about love at all. I am fond of blaming her. It is she who put me on this journey around the world to reveal my truth, a truth, the truth, about love. Evidently, in spite of what I think of myself and my failures in love, I have something to offer. Thus, having

landed on the least populated continent in the world, the mission is to observe, perceive, participate, create, and live in the space of love. As I write this passage, I sit in one of the more comfortable, spacious, cafés I have stumbled on in Hamilton, probably due to the fact that its location is actually in Tamahere, seven kilometers south. I look like one more of the 20,000 students in this town selfishly occupying a table, laden with laptop and an air of intent. Customers leave you alone and circle farther than necessary around the table in a way that suggests they could catch an airborne disease. I suppose it is possible; we are sources of bacteria and germs. The cook just came out from his kitchen cubicle to greet some people on the patio. And as I gaze into the lives of others looking for my own, the back of his shirt says: “The sweetest kiss leaves a chest wound.” There it is in all its glorious trumpeting. A public advertisement stating an effect of love, just one of the effects, on just one person, and it occupies a space of pain in his body. Understandably, it may very well be a joke, especially given the dry, quirky, survivalist, wit of this country. Nevertheless, there is truth behind humor, and there is nothing funny about equating a kiss with a chest wound. On the other hand, it made me smile at how hidden messages are everywhere, but only if we are willing and conscious enough to notice them. I am reminded of a passage in *The Alchemist*, by Paulo Coelho, (1992) that speaks to following ones destiny:

He thought of the many roads he had traveled, and of the strange way God had chosen to show him his treasure. If he hadn't believed in the significance of recurrent dreams, he would not have met the Gypsy woman, the king, the thief, or... ‘Well, it’s a long list. But the path was

was written in the omens, and there was no way I could go wrong,' he said to himself (175).

I did notice, and it has given me laughter in the face of despair. In all honesty, sometimes, the sweetest kiss does leave a chest wound, and wounds do heal.

Healing emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually, is a miracle of nature, of the divine. Just as the foundation of loving is laid through parenting, so is the opportunity to demolish a corrupt foundation. Initially, exposures to teachings of love are passed through the filters of those closest to us: parents, family, friends, culture, and possibly, religious convictions. As it comes from a rather subjective approach, the lessons must be questioned. We may have learned we were separate from others, we were to be ashamed of ourselves, we were unlovable, and therein lies what is at stake; having learned through those closest to us their way of approaching, expressing, receiving, and experiencing love. This is the complication: that love is taught with a bias, when love itself is simple. And the direction to the simplicity of love is to go within. Jesuit priest and French philosopher Teilhard de Chardin, wrote:

It is a fact beyond question that deep within ourselves we can discern, as though through a rent, an 'interior' at the heart of things; and this glimpse is sufficient to force upon us the conviction that in one degree or another this 'interior' exists and has always existed everywhere in nature. Since at one particular point in itself, the stuff of the universe has an Inner face, we are forced to conclude that in its very structure – that is, in

every region of space and time – it has this double aspect, just as, for instance, In its very structure it is granular. *In all things there is a Within, co-extensive with their Without* (de Chardin, 1961, 83).

Change is possible, and is always occurring within us. Every day we shed our skin, our hair falls out, and our minds think the same familiar thoughts. On the other hand, each day our hair continues to grow, our skin rejuvenates, and our minds, from the moment we choose, can think differently. Just as our cellular make-up and DNA are fluid, so is our ability to shift our self perception. There is evidence bursting forward from the emerging field of spiritual science demonstrating how our thoughts create our reality. Bruce Lipton, a developmental biologist, suggests that genes and DNA can be manipulated by belief.

Evolving new-edge science reveals that our power to control our lives originates from our minds and is not preprogrammed in our genes...

Nearly every cell in your body has all of the functions present in the human body, which means that every cell has its own nervous, digestive, respiratory, musculoskeletal, reproductive, and even immune systems.

Because these cells represent the equivalent of a miniature human being, conversely, every human is the equivalent of a colossal cell! (Lipton, 2009, 7 & 10).

What are required are the interest and the desire to seek a simpler way of life. This can be accomplished through a dedicated journeying back to the Self. All this suggests is taking

the time to reconnect with our divine Self, who we were, and have always been, before the barrage of outside influences. In order to silence the mind long enough to remember takes rigor; however, in due time, through the practice of mindfulness and loving-kindness, perception changes. It is this change in perception which can return love to its origin of simplicity.

## **2. Love and the Wairua of Self**

Before I came to New Zealand, I began a rigorous focus on the ‘type’ of experience I wanted. Given my nature, what I wanted was the sacred, the prayerful, the powerful, the religious, and all those components that make up the matter of spirit, heart, and tradition. I knew that the gathering place of the Māori community was its *Marae*, and I also knew that respectfully, it was by invitation only, but I had heard of gate crashers. Unwilling to crash the gate, I kept asking for what I wanted. Within five days of arriving, I was invited to a *Marae*. In that moment, I realized it was just the beginning of exploring love; or in a broader term, *aroha*, the all encompassing word for love in the native language of the Māori. There was no question that I had to enroll in a paper to study Māori culture. For me, choosing to live in New Zealand was synonymous with honoring the indigenous customs of the Māori, and nurturing my lack of knowledge. The paper was titled, *Mana Wahine, Mana Tāne, Mana Tangata*, which translates to Culture, Gender, and Sexuality, and was offered in the School of Māori and Pacific Studies. It being a graduate paper, and myself the only non-Māori in class, the challenge was evident. As I waited early the first morning of class, the next woman to walk in greeted me with a melodic ‘Morena!’ and a kiss on each cheek as she took the chair next to me. The warmth generating from her was



to be the beginning of my beginning to receive aroha with the diversity and integrity that I had imagined, but not yet felt.

As our friendship found itself with humor, banter, and silent camaraderie, my thankfulness expanded as the dynamic of the paper took shape. How could I have known that I was about to be plunged into another Māori experience: one of oppression, exclusion, and racism. I was tragically unprepared as the head of the monster unveiled a hint of what to come, and barreling forth it did. The putrefied carcass of the remains from betrayals and wrongdoings of ancient lineage were going to right the wrongs – using me as an example. I was to be the spearhead for the ugliness of white supremacy, and white privilege, at all cost; not to mention that I had willingly paid quite a bit of currency for this honor. I could feel my heart closing and my interior going dark, as my naiveté rushed into the oozing gash. The disbelief at what I had signed on for was going to present a rough and challenging road. The workload was heavy, quite heavy, and I was going to have to self-educate significantly on Māori culture if I was going to pass. Success would not come through professorial encouragement, but through intimate connection with my classmate.

Independent thinking was the only gift going to save me, so I had to lean into my initial concept of aroha before meeting this academic challenge. It was time to dig into their aetiological mythologies; narratives that provide the foundational teachings with respect to the creation of the universe, accompanied with the ever-present grounding in morality and ethics. What I discovered quickly was a visceral absence of female strength in a positive light. There are hundreds of stories centered on powerful women, both of goddess and human origin; however, the primary learning is one of weakness,

shame, and love for another to detriment. Due to my focus on love, on aroha, it was necessary to re-interpret a widely accepted, unquestioned, outcome in well known love stories. For example, the story of Hine-Tītama and Tāne is written as a story of great love, until she is told of Tāne's dual roles: those of her husband, and her father. In that moment, it is also said that out of great shame she removes herself to the underworld where she will receive her children upon their death. I decided to ask every Māori woman I knew if they agreed it was shame. All but one agreed. This experience called to mind a passage in Probyn's *Blush: Faces of Shame*:

The core idea in [John] Braithwaite's articulation of shaming is that shame can be either reintegrative or stigmatizing. It all depends on the context in which shaming takes place. Braithwaite took the idea originally from a new Zealand legal initiative that had been based on Māori traditions. It is argued that within close communities, shaming the offender works better than other more formal sanctions, because individuals care deeply about what their family and friends think about them. Braithwaite argues that the desire to be accepted by those close to us is a common aspiration of humankind: we all fear that "deviance will evoke some respect or status loss among acquaintances or in the community as a whole" (Probyn, 2005, 88).

If mythologies provide the basis for learning, then it had been successfully taught that Māori women had something to feel shameful about. This is not the passing of aroha,

self-love, and pride. It is the embedding of low self-esteem. Probyn confirmed: “Shame goes to the heart of who we think we are. In this sense, shame puts one’s self-esteem on the line and questions our value system” (Ibid, x).

Everything I have encountered since arriving to Aotearoa, whether a negative or positive experience, is cradled in the Māori concept of aroha. Initially, to a tourist, it is defined as love; however, soon it becomes clear that every ‘being’, every ‘thing’, lives in the encompassing breadth of aroha. Broken down etymologically, *aro* is to face, turn towards, and *ha* is to breathe, to taste (Moorfield, 2005, 9 & 18); so, to accept life through the spirit of aroha amounts to having accepted the sacred breath energy gifted from the gods. Aroha is an infusion of love in each and every action towards each and every living thing. And it lives in the mythologies of the gods and goddesses fraught with the passions and furies of love and creation. Their stories, their love stories that ultimately determined the fates of so many, simply paved the road to love in all its’ forms. Through their ferocity of heart, I was moved to find a love story, and was pointed towards the love between Tāne-Mahuta and Hine-Tītama. Shortly thereafter, I determined that I could not write of their love story, for I could not find the love between them. However, what I found was Hine-Tītama’s love of Self: her-self, her strength, her knowing, and her stand for all that she declared as the future for herself. In *Tikanga Whakaaro*, the elders offer a beautiful quote that allows for the understanding in the presence of love for each of us: “Love is not skin deep like the tattooed face of a chieftain, but swells up continually from the depths of one’s heart” (as cited in Barlow, 1991, 8). In the moment of her choosing to stand, she was able to acknowledge the depth

of her own heart. I assert that in the instant of knowing the truth of Tāne, she also knew the truth of her strength and destiny.

