

**A Gift of Love:  
Liberating Love  
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How can something as amorphous as love—a concept that takes many forms, that can shift from day to day, sometimes minute to minute—be liberating?

Chalice Lighting: The Names of Love *Rev. Scott Tayler, Team Lead of Soul Matters*

We light this chalice in the names of love. The love of family that brings us into being, allows us to bloom, and then sends us on our way with courage, knowing we can return no matter what.

The love of partnered hearts that teach us to trust and help us know that who we are does not end at the barrier of our own skin.

The love of friends who help us feel seen and sing our song back to us when we cannot hear it with our ears alone.

The love of community that bathes us in belonging and calls us to see the needs of others as our own.

And the greatest love: the love that will not let us go, even in our fear, even in our failure, even when we are lonely or lost.

Love invites us home. If we listen, it is doing so, even today.

- What is Love?
  - a neurochemical process, but it evolves into a lot more
  - Love is the energy of life
    - It's what motivates us to get up each day and keep going
    - It gives life purpose and meaning
  - Rough definition: active commitment to the well-being of another
    - but what we think of as another person's well-being may not be the same thing they would want for their lives
- So what the heck is Liberating Love?
  - Liberation means being free of ties that are unhealthy, being able to revel in bonds that feel good, that do good
  - Liberating love
    - is a love that we can give and receive freely because we fully know and understand what is at stake
    - goes beyond conventional notions of love

- emphasizes freedom, acceptance, and personal growth
  - dynamic and personal experience that unfolds uniquely for each of us
- Love provides a sense of belonging and a sense of freedom
- It does not try to control or manipulate others or reach fulfillment through the destiny of others
- navigate life's challenges with courage and compassion
- invites us into a sacred communion with the divine and with one another
- move beyond the confines of dogma and doctrine
- transcend the limitations of our own understanding
- Key aspects of liberating love:
  - Freedom from Judgment
    - creates a space where we can express ourselves
      - Authentically
      - without fear of judgment
      - free from societal expectations
      - free from the fear of being rejected for who we are
    - involves accepting others and ourselves
      - with compassion and understanding,
      - transcending societal norms or prejudices that may otherwise create divisions
    - *encourages* us to love without judgment
    - also *allows* us to love and be loved without fear of judgment
    - encourages autonomy and a rejection of oppressive norms that limit personal freedom
    - break chains of fear, insecurity, and doubt
  - Joy and Fulfillment:
    - we sometimes look for fulfillment in ways that seem good but often leave us feeling empty
      - Loving and being loved make life worth living
    - source of happiness that goes beyond external circumstances, rooted in the deep satisfaction that comes from authentic connection, self-discovery, and living a life aligned with one's values
    - Only by walking in love—putting love into action by continually reaching out to others and making an effort to

show them love through various acts of kindness—can we truly find what we desperately seek

- Personal Growth
  - catalyst for personal growth, positive change, transformation and self-discovery
  - allows us to be our authentic selves
    - fosters an environment where we can explore our potential, overcome challenges, and evolve on our spiritual or life journeys
- Courage to Be Authentic
  - provides courage to be authentic and true to ourselves
  - encourages us to express our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs openly
  - fosters an environment where we can live in alignment with our values
- Acceptance and Self-Love
  - we sometimes have times in our lives when we believe we are unloved or have no one to love
    - develop this mind-set because we are looking for fulfillment in ways that seem good at first but often leave us feeling frustrated, disappointed and empty inside
    - If we dwell constantly on their negative thoughts, we become extremely unhappy and depressed
  - involves embracing ourselves with all strengths and imperfections
  - encourages self-love and self-acceptance, fostering a positive relationship with one's own identity and experiences
  - provides the courage to step outside of our comfort zone
    - fosters an environment where we can express ourselves freely
  - extends beyond the self, encouraging us to accept others without judgment, recognizing the beauty in diversity
  - When we keep our own self-worth in our minds, hearts, and in our words and actions, seeing the worth of another is easier
  - To love another we must love ourselves
    - One way that we love ourselves is by keeping our own boundaries for our personal sense of safety,

