

5

'Taters, Alters, and Gems: Mending the Fractured Self

In the Gospels, Jesus was asked a series of trick questions designed to prove that he was a fraud. Among them, he was asked which commandment was first among all the others. Which was the most important? No doubt his questioner expected him to pick one of the Ten Commandments handed down by Moses on Mount Sinai, and whichever one he chose, they could then argue that he was wrong. But Jesus surprised them with a different answer altogether. First, he said, you must love God—totally, without hesitation or reservation, and with all your being. He then added that you must also love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28–31). The injunction is famous: often quoted, widely misunderstood, and usually dismissed as being humanly impossible to carry out. But it is worth taking a closer look at this powerful set of instructions for life.

The first thing to note is that Jesus was asked which single commandment is first and therefore most important. Yet he replies not with one, but two. Or so it would appear.

For most of us, loving God is so abstract a concept that, although we agree it's certainly a good thing and we'd like to comply, we don't quite know how to go about it. Because when it comes to God, we are confused. We are told that God is love, pure and simple. But we're also warned that God sits in judgment over our every word and deed, and therefore God is to be feared. We can quite naturally respond to a loving God with our own love, but loving what we fear is a stretch. If we're honest, we'll admit that we have no idea what God is like, so the idea of loving God with all our being seems almost nonsensical. Nor does it help to admonish us that we may not understand God, but we should have faith and love God anyway. So we do the best we can. We craft an image of God, however inaccurate and inconsistent, and try to love it.

But Jesus then adds this second commandment about loving our neighbors. The notion of loving God may be too abstract to grasp or put into practice, but loving our neighbor is specific and unambiguous. Unlike God, we know exactly who our neighbors are. They are the people around us. We encounter them daily. But Jesus is casting a wider net than that. Metaphorically, we are all "neighbors," because we share the same world. In this sense, Jesus is instructing us to love, not just the folks who live next door, but everyone: those we know personally and those we will never know or meet.

Why did Jesus feel the need to add this second commandment when only one was requested? Perhaps because there is no second commandment. Perhaps because the two are actually one and the same: two faces of the same teaching. Could it be that you cannot truly love God unless you also love your neighbors—your fellow humans, each and every one of them—because they, like you, are also God’s creation? We can take this even further. What if loving your neighbor is in fact the only way to really love God? It is the practical, behavioral aspect of loving God within the world, and so it naturally pairs with the first commandment. Viewed in this way, Jesus’s answer makes sense.

Jesus doesn’t just instruct us to love our neighbor, however. He says: Love your neighbor *as yourself*. Most hear this as a measure of how much we should love others. We should love and value them as much as we do our own self. But as we saw in chapter 1, we’re not terribly adept at identifying the nature of self. We don’t really know who or what we are. Therefore, what exactly is it that we should love? Bodies? Personalities? Life histories?

And what about those who are unhappy with themselves? Or who despise themselves, perhaps to the point of trying to take their own lives? Would Jesus’s answer give them license to hate others too? To take others’ lives? Obviously that’s not what was intended.

If we listen to Jesus’s words with ears attuned to truth, when he says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” he is not describing how much to love your neighbor. He is not making a comparison, that you should love them as much as you love yourself. Love is not measurable; it is not a quantity, not

something you can place on a scale to weigh and compare. Rather, what Jesus suggests is that you begin to see your neighbor *as yourself*. That is, you recognize in some way that you are both aspects of the same greater Self and therefore equally deserving of love. Jesus is in fact helping us to understand how we can succeed at this seemingly impossible task of loving our neighbors. We do so when we recognize them as identical to us in the only way that matters.

There is a flip side to this. When we look on others with love, we drop our judgments and grievances—those patterns of thinking that keep us separate and apart from them. We are naturally pulled to join with them in the union that is love. Love sees no differences, no limits, no exceptions. Love is all-inclusive; that is its nature. It draws us together. In fact, unless we learn to love our neighbors, we will fail to recognize their true nature. Only in love's clear light can we see that we are all reflections of one greater Self, shining in the self-same love that flows from God to all of us.

But how is this possible, you rightly ask? How can I walk down the street, drive down the freeway, stand in line at the supermarket, and look on everyone I see with love? That seems harder than loving God. What about those who do not share my values—those nasty creatures who troll me on Facebook and threaten to kill me because we disagree about whom to vote for? How can I love them? At least God loves me back. They sure don't.

To answer this, we must return to the central question of this book: what are you? Start out with a false concept of self, and love becomes impossible—at least the kind of

love that Jesus preached. Bring your self-concept back into alignment with God and Ever-Mind, however, and love becomes the most natural response there is. To everyone. In fact, it becomes the only response possible.

When you want only love you will see nothing else.¹

You will be made whole as you make whole. . . . To give a brother what he really wants is to offer it unto yourself, for your Father wills you to know your brother as yourself. Answer his call for love, and yours is answered.²

In the sections that follow, I will attempt to convey a very different understanding of self, that is, of what you are and what your real relationship is with everyone else, and how we are all one within Ever-Mind—the only joining together that can never be lost or broken. Such a self-concept is so radically at odds with everything you now believe about yourself and others, however, that it's best taught, not through logic or reasoning, but with metaphor. What follows then are three metaphors, three different models that portray how the one Self of Ever-Mind can appear to be divided and parceled out among billions of beings who outwardly appear so very dissimilar, yet remain fundamentally one.