In Māori mythology, and noting the spectrum and differences in each story, the final interpretation will be a conglomeration. Given that the culture is one of oral teachings, each storyteller will likely put their own stamp of originality and creation into the telling. Thus, with each book that has the integrity to offer the words, ‘as told by’ into their writing, it must be noted that the authors expertise, or opinion, might be taken with a grain of salt. Additionally, the historic observations and compositions by those that were essentially in New Zealand to affect change as they saw fit, must be considered as biased; for what is written is from their filter of beliefs no matter how the tribal information was received. Ranginui Walker stated most directly and eloquently:

In 1814 the missionaries arrived bearing the cross in one hand and the Bible in the other as justification for their mission of converting the Maori from heathenism to Christianity and savagery to civilization. The glorified mission masked the insidious nature of their cultural invasion. They railed against the sacred icons of the Māori as works of the Devil and systematically undermined their myths and spiritual beliefs to replace them with their own (Walker, 1990, 9).

Furthermore, the devastation and subjugation of Māori culture through colonization was dissected by Aroha Yates-Smith in her doctoral thesis titled, *Hine! E Hine!* – *Rediscovering the Feminine in Māori Spirituality*. Indeed, Yates- Smith “deconstructs the

colonial anthropological obsession of imposing colonial notions on the roles and position of wāhine Māori” (Pihama, 2001, 280). Additionally, it must be noted that as an outsider peeking in, I also carry my own ideas for what might have transpired in the union of Tāne-Mahuta and Hīne-Titama. To consider the time before the written interception of non-Māori, I see a different story of love to tell; specifically in the transformation of Hine-Tītama into Hine-nui-te-pō.

The beginning of the universe, or rather, the essential essence of creation, is also heavily debated. It is a debate between the embedded history of colonized input via Christianity, and the original threads of Māori lore. In the 1800’s, the main agenda of the New Zealand government was “To protect Pākehā’s interests” (Orbell, 1995, 72). She continued, “In this highly stressful situation, Māori society and thought survived through the creative adaptation of new ideas... At some point, this group (Tohunga leaders), acquired a belief in a high god, Io, in the highest of the skies” (Ibid, 72). So, frequently, when reading the mythology, in the beginning there was Io - defined widely but similarly regardless of the influence. For example, as Māori Teone Tikao Taare (1939) declares, “Io was the supreme god of the Māori” (Taare, 1939, 24); yet side by side a pākehā presents Io as “all godships are in him, and he appoints them their places; the gods of the dead and the gods of the living” (Reed, 2004, 44). On the other hand there is validity in Poignant’s (1967) statement that Io’s

presence at the head of the hierarchy of Maori gods was unknown until the eighteen-seventies when the first European reference to him was published... This could mean either that the inner knowledge had been

deliberately withheld, or that the cult of Io represented a reorganization of Maori sacred lore under the impact of European contact. Some of Io's names certainly seem to be derived from Christianity (40).

However, before the concept of Io, there were ten phases of Te-Po, though "Some tribal accounts give eleven, twelve, and even twenty overworlds, but ten was the usually accepted number" (Reed, 2004, 475). It is necessary to note Te-Po and its undue influence on the story of creation, for when Hine-Tītama changed her name to Hine-nui-te-pō, the interpretations are consistently dark in demeanor.

After the transitional phases of Te-Po, and after the creation of the universe, it came time for Tāne to separate his parents Papatūānuku and Ranginui from one another. They were so intimately enmeshed that the light of the universe was unable to enter between them. And their children, living within the confines of Papatūānuku, no longer wished to live in darkness. They yearned for the light. After some heated discussion among the godly brothers about how to separate their parents, Tāne was reproached by his brother Tūmatauenga asking if he had a plan. He had decided to use all of his strength to push his parents apart by leveling his feet against his father, Ranginui, until they were separated. In *Weaving Earth and Sky* Sullivan (2002) wrote of the separation gently and kindly, an outlook not often assigned to the behavior of the gods:

He lay on his back, and placed his feet very carefully on his father's body. He didn't want to hurt him. He loved his parents. He just wanted more space. More light and air. Light for all the plants and birds and insects of

Tāne, for he was God of the Forest and father of many creatures. Very slowly, quite gently but firmly too, he pushed his feet up a bit. Some of the vines holding the sky and the earth together began to spring, and rustle, even snap....Tāne kept pushing. Higher and higher his father went. He used his hands to press down into the soil of his mother, Papatūānuku. Soon Ranginui, the sky father, the great parent, the greatest husband of the greatest wife, was out of reach. Tāne the lord of the forest, had separated his parents forever (17).

In other words, by portraying Tāne in a loving light while forever separating his parents, a human element is inserted into a rather ferocious, godly, act. Additionally, Reed (1977) also emphasized gentility: “Earth could be seen in the first light of dawn, which turned to full day when Tāne lifted Rangi from the embrace of Papa” (14). Once separated, Tāne began his work to adorn and beautify not only his mother, but also his father. He brought forth the stars, the sun, and the moon. He looked upon his mother in her nakedness, and he began to adorn her. Thus, came the trees, the birds, the creatures of the planet, and the garments layered upon her in all the colors of the rainbow; and she was beautiful; yet, one thing was missing. It was for Tāne to begin procreation so that “The iho-tangata [the form or likeness and attributes of man] could be born” (Smith, 1913, 139). The gods gathered and said, “Try the earth at Kura-waka, and commence your operations there. For in that place is the female in a state of virginity and potentiality; she is sacred” (Ibid). Tāne gathered the red soil into the shape of a woman, and from this blood red soil of Papatūānuku, Hine-hau-one was formed: “When Hine had been completely formed in the

likeness of mankind, she was delivered over to Tāne-Matua in order that procreation might take place” (Smith, 1913, 140). Their first daughter was named Hine-Tītama.

Tāne soon-thereafter took Hine-Tītama as his wife in order to further procreate. As mentioned earlier, my intent was to find the love story between them. Regarding evidence to cite a union of love as such, none is to be found. There are stories that report when Tāne took human form and she laid her eyes upon him, she fell in love. However, there is no further indication of love exchanged except for the express purpose to create more children born to Tāne. On the day Hine-Tītama questions Tāne of his origin, he directs her to the four posts of the house. Sullivan (2002) explains:

In those times the carvings could really talk, so she asked them: Who is my father? Oh, how the carvings didn't want to say. They rolled their eyes and bit their tongues. Some of the pāua-shell eyes cried, for they knew what she would think, but they couldn't run away and not tell her. They were stuck to the sides of the house. The carvings were very upset. The carvings howled in fear when they saw Tāne appear at Hine-Tītama's side. That was when she guessed. Her husband was her father (33).

And she knows, in that instant, she must leave Tāne and her children. For, whatever created her 'knowing' of what she must do, whether it be Tāne as father, Tāne as husband, protection of her children, unwillingness to make the best of her situation, or Hine-Tītama in full emergence of Self; separation was imperative.



This critical moment when Hine-Tītama, the dawn maiden, is rumored to have fled in shame is a defining exchange held closely as the ‘truth’ of how it must have felt to discover husband as father. Shame is the assigned emotional response, and there does not appear to be any other option that does not question the story as relayed. Even Pere (1994), a rather staunch, Māori feminist/educator, writes: “The feeling of shame comes into Maori mythology when Hine-Tītama realizes that her husband Tāne is also her father and grandfather. According to one version this trauma made Hine-Tītama run away from Tāne bearing deep feelings of remorse and shame” (17). It seemed odd that Pere, especially, should agree through inference that the only emotional option was one of shame. However, it is possible she is also held captive in her Māori roots. Feelings of shame do not make for a sweeping love story between a man-god and woman. Tāne created his daughter, his wife, and as such, witnessed her growth into a woman. It is rather certain he loved her, but only in as much as he loved himself. She was his creation. As a god, is it not fair to question the attitude of narcissism towards all of his creations. It was his world to envision and populate as he wished. As he followed her in tears, “Hine turned and looked back to this world, when she saw Tāne following her, wailing as he came” (Best, 1976, 129), it was ostensibly in display of husbandly love. But all Hine is asking of him, or possibly wanting from him, is to raise the kids: “Remain here to bring forth progeny to the world of life, while I will ever draw them down to the Po” (Ibid, 129). In this transitional exchange, her name becomes Hine-nui-te-po as her own idea of Self becomes re-defined. Jack Kornfield (1988) explains what occurs in a spiritual crisis: “Living aligned with truth is more important than either living or dying. This understanding is the source of incredible power and energy, and must be manifested

through *love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity*” (as cited in Grof, 141). The alignment of Hine-Tītama into Hine-nui-te-po has been manifested. For example, I suggest that Hine-Tītama went through a breaking down of reality that led her to a spiritual crisis. And due to her inner reservoir of strength, her acceptance of the truth brought forth her transformation into Hine-nui-te-po. She knows, in that instant, she must leave Tāne and her children. There are often visual indicators that suggest shame, and the only visceral reaction written is of her tears. Probyn (2005) summarized American psychologist Silvan Tomkins theories of shame:

Shame can appear only once interest and enjoyment have been felt and when they have been ripped from you. At that moment the sheer disappointment of loss translates into shame that attacks your sense of self: the entrails of who you thought you were are suddenly displayed for all to judge (xii).

For, whatever created her ‘knowing’ of what she must do, whether it be Tāne as father, Tāne as husband, protection of her children, unwillingness to make the best of her situation, or Hine-Tītama in full emergence of Self, separation was imperative.

This moment of discovery is not a shameful moment. It is a moment of deep recognition and knowing of the spirit. And the cultural, collective, agreement to label it shame does not make it so. Additionally, when an oral story is passed down through the ages, and inevitably written down, it does not provide an accurate, un-biased, re-telling of

the story. Best, whose life-long literary project was to catalogue the beliefs and behavior of the Māori culture acknowledged that

(t)he opinion of an individual has been recorded and accepted as a general or widespread belief, a sporadic belief, custom, or isolated usage has been looked upon as evidence of widespread belief or practice. There are numerous instances of such errors, and all of us who have written extensively on Māori topics have committed such errors (Best, 1995, 58)

And though Haami (1997) poetically suggests “Ahakoa, he aroha iti, he pounamu tonu – a love that is brief is love nonetheless” (78), it is not enough to declare Tāne and Hine-Tītama a love story.

