

Jamie MORAN

Six Steps of Passion

Let the ultimate be the starting point.

6. Sacrifice

The most profound definition of passion is: what we will suffer and lose for Love (really, for the Truth of Love, which is the heart truth – not any abstracted truth, or a doctrinal truth, but a truth lived out to the full and discovered only by the human heart). Passion is the energy of love, its muscle, its outgoing and ‘put up or shut up’ outreach and thrust. Passion is what we will ‘do’ for what matters most to us, and indeed, what matters most in all the world. Passion is binding ourselves to what is at stake, for the sake of saving it.

God is a being of passion, and the deepest spiritual heart of a human being is thus a wrestling with passion, a struggling with and suffering of passion. For we suffer in the process of coming to terms with and agreeing, freely, to suffer for love. Passion, especially at its ultimate, is what we most want and most resist. It creates ambivalence and conflict in us, reflected in ‘how far we will go’ with its doing, its sacrifice and loss, for the sake of what is at stake. How staked to the ground will we be – or will we float off, up and away? Passion challenges us, yet nothing touches or moves us like passion.

“God is Fire”: this fire of passion seeks to kindle us to burn as it does, with ferocity and tenderness, anger for truth and compassion, long-suffering persistence and patience, but also unhesitating and undelaying ‘going for it’ and ‘striding in’ to it. In passion, we transcend the self by giving the self to the world, for the sake of the world. Passion is the deepest, most inexplicable and pained relation to the world: the relation of heart. Passion arises in the wound between heart and world: it only arises as the result of a wound inflicted on the heart by existence. Passion rises to what is hard, profound, mysterious, pained: it dies, or lapses back, to what is easy, shallow, take it or leave it. Passion is not erotic, it is dæmonic. God is not only a passionate being, but a dæmonic being. Thus, it is God who inflicts the wound of the dæmonic – not nature, not evil, not other humans. The dæmonic ‘deepens’ passion, and is thus necessary to passion passing from childlike enthusiasm to adult give-away and sacrifice. Passion seeks the deep, difficult, inexplicable and pained ‘truth’ of heart, in its relation to God, humanity and the world. In the end, passion ‘serves’ this truth,

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whatever its cost and consequences; it is the ‘honour’ of passion to bear the burden of paying the cost and undergoing the consequence: passion ends as the ‘give-away’ of ‘suffering love’. It serves not itself, but what matters to God and what matters to the world. Passion is self-transcending and self-emptying: it is the least self-pleasing force in humanity. That is why humans fear it, as well as yearn to be more ‘on fire’ with it. Passion is ecstatic. When we say to someone, “have a heart”, we are asking her or him to accept the wound and carry the burden of passion’s ecstasy.

There are less profound definitions of passion which point more to where passion begins. People do not start at the ultimate; they have to get there by living a certain way.

1. Innocent Enthusiasm

Passion begins in the child, with what Søren KIERKEGAARD called our “thirst for the prodigious and the mysterious”. Another word for this is ‘enthusiasm’. Still another could be ‘inspiration’ – what gets you to your feet, what gets you going.

Always passion is what touches and moves us, moves us out of stasis into dynamism. Its energy gets our energy ‘up’ and gets this energy ‘going’. Many people lose childhood passion before adolescence, and show little or no passion in adult life. Of this tragedy it could be said: their spark was snuffed out, or killed off, before it really got going.

2. Taking a Stand

The real forerunner of wounded, spiritualised, deepened passion is evident somewhere in the cusp between childhood and adulthood. Passion is our existential birth into the world that the adult faces, a world non-protective and non-flattering, a world of challenge. Ultimately, a world of ontological insecurity and ontological ungroundedness. There is a passion that reflects a mixture of the child’s innocent – indeed naïve – enthusiasm and the young adult’s beginning to rise to challenge. I call this ‘standing’. Passion is our ‘coming out’: emerging from the childhood egg and standing on the stage of adult existential reality. It is your passion that gets you out there. Passion gets you on your feet and keeps you there. It supports your whole outreach, and your whole thrust into something in the world, with which you take hold. Anita HARMON calls this type of early passion “walking on the stage (of life) with intention”. She adds, this is “where you are seen to enter and will not exit”. Here I stand, and I will not be shoved off, or shoved away; I will not be pushed down. I will stand my ground, and hold my ground.

