

Excerpts from C.S. Lewis

On Being in Love

"Our experience is colored through and through by the books and plays and the cinema, and it takes patience and skill to disentangle the things we have really learned from life for ourselves."

"What we call 'being in love' is a glorious state, and in several ways, good for us. It helps to make us generous and courageous; it opens our eyes not only to the beauty of the beloved but to all beauty, and it subordinates (especially at first) our merely animal sexuality; in that sense, love is the great conqueror of lust. No one in his sense would deny that being in love is far better than either common sensuality or cold self-centeredness."

"But, as I said before, 'the most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of our own nature and set it up as the thing your ought to follow at all costs.' Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing. There are many things below it, but there are also many things above it. You cannot make it the basis of a whole life. It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling. No one feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all."

"Knowledge can last, principles can last, habits can last; but feelings come and go. And in fact, whatever people say, the state called 'being in love' usually does not last. If the old fairytale ending "They lived happily ever after" is taken to mean 'They felt for the next fifty years exactly as they felt the day before they were married', then it says what probably never was nor every would be true, and would be highly undesirable if it were. Who could bear to live in that excitement for even five years?

What would become of your work, your appetite, your sleep, your friendships?"

"But of course, ceasing to be 'in love' need not mean ceasing to love. Love in this second sense—love as distinct from 'being in love'—is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit.....They can have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other, as you love yourself even when you do not like yourself. They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be 'in love' with someone else. 'Being in love' first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it."

"People get from books (and movies) the idea that if you have married the right person you may expect to go on 'being in love' forever. As a result, when they find they are not, they think this proves they have made a mistake and are entitled to a change--not realizing that, when they have changed, the glamour will presently go out of the new love just as it went out of the old one. In this department of life, as in every other, thrills come at the beginning and do not last.....What is more...it is just the people who are ready to submit to the loss of the thrill and settle down to the sober interest, who are then most likely to meet new thrills in some quite different direction. The man who has learned to fly and become a good pilot will suddenly discover music; the man who has settled down to live in the beauty spot will discover gardening.....It is simply no good trying to keep any thrill: that is the very worst thing you can do. *Let the thrill go--let it die away--go on through that period of death into the new quieter interest and happiness that follow--and you will find a world of new thrills all the time.*"

"But if you decide to make thrills your regular diet and try to prolong them artificially, they will all get weaker and weaker, and fewer and fewer, and you will be a bored, disillusioned old [person] for the rest of your life."

"It is because so few people understand this that you find many middle-aged men and woman maundering about their lost youth (or some other thing), at the very age when new horizons ought to be appearing and new doors opening all round them."

"Another notion we get from novels and plays (and movies) is that 'falling in love' is something quite irresistible; something that just happens to one, like measles. And because they believe this, some married people throw up the sponge and give in when they find themselves attracted by a new acquaintance [or someone else]. But I am inclined to think that these irresistible passions are much rarer in real life than in books, at any rate when one is grown up. When we meet someone beautiful and clever and sympathetic, of course we ought, in one sense, to admire and love these good qualities. But is it not very largely our own choice whether this love shall, or shall not, turn into what we call 'being in love'? No doubt, if our minds are full of novels and plays (and movies) and sentimental songs, and our bodies full of alcohol, we shall turn any love we feel into that kind of love; just as if you have a rut in your path all the rainwater will run into that rut, and if you wear blue spectacles everything you see will turn blue. But that will be our own fault."