Due to my readings and discoveries, I have determined to call this moment her ‘wairua of self’ moment. In the instant Hine-Tītama was confronted with knowing that her husband was also her father, she experienced what the “Old People call the natural pathway of the wairua of self” (as cited in Ra, 2002, 50). Before furthering the idea of the wairua of self, I suggest that this is her experience of what occurs in that exact moment of discovery. Rather than experiencing shame, or scorn, or horror, or abject revulsion of incest, or the insertion of any word that may have been prescribed by anyone other than Māori, is it not the moment of the concrete implementation of the knowing of absolute Self? Often, in the face of the complete breakdown of one’s assumed reality – a tragedy of sorts – an awakening occurs. By our very nature, human beings placed in a tragic situation not only have a choice in the handling, but are vulnerable enough to be ‘cracked

open' by the universe. Somehow, in the greatest moments of weakness, occur the greatest moments of possibility in a core change of belief. For Grof and Kornfield, this might be considered a spiritual crisis; however, in the spirit presence of the crisis what may be revealed is the essential heart-opening of acceptance to the Self. The wairua, according to the 'Old People', holds that

The distance between the real and the unreal, the mental and the physical and the knowing and unknowing, is both far and near. It is as far as the illusion of mind permits and as close as the inquiry of self allows. The bridge between the two is the light that shines within our inner selves. By concentrating our attention on this inner light are we able to penetrate the curtain that divides physical and spiritual. Then we meet ourselves face to face and no longer stand alone. We only know that the complexities and difficulties of the physical world with which we surround ourselves is no longer present. The fetters of our misunderstanding as to the nature of our true selves is unshackled and allows us to directly interface with the wairua of self of all that we are (as cited in Ra, 2002, 50).

The wairua of self is not rooted in Christianity, nor in an ethnographer's report, but in a word of Māori origin. According to Rangimarie Rose Pere (1982) "wairua denotes wai (water), rua (two), a word that can depict spirituality" (13). In the pivotal maneuverings of Hine-Tītama's accelerated growth, she stood in the courageous act of facing her 'Self', standing in the stillness, and taking decisive action to change the course of her life.

Without shame as an explanation for her actions, the story of her departure is fraught with having to delve into the re-examination of her actions. In Maori, shame is called *whakamā* and is defined as, “shy, bashful, embarrassed, to whiten” (Māori.org, 2010, 1). These are emotions of self-prescribed ownership; and must be put upon oneself. However, in English, *shame* is defined as “a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety” (Merriam-Webster, 2010, 1). These latter definitions are judgments put upon someone by someone else; hence, Christians, ethnographers, translators, missionaries, and outsiders telling a story littered with their personal morality and misconceptions. As an outsider to this culture, I am also perceived with having ‘an agenda’ of sorts; alternatively welcomed, ignored, loved, and dismissed at the same time. However, I have no agenda, just a different perspective. As I open to my larger Self, and go where I am meant to go, it just happens to be in Aotearoa. We all have a story to tell; and if Hine-Tītama were to tell her own story, certainly it would be different. Were shame removed, this story would offer the Māori culture, specifically Māori women, a drastic change in self-perception. Perhaps one that comes from strength, knowing, affirmation, and confidence. There could be written a new story that would allow for the emergence of beauty and assuredness in the challenge of facing the unforeseen. I did find the sweeping love story I was looking for. It is a story of love between Hine-Tītama and her highest Self, Hine-nui-te-po.

Due to my insistence to find love in its simplest form, the story above presents the love of Self as the point of origin; for from the purest approach, Self is embraced through love, without disregarding the journey required. Religion may be one avenue, but ultimately, it is love that can conquer all. Fear, as the stop-gap, or as the

catalyst, also has the properties necessary to push beyond the ‘what might happen’, to the revelation of ‘what is’, and in the process it is possible to return to the love that always was. Initially, Hine-Tītama may have thought she loved Tāne, but only up until she discovered she loved herself more. Once again, the simplicity of love could only come about after struggling through a perceived complication.

### 3. The Spirit of Aroha

It was shortly after having passed the mid-way point in the semester, that my friend issued an invitation to come her *moko kauae* ceremony. My heart stopped. Up to that moment I had considered our fondness for each other a variation on soul acquaintance and familiarity. Once again, I underestimated where I lived in her heart; yet instantly appreciated that hurtful patterns occur in order to awaken. I believed in her love for me. I knew the term *moko kauae*, loosely translated, meant chin tattoo, and I knew what the end-product was, given it is a distinctly visible piece of art. But I never, ever, imagined I would be invited to such a sacred ceremony, and from a spiritual vantage, I had not been so moved since my arrival in New Zealand. She gave me the day, the date, but no time. In *Talking Past Each Other*, Metge and Kinloch (1978) explain Māori time:

In ordering their own affairs, they emphasise progress through a sequence of events as more important than the clock, stretching time to accommodate events instead of squeezing events into time limits. They are much less concerned to ‘save time’, less worried about ‘wasting’ it. Their gatherings begin when people have gathered and end when their

purpose is achieved (32).

Māori time meant that I would have to determine for myself what time the ceremony would begin. So it was that upon walking through the door at 10.00 am that Sunday morning, I hoped with all my might that their purpose had not yet been achieved. As it happened, I arrived just minutes before the ceremony began. As a non-Māori, I held my breath thankful for my sense of timing. I was quickly introduced to an overwhelming roomful of *whānau* already seated. Whānau, a traditional Māori concept that has crossed cultural boundaries, denotes ‘family’ in a very wide sense, extending deeply to anyone non-familial but nevertheless accepted into the group, and thus as *whanau*.

Every head turned as my friend ran up to me and laid her head on my shoulder. After our tearful embrace, she boldly announced to all that I was her friend from Uni. Hundreds of eyes, with their rich shades of browns, sparkling blues, and opaque greens, slowly transformed from curiously observant to welcoming warmth as the initial defense and bracing of their bodies softened. Smiles replaced concern, barricades were softened, and I was escorted to a seat in the front row. I was allowed into the sacred vestibule of ancient knowledge, ritual, and privacy. I was whanau.

Although in present times the decision to wear a *moko kauae* is chosen for an extensive variety of reasons, this occasion was in honor of my friend’s ‘Nan’, her great grandmother. Michael King (1972) notes, that of old, “Particular moko were often perpetuated in particular places by women taking the patterns of their mothers or grandmothers” (63). My friend had been asked by her uncle if she would wear their great grandmother’s moko, and carry the tradition forward. Initially, she felt she did not

deserve the honor, but her uncle asked three times. After seeking permission from her six children, or as she says, ‘her kings and queens’, the date was set. To further understand the essence of meaning behind this substantial moment, a childhood experience is recalled in *Mau Moko*:

I remember growing up around the legs of kuia [women], as a little girl, around the kuia....all in their blacks and stuff, and I remember their faces....they just had this face that looked like the surface of the earth, with all the cracks and creases, it was so normal, I didn’t know anything else, it’s like you see the landscape with all these bumps and hollows and things.... So that’s the permanence for me, it was like seeing Papatūānuku [father sky] when I look at those kuia (Te Awekotuku & Nikora, 90).

The spiritual embodiment in the carriage of memory, lineage, honor, ritual, and tradition, alternately hovered between serious and giddy. The whānau was ready, the ancestors were present, and the prayers chanted as she lay down to have the tattoo artist sketch her moko. The love in the room lay lightly in every corner. Finally, I was ensconced in the absolute knowing of aroha. Not as the simple definition listed in most dictionaries, or in the cavalier use by outsiders, but the intended basis for the word in Māori culture. Aroha, to be certain, is love; however, it is a cloak of love that warmly drapes every form of energy. Whether that is human, animal, plant, rock, or object, it is the expanse of love in all its infinite, energetic, expression. When the feeling of love is swirling furiously through every crack and crevice, it will not be dismissed. Where there is discontent, love



will find it and wrap it gently into a smile. Where there is heartbreak, love will carry that heart until it breaks open. Where there is love shared, love will proudly contaminate everyone else. Where there is love, there is the freedom to love, and live. Aroha is described beautifully by Irihapeti Ramsden (1993):

It seems to me that reality can only be encountered through accepting the validity of the experiences of others. This means that the truths of others, the history of others, their justice and what it means to them to be free are real to them and are therefore legitimate in the world. The force which enables people to understand the legitimacy, the reality of others is aroha. Aroha therefore is of itself a force for freedom. Freedom of the human spirit. Freedom to be without fear (344).

It takes enormous courage to live through the temper of love; especially when the dynamic of extended love most often attracts anger. Whereas love is not gripped by another temperament, anger belongs to a more controlling, dominant, force that contradicts the expression of freedom. She sat up for us to view the sketched moko, the aroha in the room elevated itself, and the tattooing began.

She lay on the table blindfolded, beneath pictures of her departed, joyfully smiling husband, and her ancestors, including Nan, with the ever-present pipe. She had her daughter holding her right arm, her moko [granddaughter] holding her left arm, and her son holding her legs. At her crown were the tattooist and his assistant, who provided the essential ingredient of comfort. It was announced that the movement of the feet were

a dead giveaway to the elements of fear and pain. Her feet were calmly still for ninety minutes. There was singing throughout the ceremony, accompanied with extraordinary outbursts of laughter. There was an abundant amount of food to nibble throughout that was the precursor to the hangi [meal] afterwards. There was a thorough impression and balance of peace, harmony, light, love, and happiness in the room. A sense of completion was occurring, as if this ceremony had been waited for and wanted, for decades. And everyone knew it. My journey was being sharpened centimeter by centimeter, inch by inch; and as I became swept into the currents of love, I remembered how I was initially struck by her in the classroom. Harvey (1991) succinctly states: “You have come to give the Light to all people, so all can awaken in whatever way they choose, in whatever situation or society or religious discipline they find themselves” (184). This is our bond. She brought me in, and nothing else mattered.

