

Why Love God (part 1 of 2)

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.

Endnotes:

[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.

Why Love God (part 2 of 2)

Description: Understanding God's love through His Names, and how to receive His special love.

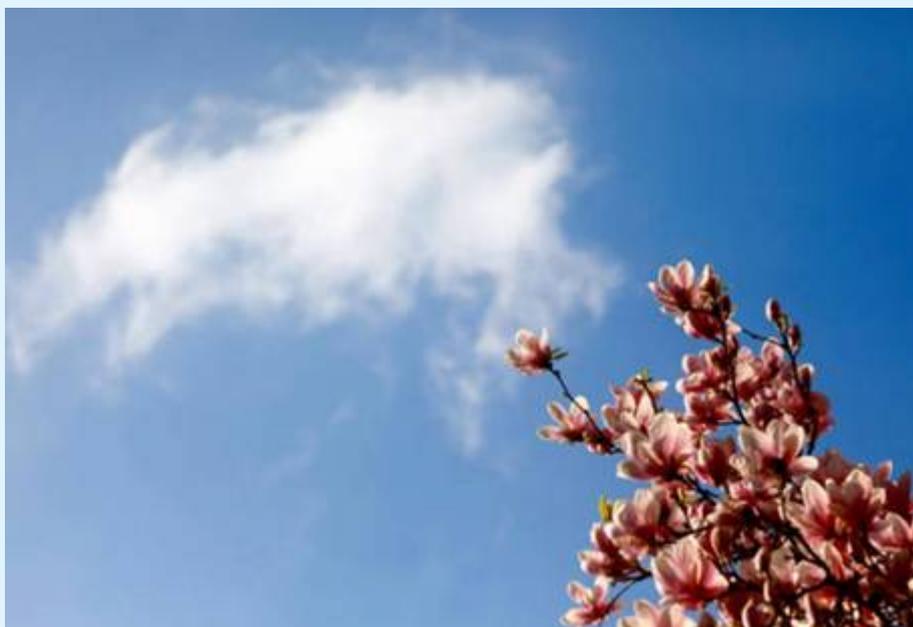
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Mercy

It is said that another word for love is mercy. One of God's names is The-Merciful; the Arabic word used is *Ar-Rahmaan*. This English translation does not fully represent the depth and intensity that the meaning this word carries. The name *Ar-Rahmaan* has three major connotations: the first is that God's mercy is an intense mercy; the second is that His mercy is an



immediate mercy; and the third is a mercy so powerful that nothing can stop it. God's mercy encompasses all things and He prefers guidance for people. In God's book, the Qur'an, He says,

"... but My mercy encompasses all things...." (Quran 7:156)

"It is the Lord of Mercy who taught the Qur'an." (Quran 55:1-2)

In the above verse, God says He is The-Merciful, which can be understood as the "Lord of Mercy", and that He taught the Qur'an. This is a linguistic indication to highlight that the Qur'an was revealed as a manifestation of God's mercy. In other words, the Qur'an is like one big love-letter to humanity. Just like with true love, the one who loves wants good for the beloved, and warns them of pitfalls and obstacles, and shows them the way to happiness. The Qur'an is not different: it calls out to humanity, and it also warns and expresses glad tidings.

Special Mercy

Connected to *Ar-Rahmaan*, is *Ar-Raheem*. This name shares the same root as the previous, which comes from the Arabic word for womb. The difference in meaning however is significant. *Ar-Raheem* refers to a special mercy for those who want to embrace it. Whoever chooses to accept God's guidance has essentially accepted His special mercy. This special mercy is for the believers and it is manifested in paradise; unending blissful peace with God.

Special Love

According to the Qur'an, God is The-Loving. The Arabic name is *Al-Wadood*. This refers to a special love that is apparent. It comes from the word *wud*, which means expressing love through the act of giving: "And He is the Forgiving, the Loving." (Quran 85:14)

God's love transcends all of the different types of love. His love is greater than all worldly forms of love. For example, a mother's love, although selfless, is based on her internal need to love her child. It completes her, and through her sacrifices she feels whole and fulfilled. God is an independent Being who is self-sufficient and perfect; He does not require anything. God's love is not based on a need or want; it is therefore the purest form of love, because He gains absolutely nothing from loving us.

In this light, how can we not love the One who is more loving than anything we can imagine? The Prophet Muhammad (may God's peace and blessings be upon him) said, "God is more affectionate to His servants than a mother to her children."[\[1\]](#)

If God is the most loving, and His love is greater than the greatest worldly love we have experienced, this should instil in us a deeper love for God. Significantly, this should make us want to love Him by being one of His servants. Al-Ghazali aptly said, "For those endowed with insight there is in reality no object of love but God, nor does anyone but He deserve love."[\[2\]](#)

From a spiritual perspective, God's love is the greatest blessing anyone can ever achieve, as it is a source of internal tranquillity, serenity, and eternal bliss in the hereafter. Not loving God is not only a form of ingratitude, but the greatest form of hate. Not loving the One who is the source of love is a rejection of that which enables love to occur and fill our hearts.

God does not force His special love on us. Although, by His mercy, He lovingly gives us every moment of our lives, to fully embrace God's love and be recipients of His special love, one must enter into a relationship with Him. It is as if God's love is waiting for us to embrace it. However, we have closed the door and put up the shutters. We have kept the door shut by denying, ignoring and rejecting God. If God were to force His special love on us, love would lose all meaning. We have the choice: to follow the right path and thereby gain God's special love and mercy, or reject His guidance and face the spiritual consequences.

The most loving Being loves you, but in order for you to fully embrace that special love, and for it to be meaningful, you have to choose to love Him and follow the path that leads to His love. This path is the Prophetic path of the Prophet Muhammad (may God's peace and blessings be upon him):

"Say, [O Muhammad]: 'If you love God, then follow me, [so] God will love you and forgive your sins. And God is Forgiving and Merciful'."
(Quran 3:31)

An important question that follows from this is: *I know why I must love God, but how do I love Him?* I hope to address this in another piece. However, to conclude, I leave you with the words of the 14th century theologian, Ibn Al-Qayyim:

"There is no doubt that perfect servitude to God is part of perfect love, and perfect love is connected to the perfection of the Beloved in and of Himself, for God, may He be glorified, is completely and absolutely perfect in all aspects, and could not possibly have any imperfections whatsoever. For one who is like this, nothing can be dearer to people's hearts than Him; so long as their basic nature and reason are sound, it is inevitable that He will be the dearest of all things to their hearts. Undoubtedly love of Him leads to submission and obedience to Him, seeking His pleasure, doing one's utmost in worship of Him and turning to Him. This is the best and strongest motive to do acts of worship."[\[3\]](#)

Last updated 5 April 2017. Taken and adapted from my book "The Divine Reality: God, Islam & The Mirage of Atheism". You can purchase the book [here](#).

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Abu Dawud

[\[2\]](#) Al-Ghazali. (2011) Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment, p. 23.

[\[3\]](#) Miftaah Daar al-Sa'aadah, 2/88-90.

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