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JONATHAN M. PHAM

SEP–OCT 2024 EDITION

**Loving unconditionally**



## A LETTER FROM JONATHAN

Good day, my friend!

Welcome to the September-October edition of my blog's newsletter series! I am glad to have you as a companion on this journey.

This time, I would like to invite you to reflect on a profound theme: **unconditional love**. It's something that I've long been drawn to, though I initially hesitated to explore it, given its vast coverage and inherent dilemmas:

- Is there something called unconditional love actually, or is it just a romanticized concept typically found in dogmatic and romantic literature?
- How can one unconditionally love another one who has wronged against them?
- How can we call a love unconditional, if there are still some rules/ boundaries to be aware of?

As a writer, I often feel the pressure to provide definitive answers. But with this topic, the questions, I think, **outweigh the concrete solutions**.

I remember a time when I first started this blog and felt too intimidated to tackle the subject (even though I truly wanted to). Instead, I opted for a safer route - [a collection of quotes](#).

But the question of unconditional love continued to linger, a nagging curiosity that wouldn't be silenced.

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Now, I feel like it's the perfect time to explore the subject, especially given that today's society has become too chaotic - mostly because people live without love!

*"Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all those who live without love."* - Albus Dumbledore (Harry Potter & the Deathly Hallows)

The love we are talking about here is not just some kind of romantic affection between two people. It's something much grander; you can refer to it as altruism, compassion, and a deep connection to everything.

It's a love that knows no bounds, one that is not jealous, one that extends to everyone, and even to other living beings and the whole world as a whole.

Rather than a romanticized idea found in books or movies, it's a powerful force that can completely transform our lives and the world around us - if only we start thinking seriously about it! (instead of pointing fingers/ guns toward each other)

In this newsletter, we'll explore the meaning of unconditional love, its challenges, and its potential to create a more compassionate and harmonious society from various angles - including philosophical works, religious texts, experts' sayings, and other relevant secular sources. Additionally, we will also go over some real-life stories of people who have demonstrated it through their own examples.

## A LETTER FROM JONATHAN

Sounds intriguing? Then let us embark on this journey together!

All the best!

**Jonathan M. Pham**

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# A DEFINITION OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

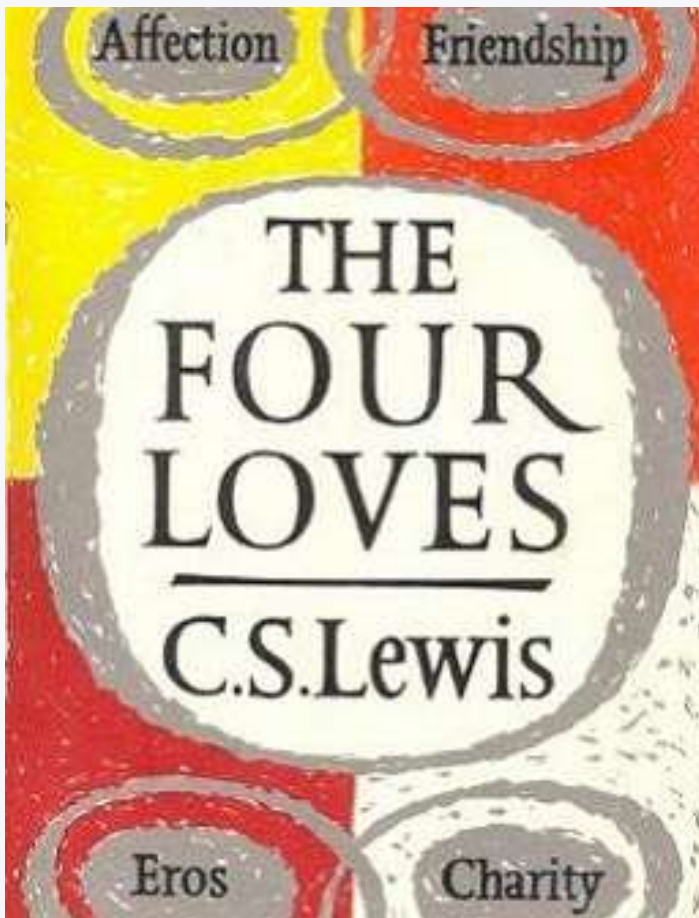


Unconditional love is a type of love that is not dependent on any conditions or expectations. It is a pure and selfless form of love that is given freely, **without asking for anything in return**. Instead of being limited to romantic relationships, it can extend to all aspects of life, including **family, friends, humanity, all living beings,** and **spiritual things** (love for the Divine, nature, or any other spiritual concepts)

## 1.1. HOW UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FEELS LIKE

### 4 types of love

When it comes to the subject of love, one popular framework (which was based on ancient Greek traditions and popularized by C. S. Lewis in his book “[The Four Loves](#)”) recognized four primary types:



- **Eros**

Also referred to as romantic love, it is characterized by phy-

sical attraction, emotional intensity, and a desire for union. Eros is associated with conditions like beauty, compatibility, mutual attraction, exclusivity, and commitment; hence, it is often seen as temporary and fleeting.

Additionally, while it may be deeply fulfilling, it may create room for the darker aspects within humanity to arise – especially if one places a too strong emphasis on it.

- **Storge**

This is familial love, the natural affection between parents and children. It's a love that is often unconditional, based on a deep bond of kinship and shared experiences, and is foundational for fostering a child's emotional development and sense of security.

That being said, it is still subject to being influenced by family

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dynamics, expectations, and societal norms.

- **Philia**

Philia involves a brotherly or sisterly love – a deep affection for friends and family based on shared experiences/ values and mutual respect (e.g. the bond between siblings, close friendships, and the camaraderie among teammates). While it can be deep and enduring, it often involves expectations of reciprocity and mutual support.

- **Agape**

As the highest form of love, Agape is characterized by selfless giving, compassion, and forgiveness. It's a sacrificial love that seeks the well-being of the beloved (even if they are one's enemies) without expecting anything in return. Due to its transcendent nature, it is often associated with the Divine, saintly figures such as

Christ and the Buddha, and those who have committed tremendous acts of bravery/ self-sacrifice/ righteousness.

### When love is unconditional

*When you love someone, you love the person as they are, and not as you'd like them to be.*

*Leo Tolstoy*

- **Acceptance and safety**

Acceptance is when one makes others feel truly seen and heard. It is about creating a safe space where people may openly express their thoughts, feelings, and desires – as well as embracing them for who they are, flaws and all. Even when people share something difficult, embarrassing, or not aligned with your expectations, you are still capable of composing yourself and maintaining attention.



## 1.1. HOW UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FEELS LIKE

- **No strings attached**

Love is given freely, without expecting anything in return. It's a selfless act of kindness and compassion – when one cares for others for apparently no personal gains at all.

- **A behavior, not a feeling**

Regardless of personal emotions, one maintains consistency in whatever they do, thereby demonstrating their commitment to others. Even times of adversity do not stop one from showing up, being present, and actively supporting the people whom they share a bond with through acts of service (e.g. cooking dinner, running errands, or offering emotional comfort).

- **Rejoicing in others' happiness**

Just like a mother would do everything to keep her child

happy and save him from potential pitfalls, one who loves unconditionally is devoted to the other person's wellbeing. A good example is when one feels genuinely happy for their partner's career advancement, even if it means they themselves have to make sacrifices (e.g. less time together).

In other words, they place a strong emphasis on people's well-being and are able to empathize with others' accomplishments.

- **Satisfaction in giving**

In other words, fulfillment comes from the act of giving itself, not from what you receive in return. This is especially true for those who pursue career paths such as teaching, coaching, or mentoring; seeing their students/ fellows succeed and become a better version of themselves is a source of joy that few others can match.

## 1.1. HOW UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FEELS LIKE

- **Forgiveness and understanding**

People make mistakes from time to time (nobody is exempt from that); when one is capable of seeing themselves in others, they start becoming detached from grudges/ emotional burdens and willing to work together for the greater good.

### Signs of Unconditional Love



Acceptance and safety



No strings attached



A behavior, not a feeling



Rejoicing in others' happiness



Satisfaction in giving



Forgiveness and understanding

## 1.2. IS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE REAL?

**Unconditional love really exists in each of us. It is part of our deep inner being. It is not so much an active emotion as a state of being. It's not 'I love you' for this or that reason, not 'I love you if you love me.' It's love for no reason, love without an object.**

Ram Dass

Is unconditional love a myth or a reality?

Is such a pure form of love truly attainable?

Can humans, with their inherent flaws and limitations, truly love another without judgment, fear, and expectation of reciprocity?

These questions have captivated humanity for centuries. Throughout history, philosophers, theologians, scientists, and artists have offered diverse perspectives on the topic. From the ancient Greek concept of agape to the modern psychological explorations of empathy and compassion,

unconditional love has been a recurring theme in human thought and experience.

### Ancient philosophies

As mentioned above, in ancient Greece, the term Agape was used to describe a selfless love that transcended personal desires and expectations. This type of love was considered the highest form of human affection, often associated with divine or spiritual qualities.

Beyond Agape, Greek philosophy also offered insights into the nature of happiness and human flourishing. Stoic philosophers, for instance, believed that true happiness, or

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**Eudaimonia**, could be achieved by living in accordance with nature and reason. This involved a sense of interconnectedness with the universe and a love for humanity as a whole. The same ideology can be found in other Greek scholar's works; for instance, in his "Symposium", Plato stated:

*The truth is that we isolate a particular kind of love and appropriate it for the name of love, which really belongs to a wider whole.*

In Eastern philosophies, similar concepts are also found. Confucianism emphasized **Ren** (仁), a principle of humaneness or benevolence that involves a deep concern for the well-being of others.

While not explicitly defined as unconditional, Ren implies a love that extends beyond personal gain or familial obligations.

*Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others.*

*Confucius*



### Religious contexts

The concept of unconditional love has long been explored by various religious traditions. Christianity, for example, places great emphasis on the idea of God's unlimited love for humanity – which is exemplified in the belief that Christ was sent to atone for human

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sins (and that his followers are encouraged to follow his examples). The Bible is filled with verses that emphasize the importance of an unwavering, all-encompassing love, such as:

***I desire mercy, not sacrifice.***

*Matthew 9:13*

***The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.***

*1 Timothy 1:5*

***Love is the fulfillment of the law.***

*Romans 13:10*

In Buddhism, the concept of [\*\*Metta\*\*](#) (loving-kindness) encourages individuals to cultivate a sense of selfless love and empathy for all beings –

including not only human beings but also animals, plants, and even inanimate objects.

Additionally, [\*\*Karuna\*\*](#) (करुणा – compassion) is a fundamental Buddhist virtue, which requires one to show a deep concern for the suffering of others and a desire to alleviate it.

***Let none deceive another,  
Or despise any being in any  
state. Let none through  
anger or ill-will. Wish harm  
upon another.***

*Metta Sutta*

In Hinduism, the concept of love is also explored in various ways. The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred text, discusses divine love and the concept of Bhakti (devotion).

Bhakti involves a deep and boundless love for a deity or a higher power, often leading to a sense of spiritual fulfillment



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and liberation.

*Every act of charity, every thought of sympathy, every action of help, every good deed, is taking so much of self-importance away from our little selves and making us think of ourselves as the lowest and the least, and, therefore, it is all good.*

*Swami Vivekananda*

### Philosophical works

The concept of unconditional love has been a central theme in philosophical discourse for centuries. One of the earliest pioneers was Augustine of Hippo. In his writings, Augustine often emphasized the divine love of God as boundless – one that transcends human understanding and limitations, and is freely given regardless of human worthiness or merit. As he famously stated:

*The measure of love is to love without measure.*

In the Enlightenment era, Immanuel Kant's ethical philosophy offered a unique perspective on the topic. While not explicitly using the term, his idea of [Categorical imperative](#), which states that one should act only in such a way that they could will the maxim of their action to become a universal law, can be interpreted as a form of love that extends to all beings without exception.



*(Source: Wikipedia)*

Later, the concept of unconditional love was explored by Danish philosopher Søren

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Kierkegaard in his existentialist framework. His works on faith often discuss a [leap into the unknown](#), a radical commitment to something beyond reason or empirical evidence.

*Love does not alter the beloved, it alters itself.*

*Søren Kierkegaard*



In the 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir also touched on the theme. Though not explicitly defining it, her emphasis on freedom and authentic relationships suggests a love that is free from conditions or expectations. In her work “[The Ethics of Ambiguity](#),” Beauvoir

explores the concept of “love without hope,” which, while not entirely unconditional, involves the transcendence of expectations and external conditions.

Aside from Beauvoir, Henri Bergson and Simone Weil were two other notable figures who were interested in the theme.

- Bergson emphasized the importance of [intuition and empathy in understanding the world](#), which could be interpreted as a call for unconditional love.
- Weil, on the other hand, saw love as a powerful force that transcends the limitations of human understanding. [She argued that true love](#) is unconditional and involves complete self-giving.

*People who live by sensations are parasites, both materially and*

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*morally, in relation to those who work and create... who do not seek sensations but experience in fact much livelier, profounder, less artificial and truer ones than those who seek them.*

Simone Weil

Finally, we have to mention the [Golden Rule](#) – a principle found in various religious and philosophical traditions – which offers a timeless perspective on unconditional love. Its motto “**Do unto others as you would have them do unto you**” promotes a love that is based on empathy and consideration for others.



### Humanistic psychology

*If I let myself really understand another person, I might be changed by that understanding. And we all fear change. So as I say, it is not an easy thing to permit oneself to understand an individual.*

Carl Rogers

Humanistic psychologists have made significant contributions to our understanding of unconditional love. Carl Rogers, a pioneer in this field, introduced the concept of [unconditional positive regard](#) – which is about accepting and valuing individuals without judgment, regardless of their flaws or shortcomings. He believed such an attitude is essential for fostering personal growth, self-acceptance, and healthy relationships.

Another influential figure,

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Abraham Maslow, highlighted love and belongingness as fundamental human needs. He described a concept called “[Being-love](#)” (B-love) – a form of love characterized by seeing one’s partner as essentially perfect and extraordinary. According to him, B-love not only fosters deep, meaningful connections; it also plays a crucial part in achieving self-actualization, the highest level of psychological development.

***The fact is that people are good. Give people affection and security, and they will give affection and be secure in their feelings and their behavior.***

*Abraham Maslow*

Moving to the 20th century, Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and existential psychologist, explored the profound role of love in human life.

In his book “[Man’s Search for Meaning](#)“, Frankl argued that love is the only way to truly understand and connect with another person. His experiences in concentration camps led him to conclude that even in the most difficult circumstances, love and the ability to find meaning in suffering are essential for survival.

***If you treat people to a vision of themselves, if you apparently overrate them, you make them become what they are capable of becoming.***

*Viktor Frankl*





## 1.2. IS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE REAL?

### Literary & poetic explorations



(Source: Wikimedia)

***“Ah, the abomination! He has stolen our silver!”***

***“And, in the first place, was that silver ours? Madame Magloire, I have for a long time detained that silver wrongfully. It belonged to the poor. Who was that man? A poor man, evidently.”***

***Bishop Myriel to Madame Magloire – from Victor Hugo’s “Les Misérables”***

Throughout history, poets and writers have captured the beau-

ty, complexity, and enduring power of unconditional love with their works. Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116, for example, describes love as an “ever-fixed mark” that remains steadfast even in the face of changing circumstances. In his play Romeo and Juliet, the young lovers defy their feuding families and societal norms in pursuit of their love.

Many other notable authors have also gone over the topic.

- Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice” features a love story that overcomes initial misunderstandings and societal pressures.
- Victor Hugo’s “Les Misérables” demonstrates the transformative power of unconditional love through the character of Myriel, whose compassion has resulted in the redemption of the main character Jean Valjean,



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through Valjean himself, who later sacrifices his own well-being for the sake of many other people.

- Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" explores a love that endures despite social class differences and personal secrets.

### Modern scientific findings



(Source: Wikipedia)

In 2005, biological anthropologist Helen Fisher [conducted fMRI studies](#) to observe the brains of individuals in love. Her research found that areas rich in

dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward, were highly active when people experienced romantic love. This suggests that the emotion is deeply rooted in humanity's biology.

Further research has revealed that the brain regions associated with unconditional love are similar to those activated by maternal love. [A 2009 study published in Psychiatry Research](#) found that unconditional love involves seven areas of the brain, including regions linked to empathy, compassion, and altruism. In other words, it is not merely a romantic or religious concept – but a complex biological phenomenon.

[In a more recent study](#), researchers identified the periaqueductal gray (PAG) as a key brain region associated with unconditional love. The PAG is also involved in fear

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conditioning, pain modulation, and altruism, suggesting a link between these concepts and religious beliefs.

As you may see from the analysis above, while the concept of unconditional love may seem idealistic or even unattainable, the evidence suggests that it is **a very real and powerful force in human life**. While it may be challenging to achieve, the rewards (potential for deep connection, personal growth, and a more fulfilling life) cannot be denied.



## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

**Unconditional love, extended to others without exception, is considered to be one of the highest expressions of spirituality. The rewarding nature of unconditional love facilitates the creation of strong emotional links. Such robust bonds may critically contribute to the survival of the human species.**

Mario Beauregard

I remember when I was thinking about which category on my blog this topic would fit in, I decided to consult with a chatbot (not the most optimal way to do it, I guess, but there was no other choice. [\*Shikata ga nai\*](#)).

For a piece of content about love, you would expect it to be placed in the “[\*Interpersonal\*](#)” section, right? At least, that was my initial assumption.

Nope. Here is the reply from the chatbot.

I’m working on an article about “unconditional love”. If I publish it on my self-discovery blog, which of the following categories is the best fit for it?

- Self awareness
- Personality
- Self reflection
- Interpersonal
- Life purpose
- Spirituality
- Resilience
- Self care
- Self expression

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✦ The best category for an article about "unconditional love" on your self-discovery blog would be **Spirituality**.

Here's why:

- **Unconditional love** is often associated with spiritual concepts like compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance.
- **Spirituality** encompasses a broader understanding of one's connection to the universe, oneself, and others.
- **Unconditional love** is often seen as a spiritual practice or goal.

While other categories like **Interpersonal** or **Self reflection** could also be relevant, **Spirituality** provides the most comprehensive and appropriate context for discussing unconditional love.

The answer above prompts me to recall John Donne's famous line: **"No man is an island"**.

Why is "unconditional love" deemed as part of Spirituality rather than Interpersonal? Does it mean one has to **profess a certain level of spirituality** in order to wholly embrace the concept?

While romantic love is indeed a powerful expression of affection, it often comes with expectations, desires, and a sense of ownership (hence, it can be very transactional from time to time).

Unconditional love, on the other hand, goes beyond these limitations. It's a love that is free from judgment, resentment, or possessiveness. It **extends to all beings** (not just those within one's inner circles), regardless of their worthiness or actions.



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And that's where it intertwines with spirituality – which is often attributed to a yearning for connection to something greater than oneself. Through spiritual teachings and practices such as meditation, prayer, and acts of service, one becomes equipped with the requirements necessary to experience this type of love.

### 1. Transcendence beyond self

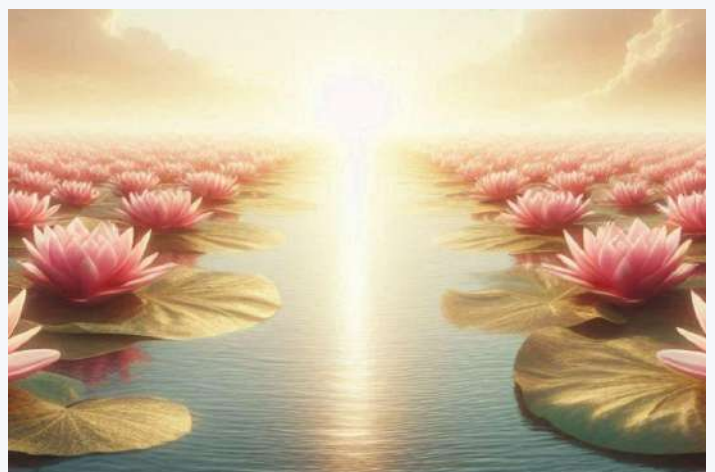
The ego, often associated with self-preservation and judgment, is a hindrance to the ability to love unconditionally. The expectations and fears that naturally stem from it are the cause of the psychological barriers that prevent us from extending the depth and breadth of our bonds.