When she sat up, moko in place, the hum of the room was silenced. The beauty and brilliant light of her aura was stunning. She was glowing. The moko adorning her chin had always been there, and that day, it was uncovered and glorified. The intense burning of her inner light was now a visible outer light showering forth for all to see. It was evidenced that something within her spirit returned home, and landed as brightly as a newborn starburst. She already carried and emanated the spirit of aroha to every person she touched; but now, the pronounced distinction was a glorious, prevailing, peacefulness. Prior to receiving *moko kauae*, her sorrow and longing for her husband kept her separate from him, separated from all those who had passed. What was evident, and remains present, is the feeling that she holds a secret, and was given a sacred secret through the re-integration of her moko. Now, she dances with her husband in the ethers

with no space between. Where there was longing, there is completion. The emptiness that was within her has been replenished through light and love. She is whole again and fully present to those who need her here. We were witness to the spiritualizing of emotion within her. And Bachelard wrote, “But for the man who spiritualizes his emotions, the resulting purification is of a strange sweetness, and the consciousness of purity pours forth a strange light. Purification alone can permit us to examine dialectically the fidelity of a great love without destroying it” (Bachelard, 1964, 101). Viscerally, abounding love re-appeared as if to quash any particles of sorrow left behind.

I suggest that her secret is nothing more than a reminding and re-infusion of love in all its simplicity. The complications that are self-created through loss can easily mask the barely underlying truth of love in its nakedness. Truth is misunderstood as complicated; whereas, denying truth is far more painful and damaging. In the instant she was lifted from the table, all of her came rushing forth, as all of her came rushing back in a celebrated return to Self. I beheld a moment of perfection in the wairua of spirit. She lay on the plane between physical and spiritual dimensions, her inner light welcoming her spiritual self. When she rose, her wairua was all we could see as she met herself, no longer alone.

#### **4. Hypocrisies of Love**

Each day I attempt to keep my ears, my eyes, and my heart, though not always successful, open to feeling love. In short, I am always on the ‘lookout for love’ given I am always wanting to follow the calmer stream. Today, I returned to a café I have not been to in awhile. The owner has always been kind, and extremely attentive to my

idiosyncrasies towards the day's first cup of coffee. Additionally, she has an enormous gift for the gab, and I always do my best to listen beyond the moment when the exchange should have ended. Suddenly, I was pulled into a picture that was taped to the espresso machine, and could not look away. It was a picture of a Māori man in his late 30's, with his dog. Although the photo was a close-up of them, it was easy to see the beauty of where they were. Behind them was the sensuous, juicy green of healthy, exuberant trees; their demeanor was relaxed, knowing there was no other place to be.

But what leapt out of the picture was his spirit, his life, his contemplative dis-ease with himself and I knew, instantly, that he had taken his own life; this was before noticing the printed 'In memoriam' on the photo. He had left just eight months ago. He was seven months shy of turning forty. Whilst I was lost in the picture, she asked me what I was looking at. I mentioned the feeling of life jumping out of him, and she said, 'That was my son.' I asked no questions and she began to speak of her love for him and how he took his life. She offered me a moving monologue on love: hers for him.

Although I could not hear pain in her voice, I felt her pain, and was witnessing her recent, unexpected encounter with hope and despair. It was evident, that at the crossroads of hope and despair, she chose hope; and the single thread of difference between them might well be hope's desire for life from a place of faith. Despair has the characteristic of taking a sour attitude, burrowing into the mind, and calling it home. Sr. Joan Chittister, member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, and a world renowned lecturer on spirituality, comments:

Reality is the only thing we have that can possibly nourish hope. Hope is

not based on the ability to fabricate a better future; it is grounded in the ability to remember with new understanding an equally difficult past, either our own or someone else's that became new life, more life than we could have ever thought it might. The fact is that our memories are the real seed bed of hope. They are the only things we have that prove to us that whatever it was we ever before thought would crush us to the grave, would trample our spirits into perpetual dust, would fell us in our tracks, had actually been survived. And if that is true, then whatever we are wrestling with now can also be surmounted (Chittister, 2007, 11).

Her hopefulness, her stubborn intent to survive and thrive through the loss of a son, was inspiring in its ferocity. She brought impressive words regarding the concept of love and its importance; the need, our need, to stay in the space of love no matter what life throws at us. I believed I had met yet another kindred spirit, a kind of love-warrior per se, and I was thrilled at finding more examples of love in action. She was all love in the telling of his story, up until she spoke of his wife.

I was dumbfounded, and extremely disheartened. I know that to speak of love is a fickle thing, and yet it does not suffocate the embers of belief inside me. Nevertheless, whenever I engage in a conversation of love in any context, there often follows the effect of a '1- 2- 3- PUNCH' that belies what has been spoken. As the conversation rapidly plummeted from relative equanimity to one of complaint and blame, I discovered the real truth of her outlook on love. She blamed her son's wife for his death. It was the wife's fault completely. It was her drinking, her drugs, and her marriage to him for nine years. If

she had never come along, if they had never met, he would still be alive. After the opening of another door in her truth of love, there was nowhere to go but down, and she did. She exposed the ugliest parts of her nature, her anger, her fury, her disappointment, by pointing her finger outside of herself. But what was most striking was her contrasting behavior between telling the story of her son versus the other stories of hate. She was an effortless endeavor in wanting to share her son: there was softness, vulnerability, fragility, and sincere beauty. When speaking of her former daughter-in-law, when accusing Māori of taking and wanting everything, when criticizing terrorists for terrorizing in the name of love; she was angry, irritated, impatient, emphatic, and unabashedly attached to what she believed. I understood. I did.

Often with their children, parents protectively react with a blinding fury that discounts the enormity of love. Irrationally, love becomes used as an instrument and convenience in order to defend a closely held idea. In this instance, her son represented her ego, her best work, her success or failure as a parent. It is challenging to hold a loving place whatever the circumstances. Parenting can challenge the self identity of even the strongest character. The subliminal option of fusing with the child can cause blurring in the perspective, and perception, of a parent. Gaylin (1988) has this to say about love:

When properly understood, love and the need to be loved will be seen as more powerful motivating forces in human behavior than the desire for sexual release. Love is not only an alternative to self-gratification, but by modifying the sense of self it allows unselfish behavior to serve self-interest. To love someone is to so fuse their identity with our own so that

even self-satisfaction may involve service to the other. The concept of fusion, which hitherto has been reserved in psychoanalysis for pathological states, must be seen as an essential and normal aspect of loving (56).

She had fused with her son and was unable to hold the distinction where one human being ends, and another begins. In this instance, her dedicated protection of her son in death was possibly more passionate than it was in life. The widening gap of discrepancies between her love for her children and little else was barreling through the facade. But what was most striking was her behavior when she was telling the story of her son, as compared to telling the other stories. Her expression of love was initially very simple. However, when the tattered parts of her personality trumped her heart, love became extremely complicated. This is just one issue with the concept of personality; it has a tendency to conceal what might be a core loving nature.

One can dedicate oneself to the path of meditation and spiritual growth; yet, if there is a refusal to work on the masks of personality, it is the personality that will explode with objections. In this regard, the guru's, the yogi's, and the religious leaders will inevitably be exposed in their weakness in not having thoroughly examined themselves. Clinical Psychologist, Na'im Akbar, has explained what he calls the 'weaker demands of the personality':

In order to be healed we must accept the Higher authority in our own Consciousness and not give in to the weaker demands within the

personality. Will must always stand above temptation, faith must triumph over doubt and growth must overcome decay....*We heal the people* when we understand that we are the people and we acknowledge our inner dis-ease and our inner healing power simultaneously. We are healed when we restore our affirmation of who we are and draw from the universal energies that brought us into existence and have sustained us throughout this eternity (1996, xix, xxii).

When people are called to be healers, the personality also comes along, and sometimes it gets in the way. And in that realm, there may be a higher authority, but the grounding of community is indispensable. Through self-dedication, and the love and support of community, the sincerity of personality change can occur. It is due to public positioning that accountability can be called out if there is behavior of mis-alignment. The power of community is an essential component to the fortification of personality, faith and healing. Love can only be love all the time. Not occasionally, or some of the time, or when one feels like it, but all of the time. Love is not a condition, or an option. Love simply is a state of being towards everything.

### **5. Love, Fear, and the Distortions of Power**

I arrived in New Zealand with resolve, the lightest carriage of defensive armor I have ever worn, and an open heart. With an enormous amount of diligent work and daily intention, my heart remained steadfastly open for days. Of course, it felt like months given my infancy in the practice of open-heartedness, and it would only be days until the



first sting came along. I did not realize until much later, that I had committed a blasphemous cultural faux pas, at least from her perspective. It occurred while I was staying at the YWCA in Hamilton, my temporary home. Outside my world of knowing, maneuvering without friends and suspended between time zones, I was doing the best I could at being sensitive to another way. I managed to soften the imaginary divide by meeting a few people, and it was through that endeavor I found myself invited to a Marae. When the day on the Marae was over, we went out for drinks. We laughed and danced for hours, something I so desperately needed. The following morning, all the sweetness and beauty of the day before would be drastically altered. The lurking culprit would be my degree of eye contact. Unbeknownst to me, I was accused of looking too directly, too long, too something, too anything. I had never been called out before in the nuances of social eyeballing. According to the cultural considerations of connecting through the eyes, Joan Metge (1978) notes that:

[Māori and Samoans] consider it actually impolite to look directly at others when talking to them. They say that it tends to put the two concerned into a relation of opposition, encouraging the development of conflict and confrontation...Pakehas [non-Māori and non-Samoans] make Polynesians uncomfortable by the unrelenting way they fasten their eyes on their faces, so that there is no escape or respite from the pressure of their personality (13).

After the one-sided assault discharged the last round of ammunition, I sat shocked into submission. Confused, wounded, and bleeding, I quickly found the locked door to my cubicle with single bed, opened it and shaking, closed the door and bolted the world out. I offer this as the first self-betrayal to my heart: it hurt, it ruptured, and I closed it ever so slightly. The effortlessness in closing the heart is evident; however, the energy required to stay closed, is enormous. Due to this, staying bounded in the limitless confines of love is categorically simpler. However, the compensation for pursuing the presented travails of life inevitably direct us to where further development is necessary; thus, the second sting.

