

INFINITE LOVE ∞

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LOVE is a word that defies a single definition, conveying a felicity which in its essence transcends the earth. How should man perceive love?

Love emanates from Allah, for He loves and is loved. What then is the Most Beloved of Creation to Allah? It is the Best of His Creation, His Beloved, Prophet Muhammad. Every other true love on earth would stem from this love.

Indeed, Allah conveys to Prophet Muhammad the means by which we should love Him. He instructed him: "Say: If you love Allah, follow me and Allah will then love you." (3:31) Prophet Muhammad's path is the way to achieving the supreme love.

Thawban, the servant of the Prophet, once said to him, "Messenger of Allah, I love you more than my family and my possessions. I remember you and I cannot wait until I can come and look at you. I remember that I will die and you will die and I know that when you enter the Garden, you will be raised up high with the Prophets. When I enter it, I will not see you." (Al-Maqdisi)

Then Allah revealed the following verse, "And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, they will be with those whom Allah has favoured, from amongst the Prophets, *Siddiqin*, the martyrs and the righteous. How excellent these companions are!" (4:69)

Prophet Muhammad told us, "You will not become true believers until I become more beloved to you than your wealth, sons and all mankind." (Bukhari, Muslim) He told a man who asked who will be with in the Hereafter and was told, "You will be with those you love." (Bukhari) It is indeed the delights for Muslims in this world that their reward for obedience to Allah and his Messenger will be the opportunity to be with their loved ones for all eternity.

Of the people of this earth, Allah has given man the opportunity to have many loved ones, be they related by blood like his mother, father, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and relatives or those unrelated like his friends. It is Allah's Grace that this love, if based on the love of Allah and His Messenger, will transcend the earth and ascend to the heavens.

Romantic love – the love of the spouse – is a love unlike any other, made distinct by Allah Himself. But this love in its truest form stems from a love of the Prophet and its origin lies in the heavens themselves.

It is said when Adam saw Hawa, he wanted to touch and kiss her, but Allah sent Archangel Jibril to stop him. Allah told him that if we wanted to take Hawa as his wife, he should first pay her compensation for the privilege. When Adam asked what type of compensation this would be, Allah told Jibril to inform Adam that the best way for him to pay this would be to recite salutations on Prophet Muhammad three times. Adam did so immediately and Hawa was granted to him as his legal wife. (Ibn al-Jawzi)

In this primordial encounter, the origins of romantic love can be found. Adam upon gazing at Hawa fell in love with her, but his love could not be licit till he had married her. In the same way, romantic love can be generally understood to be licit when it leads to marriage, and the quicker the time between the initial gaze and the marriage itself the better.

Romantic love between Muslims is realised when a husband and wife live together, with Allah stating that spouses are like clothing for each other (2:187). The intimacy of the marital union in its physicality is like the covering of clothes over skin, but legally it protects each spouse from others and spiritually allows them to earn Allah's Grace so that when they

have reach old age, the eyes of the other remain beautiful. Indeed, the mystic Ibn 'Arabi's in his *Fusus al-Hikam* perceived man's knowledge of himself through woman preceding and encompassing his knowledge of Allah, making the perception of Allah through woman the greatest and most perfect vision of Him.

Prophet Muhammad spoke of his wives being with him in Paradise and Muslims can also find their spouses residing in Paradise with them, provided their love was based on loving Allah and His Messenger. The love between a Muslim husband and wife would enhance if it was founded and built upon this Divine love. This is the basis on which spouses should be sought for Muslims should aim to be with and love those on earth whom they will inshallah reside with in Heaven.

What then of illicit love? We have the Qur'anic example of Prophet Yusuf, a man so handsome that ladies who saw him said he resembled "a noble angel" (12:31) rather than a man. He rejected the seduction of al-Aziz's wife in Egypt (12:23) and chose voluntary imprisonment (12:33) for years. In this vein, any love of that which Allah has forbidden is false and is excluded from the gates of heaven.

Chastity, the preservation of one's sexuality from other than a spouse, is a rare word today, but is praised by Allah who cites it, for example when speaking of women who do not take boyfriends (4:25). The concept of a "taking" a boyfriend was alien to the Islamic tradition, that Allah Himself uses the verb '*akhasa*', literally 'to take', when forbidding this act.

Young men should also not sow their wild oats for Allah exhorts them, "And let not those who find the financial means for marriage keep themselves chaste, until Allah enriches them of his bounty." In general, a man would be classified as someone financially independent to be able to provide for his wife (4:34) – particularly if he has reached this status of by working conscientiously, even fasting in the interim as the Prophet advised.

In this regard, it should be remembered that the food and sustenance of one often suffices that of two and that young men must work diligently but should be assisted, by parents or by government endowments, to marry early to preserve their chastity.

What then of the possibility of romantic love amongst Muslim youth today? How does one go about finding a partner? The key to any introduction is to have a mahram, like her father or brother, of the female involved from the very beginning and to avoid any interaction alone.

Chastity is even more important in marriage as it prevents adultery, and patience is advised in this regard. During the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, there was a woman whose husband had gone on jihad and remained absent for a long time, and the woman yearned for him. One night, Umar passed by her house and he happened to hear her recite poetry: "The night has become long and this time has blackened / It pains me that I have no lover to play with."

The following day, Umar asked his daughter, Hafsa, "How long could a woman be patient if her husband is absent?" She answered, "Four months." Thereafter, Umar dispatched an order to his military commanders stating, "Do not keep any soldier away from his family for more than four months." (Al-Ulwan) Despite the needs this woman had, she feared Allah and remained chaste, acting as a reminder to husbands to keep such requirements in mind when making any travel arrangements.

There is also chaste love, a love for the characteristics of a person of the opposite sex without any physicality, which existed at the time of the Prophet. Muslims at that time did not reveal this love as they were embarrassed from Allah and preferred peace above entering risks.

What of love's antonym, hate, a word in any language draws to the negative? In Islam, it only becomes meritable when Allah requests the believers to do so. Ibn Abbas reported that Allah's Messenger said, "The strongest faith is to be sincere for the sake of Allah, to hate for the sake of Allah, to love for the sake of Allah, and to discard for the sake of Allah." (Ibn Abbas)

What of unrequited or unfulfilled love? How should a Muslim deal with a pain which troubles the heart and plagues the mind? If there was an innocence to the love, a crush, then consoling words of today's contemporary Makkan youth sometimes suffice: 'Allah created that person, He can create better than them.' But what if a person fell in love with someone, and was unable to marry them for whatever reason? The Muslim would be advised to still try and forget that person, and if they couldn't then, the Prophet advised in the best way: "Whosoever loved and remained chaste and concealed his love until he died, his reward would be like that of a martyr." (Ibn Hanbal) This love would, nevertheless, have to have been potentially lawful in the first place for martyrdom to have been its reward.

But in homes where love between Muslims spouses is established, the opportunities arising from this love are exponential. With houses fortified with Divine love, we learn how love forms the basis of any problem we face. When Muslims love one another, the Ummah can be unified as our Prophet commanded. When Muslims love for non-Muslims to embrace the path of our parents Adam and Hawa, mankind can be unified.