

The World is a Waiting Lover: Desire and the Quest for the Beloved

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When the Beloved beckons, as in the story of Krishna that opens this book-journey, the lover drops everything to respond. Moving into that embrace means stepping into what the author calls “the human yearning to live with fearless authenticity.” Johnson’s personal mid-life transformation—falling in love with a younger and unavailable man, her “Escort to the Beloved”—launches her search. Making a hero’s journey into the heart and depths of love, she uncovers the meanings and guises of the Beloved. An intrepid traveler and vision quest guide, Johnson was called to track passion itself. The Beloved, it turns out, is not a personal life partner.

Readers observe Johnson’s transformation as her path leads eventually to an “Inner Beloved.” Tracing a circuitous route of research, interviews, vision quests, synchronicities, and even a facial, she follows the myths of love from Eros and Psyche, Orpheus and Eurydice, ancient Egyptian poetry, to Jung’s work on the Beloved. She draws on literature from around the world, relates the tales of friends and colleagues from workshops and vision quests, and explores research on the Beloved from myth to psychoanalysis to the mystics’ ecstatic vision of unity with a God-Beloved, all to uncover the many possibilities.

In seeking the Beloved, one is changed irrevocably. Yearning and desire take center stage in everything, as indicated by the book’s title. Johnson elaborates: “The Beloved beckons us into a passionate embrace with all we undertake ... impels us to embark on a journey toward ecstatic engagement with people and places, ideas and acts.” One might question whether the majority of people want to pursue such intense and potentially trouble-making, soul-shaking passions.

On the other hand, the author notes, “The Beloved personifies the object of the soul’s longing for union with its highest expression ... what is at once greater than we and intimately, exquisitely, our truest self.” In tantalizing chapters like “Beauty Tips from Myrna Loy” and “The Lover Who Came By Staying Away,” readers are privy to the author’s trials, along with explanations of activities that have helped others on their journeys.

This hero’s journey to the Beloved offers the possibility of experiencing oneness with pure love. It embodies the profound yearning of those searching for something bigger in their lives. This book maps the territory of finding and uniting with the One who loves and accepts the totality of being. Despite the difficulties, many will find it so compelling that they undertake the journey. Johnson reminds readers just how treacherous each unique path is, while exposing the seductions, ecstasy, and profound challenges of charting this quest to the Beloved, ultimately to the God within.

BOBBYE MIDDENDORF (August 18, 2009)

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