It was through the invitation to the Marae that I was to meet one of her distant relatives. When we were introduced, I knew – we knew – that we had been introduced before. Somewhere else in time we had been friends. I have had the privilege of many of those moments, and there is an insurmountable joy in the soul that is reflected through the eyes. It is love at its purest expression without the default of becoming humanly self-conscious. Yet, that often happens immediately after levitating together in a somewhat private state. So there we were, in a lovingly blissful state of exchange, and she warmly insisted on my phone number. Our friendship seemed to occur instantaneously in need, but it was always just a little uncomfortable. There was an urgent pull to get together, and our visits were likely to hold insufferable silences. I did begin to notice that her enthusiasm and utter excitability towards me tragically conflicted with her ability to continue creating friendship. Her confusion at the powerful love she felt was to become overwhelming. I am reminded of something I read on a bathroom wall in Wellington, ‘If you fear life, you fear love. If you fear love, you’re already three parts dead.’ I detected

her fear at being not only emotionally exposed, but viscerally naked. And if it is so that at the core of our emotional vulnerabilities awaits fear, then I had tapped into her greatest hope and greatest fear: loving her and wanting nothing. Or perhaps, it was not that I wanted nothing, but that I only wanted friendship. I will never know her truth. What I do know is that the challenge of her feelings presented a complication that shrouded the obviousness of love. The horror of the situation was there was no way to define what was occurring for her. There was no category, no compartment, no definition, and no recollection that could offer her the salvation of a boxed and labeled ideal. Her husband held her clarity and role of purpose. And when he raised the objection that her enthusiasm for me was usually reserved for a spouse, her emotional vitality evaporated. On these experiences Adrienne Rich so beautifully, eloquently, stated, “The connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet” (as cited in Siegel, 2007, 47). Yet, sometimes, women fear their own selves the most.

Whenever we met she would come bounding out of her car and run towards me across the car-park, or over the field, waving with abandon. And then she would throw her arms around me and hold on very tightly. Always while hugging, she would whisper in my ear and say, ‘I don’t know why I love you so much. I don’t know why I think about you all the time. This has never happened before. I don’t usually behave this way.’ And I would let her stay in my arms until she decided she was done. Nevertheless, our visits stayed somewhat one dimensional in conversational acuity. If we were to develop a friendship, we would have to talk and get to know each other in this earthly incarnation. I talked; she did not. It was as if she fully expressed herself upon greeting, and then swiftly

deflated. A sullen look would command her face as I felt her yearning for connection. In contemplating her sadness, I cannot say whether it was her husband, her dutiful and familial obligations, her sexuality, or the cramping of her heart. Regardless, all her options were preventing her from facing her own heart and desire of spirit. This is another occasion where, when stripped of categorizing, love is a natural and flowing expression. When the dangers of wanting to fit love into a tightly bowed package are presented, complications arise. On the paralyzing fear of fear and self-honoring, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote:

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from our motives of policy are silent when we speak, the divine floods of light and life flow no longer into our souls. Every truth we see is ours to give the world, not to keep for ourselves alone, for in so doing, we cheat humanity out of their rights and check our own development (as cited in Schneir, 1994, 156).

Those fears are most assuredly imprisoned by the fear of not being loved. The paradox is withholding truth, heart, and love in order to be loved.

After a particularly long absence coupled with my feeling of her separating – no, running – from me, I received an e-mail. In a rambling, strange, expression of love and friendship, she was trying to tell me, in a disjointed manner, that her expression of joy for me and her overall enthusiasm had been questioned by her husband. That second I also knew that, once again, I had to face my fears of being dismissed through the act of loving

for the sake of love. If she was going to both support her husband for speaking the truth, and blame him for her having to end our friendship, she was also telling me the ‘confusing quotient of us was too much’ for her. I understood. It is discomfiting to want to be around something that feels good, especially when it is not your husband; and most assuredly, when it is a woman triggering the pleasure. This caused me to think about the dynamics of marriage, control, and power. It is a fertile industry of interest, and a study by Thagaard, (1997) stated the results extremely well:

Jónásdottir’s (1991) perspective on men’s exploitation of women’s love indicates how the gender gap in expectations of intimacy and closeness can reflect skewed power relations. She emphasizes that men use women’s love for their own empowerment. A consequence of this is that men perceive a right to receive love without giving love and consideration in return. If men take women’s love for granted, why should they make the effort to meet women’s expectations for intimacy and closeness? (361).

Sadly, it is the evidence of such studies that comfort me through the loss of friendship. I support marriage when it is based on respect, courtesy, communication, and love. I do not support any union where threat is a component. Admittedly, I did not understand their union, but it was theirs. I am just a casualty of what evidently does not work for them. Furthermore, the balance of power in marriage, as reported by Felmlee (1994), is that “Less than half the respondents perceive their relationships to be equal in the distribution

of power, and men are over twice as likely as women to be viewed as the partners having more power” (275). I found her to be an extremely powerful force to be reckoned with; yet, she was willing to sacrifice her power in her relationship by smothering her heart.

Still, this thesis is not a treatise on marriage; it is a treatise on love. However, as romantic love most often evolves into marriage, it must be mentioned. As the dynamics of marriage, initially intended to keep wealth with wealth, seems to have evolved primarily into the marketing of love, the infusion of the effects of mothering on loving do shape a marriage. The critical dynamics of love between a man and a woman that beget power and control are put into motion through parenting. It is useful to note the work of Chodorow as cited in Baier (2010):

Mother love in our society tends to prepare sons for independence rather than for reciprocal dependency, and to prepare daughters both to accept continued unequal power (with parents, and later, husbands) and to use their eventual power over their own children to perpetuate this pattern of both crippling male adult inability to accept the dependencies of love, and crippling female adult inability to assert themselves enough to become equals to their male fellows in politics, love, war, and peace (156).

We are all the effect of a vast assortment of influences that shape our unions. And their union affected my determination to remain open-hearted. Unfortunately, this occasion would be the jolt to my heart that caused it to skip one more beat before closing the access door. The methodical creeping in of expectations, power, will, and control can

turn love into a complication. The complications of being utterly and only human, while also carrying lessons in the distortions of power, the exertions of control and will, serve to further obscure love. Closing the heart is easy, re-opening the heart bears conviction, and striving to simply love continues to remain the most simple.

### **6. Starving for Love, Leaving the Self Behind**

In exploring the methods of learning how to love, I am forced to reckon with what I was taught. Although being loved was the assumption in my family, assumptions leave the field wide open in drawing conclusions about the truth of love. As the middle child of three in a Jewish family, there did seem to be consequences to being perfectly squeezed into a middle role. The stereotyping of middle children and the repercussions effortlessly inserted me into a role of becoming caricaturized. Which came first: being birthed as a middle sibling, or assigned the prescribed behavior of ‘the middle child’? There are theories about positioning. If born into a position-based expectation, does one manifest that which was expected? Just one of the unintended results is the lifetime carriage of low self-esteem which may inevitably be linked to an absence of self-love. Kidwell asserts:

Middleborns have a significantly lower self-esteem than first-borns and lastborns and that the self-esteem of middleborns is significantly lower when the average spacing of their immediately adjacent siblings is two years compared with one year. It is believed that middleborns are conceptually distinct from other birth positions, with different experiences

and attitudes concerning their roles within the family (1982, 225-226).

I am separated by two years from each of my siblings; however, there are floating months where there is only 1 ½ years. I suggest that her findings correspond with my experience irrespective of the ever evolving planetary configurations.

The legacy of gossip regarding middle children is profound, and I managed to stay loyal to the psychological studies before ever knowing of the evidence. However, due to the effects of parenting, I have whittled love down to the absolute certainty of three things. To begin with, there was an inability to welcome me into the world exactly as I had been created, which cultivated enormous angst and attachment to how I behaved, and how I looked. Given how my physicality was perceived, I was raised with different conditions and regulations around food. And the system of rewards and punishment were embraced with enthusiasm. Love in all its complicated glory wrapped its tentacles around me and held on tight, refusing me the air I gasped for. The result precipitated a lifelong pattern of having to leave in the face of love, and longing for the fresh air that only movement and ideas of freedom can bring. Once more there is empirical evidence finding that issues of alienation are specific to middle children. McGurk & Lewis (1972) found that:

For birth order, the analysis indicated that second borns sought more adult help and more adult approval than first- or later-borns. They also spent more time in individual activity, were generally more talkative, and expressed more negative affect than other subjects. The effects for birth



order are more revealing and highlight the second born as different from his first- or later-born siblings. Second borns, for example, showed more dependency behavior (seeking help, approval, and affection from adults) than subjects from the other two positions (366).

Their results cast a shadow of truth in the behavior that continues to haunt me. The dire seeking for approval, while standing outside the circle of participation; all factors related to the inner hunt for self-approval and self-love. As early as I recall, I never felt a part of my family. Yes, I was birthed through my mother, but that does not guarantee the feeling of belonging. And to compound the alienation, I did not resemble my brother or sister in appearance, behavior, or interests. The saving grace was I looked like an imprint of my father. Furthermore, I had an inborn pride to being Jewish, and that helped me to know that I belonged somewhere. As my genealogical roots were based in ancient tribal ways of wandering and foraging, I was comforted; and it was not enough. Memory upon memory there are instances where I instinctively knew I was somehow separate from my family. For example, the summer we went to the ocean and spent evenings ambling along the boardwalk, a beautiful amusement park on the beach bursting with flashing, static, neon signs of reds, yellows, and blues that command attention. With the inimitable wafting of fried grease and sugar enticing the salivary glands, and the French-fries and elephant ears – greasy, sugary, artery-clogging delights – just around the turn, the seductive, curvaceous, arrows beckoned into the beyond. Instead of indulging, we entered the penny arcade as my mother went into a shop of her own choosing. Arcades did not excite me or entice me, and the escalating noise of winning pinball machines, and

whack-a-mole, only served to heighten my anxieties. My father gave each of us a \$20 dollar bill and said, ‘Go have fun, and don’t spend it all in one place!’ As my brother and sister ran off to play, I pocketed the money and walked around waiting for this fun to end soon. I could not play with the money. I was somehow convinced that I would never again see that much money. It would not be replaced, and, without doubt, there would never be any more. I held onto that precious money until I found my dad and proudly told him that I was saving it. Whether he was confused or not, I cannot remember. Yet, I walked away from that evening knowing I had to take care of myself given I could not count on family always being there. Was my feeling of separation a reaction to the notion that who I was, how I looked, and what I did, mattered due to my being an extension of them? Quite possibly, and it did not foster a self. Dean Ornish said of his family:

Growing up in my family, as in many families, the unspoken yet heard message from my parents was this: ‘You don’t exist as a separate person; you are an extension of us. Therefore, you have a great capacity to cause us joy or pain. If you act right, we will be so proud of you. If you don’t, we will suffer. If you really mess up, we will *really* suffer – and if we suffer enough, we will die and leave you all alone. Since you don’t exist separate from us, then if we die, you’ll die, too. And it will be your fault’ (1998, 82).