To truly embody unconditional love, one must transcend the limitations of their personal ego. This involves **a detachment from self-interest** and a willingness to **love without expectation** (which has been discussed thoroughly in many spiritual traditions, i.e. the concept of “emptiness” or “non-self” in Buddhism).

When we let go of the self, we open ourselves up to a deeper connection with the universe and with others.

Letting go of the self allows one to transcend the physical limitations of this world.

Depending on your specific faith background, it will pave the way for you to attain either sainthood, Buddhahood, or something similar.





## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Just think about the expression that we often use: “**falling in love**”. Why do we say “**fall**” instead of “**going to love**”?

This is a question that my spiritual mentor once asked me when we were talking at a café one day. Without ever thinking about it before, I just answered based on my own understanding and intuition.

“Maybe it’s because love is a force that is extremely powerful – one that people cannot resist with their own will.”

Maybe the phrase speaks to the fact that in order to embrace love, we must be “melted” and give in instead of resisting. In other words, we must **let go of all notions about the self**.

When we are truly in love, we often lose ourselves in the other person. We are less concerned with our own needs and desires and more focused on the happi-

ness of our loved ones.

Likewise, unconditional love requires us to be detached from our ego and focus on the well-being of others.



We often see examples of this kind of love in children, who are (I dare say) typically more selfless than adults (I’m not making that up – it is [something that has already been suggested by certain research](#)).

Imagine a kid who offers a toy to a friend without hesitation.

They do so not because they expect something in return, but simply **out of a pure desire to share**.

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Another example. Have you ever witnessed a situation like this? A kid is walking on the street with his parents when a beggar appears. The kid then asks his parents if he can give the beggar something.

Why would he care about the stranger anyway?

How could children demonstrate such unlimited compassion?

From my experience, I dare say that they love unconditionally because **they haven't yet developed a strong sense of the self.**

They do not think “If I give this to the other person, I will lose something or become lesser”.

This is not the case with many adults. As we grow older, we start drawing countless lines between what IS “me” and what IS NOT “me”. If something

is not “me”, we cannot accept it.

If there's a slight possibility that the act of giving may cause us to lose something or be in a disadvantageous position (even if there is no concrete proof for it yet), we will hesitate to do it.

That being said, even when under the influence of the ego, we are still capable of experiencing moments of unconditional love from time to time.

Think about times when you've helped a stranger without expecting anything in return. For instance, have you ever been asked for directions by a random driver on the road? In that case, would you hesitate to answer?

I assume that 99% of the time, we will help them without even thinking about being rewarded for the act.

Or, perhaps you've volunteered

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your time to aid a colleague in trouble – or join a cause you believe in.

These acts of selfless service are prime examples of unconditional love in action, when one transcends their personal desires and instead focuses on the well-being of others. It's as if one has become **part of something larger than oneself** – and connected with a universal energy that breaks through all individual limitations!

***First remove “I” that’s ego. Then remove “Want” that’s desire. See now you are left with only “Happiness”.***

*Buddha*

A spiritual perspective makes it easier for us to see beyond the ego and recognize our interconnectedness with all beings. It is from this awareness that a more expansive and compassionate view of love may come

forth.

***When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.***

*Paulo Coelho*



## 2. Admittance of life's impermanence

The impermanence of life is a fundamental truth that underlies the practice of unconditional love. Recognizing the fleeting nature of existence is crucial for the cultivation of compassion and forgiveness. As the monk

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Thich Nhat Hanh has wisely observed:

*Some people do not even want to look at a person when the person is alive, but when the person dies they write eloquent obituaries and make offerings of flowers. At that point the person has died and cannot really enjoy the fragrance of the flowers anymore. If we really understood that life was impermanent, we would do everything we could to make the other person happy right here and right now.*

Indeed, many of us tend to wait until it's too late to express love and appreciation. We withhold our kindness, waiting for the perfect moment or the ideal circumstance.

Many times, we hold onto grudges and refuse to love or forgive people due to their

wrongdoings.

However, the sobering truth is that life is unpredictable. Tomorrow is never guaranteed.

Those we are talking to/ about today – tomorrow they may not be anymore!

You and I may be reading this article now, but after the next 24 hours, we may end up in the grave already!

*When we meet someone and fall in love, we have a sense that the whole universe is on our side. And yet if something goes wrong, there is nothing left! How is it possible for the beauty that was there only minutes before to vanish so quickly? Life moves very fast. It rushes from heaven to hell in a matter of seconds!*

*Paulo Coelho*

## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Realizing this should encourage us to seize the moment, cherish our relationships, and express love and gratitude while we still have the chance.

At the same time, it is also helpful for letting go of grudges and resentments. In fact, our perceptions and judgments are often based on past experiences or limited information, which are not everlasting. When we recognize this truth, we open ourselves to the possibility of forgiveness and understanding.

When we have internalized the fact that everyone is subject to change and suffering, it becomes much easier to extend compassion and forgiveness.



I would like to mention a story about unconditional love here – the [Parable of the Prodigal Son](#). It is a popular tale among Christian communities (and even non-Christians too).

Despite the religious origin, its messages, I believe, can be appreciated by everyone, regardless of their background. (in fact, scholars have noted that there is [a similar tale in Mahayana Buddhism](#))

The story tells of a young man who squanders his inheritance and becomes estranged from his family. Despite his wrongdoings, his father welcomes him back with open arms. No strings attached, just pure loving – like the ocean.

When I reflect on the story, I cannot help but wonder: Why? How can the father demonstrate such boundless love?

One reason, I believe, is becau-



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se he does not give too much weight to the past. His son, indeed, has committed grave mistakes – by asking for his share of the estate (which, as many scholars have pointed out, is the same as wishing his father to die) and wasting money in vain.

However, that was the past son, not the current one. He has changed and regretted his decisions.

The act of the father in the story symbolizes a profound understanding of human nature and the possibility of change. Even in the face of imperfection, love is still capable of enduring – provided we can see beyond our judgments and embrace the potential for growth!



### 3. Appreciation of our shared humanity

*People at birth are naturally good. (人之初, 性本善)*

*Mencius*

One core idea found in a variety of spiritual traditions is humanity's interconnectedness – that is, we are all inherently good, and all descend from the same source (typically referred to as the “Ultimate Reality”). This notion is reflected in concepts such as:

- **Nothingness:** In Buddhism, the concept of *śūnyatā* (nothingness) suggests that all phenomena are interconnected and interdependent. This can be demonstrated with the analogy of a wave: while a wave appears to be a distinct entity, it is ultimately made up of water.

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Similarly, individuals may seem separate, but they are fundamentally connected through their universal nature. As such, there is no fundamental difference between ourselves and others; we all share the same “Buddha-nature” and are capable of attaining enlightenment (even for those like the historical Devadatta).

- **Image of God**: Similarly, the Christian belief that humans are created in the image of God implies that all individuals possess inherent value and worth. Because there is a divine spark within everyone, people are deserving of love and respect, regardless of their actions or circumstances.

When we contemplate these concepts, we can see that both traditions emphasize the essential unity of all beings. It

doesn't matter which lens you view this unity through – they both provide a foundation for unconditional love.

When we recognize and appreciate our shared humanity, we move beyond superficial differences and cultivate a deeper sense of compassion and understanding. As a result, we may see beyond our own limitations and those of others, which enables us to extend love and acceptance even in the face of imperfection.

After all, from a purely secular perspective, human beings are all made up of the same things: a pile of bones, flesh, and blood put together.

Are babies so different from each other? Are elders so different from each other? And above all, are dead people so different from each other?

No matter how beautiful or

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handsome one is while living, after death, their body returns to the same state (which I think you can imagine yourself).

When looking at the pile of skeletons left behind after a genocide, can't we realize that essentially, we are all the same?

And that's just speaking from a scientific angle – without contemplating the possibility of us all being part of the same Divine creation.

***Everyone's blood is red,  
everyone's tears are salty.***

*Buddha*



*(Source: Wikimedia)*

### 4. Awareness of humanity's imperfections

Unconditional love is rooted in a deep understanding of the inherent worth – as well as imperfections of all human beings.

We are all flawed, capable of making mistakes and causing suffering. Recognizing this shared humanity is essential for cultivating a compassionate and accepting attitude – and that's where spiritual practices come in.

As many sages and spiritual teachers have observed, it's hypocritical to judge others when we also commit the same (if not worse) atrocities.

***Don't complain about the  
snow on your neighbor's  
roof when your own  
doorstep is unclean.***

*Confucius*

## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

***How easy it is to see your brother's faults; How hard to face your own. You winnow his in the wind like chaff, But yours you hide, Like a cheat covering up an unlucky throw.***

*The Dhammapada*

***Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.***

*Luke 6:41-42*

All of the teachings above convey the same message: **do not**

**be quick to pass judgment while ignoring one's own shortcomings.** We must first address our mistakes before offering guidance to people.

When we acknowledge our own imperfections, we become more empathetic towards the flaws of others. This lays the foundation for a love grounded in compassion, acceptance, and the awareness that everyone is struggling in their own way.

Unconditional love doesn't mean condoning harmful behavior. However, it does mean recognizing that people are complex beings with their own limitations. By understanding that everyone is doing the best they can, we may cultivate a more compassionate and forgiving perspective.

***The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own***



## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

***image. Otherwise, we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.***

*Thomas Merton*



Easier said than done. Our innate tendency is to be more critical of others than ourselves. We are inherently inclined to overestimate the flaws of those around us while minimizing our own. This cognitive bias, known as the “[spotlight effect](#),” makes it quite challenging to empathize with others.

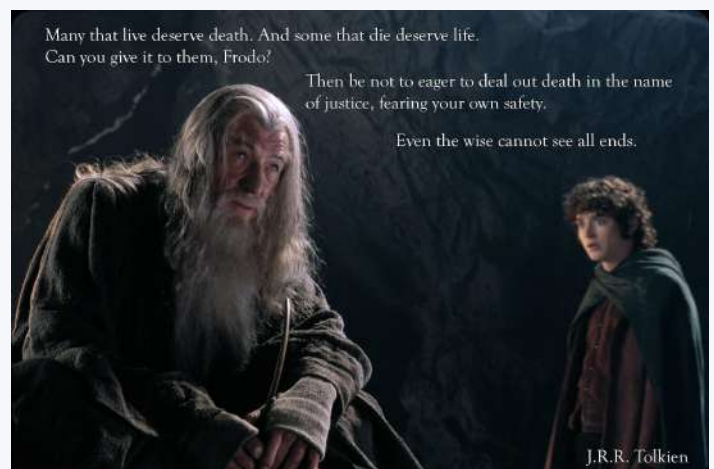
For example, we might easily notice a minor mistake made by a colleague and immediately judge them harshly. Yet, when

we make a similar error, we are likely to be more forgiving of ourselves, attributing it to a temporary lapse in judgment or external circumstances.

Recognizing this discrepancy is the first step toward overcoming it, which starts with actively cultivating self-awareness through practices such as mindfulness and [self-questioning](#).

***Do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends.***

*J. R. R. Tolkien*



*(Gandalf & Frodo, Fellowship of the Ring - Source: Reddit)*



## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

### 5. Understanding that loving others is loving oneself

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

*1 Peter 4:8*

When we love others, we are essentially loving ourselves. This is because our relationships with others are mirrors that reflect our inner state.

When we hold onto resentment, anger, or bitterness, we are essentially poisoning ourselves. These negative emotions sow the seeds of physical and emotional suffering.

Conversely, when we cultivate love and compassion, we nourish our own well-being and free ourselves from the burdens of the past.

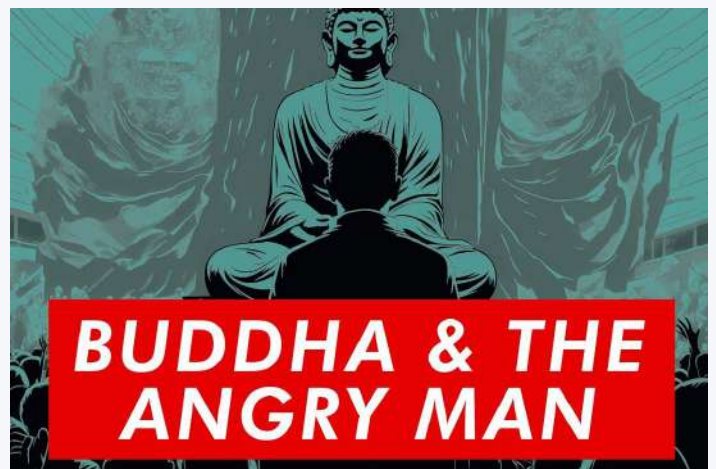
The Buddha's story about the angry man\* offers a powerful

illustration of this principle. When someone throws anger or hatred at us, we have the choice to accept it or reject it.

If we choose to accept it, we take on their toxic emotions, harming ourselves in the process.

*Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.*

*Buddha*



*(Source: YouTube)*

By choosing love over hate, we not only improve our relationships with others but also culti-

\* Check Appendix 2, page 148-149

## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

vate inner peace and happiness. This is the essence of unconditional love: a **harmonious balance between self-love and love for others.**

As the Dhammapada teaches:

*Hatred is not appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased.*

Unconditional love is essentially love that stems from the awareness that everyone makes mistakes, and that **everyone is suffering.**

When we respond to negativity with compassion, we break the cycle of suffering and promote peace within ourselves and in our relationships.

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

*Romans 12:10*

### 6. Detachment from worldly standards

*Until he has unconditional and unbiased love for all beings, man will not find peace.*

*Buddha*

Unconditional love often requires us to transcend conventional societal standards and expectations. These standards, while important for maintaining order and justice, may sometimes hinder our ability to love others.

Imagine this scenario. A teacher is preparing to give a final exam. One of his weaker students, who has worked hard throughout the semester, approaches him with a plea for extra credit.

While the student's performance has been lackluster, the teacher, recognizing his poten-

## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

tial and proven dedication, decides to give him a challenging extra credit assignment.

The teacher's decision, though seemingly unfair to the students who have consistently excelled, reflects a deeper understanding of the learning process.

Specifically, it demonstrates a **commitment to fostering growth and development**, rather than solely focusing on grades and performance.

***We make exceptions for those we love, not because they are exceptional, but simply because we love them.***

*J. N. Nielsen*

In a world increasingly focused on material gain and personal success, it is truly challenging for many of us to let go of expectations and judgments.

Unconditional love, however, invites us to embrace a more holistic perspective – and to let go of our preconceived notions of fairness and justice. This doesn't mean compromising our values – but rather recognizing that sometimes, **love and compassion may require us to make exceptions.**

Have you not seen it already? Normally, a person who has committed a serious wrong should be punished. In some cases, however, forgiveness and reconciliation may be more important than punishment, especially if the offender has shown genuine remorse and is committed to making amends.

Some may say “Nah, such tolerance will only deconstruct the whole social system.”

However, I bet their response will be much different if they happen to be a close relative (e.g. parent or offspring) of the

## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

offender.

Why the difference in terms of response then, **if not because of love?**

As ancient scriptures have suggested, social frameworks are meant to keep those who have not been “enlightened” in control (thereby maintaining harmony). On the other hand, those who have attained a higher level of spiritual understanding are capable of transcending the limitations of conventional morality.

***We know that the law is not meant for a righteous person, but for the lawless and rebellious.***

***1 Timothy 1:9***

Similarly, the Buddha taught that while the Dharmas (spiritual teachings) are helpful for cultivating goodness, they should not become a burden or

a hindrance to spiritual liberation. True freedom comes from letting go of attachments and expectations, including those imposed by societal standards and even religious guidelines.

***When you move your focus from competition to contribution, life becomes a celebration. Never try to defeat people, just win their hearts.***

***Buddha***



**7. Realizing the blurred lines between personal & collective benefits**

***We're all human, aren't we? Every human life is***

## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

*worth the same, and worth saving.*

*J. K. Rowling*

Unconditional love involves understanding the interconnectedness between personal and collective well-being. When we love others selflessly, we are not only benefiting them – but also contributing to the greater good.

Countless stories throughout history illustrate this principle. Mothers who donate organs to save their children, soldiers who sacrifice their lives for their comrades, and monks/ priests/ residents who risk their own safety to shelter others in times of crisis are all examples of individuals who have demonstrated a love that knows no bounds.

Why would they do that?

I believe their actions were

driven by a deep sense of compassion, empathy, and a desire to make a positive impact on the world. By putting the needs of others before their own, they have made their contribution to a more harmonious and just society.

Through their selfless acts, these people have left behind a legacy that helps shape the moral and ethical landscape of future generations.



While we may not all be called upon to make such extraordinary sacrifices, we can all practice unconditional love in our daily lives – by offering kindness, compassion, and support to those around us.



## 1.3. THE NATURE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

While they may not result in a miraculous effect like the [Sacrificial Protection charm](#) in Harry Potter, each simple act we do daily does leave behind a “mark”.

When you let go of the self for the greater good/ for someone you love, you leave behind a moving example that inspires others to follow suit, hence helping keep society’s morals at a high standard.



**And over all  
these virtues  
put on love,  
which binds  
them all  
together in  
perfect unity.**

Colossians 3:14

*(Harry & Hermione standing before the grave of the former’s parents  
Source: Harry Potter & the Deathly Hallows - Part 1)*

# WHY UNCONDITIONAL LOVE MATTERS



**Resolve to be tender with the young,  
compassionate with the aged,  
sympathetic with the striving, and  
tolerant with the weak and wrong.  
Sometime in your life, you will have  
been all of these.**

Buddha

## 2.1. BENEFITS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Is unconditional love healthy or not?

My answer is: **It depends.**

Depending on the context, the love you share with another person may turn out healthy or not.

There are certain requirements, but I'll talk about them later. For now, I would like to present to you evidence that supports the benefits of practicing unconditional love – first. After we've wholly embraced its necessity, we'll discuss what it takes to make it truly last later.

### Improved wellbeing

*Serenity comes when you trade expectations for acceptance.*

*Buddha*

Research suggests that this type of love activates regions of

the brain associated with reward and pleasure, creating a sense of [fulfillment](#) even in the absence of reciprocation.

[A study conducted at Montreal University](#) revealed that unconditional love involves a complex interplay of brain regions, distinct from romantic or maternal love. This suggests that the act of giving love without expecting anything in return is inherently rewarding. Participants who cared for individuals with learning difficulties exhibited heightened brain activity in areas linked to the reward system while viewing photos of their loved ones.

Studies have consistently shown that those who experience unconditional love report increased happiness, self-esteem, and resilience. Knowing that one is loved for who they are, regardless of their flaws or actions, fosters a positive self-image and a sense

## 2.1. BENEFITS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

of belonging.

[Another research from UCLA](#) demonstrates the long-lasting effects of unconditional love, particularly in childhood. Children who receive higher levels of affection from their parents are more likely to develop emotional well-being, lower anxiety, and [greater resilience in adulthood](#). Additionally, they may also experience fewer mental health symptoms and [improved overall health](#).

Beyond childhood, the benefits also [extend into adulthood](#) – including a significant reduction in depression and the alleviation of the negative impacts caused by stress.



All in all, based on the findings above, we can safely conclude that love, especially one that is unconditional, **provides a way to find peace in this chaotic world**, in your chaotic life, amidst the many uncertainties and twists. It is an anchor for you when things do not go out as planned – when people treat you/ you treat them in ways that deviate away from the expected.

### A better community

*If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you?*

*Luke 6:32-34*

The quote above, despite its religious context, can be inter-



## 2.1. BENEFITS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

preted and appreciated by those who do not subscribe to religious beliefs. Indeed, true moral character is revealed not in how we treat those who are kind to us – but in how we extend love and kindness to those who are difficult or adversarial.

By extending love and kindness to all, regardless of their circumstances, we cultivate a sense of empathy, compassion, and understanding. This moral growth not only enriches our personal lives but also contributes to a more harmonious and equitable society.

When we love and support others without expecting anything in return, we build [trust](#) and create a foundation for lasting connections.

By extending love and kindness to everyone, regardless of their circumstances, we help break down barriers, promote under-

standing, and create a more compassionate society. This is especially significant in today's world, where divisions and conflicts are prevalent.

*Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.*

*Martin Luther King Jr.*



And if you profess a certain level of faith in the power of consciousness – how it has the ability to shape realities (like how Masaru Emoto has [concluded from his water crystal experiments](#)\*), then you can be sure that practicing unconditional love is one of the best ways to save this world

\* Check Appendix 3, page 150-152

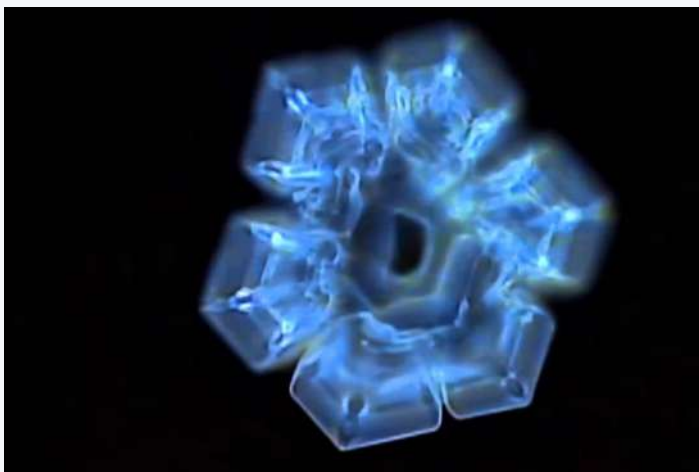


## 2.1. BENEFITS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

from its impending doom.

***Love and thanks have the same vibration no matter what the language. These are words that can be understood by everyone in the world.***

*Masaru Emoto*



(Source: YouTube)

### Return to humanity's core

***Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.***

*Emily Brontë*

This is a benefit that I find quite

challenging to explain – partly because of its abstractness, and because it concerns an **advocat- ion for religions.**

As you should already know by now, unconditional love is something found mostly in religious and spiritual teachings. If you are looking for advice from a dating expert or similar secular resources, I assume that the explanation you find will be completely different.

Why?

I think it's because of the way traditional science and psychology view humanity – separate entities that are independent of each other.

That is another story when it comes to religions, most of which state that all human beings originate from the same source, and therefore are **intertwined and dependent.**

## 2.1. BENEFITS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

After all, the term “religion” comes from the Latin word “religio,” which is believed to be derived from the verb “religare,” meaning “to bind together” or “to connect.” In other words, the original concept of religion involved a **re-connection to something that we used to be**. A re-connection to a greater whole – to each other.

Despite differences (and limitations/ corruption that occurs over time), all religions are meant to act as a **bridge for humanity to return to their original selves**.



And unconditional love is one of the things that can get us from

“here” to “there”. Back to the original transcendent essence.

Have you ever felt it? A deep sense of peace and belonging – perhaps after helping someone in need, forgiving a past wrong, or simply letting go of negative emotions.

These experiences all give a momentary glimpse of our true selves, unburdened by the limitations and conditioning imposed by ego and societal expectations.

*The guidance and teaching of nature are sufficient to show that man was created for the sake of man. Hence it is inferred that there is a mutual obligation between all men.*

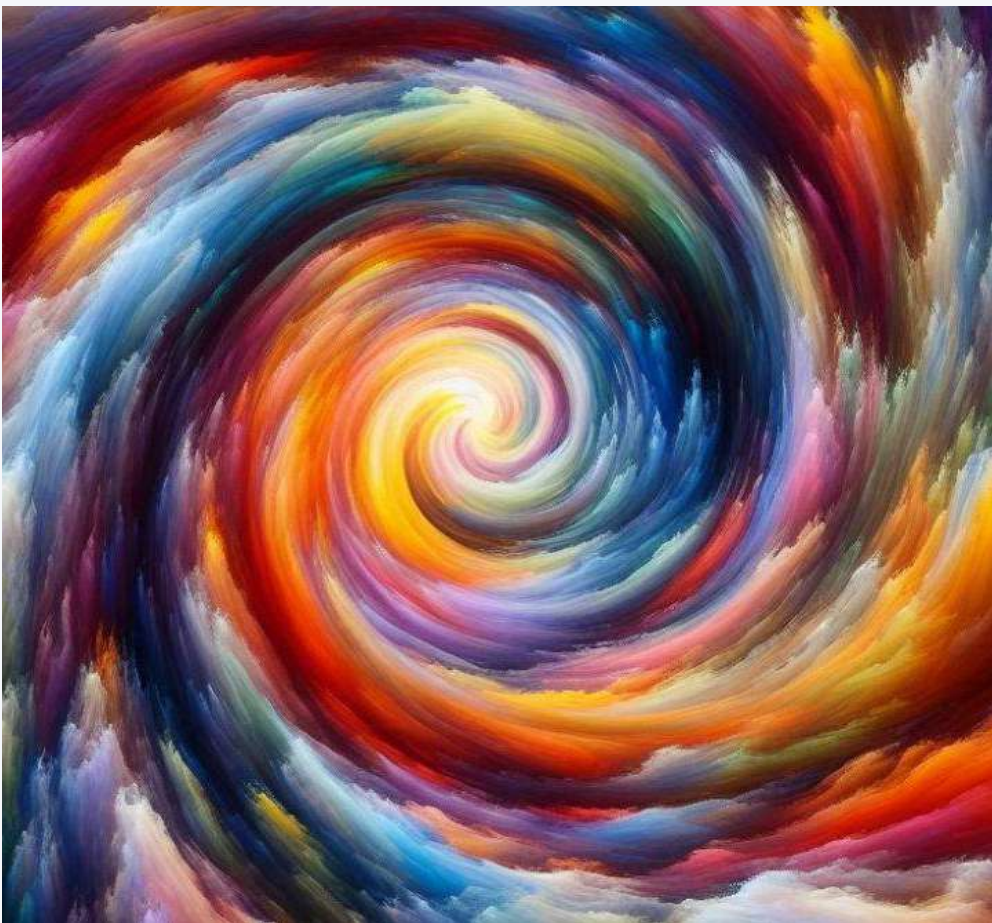
*John Calvin*

A love grounded in empathy, compassion, and a sense of

## 2.1. BENEFITS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

interconnectedness enables us to break free from all constraints. It invites us to embrace our shared humanity and to recognize that our well-being is inextricably linked to that of others.

Through the practice of unconditional love, we can gradually dismantle the barriers that separate us, returning to a state of harmony and wholeness. This is the essence of returning to humanity's core (which is about **reconnecting with our innate potential for love, compassion, and wisdom**), a journey that will lead to greater peace, joy, and fulfillment in our lives.



**The moment you have in your heart this extraordinary thing called love and feel the depth, the delight, the ecstasy of it, you will discover that for you the world is transformed.**

Jiddu Krishnamurti

## 2.2. REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

**Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.**

Proverbs 10:12

The world is filled with countless stories of individuals who have demonstrated the power of unconditional love. From heroic acts of sacrifice to everyday expressions of kindness, their stories serve as a source of inspiration for us to embrace compassion and empathy in our own lives.

- **Albert Schweitzer:** A medical missionary and philosopher who established a hospital in Africa to provide care to thousands of people, regardless of their ability to pay.
- **Nicholas Winton\*:** A British banker who risked his life to [rescue hundreds of Jewish children](#) from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia during World War II.
- **Father Maximilian Kolbe\*\*:** A Polish Catholic priest who [voluntarily took the place of a fellow prisoner](#) condemned to starvation in a Nazi concentration camp.
- **Oskar Schindler:** A German businessman who saved the lives of over 1,100 Jews during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories.
- **Mahatma Gandhi & Martin Luther King Jr.:** Civil rights leaders whose philosophies of nonviolent resistance and love were instrumental in driving lasting social change.
- **Mother Teresa:** A Roman Catholic nun who dedicated her life to serving the poor and marginalized.

\* Check Chapter 5, page 96-100

\*\* Check Chapter 5, page 101-110

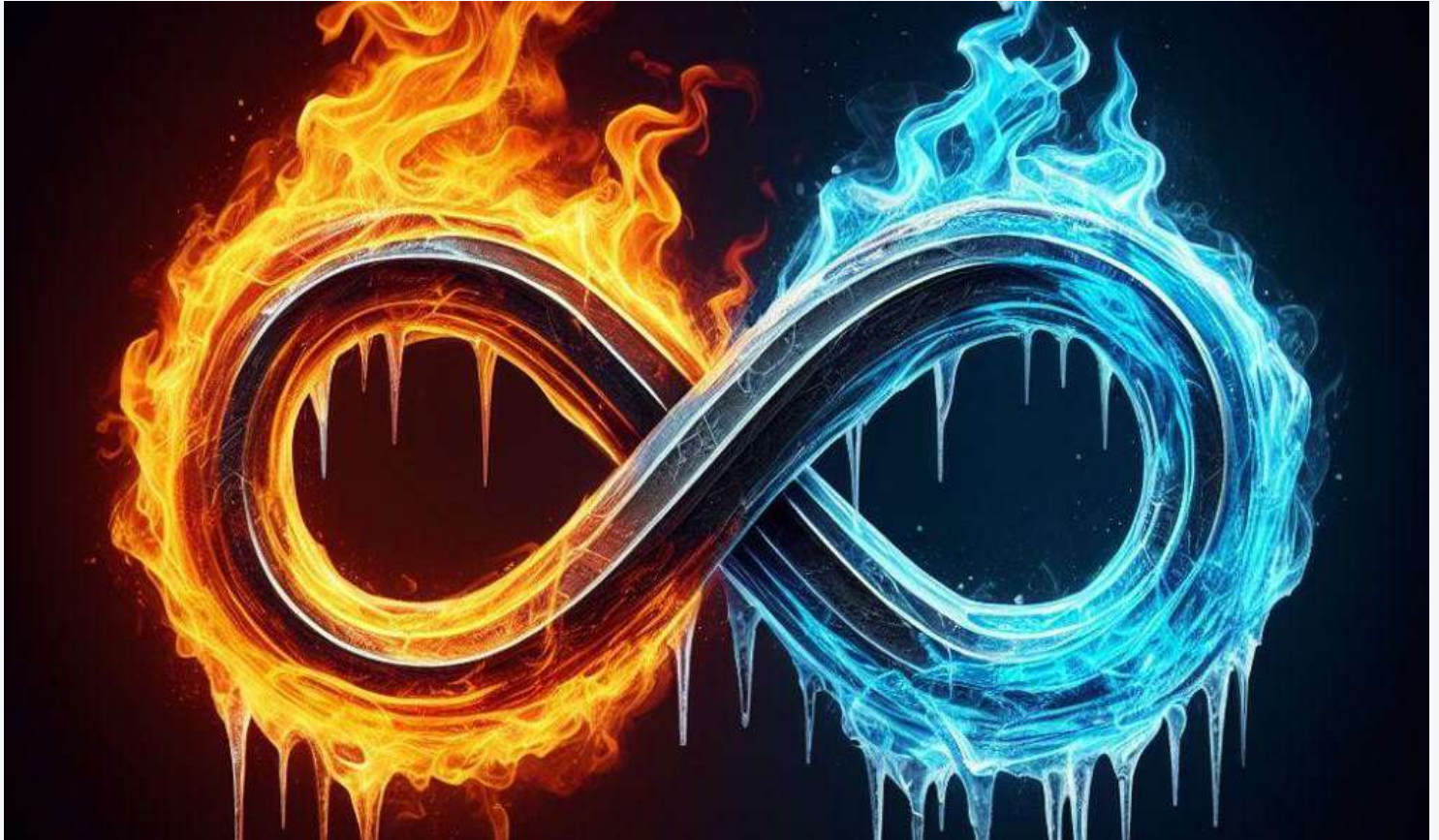


## 2.2. REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

- **Rescuers of the Rwandan Genocide\***: Individuals who risked their own lives to protect others during times of great suffering and violence.
- etc.

Beyond these historical figures, we all observe countless acts of unconditional love every day, don't we?

A stranger helping a lost child, a neighbor bringing food to a sick friend, a teacher going above their job description to better inspire their students, or a parent offering support to a struggling child – these are all examples of the love that can be found in the simplest of gestures.





# CULTIVATION OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE



**All streams flow to the sea  
because it is lower than  
they are.**

Lao Tzu

## 3.1. COMPONENTS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

### 1. Compassion

***Better than a thousand hollow words is one word that brings peace.***

*Buddha*

Compassion and empathy form the bedrock of unconditional love. These qualities allow us to connect deeply with others, understanding their experiences and emotions without judgment.

When we are compassionate, we feel a sense of concern and care for the well-being of those around us. We recognize that our loved ones are human beings who experience pain, suffering, and challenges; hence, we authentically desire to alleviate their pain.

Empathy, on the other hand, is the ability to resonate with and share the feelings of another person. It involves putting one-

self in their shoes, imagining their perspective, and experiencing their emotions vicariously.

When we empathize with someone, we may better appreciate their actions and reactions, even if we do not agree with them. This mindset enables us to bridge the gap with others and support them through difficult times.

For example, when we notice a friend seems socially withdrawn after her mother's death, we understand that her behavioral tendencies are normal, and we (as friends) should be willing to offer gentle encouragement to her.



## 3.1. COMPONENTS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

### 2. Non-attachment

***There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.***

*1 John 4:18*

Non-attachment involves cultivating a sense of detachment from material possessions, outcomes, and expectations – while maintaining a deep connection with life and others. It starts with contentment – finding joy and satisfaction in the present moment without being overly dependent on external circumstances. By embracing life as it is (both the positive and negative aspects), we become less likely to cling to things or people out of fear or need (which is a hindrance to unconditional love).

What does that mean anyway?

It means just **letting things be**, without forcing anyone or anything to be as we want them to be. Just like the concept of [Wuwei \(無為\)](#) in Daoism, we should not try to rush things and break the orders of the universe.

It is what it is. We should not coerce people to change or comply with any of our standards **if we truly care for them.**

Though we should definitely set boundaries in certain circumstances (which I will talk about later), it's up to others to make their choice. And everyone will reap the fruits of what they have sown.

***Nature does not hurry,  
yet everything is  
accomplished.***

*Lao Tzu*

For those who would like to tread this path, I suggest you

## 3.1. COMPONENTS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

adopt a minimal lifestyle – focusing on the essentials and letting go of excess possessions. Simplifying our lives is a sure way to free ourselves from the burden of material possessions and cultivate a greater sense of inner peace.

***If you love something so much let it go. If it comes back it was meant to be; if it doesn't it never was.***

*Albert Schweitzer*



### 3. Patience & self-moderation

These two qualities go hand-in-hand with unconditional love. Patience is the ability to endure hardship, delay, or frustration

without becoming angry or irritated. It requires one to cultivate a calm and composed demeanor, even in the face of adversity.

When we are patient, we are better equipped to respond to challenges with calm and understanding, rather than anger or frustration. This creates a more positive and supportive environment for our relationships.

Similarly, with self-moderation, we are less likely to act out of selfishness or greed. Rather than imposing unrealistic expectations onto ourselves or others, which will just lead to disappointment and resentment, we learn to adopt a more mature and compassionate approach to relationships.

***The greatest prayer is patience.***

*Buddha*



## 3.1. COMPONENTS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

### 4. Gratitude

***We can let the circumstances of our lives harden us so that we become increasingly resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder and more open to what scares us.***

*Pema Chodron*

A powerful force that has the potential to transform relationships and lives, gratitude is closely linked to unconditional love. When we learn to appreciate the positive aspects of our experiences, both big and small, we shift the focus away from what we lack toward what we have – which enables us to feel more content, fulfilled, and connected to others.

When we are grateful for our loved ones, we are more likely to appreciate their strengths while overlooking their short-

comings. Additionally, we are also more likely to express our love and appreciation for them without any strings attached.

Cultivating gratitude can be as simple as taking a few moments each day to reflect on the things we are thankful for – health, loved ones, experiences, or even the beauty of nature.



### 5. Sense of responsibility

***If you love someone but rarely make yourself available to him or her, that is not true love.***

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

These days, many people enter



## 3.1. COMPONENTS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

into romantic relationships (and other relationships too) without even thinking about the commitments that will naturally follow after that (e.g. they can no longer freely visit the coffee shop on the weekend; they have to spend more time for family activities rather than pursuing personal interests, etc.). To me, it is a grave mistake that we should refrain from at all costs.

Responsibility is part of love. When we love people, we have to recognize our obligations to them and strive to fulfill them to the best of our ability.

When we feel a sense of responsibility for our loved ones, we cannot help but do our best to prioritize their needs and well-being, even if things are challenging or if it comes at a personal cost.

When problems arise, rather than blaming others or making

excuses, we acknowledge our mistakes and make amends – which helps build trust and strengthen the relationship.

*When you're in love, every day is filled with anticipation and joy, but accommodating another person in your life may require that you sacrifice your free time, your money, and your space.*

Masaru Emoto

## 6. Mindfulness

Far too often, we are distracted by our own thoughts or worries, which hinder our ability to connect deeply with others. Unconditional love requires us to focus on the moment-to-moment experience of being with our loved ones, and that's where mindfulness comes in. Not only improving the quality of daily interactions, being mindful also makes us more

## 3.1. COMPONENTS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

adept at managing anger and reflecting on our thoughts and feelings before responding (thereby communicating more effectively and resolving conflicts more peacefully).

### 7. Humility

*There is no need of a teacher for those who know how to think.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

An arrogant and judgmental mindset is what prevents many people from extending their love. However, the truth is that none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes from time to time; being obsessed with people's limitations is not only un-constructive – but also hypocritical.

Being humble is about acknowledging one's shortcomings and approaching others with respect and openness. It's about

recognizing the value of others and their contributions, even if they differ from what we expect. Such an attitude is crucial for demonstrating compassion under all circumstances.

### 8. Faith

*There is force in the universe, which, if we permit it, will flow through us and produce miraculous results.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

Faith, often overlooked in discussions of unconditional love, is a vital component that can significantly deepen and strengthen our connections with others. It provides a foundation of trust, hope, and belief for sustaining relationships through challenging times.

When we have faith in our loved

## 3.1. COMPONENTS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

ones, we believe in their inherent goodness and potential. We trust that they will do their best, even if mistakes are still possible. This mindset gives rise to a sense of security and stability that allows us to feel safe and supported. In case our loved ones stumble, we understand that they may be going through challenges that we cannot fully comprehend, and we are willing to offer support and encouragement.

Faith also involves a belief in the power of love itself. It is the conviction that even when circumstances seem bleak, things will improve. That there is a higher purpose to our struggles, and that love will ultimately prevail.



**When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it's bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast, and limitless.**

Pema Chodron

## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

### 1. Cultivating mindfulness

*The most important aspect of love is not in giving or the receiving: it's in the being. When I need love from others, or need to give love to others, I'm caught in an unstable situation. Being in love, rather than giving or taking love, is the only thing that provides stability.*

*Ram Dass*

As mentioned, unconditional love is rooted in compassion, a quality that can be cultivated through mindful practices.

[Research at James Cook University](#) has shown that meditation, particularly loving-kindness meditation (LKM), helps strengthen the neural pathways associated with compassion (specifically, those found in the temporal parietal juncture as well as the insula).

Mindfulness also plays a crucial role in detaching from disturbing emotions (kleshas), which cloud our judgment and prevent us from extending genuine compassion. When we are caught up in negative thoughts and feelings, it becomes mighty hard to love unconditionally.

For example, when faced with the decision to donate, fear of financial insecurity might prevent us from giving freely. We may hesitate out of the fear that giving up what we have now may cost us the opportunity for something else (e.g. advancing in our career, helping family, etc.). Feelings of uncertainty about the future prevent us from extending compassion toward others.

Through mindfulness practices, we learn to let go of these limiting beliefs and cultivate a sense of inner peace and contentment. Reducing the influence of kleshas creates space

## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

for love to flourish.

*Thinking prevents us from touching life deeply. I think, therefore I am not really there.*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*



Such a feat is not easy. To be honest, even I am still trapped within my own cycle of disturbing emotions. While I may still be grappling with challenges from time to time, I strongly hope that my experiences will offer insights and encouragement to others.

### 2. Spiritual practices

Spiritual practices, such as

prayer, chanting, rituals, and mantras, provide a profound connection to something greater than oneself. These activities are all helpful for cultivating a sense of peace, gratitude, and love.

Most of the time, we are already aware of what we should do; all we need is a reminder. And that's where mantras come in – sacred words/ phrases repeated mentally or verbally to reinforce one's intentions, values, and beliefs. Regular repetition of a mantra leaves an imprint on the subconscious mind, making it a powerful tool for guiding decisions and cultivating positive qualities such as love, compassion, and peace.

*Mantras have effect: the mere repetition of words....*

*Swami Vivekananda*

Prayer is another powerful tool



## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

for fostering love. Whether you pray to a higher power, a loved one, or simply to some kind of inner wisdom within yourself, the act of praying should prove to be a transformative experience – in that it enables you to be **connected with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.**



As a Catholic, one text I find deeply heart-warming is the [Peace Prayer](#). Its simple, yet beautiful verses serve to remind me of the importance of cultivating peace, love, and forgiveness in my own life.

