

Love

What do we really mean when we say we love someone or something? Do we give ourselves to the subject or object of our love, denying ourselves in order to please or build up the other's welfare? Or do we seek to control the subject/object of our love? What is the cost of loving and how do we know that our behavior is actually loving or a means of control, a form of self-indulgence or an easy way out?

In this world of extremes, where everyone is expected to take a moral stance, often there seems to be love for diametrically opposed understanding. Does love of one's religion mean that there is not love for those of a different faith? Does love of one's country mean that we oppose another nation? Can we no longer work together in our personal relationships or in the way we live in the wider world?

These are all huge questions I'm sure we have all asked ourselves at times, and so we should. A life unexamined is a life not lived.

William Blake, a great poet, artist and mystic of the late eighteenth century sets before us such questions in his 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience'. He sets before us the full spectrum of human behavior, the stark extremes, leaving us to work out our own morality and way forward. Nowhere is this clearer than in his poem 'The Clod and the Pebble' from his book '*Songs of Innocence and Experience*'.

*Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a heaven in hell's despair.*

*So sung a little Clod of Clay
Trodden with the cattle's feet,
But a Pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:*

*Love seeketh only itself to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a hell in heaven's despite.'*

He begins by looking at the ideal love that we may have in our days of innocence, how we may begin with a vision of the other, whether it be a future 'lover' or 'believing' in an unquestioning way, the ideals of a group challenging the way we deal with the difficulties in the private and public sphere. Do we become 'downtrodden' as the 'clod of clay', or do we claim authority not only for ourselves or over those who may disagree with us. Does experience 'seeketh only itself to please' and in the process insist that anyone with a different point of view must be wrong.

I don't think we would want either extremes that Blake presents to us, but rather choose the middle way, a balance. We need to learn how to live in relationship, listen to each other, try and understand each other; but this middle way isn't easy, yet as we look at the world around us, it has to be the moral prompted by the poem. 'Reason, Freedom and Tolerance' are needed more now than ever before, but this middle way is the hardest love of all. Perhaps the biggest question for us now, is how we do we love in this world so divided. Without love there can be no peace. 'Blessed be the peacemakers'.