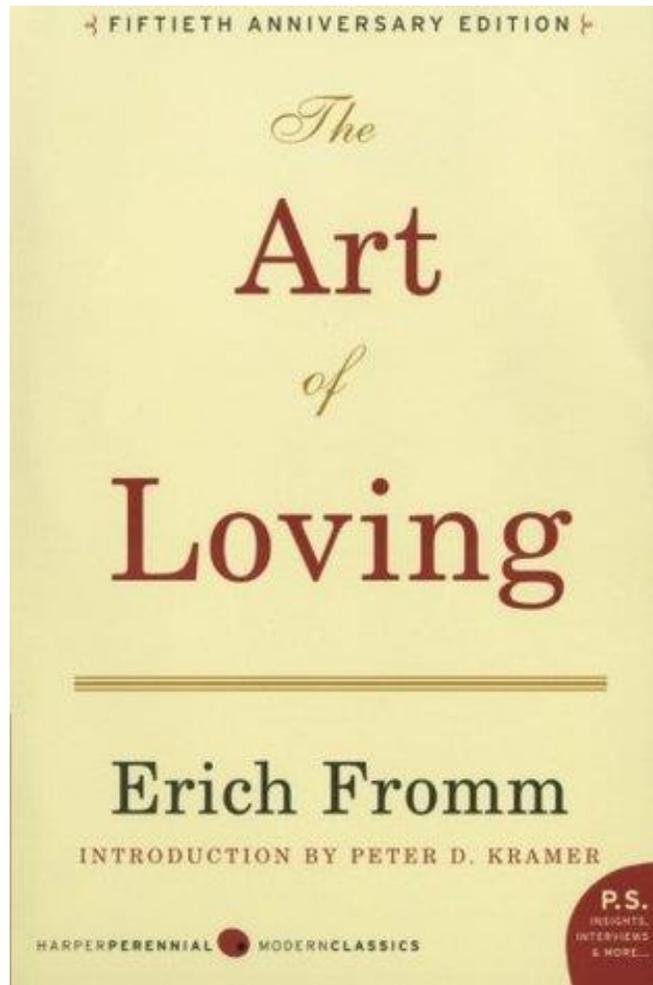


Love of God

from



From the back of the book:

Most people are unable to love on the only level that truly matters: love that is compounded of maturity, self-knowledge, and courage. As with every art, love demands practice and concentration, as well as genuine insight and understanding.

In his classic work, *The Art of Loving*, renowned psychoanalyst and social philosopher Erich Fromm explores love in all its aspects – not only romantic love, stepped in false conceptions and lofty expectations, but also brotherly love, erotic love, self-love, the love of God, and the love of parents for their children.



Introduction

From Wikipedia

The Art of Loving is a 1956 book by psychoanalyst and social philosopher Erich Fromm, which was published as part of the *World Perspectives Series*.

