

Elders on Love: Dialogues on the Consciousness Cultivation and Expression of Love

Kenneth R. Lakritz

Thomas M. Knoblauch

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Elders on Love is a book that seeks to bring insights, people and generations together, and offers “love as the missing link,” but ends with diverse views.

Rabbi Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi (From Age-ing to Sage-ing author) contributes a thoughtful preface about the nature of love. The authors, two baby-boomer clinical psychologists, interview seven “elders”: men and women beyond middle age who are educated, experienced and wise.

These include an atheist, a former Roman Catholic nun, a Christian who enjoys the Quakers, a Jew who practices Eastern Mysticism, two Unitarians, and a recovering alcoholic from a Presbyterian family. This diverse mixture of elders are asked questions such as “what is true love?”, “can love be taught?” and “how many different kinds of love exist?”. Together with the authors these elders discuss their life-stories and experiences of love in its many forms—romantic, spiritual, familial and sexual—and share their thoughts on how a current awareness of love has the potential to transform communities.

Readers will enjoy the words and ideas of the elders. Pauline Thompson, for example, a 92-year-old former teacher, nurse and psychotherapist, is a delight. She is intelligent, and élan vital runs through her comments. Dee Jaehrling, the former nun, is captivating in her comments about Franciscan life and thoughts, prayer and music.

The book sometimes suffers from continuity difficulties because it wasn’t conceived as a book, but as an offshoot of a video project. It is redeemed, however, with wonderful descriptions such as when Abraham Levitsky describes the love and caring of his spiritual teacher: Ramesh; or when Jaehrling recounts her young students saying a printed line on a poster is for “those who can’t read pictures.”

SALLY KETCHUM (January / February 1999)

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