How about yours?

*(As a side note, I would like to point out that it's possible for*

*one to come up with their own mantra/ prayer that best suits their taste – instead of relying on existent texts. Feel free to be creative!)*

***Even in these present days when science reigns supreme, we still pray. What heart doesn't pray when a sick child clutches to life or when a loved one is far away?***

*Masaru Emoto*

### 3. Investing in interpersonal communication

Effective communication is the cornerstone of any healthy relationship – and even more so when it comes to love. Key elements of effective communication include:

- **Openness and honesty:** Sharing one's thoughts, feelings, and needs openly and honestly is essential

## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

for building trust and intimacy.

- **Non-defensiveness:** Communication thrives when one does their best to refrain from acts such as blaming and criticizing.
- **Shared power:** Both parties have an equal say and contribute equally to decision-making.
- **Curiosity:** Even in long-term relationships, it's important to maintain a sense of curiosity and wonder. Asking questions, listening attentively, and exploring new experiences together are essential for understanding others and keeping the connection fresh and exciting.
- **Seeking help:** When we are struggling, it's important to reach out to others for support – whether by talking to a trusted friend, family member, coach, or therapist. Remember, it's okay to ask for help, and it

doesn't mean that one is weak or incapable.

*You must always check things out by going to the person in question and asking for his or her help: “Dear one, I am suffering so much, help me please.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

## 4. Forgiving

*Forgiveness is choosing to love. It is the first skill of self-giving love.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

Have you ever felt it? When you cannot forgive a person for something, you feel as if there's something heavy in your chest – something that you despise, but cannot let go of.

It's as if some kind of toxic is building up within your heart. You know it's bad, and yet you

## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

would like it to stay rather than to disperse.

It's an intriguing fact that far too often, we prefer drinking poisons over antidotes.

When we hold onto grudges and negative emotions, we are essentially “dying” inside. Forgiveness, on the other hand, allows us to release these toxins and open our hearts to understanding. It liberates us from the burdens of resentment, anger, and bitterness, thereby opening a “gateway” for us to transcend ourselves and experience an unmatched sense of peace.

I have to admit that it's not something simple to do. Sometimes, I find myself deeply insulted by people's behaviors and so unwilling to forget about them.

The thing is, emotions are a natural part of humanity. We

cannot suppress them; we can only keep them at a distance and observe them (which is achievable with spiritual practices such as meditation and praying).



Forgiveness is not pretending that the act was not there; it's just that **you know there's a reason behind it, and are ready to let go of the negativity that comes with it.**

*If we are mindfulness, if we are love, we are also ignorance, we are also suffering, and there is no reason to suppress anything at all.*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

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The journey of forgiving starts with actively focusing on people's good qualities – their “Buddha-nature”/ “Divine spark”. As challenging or awkward as it may seem, reframing one's thoughts has been [proven to work by various psychological research](#).

When we do our best to adopt a specific behavior or mindset, it will, over time, result in a significant change in the internal state.

When you act as if you love your neighbor (even if you don't actually feel that way), you will gradually develop genuine feelings of love and affection.

It's a fascinating fact, right? Being able to influence our thoughts and beliefs with the accumulation of small actions over time. While it may seem uncomfortable initially, if we can get over the discomfort and maintain the spree, soon “the

carp will transform into the dragon”.

***Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love him.***

**C. S. Lewis**

The only thing that matters is:  
Are we willing to see through the differences?

Are we willing to let go of resentments in the beginning?





## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

Let us revisit the story of [Oskar Schindler](#). Initially a member of the Nazi Party, he then witnessed the atrocities committed against Jews as World War II progressed.

Moved by a sense of humanity, he started using his influence to protect Jewish workers. He bribed Nazi officials, forged documents, and even sheltered Jews in his factories to shield them from deportation to concentration camps.

Regardless of social, religious, or ethnic differences, one is called to love their neighbors unconditionally, without succumbing to notions of prejudice and discrimination. As John Calvin has asserted:

*Mankind is knit together with a holy knot.*

Unconditional love is always possible, if one is aware of this simple truth and dares break

down all the barriers that they or others have set up to prevent them from reaching people.



### 5. Loving yourself

*You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first.*

*Unknown*

Self-love is the cornerstone of a fulfilling and compassionate life. When we love ourselves, we are better equipped to extend love to others.

It's like filling a cup with water before pouring it out for others. If our own cup is empty, we won't have anything to give.

Self-love and love for others are

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not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are deeply interconnected.

When we love ourselves, we are more likely to see the inherent value and worth in others.

Conversely, when we love others, we develop a greater sense of self-worth and appreciation as a result.



True altruism is not about guilt-driven behavior, which stems from the thinking “I need to be like this”, or “I need to be like that”. Instead, it is about **recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings and acting with compassion and kindness.**

When we care for ourselves, we

are more likely to extend love to others without expecting anything in return.

Cultivating self-love may take time, but it is a worthwhile journey. Here are some strategies that can help:

- **Practice self-compassion:** Be kind and understanding to yourself, especially when you make mistakes or face challenges.
- **Set healthy boundaries:** Learn to say “no” when necessary and prioritize your own needs.
- **Engage in self-care activities:** Take time for activities that nourish your body, mind, and spirit.
- **Affirm your worth:** Remind yourself of your strengths, accomplishments, and positive qualities.
- **Surround yourself with positive people:** Spend time with people who uplift and support you.

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*The object of your practice should first of all be yourself. Your love for the other, your ability to love another person, depends on your ability to love yourself.*

*Buddha*

### 6. Adjusting the environment

Some people have commented (which I myself wholeheartedly agree with) that it's far easier to be loving and compassionate within the confines of a monastery than in the external chaotic world.

While it may be easier to practice spiritual disciplines in a quiet and peaceful setting, such as a monastery, it's important to remember that unconditional love can be cultivated anywhere.

The key is to establish an environment that supports your spiritual growth and

well-being by:

- **Minimizing distractions:** Reduce noise, clutter, and other distractions that interfere with your peace of mind.
- **Finding your “tribes”:** Spend time with people who uplift and support you.
- **Engaging in activities that promote relaxation:** Practice mindfulness, meditation, yoga, or other activities to stay relaxed and better manage stress.
- **Limiting exposure to negativity:** Minimize exposure to negative news, social media, and toxic relationships.

Sometimes, it may be a great idea to escape from the world to recharge and reconnect with your inner self. This could involve taking a vacation, spending time in nature, or simply setting aside time for

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solitude and reflection.

We are, after all, imperfect beings with limitations. Given the chaotic and challenging nature of today's world, it's OK to step back and make changes as necessary. It's just a natural part of human existence.

Have you ever wondered why when a person is about to die, family members often invite spiritual/ religious leaders to their house to pray and conduct rituals for them? To turn on meditative/ spiritual music? To have chants/ mantras read out loud to them?

It's because they are **creating the environment necessary for the dying person to embrace suffering and attain transcendence.**

Even those who have lived a saintly life still [need someone trustworthy at their side for support](#) as they move closer to

the Veil.



So don't feel frustrated if you need to change the environment from time to time. And when I say the environment, I also mean the people around you.

Do not bother sticking with those who pose a detrimental impact. Leaving them is, in truth, an act of immense love.

If you think your spiritual aura is not strong enough, retreat and wait until it recovers. Once you feel confident, venture back into the world to help others by volunteering, coaching/ mentoring, or simply offering a listening ear to some-



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one in need.

You don't need to completely forsake everything in life and become a monk/ priest/ nun (though some people are indeed well-suited for a monastic lifestyle). The most important thing is to "know thyself", and choose the battle wisely.

And remember that sometimes, people (due to certain reasons) need a separate sanctuary to reflect and gradually recover. So don't take it personally if the help you offer someone is not returned favorably.

### 7. Nurturing the bond

*The best thing we can offer another person is our true presence.*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

I have noticed a prevalent viewpoint that the love between family members is the only

thing that can be deemed truly unconditional. When I ponder over this thinking, I cannot help but ask myself: Why?

While there may be biological and psychological factors that contribute to this unique connection, I believe it is ultimately **the quality of the bond that determines its strength and resilience.**

It's not enough to simply share a blood tie, as it does not guarantee unconditional love. The quality of the relationship is what matters most.

When we cultivate strong, supportive, and compassionate bonds with our loved ones, we are more likely to extend love, even in the face of challenges.

When we are close to someone emotionally, we are better able to see them for who they are in the present moment (as well as their potential for changing in

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the future), rather than judging them based on past mistakes or actions. This allows us to extend forgiveness and compassion, even when they may have disappointed us.

Like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son\*, we will be inclined to show mercy and invite people into our own “sanctuary” when they approach us devastated, rather than being obsessed with their previous wrongdoings and yelling at them.

So what does that mean?

Well, it's simple.

You should try to **spend more QUALITY TIME** with your loved ones.

*Love is neither giving  
nor receiving – it is  
participating.*

*Paulo Coelho*



### 8. Reflecting on great people's stories

As I have mentioned above, there have been countless recounts of people who sacrificed themselves for others, thereby demonstrating love in its finest form (e.g. Schindler, Mother Teresa, Father Kolbe).

I do not mean to encourage you to do the same heroic acts as them. However, just think about this.

Do you feel somehow transcendent when reflecting on these people's stories? Do you feel a sense of happiness and fulfillment that is so overwhelming - one that few can match?

\* Check Appendix 1, page 145-147

## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

Wouldn't you want to experience that in real life too?

Keep that in mind, and you should be motivated to demonstrate unconditional love the next time you are prompted to be conditional.

The stories of the exceptional figures above all share a common theme: selflessness, demonstrated through their willingness to put their own needs and desires aside in order to help others.

Reflecting on their examples should inspire us to re-evaluate our priorities, appreciate life's blessings, and take action to make a difference in the world. It should motivate us to become less attached to the superficial thing called "self".

When we let go of our ego and focus on the well-being of others, we experience a profound sense of peace,

fulfillment, and connection – which will push us to keep being a force for good. And the effects of our deeds ripple and extend far beyond our inner circles.

Not only our friends and relatives will be influenced by the "aura" we emit, but the later generations will also have something to reflect on and work toward.

Isn't it an ideal worth striving for?

***Fill your soul with love and gratitude. Pray for the world. Share the message of love. And let us flow as long as we live.***

*Masaru Emoto*

## 9. Service to others

***There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them***

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*except in the form of bread.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

My mother sometimes talks with me about the emptiness of luxurious activities such as parties, events, and shopping. “Why waste money on these things, when you can use it for helping people in remote regions?”. According to her, bringing happiness to people is a much wiser choice.

While her viewpoint may appear simple (even naive) to some people, I dare say that it speaks to a type of happiness and fulfillment that transcends the ordinary.

Unlike pleasures that are derived from self-indulging (which are fleeting and do not last for long), those that stem from acts of love are extremely rewarding and do not fade away easily.

Service to others doesn’t have to be grand or time-consuming. Even small acts of kindness should make a big difference in someone’s life.

For instance, imagine you’re walking down the street and see someone struggling to carry heavy groceries. You offer to help, even though you’re in a hurry.

That’s an example of how a simple gesture is enough to bring warmth into people’s lives.



When you help others, the most important thing is that **it has to stem from a faithful heart.** You



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have to do it willingly – without expecting anything in return. Without any hidden personal agenda.

There are countless opportunities to serve others in one's community. Here are a few ideas:

- Volunteer at a local organization to provide essential services.
- Help a neighbor or friend with their chores, errands, or childcare.
- Donate to a cause you care about.
- Spread kindness by simply smiling at people, holding open doors, offering compliments, or extending a helping hand when others are in trouble.

***Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well***

***fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.***

*James 2:15-19*

### 10. Reflecting on death and separation

***You don't know who is important to you until you actually lose them.***

*Mahatma Gandhi*

Reflecting on the impermanence of life is a powerful tool for cultivating compassion and unconditional love. When we realize that life is fleeting, we are motivated to appreciate the preciousness of each moment

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and the importance of fostering positive relationships.

Just think about it. If you hate someone deeply, but suddenly you hear that they're on their deathbed and going to die, would you still keep your hatred?

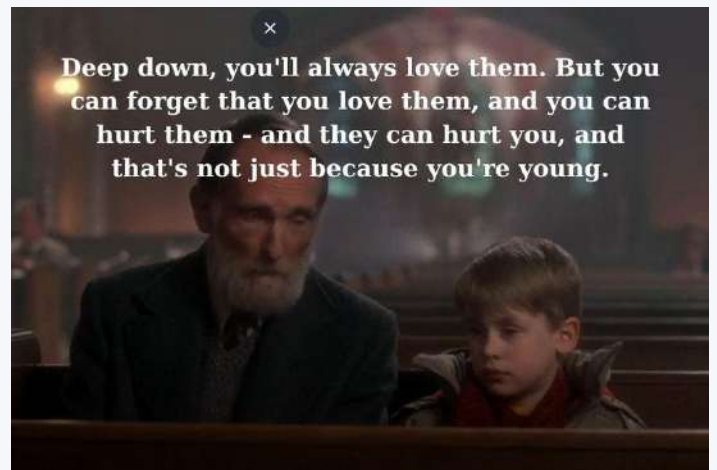
If not, what's the point of hating them all the way, if not **because of your inflated self?**

Whenever you intend to say something bad to others, just imagine how you would feel if they suddenly passed away.

Whenever you get angry with your spouse/ parent/ kid/ relative/ friend, think about how you would feel if they were no more. This practice should let you see the situation from a different perspective.

If you realize that your relationships are important to you (and yet too shallow now),

take steps to improve them. Communicate openly, express your love and appreciation, and work on resolving conflicts. Do it now – before it's too late!



*Deep down, you'll always love them. But you can forget that you love them, and you can hurt them and they can hurt you, and that's not just because you're young.*

*Old Man Marley to Kevin McCallister – Home Alone 1*

## 11. Education

I would like to revisit the example of the kid showing love to an unknown beggar

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above.

There are various ways to interpret the motives behind such a selfless act. Some may say that it's his conscience acting. Some may deem it a sign of Divinity trace/ Buddhahood trace within him. Others may attribute it to his parents' teaching.

Whatever lens you would like to take, I believe that all of them speak to the importance of having a good inner core, which can be cultivated right from childhood with the proper guidance.

Children are naturally curious and open-hearted. By providing them with a nurturing and supportive environment, we lay the foundation necessary to cultivate their innate capacity for love and compassion:

- **Teaching empathy:** Encourage them to think about the feelings of

others and to treat everyone with respect and kindness, no matter their perspectives or cultural backgrounds.

- **Modeling compassionate behavior:** Children learn by observing and imitating the behavior of adults. As adults, our responsibility is to embody good values and demonstrate them through what we do every day (e.g. choosing our words carefully; tolerating others when we can, etc.).
- **Fostering a sense of connection:** Being close to kids and explaining to them about the interconnectedness of all things – as well as one's responsibilities in society.

*Examples of educational approaches:*

- **Character education:** Programs that focus on teaching children about

## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

- positive character traits such as honesty, kindness, and respect.
- **Service learning:** Opportunities for kids to engage in volunteer work and community service.
- **Social-emotional learning:** Programs that help participants cultivate emotional intelligence and social skills.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Encouraging positive behavior through praise and rewards.

Education is not just meant for children. Throughout our lives, we can continue to learn and grow as individuals, by actively seeking out opportunities for personal and spiritual development.



**Set your heart  
on doing good.  
Do it over and  
over again, and  
you will be filled  
with joy.**

Buddha



## 3.2. BEST PRACTICES FOR LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

# How to Love Unconditionally



Mindfulness



High-quality time



Spiritual practices



Reading & reflecting



Communication



Service to others



Forgiveness



Death contemplation



Loving yourself



Education



Environment



# FROM “HERE” TO “THERE”



**Human relationships must be based  
on love – but not a blind or spoiling  
love. A small good is like a great evil.**

Kazuo Inamori

## 4.1. ADDRESSING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

### Unconditional love is romantic love

While both involve feelings of affection and attachment, they differ in their underlying motivations and characteristics.

- Romantic or erotic love is typically characterized by passion, desire, and exclusivity. It often involves a strong emotional connection and a sense of infatuation. While it can be deeply fulfilling, it is subject to the influence of factors such as physical attraction, shared interests, and societal expectations.
- Unconditional love, on the other hand, is a more selfless and enduring form of love. It is based on a deep sense of care, compassion, and acceptance – a genuine desire for the well-being of another person.

As Sadhguru has pointed out\*,

true love is not about what you or others do, but rather a **state of being within yourself**. It is a selfless expression of joy and compassion completely within one's control. Regardless of the circumstances, one is free to choose to love unconditionally or not.

*Love is not a relationship, a relationship is a different thing. If you are willing, you can become love, you can make your emotions into a very sweet space.*

*Sadhguru*

### Unconditional love does not have boundaries

While it's true that this type of love is a transcendent one, we should not idealize it and overlook the crucial role of boundaries. In fact, commitments and responsibilities ARE required for love to be unconditional.

\* Check Chapter 5, page 128-134

## 4.1. ADDRESSING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Just think about a garden. Even with the most fertile soil and abundant sunlight, careful tending is still necessary. Weeds must be pulled, pests controlled, and water provided at the right times.

Similarly, a relationship cannot be one-sided; it requires boundaries to flourish. These boundaries are not about control or restriction but about creating a healthy, nurturing environment for both parties.

A common misconception is that unconditional love equates to limitless tolerance – which may lead to dangerous situations where one person's needs are consistently ignored or violated. True love, even unconditional, involves respect and consideration for each other.

For instance, a parent's love for their child is boundless, but this doesn't mean they should tolerate harmful behaviors.

Setting limits on screen time, enforcing curfews, or discouraging unhealthy habits are all ways of demonstrating love and care. These boundaries are not about punishment – but **about guiding the child toward a healthier, happier future.**

They are not about control or manipulation – but about **maintaining mutual respect, so that the relationship may endure.**

*Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.*

*Proverbs 13:24*





## 4.1. ADDRESSING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

In romantic relationships, boundaries are equally important. It's okay to express your needs and expectations, even if they may conflict with your partner's desires. For example, if one feels overwhelmed by constant texting, it's reasonable to request a break from electronic communication.

Sometimes, it may be better for two people to be separated for a while – not because of hate, but so that both may have the chance to contemplate the experience, learn from it, and renew their bond (which is, indeed, **a sign of love**).

*(As a side note, some may argue that for this reason, only the love between one and the Divine can be classified as “unconditional”. That may be understandable, given that humanity is not perfect. But hey, even the Divine has rules for us to follow. Don't expect to be whoever you are*

*and still end up in Heaven or Nirvana. You reap what you sow, so don't be abusive :)))*

**Unconditional love is one without conflict**

*There are limits to what we can offer others, because as human beings we're wired to have needs for acceptance, kindness, and intimacy.*

*John Amodeo*

Conflicts are a natural part of any relationship, regardless of the level of love involved. Even the most loving couples will experience disagreements or misunderstandings from time to time. What matters is how these disputes are handled – whether they are resolved with patience, empathy, and a willingness to find common ground or not.

Speaking of which, I think it is a

## 4.1. ADDRESSING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

good idea to draw a fine line between two terms: “**love**” and “**like**”.

The distinction between them is a nuanced one. Love often involves a deep emotional connection and a sense of care, while liking may be based on admiration or respect.

Hence, it’s possible to [love someone without liking their behavior or actions](#). In such cases, it’s important to communicate openly and honestly about the issues at hand.

Unconditional love is not about avoiding conflict or pretending that everything is perfect. It’s about approaching challenges with compassion and understanding, even when it’s difficult.

What’s more, because unconditional love is boundless, it doesn’t have to be tied to any specific being. Rather, it’s when

you become one with the “flow” and let things be regardless of the external conditions. It’s a state of mind that involves no attachment. Even to the one we care for.



Sometimes, the best way to maintain a state of love is to set boundaries or distance oneself from toxic situations. This doesn’t mean that the love is gone – but rather, one is just trying to protect everyone from harm.

Sometimes, leaving a relationship is actually an act of love, especially when it becomes clear that the tie is harmful. This decision is often made with the intention of seeking a

## 4.1. ADDRESSING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

healthier future for both parties.

It's a complex choice that requires careful consideration and may involve significant emotional pain.

After all, I believe that the most important thing has to do with the intention behind it. Is it because of YOU only or because of BOTH OF YOU?