Passion is, always, our deepest and most intentional motive, our motive to go forth and take hold, or in street lingo, to ‘step up and take it on.’ Or, ‘to have a go’, by ‘getting stuck in’. Passion is the arrow we shoot into the world: it is our most active motive of outreaching and outgoing. It is the basis for genuine existential ‘Action’.

Passion is a commitment toward what matters to us in existence, and our engagement with it. Ultimately, this grows into what people will sacrifice for the sake of what matters: first, outer things; second, inner psychological baggage; third, our very self. Passion is the energy of heart, and this is what heart ‘does’, actively, in relation to the world.

The realm of meaning is vast and all-inclusive, but a person's passion is what makes a selection from that: this occurs through 'value'. A person values some more particular meaning, and thus that specific meaning becomes a 'figure', and the rest of the meaning landscape remains a 'ground'. Passion is inherently moral in the broadest sense, because it is an inherent valuing of certain things as supremely meaningful, vitally mattering, purposeful, worthy of pursuing. Often the meaning world is confused to us, due to its near-infinite potentials and possibilities, but passion is what brings that world alive and into greater selective focus for each of us personally. Certain meanings become 'energised', and we stand on them, and start to stand for them. Certain things 'stand out', and we make our 'stand' for these things, not others.

To have no passion is to be in a state where nothing matters, a state of deadness, alienation, boredom, drift. No action directed at something important to the person. Nothing to stand up about, nothing to commit to and engage with. Nothing has value, nothing has purpose. At best, one can flit like a butterfly, promiscuously tasting different meanings, but one always moves on. There is never any adhesion to anything in particular, and thus there will never be any sweat, tears or blood shed for any given area of existence. Nothing has significance for us, or is worthy of our effort. Martin HEIDEGGER calls passion "care". That nothing has meaning and value and purpose for us personally also entails there is nothing we 'care about' and 'care for'. We do not attend, and so we do not tend anything. Passion is our 'tending toward' which motivates us to 'attend' (look at) and 'tend' (look after). Without passion, a person has no powerful active intentionality toward the world; and thus they are not 'up' for action. Between them and world no spark is kindled.

Passion is therefore the energy of direct contact with and involvement in the world: through it, we affect and are affected by the world. Earlier passion discovers the former, and it is heady stuff. Later passion must take on the board the latter: at this point, passion can become a 'power freak', 'go it alone' bully or egomaniac. It tries to use force to impose its value by willpower, and passionate intensity and passion's strength, alone. But this unilateralism twists and distorts passion. Its real mission is 'power with', but it becomes addicted to 'power over'. Yet if passion just gives in to the world, or just gives way, then passion collapses under the weight of 'reality bites back'. It loses heart, it becomes overcautious, it loses all élan, punch and boldness.

Passion must gradually awaken to a new double-sided challenge that emerges as we truly 'give it our best shot': one – outer conflict with the world; two – the inner conflict generated within passion as it wrestles in its relation to the world.

Out of this two-sided conflict will gradually emerge not only a questioning of what is most true in the world, but also a questioning of what is most true in passion toward the world. It is being affected by, not just affecting, the world that will initiate passion into its most basic and searing conflict over searching for, and being purified to be able to reach, the deepest truth of passion's nature and destiny – its 'calling' to the world.