I suggest that his parents’ approach might be considered extremely Jewish in its blaming tone. It is ethnic, it is a binding factor, it is one of the self-deprecating, endearing ways

the Jewish culture loves itself. And although there is a sense of warmth and familiarity in Ornish's words that have me love my parents more, it is not without damage. It would have been so much simpler if they had just stopped, looked, listened, and took a breath, in order to realize I was perfect just the way I was. The tributaries of love can create vast, unnecessary routes when, in the end, all the channels flow to the same repository of love.

In feeling apart, the rejection of who I was had already begun to deeply shape how I was going to love. The gifts I held as athlete rather than scholar, as laborer rather than professional, as humanist rather than separatist, were dismissed, not encouraged. Through my parents' non-negotiable commitment, I was positioned to be held back from myself, as well as the forbidden foods suspended from my intake. Regulatory behavior instituted with righteous intention, yet having caused indignant rebellion. And so, I turned to food for love. Food offers unyielding, unconditional love, and most importantly, never directly doles out immediate punishment; the punishment comes later. Beginning a love affair with food introduced me to an engaging amorous affair of reciprocation. There was the juicy presence of tasty love in the exchange of edible magnificence that surged into the holding tank where the core absence of love lived. And within the darkness of an unfilled core, loneliness drifts in and blankets the insides of a food addict; thus, in order to soothe the loneliness and craving for love, food steps in. Roth says it best.

Food was our love; eating was our way of being loved. Food was available when our parents weren't. Food didn't get up and walk away when our fathers did. Food didn't hurt us. Food didn't say no. Food didn't hit. Food didn't get drunk. Food was always there. Food tasted

good. Food was warm when we were cold and cold when we were hot.

Food became the closest thing we knew of love (1991, 18).

Food can become the primary relationship and it is one filled with romance, passion, and pain. My most potent memories both when sober and gripped by the intoxication of food are of cozying up. Cozying up to food is to feel as if there is nowhere else in the world to be. The degree of comfort and peace is complete, and the loneliness is temporarily silenced. Additionally, the fear of losing the most beautiful place in the world continues to feed the desire to become one with food. Yet, before ever considering the reach for food, my mother was feeding me differently, both actualizing and causing her immense fears for me to materialize.

When I was in grade school my mother would prepare a different lunch for me than the lunches she packed for my brother and sister. I imagine that the reason she fed me differently was only due to my physical difference from them. I stand in the middle of two siblings that physically resemble each other in their slightness, and my body comes from peasant stock as the granddaughter of a poor, Jewish, Pennsylvania coal miner. My memory of her outrage when I referenced my roots as such, made an enormous impact on me. I was used to being 'shut down', but her utter rejection of my roots was astounding. Imagine her reaction when reminding her that her husbands' favorite food was chipped beef, a visually nauseous mixture of white sauce and corned beef on a piece of white bread. Was it reverse racism, was it the suggestion of coming from poverty, was it classism, or possibly just embarrassment? Policar (2010) comments that:

Since individuals are held personally and even at times morally responsible for their position on the class ladder, often the psychological conflicts associated with class identity are kept hidden... The internalization of cultural judgments towards the working class and identification with the tenets of the American dream result in conflicted identities for those who ascend from the working class (20 & 25).

Apparently, my physical body in conjunction with my pride of lineage represented one of her darkest secrets: heritage.

Certainly, I had a developing body that my mother feared: strong, thick, capable, independent, and athletic. Whomever, whatever, I reminded her of was not good, and her idea of preventing me from the possibility of fatness took absolute priority. And unfortunately, the food rules of my mother were not only passed to each of us, but also embedded into our vulnerable malleable raw material of impression. I am the only child that absorbed her teachings and became fat. My lunches never contained a cookie or dessert of any kind; whereas, their lunches were enhanced with sweet treats. Every day my lunch was a tuna fish sandwich wrapped in tin-foil, iceberg lettuce soaked with Caesar salad dressing wrapped in tin-foil, a piece of fruit wrapped in tin-foil, and placed in a small, brown paper bag. The finished product produced a dripping, greasy, oily, fishy, smelly mess of a lunch bag with my trademarked one-half dark brown-bottomed bag. You could smell me coming, and my lunch always sat alone on the shelf in the coatroom. This was second grade, and the only exit out of the classroom was through the coatroom. I would routinely raise my hand to ask for the bathroom key for in order to get

to the bathroom, I had to pass the lunches in the coatroom. I would troll through the lunches moving as fast as possible looking for cookies, candy, cupcakes, and anything else that resembled everything I was not allowed. I stole their desserts and stuffed them into my greasy paper bag. What this quickly afforded me was not only the thrill of getting away with something, but set me up for a lifetime of eating secretly and alone. It was not possible to steal from your classmates and then share lunchtime. I wandered around the school-grounds during lunch period shoving sugar in my face. Roth (1991) wrote, “Food, being a tangible substance, cannot satisfy intangible needs. It can numb you, drug you, but it cannot nourish you. Food satisfies when the hunger is physical, and only then can it be considered nourishment. Every other time you use food, you leave yourself” (128-129). The cycle of starving for love was firmly entrenched, which only continued to lead to greater complications in the pastures of love.

What I had learned about love is that the attachment to results takes priority over love of any kind. There is a foundational basis for attachment and parenting as observed by Surcinelli & Rossi (2010), “secure attachment in adults was associated with better mental health, while insecure attachment styles characterized by negative thinking about the self were associated with higher depression” (523). It seems that underneath the lifting of every lid, the foundational dearth of self- love is gawking, patiently waiting in a taunting crouch. In the exchange of agreements to behave appropriately, lay the loving expression of remuneration in kind. If I did ‘that’, then they would do ‘this’. In my rebellion for the wanting of love, I executed with precision, stealing, lying, cheating, and the blasphemous, in-excusable decision, to leave my Self behind. It is in those moments of great despair where one often turns to God; for where else is there to look for reasons

to live if not up towards God. This is when I returned to the spiritual components of Judaism to begin the journey of self-love.

### **7. Wandering the Desert and Meeting the Self**

In re-examining my origins, I have discovered that Jews and Māori have a commonality that is unmistakable. We are tribal, ritually centric, largely unwelcome, and live by knowing there is spirit in everything. Essentially, our ancestral lineage is shared and snipped from the same cut of fabric. Where Māori have the wairua of spirit, Jews have the ritual of Mikveh. Where the Māori embrace aroha, Jews encircle Tikkun Olam. I suggest both capture the essence of each culture and are somewhat parallel concepts.

As mentioned earlier, Io, though considered a supreme being by many Māori, maintains a questionable historical/mythical quotient due to the occurrence of colonization. However, in brief, Io would also be similar to the Judaic belief of Ein Sof, representing infinite nothingness. Thus, for each there is the notion of an all knowing something/nothing that encompasses the space and time before time, as we determined, began. Both perceived as hidden and revealed, specks of reality and illusion, and that which holds the container of belief in mystical, magical, sphere. Given belief is a controversial theory, the words of Gregg Braden (2008) will be the model of belief for this conversation:

In the instant of our first breath, we are infused with the single greatest force in the universe – the power to translate the possibilities of our minds into the reality of our world. To fully awaken our power, however,

requires a subtle change in the way we think of ourselves in life, a shift in belief. Just the way sound creates visible waves as it travels through a droplet of water, our “belief waves” ripple through the quantum fabric of the universe to become our bodies and the healing, abundance, and peace – or disease, lack, and suffering – that we experience in life. And just the way we can tune a sound to change its patterns, we can tune our beliefs to preserve or destroy all that we cherish, including life itself. In a malleable world where everything from atoms to cells is changing to match our beliefs, we’re limited only by the way we think of ourselves in that world (5).

Plainly, belief requires at the very least, the temporary suspension of what we all think we know. Scientific proof and evidence have no home in the discussion of belief. And although there is a significant growth in the field of spiritual science, it is still in infancy.

Historically, in following Moses out of Egypt, Jews wandered the Sinai desert towards their vision of a homeland, the Land of Canaan. Once there, they could live freely, beholden only to themselves and God. The Māori, though of Polynesian descent, also wandered in search of a homeland where they could live as they wish. According to oral tradition, when Maui, their comparable figure to Moses, “fished up the North Island” (Smith, 1978, 180), that was to be their home. Thus, the Jews declare Israel as their land, just as the Māori pronounce the North Island, as theirs. Incidentally, as minority populations, Jews comprise 75.2% of the population of Israel, and 0.201% of the world (as cited in Jewish Virtual Library, 2006); whereas, Māori, primarily situated on the



North Island, are nearly 15% of the population (as cited in Virtual New Zealand, 2010, 5). Unfortunately, there are no reliable statistics addressing the Māori population outside of New Zealand. Regardless of the numbers, neither tribe has yet to live in the peace they had longed for.

