

# OUR HIDDEN GROUND

by  
Chris McDonnell

The stark spaces  
    places  
of hidden dreams  
where broken words  
are spoken  
under the dawn sky

These hollow hours  
    wear  
out my muted calls  
soundless echoes  
that speak through  
the cycle of  
    Seasons

Here in morning  
    stillness  
our buried time  
seeks love that  
is hidden

our deep ground  
    of love

*'The happiness of being one with everything in  
that hidden ground of love for which there can  
be no explanation'*

Lecture given by Thomas Merton April 13th 1967.

cry and laugh with those who laugh and be all things to all people". We become, in other words, capable of community.

Real community, in my experience, should lead to a gradual awakening to a deeper self than the ego. By the ego I mean the 'me' who is identified with purely personal thoughts and feelings. Any real living together with people makes us soon realize that at the level of ego we can never be one, we are always separate and distinct and normally in competition. The ego always compares itself with other people so it can say, "At least I am not like him!" or "If only I had what she has got" (That is why it so easily gets annoyed with other people). The deep self couldn't care less. It is not measured by exam results and other peoples opinions about who we are. It is secure and free in its own essential and unique being. In this way it is continually "in solitude" because free from comparison. But the paradox is that at this level we are not alone. The deeper we go into the mystery of the 'me' that awakens in us, the more we naturally relate to others also at that level, at the deepest and most unique level of their being. Our own self and that of our neighbour no longer remain mutually exclusive entities. As we learn to love ourselves we learn to love our neighbour and as we learn to love another we are learning to love ourselves. I feel more and more that when Jesus said "Love your neighbour as yourself", he was not issuing a commandment but stating a fact - this, he says, is how it works.

That is why the early Christian monks regarded the greatest sin as that of judging another person for that involves putting the mystery of existence under the measure of our own personal opinions. The more we judge other people the more we are trapped in the ego as the centre of the world, the more we are in conflict with other people. Another clear fact that emerges from community life is that "the judgments you give are the judgments you get, and the standard you use will be the standard used for you". Other people don't like being criticized and if you spend your life moaning about other people they will moan about you. A person's behaviour might need reproof but they must still feel that their being is held in reverence. Actions are in the realm of outward persona and can be judged good or bad but the person him or herself must be unconditionally loved. I have found that community must be based on an acceptance of the goodness of myself and of others, that, despite everything, each one of us is precious. The end is love, love of self and other, love of both as one, love that reveals between two people a common origin, a common ground in the experience of love itself.

Two poems  
by  
Sara Jane Kingston

### THE BUDDHA'S TOOTH

Word has got around  
that the Buddha's Tooth  
has arrived in town.

The Emperor himself  
has ordered new clothes  
to wear at its unveiling.

The children are laughing,  
hoping to be held  
up high on older shoulders,  
to see the wonder  
such a rumour can create.

And the Buddha  
sits and smiles.

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