When we leave somebody, is the decision the result of our arrogance and selfishness? Is it an act that truly comes from the heart? Have we already considered every other alternative?

**Unconditional love is not painful**

Contrary to the popular belief that unconditional love is always blissful, it can be deeply challenging in certain circumstances.

One of the most common sources of pain is **unrequited love**. When we give someone our love freely and unconditionally, it can be incredibly painful if our feelings are not reciprocated. Even though we continue to love them, the absence of their love in return is capable of causing emotional distress (which, I believe, has to do with the fact that we have NOT been detached from worldly standards yet).

Another issue is **experiencing the pain of those we love**. When we care deeply about someone, we often feel their pain as our own. This vicarious suffering can be emotionally exhausting, especially when we are unable to alleviate their suffering.

Sometimes, caring for others means that we have to confront and speak up to them – especially if they are resorting to unhealthy behaviors.

## 4.1. ADDRESSING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

As excruciating as it may seem, it is precisely in these challenging moments that the true depth and strength of love are revealed.



**It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.**

J. K. Rowling



## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

### Unrealistic standards

***If someone isn't what others want them to be, the others become angry. Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives, but none about his or her own.***

*Paulo Coelho*

One thing I find quite perplexing is the abundance of romantic novels these days, most of which portray love in a way that is far too perfect – as well as the large fanbase of such works.

Many of us have a preconceived notion of what love should be. We may envision a fairytale romance, a perfect partner, or a harmonious relationship devoid of conflict.

We may believe that true love means never being disappointed or hurt.

However, these idealized versions of love will just turn to disappointment and frustration when reality falls short. Everyone has flaws and imperfections. True love is often about **accepting these flaws and supporting each other through challenges.**

Even when we think of loving parents or relatives, there often seem to be unspoken expectations placed upon us. These make it difficult to feel truly loved and appreciated, as we may constantly feel the pressure to meet certain criteria.

Similarly, we may place our own expectations on our loved ones, limiting our ability to love them unconditionally.

***Be careful not to fall in love with the fantasy you imagined instead of what's standing before you.***

*R. J. Intindola*

## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

Recognizing and challenging unrealistic expectations is the first step toward cultivating a healthier understanding of love and life. In certain circumstances, especially for those who have just started embarking on their [self-discovery](#) journey, it may be better to remain isolated for a while to strengthen their internal state – until they are ready to be back and shower their family/ community with love.

***Live alone and do no evil;  
be carefree like an  
elephant in the elephant  
forest.***

*Dhammapada*



### Inflated ego

***It is easy to acknowledge,  
but almost impossible to  
realize for long, that we  
are mirrors whose bright-  
ness, if we are bright, is  
wholly derived from the  
sun that shines upon us.***

*C. S. Lewis*

An inflated ego, characterized by excessive self-importance and a sense of entitlement, is a major hindrance to the ability to practice unconditional love. When the ego is at the forefront, one becomes preoccupied with their own desires, needs, and accomplishments; hence, it becomes extremely difficult to put the needs of others before their own. At the same time, these people are inclined to seek constant validation and admiration from others, which makes it truly challenging for them to accept criticism or negative feedback.

## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

Many spiritual and philosophical traditions emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings. In other words, the ego, or the sense of a separate self, is a mere illusion. The pursuit of personal agendas and revenge, often driven by an inflated ego, will ultimately lead to a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction.

While it may provide a temporary sense of relief or pleasure, it will just perpetuate a cycle of negativity and harm.

Realizing the detrimental effects of an inflated ego is essential for one to cultivate a greater capacity for unconditional love and nurture more meaningful connections.

***Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.***

*Rumi*

### Excessive greed

***It's more blessed to give than receive.***

*Acts 20:35*

In today's materialistic world, far too often, we find ourselves chasing wealth instead of catering to our inner world. Driven by the desire for possessions and fame, we become trapped in a never-ending cycle of dissatisfaction and longing.

Worse, we become inclined to expect rewards or benefits for our actions, even when it comes to acts of kindness or generosity.

We give not out of altruism, but out of the expectation of rewards – recognition, certification, praise, potential for reputation/ new business (which makes our act completely conditional and lose its meaning).

## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

When we give in to greed, feelings of resentment, envy, and distrust are given the room to flourish. As a result, not only are our relationships damaged, but we also experience a loss of perspective and an inability to appreciate life's simple joys.

Overcoming the desire for more is not an easy feat, and yet it is still possible. Daily gratitude practices, acts of generosity, and mindfulness activities all help “reprogram” the subconscious and therefore counter-balance the effects of greed.

***When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do to be honored by others. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.***

*Matthew 6:2-4*

### Ignorance

***Fear is born from our ignorance, from our concepts regarding life, death, being, and non-being. If we are able to get rid of all these concepts by touching the reality within ourselves, then nonfear will be there and the greatest relief will become possible.***

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Ignorance, a concept featured prominently in traditions such as Buddhism (which refers to it as “[Avidyā](#)”), refers to one’s lack of knowledge about the world. It causes them to become unable to see things as they truly are, leading to misunderstandings, judgments, and harmful actions.

There are a lot of ways that ignorance manifests in one’s life:

## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

- Preoccupation with material possessions and external appearances.
- Neglecting the importance of cultivating a healthy and compassionate inner life.
- Preference for immediate pleasures over hard work.
- Obsession with career advancement without caring enough for the family.
- Excessive focus on worldly glory without working on one's heart and mind.
- Prejudices and stereotypes that are based on people's achievements or backgrounds, rather than their intentions/ potential.
- Feelings of inadequacy, envy, and resentment.
- Constantly comparing oneself to others, especially in an unhealthy way.
- An excessive desire to conform to societal expectations, especially those that are superficial.

A commitment to lifelong learning and personal growth provides a solution to combating ignorance and developing a deeper understanding of oneself (as well as the world around them).

***Don't compare your life to others. There's no comparison between the sun and the moon. They shine when it's their time.***

*Buddha*



### Busyness

I remember once visiting a barbershop and waiting for my turn to have a haircut. At that time, I was reaching out to the



## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

phone in my pocket, when I suddenly noticed one thing.

**Everyone in the barbershop, including the guests and the staff, was holding a phone in their hands.**

Suddenly, I felt a great sense of shame and decided to stop pulling out my phone; instead, I just sat there silently and waited. After all, there was no need for me to use it – besides the urge to check social media.

It's so disheartening to see everyone in the shop immersed in their own superficial "world" – instead of talking to each other or just meditating in silence and being mindful of the surroundings.

In fact, I believe we see that every day: at work, at home, at school, in the hospital, at the restaurant, on the bus/ train, at church/ temple/ pagoda, etc. everywhere!

***We have been moving along at such a fast pace that we no longer know what we are doing. Now we have to wait until our soul catches up with us.***

*Paulo Coelho*

In today's fast-paced, tech-driven world, busyness has become a pervasive issue. When one is constantly pre-occupied with work, obligations, and distractions caused by the constant stream of notifications and updates, it becomes mighty hard for them to connect with others on a deep and meaningful level.

What's worse is that constant busyness makes us more likely to become indifferent to people's needs and feelings. Instead of spending time with our loved ones, we prefer staying at work to chase our personal agendas, rather than catering to what truly matters

## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

to us. With the rise of social media platforms (which allow people to become “famous” on their own terms without the need for hard work), many become preoccupied with building their online image and social status; hence, they acquire an inflated sense of self as a result.

Setting clear boundaries between work and personal time is one way to avoid feeling overwhelmed and stressed. We should remind ourselves to take regular breaks from technology to reconnect with ourselves and others.

*Indifference and neglect often do much more damage than outright dislike.*

*J. K. Rowling*

**A political, divisive mindset**

I cannot recall a time in my life

when there were so many conflicts and political divisions all occurring at the same time – as it is happening right now. The Russian-Ukraine war, the escalating conflicts in the Middle East, the rising tensions in East Asia, the US 2024 election (where people seem to enjoy pointing fingers at each other rather than presenting a solution to move forward), etc. the list just goes on and on.

No wonder why people these days find it truly challenging to embrace the concept of unconditional love.

Polarized thinking and partisan loyalty cause us to become caught up in divisions. As a result, we cannot see others as individuals and instead view them through a lens of political affiliation. The sense of tribalism that stems from such divisions prompts us to view others (especially those who do not belong to our “groups”) with

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suspicion or hostility.

Not to mention, many people engage in politics to advance their own interests or those of their social or economic group – rather than for the greater good.

However, I believe that it is in this chaotic period that the message of love – a boundless one – is more critical than ever.

Despite political differences, we all share many common experiences and aspirations. Recognizing the underlying humanity of all people is essential for fostering understanding and compassion.

***In the sky, there is no distinction of east and west; people create distinctions out of their own minds and then believe them to be true.***

***Buddha***

While it may seem ambitious to discuss things like war and social justice, I believe we can all contribute with the simplest daily acts.

For example, have you ever found yourself engaging in meaningless quarrels with a colleague – just because of a trivial difference in your working styles?

Have you ever argued with your spouse – just because their culinary preferences are not the same as yours?

Have you ever distrusted another person – just because of their dress code/ accent/ religion, etc.?

The cultivation of unconditional love doesn't have to involve something marvelous. Just do your best to engage in constructive dialogues and work toward common goals in the workplace/ at home – that should

## 4.2. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

suffice and help create a more inclusive and equitable society.



**Differences of  
habit and  
language are  
nothing at all if  
our aims are  
identical and  
our hearts  
are open.**

J. K. Rowling

## 4.3. OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Who & when should I show unconditional love to?

Again, my answer is: **It depends.** It's up to you to decide.

After all, it's a personal journey that is greatly influenced by one's unique circumstances and values. The most important thing is to **listen to your heart and intuition.** Ask yourself:

- Do I genuinely care for this person without expecting anything in return? (making sure that no sense of self is involved)
- Is my desire to love them free from everything, or is it rooted in self-interest or societal pressures?
- Do I truly care for someone, or is my act just to make myself look better?
- Do I make donations out of altruism, or is it because I don't want people to bad-mouth me?
- When I commit an act of generosity, do I feel coerced to do it? Am I afraid that failing to do so will not meet a certain level of social ethics?
- Can I love them even when they're difficult or make mistakes?

*Additional questions to consider:*

- Who do I naturally feel drawn to? Are there certain individuals who evoke feelings of warmth, empathy, and a desire to support them unconditionally?
- When do I find myself offering unconditional love without hesitation? Is it in moments of crisis, joy, or simply in everyday interactions?
- What are my motivations for extending love? Are they purely altruistic, or do fear of rejection, a need for control, or a desire for approval play a role?



## 4.3. OVERCOMING DOUBTS

*Examples to ponder:*

- **Family:** Do I feel a deep connection to my family members and a desire to love them unconditionally, regardless of their actions or mistakes?
- **Friends:** Are there friends who I have a strong bond with/ consistently support and care for, even when they may disappoint me?
- **Community:** Do I feel a sense of responsibility toward the community and a desire to help others, regardless of their background or circumstances?
- **Strangers:** Have I ever found myself offering kindness to a stranger, perhaps in a moment of need or vulnerability?

Remember, unconditional love is a personal journey. It's about **discovering who you are, what truly matters to you, and how you want to express your love**

**and compassion in the world.**

While this type of love may seem like an unattainable ideal, it is a worthy goal to strive for.



The choice to love unconditionally is ultimately up to us. If we let expectations, judgments, or resentments come in, even parental love may become transactional. (though I myself – at least as an East Asian – believe most are not)

As the saying goes, “**You reap what you sow.**” By choosing to love unconditionally, we reap the rewards of inner peace, fulfillment, and harmonious relationships. Conversely, choosing to hold onto resent-

## 4.3. OVERCOMING DOUBTS

ment, judgment, and expectations will only give rise to suffering and isolation.

It's not about loving everyone under every circumstance (e.g. who would do that to someone like Hitler or Pol Pot?), but about cultivating a more compassionate and forgiving attitude toward those in our lives.

As challenging as it may seem, I highly recommend that you try to practice this type of love more and more every day, especially with those in your family, your “tribes”, and eventually, the community.

I am not claiming to have mastered unconditional love. It is a journey that requires constant effort and self-reflection (I myself have stumbled from time to time and committed many foolish mistakes). In fact, even the most spiritually evolved

individuals may struggle with moments of judgment or resentment.

However, even small steps can make a significant difference in our lives and the lives of those around us.

While it's important to exercise discernment and not extend love freely to those who may exploit it, striving for this ideal can enrich your life and foster stronger, more meaningful connections with others.

The rest is up to you. **Would you prefer to drink poisons or antidotes?** Your choice.



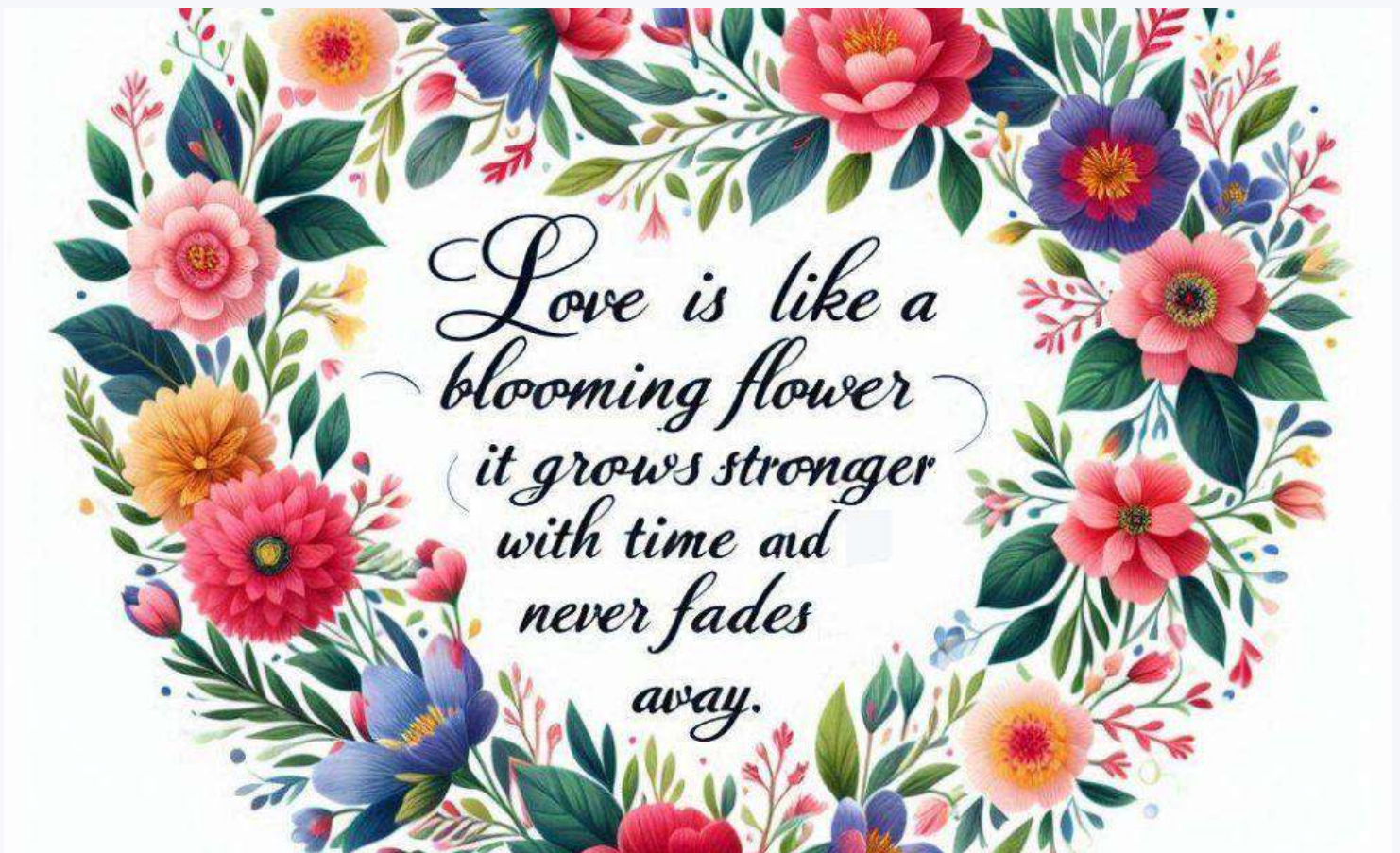
## 4.3. OVERCOMING DOUBTS

**Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal.**

**Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.**

**To love is to be VULNERABLE.**

C. S. Lewis





# UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IN ACTION



It's not just a myth; countless records have proven that unconditional love is possible, even in face of adversity!

## 5.1. STORY #1: SIR NICHOLAS WINTON



*(Originally published at [jewishnews.co.uk](http://jewishnews.co.uk)  
Image source: Wikimedia)*

**(Background information:** Sir Nicholas George Winton was a British stockbroker and humanitarian who helped to rescue Jewish children who were at risk of being murdered by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust. He assisted in the rescue of 669 children, most of them Jewish, from Czechoslovakia on the eve of World War II. His humanitarian accomplishments remained unknown and unnoticed by the world for nearly 50 years until 1988 when he was invited to the BBC television programme *That's Life!*, where he was reunited with dozens of the children he had helped come to Britain and was introduced to many of their children and grandchildren. The British press celebrated him and dubbed him the "British Schindler")



## 5.1. STORY #1: SIR NICHOLAS WINTON

In December 1938, stockbroker Nicholas Winton got involved in a war few knew was coming. He later became known for following through on a particular idea, after a phone-call from a friend asking him to drop a planned skiing holiday and come to Prague instead. That idea was to get vulnerable Jewish children out of Czechoslovakia and into Britain.

He knew the situation in Europe. His German Jewish parents, resettled in Hampstead, were still in close contact with their kin, who relayed news on the ground. Kristallnacht had been a month earlier, and Hitler had annexed Sudetenland in western Czechoslovakia a month before that. British politicians flew back waving paper, but through his family connections and left-leaning political acquaintances, including ‘father of the NHS’ Aneurin Bevan, the young Nicholas knew more than most that something needed to be done.

“I went out knowing roughly what I would find. I knew they were in danger, living rough, in camps, in temporary shelter. That didn’t surprise me. What surprised me was the number of societies already there helping them.”

Indeed, the Central British Fund for Germany Jewry (which became World Jewish Relief) was busy raising half a million pounds to re-house and subsequently care for 10,000 German and Austrian children, but what of the children of Czechoslovakia? “There is no organisation in Prague to deal with refugee children,” he was told. “But if you want to have a go, have a go.”

He did. From a hotel table in Wenceslas Square, he set about writing, phoning, calculating and planning. Amidst the mayhem, the rulebook

## 5.1. STORY #1: SIR NICHOLAS WINTON

got lost. With embezzled stationery from the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, he created a fake affiliate, of which he made himself chairman.

Thousands of Czech parents soon queued outside his new Prague office, where Winton and Trevor Chadwick filled in forms and registered children. The Gestapo became interested. When they sent a stunning honey-trap, Winton reciprocated.

Shame there weren't more reciprocal governments. Only Britain and Sweden said they'd take the kids – America was too busy. The Home Office, badgered by Winton's mother, finally laid out its criteria: £50 deposit and a family to take the child. Fifty pounds was a lot of money, but it could be found, as could the families.

Through adverts in newspapers, churches and synagogues, word got out, money came in, and foster parents got in touch. "Somebody would write and say we want a girl of seven. We'd send several photos of girls aged seven and tell them to choose one. It wasn't the normal way you'd do things, but it worked well. It was quick."

With families lined up, and forged visas bypassing Home Office sloth, logistics followed. On 14 March 1939, aged 29, Winton saw the first of his transports leave for London. Seven more followed. Once there, the kids were moved to their families. "It wasn't as difficult or mysterious as people make out. They were already evacuating children from the south of England. We just had to get them on the train."

Time was of the essence, and he politely rode roughshod over resistance. To rabbis outraged that Jewish children would grow up in

## 5.1. STORY #1: SIR NICHOLAS WINTON

Christian homes, he told them: “Mind your own business. This is what needs doing and I’m doing it. If you prefer a dead Jew to a Jew brought up in a Christian home, that’s your problem.”

He rescued 669 children. It would have been thousands, but on 1 September 1939, his ninth train, carrying 250 children, was stopped from leaving Prague, as Britain declared war on Germany. Their fate is unknown, as, for decades, was Winton’s role, locked in a box in his Maidenhead attic, contained in notes and diaries, where it would have stayed had his wife not one day been rummaging around. Enter Esther Rantzen and her team of researchers. That 1988 ‘Hearts of Gold’ episode, when she pulled together many of those he’d saved and sat them around Sir Nick in the audience, is now part of British Jewry’s communal memory.

