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Agape love means feeling and expressing pure, unlimited love for every human being with no exception. Developing such divine ability has been a goal for me for almost all of my eighty-six years on earth.

This does not mean you need to admire each person or to weaken legal penalties for crimes. It does mean that if your mother were murdered, you should try to eliminate the poisons of hatred or revenge. While a murderer is being properly punished and prevented from a criminal life, agape love allows you to pray for his conversion and his soul.

Numerous researchers have helped me explore concepts of unlimited love in eight major religions. I am only a student and beginner in the research and practice of this fruitful and
basic reality called “agape love.” I hope that each reader of this little book will contribute his or her own fruitful thoughts on the nature and enormous benefits of agape love.

The rich variety of world religions creates a tapestry of amazing beauty—a testimony to the essential spiritual nature of our human existence. And yet, within this amazing and sometimes fascinating diversity can be found an equally amazing unity, the basis of which is “love.” Perhaps without even being fully aware of it, religious leaders and their followers through the ages have defined religion largely in terms of love. All the world’s great religions, to varying degrees, both teach and assume the priority of love in religious practice. To put it another way, whether consciously or subconsciously, the world seems to have determined that any system of beliefs that teaches or tolerates hatred or even apathy toward others does not deserve to be considered a religion in the first place.

As the Dalai Lama has stated, “All the major religions of the world have similar ideals of love, the same goal of benefiting
humanity through spiritual practice, and the same effect of making their followers into better human beings.”

Within Western culture, love has been defined in countless ways. To the philosopher, it is the “eternal emotion”; to the songwriter, “a many-splendored thing.” The fact that it takes so many definitions to capture the meaning of love suggests that its meaning cannot be fully captured after all, at least within the limitations of language. It is more accurately measured in action—in good will, kindness, forgiveness, and compassion toward others.

For our single word “love,” the ancient Greeks used several words in an effort to clarify love’s various shades of meaning. They distinguished, for example, between the romantic love shared by husband and wife, and the “brotherly love” that exists among friends.

But the highest kind of love gained expression for the ancient Greeks in the term agape. Agape love is not directed toward a single person or small group of friends, but toward all humanity, even all of creation. Agape love is not based on
how we are treated by others. Rather, it is unconditional and unlimited in its expression. It is this kind of love in which the religions of the world may find a basis for unity.

Agape love comes closest to describing the kind of love with which the Creator loves the creation. Agape love is pure love, unlimited in its possibilities. Agape love is altruistic love, love that is given for its own sake, without expecting anything in return.

Religion provides both the structure and the principles to guide this universal spiritual need. To those who are looking, it is not hard to find fundamental principles shared by the world’s religious traditions in their efforts to move adherents toward the goal of loving as God loves.

One such principle is known within Christianity as the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” A Buddhist would say, “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.” A follower of Confucius would say: “What you yourself do not desire, do not put before others.” Islam states it as follows: “Do unto all men as you would wish
to have done unto you.” And Hinduism says: “This is the sum of true righteousness—treat others as you would yourself be treated.”

Other principles shared by the world’s great religions include the goal of alleviating human suffering, avoiding harm to others, and the striving toward empathy; that is, learning to identify with the needs of others, especially those who are most vulnerable to the world’s ills. These interrelated principles are all firmly rooted in the commitment to pursue agape love.

The purpose of this book is not to conclude that all religions are the same, for certainly they are not. Nor is its goal to try to convert anyone from one religion to another. Rather, the purpose is to point toward the possibilities and responsibilities of love. It is to awaken people to the realization that despite the differences, all religions share some very important, fundamental principles and goals, the highest of which is the realization of agape love—unconditional, unlimited, pure love.
The Native American poet Manitongquat wrote:

Life is the Sacred Mystery singing to itself, dancing to its drum, telling tales, improvising, playing and we are all that Spirit, our stories all but one cosmic story that we are love indeed, that perfect love in me seeks the love in you, and if our eyes could ever meet without fear we would recognize each other and rejoice, for love is life believing in itself.

All the world’s people, whatever their religious beliefs, are part of the same family. We all have the same general needs, problems, desires, and dreams. When we embrace the possibility of agape love, we are expressing, amidst our differences, a unity of purpose, a common hope. At the dawn of the third millennium, what vision could be more important?
O Love, O pure deep love,
be here, be now.
Be all; worlds dissolve
into your stainless endless radiance,
Frail living leaves burn with you
brighter than cold stars:
Make me your servant,
your breath, your core.

— Rumi,  
PERSIAN SUFI POET