

WHY LOVE GOD (PART 1 OF 2)

Rating:

Description: What is love and how self-love necessitates loving God, the source of love.

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"Whilst the pen was making haste in writing, it split upon itself as soon as it came to Love."^[1]

Rumi was right. When pen is put to paper and  writes about love, it breaks in two. Trying to describe love is almost impossible. Love is truly a powerful, unique and irresistible force or feeling. When we try and express our love, we find it very hard to find the right words. The expressions we use do not fully represent what is burning deep down inside our hearts. This may explain why we associate love with actions and not just words. We embrace each other, buy our loved ones gifts, send our partners a bunch of flowers, or take them out for a romantic dinner. Love is not just an internal feeling; it is a way of being, a way of behaving. The psychologist Erich Fromm described love as "an activity, not a passive effect"^[2]

Loving yourself, Loving God

There are many types of love and one of these includes self-love. This type occurs due to the desire to prolong our existence, feel pleasure and avoid pain, as well as the need to satisfy our human needs and motivations. We all have this natural love for ourselves. Ultimately we want to be happy and content. Erich Fromm argued that loving oneself is not a form of arrogance or egocentricity. Rather, self-love is about caring, taking responsibility and having respect for ourselves.

This type of love is necessary in order to love others. If we cannot love ourselves, how then can we love other people? There is nothing closer to us than our own selves; if we cannot care for and respect ourselves, how then can we care for and respect others? Loving ourselves is a form of 'self-empathy'. We connect with our own feelings, thoughts and aspirations. If we cannot connect with our own selves, how then can we empathise and connect with others? Eric Fromm echoes this idea by saying that love "implies that respect for one's own integrity and uniqueness, love for an understanding of one's own self, cannot be separated from respect and love and understanding for another individual."^[3]

Although, due to loving others, we may sacrifice and disadvantage ourselves, these sacrifices are always for a greater form of happiness. Consider, for example, when someone goes without food to feed others. This person may have felt the pain of hunger; however he also achieved a greater overall happiness because the pain of seeing others go without was greater than the discomfort caused by the lack of food. Such sacrifices, although can be perceived as negative, are ultimately for a greater happiness. From a deeper, Islamic point of view, going without to ensure others are satisfied is the path that leads to ultimate happiness. The Divine blessings and rewards associated with sacrificing for our fellow humans, is ultimate eternal bliss – paradise. In this way, these sacrifices are to be understood as spiritual investments and not losing out. In summary, self-love can include sacrificing and enduring hardship for others, because that will lead to a greater happiness and contentment.

If a person's love for himself is necessary, this should lead him to love the One who made him. Why? Because God is the source of love. He also created the physical causes and means in order for each person to achieve happiness and pleasure, as well as to avoid pain. God has freely given us every precious moment of our existence, yet we do not earn or own these moments. The great theologian Al-Ghazali aptly explains that if we love ourselves we must love God:

"Therefore, if man's love for himself be necessary, then his love for Him through whom, first his coming-to-be, and second, his continuance in his essential being with all his inward and outward traits, his substance and his accidents, occur must also be necessary. Whoever is so besotted by his fleshy appetites as to lack this love neglects his Lord and Creator. He possesses no authentic knowledge of Him; his gaze is limited to his cravings and to things of sense."^[4]

God's Love is the Purest

God is The-Loving. He has the purest form of love. This should make anyone want to love Him, and loving Him is a key part of worship. Imagine if I were to tell you that there was this person who was the most loving person ever, and that no other love could match his love, wouldn't that instil a strong desire to get to know this person, and eventually love him too? God's love is the purest and most intense form of love; therefore any sane person would want to love him too.

Given that the English word for love encompasses a range of meanings; the best way to elaborate on the Islamic conception of God's love is to look into the actual Qur'anic terms used to describe Divine love: His mercy, His special mercy and His special love.

By understanding these terms and how they relate to the Divine nature, our hearts will learn to love God.

Footnotes:

[1]

Masnavi I: 109-116

[2] Fromm, E. (1956). *The Art of Loving*. New York: Harper & Row, p. 22.

[3] *Ibid*, pp. 58-59.

[4] Al-Ghazali. (2011) *Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Eric Ormsby. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, p. 25.

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