THE NEW SHOFAR

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, ***for God is love*** **1 John 4:7-12**

September 6, 2026

For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. – Romans 13:8

What has happened to Love? It has been celebrated here in the West with great dignity, with an understanding that true love has an element of the Sacred in it making it sacrosanct, something to be celebrated and cherished, moments of engagement with the God in whose image and likeness we have all been created. What happened?

How do we begin even reflecting on the sacred heritage that is the foundation on which love is built? We could begin by reflecting on Love with the **Code of Hammurabi**, an ancient Babylonian legal text nearly 4,000 years old. Hammurabi is well-known for having put together the Code, which he claimed to have received from Shamash, a solar deity and the Babylonian god of justice. See what is happening? The oldest and most significant legal text in human history understands well the need to have God as the source of guidance on how to live and love as men and women fully alive. It talks of faithfulness, the need for a code of justice and the importance of obedience, the submission of the self.

Love gave the ancient societies a trellis for living

If we want more, we could go to the dialogue between Socrates and his best friend, Crito, on ***the nature of Ethics***. It is seen as the fullest expression of pre-Christian ethics in the West—Socrates reveals that one must never do wrong, even when wronged. Further, he says, anytime anyone does an ill—even with the best of intentions and in the search for a higher good—he has utterly tainted the good. In other words, in no way, shape, or form, must one ever do ill to another. It's an incredibly hard teaching, but it marks the beginning of ethics in the West. When writing this, Socrates is only three days away from the end of his life and he is willing to be a martyr for God, the one who has commanded him to pursue Truth, no matter the cost. The cost is his execution by the polis he loves, Athens.

Not surprisingly, the early Christians, especially the Roman Stoics, thought that Socrates was a proto-Christian, with St. Justin Martyr going so far as to label him a "Christian before Christ." He had, after all, argued that one should turn the other cheek a full four centuries before Christ would, and he died for his God and for his community.

What we in the twenty-first century should recognize is that Socrates did everything he did out of love: love of his fellows, love of his community, and love of his God. This Western world in which they sought the Truth was not rooted in racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism or any form of denigration, but rather in love and dignity. If there was a guiding principle in the very beginnings of Western civilization (and Christianity), it is in **love and sacrifice**, and a desire to find the universal good of the human person in all his or her manifestations, regardless of the accidents of birth (skin colour, gender, religion, etc.).

Love defined the entirety of Socrates' thought and his action, but it also guided the Greeks who would follow him, especially the Stoics, who adopted **the Logos of Heraclitus** as their god, their guiding principle for the universe and of creation. In the Logos, Virgil, predicted the birth of Christ,

the child of the God and the virgin who will erase sin from the world through the merits of his Father teaching us: *Love conquers all; let us, too, yield to love*.

A half-century later, God does exactly this – Jesus who is love itself, came into the world. Not only was Jesus ***Love personified***, but He, too, would give His absolute everything for the redemption of mankind on a grim Friday afternoon, only to rise on the third day: death was shattered by love itself. Our ancient forbears understood a significant reality many today seemed to have forgotten: the conception and the birth of the Incarnate Word sits at the very centre, of all history. He is the *light that enlightens every person*. God's love does not extend only toward the future, but it enlightens every person, past, present and future.

Christian love animates the Western world from Pentecost through the saints and the martyrs, through St. Augustine, through King Alfred the Great, through Thomas Aquinas, and through Dante. Everything that lives, and move, and breaths does so only because Love upholds the very universe itself.

Where did we go wrong?

In *our* struggling modern world though, love is all too often perverted into lust or ignored and trivialised. Biblical love is rarely discussed as being the lifeblood of those things we do consider to be of importance. How could the modern West be so very different from the ancient and medieval West? My old philosophy professor would put Nicolo Machiavelli near the centre of what went wrong. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli tells us that while it is good to be good, effective and successful leaders understand how they need to employ evil in pursuit of a greater good. For Machiavelli, is it power, not love, that moves us.

He won the day. The last six centuries of the Western tradition have been radically different from the first several thousand years of the Western tradition. The left, especially, has embraced power—power to rule and power to explain identities in society. It is hard to imagine any statesmen, especially since the French Revolution, proclaiming love as the motivating power of society. To talk of love is to engage in superstition, folly, and romance.

Those who love are, in the long run, the realists, while those who love power are deluding themselves and promote chaos, darkness over peace. Long before Celine Dion gave us the hit song *The power of Love* Christians have been living witnesses to what happens when the Love of God empowers and guides relationships and the day to day lives of individuals and families. St Paul spoke to the real power of love…***4*** *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant* ***5*** *or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;* ***6*** *it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.* ***7*** *It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (**1 Cor 13:4-7).** Love is looking for the good news in the other, leading to the acceptance of the other as a lovable self. It gives rise to the desire to be with the other and to do good for the other, leading to a profound and joyous unity. Love means it is just as easy (if not easier) to do good for others as to do it for the self. This love brings about a productive and empowering mutual openness to the other as a divine gift enriching our lives with grace. For at least the last five thousand years we have sought the answer to the meaning of Love: now we know: ***God*** is love.