- well-being and health
  - we know what we want and need and can identify how other people make us feel
  - We are liberated from fearing other people or their rejection because we know who we are
- Connection and Unity
  - dissolves feelings of isolation, fostering a sense of belonging
  - fosters a deep sense of connection with others, promoting unity and a shared sense of humanity
  - connects people on a deeper level
    - goes beyond superficial differences
    - encourages recognition of the interconnection with the larger world
  - creates a supportive community
    - recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every individual
    - promotes an inclusive and diverse community where we can express our unique identities, beliefs, and experiences without fear of rejection
- Forgiveness and Healing
  - has the power to heal emotional wounds and promote forgiveness
  - allows us to let go of past hurts
    - provides willingness to move forward
- Empowerment and Empathy
  - empowers us to empathize with others and make a positive impact
  - encourages a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others and the broader community
    - fosters desire to contribute to positive change
- Spiritual Connection:
  - may manifest as a spiritual experience, connecting some to a higher purpose or sense of the divine
  - may involve a deepening of our spiritual beliefs and practices
  - encouragement to embrace a spiritual path that is both personal and collectively empowering
  - creating a space for spiritual exploration and growth within a supportive community

- Pagan view of liberating love
  - celebrate the inherent magic that resides within each being
    - recognition that divinity, sacred spark, resides not only in the natural world but also in the hearts of everyone
    - It's a call to love and honor the divine within ourselves and each other
  - allows us to embrace the ever-changing nature of existence
    - to let go of that which no longer serves us
    - to welcome new beginnings
    - intimately connected to the cycles of nature: waxing and waning of the moon, the ebb and flow of the tides, the eternal dance of life and death
  - cast aside judgments and prejudices that linger in the shadows
    - honor the balance of light and darkness, light and shadow, joy and sorrow
    - Liberating Love dissolves the illusion of separation, uniting us as one with the earth, the elements, and each other

“It is essential that our love be liberating, not possessive We must at all times give those we love the freedom to be themselves Love affirms the other as other It does not possess and manipulate another as mine”  
 — Jesuit author John Powell

#### Story: The Cracked Pot

A water bearer had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years, this went on daily, with the bearer bringing in only one and a half pots full of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. “I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you”. The bearer asked, “Why? What are you ashamed

of?” The Pot replied, “For these past two years I am able to deliver only half of my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master’s house. Because of my flaws, you don’t get full value for your efforts”.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion, he said, “As we return to the house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.” As they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it somewhat. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, “Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot’s side? That’s because I have always known about your crack, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you’ve watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my table. Without you being just the way you are, we would not have this beauty to grace our house.”

Moral: Each of us has our own unique flaws. We’re all cracked pots. In this world, nothing goes to waste. You may think like the cracked pot that you are inefficient or useless in certain areas of your life, but somehow these flaws can turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

Applying "liberating love" in everyday life

- involves cultivating a mindset and adopting behaviors that promote personal growth, connection with others, and a sense of freedom
- practical ways us can integrate the concept of liberating love into their daily experiences
  - Practice Self-Love and Self-Acceptance:
    - Start by embracing and accepting yourself as you are
    - Celebrate your strengths and acknowledge areas for growth
    - Treat yourself with kindness, compassion, and the understanding that you are deserving of love
  - Express Gratitude:
    - Cultivate a habit of expressing gratitude for the people, experiences, and opportunities in your life

- Gratitude opens the heart and fosters a positive outlook, contributing to a sense of liberating love
- Be Present in Relationships:
  - Engage fully in your relationships by being present and attentive
  - Listen actively to others, seek to understand their perspectives, and communicate openly
  - Liberating love thrives on genuine connections and authentic communication
- Forgive and Let Go:
  - Practice forgiveness, both for yourself and others
  - Let go of grudges and resentments, recognizing that holding onto negativity hinders personal growth and the experience of liberating love
- Challenge Judgments and Assumptions:
  - Be mindful of judgments and assumptions, both about yourself and others
  - Liberating love encourages an open mind and a willingness to see beyond superficial labels or preconceived notions
- Actively Support Others:
  - Be a source of support and encouragement for those around you
  - Offer a helping hand, lend a listening ear, or provide assistance without expecting anything in return
  - Acts of kindness contribute to a culture of liberating love
- Advocate for Equality and Justice:
  - Stand up against injustice and advocate for equality
  - Liberating love extends beyond personal relationships to societal structures
  - Take actions that contribute to a more just and equitable world
- Set Healthy Boundaries:
  - Establish and communicate healthy boundaries in your relationships
  - Liberating love involves respecting both your needs and the needs of others
  - Clear boundaries create a space for authentic connection and mutual growth
- Engage in Acts of Self-Care:

- Prioritize self-care to nurture your well-being
    - Whether it's taking time for relaxation, pursuing hobbies, or seeking professional support when needed, self-care is an essential aspect of liberating love for oneself
  - Encourage Inclusivity:
    - Celebrate diversity and encourage inclusivity in your social circles
    - Liberating love embraces the uniqueness of us and fosters an environment where everyone feels valued and accepted
  - Practice Mindfulness:
    - Cultivate mindfulness to be fully present in each moment
    - Mindfulness allows you to appreciate the richness of life, fostering a sense of liberation from worries about the past or anxieties about the future
  - Engage in Lifelong Learning:
    - Stay curious and engage in lifelong learning
    - Liberating love involves a commitment to personal and intellectual growth
    - Be open to new ideas, perspectives, and experiences
- By incorporating these practices into daily life, us can create a foundation for experiencing liberating love
  - It's a dynamic and ongoing process that involves intentional choices, self-reflection, and a commitment to fostering positive connections with oneself and others

### Applying "liberating love" to a conflict

Martin Luther King: "In speaking of love we are not referring to some sentimental emotion. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense[...] When we speak of loving those who oppose us [...] we speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word Agape. Agape means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate; it means understanding, redeeming goodwill for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return."

It was a love that demanded that one stand up for oneself and tells those who oppress that what they were doing was wrong.

- Applying the principles of liberating love to conflicts requires patience,



- commitment, and a genuine desire for positive transformation
- involves creating an environment where us can move beyond adversarial positions to embrace a more compassionate and collaborative approach
- involves fostering understanding, compassion, and connection in order to transcend the tensions and find a resolution
- Principles and strategies:
  - Empathy and Understanding:
    - Cultivate empathy by seeking to understand the perspectives and emotions of all parties involved
    - acknowledge the humanity in others, even when there are differences
    - Listen actively and without judgment to the concerns and experiences of those in conflict
  - Open Communication:
    - Encourage open and honest communication
    - Create a space where us feel safe expressing their thoughts and feelings
    - promote dialogue that is constructive, respectful, and aimed at finding common ground
  - Forgiveness and Healing:
    - Emphasize the importance of forgiveness and healing
    - let go of grudges and resentments to create space for understanding and reconciliation
    - Encourage us to acknowledge past hurts and work towards mutual healing
  - Shared Values and Common Goals:
    - Identify shared values and common goals among conflicting parties
    - recognize that, despite differences, there are often underlying aspirations that can serve as a foundation for resolution
    - Highlighting these shared elements can foster unity
  - Conflict Transformation:
    - Shift the focus from winning or losing to transforming the conflict
    - seek to move beyond a win-lose mentality
      - embrace a collaborative approach that aims for a resolution beneficial to all parties involved
  - Inclusivity and Diversity:

- Acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of perspectives within the conflict
  - Aim for inclusivity, recognizing the value of different viewpoints
  - Encourage a collaborative exploration of how various perspectives can contribute to a more comprehensive solution
- Creative Problem-Solving:
  - Engage in creative problem-solving that goes beyond traditional solutions
  - Encourage thinking outside the box and exploring innovative approaches that address the root causes of the conflict
    - brainstorming and co-creating solutions together
- Mediation and Facilitation:
  - Consider involving a neutral mediator or facilitator to guide the resolution process
  - Recognize the importance of a supportive and impartial presence that can help us navigate the complexities of the conflict and facilitate dialogue
- Educational Initiatives:
  - Promote educational initiatives that foster understanding and awareness
  - Address ignorance or misconceptions that may contribute to conflict
  - Work towards creating an environment where we can learn about each other's backgrounds and perspectives
- Community-Building:
  - Focus on community-building efforts that strengthen connections between conflicting parties
  - Extend beyond the immediate conflict to build a sense of community and shared humanity
  - Encourage activities that foster cooperation and mutual support

