

What is love?

Mehmet Akşit

*So long as I can breathe or I can see,
So long lives your love which gives life to me.
Shakespeare^A*

Love; it is a word we are never tired of saying, in novels, in poems, and in all that singing. Despite all sufferings, love is a magic which makes up our well-being.

*Life is the first gift, love is the second, and
understanding the third. Marge Piercy^B*

Love is a too abstract concept to grasp, even we do our best. Love is also the brute force that can pull the heart out of its nest.

Love is defined as affection stronger than friendship or good intention. It is also said that love comes along in many different kinds and shades.

Clearly, it is difficult to capture the meaning of love in one word, sentence, even a book. Many writers tried but could not succeed. How shall I describe love? More importantly, how shall I understand truly, what love is?

Ghazali^C claims that even if we cannot completely understand a concept, we may at least try to perceive it using the right methods.

*We love; therefore life is decorated with so many
beautiful things. Rumi^D*

These beautiful words advise us to seek for love in life. We should discover love in the nature; the nature that dazes us with the harmony of countless colors.

I felt love over there. In the middle of the waterfall that surrounded me. Where its glorious appearance dazzled my eyes, its roaming made me worthily deaf, its freshness thrilled me from my hair to toes, the scent of wild flowers came along from

many miles, it gave me the feeling of joy; there I felt love.

*Veysel is in love with the nature,
We are all one family, from the nature.
Aşık Veysel^E*

We came from the nature; we will go to the nature. Fish, birds, wild animals, domestic animals, humans; we share the chemistry, our essence are all the same. In fact, I love animals as much as I love the nature.

How could I be so unfaithful? How could I fail to remember my sweet cat? I shared love with him this morning, when he stared at me with love, when I caressed his soft fur, when we shared the joy of the day together. I am sure.

I love children; the little ones, the big ones, the clean ones, the dirty ones, the shy ones, the naughty ones, the white ones, the black ones. I just love children as they are.

I love elderly people; grannies with smiling faces and angry faces. They remind me my mother and father, my aunt and uncle. I get a feeling to hold their hands and kiss their cheeks. I just love elderly people as they are.

We fall in love, get married, have children, and so the life continues to exist. Love means to live and let live. It means continuity.

I have had many good friends, with whom I shared beautiful days together. They have helped me to shape my character; by playing, quarreling, laughing, crying, and supporting me in difficult moments.

And, when the days pass, eventually I met persons whom I consider special. I became influenced by their life story, knowledge and behavior. Being interested in similar topics

and sharing the same feelings, created a profound relation. I enjoyed their accompany. Usually, such bonds take many years to mature. Occasionally, seconds seem to be long enough to foster such attachments. Mutual respect and appreciation flourish. Years of friendship anchors. For some, all this turns into a platonic love.

And, all that simple moments when I felt affectionate. I was having a long distance flight. The plane was rather full. One flight attendant was doing her best to comfort the passengers, although I could feel her tiredness hidden in her voice. Half an hour before the landing time, she offered me a seat near to the exit door since I could have otherwise miss my connecting flight. She also helped me in carrying my hand baggage. I was impressed by her care and willingness to help. I told her “you have a wonderful heart”. My words blended with her warmest smile, leaving both of us feel the joy of friendliness.

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Koran, The Chambers (49), 13

To give a chance for better knowing each other, and for liberating our soul from prejudice, for understanding each other’s thoughts, the state of mind and hopes; these must be the steps to bring us closer to mutual love and understanding.

*Come, let us all be friends for once,
Let us make life easy on us,
Let us be lovers and loved ones,
The earth shall be left to no one.
Yunus Emre^F*

Sometimes I feel desperate when I see how much suffering is in this world; poverty, hunger, diseases and wars. Most sadly, there is a tendency to overlook, disregard or even justify the agony. Experts try to find reasons for the cause of misery; illiterateness, social differences, religious animosities, economical struggles, exploitation. In the

core of all, there is the one which fuels the rest; lack of understanding, compassion, and love.

Peace and justice are the two sides of the same coin. Dwight David Eisenhower^G

To restrain from carrying out acts that we would not like others do to us seems to be the key mind set to avoid the misery. To learn to love the fellow citizens of this earth seems to be the way to accomplish this attitude. This is not only essential for the wrong doers, but also for the ones who are insensitive to all that sufferings.

Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity. Buddha^H

Rational thinking makes me clear that loving each other brings peace to this world. But, what is the profound reason why I love? Most importantly, why am I so happy when I love and be loved?

Kory Floyd, in his book, presents a comprehensive overview of the research work carried out for understanding affection between humans [1]. The book discusses in detail the ways how persons express their affectionate feelings, how the receivers of such communication act accordingly, and the benefits and risks of affectionate communication.

All studies clearly show that the persons who give and receive relatively a higher degree of affectionate communication are happier, have higher self esteem and are less affected from psychological disorders and depressions.

The existing theories on affection give psychological, physiological and social reasons why humans need affectionate communication. For example, according to Darwinian perspectives, the persons who communicate affection become advantageous for their survival and continuity.

The book argues that the existing theories fail in short in explaining affectionate behavior uniformly, both from the perspectives of psychology and sociology.

Floyd focuses on affectionate communication between humans. There are certain aspects of affectionate communication I still do not understand completely. Is there any explanation why I feel a need to love the nature, plants and animals? From where comes my instinct to get to know people with whom I have no direct advantage of, and eventually love and serve them unconditionally?

Beloved, let us love one another: love comes from God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God. Bible, John, 4-7

Through the history, affection towards God has taken an important place for human beings. But why do humans love God? Is it because they are afraid of His punishment? Or is it because they hope to be welcomed in His Paradise? Or is it because they follow their primitive instinct of admiration for the happenings that they cannot fully understand and control?