The sustenance of faith, survival and expansion are encapsulated in Tikkun Olam and aroha. Hebraically, Tikkun Olam translates to a repairing of the world, and there is a twofold repair of both the inner and outer self: outer repair is to occur through acts of kindness and social responsibility, while inner repair is to re-connect with the Divine inside us. Simply put, the revelation is to return to love; the love of all that has been created by the Divine, most essentially, our Self. Once met, the light, the spark in each of us can be restored. When we return to our Self, we not only return to God, but all that is, or has ever been. The expansive, existential, intent is to repair the universal consciousness to the world and all the wonders within. Yet again, as a species we have inserted the complications to what is truly, the simple act of love unencumbered. Golden, (2010) offered Winklers' succinct interpretation of Tikkun Olam:

In its aboriginal form Jewish spirituality has less to do with religion that it does with direct, uninhibited experience with Creator through Creation. What was once a holistic spirit path that encompassed all the nuances and dynamics of the spirituality of earth and body ha[s] over the centuries mutated into a parochial focus on religion as an institution by itself. Judaism emphasizes the sacredness of the earth, and that all organisms, even stars and planets, are imbued by the Creator with a divine

consciousness (4).

Tikkun Olam is the very same premise of aroha, to love all that is. In walking the talk, in honoring the inherent, natural life-force within, it is possible to return to our original design in the name of love. Aroha may not specifically translate to repairing the world, but in extending oneself through the mists of aroha as a way of life, all is becoming repaired. The results show up as an inverse reflection from that of Tikkun Olam. Aroha leaves droplets of love and light in its wake, as well as recognizing spirit in the absolute-ness of every design. Every action, every word, every thought, leaves footprints on the path to the Divine; thus, in response, repairing is always occurring. One elemental factor in carrying and expressing aroha is the opportunity to feel the difference in human exchanges of reciprocity. To further explain, the Māori perspective on the offering of self in volunteering states:

Its value was in providing essential services or other benefits to Māori that would not otherwise have been available and that contributed to improving the wellbeing of Māori as a people, as well as individuals... Some said that they were comforted by knowing that they were doing something that was valued and made a difference (Mahi Aroha, 2007, 28).

There are many ways to awaken the soul of service to self while tangentially, enhancing all that is touched. And this is the nucleus of the desire to view our lives through a

spectacle of magnificence. The boundaries of beauty are no longer imprisoned through definition as beauty begins to take form through aroha as truth. As Etienne Gilson has said:

Finding out truth is not so hard; what is hard is not to run away from truth once we have found it. When it is not a ‘yes but,’ our ‘yes’ is often a ‘yes, and . . . ’; it applies much less to what we have just been told than to what we are about to say (as cited in Charleton, 2008, 291).

Once we undergo a knowing of truth without equivocation, there is only to continue. And the Judaic ritual of the Mikveh ceremony is a culmination of the long-awaited journeying back to center of Self, back to the radical act of self-love.

The act of Mikveh is the symbolic cleansing from ‘what was’ to ‘what is’, through the full immersion into sacred water. Although there are very strict laws stipulating the assembling of the container and the water(s) inside, the primary purpose is to sanctify a transitioning. Historically, and authoritatively, the Mikveh was intended for conversion to Judaism; this is no longer so as it is utilized for a menagerie of life celebrations and sorrows. In so stating, there are two specific dimensions in declaring a transition through water. First, and foremost, the water must have components of being alive and flowing, not treated chemically, such as municipal water. For it is in living waters we are re-birthing and begin to awaken. As previously mentioned, water unbound holds energetic properties that respond to environment. Therefore, on a physical level, the suspension of body into water, whose organic nature has the freedom to flow and touch every element of the human body, acts as healer as it purifies. The utter detachment from

gravity and the weightlessness that it brings, also submerge the ego which allows for the second, most essential metamorphosis to occur. The symbolic suffocation of body, and therefore, temporary death, spirits away the old as the new emerges. What is often referred to as a liminal state could be considered a spiritual location of lingering in the in-between. On this occasion, in between what has been, what will be, and what is to become. There is a wanted transcendence to the meeting of Self, as it has patiently waited for this ascension; however, only if there has been the unquestionable, inarguable, wish to meet. On matters of will and wish Rollo May (1991) wrote:

We must have a conviction before an act of will can be effective. ‘Wish’ is part of the area in human consciousness which includes hoping, yearning, imagination, believing – all of which have to do with the innate dimension of feelings that give birth to motivation (61).

Therefore, rebirth can be completed through Mikvah; much as the wairua of spirit presented itself in the *moko kauae* ceremony. The origin for each ceremony begins with the same hunger within, hence determining the wanted outcome to become one with the Divine blueprint of Self.

Wairua, the Māori word for spirit, beautifully illustrates the poetic collective of water, healing, heart, Judaism, Māori, tribal, indigenous, and cultural birthing. Pere (1991) has said that, “Wairua is an apt description of the spirit – it denotes two waters. There are both the positive and negative streams for one to consider. Everything has a wairua, for example, water can give or take life. It is a matter of keeping a balance”(16).

The individual paths converge as the united goal is shared as one; the urgent desire for a soul convergence. Above all, the nature of self-love and love in the highest realm is held in the kingdom of mother earth and father sky. Water, and its purity of creation, is love that comes from the Divine. Make no mistake, the life-affirming rituals of countless religious and spiritual practices incorporate the use of water. Wairua of spirit implies the liquescence of spirit, and its truth of purpose is to spread, expand, and wash up to the banks of the soul to invite further ascension.

The components of Tikkun Olam, aroha, mikveh, and wairua of spirit, are intertwined and interconnected, such that the delineation between cultures and spiritual beliefs cannot be divided as oppositional forces. The denominator lives in the magnitude of love for all that has been created; beginning with the Self. For in setting the foundation of self-love and allowing it to settle into the fractures and rifts of porousness, love may then be extended out without attachment. When freely proffered without an individual agenda, it will seep into every curve of the universe; thus, changing the world. When interviewed, Rollo May spoke of individualism, or what might also be interpreted as the deficiency of self-love:

Our individualism, in contrast to what Perls (1969) said, will destroy us. We are concerned with the self and how the self gets on. We leave out the society, the culture. We don't ask ourselves, 'How is our family doing? How is our city doing? How is our world doing?' This we don't ask (Rabinowitz, Good & Cozad, 1989, 440).

His questions mirror individualism and its fundamental drive for self-concern, while conceding to the ego and its coveted position of leadership. These are polar qualities to the pure expression of love. And for those who are uninterested, doubtful, or just plain angry, all it really takes to hold onto behaving through love, is courage; the most extraordinary act of courage imaginable. In the most fearful encounters which often occur in a split second, an act of courage is the solution. For example, when the Jews were seeking their Promised Land, Moses routinely sent spies ahead to scout out the situation. Singer (2006) wrote:

Moses sends out 12 spies, one from each tribe, to scout out the Promised Land (Bamidbar 14: 1-10). They go and explore for 40 days, and upon their return, 10 of them report that the Land is a death trap and recommend aborting the mission altogether, going as far as to suggest returning to Egypt. But 2 of the scouts—Joshua and Caleb—report that the land is very, very good, and advise that the Israelites faithfully and fearlessly proceed. Joshua and Caleb are not only in the minority; they are holding an idea that is extremely unpopular, and they come dangerously close to being stoned to death by the community for their views (6).

The position of underdog, as Joshua and Caleb represent, is the true north of courage. And to speak from courage requires moving aside fear. If anger is disguised fear, and fear removed reveals love, then it is plausible that self-love begets courage. Which suggests the reward for risk is bumping against the underlying matter of love that lives in each of

us. The challenge is to discard the complications, the doubts, and the fearful vulnerabilities to feeling at risk. Yet again, at risk for what: the off-chance of being stoned by the community, or for daring to take a stand. The consequences for speaking out loud cannot be predicted, but it is certainly easier to imagine the repercussions in a life of silent self-hate. Joshua and Caleb had to tell the truth, their truth, in reporting the conditions of the Promised Land. Their behavior and willingness to disagree with their comrades took all of their strength, and nothing less than every kilo of courage. Rather than being pelted by community, there is a kinder, more respectful way to begin to surrender into love.

The relinquishing of self to facilitate collapsing into the larger Self is merely an urgent request to abandon the difficulties in the bid to be fully seen. Assuredly, whether acknowledged or not, the desire to experience that we matter is critical to feeling loved. Rachel Naomi Remen, founder and director of the Institute for the Study of Health and Illness at Commonweal, offers retreats for cancer patients which gives her a valued perspective on love. She said:

Perhaps something about knowing that others care, that your suffering matters to other people, your joy matters to other people, you matter to other people – that strengthens this deep impulse toward life that is in every one of us. We find this in community and in intimacy. Being loved is kind of a grace. It's not earned. It's just somebody reflecting back that this little life that we have, this single human being, makes a difference in this world... So much in our culture tends to erase our uniqueness

(1997, 205).

And yet, even though this experience lives outside of the Self glowing in the validation of others, it is a gentle beginning to feeling not only loved, but deserving of love. It is healthy, and often necessary to focus on loving another in order to feel loved. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of Nazi Germany, wrote of the love for his wife that kept him alive:

I did not know whether my wife was live, and I had no means of finding out; but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I would still have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would be just as vivid and just as satisfying (Frankl, 2006, 38-39).

It was his focus on the love outside of himself that brought fulfillment. As long as his wife lived inside him, love of her kept him alive.

### **8. Getting to Love: Belief, Intention, and Breath**

Nearly all religions provide the doctrine for finding one's way to the Self. However, when following directions to assemble a piece of furniture, for example, unless one is a carpenter, rarely is the final product a perfectly nailed together bookshelf. Chances are,



one of those nails found its way clean through to empty space on the other side, missing wood completely. Yet, after further ordeal and trouble-shooting, the shelf will, ultimately, hold books. Religious doctrines are perfectly suited for the religiously inclined, but what is necessary is perseverance and belief, or faith; or, intention – as in “meaning is an intention of mind” (Edmund Husserl, as cited in May, 1969, 227). It would seem the most common intention of mankind, is to ‘know or feel’ God so that it is not as if we are alone. And by using the pronoun God, all Divine beings are inferred: Allah, Mohammad, Jesus, Adonai, whomever one worships. The human craving for purpose and meaning, and love, are woven throughout religions all purporting to fill the hole in the soul. The quest for self-love incorporates rigor and determination. The teaching that touches the heart will be the conduit to the crack of energy that will expose and soften the mind. Incidentally, cosmologically, our inherited story gave to us a fortuitous explanation of purpose, but the universe has begun to change and in kind, ‘we’ are responding. Dominican Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, (1986) states:

What’s happened in the past half-hour and especially in the past few moments, in what we might call the scientific-industrial age, is that our knowledge has exploded, and ‘our power has expanded so astronomically, that through us, and what we now know, the earth is coming to a new moment of awareness... Our understanding has become so deepened and broadened that we are literally bringing the earth into a whole new phase in its unfolding (13).