### Closing Statements

- Just as the sun shines on all, the rain falls without discrimination, and the earth holds and sustains every living being, let our love be all-encompassing and indiscriminate
- Let us be agents of liberation, breaking down the walls that separate

- us and building bridges of understanding and compassion
- May the liberating power of love guide us in our spiritual journey, uniting us as one sacred community
  - As we embrace the diversity within our midst, let us be living expressions of love, embodying the transformative energy that sets us free
  - In the spirit of liberating love, let us go forth with open hearts, boundless compassion, and a commitment to building a world where unity and diversity coexist in harmony
  - Let us walk this sacred path with open hearts, celebrating the diversity of our beliefs and practices, and finding liberation in the dance of love that unites us all
  - May the magic of liberating love guide us on our journey

Final words:

"I am grateful to have been loved and to be loved now and to be able to love, because that liberates. Love liberates. It doesn't just hold—that's ego. Love liberates. It doesn't bind. Love says, 'I love you. I love you if you're in China. I love you if you're across town. I love you if you're in Harlem. I love you. I would like to be near you. I'd like to have your arms around me. I'd like to hear your voice in my ear. But that's not possible now, so I love you. Go.'" — Dr. Maya Angelou

## Halting a war using liberating love

- immensely challenging endeavor
- principles of liberating love can inspire efforts toward peacebuilding and conflict resolution
  - involves addressing the root causes of the conflict and fostering understanding among conflicting parties
- strategies:
  - International Diplomacy:
    - Engage in diplomatic efforts at the international level
    - Encourage dialogue between nations, mediated by neutral parties
    - Liberating love promotes the idea of finding common ground, emphasizing shared humanity and the desire for peace
  - Humanitarian Aid and Assistance:
    - Mobilize efforts to provide humanitarian aid to those affected by the conflict
    - Liberating love involves expressing compassion and solidarity with those who are suffering
    - Humanitarian assistance can create a foundation for trust and cooperation
  - Track II Diplomacy:
    - Facilitate unofficial, non-governmental channels of communication
    - Liberating love recognizes the potential for grassroots and citizen-led initiatives to influence peace processes
    - Encourage dialogue and collaboration between civil society groups, religious leaders, and community organizations
  - Peacebuilding Initiatives:
    - Invest in peacebuilding initiatives that address the underlying causes of the conflict
    - Liberating love seeks to transform systems and structures that perpetuate violence
    - Support programs focused on reconciliation, social justice, and sustainable development
  - Truth and Reconciliation Commissions:
    - Advocate for the establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions to address past grievances and promote healing
    - Liberating love acknowledges the importance of acknowledging and learning from the pain of the past to build a foundation for a more peaceful future
  - Cultural Exchange Programs:
    - Promote cultural exchange programs to foster understanding and appreciation among different communities
    - Liberating love thrives on the recognition of shared humanity, and cultural exchange can break down stereotypes and build connections
  - International Mediation and Peacekeeping:

- Seek international mediation and peacekeeping efforts
- Liberating love encourages collaboration between nations and international organizations to facilitate peaceful resolutions
- UN peacekeeping missions and diplomatic interventions can play a crucial role
- Disarmament Initiatives:
  - Advocate for disarmament initiatives as part of a peace process
  - Liberating love calls for a commitment to non-violence and the reduction of weapons
  - Efforts to disarm conflicting parties can contribute to building trust and reducing the likelihood of a return to violence
- Dialogue with Civil Society:
  - Foster dialogue with civil society groups, including grassroots movements, women's organizations, and youth networks
  - Liberating love recognizes the agency of diverse voices in peacemaking
  - Inclusive dialogue involving various stakeholders can lead to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions
- Education for Peace:
  - Implement educational programs that promote a culture of peace and conflict resolution
  - Liberating love involves addressing the root causes of conflict through awareness and education
  - Encourage curricula that teach tolerance, empathy, and nonviolent communication
- Stopping a war requires a multifaceted and sustained effort
  - Liberating love, in this context, is about recognizing the humanity of all involved, fostering understanding, and working towards transformative change that leads to lasting peace