*O God, If I worship You in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell,
If I worship You in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise,
If I worship You for Your own sake, Withhold not Your Everlasting Beauty. Rabiah¹*

The great Sufi's^J loved God consciously because of His magnificent attributes^K. Their love was not the result of a primitive instinct of admiration towards the unknown, but the contrary; Love was built up through years of painstaking self reflection and education. Sufi's could reach to such a sophistication in love that they created overwhelming masterpieces when they were "drunk of love"^L.

The most beautiful names (attributes) belong to God. Koran, The Elevated Places (7), 180

To love the Creator because of His perfect attributes, through love try to reach to perfection, and be loved by Him. But, what is the relation between "to love God" and the affection people feel in their daily life?

I love the created ones because of the Creator. Yunus Emre^F

If indeed God created everything with love, it makes sense that the ones who consciously love God also love everything created by God.

As Floyd presents in his book, feeling affection occupies a very important role in our life, and as such to love and to be loved are among the very basic instincts that we own. Evidently, to love and be loved make us happy as well. As Floyd also discusses in detail, however, there are a number of risks in communicating affection. Floyd studies the risks mainly from the perspective of the psychology of the persons that involve in affectionate communication.

Of course there are also "natural" threats to affectionate behavior. First of all, life is limited to a certain time span which brings restriction to the time that we feel affection. But most importantly, this causes uncertain feelings about everything that we do in life. Secondly, unpredictable events in life influence our way of living. Thirdly, due to our limited knowledge and estimation capabilities, we may make wrong assumptions and decisions about our future. Such imperfect happenings inevitably influence our life, and affectionate behavior. Anything that negatively influences our affectionate behavior also threatens our happiness.

To minimize the negative influences of imperfections of life, first of all, our affection may be expended to the new dimensions that offer a more robust foundation for our feelings. Ultimately, this means to love and be loved by someone who does not suffer of any imperfection; that is being in love with the All Encompassing and

All Knowing one; these concepts can only be attributed to the Creator.

Secondly, as Floyd discusses in his book, to minimize the risk of loving someone^M, the one who receives love must reciprocate the love, must not misinterpret the intentions of the lover and the lover must not suffer due to any censure imposed by the society. The first two risks are irrelevant for the Creator because He has the attributes The Loving and All Knowing. Although the third risk may be a practical problem in repressing societies, the lover may express the love for God by the heart, because God is also All Hearing.

Last but definitely not the least, the love towards God must be a genuine one based logical thinking of the mind and passion of the heart; otherwise it would have no real affect to the lover.

Sufi's were successful in developing a genuine love through conscious thinking and practicing. This journey generally starts by observing, feeling, thinking and discovering the miraculous bond between the tiniest particles, the body and the attributes of the Creator.

Then it progresses towards a mental state that comprehends the necessary conditions for our emotional, physical and social well-being. It becomes more and more apparent that such conditions can only be achieved through the attributes of the Creator. As such the admiration and love towards the Creator nourish. This follows a painstaking series of self reflection and education efforts to tame the soul.

Finally, practicing the aimed perfection through giving love and self meditation eventually leads to a state of mind and soul which enjoys the taste of all-encompassing love with the profound happiness. By this way the inner peace and peace in the society complement each other.

God is most Loving and Compassionate, Koran, The Celestial Stations (85), 14

Love, lover, to love, I love. What a wonderful feeling.

Notes

- A. Shakespeare (baptized 1564 - 1616): He was a poet and playwright.
- B. Marge Piercy (1936 -): She is a poet, novelist and social activist.
- C. Ghazali (1058 - 1111): He was a Sufi philosopher and saint (for Sufism see the note J). Ghazali's reasoning was related to the proof of God's existence. See for example chapter 6 "The God of the philosophers" in [2].
- D. Rumi or Jalalu'ddin Rumi (1207 – 1273): He was a Sufi saint, poet and theologian.
- E. Aşık Veysel (1894 – 1973): He was a folk singer and poet.
- F. Yunus Emre (1238 – 1320): He was a Sufi saint and poet.
- G. Dwight David Eisenhower (1890 – 1969): He was the 34th President of the United States and general in the United States Army.
- H. Buddha (around 4th century BC): He was a spiritual teacher from Ancient India and the founder of Buddhism.
- I. Rabiah (717 - 801): She was a Sufi saint.
- J. Sufism is generally understood to be the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. A practitioner of this tradition is generally known as a Sufi. Sufism also appeared in various forms in Christianity and Judaism. See for example chapter 7 "The God of the Mystics" in [2].
- K. In Islamic tradition, God is generally referred to with His 99 attributes.
- L. One well-known example of a masterpiece is The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi [3]. Also read chapter 14 "Afterword: The Konya District in [4].
- M. In chapter 6 "Risks associated with affectionate communication" [1], Floyd presents 4 risks for the senders of affectionate messages: risk of nonreciprocity, risk of misinterpretation, risk of social censure, and risk of disease transmission. For obvious reasons, we do not discuss the last risk here. Floyd also discusses the potential problems for receivers of affectionate expressions: expectations for reciprocity, relational boundary ambiguity, and affectionate expressions as manipulation attempts. Obviously, these risks are not relevant for the discussion in this article.

Inevitably, all translations are approximate translations.

References

1. Kory Floyd, "Communicating affection: interpersonal behavior and social context", Cambridge University Press, 2006.
2. Karen Armstrong, "A history of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam", William Heinemann Ltd. London, 1995.
3. The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi, R. A. Nicholson (translator), Konya Metropolitan Municipality, 2007.
4. C. Alexander, "A foreshadowing of 21st century art: the color and geometry of very early Turkish carpets", Oxford University Press, 1993.

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