

SPREAD LOVE

Love – it is undoubtedly human's strongest emotion, and essential for humankind's survival.

Everyone experiences love. Even before we were born, we are filled with our mother's love as she patiently carries us in her womb. The moment we enter this world, the outpouring of love continues and is extended by our parents and family members. As we grow up, we continue to establish new love connections with individuals we meet along the way, from acquaintances to friends.

The need to be loved is fundamental, everyone wants to be loved – a child seeks a mother's love, a wife seeks her husband's love and vice versa. It goes beyond close relationships, extending to friends, neighbours as well as strangers.

We have seen what the lack of love could do to people. This includes sadness, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, depression and some even to the extent of committing suicide.

A lot of the world's problems could be resolved if people were to embrace and sincerely express love. There are too many haters in this world; from racism to vengeance, swindlers to burglars, greediness to power craze – these are some of the root causes to the world's problems, the violence and disharmony that is happening all over the world.

***Love comes naturally. Hate is learned.
It misleads, distorts the truth and erodes our sense of value.
Choose to spread love and goodness always.***
Mufti Ismail Menk

Although love can sometimes produce negative outcomes, it is our greatest strength and asset. It has the ability to get us to do things that we always thought impossible.

Misconceptions on Islam

Before we explore and discuss further on the beautiful topic of love i.e., how it plays a big part and changes our life, I would first like to clear some misconceptions about Islam, particularly about it being wrongly portrayed as a religion of violence and hate instead of love.

I wrote this chapter in early 2016, when the world, especially in western countries, is terrified with the increasing terrorism activities of extremist terrorists, ISIS in particular. Prior to ISIS, there have always been extremist militant groups being linked to terrorism – al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Taliban etc. These terrorist groups have claimed to be on a jihad journey fighting for Islam. However, in reality, they are far off from the teachings of Islam. None of their terrorising actions reflect or represent what Islam is about.

Islam is a religion based on love, period.

It is reflected in all aspects of life including warfare, an act that naturally involves pain, violence and death. With regard to warfare, Islam provides explicit and strict guidelines on its conduct, on what can and cannot be done. Among others is to never to harm, what more kill, women and children during war.

It was narrated by Ibn 'Umar that a woman was found killed in one of these battles; so the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) forbade the killing of women and children.

Muslim

If we were to analyse any major wars the world has experienced, be it world wars or civil wars, women and children were not spared from the ruthless killings. To a certain extent, harming them became part of a war strategy. Such ruthless actions are never prescribed by Islam – on the contrary, Islam strictly prohibits it. If there are any Muslims in this world who does this heinous crime, they are doing it on their own accord. In no way do their actions represent Islam; they are just plain cruel murderers.

Their ruthless and unforgiving actions only spurred an Islamophobia wave across the globe causing distress to innocent Muslims who practise true Islamic teachings.

Islamophobists claim that Islam was spread by the edge of a sword and they have managed to get a lot of people to believe so too. However, the truth is far from it. According to Yusuf Estes in one of his talks, out of the many words representing sword in Arabic (and there are about 16 of them), none of them actually appear in the Quran. Instead the word “sword” is found and repeated numerous times in scriptures of other religions, but not Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had always used love and respect to deliver his messages in spreading and teaching Islam, especially during critical times. A classic example is the day he claimed back Makkah after the Makkah polytheists violated the peace treaty they had signed earlier. The whole takeover process was done in peace. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had promised safety for the residents of Makkah who stayed indoors while the Madinah Muslims entered

the city. Almost everyone chose to do so except for a minority few, who stubbornly resisted.

Remember that these were people who hated, cursed and tried to kill Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) many times. Among them were people who waged wars and killed hundreds of Muslims throughout the early days of Islam. However, all of these people were pardoned and unharmed when Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) opened the holy city of Makkah.

This included the person responsible for killing Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) beloved uncle, Hamza ibn 'Abdul-Muttalib during the Battle of *Uhud* – Hind bint Utbah, the wife of Abu Sufyan. She had ruthlessly cut open Hamza's corpse, took out his liver and attempted to eat it. Despite all that she had done – the long drawn confrontation she had with Muslims including her personal vendetta against Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) himself – she was still pardoned by our beloved Prophet (ﷺ).

Aishah narrated: Hind bint `Utbah bin Rabi`a said, "O Allah's Apostle! (Before I embraced Islam), there was no family on the surface of the earth, I wish to have degraded more than I did your family. But today there is no family whom I wish to have honored more than I did yours." Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "I thought similarly, by Him in Whose Hand Muhammad's soul is!" Hind said, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! (My husband) Abu Sufyan is a miser. Is it sinful of me to feed my children from his property?" The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "No, unless you take it for your needs what is just and reasonable."

Bukhari

After embracing Islam, Hind bint Utbah made a lot of contributions to the Muslim nation. This was all due to the loving and forgiving attitude Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had towards her. This was how Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) spread Islam, with love – even turning his foes into his best allies.

So how can anyone claim that Islam was spread by the edge of the sword?

Love in Islam

Islam is a religion that is based on love, which is, in essence, its fundamental core and roots. We are prescribed to approach life with love and compassion from every aspect of life, be it family, social, politics, economy or warfare – nothing is excluded.

This reflects our Creator's main attribute of love towards His creations. He ensures that we carry it through in our daily lives through the commandments He has set for us through the teachings of Islam.