The same can now be said of the man himself, after he fell asleep one last on 1 July, 76 years to the day since one of his transports landed in London.

In death, he leaves those he saved. In life, he’d sought neither praise nor the acquaintance of the kids, who, by then, were “dotted all over the place”. He hadn’t worried, though. Britain had an after-care system, in which his mother – whose vital role is underplayed – was heavily involved. Still, they loved him, for his act of unconditional love, to which they owed everything. Many saw him as a father figure.

“That’s just how the cookie crumbled on me,” he’d say to yet another stumbling, fawning interviewer. “It just happened like that. It’s nice to think that it went alright.”

## 5.1. STORY #1: SIR NICHOLAS WINTON



*(Image source: [jewishnews.co.uk](http://jewishnews.co.uk))*

**If everyone believed in ethics – goodness, kindness, love, decency –  
we'd have no problems at all.**

Nicholas Winton



## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE



(Originally published at [militia-immaculatae.org](https://militia-immaculatae.org)  
Image source: Canva & Wikimedia)

**(Background information:** Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish Catholic priest who volunteered to die in place of a man named Franciszek Gajowniczek in the German death camp of Auschwitz, located in German-occupied Poland during World War II.

At the end of July 1941, a prisoner escaped from the camp, prompting the deputy camp commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Fritzsch, to pick ten men to be starved to death in an underground bunker to deter further escape attempts. When one of the selected men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out, "My wife! My children!" Kolbe volunteered to take his place)



## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

*Below is the content of an interview with Michał Micherdziński, one of the last witnesses of sacrifice of St. Maximilian Kolbe instead of a fellow prisoner, made the night of 29-30 July 1941 in the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau by Fr. Witold Pobiedziński*

**You were prisoner in the Auschwitz concentration camp for five years. You personally met St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe there. How important for you and the other prisoners was the presence of this monk among you?**

All prisoners coming to Auschwitz were greeted with the same words: “You did not come to a sanatorium but to a German concentration camp from which there is no other way than through the chimney. Jews can live for two weeks, priests live a month, and the rest live three months. Those who do not like it may just go to the wire.” This meant that they could be killed, because there flowed nonstop high-voltage current in the wires surrounding the camp. These words at the beginning deprived the prisoners of hope. I was granted incredible grace in Auschwitz, because I stayed in one block with Fr. Maximilian, and I was standing with him in one row at the time of the selection for death. I was an eyewitness of his heroic sacrifice, which brought hope back to me and other prisoners.

**What were the circumstances of this event, which is still of so great and keen interest and inspires people to ask the question: Why did he do it, in the name of what values?**

63 years ago, on Tuesday, July 29, 1941, about 1.00 o'clock, just after the midday roll call the alarm sirens howled. More than 100 decibels went through the camp. The prisoners by the sweat of their brows

## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

were fulfilling their duties. The howl of sirens meant the alarm, and the alarm meant that the prisoner was missing. The SS immediately stopped the work and began escorting prisoners to the camp for roll call to check the number of prisoners. For us who worked on the construction of a nearby rubber factory, it meant a seven-kilometre march to the camp. We were rushed to go faster.

Roll call showed a tragic thing: There was one prisoner missing on our Block 14a. When I say “on our block” I mean Fr. Maximilian, Franciszek Gajowniczek, others and myself. It was a frightening message. All other prisoners were relieved and were allowed to go to the blocks, and we were announced the penalty — standing at attention without caps, day and night, hungry. The night was very cold. When the SS had a changing of the guard, we were crowding together like bees — those standing outside warmed those in the middle, and then there was a change.

Many older people did not withstand the drudgery of standing in the night and in the cold. We expected at least that a little sun would warm us. We also expected the worst. In the morning, the German officer shouted at us: “Because a prisoner escaped from your block and you did not prevent it or stop it, ten of you will die of starvation in order that the others will remember that even the smallest attempts to escape will not be tolerated.” Selection began.

**What happens with a man when he knows that this may be the last moment of his life? What feelings accompanied the prisoners who could hear the sentence condemning them to death?**

I'd rather spare myself remembering the details of this terrible

## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

situation. I will tell generally what the selection looked like. The whole group went to the beginning of the first line; on the front, two steps ahead of us, a German captain was standing. He looked you in the eye like a vulture. He would measure each of us and then raise his right hand and say, “Du!” that is “You.” This “Du!” meant that you will die of starvation, and he would go on. The SS men dragged the poor prisoner out of his place in the row, wrote down the number, and set him aside under guard.

“Du!” sounded like a hammer hitting an empty chest. Everyone was afraid that anytime the finger might point at him. The line under scrutiny moved a few steps forward, so that between the lines being scrutinized and the next line something like corridors formed, with a free space with a width of three to four meters. The SS-man walked in this corridor and again said, “Du! Du.” Our hearts thudded. With noise in heads, the blood throbbed in temples, and it seemed to us that the blood would spring out of our noses, ears, and eyes. It was something tragic.

### How was St. Maximilian behaving during this selection?

Fr. Maximilian and I were standing in the seventh row. He stood on my left; perhaps two or three friends separated us from him. When the rows before us dwindled, more and more, great fear started embracing me. I must say, no matter how much a man is determined and frightened, no philosophy is then needed for him. Happy is the one who has a faith, who is able to fall back on somebody, to ask somebody for the mercy. I prayed to the Mother of God. I must honestly confess it; I had never before nor afterwards prayed so zealously.

## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

Although there was still heard “Du!” the prayer inwardly changed me enough that I was calmer. People having a faith were not so horrified. They were ready to accept destiny with the peace, almost like heroes. It is great matter. The SS men passed me by, sweeping with his eyes, and then passed Fr. Maximilian by. They “liked” Franciszek Gajowniczek standing at the end of the row, who was a 41-year sergeant of the Polish Army. When the German said “Du!” and pointed at him, the poor man exclaimed, “Jesus, Mary! My wife, my children!” Of course, SS men did not take notice of the words of prisoners, and just wrote down his number. Gajowniczek later swore that if he had died in the hunger bunker, he wouldn't have known that such a lament, such an imploring request came out of his mouth.

**After the selection was finished, did the remaining prisoners feel relief that the great terror was over?**

The selection ended, the ten prisoners already were chosen. It was a closing roll call for them. We thought that this nightmare of standing would end: our heads ached, we wanted to eat, our legs were swelling. Suddenly some commotion started in my row. We stood at intervals the length of our clogs apart, when all of a sudden somebody began going forward between prisoners. It was Fr. Maximilian.

He was going by short steps, since one could not go by long strides in clogs, because it was necessary to curl one's toes in order keep the clogs from falling off. He was going straight towards the group of SS men, standing by the first row of prisoners. Everyone shivered, since this was breaking one of the most insisted upon rules, the breaking of which was brutally punished. The exit from the row meant death.

## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

New prisoners arriving to the camp, not knowing about this ban against leaving the row were beaten until they were incapacitated from work. It equalled going to the starvation bunker.

We were certain that they would kill Fr. Maximilian, before he managed to get through. But something extraordinary happened that was unheard of in the history of seven hundred concentration camps The Third Reich. It never happened that a prisoner of a camp could leave the row without being punished. It was something so unimaginable for SS men that they stood dumbfounded. They looked at each other and didn't know what was happening.

### What happened next?

Fr. Maximilian walked in his clogs in his striped prison uniform with his bowl at his side. He didn't walk like a beggar, nor like a hero. He walked like a man conscious of a great mission. He stood calmly before officers. The camp commandant finally came to his senses. Furious, he asked his deputy, “Was will dieses polnische Schwein?” (What does this Polish swine want?). They started looking for the translator, but it turned out that the translator was unnecessary. Fr. Maximilian answered calmly: “Ich will sterben für ihn,” pointing with his hand at Gajowniczek standing beside: **“I want to die instead of him.”**

The Germans stood speechless with their mouths open from amazement. For them, representing the secular ungodliness, it was something incomprehensible that somebody may wish to die for other man. They looked at Fr. Maximilian with the questions in their eyes: Has he gone crazy? Maybe we didn't understand what he said?



## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

Finally the second question was put forward: “Wer bist du?” (Who are you?). Fr. Maximilian answered, “Ich bin ein polnischer katolischer Priester.” (I am a Polish Catholic priest). Here the prisoner confessed that he was Polish, comes from the nation, which they hated. Further, he is admitting that he is a clergyman. For SS men, the priest was a twinge of conscience. It is interesting that, in this dialogue, Fr. Maximilian did not once use the word “please”. With his statement, he broke the German authority to judge with the usurped the right to decide on life and death, and he forced them to change the sentence. He behaved like an experienced diplomat. Only instead of a tailcoat, a sash, and medals, he presented himself in a striped prison garb, a bowl, and clogs. The deathly silence prevailed, and every second seemed to last centuries.

Finally something happened, which neither the Germans nor the prisoners can understand to this day. The SS captain turned to Fr. Maximilian and addressed him formally with “Sie” (formal “you”) and then asked, “Warum wollen Sie für ihn sterben?” (Why do you want to die instead of him?).

All canons, which the SS man confessed earlier, fell apart. A moment ago he called him the “Polish swine,” and now is turning to him with “Sie.” The SS men and non-commissioned officers standing beside him weren't sure whether they heard right. Only one time in the history of concentration camps had the high-ranking officer who murdered thousands of people addressed the prisoner this way.

Fr. Maximilian answered, “Er hat eine Frau und Kinder” (**He has a wife and children**). It is the entire catechism in a nutshell. He taught everyone what fatherhood and family means. He was a man with two

## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

doctorates defended in Rome with “summa cum laude” (highest from possible), editor, missionary, academic teacher of two universities in Cracow and Nagasaki. He thought that his life was less worth than the life of the father of a family! It was a wonderful lesson in catechism!

### How did the officer react to words of Fr. Maximilian?

Everyone was waiting to see what would happen next. The SS man was convinced that he was the master of life and death. He could order him to be beaten badly for breaking the most strictly followed rule on stepping out of the line. And more importantly, does a prisoner dare preach morality?! He could sentence both to death by starvation. After a few seconds, the SS man said, “Gut” (very well). He agreed with Fr. Maximilian, and admitted that he was right. It meant that the good won over evil, the maximum evil.

There is no greater evil than to sentence a man to death by starvation through hatred. But neither is there a greater good than to give one’s own life for another man. The maximum good won.

### How important was it for you and the remaining prisoners to be eyewitnesses?

Germans let Gajowniczek go back to the line, and Fr. Maximilian took his place. The convicts had to take clogs off, because they were already unnecessary for them. The door of the hunger bunker was opened only in order to take bodies out. Fr. Maximilian walked in as one of the last pair, and he even helped the other prisoner to walk. In principle, it was their own funeral before death. In front of the block, they were told to take the striped uniforms off and were thrown into a

## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

cell with an area of eight square metres. Sunlight seeped through the three bars of the window onto the cold, rough, wet floor, and black walls.

Another miracle happened there. Fr. Maximilian, although he had been breathing only with one lung, survived all. He was alive in the chamber of death 386 hours. Every doctor will recognize that it is incredible. After this horrendous period of dying, the executioner in white medical overalls gave him a lethal injection. Moreover, he again didn't die.... They had to finish him off with a second injection. He died on the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, his Hetman. He wanted to work and die for the Immaculate Mary throughout his life. It was the greatest happiness for him.

**Referring to the first question, be so kind and add, please, what did this extraordinary attitude of Fr. Maximilian mean for you, being rescued from the death by starvation?**

The sacrifice of Fr. Maximilian inspired a lot of work. He strengthened the activity of the camp group of the resistance, the underground prisoner organization, and it divided the time into “before” and “after” the sacrifice of Fr. Maximilian. Many prisoners survived the camp, thanks to the existence and operation of this organization. A few of us were rescued, two in every hundred. I received grace, because I am one of these two. Franciszek Gajowniczek was not only rescued but also lived another 54 years.

Our saint fellow-prisoner rescued, above all, the humanity in us. He was a spiritual shepherd in the hunger chamber, supported, led prayers, absolved sin, and led the dying out to the other world with

## 5.2. STORY #2: FATHER KOLBE

the Sign of the Cross. He strengthened the faith and hope in us who survived the selection. **Among this destruction, terror, and the evil, he restored hope.**

**Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life  
for one's friends.**

John 15:13

## 5.3. STORY #3: HEROES OF RWANDA



*(Originally published at [sapiens.org](https://sapiens.org)  
Image source: Wikimedia)*

**(Background information:** The Rwandan genocide occurred between 7 April and 19 July 1994 during the Rwandan Civil War. During this period of around 100 days, members of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, as well as some moderate Hutu and Twa, were killed by armed Hutu militias. The scale and brutality of the genocide caused shock worldwide, but no country intervened to forcefully stop the killings.

During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, more than 800,000 people were slaughtered over 100 days. Amid the chaos there were heroes—those who put their own lives on the line to save others during the massacre.)



## 5.3. STORY #3: HEROES OF RWANDA

On April 21, 1994, Felicite Niyitegeka took in a sight many Rwandans had come to dread: a line of minibuses pulling up to her door. For much of the month, members of the Interahamwe militia—agents of the majority Hutu-led government—had been rounding up members of the Tutsi minority, taking them to killing fields where they were shot or hacked to death with machetes.

Though the Hutu and Tutsi peoples shared a long history and a cultural heritage, animosity had festered between them for many years. In the early part of the 20th century, Belgian colonizers decided Tutsis were more European looking and rewarded them with positions of power, angering the Hutu. But in the late 20th century, Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, became president and his administration discriminated against Tutsis; he installed mostly Hutus in his dictatorial regime. On April 6, 1994, a missile attack shot down Habyarimana's plane. After the fatal crash, Hutu extremists assumed power, claimed Tutsis had killed the president, and embarked on a vengeful campaign of mass slaughter.

In the midst of the chaos, Niyitegeka, a dedicated lay worker in the Roman Catholic Church, was saving as many Tutsis as she could. She helped them across the Congolese border and hid them in the compound where she worked, the Centre Saint Pierre in the city of Gisenyi. But the Interahamwe had learned of Niyitegeka's rescue efforts and hatched a plan to capture all of her charges.

After the militiamen forced their way into the compound, they told Niyitegeka that they intended to spare her life since she was a member of the favored Hutu majority. The dozens of Tutsis living at the compound would have to board the buses to their deaths.

## 5.3. STORY #3: HEROES OF RWANDA

The killers had offered Niyitegeka an out, but she refused to take it, with full knowledge that she could be killed as well. She told the soldiers that, whether in life or in death, she would remain with the Tutsis she had sheltered. Singing and chanting, she followed them onto the buses, which headed for the notorious Commune Rouge, a public cemetery that served as a killing field. There, alongside her Tutsi friends, Niyitegeka was slain by an assassin's bullet.



**What motivated rescuers like Niyitegeka to put their lives on the line to save others during the 100-day genocide? And why had so many others remained on the sidelines or even participated in the killing?**

Questions like these haunted Jennie Burnet for years. As an anthropology graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the late 1990s and early 2000s, she'd interviewed a variety of Rwandans after the 1994 genocide, in which about 800,000 Tutsis had been slaughtered. From time to time, people Burnet met would talk about how they—or someone they knew—had protected Tutsis during the height of the killing. These Rwandan rescuers, Burnet learned, had pulled off feats that were as bold and brave as those of Holocaust rescuers. They had hidden Tutsis in their homes and stables, smuggled them across the border to safety, and warned them of planned killings so they would have a chance to escape.

Listening to these accounts, Burnet began to wonder just how common rescue behavior actually was during the genocide. What had compelled some people to push past their own fears to help those whose lives were in danger? She thought about studying rescuers'

## 5.3. STORY #3: HEROES OF RWANDA

stories and motivations in more detail, but she was initially wary. When she broached the topic of genocide with Rwandans she met, few seemed to want to talk about it, and most of her colleagues didn't seem very enthusiastic about it either. "I kept trying to convince people with the necessary background to take on the project, because I didn't feel I had the skills," says Burnet, now an associate professor of global studies and anthropology at Georgia State University in Atlanta. "I never found someone who had the interest or the time to take it on."

But in the following years, Burnet felt increasingly ready to take up her own suggestion. As she gained experience and took intensive courses in Kinyarwanda, Rwanda's national language, her confidence in doing fieldwork grew. And by 2012, many Rwandan genocide perpetrators had been tried and convicted in gacaca (community) courts, which brought a certain degree of closure to the national nightmare. Gradually, some Rwandans became more open to reflecting on what they had seen and done during those fateful months of 1994.

With the help of a National Science Foundation grant, Burnet took several research trips to Rwanda in 2013 and 2014 to interview more than 200 people, including rescuers, witnesses, and genocide perpetrators. The stories she has uncovered reveal surprising ways human selflessness can surface even as ethical norms are slashed to bits and entire communities disappear off the face of the earth.

*It depends on people's hearts. We are created differently.*

Rescuers weren't always as morally righteous as many people might

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assume, Burnet has found, and the success of their efforts often hinged on accidents of geography and timing. Beyond circumstance, though, what motivated rescuers to act was a burning inner conviction that what happened to their fellow human beings mattered. “One can have pity, take the risk, and save people. Others say, ‘I cannot involve myself in these troubles,’ because they are afraid to take the risk,” one genocide survivor told Burnet. “It depends on people’s hearts. We are created differently.”



From an early age, Burnet had been curious about what drives people to risk their own lives to save others. She had read Anne Frank’s diary as a child, impressed at the bravery of the Dutch rescuers who helped the Frank family while they were hiding from the Nazis. As an undergraduate at Boston University, Burnet took a course with Elie Wiesel, the Auschwitz and Buchenwald survivor whose memoir *Night* is a classic of Holocaust literature. Wiesel “designed his courses intentionally as an experience,” Burnet says. “He talked a lot about evil and goodness, and that shaped a lot of my thinking.”

That moral influence helped ground Burnet as she ventured into eight different regions of Rwanda to interview rescuers, perpetrators, and observers by the dozens. She and her research partner, anthropologist Hager El Hadidi, stayed in rustic guesthouses and drove over bumpy dirt roads to the communities they had chosen, keeping up a grueling research pace.

As she traveled from region to region collecting people’s testimonies, Burnet knew that the Rwandan government could decide to stop her

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at any time. In today's Rwandan political climate, conducting research like this is an act of bravery in itself, says Lee Ann Fujii, a University of Toronto political scientist and author of *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) regime now in power is invested in the myth that almost all Hutus participated in the genocide, as opposed to a fraction of Hutus loyal to the extremists that took power after Habyarimana's death. Many rescue stories are considered an affront because they contradict this official narrative, and the regime has blacklisted some scholars who publish work critical of the government.

After completing her interviews in 2013 and 2014, Burnet began combing the interviews she'd gathered for dominant themes that shed light on rescuers' selfless acts. One of the first things she noticed was that lifesaving rescue efforts were common. Dozens of people she interviewed had taken part in a variety of rescue operations during the genocide, from supplying people in hiding with food and clothing to paying militiamen to release Tutsis marked for death. "Rescuer behavior was widespread," Burnet says. "Many Rwandans engaged in rescuer behavior for long periods of time, sometimes weeks, until it was no longer possible."

When Burnet asked rescuers why they had done what they did, they overwhelmingly said they viewed their fellow Rwandans—whether Hutu or Tutsi—as worthy human beings like themselves. That core belief motivated them to save others who were in danger, even though it meant putting their own lives at risk. "They almost all said that it's what any decent human being would do," Burnet says. "It has to do with identifying as a certain kind of person." University of California, Irvine, political scientist Kristen Renwick Monroe came to a



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similar conclusion after interviewing Holocaust rescuers, reporting that they “**saw themselves as individuals strongly linked to others through a shared humanity.**”

Reflecting on why some Rwandans, but not others, tried to help Tutsis, one rescuer told Burnet, “The one who had a beastly heart didn’t save the person, but the one who had a merciful heart, which understood that a human being is a human being, saved that person. That’s how we saved people.” Another rescuer added, “The first reason why some people saved others is because they understood that every person is like themselves—and that, if he was being hunted today it’s maybe because you could also be hunted the following day, that if he dies today, you can die tomorrow. ... We understood that no one has [the] right over another person’s life.”



