

The Love that Knows No Other

By Munir

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It's Groundhog Day. Does anyone know a good Groundhog Day joke? I keep hearing the same one over and over again...

Groundhogs are the largest member of the squirrel family. They have two layers of fur: a dense grey undercoat and a longer coat of banded "guard" hairs that gives the groundhog a "frosted" appearance. When groundhogs are frightened, the hairs of the tail stand straight up.

Doesn't that sound like us? Actually, groundhog day is perfect for my message today. I want to talk about waking from sleep and coming out of hiding, which we all must do. I want to talk about the difference between living life from the mind and from the heart. I want to talk about what's illusory - the separate self - and what's real, which is true nature.

Rumi says, "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

Let's just sit with that for a moment. Notice Rumi says "seek and find" the barriers to love. He doesn't say, "Get in there, root around and fix this problem." Why is that? Because we put the barriers there in the first place...to protect, to assuage, to hold back, to feel safe. Who we think we are is tied up in them. Can the entity who created this situation also fix it? That's what this talk is really about.

For the person part of us...protecting the heart is a fairly universal reaction to life. Our organ of wholeness, extremely sensitive and miraculous, the heart feels pain quite easily. Life can seem too harsh, too much. So we resist, building up hides over our being. They are like barriers of protection.

Here's what Meister Eckhart says about this: "A human being has so many skins inside, covering the depths of the heart. We know so many things, but we don't know ourselves! Why, thirty or forty skins or hides, as thick and hard as an ox's or bear's, cover the soul. Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there."

How about that image from a man of the middle ages? What are these hides made of? Mostly resistance, and seeking. The accumulation of experiences that we could not handle and stored in our bodies to keep us safe from the next time. Memories,

perceptions, images, held in the body, form hides of protection. It's all resistance to "what is".

What are those hides made of?

Resistance. Resistance to the present moment, or seeking for a better moment in an imaginary future, are the only things that take us away from our true nature. It hurts when we do this, but we do it anyway. There is *no one* who is resisting. So, our hides are made out of resistance and seeking. Why do we resist?

Pain in the heart is unavoidable. Hazrat Inayat Khan said, "Your heart is not living until it has experienced pain... The pain of love breaks open the heart, even if it is as hard as a rock." So, though the imaginary self tries to avoid it, pain increases the heart's capacity to hold Life with its many, apparent opposites, including beauty and horror. It's made for this.

And then Meister Eckhart says, "Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there." What does he mean?

Pema Chodron teaches that "You're all sky; the rest is just the weather." You won't find yourself as an object. Emotions and sensations are just the weather. The sky is...? Pure awareness. Openness, Loving disinterest. Nothing. no-thing at all. I've spoken about the true self here many times before. It is not and cannot be an object in consciousness. We can only *be* it.

But we assume that there is "someone" there to protect. That ego keeps trying to get rid of itself but we're afraid to discover that it may not exist at all. Ramana Maharshi spoke about this. The ego is like a snake we assume is coiled up in a corner. Until we actually see that the snake is actually just a coil of rope, we will still be afraid.

So, "going into our own ground and learning to know ourselves there" means understanding the nature of what we essentially are, in the ground of our being. [All experience occurs in awareness, and that is the ground that we overlook in our exclusive attention on objects, events, and relationships. Everything we know is revealed in the seamless, infinite, ever present field of awareness. When we recognize this, then we start to act differently, coming into congruence with it.

This implies seeing ourselves really clearly. What I can't accept about myself will run my life. Believe me, I know about this. Though I may appear to have my act together, I have

my struggles like everyone else. Mine involve accepting how some things in my nuclear family affected me... just like most everyone else.

So, on groundhog day we can also talk about seeing our shadow but not falling for the illusion that that is what we are. It requires discrimination. The shadow is composed of the elements of ourselves we find unacceptable so we've pushed into the dark recesses of the body. But, in the light of day, under the clear, blue sky of the real Self, the shadow is seen to be not real - just a bundle of sensations.

THAT is the face that I can bring to the world, if I only would. Can I come out of my hole and be that vulnerable? Well, actually, we really don't have a choice about it one way or another.

Love will have its way with us because (the Sufis say) the soul feels restless when we shut away life in our groundhog hole. The very nature of the soul is impersonal, intimate love. We can try to keep it down, but the Lord of Love is actually the one in charge. It is for this reason that Hazrat Inayat Khan taught that we have to take our stand at the top of the mountain, as what we really are, and turn away from all apparent, negative impressions of ourselves.