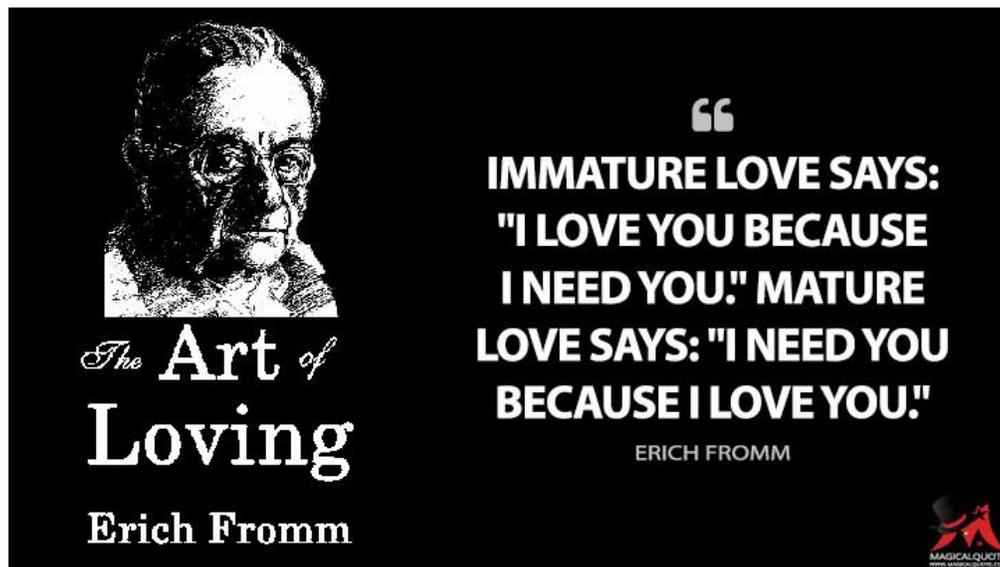
Fromm presents love as a skill that can be taught and developed, rejecting the idea of loving as something magical and mysterious that cannot be analyzed and explained. He is therefore skeptical about popular ideas such as “falling in love” or being helpless in the face of love.

Because modern humans are alienated from each other and from nature, we seek refuge from our lonesomeness in romantic love and marriage. However, Fromm observes that real love “is not a sentiment which can be easily indulged in by anyone.” It is only through developing one’s total personality to the capacity of loving one’s neighbor with “true humility, courage, faith and discipline” that one attains the capacity to experience real love.

From the book:

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) emigrated from Germany in 1934 to the United States, where he held a private practice and taught at Columbia, Yale, and New York University.

The entire book (on line version is 133 pages) can be read at:
<https://farzad.devbro.com/the%20art%20of%20loving.pdf>



Of all of the qualifications love is the most important,
for if it is strong enough in a man it forces him to acquire all the rest,
and all the rest without it would not be sufficient.

Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj

(ruhanisatsangusa.org/gemsq.htm)



Love of God

It has been stated above that the basis for our need to love is in the experience of separateness and the resulting need to overcome the anxiety of separateness by the experience of union. The religious form of love, that which is called the love of God, is, psychologically speaking, not different. It springs from the need to overcome separateness and to achieve union. In fact, the love of God has as many different qualities and aspects as the love of man has—and to a large extent we find the same differences.

In all theistic religions, whether they are polytheistic or monotheistic, God stands for the highest value, the most desirable good. Hence, the specific meaning of God depends on what is the most desirable good for a person. The understanding of the concept of God must, therefore, start with an analysis of the character structure of the person who worships God.

The development of the human race as far as we have any knowledge of it can be characterized as the emergence of man from nature, from mother, from the bonds of blood and soil. In the beginning of human history man, though thrown out of the original unity with nature, still clings to these primary bonds. He finds his security by going back, or holding on to these primary bonds. He still feels identified with the world of animals and trees, and tries to find unity by remaining one with the natural world.

Many primitive religions bear witness to this stage of development. An animal is transformed into a totem; one wears animal masks in the most solemn religious acts, or in war; one worships an animal as God. At a later stage of development, when human skill has developed to the point of artisan and artistic skill, when man is not dependent any more exclusively on the gifts of nature—the fruit he finds and the animal he kills—man transforms the product of his own hand into a god. This is the stage of the worship of idols made of clay, silver or gold. Man projects his own powers and skills into the things he makes, and thus in an alienated fashion worships his prowess, his possessions. At a still later stage man gives his gods the form of human beings. It seems that this can happen only when he has become still more aware of himself, and when he has discovered man as the highest and most dignified “thing” in the world. In this phase of anthropomorphic god worship we find a development in two dimensions. The one refers to the female or male nature of the gods, the other to the degree of maturity which man has achieved, and which determines the nature of his gods and the nature of his love of them.

Let us first speak of the development from mother-centered to father-centered religions. According to the great and decisive discoveries of Bachofen and Morgan in the middle of the nineteenth century, and in spite of the rejection their findings have found in most academic circles, there can be little doubt that there was a matriarchal phase of religion preceding the patriarchal one, at least in many cultures.

