

What Are *Agape* Love and Forgiveness?

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You already have met David Kiel and Joy Tanchi-Mendoza. They both demonstrated *agape* love and forgiveness.

Yet, one thing is missing: What do we really mean when we use those words, *agape* love and forgiveness?

In ancient Greece, whenever Plato would start one of Socrates' dialogues, the reader almost always would hear Socrates ask of any philosophical concept, "What is it?"

So, in that ancient Greek tradition, let us ask: "What do we exactly mean by the terms *agape* love and forgiveness?"

What are *agape* love (*agape* comes from the ancient Greek) and forgiveness?

➤ LOVE AND FORGIVENESS ARE A CHOICE



➤ LOVE AND FORGIVENESS ARE MORAL VIRTUES



➤ LOVE AND FORGIVENESS CUT ACROSS MANY DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHIES AND RELIGIONS



WHAT IS A MORAL VIRTUE ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE?

All moral virtues have these 5 characteristics according to Aristotle:

- 1) All moral virtues concern the good of human interaction.**
- 2) The person *knows* it is good. (*Thinking* about goodness)**
- 3) The person is *motivated* to do good. (*Feelings* as goodness)**
- 4) The person *practices* the virtue. (*Behaviors* as goodness)**
- 5) We are all imperfect in our practice of any virtue.**

Simon, Y. (1986). *The definition of the moral virtues*. New York: Fordham University Press.

What do we mean by *agape* love?

What is its Essence?

DEFINING *AGAPE* LOVE

Agape love includes:

- A decision to be of service to particular other people for their own sake
- A motivation to be of help to others
- Softened feelings toward the one being served
- Behavior directed toward particular people, not just a general feeling of love toward all people.
- *Agape* love takes effort and can be painful for the one giving this kind of love to others.

DEFINING *AGAPE* LOVE

Perhaps the leading modern philosopher on the topic of *agape* is Gene Outka (1972), with his philosophy book, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*. He has identified three features of *agape* as follows:

1. equal regard for all persons regardless of certain personal characteristics (attractiveness, wealth, and so forth);
2. self-sacrifice in that the ones who love give of their own resources (such as time, energy, and even material goods) to meet the needs of others. This giving of resources costs the giver. For example, if someone is hungry and gives her left-overs from dinner to a homeless person on the street, this is different from the person who is hungry, has only one sandwich, and shares half of it with the person without a home. The latter is an the example of *agape*;
3. concern for the other without necessarily expecting reciprocity.

WHAT *AGAPE* LOVE IS NOT

Aristotle reminds us that as we strive to understand any moral virtue, then we must understand what is ****the specific difference**** between that moral virtue and other concepts.

- Compassionate love or a general love for all of humanity
- Altruism or selfless giving. Altruism need not be effortful or painful. Example: A millionaire gives \$100 to poor people. This does not inconvenience the millionaire.
- Friendship love or mutual affection
- Reciprocity in all cases. Reciprocity means delight, reduced conflict, and harmony. *Agape* can occur when there is no reciprocity. Example: Assisting a person without a home to find shelter. The person cannot repay the one showing *agape*.
- Burning out. Instead, *agape* is a paradox: As you give to others, you are the one who so often becomes refreshed.

Two more clarification on *agape* love:

1) Practicing *agape* does not imply that the service is centered only on material needs of the receiver (such as receiving money, having a wounded leg disinfected, or being offered shelter).

The receiver might obtain emotional support, by the one practicing *agape*, when the receiver of this love, for example, is grieving or depressed.

2) As one more clarification, the joy an *agape* love practitioner experiences may not derive principally from achieving a material goal (binding the wounded leg of the other), but instead for other reasons to be discussed on Slide # 18.

What do we mean by forgiveness?

What is its Essence?

DEFINING FORGIVENESS

When we forgive there are three components to the definition:

- We have been treated unjustly by a person or persons.
- We strive to get rid of the resentment (persistent ill-will).
- We strive as best we can to offer goodness of some kind to the one(s) who have hurt us. This goodness can take the form of kindness, respect, generosity, or even love.
- *Agape* love is the highest form of forgiveness. Why? The person is reaching out, in suffering, toward the injurer, and this costs the one forgiving.
- I think this—*agape* as forgiveness— is a heroic manifestation of what it means to forgive.

Again, Aristotle reminds us that as we strive to understand any moral virtue, then we must understand what is **the specific difference**** between that moral virtue and other concepts.**

The specific difference between forgiveness and other ideas:

Forgiveness is more than:

accepting what happened. Why?

ceasing to be angry. Why?

being neutral toward the other

making oneself feel good

Forgiveness is not:

making excuses for bad behavior

forgetting (We remember in new ways.)

calming down

exerting power over the offending person

reconciliation—which is not a moral virtue

abandoning the quest for justice

Being weak; as with *agape* love, those who reach out in forgiveness can be refreshed. Our science shows this to be true.

Forgiveness is not:

a **skill** in that you engage in particular behaviors with expertise. Why? It is because forgiveness as a moral virtue is first **an inner response** to be good to others and requires thinking, feeling, behaving, and if possible, relating to another person.

a **psychological technique**. Why? To forgive is to **change who you are as a person, as someone who can love those who do not love you**. It is a **life-style change**, not the practice of a particular psychological pattern toward one particular end, such as the elimination of anxiety or anger.

a **decision**. To “decide” is only one aspect of any moral virtue, including forgiveness. Please recall that there are at least 5 characteristics of a moral virtue, including thinking (**a decision is thinking**), feeling, acting, and, if possible, relating.

Summary:

Forgiveness, as a moral virtue, is for the other person, the one who acted unfairly.

You as the forgiver can benefit as you offer forgiveness to the other, but to truly qualify as forgiveness, you have to be motivated to be good to the other, think about being good to the other, and do your best to be good to the other.

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN FORGIVING
SOMEONE AND BEING A
FORGIVING PERSON?**

WHAT ARE SOME GOALS OF LOVING AND FORGIVING:

- 1. To emotionally heal from injustice**
- 2. To help offending people to change**
- 3. To possibly reconcile**
- 4. To practice goodness (love) as an end in and of itself regardless of the consequences.**
- 5. To be consistent with one's philosophy of life or religious beliefs**

The Application of Forgiveness in Schools

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA teachers and psychologists (pre-kindergarten through eighth grade) taught the Forgiveness Education Program during school years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. A total of 107 teachers filled out the evaluation.

- 78% of the instructors observed that the students **increased in cooperation** as a result of learning about forgiveness.
- 93% of the instructors thought that they became **a better person** as a result of teaching the forgiveness curriculum.
- 84% of the instructors thought that the **classrooms as a whole began to function better (academically and socially)** as a result of the forgiveness curriculum.

How are *agape* love and forgiveness connected to each other?

Forgiveness is more specifically targeted toward people who are unfair to us.

Agape love can occur toward those who are fair and good to us or who are so suffering that they are not focused on us.

The moral virtue of forgiving flows from the moral virtue of *agape* love. **Most people do not realize this.** In other words, most people, when they forgive, do not consciously and deliberately try to love the one who was unfair.

To repeat from an earlier slide: **The highest form of forgiveness is when we strive, even struggle, to love the one who hurt us.**