

LOVE BEGINS WITH ME

Ayn Rand, a Russian-American novelist, philosopher, playwright, and screenwriter once said, "To say 'I Love You' one must first be able to say the 'I'."

That is how important the role of the giver of the love is! The initiative should emanate from me, as the giver. To effectively share and spread the same, I need to love my own true self first.

The love for oneself constitutes a strong foundation for building relationships. The Irish philosopher, novelist, dramatist, and critic, Oscar Wilde, even stated that "Loving oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance."

How do I love myself then? There are various ways of doing so, such as knowing my strengths, as well as recognizing and accepting my weaknesses and limitations; enjoying my own company whenever I am in solitude and making use of the same for self-reflection and reinvigoration; enhancing my potentials and doing something to improve my imperfections; respecting myself and ensuring that other people treat me similarly; believing in myself and considering problems as challenges and obstacles that I need to overcome in order to be transformed into a better, more mature and stronger individual; looking after my body through proper nutrition and regular work-out; nurturing a mind that grows more beautiful each day; growing spiritually; and realizing my dreams by doing the best I could.

My childhood dream was to become a nun so I could be of greater service to humanity. Since I had instead ended up as a lawyer, I dedicated for several years my time, energy and knowledge to the governmental institutions that I had joined. To my mind, public service was then another avenue for extending love to my country and fellow-men.

It feels nice to hear people describe me as somebody beautiful inside and out. Admittedly, I neither have the stunning looks of a beauty queen nor the svelte figure of a fashion model, but I guess, what they really appreciate is the glow that radiates from my inner self.

For me, love may be shared by doing even small things to inspire and alleviate the conditions of other people.

I see to it that I am happy and joyous each passing day. I start the day by praying for the safety and protection of myself and my dear ones, including the world in general. My heart is filled with so much inspiration that I never pass a day without sharing either a motivational/inspirational text message or electronic mail to my family members and friends from all over. They find the same so touching that they themselves share those to people dear to their hearts.

Whenever people request for a *pro bono* legal assistance, I try to serve them with utmost courtesy, respect, efficiency, and effectiveness, regardless of their social or economic stature. Seeing their eyes glint with happiness makes me feel complete and fulfilled. I tell them that doing good to their fellow-beings is enough compensation for me for whatever service I had rendered in their favor. I practice and preach, in small ways that I could do, what is akin to the so-called *domino effect* or the chain reaction theory. It starts with just myself and another, but hopefully spreads out on a wider scale.

I had twice been invited to deliver inspirational messages in my grade school alma mater and the one situated in the community where I reside. I am aware that there are youngsters who look up to me as a role-model. Hence, I try to come up to their expectations by conducting myself properly at all times.

We live in an imperfect world. No matter how nice am I, there are still those who had hurt me by an unkind word or deed. I just shrug off my shoulders, knowing that it is impossible for me to please everyone. Since my heart is filled with love, the compassionate part of me prevails and still extends, despite the hurt and pain, understanding and forgiveness. The healing process moves on a faster phase.

This does not mean, however, that I allow myself to be the subject of any disrespect and abuse. I peacefully deal with the matter by calling the attention of the concerned individuals, not just as a remedial measure, but preventive as well, in order that other people would not suffer the same predicament.

Through my social networks, I have likewise joined groups/communities, espousing love for our environment and endangered species, as well as the promotion of the welfare of people of whatever race, creed and station in life.

Together with my two (2) lady friends, we also visited last December 2008 several families in one province and shared with them grocery items and clothes, as our special way of rendering community service and sharing with the recipients the spirit of Christmas. We committed ourselves to do this regularly, at least on an annual basis.

I could say that when one loves himself/herself, so many virtues are imbibed in the former's *personae*. Said virtues are the ones which draw/magnetize other people to him/her and enrich the relationships built in the process. Consciously/unconsciously, other people adopt also the said virtues, which improve their personality and enhance their relationships with other beings. The relationships referred to may start with the family, then extends to the peer group; community; society; and globally. Self-love transcends to higher levels until it ultimately becomes universal love. It is this latter kind of love which binds us all to co-exist on earth peacefully and harmoniously. Hence, we must observe and apply love at all times in every aspect of our life in order to strengthen this universal tie even more. Likewise worth stressing is that in doing acts of love and charity, we are returning the love extended to us by our Creator, which to me is the greatest love of all.

Since love begets love, I feel proud to say that love not only begins with, but comes back to me in countless ways and then re-starts with me all over again. This is because true love is both limitless and endless.