The impetus to uncover how I've shut love away becomes the increasing imperative of spiritual practice. It gets more intense the longer I try to ignore it. If I am resisting something, things will go wrong, nothing will add up in my life.. This is why Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas says, "If you bring out of you what is within you, it will save you. But if you do not bring out of you what is within you, it will destroy you."

There is no one who resists doing this. Resistance is the very substance of the separate self. If I say, "I must stop resisting", I've just piled on. We simply have to "see" what we are doing.

We confuse life lived from the mind (that is the assumed person), and life lived from our being, from The Real. They appear to be the same, but they are not. We will never find the remedy for inner suffering, nor for injustice, corruption and all the troubles of the world, at the level of mind. If we want to be free, to live fully, to love completely, we have to "go back" further prior to the mind and essentially become nothing at all.

Here's why. All experience happens in subject/object relationship, in the finite mind. But, as HIK says, You will not find yourself as an object in your experience. The soul sees all but cannot see itself. It is not located in space or time. So the fact that my real self is actually the "self of all" sets up a misunderstanding..

Here's how this plays out. I see my friend. I know him in subject/object relationship. I believe he and I are "persons". I have my various projections and ideas about myself, about him, all based on memory, on experience. As a person, separate from me, I can say I "know" him. But, is this really love?

But dropping back, taking the backward step, disidentifying from all qualifications like being a body, thoughts, feelings, sensations; by being nothing at all - it's revealed that my friend and I are already One. No separation. "Only this". Our time together becomes a communion, a moving together, an exploration of being.

Love is the feeling of being "one with" someone or something. With others, we call it love. With something like the forest, we call it beauty.

Where does this sense of "one with" come from? In Being it's a simple recognition that *this* is more real than my concepts, my expectations, my fears, than the feelings and sensations that make up the thick hides I have laid over myself. The hides I put over my soul are made of mind stuff.

Whatever the impressions we have piled up, getting the hides off of our soul is about going deeper and being our real self underneath.

In being, my friend is not different from what I am.

Actually, those barriers we have put up to Love just drop away when we finally "see" what we have been doing. We have to see that the snake is really just a coil of rope. All of these resistances are made of the same stuff - me! Then, like relaxing a tight fist I just let it go. That's what Meister Eckhart means by "Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there."

He further says this, "Spirituality is not to be learned by flight from the world, or by running away from things, or by turning solitary and going apart from the world. Rather, we must learn an inner solitude wherever or with whomever we may be. We must learn to penetrate things and find God there."

So, settling down into our ground, when we meet another in being, there is no "other". This is what he means by an inner solitude "wherever or with whomsoever". Solitude means there is only there is only "You" which and You includes "here" and "Him/Her". *Are you willing to be so alone such that everyone and everything is your Self? Could you ever rest as that, abide as that and let the hides drop away?*

So, to sum up...

I have two choices. I can hold myself separate and settle for “knowing” my friend. Or, I can drop barriers, become nothing and be the *same* as my friend. Recognition of shared being is the Love that Knows No Other. We cannot “stand apart” from something and truly love it.

Love is not an experience a person has. To truly love, we have to become nothing. Love has no object, and it shines forth in being, which is shared existence. We can know with the mind or we can love with our whole being, which is infinitely in love with itself.

Every face is a face of Love, though to the mind it may not seem that way. Look past life’s appearances and (whatever happens) keep that hide off! It’s not called a “hide” for nothing. Don’t work on it. Just relax the tight fist. Relaxing a fist can feel like effort at first, but later it’s a huge relief.

That means my friend and I are one, not two, in the “solitary-ness” of being. I have gone from “knowing” him to “being” him. There really is no one else. There is just you, and you are everyone and everything. It’s the love that knows no object. That is Rumi’s and Meister Eckhart’s message.

Dropping the barriers means becoming so familiar with your real self that you never choose to retreat back into that burrow again. The clear blue sky of you, the open air, in the clear light of day feels way more comfortable than life lived under a hide. It feels great to drop our hides, the overlay of concepts and demands we place on life.

So being a groundhog is not our real self. Our true nature is the bright light of day, pure awareness, unblemished, free and ever present. When we drop being a groundhog there is no need to pull away or hold ourselves separate from “what is”, because we already are that...it’s all “me” anyway. No other persons, places or things. Just THAT - Sufis call it the Beloved.

As Rumi says, “Lovers don’t finally meet somewhere; they’re in each other all along.”

We are in each other all along. We recognize our Self in everyone and everything, and that is love - the “Maha-Love”, the big Love that is the foundation of the universe. It’s not miraculous, enlightened or far off. It’s the recognition of being the same as. When we remove all the barriers to love, everyone and everything shines as our real self.