

*“it is not how much you do, but how much love you put into the doing that matters..... We can do small things with great love.”*

## Mother Teresa

Anxiously, I exited the crowded market in the small town of Puttaparthi India, where they had recently added a miniscule refrigerated section to the only ‘supermarket’ in this remote village. Having just finished the morning leg of my twice daily mission to feed the stray dogs that were wandering solo or in small packs on the perimeter or within the ashram, I was frantic, as I was completely out of cheese. On my way back to the hotel, I had noticed a very young female standing in the middle of the street, seemingly oblivious to the loud screeching of the horns of the cars and the auto-rickshaws. Swaying with weakness, with every rib protruding from her wasted form, she stood confused and unresponsive. I had been afraid that if I left her to purchase the cheese, I would not be able to find her again in the throng of people mobbing the street. Impatiently, I attempted to rush past the guard at the door, who seemed diabolically intent on making me wait, as he checked my receipt to verify that I was not a shoplifter. Tearing out of the store, I ran out into the street, but she was no where to be seen. Finally, I could breath a sigh of relief, when I noticed her a few hundred yards away.

Without a knife to cut through the heavy plastic packaging, I hastily tore it with my teeth, then began biting off small chunks of the cheese. She had the softest brightest eyes, startling in contrast to her emaciated body. When I tried handing her the pieces she backed away warily, never taking her eyes off of me, so I lightly tossed the cheese at her feet. She sniffed it, and gingerly oh so gingerly tried to take it into her mouth. Not having eaten in a very long time it almost seemed as if she had lost the ability to chew. Gradually she was able to ingest it, and slowly painfully slowly she began to eat the pieces laying before her. As I reached the end of the pound, she began to take it from my hands.

How happy I was when I saw her the next day, noticeably stronger! The protein and fat from the cheese, had given her strength. That was exactly what I had been hoping for. When I saw the dozens of stray dogs rooting around in the garbage dumps for scraps, and

noticed that the prize was usually pieces of stale bread or white rice or curry, garbage that the restaurants dumped into the vacant lots for the poor, I imagined that these unfortunate creatures probably had never eaten meat or animal protein in their life. All the dogs seemed to be under two years old. They most probably didn't live long after that.



The joy that I experienced feeding these dog cannot be described. The connection that I felt to them, the sense of purpose, of usefulness, left no room for the anxieties, doubts, and worries, that usually crowd my mind. Somehow, my little sense of ego dissolved into the urgency of the moment and I felt at peace. I cannot change their lot, but I could bring them a daily dose of joy, hope and loving kindness. Although these were feral dogs, never having known the love and security of a family, they behaved like perfect ladies and gentlemen. Despite their starved condition. they surrounded me, sitting patiently, awaiting their turn to take the bit of cheese gently and delicately from my hand, their gaze continually fixed upon mine, eyes bright with expectation with their tails hesitantly wagging. One or two

of them could be a bit greedy and try to grab or to push another dog away, but with a gentle reprimand, they would fall into line. Occasionally when one would become submissive or frightened and would run off as an alpha approached, I would throw the cheese their way, but this seemed to scare them more, which made me very sad.

I love them all: mangy, skinny, ears torn off from battles over turf and food, I cannot differentiate between them. In their eyes, I see God.



One I call the monkey dog: he spends all the day under a big tree where the monkeys gather. He is a rather plump fellow (lucky him), but totally bald from the mange. He is fascinated with the monkeys, barking and barking at them, like my dogs do with squirrels. He takes the cheese thrown at him, but goes right back to barking at the monkeys.

A favorite pair that I met on the road to my hotel, was a big spotted male and a small delicate golden brown female. They seemed to me a couple, like Lady and the Tramp, inseparable companions. As I stretched out my hand to offer the cheese to the male, he became demanding and vocal and howled for the food. But in truth, it was all about love. After he ate, he kept pushing himself into my leg, so close wanting to be near me, overflowing with gratitude. Both Tramp and his girlfriend stayed right by my side, licking my hands as they followed me down the path.



A very holy experience for me was the day I discovered a deserted field, behind the sheds in the ashram, a place that was obviously the 'cave' of the dogs. There were about twenty of them resting in the shade, in the shallow ditches that they had dug for themselves. As I approached, they barked protectively, territorially, ferociously. But love has no fear. I softly called them over, offering the cheese, and within seconds, they were all docilely awaiting their turn. They became my friends. When workmen drew near to watch the unusual

scene, my canine companions ran towards them barking protectively. It was exquisitely moving to me that these wild dogs frequently abused by many of the Indians who in general have no warm feelings towards them, had the same sweet loving dispositions as my own dogs. I used to think that street dogs were different, like street people. But no, we are all the same. Although outwardly for the most part they look like train wrecks, they are open and trusting, wanting only food and affection. It is nothing short of a miracle that despite being treated so poorly, they still have so much love in them.

My joy was in the giving. I expect nothing. But how it fills my heart to see them happy!

