

THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF THE BIBLE

Pulse of Spirit
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DAVID KARCHERE is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their *Primal Spirituality*—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

The Bible is many things. It is a history, however accurate we might think it is. It is a spiritual teaching. And today we are focusing on something else—the teaching of emotional intelligence that it contains. It is an owner's manual for the human heart, telling how the heart is meant to function creatively.

What we find conveyed throughout the book—sometimes as a teaching and sometimes as a teaching story—is that the emotional capacity of a human being only functions well when it is in relationship to the spiritual, and that it is made to function that way. Human emotion functions in relationship to all the elements of experience. But most pivotal is its relationship to its spiritual source.

The book also tells us where the heart begins and what follows from that beginning. There is

a first love, and there is a second love that comes out of it. Everything else in this teaching depends on that order.

Nowhere is the first love clearer than in the teaching of the first commandment:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

Mark 12:30

Human emotion, including all the ways it is interlaced with the human capacities, functions in a healthy way when it does so in the context of a love relationship with its spiritual source.

Speaking of the role that human values play in the process, Jesus said it this way:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:21

Whatever you value, whatever you care about, that is where your heart goes. And the instruction is to allow what we care about to be the spiritual dimension of life, not just Spirit up there someplace else, but the spiritual dimension of all life. And when we value the spiritual dimension of other people, ourselves, and all life, that is where our heart goes. Our heart goes to a good place. If your heart is not going to a good place, here is a good instruction.

When the heart goes to a good place, all the rest of the human experience can go to a good place.

The Bible speaks of the readiness of the heart to receive the pulsation of Creation and the wisdom of Creation from the Creator. In Greek terms, it was spoken of as the *logos*, the cosmic mind, cosmic intelligence, and cosmic awareness. There are so many teachings in the Bible that speak of the necessity for the heart to be open to the *logos* or the word. Here is one spoken by the disciples in the Gospel of Luke:

And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

Luke 24:32

Did not our heart burn within us? People's hearts burn for all kinds of reasons. We sometimes say we got burnt. What flame are we being

burnt by? The fire of what other people are doing? The fire of our reaction to what is happening in our lives, or in the world?

Here is a different suggestion. Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? Can we be open to the spiritual and drink it in and have it fire up our hearts, so we are aflame with love for the truth that we are receiving?

Sometimes we receive it directly from the Invisible. It enters and inflames the heart. Sometimes we receive it from another person. Have you had that experience of having someone else say something that is true, revealing, and enlightening? And do not our hearts burn?

That fire can go out. John in Revelation speaks of something similar, yet he speaks of it as a chastisement and an instruction. This is the message to the church of Ephesus, a city in modern-day Turkey:

I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience . . . Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.

Revelation 2:2–5

The people of Ephesus were not accused of failing in their tasks. They were working, laboring, enduring, and distinguishing the false apostles from the true ones. What had gone out of them was the fire. And so the

instruction is not to work harder. It is to remember.

The word *repent* is not one of my favorite words. It is a word from Latin that crept into the Bible through—guess who?—the Romans. It has that root word, *pent*, which is familiar from penitentiary and penal colony. And so, when we speak about repentance, it definitely implies some kind of self-punishment. And actually, the original Greek word translated as *repent* was a form of the Greek word *metanoia*, which meant a change of heart and a change of mind—a change, a metamorphosis.

So when it is translated as *repent*, think of a change of heart. Allow your heart to be inflamed by its first love. And what is the first love? For someone on a spiritual path, we might say our first love is what we originally encountered on that path—what originally excited, inspired, and uplifted us and what we originally fell in love with.

We could view our first love as our primal spirituality that we knew from birth. It is our love for life itself, for reality itself, until something goes wrong in the human experience. John asks the Ephesians to remember that first love. Be true to it. Be true to your passion for what is true.

When a person knows the first love, what naturally follows is the second love—loving your neighbor as yourself. The second love is not another commandment set alongside the first. It is what the first love looks like when it moves between people. The heart that burns for the truth does not then have to be

persuaded to care for the person sitting next to it.

This is portrayed in the story of David and Jonathan. Jonathan was the son of Saul, David's predecessor. Ultimately, Saul lost his mental, emotional, and spiritual balance. And yet between Jonathan and David, there was this great love. It is spoken of this way:

Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword and to his bow, and to his girdle.

1 Samuel 18:3–4

What a portrayal of love openly expressed—nothing held back. And notice what kind of love it is. It is sworn. It is given a form: a covenant, and then the robe, the sword, the bow, the girdle handed over one by one. Jonathan is giving away the very things that mark him as the king's son.