*(Source: sapiens.org)*

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A profound sense of shared humanity also motivated Felicite Niyitegeka, who was well aware of the dangerous territory she'd entered when she decided to become a rescuer. But her dedication to her fellow Rwandans' safety and survival overrode her doubts. When Niyitegeka's brother advised her to flee and avoid the killing squads, Niyitegeka wrote back:

***Thank you for wanting to help me. I would rather die than abandon the 43 persons for whom I am responsible. ... If God saves us, as we hope, we shall see each other tomorrow.***

Though neither Niyitegeka nor those she sheltered survived the genocide, several people Burnet interviewed in Gisenyi shared Niyitegeka's story and testified to her compassion and heroism. Her story echoes that of Janusz Korczak, a Warsaw Ghetto orphanage director who willingly accompanied his charges on a 1942 transport to the Treblinka death camp in Poland, where all of them died.

Some rescuers not only lived out the principle of caring for everyone around them but also attempted to foster it in others. One priest Burnet interviewed ran an orphanage in southern Rwanda that housed many children from displaced families. Some of the children were Hutus who harbored negative feelings toward Tutsi children who lived under the same roof. Recognizing the importance of promoting unity during such a dangerous time, the priest spent a lot of time talking to the children about the importance of supporting others, even those who belonged to a different group than they did. In the end, the children sheltered at the orphanage survived.

Many rescuers also stated that their religious ideals had prompted

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them to act. They pointed, for instance, to verses from the Quran stating that murder is a sin and that all humans share the same blood. Their testimony and actions supply a unique rebuke to those who claim Islam is a religion of violence that promotes hateful behavior. Inspired by their faith's moral tenets, Muslims in the city of Mugandamure and elsewhere protected Tutsis they had smuggled into their homes, building roadblocks out of whatever they could find to keep the killers from entering. "Our religion, Islam, doesn't allow people to spill our neighbors' blood," one rescuer explained to Burnet. "We looked and we only saw brothers here. You could not think about killing this person, because he was a brother, someone who would have rescued you too, if you needed help."

Some of these rescue efforts, Burnet says, were also rooted in certain religious communities' longstanding sense of themselves as separate from other Rwandans. Under Belgian colonial rule, Muslims had to live in designated areas called "Swahili camps" that were much like ghettos, and this kind of persecution may have sensitized them to the plight of Tutsis whose identities also put them in danger. Psychologist Ervin Staub of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has found that when people have been through deeply traumatic life events themselves, they're more likely to commit to helping others in trouble. This response, which Staub calls "altruism born of suffering," may have helped spur some Rwandan rescuers' heroic acts.

But while many rescuers valued morality and empathy to an unusual degree, those values were not sufficient by themselves. Situational factors like location and geography could also help or hinder rescue missions. In Gisenyi, a city not far from the Congo, rescuers were able to save many Tutsis because the border was in the vicinity and only

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partially fenced. Burnet interviewed import-export traders from the area who had engaged in rescue efforts. Many of them had taken part in illegal smuggling and were experts at guiding Tutsis through fence openings undetected, when there were no guards in sight. “They knew how to get things across the border secretly,” Burnet says. “It gave them great opportunity.”

Similarly, local fishermen or others near Lake Kivu were sometimes able to ferry escaping Tutsis across the lake to the Congolese border. One such rescuer had saved many Tutsis, hiding them in banana groves around his house or at a nearby coffee plantation before paddling them in his canoe to safety. When Burnet asked him why he’d rescued so many people, he answered, “I’m so poor in this life, how is it possible to lose both heaven and earth in this lifetime?” In areas further from the border, however, few viable escape routes existed, making rescue operations all the more difficult.



Not only were successful rescues highly dependent on the whims of circumstance, but unyielding outside pressures could also eat away at rescuers’ moral resolve. While most rescuers were deeply concerned with the fate of those around them, they were also vulnerable to the trickery, threats, and demands of the Interahamwe. As the genocide gathered momentum, Interahamwe militiamen stormed homes in targeted areas repeatedly, looking for fleeing Tutsis. During these searches, household heads knew the militiamen might kill them, too, if hiding Tutsis were found on their property.

The constant fear of death, of yet another group of militiamen storm-

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ing into their homes, taxed the endurance of even the most compassionate rescuers. Many Rwandans initially helped threatened Tutsis, but some lost the will to continue their rescue efforts as the killing operations dragged on. Those who committed genocide looted and demolished property, terrorized dissenters, and raped Tutsi and Hutu women. As people faced all this chaos, quite a few opted to focus on their own survival and that of their families. “It was pretty normative in the early days of the genocide that people’s reaction was to help their friends and neighbors,” Burnet says. “That changed as the genocide evolved and continued.”

One Hutu rescuer told Burnet about his efforts to save a Tutsi acquaintance. He had hidden the man in his home for nearly a month, feeding and sheltering him as he evaded the onslaught of the Interahamwe. But when the rescuer and his family decided to flee the war-torn area, they decided—with regret—that they had to leave the man they’d been protecting behind. “We could not bring him with us. I don’t know what happened to him,” he said. “I do not talk about these things because people can misunderstand or twist my words to say that I am the one who had him killed.”

As the bodies piled up, the Interahamwe also put more pressure on ordinary Rwandans to get involved in the killings. Militia groups rounded men up on the pretext that they would be carrying out a routine night-security patrol. When the men appeared for service, militia heads told them to track down Tutsis who were attempting to hide or flee from their killers. “People went to the security patrols as a way to look like they were complying with the government,” Burnet says. “They didn’t intend to participate in the genocide.” Still, after their surprise initiation, some of these complicit men became more



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directly involved in the killing process, especially when they felt that disobeying the militia's orders could put them or their families in danger. "It's the slippery-slope phenomenon," Burnet says. "You start out doing something that's a little bit wrong, but that makes it easier to do something that's more wrong."

Rescuers were by no means immune to such slippery-slope thinking. A number of people Burnet interviewed helped rescue Tutsis and rounded up or killed people themselves—often because they felt their own lives could be at risk if they did not do as the Interahamwe demanded. "Not only did a person have to have the will to help someone," Burnet says, "they also had to make the decision many times a day to not become implicated in the genocide. There was a combination of explicit and implicit threats people felt they were under." Her findings shatter the common assumption that rescuers are morally above reproach. They may have a deep respect for their fellow human beings and a burning desire to help them, but like anyone else, when a situation turns deadly they can make decisions they later regret.



If even the best-intentioned rescuers sometimes fall short of their moral ideals, how realistic is it to encourage rescue behavior when persecution and killings begin? One constructive way to assist rescuers, Burnet says, is to stave off or alleviate the pressures they face before those pressures become intolerable. "Early intervention is key," she says. She argues that if the United Nations had not reduced its peacekeeping force during the genocide, rescuers would not have had to hold out in dire conditions for as long, braving ongoing raids

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and the threat of death in order to save their fellow citizens. As a result, many more Tutsis would be alive today. “It’s about the space for rescuing,” says Fujii, the political scientist. “Outside powers can enlarge those spaces.”

Elevating the significance of rescue behavior can also help promote it in others. The rescuer heroes in Burnet’s narratives can motivate people to help fellow human beings in desperate circumstances, says University of Kentucky anthropologist Monica Udvardy. As sociologist Samuel Oliner’s rescue research has shown, selfless role models can be crucial in shaping our future capacity to help others. “There’s definitely a role model effect,” Udvardy says. “One has to act, one has to be involved, rather than just shaking one’s head and saying, ‘That’s too bad.’”



*(Source: sapiens.org)*

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In Rwanda, where social norms encourage people to blend in, acknowledging rescuers and sharing their stories can be a complex undertaking. Through her immersion in Rwandan culture, Burnet came to understand that most rescuers did not want public recognition for their lifesaving deeds—and that, in fact, many preferred to remain anonymous. “Rwanda is a place where conformity is a form of protection. You hide by being like everyone else,” Burnet says. “There is a strong desire not to be exceptional.” And while many Tutsis are grateful for Hutu rescuers’ efforts to save them, some of these rescuers may be reluctant to go public out of fear that people will judge them for having harbored Tutsis. Though Rwanda has encouraged reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis, some animosity still simmers between the two groups.

Despite these ongoing tensions, Burnet’s work reflects a growing conviction—in Rwanda as well as abroad—that there is value in absorbing rescuers’ stories, in understanding how they reacted when they faced stark choices between compassion and survival. In all their messiness and complexity, real-life rescue narratives prompt reflection on the full spectrum of moral choices that people face in extraordinary times—and on the magnitude of the sacrifice people like Felicite Niyitegeka made in order to help their fellow human beings.

**We looked and we only saw brothers here. You could not think about killing this person, because he was a brother, someone who would have rescued you too, if you needed help.**

## 5.4. STORY #4: CHEERLEADER, NOT NAYSAYER

### Be a Cheerleader Not a Naysayer



(Originally published at [weeklywisdomblog.com](http://weeklywisdomblog.com))

Image source: [weeklywisdomblog.com](http://weeklywisdomblog.com))

In a small town in New Jersey, there were 26 students sitting in a dark classroom of a school. Each student came from a troubled background: some were drug addicts, some went to prison, there was even a girl who had three abortions in one year. Their parents didn't know what to do with them, and the school had pretty much given up on them.

At this time, a new teacher named Ms. Fila was appointed as this class's homeroom teacher. During the start of the new school year, Ms. Fila did not scold and lecture the students like the previous teachers did. Instead, she asked everyone a question.



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She said:

"Let me tell you about three people. Person A is a devout believer in witchcraft, has two mistresses, has a long history of smoking, and is addicted to drinking alcohol. Person B was kicked out of the office twice, wakes up at noon every day, drinks two liters of brandy every night, and has been convicted of using opium. Person C used to be his country's war hero, is a vegetarian, is passionate about art, occasionally drinks some alcohol, and never broke the law when young. If one of these people became extraordinary and admired by all, who do you think it would be? Can you guess what kind of future each person had?"

All the students picked Person C to be the person who would become extraordinary. As for the future of these three people, they guessed that Person A and Person B would probably have a bleak future; maybe they became criminals, or perhaps just a burden to society, while Person C probably became a great success.

Mr. Fila then said, "Your guesses are the same as what most people would guess, but in actuality, you are all wrong. You are probably familiar with these three people; they are famous people from World War II. Person A was **Franklin Roosevelt**. Although his body was partially paralyzed, his will remained strong. He served as America's president for four terms. Person B is **Winston Churchill**, who is probably the most famous Prime Minister in British history. Person C is also someone you should all know. His name is **Adolf Hitler**, the fascist leader who killed millions of innocent people."

All the students stared in shock at Ms. Fila, afraid that maybe they



## 5.4. STORY #4: CHEERLEADER, NOT NAYSAYER

heard her wrong.

Ms. Fila said, "Your life has barely begun. Your past mistakes and shame can only represent your past. But what truly represents you as a person is what you do now and in the future. No one is perfect. Even great heroes have faults and make mistakes. **If you can walk out of your past shadows and start working hard today, you can all become extraordinary people in the future.**"

Thanks to Ms. Fila, the lives of these 26 students were changed. They all went on to become great people. Some became psychologists, some became judges, some became pilots. Of special mention is Robert Harrison. He was the biggest troublemaker in the class, yet he later became Wall Street's youngest Fund Manager.

Later, a student of Ms. Fila said, "We all thought we were beyond saving because that's how everyone viewed us. Ms. Fila was the first person to give us a wake-up call: the past isn't what's important, what's important is what we do now and in the future."

*(Story Source: Harvard Family Instruction, Chapter 2)*

**You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is like an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.**

Mahatma Gandhi

## 5.5. AN INTERVIEW WITH SADHGURU ON LOVE



*Sadhguru and actress, film producer and former Miss India, Juhi Chawla, engage in a lively and insightful discussion about what exactly love is. In the interview, Sadhguru dispels many myths about love and attachment, and explains how falling in love with everyone and everything around us possible for each of us. Love is a sweetness of emotion within us, he explains, not something given to us by someone else. Thus, the possibility to be loving or to fall in love is entirely in our hands. (video link: <https://youtu.be/vjzuJdmqQWM>)*

**Juhi:** Some teachers, some gurus, some guides will say, you know, "You can love, but you must be detached; you must love, but it cannot be conditional, it should be unconditional."

**Sadhguru:** "Love, but be detached." Why do you want to love then? Only because you want to include somebody as a part of your life, part of yourself, that's why you love.

"No, I love, but... I'm detached."

This means you have to come back to consultation every day. It's like a psychiatrist's job; every day you have to come and sit on the couch.

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You need treatment, and there is a fee.

**Juhi:** So... okay, all right, so you can love and be attached...

**Sadhguru:** No, I didn't say that.

**Juhi:** Okay, I'm coming back for consultation, please. So, what did you say?

**Sadhguru:** I only said... see, what is this need for love in a human being truly?

You must understand, a human being is constantly longing to be something more than what they are right now.

From the perspective of a simple, basic physical expression, we call this sexuality. Sexuality means just this: physically you're trying to make something which is not you, a part of yourself. For a few moments you may succeed.

If you try this mentally, it gets labeled as greed, conquest, or maybe simply shopping. Some people go for conquest with swords and guns, some people go with checkbooks, cash, and credit cards.

The thing is you want to include something which is not a part of you as yourself, that is the whole effort.

Whether you want money, or wealth, or you want to occupy a nation, what is it?

Something that is not you, you want to make it yours.

Yours is an effort to make it a part of yourself.

If it happens emotionally, we call this a love affair.

You are trying to make somebody who is not a part of you, a part of yourself emotionally.

If you do it consciously, we call this yoga; yoga means union.

## 5.5. AN INTERVIEW WITH SADHGURU ON LOVE

So, all these efforts are fine, everything has its own beauty, but has its own limitations.

When you understand the limitations of all the other methods, nothing right or wrong about it; it is just that it will work briefly, it will not work for always.

**Juhi:** You said love, inclusiveness... I can't understand how I can love everybody in this room.

**Sadhguru:** You cannot. There are some people you cannot love.

**Juhi:** So, how do you include everybody in your love?

**Sadhguru:** See, because you're looking at love as something that comes to you, or you yield to the process of love only because you appreciate a particular quality, a shape of somebody's nose, or the shape of their mind, or their thought, or their emotion, or the way they speak, or the way they do things, or the way they relate to you, something.

There are many, many things. It is based on something that is acceptable to you. If they do something that is not acceptable to you, love crumbles.

**Juhi:** Yes.

**Sadhguru:** Now I want you to look at this, whether love happens to you, or hate happens to you, anger happens to you, misery happens to you, joy happens to you... it only happens within you, isn't it?

**Juhi:** Yes.

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**Sadhguru:** People say “love is in the air”. No. Because you are feeling pleasant in your emotions, suddenly the air feels vibrant. It's always been, you missed it all your life, now you're beginning to feel it.

**Juhi:** Okay.

**Sadhguru:** So, whatever human experience, love or hate, whatever happens only within you.

What I'm saying is, at least what happens within you, must happen by your choice. Consciously you must be able to make it happen.

If you are able to... if your experience of what is happening within you is happening by choice, what is the problem? It only happens within you.

Love is not a relationship, a relationship is a different thing. Love is a certain sweetness of your emotion.

Whether you look at a tree, or a dog, or a man, or a woman, or a child, or just at the sky, why can't you look at it lovingly?

Because it's not about loving the sky, it's about the sweetness of your emotion.

If your emotions are sweet, whatever you look at, you'll look at it in a certain way.

Right now if you have nasty emotions, then whatever you look at, you look at it in a different way.

We have always associated love with somebody. But no, this is not about somebody.

Love is not something that you do, it is something that you can become.

If you are willing, you can become love, you can make your emotion into a very sweet space.



## 5.5. AN INTERVIEW WITH SADHGURU ON LOVE

If you make your body very pleasant, it becomes pleasure.  
If you sit here, it can be great pleasure just sitting here and breathing.  
I will show you millions of people, if they close their eyes, tears of ecstasy will just drip. Nothing – simply close your eyes.  
Ecstatic they are, bursting, every cell in their body, because their body has become so pleasant.  
If your mind becomes pleasant, we say this is joy.  
If your emotions become pleasant, we say this is love.  
If your very life energies become pleasant, we say this is blissfulness, this is ecstasy.  
If your surroundings become pleasant, we call that success.  
Now if you're calling success with somebody as love, that's a mistake.  
You have a success story with somebody. That is, you have created pleasantness in the atmosphere between you and, let's say, 5 to 10 people around you. And you're calling that love.  
No, that is actually success, because that needs lots of management.

**Juhi:** Yes.

**Sadhguru:** For you to be loving, there is no management.  
If you just make your emotions sweet, your emotions are sweet and it's beautiful. It's not about anybody.  
If somebody comes, we can share it.  
If nobody comes, you can sit here with eyes closed and still be loving.  
What's the problem? It is not about somebody, it's not an action.  
It is not something that you do, it is something that you can become.

**Juhi:** It's a lovely, idyllic...

**Sadhguru:** It is not idyllic, it is the way it is.

## 5.5. AN INTERVIEW WITH SADHGURU ON LOVE

**Juhi:** I mean, you would really have to practice this.

**Sadhguru:** Why?

**Juhi:** Because I'm thinking...

**Sadhguru:** See, this is what exactly I'm saying: if it is an action, an action comes to perfection with practice, only if it's an action.

I'm saying, love is not an act.

Is health an act? Are you acting healthy right now?

**Juhi:** No.

**Sadhguru:** I know you're an actor, but are you acting healthy?

**Juhi:** No.

**Sadhguru:** So, health is because we have done certain things. If you eat bad, if you live bad, you won't be healthy.

We've done certain things to manage our health.

Similarly, if you do certain things, you can manage the pleasantness of your mind.

If you do certain other things, you can manage the pleasantness of your emotions.

If you do certain other things, you can manage the pleasantness of your very life energies.

These are things that you can do.

Now, what you can do internally, you're trying to manage externally. What can be done here within you, you are trying to manage by creating an atmosphere around you, which is a very difficult thing to

## 5.5. AN INTERVIEW WITH SADHGURU ON LOVE

do, because outside will never happen 100% the way you want it. To some extent we can manage, we can't do all of it by ourselves, because there are many forces involved.

**Love is not something that you DO, it is something that you can BECOME. If you are willing, you can BECOME LOVE, you can make your emotion into a very sweet space.**

Sadhguru

## 5.6. WORDS OF WISDOM

**Intense love does not measure, it just gives.**

Mother Teresa

**Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get – only with what you are expecting to give – which is everything.**

Katharine Hepburn

**If love is blind, then maybe a blind person that loves has a greater understanding of it.**

Criss Jami

**The hardest thing in the world for a human to accept is pure, unconditional, true love and acceptance. We're conditioned to believe that love and acceptance have to be earned in some way.**

Fredrica

## 5.6. WORDS OF WISDOM

**Until we have seen someone's darkness we don't really know who they are. Until we have forgiven someone's darkness, we don't really know what love is.**

Marianne Williamson

**When I look at a sunset, I don't find myself saying, "Soften the orange a bit on the right hand corner." I don't try to control a sunset. I watch with awe as it unfolds.**

Carl Rogers

**Life without love is like a tree without blossoms or fruit.**

Khalil Gibran

**Love leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever.**

J. K . Rowling



## 5.6. WORDS OF WISDOM

**We have stopped for a moment to encounter each other,  
to meet, to love, to share. This is a precious moment.  
It is a little parenthesis in eternity.**

Paulo Coelho

**Love is hard to believe, ask any lover. Life is hard to believe,  
ask any scientist. God is hard to believe, ask any believer.  
What is your problem with hard-to-believe?**

Yann Martel, Life of Pi

**If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody else.**

Chinese Proverbs

**Everything begins and ends with love and thanks. Wouldn't it be  
wonderful to live each day with the beauty of this crystal  
within your heart?**

Masaru Emoto

## 5.6. WORDS OF WISDOM

**For most people, love means, 'You must do what I want.' No, love means, they can do what they want, and we still love them.**

Sadhguru

**To give pleasure to a single heart by a single act is better than a thousand heads bowing in prayer.**

Mahatma Gandhi

**My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.**

Dalai Lama

**I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.**

Martin Luther King Jr.