3. Standing in Adversity

To stand up to be counted for something often entails entering a worldly arena of conflict. The world often opposes what we value personally, as it opposes what is of most true, divine value. This is commonly registered in the idea that passion ‘must fight’ for what it cares about, and cares for: dramatic clashes are going to happen, because part of the existential disillusioning of naïve innocence is the discovery that the world both needs and hates meaningful, valuable, purposeful things that ‘really matter’.

This is why such things do not simply ‘matter’, but are indeed ‘at stake’: they are hedged round by existential insecurity in any case, but they are also endangered by worldly shallowness, indifference and evil. Passion must fight for love. Love is no pacifist, or unitary erotic joining; it is a journey, and it is a battle. The journey is long; the battle is costly and consequential. Here is where passion starts not just to sweat but to bleed. Here passion becomes the heroine or hero. Here passion’s inherent aggressivity must come to the fore, because at this point passion will be intimidated and broken unless it stands for truth. To stand for truth means standing against falsity, forgery and fakery. The oldest Greek description of passion, after a ‘suffering of existence’s wound’ (*pathos* and *penthos*), is ‘incensiveness for truth’ (*thymos*): passion is ‘angry’ for truth. It has zeal and will not relent. It cannot be bought off or distracted. It cannot be intimidated or broken; it cannot be seduced or undermined. It bears the unbearable and endures the unendurable, to promote what matters and indeed, to protect and enhance what is at stake.

In this process, we either become zealot ‘hard-hearted’ fanatics, thereby destroying passion’s driving force, which is love; or we opt out and become sentimental, sloppy and soft-hearted ‘anything goes’ liberals, who think love is benign and easy when it is really harsh and demanding. We need a third way beyond either accusing or excusing the human heart – a way that challenges yet also heals untruth, destruction and distortion. We must learn the way of the warrior, must take up the old sword of honour, which Christ said he came into the world to wield. There is no final Cross without this prior Sword. Here, we are wrestling with the more subtle and profound meaning of truth of heart, and this is what forges us as a real warrior in a fiery furnace – and stops us from becoming a thug or a soldier or a wimpish weakling. How do I fight? What is the ‘good fight’? At this point, passion shifts. It is no longer simply ‘self-investment’ into the world, with a one-way power. It starts to have to be more reflective, as well as tortured, troubled, agonised and anguished, over its two-way interaction of affecting and being affected by the world. The world starts to seem a wounding paradox: it cries out for true passion, to redeem its potentiality; yet at the same time it resists true passion passionately, preferring evil passion, mad passion, escapist avoidance of passion, and all the structures, rules, regulations, that seek to create a safe and secure rational order to hold passion down and keep passion in check. True passion is needed, cried out for, yet it is punished, mocked, rejected and evaded. It becomes crucial in this process not just to stand up for truth and stand against adversity opposing this truth, but also to speak the truth, and expose lies, falsity and rationalisation.

Passion seeks a deeper truth, of the world and of itself, at this stage. It loses all worldly ‘ambition’. We can speak of this shift by using the word ‘integrity’, and the word close to it, ‘honour’. Passion tries to be true to something that binds it to the mark. It confronts, through honesty and humility, that the world contains both gold and dross; but so does its own ‘basis of operations’, the deeper heart, also contain this mixture. Thus passion comes to see that not only is there an outer fight for the real truth of the world, but there is also an inner fight for the real truth of the heart that cares about, and will suffer to love, the world.

Human beings are tragic creatures. Some never had passion even as a child. Many come forth and stand up, having a real try, at their emergence into adulthood, but give up and turn back when the ‘going gets rough’. Few indeed are the people who, well into their middle years, persist into fighting for the truth in the world; and fewer still are those who realise that to fight for truth outside them they must fight for truth inside themselves, within their own hearts.

To be a warrior in the external world, one must be a warrior in the internal world: one must be on an ascetical and spiritual path that can reveal and expose and also purge, forge and transfigure, one’s ‘inward parts’. Only a pure heart is singular, and only a singular heart can really find the truth of the world by wielding a sword that does not wound, but exposes a wound already existing at the foundation of everyone and everything, so that it can be healed. This is where the Sword finally becomes the Cross.