I watched the movie *The Odyssey* the other night. It reminded me of all the Greek myths and legends, which I love. They are full of love, and full of grief over love. But where in all that do you find love made into a covenant, spoken out loud, and held before the Divine? That is what is happening here, and it is what the second love is: not a feeling that visits us, but something we declare and then live inside.

The second love shows its whole range when it has something to forgive. The portrayal of

Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers is remarkable:

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

Genesis 45:4–5, 14

Consider what Joseph does not do. He does not pretend that nothing happened—he names it plainly: *whom ye sold into Egypt*. He does not require his brothers to grovel; he asks them to come near. And then he weeps on Benjamin's neck. This is not a grit-your-teeth, forgive-but-do-not-forget kind of forgiveness. It is a profound overflowing of the heart, dramatically expressed.

What makes it possible is that Joseph is seeing his own life in the light of something larger than the injury done to him:

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

Genesis 50:20

A person cannot manufacture that by an act of will. It is what a heart already burning with the first love does when it meets its brothers. The first love reframes the whole story, and the second love embraces the people in it.

When both of those loves are alive in a person, something opens. The heart becomes hospitable to the Divine. Here is a story of great openness of heart, in which Abraham offered hospitality to the spiritual:

And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;

And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground. . . .

And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. . . .

And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

Genesis 18:1–8

We think of Abraham as a patriarch, the founder of three great faiths of the world: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. And yet what is pictured here is not the picture of some autocratic patriarchal figure, but of a great openness of heart expressed to the spiritual. He is sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day, and when the Divine appears in the presence portrayed as three men, he runs to greet them. He bows. He feeds them. Puzzling, is it not? Is it the Lord or is it three men? It seems clear that the three men were a way to describe a multifold divine presence.

That same welcome, at its most passionate, is what the Song of Solomon portrays. Here is a quotation that made its way into a musical piece by Carolyn Rhodes that we have performed at Sunrise Ranch. It goes like this:

*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;
blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof
may flow out. Let my beloved come into his
garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.*

Song of Solomon 4:16

Here is some of the most beautiful poetry ever written. Through it, the human encounter with the divine is portrayed as a love story. Do you want a good, sexy love story portraying the human experience of the spiritual? Read the Song of Solomon. Historically, its place in the canon has long been contested. Yet there it is, this juicy tale of what it is to welcome Spirit in, to be here, for Spirit to come into this garden, my garden, my human body, my human soul, the world that I live in. To welcome that, it takes the audacity to believe that we have something to offer to Spirit, to nurture Spirit here on earth.

Notice that the invitation is not passive. *Awake, O north wind. Blow upon my garden.* The heart is calling the elements down on itself, because it wants the spices to flow out and the beloved to come. It touches on the profound love at the root of the human soul to allow divine being to be known in this space in which we live. Deep, deep prayer.

I want to end with one more prayer, in which the first love and the second love are finally one thing. This is spoken of as the Prayer of

Intercession from John 17. This is Jesus speaking in perhaps his most desperate hour, just before his arrest and crucifixion. And it is he at his most passionate, most intimate, and most prayerful. It is a portrayal of his heart, his beautiful heart, relating to the one he spoke of as his Father:

*I in them, and thou in me, that they may be
made perfect in one; and that the world may
know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved
them, as thou hast loved me.*

*And I have declared unto them thy name, and
will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast
loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

John 17:23, 26

That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them. There is the whole teaching in one line. The love that comes from the source is the same love that moves between people. It is not two loves after all. It is one love, received and then given, and the human heart is the place where that happens.

Here is a teaching of the spiritual, which is also a teaching of the heart. Can we accept the spiritual teachings without accepting the teachings of the heart? Do the spiritual teachings make any sense otherwise? Do they work without the emotional intelligence that leads the heart into paths of health and goodness and, ultimately, of love and of Spirit?

I believe the answer is clearly no. If the human being is to learn, if the soul is to learn, we have to accept the teaching of the heart. Contemporary psychology attempts to address the distress of the human psyche while often

excluding any reference to the spiritual. The same is true of much of the writing on emotional intelligence. With all the misinterpretation of our primal spirituality and all the dogma that has dominated the religions of the world, it is understandable that contemporary human science is wary of spirituality as it is represented through religion. But something essential goes missing in that exclusion. The spiritual nature of a human being is not an optional dimension of the psyche; it is the source of the heart's first love, and without it the second love has nothing to draw from.

So we return to the prayer, and to the burning heart. *Did not our heart burn within us? Remember from whence thou art fallen. Awake, O north wind. Come into this garden.* This is the owner's manual for how the heart works, how the heart becomes healthy, leading the entire human experience into wholeness and well-being. And it is all here, in a book we thought we already knew.

David Karchere
dkarchere@emnet.org
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