In the matriarchal phase, the highest being is the mother. She is the goddess, she is also the authority in family and society. In order to understand the essence of matriarchal religion, we have only to remember what has been said about the essence of motherly love. Mother’s love is unconditional, it is all-protective, all-enveloping; because it is unconditional it can also not be controlled or acquired. Its presence gives the loved person a sense of bliss; its absence produces a sense of lostness and utter despair. Since mother loves her children because they are her children, and not because they are “good,” obedient, or fulfill her wishes and commands, mother’s love is based on equality. All men are equal, because they all are children of a mother, because they all are children of Mother Earth.

The next stage of human evolution, the only one of which we have thorough knowledge and do not need to rely on inferences and reconstruction, is the patriarchal phase. In this phase the mother is dethroned from her supreme position, and the father becomes the Supreme Being, in religion as well as in society. The nature of fatherly love is that he makes demands, establishes principles and laws, and that his love for the son depends on the obedience of the latter to these demands. He likes best the son who is most like him, who is most obedient and who is best fitted to become his successor, as the inheritor of his possessions. (The development of patriarchal society goes together with the development of private property.) As a consequence, patriarchal society is hierarchical; the equality of the brothers gives way to competition and mutual strife.

Whether we think of the Indian, Egyptian or Greek cultures, or of the Jewish-Christian, or Islamic religions, we are in the middle of a patriarchal world, with its male gods, over whom one chief god reigns, or where all gods have been eliminated with the exception of the One, the God.

However, since the wish for mother's love cannot be eradicated from the hearts of man, it is not surprising that the figure of the loving mother could never be fully driven out from the pantheon. In the Jewish religion, the mother aspects of God are reintroduced especially in the various currents of mysticism. In the Catholic religion, Mother is symbolized by the Church, and by the Virgin. Even in Protestantism, the figure of Mother has not been entirely eradicated, although she remains hidden.

Luther established as his main principle that nothing that man does can procure God's love. God's love is Grace, the religious attitude is to have faith in this grace, and to make oneself small and helpless; no good works can influence God—or make God love us, as Catholic doctrines postulated.

We can recognize here that the Catholic doctrine of good works is part of the patriarchal picture; I can procure father's love by obedience and by fulfilling his demands. The Lutheran doctrine, on the other hand, in spite of its manifest patriarchal character carries within it a hidden matriarchal element. Mother's love cannot be acquired; it is there, or it is not there; all I can do is to have faith (as the Psalmist says, "Thou hadst let me have faith into my mother's breasts.") and to transform myself into the helpless, powerless child. But it is the peculiarity of Luther's faith that the figure of the mother has been eliminated from the manifest picture, and replaced by that of the father; instead of the certainty of being loved by mother, intense doubt, hoping against hope for unconditional love by father, has become the paramount feature.

I had to discuss this difference between the matriarchal and the patriarchal elements in religion in order to show that the character of the love of God depends on the respective weight of the matriarchal and the patriarchal aspects of religion. The patriarchal aspect makes me love God like a father; I assume he is just and strict, that he punishes and rewards; and eventually that he will elect me as his favorite son; as God elected Abraham-Israel, as Isaac elected Jacob, as God elects his favorite nation. In the matriarchal aspect of religion, I love God as an all-embracing mother. I have faith in her love, that no matter whether I am poor and powerless, no matter whether I have sinned, she will love me, she will not prefer any other of her children to me; whatever happens to me, she will rescue me, will save me, will forgive me. Needless to say, my love for God and God's love for me cannot be separated. If God is a father, he loves me like a son and I love him like a father. If God is mother, her and my love are determined by this fact.

This difference between the motherly and the fatherly aspects of the love of God is, however, only one factor in determining the nature of this love; the other factor is the degree of maturity reached by the individual, hence in his concept of God and in his love for God.