4. Walking in the Truth, Outward and Inward

Crucial to the ‘self-control’ that now must join with the heart’s bravery and generosity, and its anger and zeal, is the yoke of a spiritual way. But equally crucial, and leading in the same direction, is the ‘drama’ that engulfs passion as it struggles and suffers in the world.

Drama, when deep enough to get at the deep heart realities, which cause all the good and evil of the world, has the power to be dæmonically wounding: it tears away the mask, pulls down the tower over the pit, and exposes heart truth at its most conflicted, yet also its most raw and true. Drama of this kind reveals where we really stand, but more: what it is to stand, and what the two-way truth of passion in relation to the world really is. Drama kills the lies we build up to shield us from passion, at its best and its worst, and dumps us into the boiling cauldron. People often do not know who they are and what they are called to do in the world until drama wrecks their life.

In a sense, both the spiritual path and the inescapable drama of our lives converge on one point: that we must be forged in a furnace both terrible and wonderful; indeed, that we must die to live, must be reduced to nothing to find the real something, the ‘pearl of great price’, which passion always sought. Both the world and God, between them, smash us to bits, to reconstruct us from the base up. The person who resists that ‘correction’ of her or his heart’s passion for life and for existence, is destroyed by it. If we do not voluntarily contract through spiritual practice, then being in the world will contract us, like it or not. To resist is to be finished by it, but if we accept it, humbly, with faith in the unknown and belief in what it starts to give us in our reconstruction, then it will be a breaking that remakes us.

Some people ‘tough it through’, and emerge stronger, but their strength is evil: it will only ever serve them, not the world. It is only tragedy which leads to redemption; and tragedy, with its passionate drama, simply reveals what is true, at depth, for everyone and everything. Thus it is a call to us. It shows us truly where we are, and it shows us where the world is; and thus it shows us truly what we can do, to heal, to serve, to give up our all, for the truth of heart that can change the world.

Only truth of heart can change the world.

5. The Mystical Land of Heart

Many people use a spiritual path to evade the drama that exposes our heart for existence. They confuse dispassion with indifference, or flight. ‘Detachment’ from what falsifies the deep heart exists so there can be a more radical ‘attachment’ of the heart’s depth to the world’s depth.

This final attachment is, as a spiritual state, beyond ascetical purity and beyond existential drama. It is holiness of heart, rarely sought, rarely attained. It cannot be reached by any human acting on her or his own, without God’s help and presence. It is reached by the breakdown in the depth that only God can remake into breakthrough: this is Christ’s Cross. Here the Sword has done its task, and so is reversed, becoming the Cross. Here a wall, a wailing wall, of separation between our heart and God, and between our heart and the world, finally is breached and crumbles. We enter the mystical land of the heart, where there is a ‘new heaven and a new earth’. This mystical heart ground, spoken of but rarely experienced and lived, yet is what draws us forward always, because it is what the heart ‘really’ seeks. This is the ultimate of passion, the end point of its movement, of all its “sufferings and raptures of the spirit”. This is the attainment of the Passion of the Christ, by virtue of being given by God the ‘new heart’ promised to the Jews.

This passion serves love; this passion goes to any lengths for love, because it knows the deep truth of the world and the deep truth of the heart. This final passion is “all flame”, to quote an Egyptian desert Christian saint. Its love is not just for God; but rather in greater and deeper meaning, it loves the world with God’s Suffering Love. For passion was never destined, wounded, chastised, forged, tested, risked, to ‘go to heaven’. It was put through all this, it was made to undergo heaven and hell and everything in between, for the sake of a love for the world that would sacrifice itself in order not to judge and give up on, but to save and redeem, and finally transfigure and make divine, the world.