## 5.6. WORDS OF WISDOM

**Happiness comes when your work and words  
are of benefit to others.**

Buddha

**In the end, only three things matter: how much you loved,  
how gently you lived, and how gracefully you let go  
of things not meant for you.**

Buddha

**Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,  
and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.**

Mark 10:43-44

**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,  
if you love one another.**

John 13:35

## 5.6. WORDS OF WISDOM

**If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.**

Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:39-42



## 5.7. A SONG OF HOPE



### **“Somewhere” song** (Image source: [YouTube](#))

*... There's a place for us  
Somewhere a place for us  
Peace and quiet and open air  
Wait for us somewhere*

*... There's a time for us  
Someday a time for us  
Time together and time to spare  
Time to look, time to care*

*Someday!*

*... Someday  
Somewhere  
We'll find a new way of living  
We'll find a way of forgiving  
Somewhere*

*... Hold my hand and I'll take  
you there  
Somehow  
Someday  
Somewhere*



## EMBARKING ON THE JOURNEY



And there you have it, my friend! A glimpse into the world of unconditional love. Thank you for joining me on this journey of self-discovery and heart-opening.

As you may see, cultivating unconditional love is like gardening; it requires continuous efforts, patience, and a willingness to let go of what doesn't serve you. As you tend to your inner garden, remember to trust

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your intuition, listen to your heart, and be gentle with yourself along the way!

May this newsletter have offered valuable insights and sparked a flame of love within you! As always, I'm here to support you on your path. Feel free to share your thoughts, questions, or experiences with me and your loved ones in whatever way you would like to.

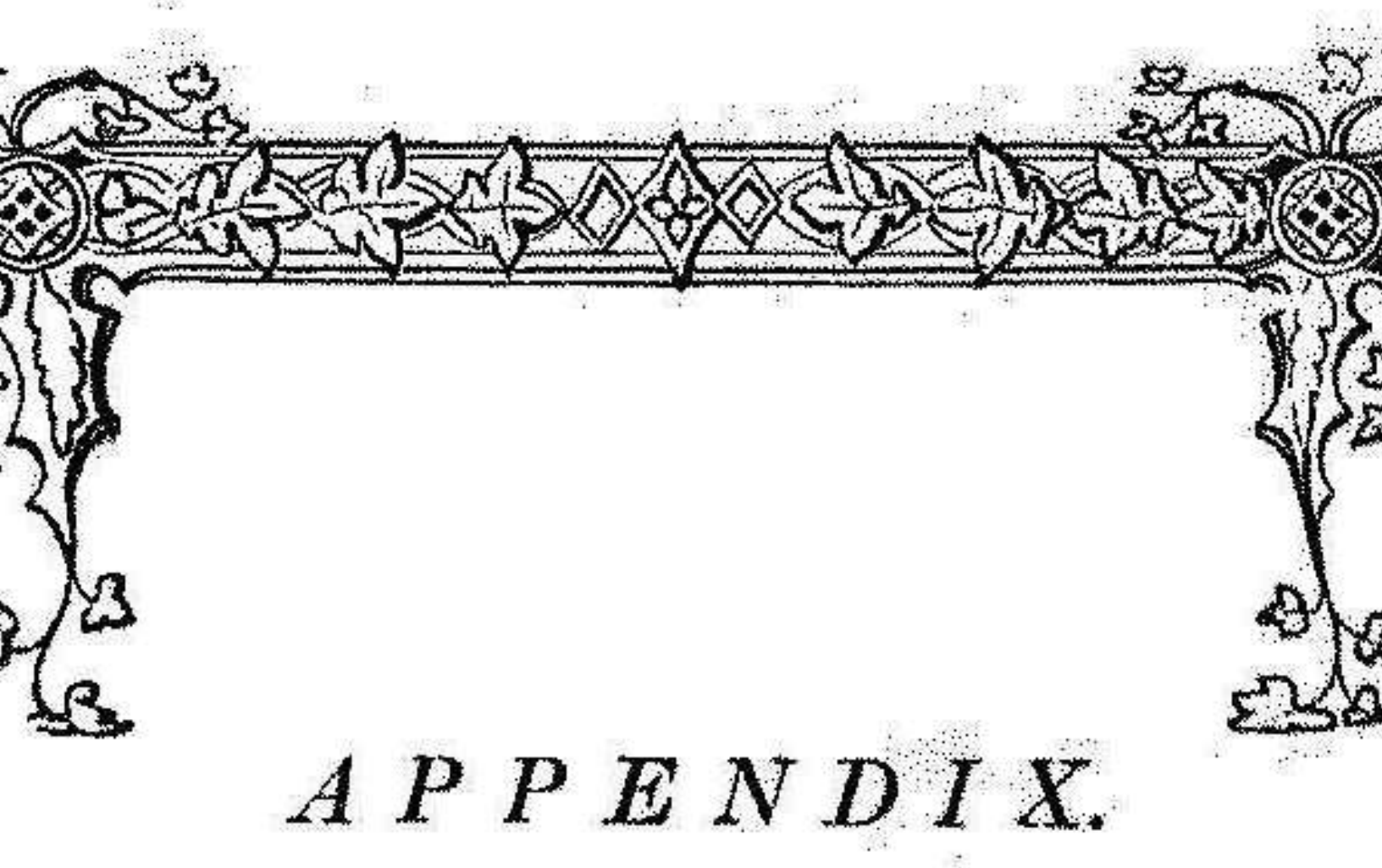
May your heart be filled with love, and your days filled with peace and joy!

Until next time,

**Jonathan M. Pham**

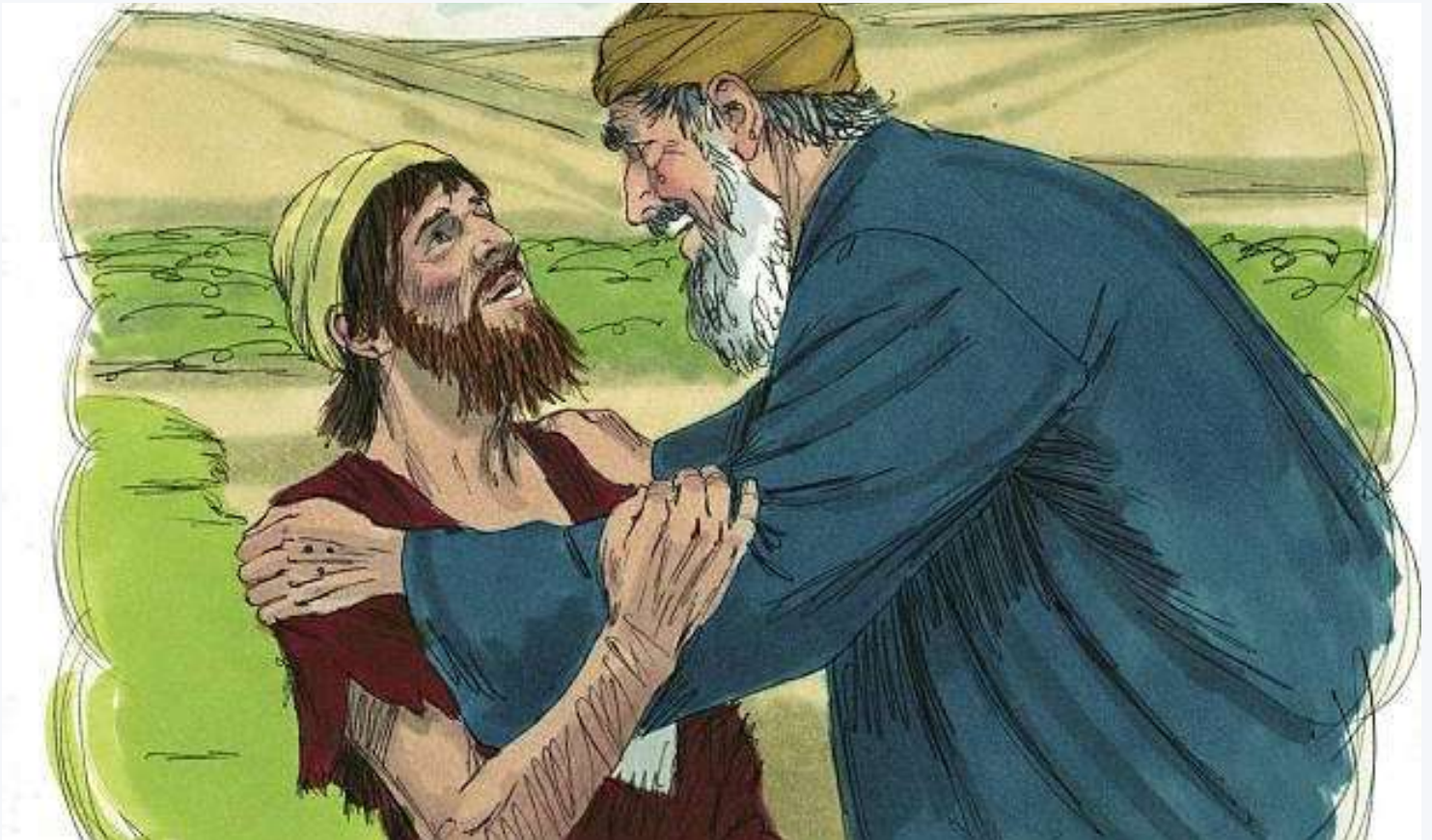


# APPENDIX





## APPENDIX #1



### Parable of the Prodigal Son

*(Source: Luke 15 NIV)*

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with

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the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

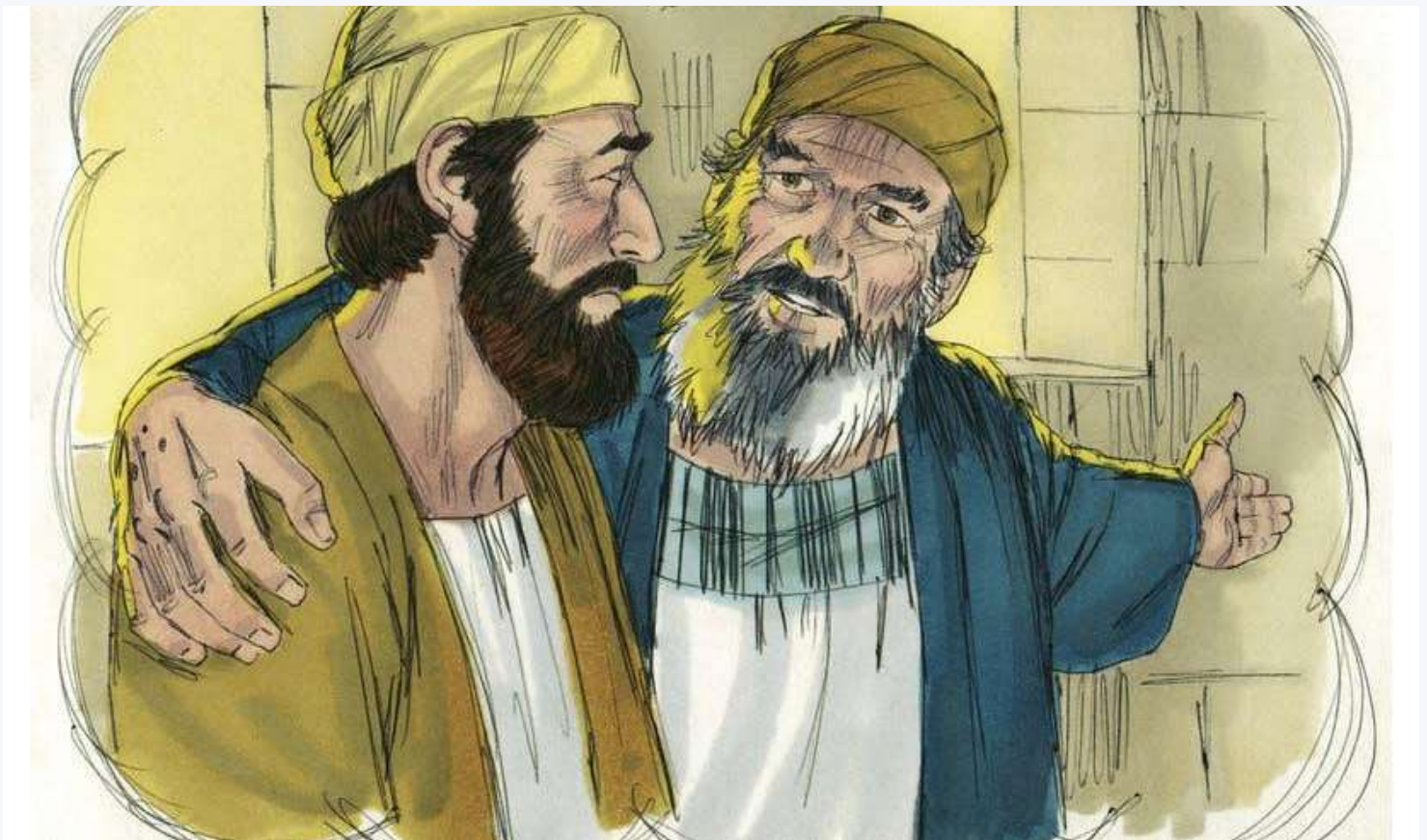
The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All



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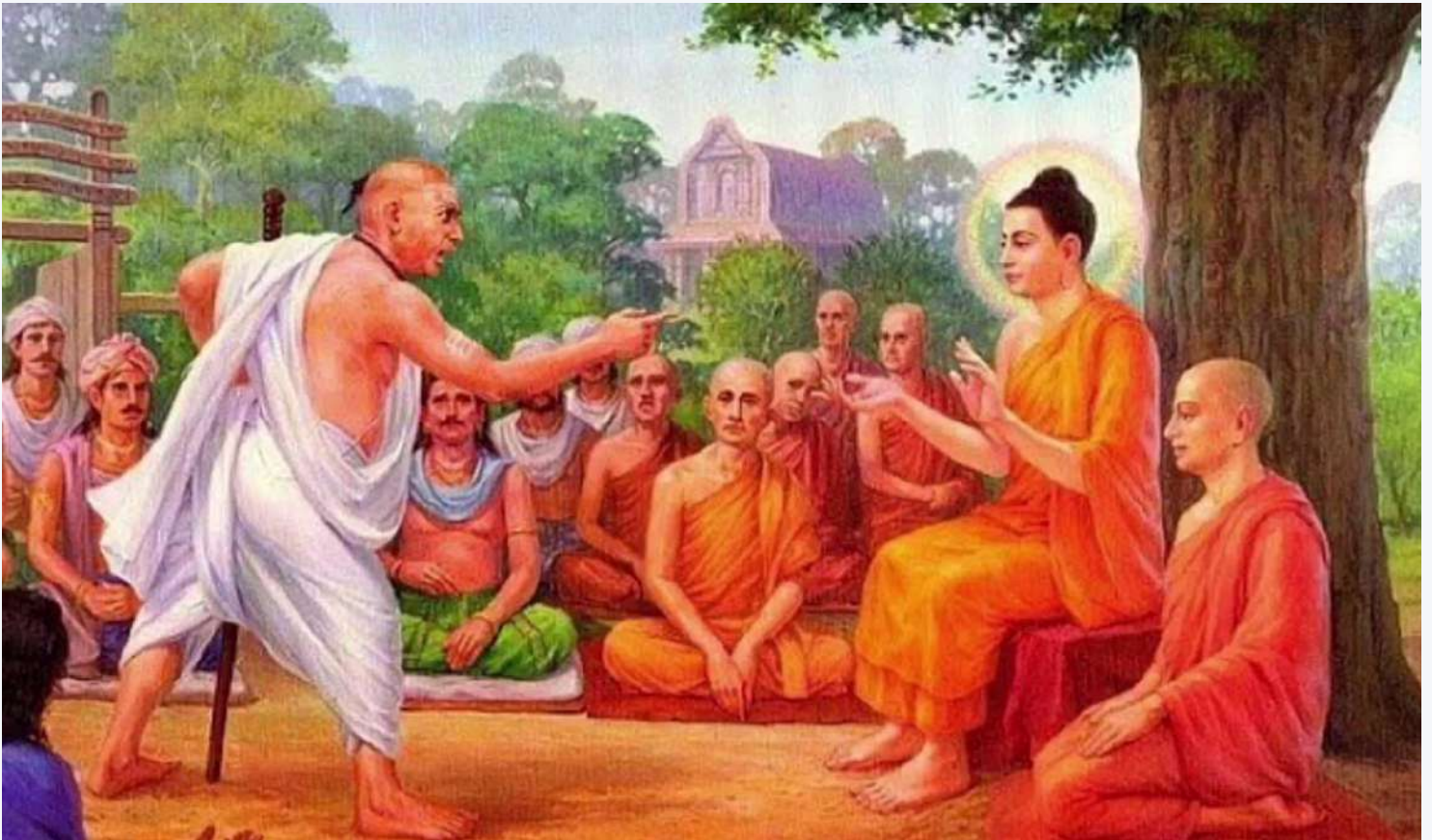
these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because **this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.**'



(Side note: Scholars have pointed out that there is a [similar parable in the Mahayana Buddhist Lotus Sutra](#) too. It's fascinating, right?)

## APPENDIX #2



### Buddha's Anger Story

*(Source: keithrosen.com)*

After many days of travel, Buddha arrived at a small town to give a speech. Everyone was happy to see him, except one young man.

While Buddha spoke, the man was shouting at him. Buddha did not pay attention and continued speaking. This infuriated the man even more. He walked directly in front of Buddha and continued to ridicule him. “You have no right to teach others. You’re stupid and you’re a fake!”

The crowd began to react to this young man’s caustic behavior. Buddha stopped the crowd from turning against him and said, “It is

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not always necessary to counter aggression by aggression.”

Instead, he turned to the man and asked, “If you buy a gift for someone and that person does not take it, to whom does the gift belong?”

The young man was surprised by the question, thought for a moment and answered, “It would belong to me because I bought the gift.”

The Buddha said, “Correct. It’s the same with your anger. **If you become angry with me and I don’t feel insulted nor accept your hostility, the anger falls back on you**, as it was initially yours to give. You are then the only one who becomes unhappy, not me. All you’ve done is hurt yourself.”

The young man understood, clasped his hands together and slowly bowed to the Buddha. It was an acknowledgement that this man learned a valuable lesson that day.

And so, the Buddha concluded, “**As a mirror reflects an object, as a still lake reflects the sky, take care that what you speak or act is for good. For goodness will always cast back goodness and harm will always cast back harm.**”



## APPENDIX #3



### Masaru Emoto's Water Crystal Experiments

(Originally published at [wellbeingmagazine.com](http://wellbeingmagazine.com))

*Image source: Wikipedia & YouTube)*

**(Background information: Masaru Emoto was a Japanese businessman, author and pseudoscientist who claimed that human consciousness could affect the molecular structure of water. His 2004 book “The Hidden Messages in Water” was a New York Times best seller. His ideas had evolved over the years, and his early work revolved around pseudoscientific hypotheses that water could react to positive thoughts and words and that polluted water could be cleaned through prayer and positive visualization)**

Dr. Masaru Emoto conducted a series of experiments exploring the

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effects of human consciousness on water. His most well-known experiments involved exposing water to various words, thoughts, and emotions and then observing the resulting changes in the water's molecular structure. One of the most striking findings was that positive intentions, such as words of “love and gratitude,” had a transformative effect on water crystals.

### Transformation of Water Crystals

In Dr. Emoto's experiments, water exposed to positive affirmations and emotions formed intricate, symmetrical, and aesthetically pleasing crystals. These crystals were not only clear but also displayed a remarkable increase in size compared to those formed when water was exposed to negative influences.

For instance, when water was subjected to words like “love” and “gratitude,” the resulting crystals were not only visually stunning but also seemed to reflect a harmonious and balanced structure. This led Dr. Emoto to propose that water has a unique ability to “remember” the energetic imprints of thoughts and emotions.

### Implications for Health

The implications of Dr. Emoto's experiments extend beyond the laboratory, suggesting a profound interconnection between our mental and physical well-being. If our thoughts and emotions can influence the molecular structure of water, and considering that the human body is composed largely of water, it raises the question of whether our mental states can similarly impact our own cellular health.



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While some critics argue that the methodologies used in Dr. Emoto's experiments are not without controversy, and the scientific community has not universally accepted his findings, the ideas he presented have sparked interest in the field of mind-body medicine.

Whether or not one fully embraces the idea that our thoughts can influence water molecules, there is a growing recognition that **cultivating positive thoughts and emotions can contribute to a more balanced and harmonious life.**

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**There are two ways of spreading light: to be the  
candle or the mirror that reflects it.**

Edith Warton



I'm **Jonathan M. Pham**, and I'm delighted to welcome you to my self-discovery blog!

Life, to me, is an endless expedition, and through this blog, I invite you to join me on the exhilarating journey of self-exploration and personal growth.



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