Love is clearly reflected in the first verse of the Quran and repeated at the start of each surah in the Quran (except for surah At-Tawbah). This means a total of 113 times. It is the phrase that we are encouraged to utter before embarking on any action (except, of course, for wrongdoings or misdeeds) –

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

This is the supreme statement of love, and it clearly denies the allegations that claim Islam is a religion based on violence; an allegation made by only ignorant people.

Love in Islam travels in all directions, between us and Allah, between each other, between us and animals as well as between us and the world in general – the trees, the environment – basically, everything that exists in this world.

Allah's love to us is the greatest love of all, which is why our greatest love should only be given to Him.

Who created you, proportioned you, and balanced you?

Al-Infitar 82: 7

He has provided us with everything that we need to live in this world – the air we breathe, the water we drink, the variety of food we eat – all the different kind of resources needed for us to live comfortably in a world He created just for us.

And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures. Therein are fruit and palm trees having sheaths [of dates]. And grain having husks and scented plants. So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?

Ar-Rahman 55: 10 – 13

His love to us is beyond comprehension; we can never attain or even come close to the level of love He has given us. Despite our continuous disobedience to Him, He continues to pour us with His blessings and not punish us immediately for any of our wrongdoings. He gives us the chance to return to Him to seek His forgiveness as He is the Most Forgiving.

Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."

Az-Zumar 39: 53

We, on the other hand, lack patience for any wrongdoing others have done to us. Just look at how parents punish their children when they do something wrong, even for small mistakes such as spilling food on their shirt. Let us also reflect on how vengeful we are towards people who misuse our trust, sometimes to the point of not being able to even look at the person's face and swearing to never forgive them until the day we die.

In actual fact, Allah has more right to be angry and punish us if He wants to but instead, He showers His love and mercy towards us and continues to

provide for our needs, leaving the door open for us to return back to Him as long as we are still alive.

Ibn `Umar narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “Indeed Allah accepts the repentance of a slave as long as (his soul does not reach his throat).”

Ibn Majah

Allah has prescribed clear guidelines on loving one another, explicitly stating the rights we have for each other.

Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.

An-Nisa 4: 36

The most basic principle taught to us, especially regarding relationship among Muslims, is to love another person just like we love ourselves.

It was narrated on the authority of Anas b. Malik that the Prophet (ﷺ) observed: None of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.

Bukhari and Muslim

This goes beyond gender as well as ethnicity; love is shared across all races regardless of wealth or status.

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

Al-Hujurat 49: 13

Love is extended much further in Islam as we are expected to not only express love towards humans but animals as well.

Jabir reported that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) forbade (the animals) to be beaten on the face or cauterization on the face.

Muslim

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) once said that a woman was sent to Hell because of how she ill-treated her cat by imprisoning it and not feeding or setting it free to hunt for its own food.

Ibn `Umar narrated: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "A woman entered the (Hell) Fire because of a cat which she had tied, neither giving it food nor setting it free to eat from the vermin of the earth."

Bukhari

Prophet (ﷺ) also told us the story of how a man went to Paradise for a simple act of giving water to a thirsty dog in the middle of the desert.

Abu Hurairah narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "While a man was walking on a road he became very thirsty. Then he came across a well, got down into it, drank (of its water) and then came out. Meanwhile he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst.

The man said to himself "This dog is suffering from the same state of thirst as I did." So he went down the well (again) and filled his shoe (with water) and held it in his mouth and quenched the dog's thirst. Allah thanked him for that deed and forgave him."

The people asked, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?" He said, "(Yes) There is a reward for serving any animate (living being)."

Bukhari

Even when slaughtering animal, we are required to do it in a manner that would be least painful to the animal, by performing it as quick as possible using the sharpest tools.

Abu Ya'la Shaddad bin 'Aus reported: Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Verily Allah has prescribed Ihsan (kindness) for everything. So when you kill, you must make the killing in the best manner; when you slaughter, make your slaughter in the best manner. Let one of you sharpen his knife and give ease to his animal (in order to reduce his pain)."

Muslim

We were brought into this world to promote and perform goodness as well as to refrain from any wrongdoing. This is a call to love; once we develop the awareness to do this, we are automatically taking care of the world and its contents, be it humans or any other living or non-living things that exist in it.

And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.

Ali Imran 3: 104

This is why for any act of kindness and love that we express in this world we would have a share in its rewards. This includes kindness and care given to plants. For example, when the plants we had grown and cared for produces fruits that benefits other beings in this world, regardless whether they are humans or animals, we will receive a share of its rewards too.

Anas bin Malik narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him."

Bukhari

We have discussed earlier about how Islam promotes love even in warfare.

Besides war, love is also applied in Islamic financial or economy system through the prohibition of *riba* (usury or interest). *Riba* transactions are always in favor of the rich and against the interests of the common people, creating unfairness and placing burden on the weak. It carries adverse effects on allocation of resources and also distribution of wealth. The prohibition of *riba* eliminates unfairness in an economy. Looking at it from that angle, the prohibition of *riba* is a testament of love for mankind.

Those who consume interest cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one stands who is being beaten by Satan into insanity. That is because they say, "Trade is [just] like interest." But Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden interest.

So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with Allah. But whoever returns to [dealing in interest or usury] – those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.

Allah destroys interest and gives increase for charities. And Allah does not like every sinning disbeliever.

Al Baqarah 2: 275 – 276

In Islam, the supreme and greatest love is for none other than Allah, followed by love for His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). It is then followed by love for our parents, spouses, children, friends and humanity in general.

Anas narrated: The Prophet (ﷺ) said "None of you will have faith till he loves me more than his father, his children and all mankind."

