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Love Begins with Me

I dwell within a most wondrous garden. This garden originates within me and I have lived in it all my life. It is nourished and nurtured by love—my love for myself that is the heart of this garden. My garden has always been an intrinsic part of me, for I am both garden and gardener. Yet besides the inner garden I must also care for the outer garden: the world I live in. I work hard to make that garden as lovely and as healthy as possible.

I take care of my outer garden by among other things recycling, using healthy, organic ingredients in my cooking, trying to be conscientious and expressing gratitude for whatever I use and am given in the course of my daily life. I also do my best to be kind to others, to set a good example, and to participate in my community as best I can. In the wider world of the Internet I tend my considerable email correspondence and write my *Heartwings Love Notes* to uplift the spirits of those who read them. Still, I believe it is even more important to cultivate my inner garden because from it all else in my life flows.

I tend my inner garden by maintaining my personal awareness: monitoring my thoughts and feelings and staying as balanced as I can. In this way I become aware of any weeds that might infest it and choke off my ability to perceive goodness and beauty in others as well as in the world around me. When I encounter them I work to remove the weeds of resentment, dismay, disappointment, anger and other feelings that may cause me discomfort. Yet it is not enough to weed out that which is undesirable, it is also important to plant seeds that will grow and feed my spirit as well as help to clarify my vision.

Gratitude is an important seed. When I consciously feel my gratitude for those things for which I am thankful, both my inner and my outer world are

illuminated and become even more beautiful. As I sow gratitude and it takes root in the garden of my life I can more easily see to eliminate the frustrations and fears that otherwise obscure my vision or cloak it in despair. As they grow and blossom these seeds help me to even more strongly experience my gratitude for the small, special pleasures of each day—hot water, a comfortable bed, fresh food from my garden, and best of all, someone to love me. In this way I create a condition in which undesirable weeds cannot find room to grow.

Another important seed to plant is that of compassion. As it grows within me I am able to look with loving sympathy at everyone around me. I can also even begin to love whatever or whoever opposes me. This is vital if I am to be able to help overcome enmity and spread peace in the outer garden that is the world I live in. Then as I work in my inner garden the seeds of peace and happiness sprout of themselves. I do not have to plant these directly; they are offshoots of my work to grow in compassion, acceptance, and understanding. As I share the fruits of my labors in my writings and in my conversations, I am able to help others learn how to cultivate their gardens.

None of this gardening could be done without my love for myself and for the world I live in. That love is the sunshine that nourishes and helps both of my gardens grow. As they flourish and bear their precious fruit, that love feeds me and helps me in turn to feed others, spreading everywhere. Because what goes around comes around, that love returns to me over and over again in many, many ways. As it does I give thanks for it and for all blessings and I send it back out to do its work wherever and with whomever it can.