The ancient religions have shepherded us and allowed us to come into this awakening. Buddhism has a remedy and it is to follow the eight-fold path. Once adhering to a life within the eight-fold path, we are led to liberation, also referred to as nirvana. Buddhism insists that we are living at the full effect of our cravings, aversions, and a life rooted in ignorance. Once we have mastered the listings of all the rights in the path, our cravings, our aversions, and our ignorance, will be quieted. Also, once accomplished, we will know that there is no permanence, only change.

Hinduism offers the possibility of equanimity, and a higher goal for the ascension of self towards Self. In ascension, the concepts of karma and reincarnation are introduced for there is always the yearning for Self. Reincarnation and karma tend to work together for the common good, whereas, one asks for the other; but as beliefs, they each stand on their own. Reincarnation allows the spiritual essence of a soul to continue on body after body once the host body has died. The soul is doing what it is meant to do in its' travels to reach the true Self, leading to the final liberation of its earthly duties.

Jesus taught through parables which asked his followers to use their minds and make their own decisions. At the same time, he consistently asked for their faith, and covertly reminded them to not question his words from God. His words were meant to inspire a voluntary path to self-transformation, or *metanoia*. The transliteration of his words asked for and hoped for a transformative relationship both in behavior and in mind. He wanted his people to want to learn, dig a little deeper, ask more of them-selves, and look inward. His teachings amounted to an insistence of expansion of the self – *metanoia*. The answer lies within, not with-out.

Islam honors the concept of *Tawhīd*, which at its very essence is the belief in one

esteemed Being. There is only One, the One that is above all that is known in the universe. In this devout belief, there is also the inclusion of a community of believers. However, the community can be situated anywhere there is a devout worship to Allah. This structure successfully spreads the love and fervor for Allah around the world, thus promoting and exhibiting more love and fervor. Islam begins with a love for Allah, and is determined to stand for their love, no matter what. Islam and Christianity, though perceptively different, also stand in the same footprint of God. Where divide and conquer may be easily mis-construed, the indication remains one and the same. Pratt (1996) remarks: "The issue is not about God, or Allah, as such: it is about our human experience of, and resultant conception of, the Divine. Each faith intuitively proclaims and believes in one God: the oneness of Deity is the precondition of monotheism" (271). In kind, as he observes, "Religion is a human activity" (Pratt, 1987, 37); thus, there will be human differences, reactions, and behaviors to account for.

Then there is Taoism which is most intimately aligned with the wairua of this thesis. The essence of Tao is a way of walking in the world knowing that everything in the universe is alive. Our surroundings have a pulse and rhythm that beat as one, and at any time we can dance to their truth. It is in the magnificence of our natural habitat that one can see and feel that we are all moving together as one. In Tao the answers are in nature, the living reality. Again, there is no need to seek outside what is currently present. The intention is to acknowledge and learn from what is directly in front of you.

Religion is commonly referred to as an answer to all questions, and the guidance towards all answers. The desire to belong, the desire to adhere, the desire to create a common bond, is core in humanity. Religion offers a place to come together as one in

belief, one in commonality, and one in the same. On the other hand, it appears that religion and God have been joined as one, where there are two. Meister Eckhart's beautiful and oft repeated sentiment about God, wrote, "Pear seeds grow into pear trees; nut seeds into nut trees and God-seed into God" (Eckhart, 1981, 251). Religion does not necessarily stress the hunt for Self, nevertheless, it is an avenue which may lead to love. We flourish only at the velocity we are able, as breathless expansion gracefully allows while on the path to discover God, which also may lead to love. If one holds that God is within; thus declaring we are God, and all creations are God, then these paths will converge. In so doing, there must be permission for our diversity, as we are all God-seed. And to seek the source of our God-seed will only, yet again, lend the return to Self, to love.

Earlier, mindfulness was proposed as a way to shift perception; however, a shift can occur in simultaneous ways. To begin the behavior of mindfulness, enthusiasm and desire are extremely helpful companions. Without them, the journey is possible, but increasingly arduous. With that, the portal to authentic transformation is available. To further explain mindfulness, or what might be considered as an awakening of heart, are these words from Thich Nhat Hanh (2004): "When you breathe in, you recognize at that moment that this is an inbreath; when you breathe out, you are aware of the fact that this is an outbreath. Recognizing what is there in the present moment is attention. That is the energy of mindfulness" (17-18). Throughout this discussion, I have asserted that love is simple, we make it complicated. To become present to your life is challenging, yet only one tool is needed to pry open limited thinking: simply, breath. As the spirit of life rushes into a newborn through first breath, so does our life become renewed through beginning

to breathe. In tandem with breath, is the reminder that without belief as a passenger on this voyage, the relinquishing of defense is nearly impossible. Braden (2008) reminds us, “Belief is defined as the certainty that comes from accepting what we *think is true* in our mind, coupled with what we *feel is true* in our hearts” (52). Thus, the mind with its issues of power and control must at least think in alignment with the heart. There is no trickery to bumping into self-love for the truth in the beat of a heart, can be heard. The desire must be alive in the heart.

To begin watching the breath and connecting to love, one ritual is meditation. The stillness that is possible brings the calm that orbits our presence into the present. Once the quieting of the self is lulled, the momentous opportunity is to experience the love of Divine Self; however, without consistency and commitment, the ego may cling too tightly for this possibility. If there is an interest in communing with your soul thus enriching the souls’ journey towards ascension, re-learning focused breathing is vital. Additionally, through the welcoming of more breath the inherent difference of health to the body is profound.

Furthermore, for the pondering, scientists have been willing to consider the plausibility that meditation affects the brain, and that the brain can change solely in response to the internal machinations of thought. Andrew Newberg, a neuroscientist, has studied the neuroplasticity of the brain for over a decade. He has focused primarily on the brain activity of religious people. His work continues to provide evidence routinely suggesting that we become what we think; that the matter of the brain is an impressionable, responsive material rather than the folkloric prophecy that defines the brain as a slab of cement. His work with meditators, Franciscan nuns, and Tibetan

Buddhists, has revealed that while in meditation their brains go dark in the parietal lobe. The parietal lobe is the area of the brain related to sensory information, and sensory information helps us to form our sense of self. Newburg says, “The more you focus on something — whether that's math or auto racing or football or God — the more that becomes your reality, the more it becomes written into the neural connections of your brain” (as cited in Hagerty, 2009, 1).

The souls' desire is to expand and grow. What the soul needs in order to do this is our participation. Once we sign on, for whatever reason, the true partnership between personality and soul will be positioned for genuine results which can offer a more fulfilled life. If we are willing to trust in a situation where there is no evidence, the elevated awakening of soul and truth will occur. Mindfulness through breath introduces the suspension of thought, and in that ether, all is available. Specifically, the knowing of Divinity, of miracles, love absolute as it permeates from outside in, and inside out in the circular exchange of love. Denis de Rougemont (1956) said of the soul:

Indeed, I myself feel that it is a communion rather than a union; for, as Eckhart expresses it elsewhere, when ‘the soul escapes from its nature, its being and its life, and is born into the Divinity, no distinction remains but this: the Divinity is still God, and the soul is still a soul. The spiritual act of love is initial, not final (155).

Simply because we do not remember our beginnings, does not mean it is absent. Breath alone can remind us, for hidden in us is the memory of who we used to be. Our soul wants us to remember in order to continue its journey to another plane.

### **Conclusion**

My poppy, Jacob, nudged my soul along. He loved me fully, out loud. He was most comfortable speaking Yiddish, and he did the best he could with English, but it was not spoken language that had me know. It was everything that we did not have to say. Though I was just a child, I understood that feeling between us to be unconditional love in its glorious, righteous, parade of light. I knew that the feeling of joy and excitement between us was our hearts' content. He was beautifully, stoically, gruffly, compact in his Polish body built to last, with the scent of *Lucky Strikes* hanging on his breath. But his breath was my salvation. With him, I could forget my mind, and allow his love to throw me into my heart. He hardly ever used my name, and called me his 'little Cossack.' Of course, years later I found out that a 'Cossack' is a Russian soldier who destroys villages; but no matter. Sometimes I think forgetfulness is mindfulness due to their similar qualities. My poppy's expression of love for me absented my thinking, much like mindfulness, and I was able to abandon myself into his arms. With trust, with happiness, with courage, and with absolute certainty, I would be held in pure love. I would run to him, he would open his arms, and there we stayed, laughing in the language of our love. Simple. We make it complicated.

We can, the moment we decide, begin a walk with love that will blossom anew. The presence of Divine love lives everywhere. It lives in the insistent tapping of the

sparrow on my window convinced there are branches behind the glass. It lives in the messages that only living waters can reveal. It lives in the silence of knowing God in moments of despair. Rabbi Kushner reminds us:

When our life is filled with the desire to see the holiness in everyday things, something magical begins to happen. A feeling of peace emerges. We begin to see nurturing aspects of daily living that were previously hidden to us. When we remember that everything has God's fingerprints on it, that alone makes it special. If we remember this spiritual fact while we are dealing with a difficult person or struggling to pay our bills, it broadens our perspective... Somewhere, in the back of your mind, try to remember that everything has God's fingerprints on it. The fact that we can't see the beauty in something doesn't suggest that it's not there. Rather, it suggests that we are not looking carefully enough or with a broad enough perspective to see it (as cited in Carlson, 1997, 121-122).

It lives in the willingness to love the self, so that the greater Self can be revealed. And it lives in the soul's desire to expand.



**Love has in it no element of fear, but perfect love drives away fear.**

(1 John 4:18, *Weymouth New Testament*).

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