Bukhari

Why is the priority of our love in such order – we are to love our Prophet (ﷺ) who we have never personally met over the people who had brought us up since we were a child?

Firstly, we need to appreciate that it was through Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that we are able to enjoy and live the beauty of Islam. Although we have never met him, everything he has taught us has benefited us, a testament of love he has for us, his *ummah*. All he ever wanted for us is the best for us. The messages he had brought causes a chain effect; the moment we are able to love Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) with all our heart, we will sincerely follow his teachings, which requires us to love our parents, family, friends and mankind. And ultimately, everything that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had taught us represents our love for Allah and also His love for us as all of the messages brought by Prophet (ﷺ) originated from Allah in the first place.

Ibn Mas'ud reported: I asked the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): "Which action is dearest to Allah?" He (ﷺ) replied, "Performing As-Salat (the prayer) at its earliest fixed time." I asked, "What is next (in goodness)?" He (ﷺ) said, "Kindness towards parents." I asked, "What is next (in goodness)?" He (ﷺ) said, "To participate in Jihad in the Cause of Allah."

Bukhari and Muslim

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the greatest example of a person who optimises love to produce remarkable results. He had inspired and touched so many people, who later became his strongest supporters and protectors. We have discussed a few examples throughout this book to illustrate this fact with the latest being the story of Hind bint Utbah. Previously in an earlier chapter, we had discussed about how he treated the people of Taif; even after they had physically hurt him, he supplicated to Allah asking the best for them instead of a punishment. These are some of the examples of his loving character.

It was out of love that strong and strict characters such as Umar al Khattab and Khalid al Walid were softened and became his Companions and strongest supporters. His beautiful personality and ways entered their hearts, opening them to unconditionally accept the messages of Islam.

Another good example that exhibits Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) kindness and love for people is the incident of a Bedouin urinating in the Prophet's (ﷺ) mosque in Madinah. The Companions wanted to beat up the Bedouin but Prophet (ﷺ) disallowed them from doing so. Instead, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) asked the Companions to wash the urine with a bucket of water while he personally addressed the Bedouin, who was ignorant of what he was doing. He did not scold or punish the Bedouin but instead, he spent time reasoning and teaching the Bedouin.

This was how Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) practised unconditional love, touching thousands of lives while he was alive and millions more after he was no longer around.

Abu Hurairah narrated: A Bedouin urinated in the mosque, and the people rushed to beat him. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) ordered them to leave him and to pour a bucket or a tumbler (full) of water over the place where he has passed urine. The Prophet then said, "You have been sent to make things easy (for the people) and you have not been sent to make things difficult for them."

Bukhari

There is no doubt that we are called to fear Allah but it is the kind of fear based on love.

To illustrate this type of fear, let us ponder on a simple analogy that most of us can relate to. The fear is very much similar to how we fear our parents

especially when we were young – it was more of fear in disappointing them rather than being terrified of them.

This is what it is meant by fearing Allah, fear of doing some wrong or bad because we love Allah so much – a fear that is based on love.

Abu Hurairah narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "When Allah completed the creation, He wrote in His Book which is with Him on His Throne, "My Mercy overpowers My Anger."

Bukhari

In summary, Islam is a religion that is based on love – this is a fact no matter how hard people try to deny or misinterpret it.

Effects of Love

Do you remember what it was like when first you fell in love? For parents, do you remember what it was like when your child was born into this world? How great it felt having an abundance of positive energy running throughout our body, resulting in happiness and excitement that we are unable to explain, many times resulting in us unconsciously shedding tears of joy?

This is the kind of happiness that felt greater than any achievement or success in life, the kind of love that could shake the world and make a difference.

Love supplies us with a special kind of energy that motivates us to go beyond our limits to achieve things that we had always thought impossible.

How is this possible?

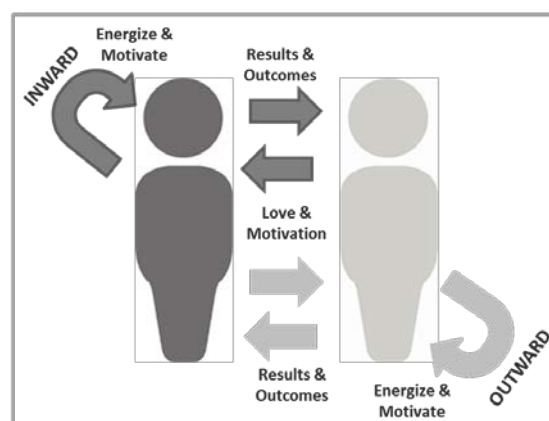
Love is when the other person's happiness is more important than your own.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr., author of a New York Times bestseller

It is because our motivation goes beyond ourselves; extending to others, the ones we love.

The power of love works in two directions, inwards and outwards. Both are closely related and connected to one another. First, it energises us internally, acting as a catalyst and source of motivation to push us to do great things for our loved ones. At the same time, it also energises the people around us to do great things for us, voluntary out of their love for us.

Love produces amazing results depending on how we harvest it. In most situations where there is mutual love, once it works in one direction, it would work in the other direction as well. Fundamentally, love is a two-way relationship. Basically, what it means is that once we give all that we have for a loved one, the person would generally return and do the same for us – we want the best for them as how they want the best for us, pushing ourselves to act in the best interest of each other and diligently taking care of each other. This does not only apply to romantic or familial relationships, but extends to other people we consider friends as well.



Love cures people – both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.

Karl A. Menninger, psychiatrist

Love concerns matters of the heart – it is closely connected to the heart, or more accurately, embedded in it. This makes it very delicate and needs to be handled with care. Care, on itself, is a natural outcome of love, which makes it most suitable to be at the core of matters involving love.