Since the evolution of the human race shifted from a mother-centered to a father-centered structure of society, as well as of religion, we can trace the development of a maturing love mainly in the development of patriarchal religion. In the beginning of this development we find a despotic, jealous God, who considers man, whom he created, as his property, and is entitled to do with him whatever he pleases. This is the phase of religion in which God drives man out of paradise, lest he eat from the tree of knowledge and thus could become God himself; this is the phase in which God decides to destroy the human race by the flood, because none of them pleases him, with the exception of the favorite son, Noah; this is the phase in which God demands from Abraham that he kill his only, his beloved son, Isaac, to prove his love for God by the act of ultimate obedience.

But simultaneously a new phase begins; God makes a covenant with Noah, in which he promises never to destroy the human race again, a covenant by which he is bound himself. Not only is he bound by his promises, he is also bound by his own principle, that of justice, and on this basis God must yield to Abraham's demand to spare Sodom if there are at least ten just men. But the development goes further than transforming God from the figure of a despotic tribal chief into a loving father, into a father who himself is bound by the principles which he has postulated; it goes in the direction of transforming God from the figure of a father into a symbol of his principles, those of justice, truth and love. God is truth, God is justice. In this development God ceases to be a person, a man, a father; he becomes the symbol of the principle of unity behind the manifoldness of phenomena, of the vision of the flower which will grow from the spiritual seed within man. God cannot have a name. A name always denotes a thing, or a person, something finite. How can God have a name, if he is not a person, not a thing?

The most striking incident of this change lies in the Biblical story of God's revelation to Moses. When Moses tells him that the Hebrews will not believe that God has sent him, unless he can tell them God's name (how could idol worshipers comprehend a nameless God, since the very essence of an idol is to have a name?), God makes a concession. He tells Moses that his name is "I am becoming that which I am becoming." "I-am-becoming is my name." The "I-am-becoming" means that God is not finite, not a person, not a "being." The most adequate translation of the sentence would be: tell them that "my name is nameless." The prohibition to make any image of God, to pronounce his name in vain, eventually to pronounce his name at all, aims at the same goal, that of freeing man from the idea that God is a father, that he is a person. In the subsequent theological development, the idea is carried further in the principle that one must not even give God any positive attribute. To say of God that he is wise, strong, good implies again that he is a person; the most I can do is to say what God is not, to state negative attributes, to postulate that he is not limited, not unkind, not unjust. The more I know what God is not, the more knowledge I have of God."

Following the maturing idea of monotheism in its further consequences can lead only to one conclusion: not to mention God's name at all, not to speak about God. Then God becomes what he potentially is in monotheistic theology, the nameless One, an inexpressible stammer, referring to the unity underlying the phenomenal universe, the ground of all existence; God becomes truth, love, justice. God is I, in as-much as I am human.

Quite evidently this evolution from the anthropomorphic to the pure monotheistic principle makes all the difference to the nature of the love of God. The God of Abraham can be loved, or feared, as a father, sometimes his forgiveness, sometimes his anger being the dominant aspect. Inasmuch as God is the father, I am the child. I have not emerged fully from the autistic wish for omniscience and omnipotence. I have not yet acquired the objectivity to realize my limitations as a human being, my ignorance, my helplessness. I still claim, like a child, that there must be a father who rescues me, who watches me, who punishes me, a father who likes me when I am obedient, who is flattered by my praise and angry because of my disobedience. Quite obviously, the majority of people have, in their personal development, not overcome this infantile stage, and hence the belief in God to most people is the belief in a helping father—a childish illusion. In spite of the fact that this concept of religion has been overcome by some of the great teachers of the human race, and by a minority of men, it is still the dominant form of religion.

