Essays - 2.

MY THREE PASSIONS

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

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Question 1: Why does Russell call the three passions 'simple'?

ANSWER:

The essay actually is the preface to Bertrand Russell's autobiography. Every human is driven by a force, a passion all her/his life. It keeps her/him going. Some desire money, other, fame. There are some who desire simple satisfaction. Bertie's desires that he chased through his life were simple as well. He was driven by passions that any ordinary man or woman might feel for. For one, he wished love and got it too; he believed that it brought ecstasy. He got married four times to tell. Second, he hungered for knowledge and of course we all seek for it. He was a mathematician, a logician, political activist and wrote vastly on philosophy and contributed to literature, for which he received Nobel Prize as well. Third, he shared “an unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind”. He took a stand against World War 1 and Vietnam war. Any human will pity a suffering man or a woman for they have a heart and feel, and so did Russell. Russell was a man who did not lust after materialistic gains; he was born in a prominent aristocratic family of Britain and gave away much of what he inherited. He rose his voice in favour of suffragists and world government. He believed in free thought in religion and morals.

Question 2: Why has he compared the three passions to great winds?

ANSWER:

Russell compared his three passions to great winds as they were the driving force in his life. They directed his life and gave him the reason for his existence. These great winds are: the love, the knowledge and the pity for the suffering of the mankind. He found ecstasy in the first two that took him to heaven while the third brought him back to the earth with the practical reality. It appears from the words of the author; these are essential parts of his life. It was because of his passions, he found his life to be worth living and that he would gladly live it again if the chance were offered to him. So, his passions are like the great winds of his life directing him all along.

Question 3: What, according to Russell, is the importance of love in life?

ANSWER:

Bertrand Russell is of the opinion that love brings ecstasy in one's life. He believes that the bliss that love brings is so magnificent that he could sacrifice the rest of his life for this joy of few hours. It relieves one of loneliness of this world. Russell says that in love he has seen the heaven that the great saints and poets have imagined. Here, Russell has given a spiritual dimension to love. He reached beyond through love and it was pity that brought him back.

Question 4: How does Russell's definition of knowledge differ from what is commonly understood by the term?

ANSWER:

Knowledge is a treasure and Russell was a seeker of it. He craved to know and understood the Pythagorean power by which a number holds sway over the flux. He was a much learned man. He did believe that he achieved a little of it as well and yet he yearned for more. The understanding of the

higher subjects, why the star's shine? He beseeched beyond all this and it in turn took him upward toward the heavens.

Question 5: Why is the quality of pity earth-bound while the other two passions are elevating?

ANSWER:

Bertrand Russell had three passions governing his life all through. The first two being love and knowledge, which elevated him and took him higher to the heavens that great poets and saints have imagined. However, he said that the third one, i.e., pity, brought him back to the Earth, the reality. The pain in the echoing cries reverberated in his heart. All the sorrow in the wide world forced him to return to the Earth; the children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people that become a hated burden to their children. Russell was moved by the loneliness and poverty and pain that mocked human life. He imagined the ideal life of a human without any suffering and sorrow. So, he longed to alleviate the evil, however, he too suffered. He yet respected the human life and found it worth living and fought throughout his life against all evils. Bertrand fought against the Vietnam war and supported suffragists. Throughout his life he fought in favour of mankind to make this world a better place to live.

Question 6: How have the three passions contributed to the quality of Russell's life?

ANSWER:

The three passions, the great winds, in the Russell's life contributed immensely to its making. He found his life worth living and had he been given a chance; he would have lived it again. It was not just passions but the three vital virtues governing his life. These gave him directions and

were behind all his actions. Bertrand Russell believed in love, knowledge and pity. Whether it was his relationships with women, or fighting against Vietnam war, his stand on Israel, or his support to suffragists it was always these three ideals that ruled all his actions.