Keep love in your heart.
A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers are dead.
Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright, novelist, essayist, and poet

The strongest strength is however not without weaknesses. Sometimes love causes us to lose judgment when we make rushed decisions, usually impulsive ones, in the name of love. There have been many instances where love caused people to make irrational decisions at the spur of the moment without taking into consideration the potential impact it may have in the future. Usually, it ends up in making things worse.

Love is about feelings and emotions, supported by fundamental values that are important to humans – trust, respect and sincerity. If one of these values are broken, especially trust, love would start to crumble almost immediately; it either crumbles slowly over time or just within seconds, depending on the root cause and severity of the incident that caused it. Because of love's delicate nature, it does not take much to break it – the closer or deeper the love is, the more vulnerable it becomes.

When this happens, it might cause a totally opposite turn, changing the positive emotion of love to hate, a dangerous emotion that could totally pull us down, destroying us.

Hate is an emotion that can cause a person to lose control of their rational judgment and resort to harmful decisions and actions that could hurt the person

as well as the people around them. Hate never leads to anything positive, ending up in frictions, disharmony and disunity.

Aslam said, "Umar ibn al-Khattab said, 'Do not let your love be a total infatuation. Do not let your anger be destruction.' I asked, 'How is that?' He replied, 'When you love, you are infatuated like a child. When you hate, you desire destruction for your companion.'"

Al-Adab Al-Mufrad. Graded Sahih by Al-Albani

Just like the movie Star Wars, of which I am a true blue fan, it is a war between good and evil. In the movie, evil is energised by hate, anger and rage – the traits that lead to regrets. This is why it is important for us to learn to optimise the strengths of love and control its weaknesses.

The Dark Side – Anger leads to Hate, Vice Versa

Anger and hate are inseparable, once we feel either one of them; the other emotion would follow, working in a perfect combo. Anger is the key to every evil; it results in enmity and grudges that can destroy a person.

Similar to love, anger also transmit a strong energy outwards. If it is not contained or controlled, it may result in harmful acts of violence, sometimes beyond normal limits. We often hear of people suddenly losing control and start injuring others out of anger including their most loved ones. In some isolated cases, it is to the extent of causing unintentional death.

At the end of such troubling episodes, people would usually end up deeply regretting their actions. However, by then it is too late to change anything.

This is because anger provides an opening for Satan to enter our hearts and influence us to say and do evil things that we would regret when it subsides. This is why Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) taught us methods to battle anger. Among

the methods to help calm us down is to seek refuge with Allah from Satan as they are the strongest supporters and influencers of anger.

Sulaiman bin Surad narrated: While I was sitting in the company of the Prophet (ﷺ), two men abused each other and the face of one of them became red with anger, and his jugular veins swelled (i.e. he became furious). On that the Prophet said, "I know a word, the saying of which will cause him to relax, if he does say it. If he says: 'I seek Refuge with Allah from Satan.' then all is anger will go away." Somebody said to him, "The Prophet (ﷺ) has said, 'Seek refuge with Allah from Satan.'" The angry man said, "Am I mad?"

Bukhari

Another practical and effective technique taught by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to help us control anger by sitting or lying down, depending on the level of our anger.

Abu Dharr narrated: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said to us: When one of you becomes angry while standing, he should sit down. If the anger leaves him, well and good; otherwise he should lie down.

Narrated by Abu Dawud. Graded Sahih by Al-Albani

Controlling anger is not an easy task; it takes a lot of energy, willpower and strength to do it. Actually the strongest people in this world are not the ones who have great physical strength. Instead, they are the ones who are able to control themselves when they are angry.

Abu Hurairah narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger."

Bukhari

Sometimes anger and hate comes in small packages and originates from different things, accumulated through different experiences with different people. Because it comes to us in a *not so* obvious manner, we tend to take these small packages of anger lightly and not address it immediately. We fail to realise that the combination of these small portions of anger will have a serious impact and affect us in the long run.

Without proper attention and treatment, over the course of time, we would start to get easily irritated with anything that goes wrong around us – we let even the simplest and smallest things get to us. We start blaming others, expressing anger at every opportunity we get.

Our personality changes from an optimist to a pessimist, from positive to negative, from an energy giver to an energy sucker. Treating this 'sickness' is more difficult than containing it. If we fail to treat or contain it, we might end up becoming an ambassador of hate instead of love.

I have seen many people around me, even my closest brothers and sisters fall into this trap. From being the most helpful person around to someone who only cares about themselves, all due to their untreated anger.

The Power of Forgiveness

An act consistent and aligned with spreading love is forgiving others. However, it is indeed very difficult to practise.

At the same time, we cannot deny its strengths and benefits to us as a person as well as to the society at large. Forgiving cleans our heart, making us the stronger person in a fight.

We created not the heavens, the earth, and all between them, but for just ends. And the Hour is surely coming (when this will be manifest). So overlook (any human faults) with gracious forgiveness.

Al-Hijr 15: 85

It is among the acts most loved by Allah, representing our sincere love towards others by sacrificing and putting aside our anger.

Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people – and Allah loves the doers of good.

Ali Imran 3: 134

Islam continuously encourages us to forgive others, reminding us that the same will be returned to us, if not by man, by Allah.

Abdullah ibn Amr reported: The Prophet (ﷺ), peace and blessings be upon him, was upon the pulpit and he said, "Be merciful to others and you will receive mercy. Forgive others and Allah will forgive you. Woe to the vessels that catch word (i.e. the ears). Woe to those who persist in their wrongdoing while they know better."