The deepest abyss of passion is called by God to the deepest abyss undergirding the world. For the world’s abyss can become a pit of death and the very hell into which everyone and everything will finally collapse in defeat, ruin and dereliction, or it can become the heart ground upholding everyone and everything. The abyss of God’s heart is meant to dwell in the abyss of the human heart: and the human heart is meant to turn the abyss beneath the world into a common ground of heart that upholds everyone and everything.

To a Buddhist – who had misunderstood the deep heart of humanity, and the extremity of the divine love’s passion for the world it had created, made free, and would suffer for to save and make divine – I once said the following. This person stated something about ‘detachment’ from passion as the necessary prerequisite for experiencing

the 'Void'. We were in a plane. I pointed to the window and said to this wrongly spiritualised person: "Passion is the bird which flies in the abyss without knowing the principle of its flight." Nothing more was said. Whether this person got it or not, I do not know, but I had pointed at the best in Buddhist enlightenment, but also pointed beyond it to Christian holiness: the holy heart on fire with a suffering, serving, sacrificial, 'staked to the ground', crucified love for this tragic, yet glorious, world.

It is passion's ultimate destiny and mission to carry the burden everyone puts down.

Suggested Reading

BUBER, Martin, *Ich und du*. Leipzig, 1923.

CHRYSSAVGIS John, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Bloomington, 2003.

CLEMENT Oliver, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*. New York, 1993.

FRIEDMAN, Milton, *To Deny Our Nothingness*. Chicago, 1978.

LORCA, Federico García, *Juego y Teoría del duende*. Madrid, 1933.

NIEHARDT, John Gneisenau (ed.), *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Bison, 2003.

YANNARAS, Christos, *The Freedom of Morality*. Crestwood, 2003.

Jamie MORAN: Six étapes de la passion

La passion commence dans l'enfance comme *enthousiasme* ou *inspiration* qui nous touche et nous fait passer du statisme au dynamisme. Si cette étincelle n'est pas éteinte, elle se développe pendant l'adolescence en une position intentionnelle, un engagement envers tout ce qui se présente à nous comme problème dans l'existence. mais par nécessité, la passion prend ici la forme d'une lutte, un conflit, entre sa propre soif de la vérité et la corruption du monde extérieur. Mais pour devenir mature, le courage et le zèle de la passion doivent être soumis à la spiritualité et tempérés par l'inévitable théâtre de la vie que nous pourrions briser et refaire plus solide avec la vérité du cœur qui peut changer le monde. Ceci est le stade final de la passion – sainteté de cœur – qui ne peut être atteint qu'avec l'aide et la présence de Dieu. Cela poursuit et sert de tout cœur, l'amour, même jusqu'à l'identification avec la passion du Christ, traduisant l'amour de Dieu qui souffre pour sauver et racheter et finalement transfigurer le monde.

Jamie MORAN: Los seis pasos de la pasión

La pasión comienza en la infancia como "entusiasmo" o "inspiración" – lo que nos toca y mueve de lo estático a lo dinámico. Si esta chispa no se apaga, se desarrolla durante la adolescencia a un estado intencional, un compromiso hacia lo que nos interesa, y por ende a nuestra unión con ello. Por necesidad aquí la pasión toma la forma de una batalla, un conflicto, entre su propia furia por la verdad y la falsedad del mundo exterior. Pero para llegar a ser verdaderamente madura, la bravura y el celo de la pasión deben ser amansados de forma espiritual, y templados por el ineludible drama de la vida, mediante el cual debemos ser deshechos y rehechos más fuertes, con la verdad del corazón que puede cambiar el mundo. Este es el estado final de la pasión la santidad del corazón la cual es sólo conseguida con la ayuda y presencia de Dios. Ella de todo corazón sirve y busca el amor, aún al punto de identificarse con la pasión de Cristo, tomando sobre sí el sufrimiento amoroso de Dios con el fin de salvar y redimir, y finalmente transformar el mundo.