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*“We can do small things with great love.”*

These are two of my favorite quotes of Mother Teresa gleaned from the books lining the sacred bookcase in my bedroom, that calming centering presence in the swirling agitation of my mind and my life.

I just caught the tail end of Diane Sawyer’s master class on Oprah’s new network, and this seems to me the truth that has evaded her. With a big heart and much compassion, she bemoaned the loss of potential of the youth in Appalachia, that because of the lack of money, although they dreamed the same dreams as the privileged class, their opportunities in life were severely limited and this was a tragedy. I have always admired Diane Sawyer, and I can’t pretend to know her from this last ten minutes of her interview, but somehow I think there is a deeper truth. One’s occupation, what status a person achieves in life, how many awards won, what exalted position attained or how much money one earns, has very little meaning, I believe, when it comes time to tally up our credits and debits at the completion of our lives. The world is God’s stage, and each one of us is as important to the play as the next. Every role in a drama is essential, a king is no more important than a servant. It is how well we play the part that has been assigned us that counts.

Every one of us, no matter what our outer circumstance, can show love and compassion. Actually, as it says in the New Testament, it is harder for a rich man to get to heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Any mother would know, that it is the love behind the awkward handwriting of their child and the pennies saved or the effort made behind the home made gift that will touch her heart, much more than the expensive store bought gift carelessly given. It is the heart that touches us. It is the heart that counts.



I freely admit that I am much influenced by my 31 years of following, studying, and struggling to put into practice Eastern mysticism. I do understand that without a belief in reincarnation and karma, it is difficult to make sense of the suffering that we see around us.. But even without that as a very young child, I understood that money did not bring happiness. It was love that I craved, that I believe we all crave. We typically seek it from the material world, in the form of a partner or recognition from the world for our gifts, talents, achievement in the form of accolades, awards, the association with so called VIPs, money or the possession of expensive homes or cars

and other things. We look for love and satisfaction from the outside world. But all the prizes or material wealth in the world cannot bring us happiness. We don't have to look farther than Entertainment Tonight, observing the lives of some of our most famous celebrities, with their problems with drugs, drinking, divorce and so forth. If money and awards and celebrity brings happiness, they should be among the happiest of all people. Desires and the subsequent fulfillment of, brings only more and more desires with the consequent need to satisfy those as well.

It seems to me that love and happiness are interchangeable. That love is our true nature has been expounded on by the sages for eons. The mistake is that we seek it from the outside. Love comes and grows by giving it, not by frantically seeking it outside of us. Like St. Francis said, "it is by giving that we receive." The source of Love is actually within ourselves. It is like Dorothy's red slippers in the Wizard of Oz. We have it all already, we only have learn how to tap into it. All that we seek is already there.



So many negative emotions arise from not truly understanding this. Envy for example. It is so hard for many of us to be truly happy for another's good fortune, especially when it seems that we are not so lucky. It comes, I believe, from a lack of faith, of not understanding that where we are right now in our life, is exactly where we should be. Faith knows that whatever we are going through is for a reason, and our struggles or seemingly "bad fortune" are really opportunities we are gifted in order to grow into more evolved souls. Both the king and the servant are equally important. We cannot compare roles. Our souls shine with our divinity when we can feel happiness for the other. And we can all recognize the beauty of this when we see it and the ugliness when the opposite is true.

I do believe that the purpose of our journey here on earth, is to grow and perfect ourselves. The world is our university. When we learn to give, we are helping ourselves much more than the other.

Here is a beautiful little story that bears sharing:

### The Good Fairy's Secret

One day, a young orphan girl was feeling exceptionally sad and lonely, because she had no family and no one to love her. She was walking through a meadow and noticed a small butterfly caught on the thorny branches of a bush.

The butterfly struggled to get free, but the thorns kept cutting into its slender body and fragile wings. The orphan girl carefully pulled away the branches and the thorns, one by one, until the pretty butterfly was freed.

Instead of flying away, the little butterfly changed into a beautiful fairy, right in front of the little girl. The orphan girl rubbed her eyes in disbelief.

"For your wonderful kindness," the good fairy said, "I will grant you any wish you like."

The little girl thought for a moment, then said, "I want to be happy!"

The good fairy replied, “Very well,” and leaned toward the little girl and whispered a secret in her ear. Then *pouf!* the good fairy vanished.

As the little girl grew, no one in the land was as happy as she. Everyone asked her the secret of her happiness. She would only smile and answer, “The secret of my happiness is that I listened to the advice of a good fairy when I was a little girl.”

Eventually the little girl grew very, very old, though her face still beamed with happiness. As she neared her time of passing out of this world, her neighbors gathered around her bed, afraid that her fabulous secret of happiness would pass away with her.

“Tell us, please,” they begged. “Tell us what the good fairy said.”

The lovely older woman simply smiled and said, “She told me that everyone—no matter how secure they seem, no matter how old or young, how rich or poor—had need of me. So I do as much good as I can, whenever and wherever I can.”

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