Musnad Ahmad. Graded Sahih by As-Suyuti

There is no disadvantage in forgiving others; it does not make us the weaker party. Remember that Allah loves forgiving His slaves, so how can the act of forgiving be a weak action?

It never is and will never be.

Aishah reported: I asked: "O Messenger of Allah (ﷺ)! If I realize Lailat-ul-Qadr (Night of Decree), what should I supplicate in it?" He (ﷺ) replied, "You should supplicate: Allahumma innaka 'afuwwun, tuhibbul-'afwa, fa'fu 'anni (O Allah, You are Most Forgiving, and You love forgiveness; so forgive me)."

At-Tirmidhi

If we are to continuously battle anger and hate with forgiveness, we will be able to protect ourselves from its traps, be it in big or small packages.

***Don't hold grudges or accuse others in your heart.
It's a poison coming from you without you ever realizing.
Don't harm your soul. Forgive!***
Mufti Ismail Menk

Unconditional Love – The Strongest Form of Love

Before we can learn how to optimise the strengths of love, we need to first understand the strongest version of it.

Unconditional love; loving another person without any conditions or limits, accepting them for who they are, despite whatever weaknesses they may have. This is the purest form of love – true love.

Each one of us would have experienced and practised unconditional love at least once in our lifetime. Much of it is experienced when we were younger, when our minds and hearts were clean and pure.

When did we first experience unconditional love?

The first experience of unconditional love for most of us was probably when we were a baby or a young child, perhaps a toddler between the ages of 1 to 4 years old. At that age, unconditional love was the love we have towards our parents, pure and sincere without any conditions whatsoever. At that point in time (and maybe even now), to most of us, our parents were our heroes.

Remember the times we would get scolded for being disobedient, naughty or mischievous. When we were much younger the effects did not last long. Despite being scolded, we would still run back to our parents seeking comfort and love. It is not until we grow a bit older, at a stage that we are able

to form our own thoughts and opinions, that we start putting in conditions, establishing parameters in expressing and receiving love. Nevertheless, for most of us, we will usually carry the unconditional love we have for our parents until the day we die.

In normal circumstances, the unconditional love we transmit as a young child is not a one way street. The feeling is mutual for the parents, usually even stronger than the child. For some of us who are fortunate to become parents, we will be able to experience this form of unconditional love first hand. The moment our child is born into this world, the first moment we hold our child in our arms, we can feel the warm rush of love spreading through us completely and unconditionally. Even for some of us where our child is born imperfect or special, we still accept them for who they are, and able to look beyond their imperfections.

This is unconditional love in its most perfect state.

Parents usually carry such great level of love throughout their lives. Regardless of how their child turns out to be as an adult, they will still continue to love them anyway. We sometimes hear stories of drug addicts physically hurting their family members or parents by accident when they are in an intoxicated state. It is very common for us to hear pleas from the parents requesting the public and authority to forgive their child, justifying the child's actions with all kinds of reasons even though the incident involved people close to them or themselves. They continue to stand by their child, protecting them from further attacks by the public. This is the extent of a parent's unconditional love.

I can still remember how my mum treated me during my naughty and rebellious teenage years. I had, without doubt, hurt her many, many times by the things that I did but *Alhamdulillah*, a mother's love is like no other. She

continued to be patient and continuously forgive me for the all the times I had hurt her. I guess this is the reason why Allah made the supplications of parents for their child among the strongest supplications of all; it carries the power and strength of unconditional love.

Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet (ﷺ), said, "There are three supplications which are answered: The supplication of the person who is wronged, the supplication of the traveler, and the supplication of a parent for his child."

Al-Adab Al-Mufrad. Graded Sahih by Al-Albani

Unconditional love brings tremendous internal power and motivation. We are willing to give it all, even to the extent of giving up everything we have for our loved ones. To illustrate this, let us honestly answer a simple simulated question – if you are stranded on a deserted island with your child, spouse, best friend, boss and an acquaintance with the last piece of bread in your hand, who would you share it with?

The answer is rather straightforward and I personally believe that most of us, especially those who are parents, would answer the same – we would give the whole piece to our child.

It is easy to extend unconditional love to our immediate loved ones – our close family members, spouse or siblings. But many of us still fail to apply it; we remain stubborn with our expectations and requirements imposed on them.

If we can't even apply it to the people closest to us, what makes us think that we can apply it to the general masses? This is the challenge that we need to overcome; a battle that we need to fight with ourselves.

If only we could extend such pure and strong level of love beyond our family members and treat everyone we know with unconditional love, the world would surely be a better place. This is where the real challenge lies – we are

stingy with our love. We tend to keep it only for certain people whom we have picked and chose – the ones who fit our requirements and criteria.

Actually, if we are to ponder on the beautiful hadith we had discussed earlier, Islam had always propagated unconditional love for everyone.

It was narrated by Anas b. Malik that the Prophet (ﷺ) observed: None of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.

Bukhari and Muslim

In summary, majority of us have failed to implement unconditional love on a bigger scale in our daily lives, sticking to our habit of labeling and categorising people according to our self-imposed requirements. In fact most of us have forgotten this beautiful yet powerful concept of unconditional love.

Love – The Key to People

Life is designed and structured in a way that we depend on each other; we cannot live alone. Everyone wants to achieve something in life, a certain kind of success that varies from one person to the other.

