

**The love is long-suffering, it is kind, the love doth not envy, the love doth not vaunt itself, is not puffed up, doth not act unseemly, doth not seek its own things, is not provoked, doth not impute evil, rejoiceth not over the unrighteousness, and rejoiceth with the truth; all things it beareth, all it believeth, all it hopeth, all it endureth. The love doth never fail ... and the greatest of these is love.**

*1 Corinthians 13: 4-8, 13*

Spend some time thinking of your special times and 'reciprocal love' moments. Are these things you would remember to offer thanks for, to acknowledge the value of such special events in your life and prayerfully ask for more such moments? The Divine is found in the ordinary, the everyday events of our life; looking for aspects of "the love" around us can be a daily task of awareness and searching for what is good.

## Loving others - reciprocal love



**We love because he first loved us.**

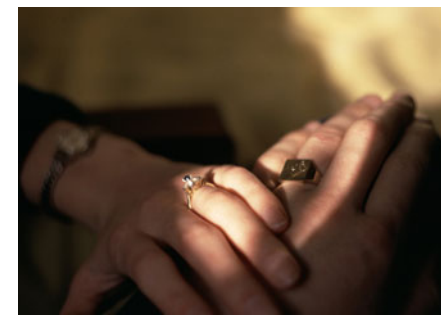
*1 John 4:19*

The way we live is a key indicator of how our faith, our belief, our sense of right and wrong really impacts in daily life. Relating to others, working together to generate constructive, positive, useful and productive outcomes can give all parties a sense of joy and fulfilment.

When we find satisfaction in a united purpose or shared understanding then it may not be too hard for us to feel something of heavenly joy within those circumstances, to be aware of real delight and to know that the feeling is mutual. Finding times when our joys are truly shared and reciprocated in this way is a little taste of the deeper spiritual delights we are all made to enjoy.

Our experience of life is that we can generally choose our friends and those we wish to be close to; where this affection is mutual and reciprocated there is the potential for stronger and closer relationships to grow. Friendships change and develop and we know that some will persist and strengthen over time while others diminish. Being with someone else who shares a similar delight means our joy can be shared and communicated - it really does become even nicer and more enjoyable to know the feeling is mutual, shared and appreciated.

We understand that in marriage a couple make a commitment to work towards mutual happiness, sharing love and understanding as they go through life together. The love of husband for wife is also used by the Lord to express the His love for the human race; Old Testament prophets speak of the faithless Israel deserting



her God and of the constant, unfailing love the 'husband/God' for the 'wife/Israel' through all circumstances. A happier marriage is within the vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is of the "Holy City ... prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

## Teaching

Reciprocal love really begins with the Lord; the author of John's Gospel and Revelation is also the author of three New Testament letters and he makes it very clear to his readers that **"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him"** *1John 4:16* and in verse 19 at the head of the first page **"We love because he first loved us."** His love is the starting point for all that is good within us, and as recipients of that love then we have the potential to express and share it through our life.

Reciprocal love requires each individual to be unselfish and generous. Putting the things we know to be good and true into practice in our life, using the knowledge we have to discern and discriminate between what we should and should not do is one very down to earth way our spiritual development takes place. By prioritising others above ourselves and seeking to be of use and service rather than expecting others to meet our needs, then the direction of our life become less self-centred and more aware of those around us.

**The essence of love is that what is ours should belong to someone else. Feeling the joy of someone else as joy within ourselves - that is loving ... divine love cannot fail to be manifested in others whom it loves and who love it.** *Divine Love and Wisdom 47-48*

## Bible

**So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.** *Matthew 7:12*

Jesus spoke very clearly about the way we should be showing love in our daily life and many scriptures and faiths have words very similar to this 'Golden Rule' of considerate living at their heart. His original listeners would have understood Jesus to mean the historical books of Moses by 'the Law,' and the Prophets were part of the Jewish scriptures too; so these words encapsulate the essence of all that we need to understand in terms of being loving to others, loving the neighbour. The desire for reciprocal love has to be within each person for it to truly happen and we

are also given warnings against harsh and unkind dealings with one another in our decisions and actions.

Things can be manifested as an unpleasant opposite of love and kindness too. Although it is wonderful to think of the pleasant life we could all share if everyone was gently disposed towards showing love and tolerance, the sad fact is our existence is also marked by the times we and others fall into the states indicated in the words below. Rather than an outpouring of love we find we have encouraged narrow minds and unsympathetic feelings within us and been rewarded in similar ways. All too easily we can find ourselves encouraging malicious thoughts and these aspects of our character will also tend to expand their own unpleasant qualities to be shared more widely. Hence the warning to be on our guard: **Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.** *Matthew 7:1-2*

These words from Jesus remind us of the way we ought to be aiming to conduct all our relationships; with those we count as friends or strangers the same considerations apply. It requires us to have self control, restraint and discipline as we work to keep our thoughts towards mutual consideration and love rather than falling into judgemental and overly critical mindsets.



## Experience and Meditation

Recall times when you have experienced the joy of reciprocal love; sharing fully in another's joy and realising they share the same delight in your happiness too. It may be an apparently trivial moment that unites you; it doesn't have to be a hugely significant event and we can look for the mutual love and joys of heaven in the most ordinary of situations.

These verses from 1 Corinthians are from Young's literal translation; perhaps these less familiar phrases may highlight different aspects of what is here called "the love".