

# Unconditional love

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**Unconditional love** is known as affection without any limitations or love without conditions. This term is sometimes associated with other terms such as true altruism, or complete love. Each area of expertise has a certain way of describing unconditional love, but most will agree that it is that type of love which has no bounds and is unchanging. It is a concept comparable to true love, a term which is more frequently used to describe love between lovers. By contrast, unconditional love is frequently used to describe love between family members, comrades in arms and between others in highly committed relationships. An example of this is a parent's love for their child; no matter a test score, a life changing decision, an argument, or a strong belief, the amount of love that remains between this bond is seen as unchanging and unconditional. Unconditional love is garnered and shared by those who love themselves first.

In Christianity, unconditional love is thought to be part of the Four Loves; affection, friendship, eros, and charity.<sup>[1]</sup> In ethology, or the study of animal behavior, unconditional love would refer to altruism which in turn refers to the behavior by individuals that increases the fitness of another while decreasing the fitness of the individual committing the act. In psychology, unconditional love refers to a state of mind in which one has the goal of increasing the welfare of another, despite any evidence of benefit for oneself. The term is also widely used in family and couples counseling manuals. Dogs are often considered to be examples of animals displaying unconditional love.<sup>[2]</sup>

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## Conditional love

Some authors make a distinction between unconditional love and conditional love. In conditional love: love is 'earned' on the basis of conscious or unconscious conditions being met by the lover, whereas in unconditional love, love is "given freely" to the loved one "no matter what". Loving is primary. Conditional love requires some kind of finite exchange, whereas unconditional love is seen as infinite and measureless. Unconditional love should not be mistaken with unconditional dedication:

unconditional dedication or "duty" refers to an act of the will irrespective of feelings (e.g. a person may consider they have a duty to stay with someone); unconditional love is an act of the feelings irrespective of will.

Unconditional love separates the individual from her or his behaviors. However, the individual may exhibit behaviors that are unacceptable in a particular situation. To begin with a simple example: one acquires a puppy. The puppy is cute, playful, and the owner's heart swells with love for this new family member. Then the puppy urinates on the floor. The owner does not stop loving the puppy, but needs to modify the behavior through training and education.

## Humanistic psychology

Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers spoke of an unconditional positive regard and dedication towards one single support. Rogers stated that the individual needed an environment that provided them with genuineness, authenticity, openness, self-disclosure, acceptance, empathy, and approval.<sup>[3]</sup>

Also Abraham Maslow supported the unconditional love perspective by saying that in order to grow, an individual had to have a positive perspective of themselves.<sup>[4]</sup> In *Man's Search For Meaning*, Logotherapist and Holocaust Survivor Viktor Frankl draws parallels between the human capacity to love unconditionally and living a meaningful life. Frankl writes, "Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the essence of another human being unless he loves him. [...] Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize ... potentialities."<sup>[5]</sup> For Frankl, unconditional love is a means by which we enable and reach human potential.

## Neurological basis

There has been some evidence to support a neural basis for unconditional love, showing that it stands apart from other types of love.

In a study conducted by Mario Beauregard and his colleagues, using an fMRI procedure, they studied the brain imaging of participants who were shown different sets of images either referring to "maternal love" (unconditional love) or "romantic love". Seven areas of the brain became active when these participants called to mind feelings of unconditional love. Three of these were similar to areas that became active when it came to romantic love. The other four active parts were different, showing certain brain regions associated with rewarding aspects, pleasurable (non sexual) feelings, and human maternal behaviors are activated during the unconditional love portions of the experiment. Through the associations made between the different regions, results show that the feeling of love for someone without the need of being rewarded is different from the feeling of romantic love.<sup>[6]</sup>

Along with the idea of "mother love", which is associated with unconditional love, a study found patterns in the neuroendocrine system and motivation-affective neural system. Using the fMRI procedure, mothers watched a video of them playing with their children in a familiar environment, like home. The procedure found part of the amygdala and nucleus accumbens were responsive on levels of emotion and empathy. Emotion and empathy (compassion) are descriptives of love, therefore it supports the idea that the neural occurrences are evidence of unconditional love.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Religious perspective

### Christianity

In Christianity, the term "unconditional love" may be used to indicate God's love for a person irrespective of that person's love for God. The term is not explicitly used in the Bible and advocates for God's conditional or unconditional love, using different passages or interpretations to support their point of view, are both encountered. The civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was quoted as saying "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality".<sup>[8]</sup>

The main use of unconditional in Christianity is the assertion "That God so loved the world..." In other words, God loves the world enough to suffer for us without preconditions. There is then that postcondition of actually accepting that Grace. The two together are not fundamentally different from psychology's unconditional positive regard with the added proviso that some actions are inherently flawed and that only God knows the true nature and consequence of our actions. Whereas psychology's unconditional positive regard allows one to fail utterly since the psychologist can not demand that we take care of the whole world since he has no fundamentally better idea of how to do that than the patient. The consequence is that we need to be in a relationship with God who does know how.

### Hinduism and Buddhism

In Hinduism and Buddhism, the Sanskrit word Bhakti is apparently used by some to refer to the concept of unconditional love, even though its root meaning seems to be "participate". Bhakti or Bhakthi is unconditional religious devotion of a devotee in worship of a divine.

### Islam

Unconditional love can only be directed to Allah. The highest spiritual attainment in Islam is related to the love of God. "Yet there are men who take (for worship) others besides God, as equal (with God): They love them as they should love God. But those of Faith are overflowing in their love for God."<sup>[9]</sup>

O lovers! The religion of the love of God is not found in Islam alone.

In the realm of love, there is neither belief, nor unbelief.<sup>[10]</sup>

In Islamic Sufism, unconditional love is the basis for the divine love *Ishq-e-Haqeeqi*, elaborated by many great Muslim saints to date. Prominent mystics explain the concept in its entirety and reveal its hardcore reality.<sup>[11]</sup> Rabia Basri, the famous 7th century mystic, is known as the first female to have set the doctrine of Divine Love based on unconditional love saying,

O God! If I worship You for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship You in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise. But if I worship You for Your Own sake, grudge me not Your everlasting Beauty.<sup>[12]</sup>

Ishq itself is means to love God selflessly and unconditionally. For Rumi, 'Sufism' itself is Ishq and not the path of asceticism (*zuhd*).<sup>[13]</sup> According to Sultan Bahoo, Ishq means to serve God unconditionally by devoting one's entire life to Him and asking no reward in return.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Other religions

Neopaganism in general, and Wicca in particular, commonly use a traditional inspirational text, Charge of the Goddess, affirming that the Goddess's "law is love unto all beings". Mohism, China c500BCE bases its entire premise on the supremacy of such an element, comparing one's duty to the indiscriminate generosity of "The Sky", or "Heaven", in contrast to Confucianism which based its model of society on family love and duty. Later schools engaged in much debate on exactly how unconditional one could be in actual society. (cf "...who is my neighbour?" in "The Good Samaritan" story of Jesus of Nazareth )

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