The journey of achieving success involves various steps and components, some within our control but most of it residing with other people. We have no other options except to obtain those components from them if we ever want to taste the success we are chasing – we have to reach out to people.

This is why Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) reminded us to live together in congregation and support one another.

Abu Musa reported: Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "The relationship of the believer with another believer is like (the bricks of) a building, each

strengthens the other." He (ﷺ) illustrated this by interlacing the fingers of both his hands.

Bukhari and Muslim

However, we need to remember that ultimately, everything comes from Allah and it is only to Him that we should fall back on. People are just intermediaries; they are not the ones who determine whether or not we would achieve success. Accordingly, everyone else in this world is in need of Allah.

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And to Allah with [all] matters be returned.

Ali Imran 3: 109

In short, success is attained through three different components – our efforts, a little help from others and Allah’s will; it can only happen with Allah’s help and approval.

And never say of anything, “Indeed, I will do that tomorrow,” Except [when adding], “If Allah wills.” And remember your Lord when you forget [it] and say, “Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct.”

Kahfi 18: 23 – 24

Hence, we need to remember that no matter how much we look for help or assistance, at a fundamental level, we need to ask from Allah, expressing our love to Him.

Ibn 'Abbas narrated: "I was behind the Prophet (ﷺ) one day when he said: 'O boy! I will teach you a statement: Be mindful of Allah and He will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him before you. When you ask, ask Allah, and when you seek aid, seek Allah's aid. Know that if the entire creation were to gather together to do something to benefit you – you would

never get any benefit except that Allah had written for you. And if they were to gather to do something to harm you – you would never be harmed except that Allah had written for you. The pens are lifted and the pages are dried."

Graded Hasan Sahih by At-Tirmidhi

Nevertheless, as much as people are only intermediaries, we are still dependent on them. In one way or another, we would need to reach out to them for help. This is the law of nature that Allah has set for us, to live in community while we try to make the world a better place together.

The million dollar question – how do we penetrate the barriers that people has erected so as to be able to reach out to them?

The answer is simple – love.

The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.

Theodore Roosevelt, 26th U.S. President

Love is the key for us to reach out to people, to enter their hearts. The moment we are able to enter their hearts, we will be able to collaborate our efforts to achieve mutual benefits.

Let's reflect on the earlier question of who we would most likely share the last piece of bread with when stranded on an island. The obvious answer would be a loved one. This applies to other matters in life as well. We would most likely help or give to people we love rather than someone we just met on the street – humans are just designed that way.

Love is usually given according to the priority that we set ourselves, depending on the level of love we have for each person. The order differs for everyone; some would have their parents at the top, while others might put their children or spouse as their top priority. As it goes down the list, we have

people such as siblings, relatives, best friends – whoever we love or have emotional attachments with. But don't be surprised that some people might have their best friends instead of family members at the top of their list for reasons only known to them – everyone experiences love differently.

This is a norm in life. It is much easier for us to apply unconditional love to people who are close to us. But what about people who are more distanced from us, such as strangers that we have just met. There is an essential need for us to tackle this group of people because like or not, the majority of things we need to succeed resides with them.

My mentor had taught me a simple yet effective technique to do this, to enter a person's heart and win them over within a short period of time. A technique that would enable us to get what we want from other people easily, at least most of the time –

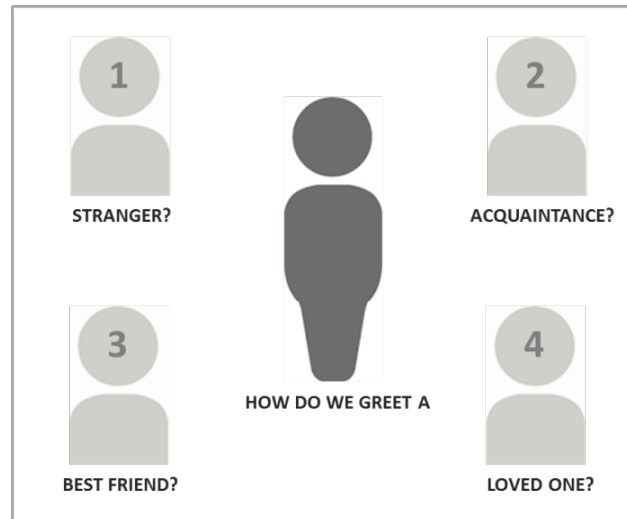
“If you can learn a technique that will help you get what you want 99% of the time, do you want to learn it?”

Obviously, everyone's answer would be yes. But the question is – does this magical technique actually exist?

This technique is best taught using an activity that would enable us to illustrate the emotional effects produced in a realistic way. The activity involves a pair; say Mr. A and Mr. B. Usually if this activity is conducted in public training programmes, the majority of the participants would not know each other.

But firstly, to produce optimum and realistic results, we need to be our true self when performing the activity. This would enable us to differentiate and experience the different types of emotions as we go through the activity.

The activity – each pair needs to greet each other based on four scenarios, with each person taking turns to go through and experience each of the four scenarios:



Scenario 1 : How do we greet strangers? People whom we have just met for the first time.

Scenario 2 : How do we greet acquaintances? People whom we have met only once or twice. Someone we just happen to know.

Scenario 3 : How do we greet our best friends? People whom we are closest to and care for, the kind of friends that we can truly be ourselves and share many parts of our life.

Scenario 4 : How do we greet our loved ones? People whom we sincerely love from the bottom of our heart and care for the most in life. We would be willing to do anything for them, at the expense of our own happiness.