Inasmuch as this is so, the criticism of the idea of God, as it was expressed by Freud, is quite correct. The error, however, was in the fact that he ignored the other aspect of monotheistic religion, and its true kernel, the logic of which leads exactly to the negation of this concept of God. The truly religious person, if he follows the essence of the monotheistic idea, does not pray for anything, does not expect anything from God; he does not love God as a child loves his father or his mother; he has acquired the humility of sensing his limitations, to the degree of knowing that he knows nothing about God. God becomes to him a symbol in which man, at an earlier stage of his evolution, has expressed the totality of that which man is striving for, the realm of the spiritual world, of love, truth and justice. He has faith in the principles which “God” represents; he thinks truth, lives love and justice, and considers all of his life only valuable inasmuch as it gives him the chance to arrive at an ever fuller unfolding of his human powers—as the only reality that matters, as the only object of “ultimate concern”; and, eventually, he does not speak about God—nor even mention his name. To love God, if he were going to use this word, would mean, then, to long for the attainment of the full capacity to love, for the realization of that which “God” stands for in oneself.

From this point of view, the logical consequence of monotheistic thought is the negation of all “theology,” of all “knowledge about God.” Yet, there remains a difference between such a radical non-theological view and a non-theistic system, as we find it, for instance in early Buddhism or in Taoism.

In all theistic systems, even a non-theological, mystical one, there is the assumption of the reality of the spiritual realm, as one transcending man, giving meaning and validity to man’s spiritual powers and his striving for salvation and inner birth. In a non-theistic system, there exists no spiritual realm outside of man or transcending him. The realm of love, reason and justice exists as a reality only because, and inasmuch as, man has been able to develop these powers in himself throughout the process of his evolution. In this view there is no meaning to life, except the meaning man himself gives to it; man is utterly alone except inasmuch as he helps another...

...The teachers of paradoxical logic say that man can perceive reality only in contradictions, and can never perceive in thought the ultimate reality-unity, the One itself. This led to the consequence that one did not seek as the ultimate aim to find the answer in thought. Thought can only lead us to the knowledge that it cannot give us the ultimate answer. The world of thought remains caught in the paradox. The only way in which the world can be grasped ultimately lies, not in thought, but in the act, in the experience of oneness. Thus paradoxical logic leads to the conclusion that the love of God is neither the knowledge of God in thought, nor the thought of one’s love of God, but the act of experiencing the oneness with God.

This leads to the emphasis on the right way of living. All of life, every little and every important action, is devoted to the knowledge of God, but a knowledge not in right thought, but in right action. This can be clearly seen in Oriental religions. In Brahmanism as well as in Buddhism and Taoism, the ultimate aim of religion is not the right belief, but the right action. We find the same emphasis in the Jewish religion. There was hardly ever a schism over belief in the Jewish tradition (the one great exception, the difference between Pharisees and Sadducees, was essentially one of two opposite social classes). The emphasis of the Jewish religion was (especially from the beginning of our era on) on the right way of living, the Halacha (this word actually having the same meaning as the Tao).

In modern history, the same principle is expressed in the thought of Spinoza, Marx and Freud. In Spinoza's philosophy the emphasis is shifted from the right belief to the right conduct of life. Marx stated the same principle when he said, "The philosophers have interpreted the world in different ways—the task is to transform it." Freud's paradoxical logic leads him to the process of psychoanalytic therapy, the ever deepening experience of oneself.

From the standpoint of paradoxical logic the emphasis is not on thought, but on the act. This attitude had several other consequences. First of all, it led to the tolerance which we find in Indian and Chinese religious development. If the right thought is not the ultimate truth, and not the way to salvation, there is no reason to fight others, whose thinking has arrived at different formulations. This tolerance is beautifully expressed in the story of several men who were asked to describe an elephant in the dark. One, touching his trunk, said "this animal is like a water pipe"; another, touching his ear, said "this animal is like a fan"; a third, touching his legs, described the animal as a pillar.

