

2007-2008 Executive Precepts Program

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Love

This year's topic is **Love**, a thing too simple to be understood.

Love brings out the best and worst in human nature, everyone craves it, no one can withstand it, all have suffered from it. Is there any adult so forgetful that they would claim not to have done foolish and destructive things for love? Who has not deceived themselves for love? Try to remember the first time you fell in love and your absolute conviction that you and your beloved had invented something unprecedented in the history of the world, inexplicable and inaccessible to all others. Then try to remember yourself ten years later, when it first dawned on you that this unique and ineffable discovery was the most universal of human experiences, as common as household dust. Disinterested or selfish, love is protean, sinuous, multifarious. People have loved money, power, animals, God, strangers, nations, work, wisdom, and themselves, among other things. Our lovers, our spouses, our children reflect back our love for them like a distant lake in the desert, shifting and shimmering and beckoning. Is there love without anger?

We never love the same way twice.

Love is so powerful that it even inspires intellectuals, who are otherwise remarkably dull beasts. There is a lecture fragment floating around on the internet about eros on the Platonic dialogues: "It's not about bodies, it's about souls. It's about aspiration towards what's best. If there's anybody in the audience that's in love ... you know that it's some kind of wrinkle in the fabric of reality. It's not like the 'table-and-chairs' that you encounter normally. It does something to you and makes you want to give a blessing — a benediction on the world. It makes you want to improve and perfect the beloved because the beloved is somehow an image of that which is perfect; of that which is worth aspiring to. It somehow justifies your suffering. It somehow makes you feel that all the misery or all the incoherence and nonsense in life somehow makes sense. And by improving and perfecting the beloved and doing what you can to make them more divine and godlike you gratify yourself that much more and also at the same time you improve your own self that much more and make yourself that much more lovable. The condition of humanity, the human condition, is a state of radical deprivation. We are souls that have somehow been stuck in this 'tables-and-chairs' world and this is not where we really belong. And all of our longing--for perfection, for beauty, for truth--is a distant and fuzzy and inconclusive recollection of what we saw when we were pure souls. In other words, the earth – the world of substance – gets in the way of our recollection...down here we see once in a while, what we could've been; what we once were. And, as a consequence of that, love enters into our life. Whenever we fall in love what we see in the beloved is not meat moving around;

what we see is a memory of some image of some perfect beauty. It's an embodiment or something we saw in an earlier life; in an earlier phase of our spiritual development before we too became meat."

We must love people as they are, not as we wish them to be. If we wait for people to become deserving of love, we will wait forever and not love anybody.

Don't be alarmed by the reading list. It is not too onerous and these books are meant to be enjoyed. They are good for you and perhaps even for those you love. If you begin to love these books, they may begin to love you back.

Reading List

- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
- Plato, *Phaedrus*
- Ovid, *Art of Love*
- Dante, Inferno (in *Divine Comedy*, Canto 5, 18)
- Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*
- William Shakespeare, *Othello*
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*
- Joyce, The Dead (in *Dubliners*)
- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
- Last Precept with Professor **Robert P. George**, readings TBA