The questions that come after completing the activities are relatively simple, it only requires a single answer. How do we feel after being greeted in each of the scenarios? Which of the four scenarios do we feel most appreciated, respected and trusted? Which of the four scenarios we felt most loved? Who would we go out of the way to help and willingly give what they need?

The answer to the questions above is obvious – our first priority would surely be our loved ones.

If we had performed the activity seriously, we would be able to feel the emotional difference and impact when greeted as a loved one, despite the fact that our activity partner isn't our loved one. There is a big difference in terms of how much we would open up to another person when approached with love compared to being approached as a stranger.

So, where does the secret of the technique lies?

The activity actually illustrates the technique.

Firstly, the activity proves that it is possible for us to approach or treat anyone, including strangers, as a loved one. The emotional connection with the person we approached would most likely feel similar to an emotional connection we establish with our loved one. At the very least, the person we had approached would be more comfortable to open up to us, which sets us off to a good start.

Next is the actual secret to the technique – to seamlessly approach everyone around us as if they are our loved one, unconditionally.

Imagine how much difference we would make to a person's day when we approach the person in a warm and loving manner, giving out an impression that they really matter to us. Any normal person would feel touched and happy to be treated that way and it is only normal for them to return the same treatment to us.

We would willingly help the person to our level best, going the extra mile for them just to make their day. We automatically apply empathy to the other person, caring and sharing whatever difficulties or challenges they might be facing.

An-Nu'man b. Bashir reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: The similitude of believers in regard to mutual love, affection and empathy is that of one body; when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever.

Muslim

We can consider this technique as an extension of the power of unconditional love. It is the secret to reaching out to other people.

Is this a technique developed only recently?

Come to think of it, this technique is not new after all. Islam has introduced a form of it, back in the times of the Prophet (ﷺ). Islam's version of the technique eliminates any danger of misunderstanding, in case someone misinterprets it as an act of flirting or any other wrong intentions. Islam provides a method to apply the right kind of love when approaching another person especially to acquaintances and strangers, people whom we have just met – this is what it means by loving another for the sake of Allah.

Abu Hurairah reported: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "A man set out to visit a brother (in Faith) in another town and Allah sent an angel on his way. When the man met the angel, the latter asked him, "Where do you intend to go?" He said, "I intend to visit my brother in this town." The angel said, "Have you done any favor to him?" He said, "No, I have no desire except to visit him because I love him for the sake of Allah, the Exalted, and Glorious." Thereupon the angel said, "I am a messenger to you from Allah (to inform you) that Allah loves you as you love him (for His sake)"

Muslim

The hadith beautifully illustrates what true unconditional love is all about.

I am fortunate to have unintentionally experienced unconditional love in this form first hand back in 2012, during my second Umrah trip, which was in the last 10 days of Ramadhan. It was a backpack adventure together with Seroja and his parents. It remains one of the best and most fulfilling trips of my life, full of colours and beautiful memories despite the various challenges I faced while I was there.

It was the peak of summer; we were fasting under extreme hot temperatures. If I can recall correctly, it was way above 40°C during the day. At night, the temperature ranged between 36°C to 39°C. I always made sure I had a small towel and a bottle of water with me as I was constantly sweating while praying, even at 2am in the morning.

There were millions of people from all over the world rushing to perform as many acts of worships and kindness possible, trying to maximise the advantages of the last 10 days of Ramadhan. Everyone was hoping to catch the night of the *lailatul qadr* – the night of decree, a night better than a thousand months.

The Night of Decree (Qadr) is better than a thousand months.

Al-Qadr 97: 3

Aishah narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Search for the Night of Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan."

Muslim

Despite the crowd, I enjoyed every single moment of the experience. As I am writing this down, I am literally wishing and praying that I would be given

another opportunity to repeat the experience again. Nothing beats spending the last 10 days of Ramadhan in the holy city of Makkah.

Among the best experience I had while I was there was meeting fellow Muslims from other parts of the world. Although they were not many people who could speak English, I was fortunate to have met a few. I can vividly remember the faces of three persons that I met.

The first was a brother from Lebanon, whose name I have forgotten. We had the chance to chat on a particular afternoon while we waited for the Maghrib azan to break our fast. I remember him telling me that he came to Malaysia with his wife for their honeymoon.

The second person was Brother Husain from Kenya whom I had the chance to spend time eating supper on the floor of a shopping mall. There were too many people around and there were not enough tables and chairs for us to sit and eat. We spent a few nights at the same spot in each other's company over hot kebabs and cups of fresh orange juice.

But it was the third person who really touched my heart from the moment we met. He was Brother Iyad, an English teacher from Palestine. It started off with him making space for me to pray just before one of the fard prayers, *Asr* if I am not mistaken. The floor was already packed with people. He gave up some space just enough to fit me in, sacrificing his comfort to perform prayers. He was big sized, over 6 feet if I recall correctly. After prayers, we continued to chat together with another brother from Egypt, who could not converse in English. Brother Iyad translated the three way conversation we had the whole way.

What actually touched me the most was the fact that from the moment we started interacting with each other, he had continuously supplicated for my wellbeing, asking the best for me and my family despite the fact we had just

met. He repeated his supplications for me after almost every other sentence we exchanged.

He also expressed his love for me for the sake of Allah publically, literally saying "I love you brother" out loud in the open numerous times. Sometimes we would just know if someone is sincere when they say they love you. From the look on his face, I knew he meant what he said. He did not ask for anything in return, only prayers for him and his family back in Palestine.

I knew for a fact that he had gone through a much tougher life compared to mine based on the stories he shared. Despite the difficulties and hard life he went through, he was the one who welcomed me into his life without conditions.