Secondly, the paradoxical standpoint led to the emphasis on transforming man, rather than to the development of dogma on the one hand, and science on the other. From the Indian, Chinese and mystical standpoints, the religious task of man is not to think right, but to act right, and/or to become one with the One in the act of concentrated meditation.

The opposite is true for the main stream of Western thought. Since one expected to find the ultimate truth in the right thought, major emphasis was on thought, although right action was held to be important too. In religious development this led to the formulation of dogmas, endless arguments about dogmatic formulations, and intolerance of the "non-believer" or heretic. It furthermore led to the emphasis on "believing in God" as the main aim of a religious attitude. This, of course, did not mean that there was not also the concept that one ought to live right. But nevertheless, the person who believed in God—even if he did not live God—felt himself to be superior to the one who lived God, but did not "believe" in him.

The emphasis on thought has also another and historically a very important consequence. The idea that one could find the truth in thought led not only to dogma, but also to science. In scientific thought, the correct thought is all that matters, both from the aspect of intellectual honesty, as well as from the aspect of the application of scientific thought to practice that is, to technique.

In short, paradoxical thought led to tolerance and an effort toward self-transformation. The Aristotelian stand-point led to dogma and science, to the Catholic Church, and to the discovery of atomic energy.

In the dominant Western religious system, the love of God is essentially the same as the belief in God, in God's existence, God's justice, God's love. The love of God is essentially a thought experience. In the Eastern religions and in mysticism, the love of God is an intense feeling experience of oneness, inseparably linked with the expression of this love in every act of living. The most radical formulation has been given to this goal by Meister Eckhart: "If therefore I am changed into God and He makes me one with Himself, then, by the living God, there is no distinction between us...Some people imagine that they are going to see God, that they are going to see God as if he were standing yonder, and they here, but it is not to be so. God and I: we are one. By knowing God I take him to myself. By loving God, I penetrate him."

We can return now to an important parallel between the love for one's parents and the love for God. The child starts out by being attached to his mother as "the ground of all being." He feels helpless and needs the all-enveloping love of mother. He then turns to father as the new center of his affections, father being a guiding principle for thought and action; in this stage he is motivated by the need to acquire father's praise, and to avoid his displeasure. In the stage of full maturity he has freed himself from the person of mother and of father as protecting and commanding powers; he has established the motherly and fatherly principles in himself. He has become his own father and mother; he is father and mother. In the history of the human race we see—and can anticipate—the same development: from the beginning of the love for God as the helpless attachment to a mother Goddess, through the obedient attachment to a fatherly God, to a mature stage where God ceases to be an outside power, where man has incorporated the principles of love and justice into himself, where he has become one with God, and eventually, to a point where he speaks of God only in a poetic, symbolic sense.

From these considerations it follows that the love for God cannot be separated from the love for one's parents. If a person does not emerge from incestuous attachment to mother, clan, nation, if he retains the childish dependence on a punishing and rewarding father, or any other authority, he cannot develop a more mature love for God; then his religion is that of the earlier phase of religion, in which God was experienced as an all-protective mother or a punishing-rewarding father.

In contemporary religion we find all the phases, from the earliest and most primitive development to the highest, still present. The word "God" denotes the tribal chief as well as the "absolute Nothing." In the same way, each individual retains in himself, in his unconscious, as Freud has shown, all the stages from the helpless infant on. The question is to what point he has grown. One thing is certain: the nature of his love for God corresponds to the nature of his love for man, and furthermore, the real quality of his love for God and man often is unconscious—covered up and rationalized by a more mature thought of what his love is. Love for man, furthermore, while directly embedded in his relations to his family, is in the last analysis determined by the structure of the society in which he lives. If the social structure is one of submission to authority—overt authority or the anonymous authority of the market and public opinion, his concept of God must be infantile and far from the mature concept, the seeds of which are to be found in the history of monotheistic religion.



Kirpalct@yahoo.com

For more booklets go to: kirpalsingh.org
(Spiritual Quotations for Lovers of God)