276 - Types of Love in Islam

the question

In a discussion among Muslims, we were trying to arrive at a definition of "love" in Islam. Though we are all well aware of the love of Allah and our obligation to love both Him and His Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), we wondered if there is a clear outline of love between humans (similar to the Christian "brotherly love"...NOT the romantic variety). Some posited that "love" lies only within the family, all else is but respect/friend- ship/etc. Others questioned whether love is limited to spouses and/or children. Still others questioned if love can be conditional or not. One idea is that "love" (as the term is commonly used) may even be an 'innovation' of sorts, based on fairy tales and Christian philosophy. Many of us have looked in various sources to seek out an "answer", but no one has found a definitive answer as of yet... Can you help?

Summary of answer

Love in Islam may be divided into specific love and general love. Specific love may be divided into permissible love and prohibited love. General love is of three types: 1- natural love; 2- love based on mercy and pity; and 3- love based on acquaintance and friendship.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Types of love in Islam

I was very happy to hear that you and your fellow Muslim sisters are studying Islamic issues and trying to find out about Islamic views of love. No doubt, you and your sisters understand the importance of the scholars’ views and referring to them in matters of dispute. I will quote here a number of views about love, so that you will understand the matter better, in sha Allah

Love in Islam may be divided into specific love and general love.

Types of specific love

Specific love may be divided into types that are permissible and types that are prohibited.

1. Permissible love:

- Love of Allah : This is the most important obligation, as it is the basis of Islam. By perfecting one's love of Allah, one perfects their faith. If one's love of Allah is lacking, then one's Tawhid is also lacking. The evidence for this is the verses (interpretation of the meaning):

"But those who believe, love Allah more (than anything else)" [Al-Baqarah 2:165]

"Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His cause, then wait until Allah brings about His Decision (torment). And Allah guides not the people who are Fasiqun (rebellious, disobedient)." [Al-Tawbah 9:24]

There are also other similar proofs in the Quran and Sunnah.

The love of Allah may also take the form of preferring what Allah loves and wants of His slave over what the slave himself might love and want. So he loves what Allah loves, hates what He hates, takes as friends or regards as enemies for His sake, and adheres to His laws. There are many ways to strengthen this type of love.

- Love of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him): This is also one of the most important duties of Islam. Indeed, faith is not complete until a person loves the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) more than he loves himself, as in the Hadiths:

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "None of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his child, his father and all the people." (Reported by Muslim, no. 44)

‘Abdullah ibn Hisham (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “We were with the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), and he was holding the hand of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him); ‘Umar said to him: O Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), you are dearer to me than everything except my own self. The Prophet (peace be and blessings upon him) said: No (that is not right), by the One in Whose Hand is my soul, (not) until I am dearer to you than your own self. ‘Umar said to him, now, by Allah, you are dearer to me than my own self. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: Now (you are right), O Umar.” (Reported by Al-Bukhari, no. 6632).

This love is part of loving Allah and is manifested by following the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and giving precedence to his opinion over that of others.

- Love of the Prophets and the believers: This is obligatory because loving Allah dictates that one should love the people who obey Him, namely, the Prophets and righteous people. The evidence for this is the Hadith: “Whoever loves for the sake of Allah (i.e., loves the people of faith for the sake of Allah) … has perfected faith”

Obedience to Allah is based on the love of Allah. Faith cannot be perfected except in this way, even if one has a lot of prayers and fasting to their credit. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “I have witnessed at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), none of us would think that he had more right to his own money than his Muslim brother.”

1. Forbidden love :

- This includes love that constitutes Shirk (ascribing rivals to Allah), which is when a person loves something instead of Allah or as much as Him. In such a case he has taken that thing as a rival to Allah. This is the Shirk of love, and most people have taken things as rivals to Allah in love and glorification.
- There are also types of forbidden love which do not go to the extent of Shirk, such as loving one's family, wealth, tribe, business or house, and preferring those things, in whole or in part,

over doing the duties that Allah requires of him, such as Hijrah (migration for His sake), Jihad, etc. The evidence for this is the verse quoted above “Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you delight . . . are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His cause, then wait until Allah brings about His Decision (torment).” [Al-Tawbah 9:24])

Types of general love

General love is of three types:

1. Natural love, such as the love of a hungry person for food, or a thirsty person for water. This does not involve any kind of glorification, so it is permissible.
2. Love based on mercy and pity, such as the love of a father for his small child. This also involves no kind of glorification, so there is nothing wrong with it.
3. Love based on acquaintance and friendship, such as that between those who share a common profession, or scholars in the same field, or people one meets on a daily basis (such as fellow-commuters), or people one does business with, or travelling-companions. This type of appropriate love between people or between fellow Muslim brothers does not imply Shirk or associating anyone else in one's love for Allah.

For more information, please see Kitab Taysir al-Aziz, *Bab wa min al-nas man yattakhidhu min dun-Allahi andadan*.

We hope that this explanation makes the matter clearer.