Although I had the chance to meet him only once while I was there, I can still remember him clearly until now – how he looked like, his tone of voice, his kindness; that was how strong the effect of his unconditional love had on me. It was surely a great honour to have met someone like him in my lifetime.

Love as a Lifestyle

We can all agree that love is an integral part of life; each of us needs it, we strive through life by leveraging on it – basically we are part of it. However, living and maintaining it as part of our life is not as easy as it seems. The constant battle we have with its archenemies, anger and hate, make things much more difficult than it already is.

Love is life. And if you miss love, you miss life.
Leo Buscaglia, "Dr. Love", author and motivational speaker

Nevertheless, if we were to hold on strong to certain guiding principles, we should be able to optimise and maximise love to our own benefit.

1. Be unconditional – extend love to everyone.

The key to penetrating others and expressing love to its maximum potential is to first be unconditional. Everyone deserves a piece of our love and the only way to do it is to break all the barriers and limits that stop us from reaching out to others.

Once we are able to break down those barriers, we will be able to treat everyone as if they are our loved ones. Believe that once we express love towards others, it would surely come back to us.

The best thing to hold onto in life is each other.

Audrey Hepburn

2. Suppress anger, be in control.

Anger is our greatest enemy and there is only one effective way of dealing with it – that is by controlling it. Prevention is always better than cure. But in the case of anger, there might not even be a room for cure. When it happens, what we are usually left with are just regrets.

Being in control of our anger makes us a much stronger person. It allows us to love without hesitation and without the worry of us blowing up, which is an action that would have just killed what we have strived so hard to build through a lot of time and effort.

3. Ask for forgiveness and forgive others.

Love cannot work without humility and the best way to achieve it is by practising two-way forgiveness. We know better that we are beings who are

never free from mistakes. We are also surrounded by other people who are not free from mistakes as well.

***My children and friend do not walk too tall,
for you will not know when you will fall.
Be nice, polite to every one and all, be they big, humble or small.***
Dato' Paduka Wan Ibrahim Wan Soloh

It isn't love if we cannot accept the imperfections of our loved ones. A practical way of expressing this is to forgive them whenever they make a mistake. But before that, we also need to put our ego aside and admit our mistakes as well.

Mistakes are always forgivable, if one has the courage to admit them.
Bruce Lee

Forgiveness does not have to be limited towards our loved ones, it should be extended to everyone in our life, be it friends or foes. Actually forgiving our enemies or people who had done something wrong to us is the highest level of love. It sets us free from negative thoughts and feelings as we pass the bulk back to the other person for an appropriate reaction. Just remember how Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had treated Hind bint Utbah, in the end instead of being an enemy, she turned out to be among his greatest supporters.

4. Help others, build emotional banks.

We can never live alone and as much as we want to stand and build success on our own, the key to achieving success is through others.

Most of the time the components we need for success resides with other people and we would need to obtain those components from them in one way or another. There needs to be a good reason for them to give it to us. For a start, we need to establish a connection with them first – we need to establish and build our emotional bank account with them.

The fastest way to strengthen the emotional bank account is none other than to help the other person achieve what they want as well. Similar to us, their success depends on others and we might be the one holding the key to their success. Be generous and give out the key to them first, help them achieve what they want. The favour would be returned back to us in no time.

Remember the simple rule in life: in order to receive, we must first give.

***You will get all you want in life
if you help enough other people get what they want.***
Zig Ziglar, author, salesman, and motivational speaker

The whole journey or experience would be much sweeter and meaningful if we put in love and sincerity in the whole process; usually when these two elements are in place, we end up being the best of friends.

5. Motivate ourselves based on love.

It is undeniable that love can be the greatest motivator for us, enabling us to do things we always thought impossible.

Love strongly supports us from the back; celebrating a purpose bigger than ourselves. We don't only carry our own strength but also the strengths of others – our loved ones.

If we are able to harvest and maximise the power of love, we can only imagine what we can achieve for ourselves individually, for our loved ones and also for the society at large.

***Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength,
while loving someone deeply gives you courage.***

Lao Tzu

Spread Love Not Hate

Love is beautiful; there is no point of us going into a debate on it. The only time it isn't is when it is broken. We can't blame love when that happens, we only have ourselves to blame for not taking good care of it.

As anger and hate is inseparable, love and life is a combo as well – at least for a happy life. We know that the major components of love are mainly positive. If they involve negative components, it is not love, it must be something else masked as love.

***We love life, not because we are used to living
but because we are used to loving.***

Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher, cultural critic, poet, and scholar

In any case, we need to remember and believe that love overpowers hate.

Spreading love is like spreading fragrance for everyone to share, once the positive energy kicks in, we would be ready and emotionally equipped to defeat love's archenemy, hate.

The world needs more love for it to resolve the various problems it is facing. Currently, there are too many hypocrites out there who claim to love but are in actual fact ambassadors of hate.

Spreading love needs to start somewhere, even if it is small, even if it is only us, alone. We need to truly believe in it and hold on strong to the concept of spreading love and do our best to live it to the fullest, spreading it to others and inviting them to do the same.

After that, we can only hope and wait for its amazing outcomes regardless big or small.

Love itself is already an amazing outcome on its own, a good enough reason for us to be thankful.

So, let us spread love and not hate. Let's make this world a better place.

Just as one candle lights another and can light thousands of other candles, so one heart illuminates another heart and can illuminate thousands of other hearts.

Leo Tolstoy, Russian writer, regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time