

# A LESSON ON ENGLISH



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## LOVE

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Any conversation about love will often end in misunderstanding, due in large part to the fact that English has only one word for love. In English you can love your wife and love chocolate, love to swim and love to hate someone.

Other cultures and languages have been wiser in this regard, realizing that “love” has many faces, shades and purposes. Here are a few approaches to “love.”

### THE GREEK APPROACH

According to “The Greece Index” ([http://www.greeceindex.com/various/greek\\_love\\_words.html](http://www.greeceindex.com/various/greek_love_words.html)), the Greeks had four words for love:

#### 1. Eros

**Eros** is love based on outward perception. Often it is fueled by physical attraction, which is a cultural attribute, changing as cultural standards change. For example, at various times and places in history, the female standard of beauty has included women who would be considered too plump, too thin or too muscular in other eras. Today a deep tan might be attractive; two centuries ago, milk-white skin was the ideal.

Eros is neither deep nor meaningful; it is neither exclusive nor lasting. The English word “lust” is closest to eros.

#### 2. Storge

**Storge** is what we find in families. It is the love of mother, father, brothers and sisters. This is a much stronger type of love than eros, with a completely different purpose. Here the satisfaction of physical lust is not

permitted (it’s taboo), but loyalty and commitment are required.

“Blood is thicker than water” is a phrase that points out the strength of family (blood-based) love over

other, more “watery” types of love. Storge endures over a lifetime.

#### 3. Philia

**Philia** is “brotherly love.” The city of Philadelphia (which means “Brotherly Love” in Latin) in Pennsylvania was named by American Quaker William Penn to remind people of the need for brotherly love.

The concept of philia is that people are brothers and sisters not by blood but in the sense of kinsmanship. Philia is the love you feel for close friends, members of a group that you belong to, and fellow citizens of your nation.

Philia is the force behind charitable giving, public works, and a social conscience. Without philia, a nation will crumble, as each citizen pursues only what directly benefits himself or herself.

#### 4. Agape

**Agape** is the highest form of love. It is an unconditional love for others despite their character flaws, weaknesses and harmful actions. True agape love is forgiving, not vengeful, slow to take offense, slow to express anger and quick to seek reconciliation.

People who practice agape love place the interests of others above their own. This is very hard to do on a consistent basis, as agape love often is directly opposed to individual perceptions of fairness and justice. Agape love places the welfare of others above your own personal rights.

In the Christian faith, agape is the “Golden Rule.” Luke 10:27 says “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Matthew 7:12 says “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” This is the definition of agape love.

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## A LESSON ON ENGLISH

LOVE—FROM P. 1

### THE AMERICAN APPROACH

Americans have just one word for “love.” This seems strange, given that English has the largest number of words of any world language (estimates range from 1 to 1.5 million), having drawn from Greek, Latin, French, and several Germanic languages, with loanwords from such diverse tongues as Hindu (shampoo, jungle), Yiddish (bagel, klutz), Sanskrit (karma, swastika), Farsi (checkmate, chess), and Arabic (sultan, caravan). (examples from <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words/loanwords.html>)

It’s puzzling that the English word “love” is forced into so many shapes and forms, covering all the Greek approaches and then some. No doubt a cultural anthropologist/philologist could provide insight into this situation; for the average speaker of American English, this puzzle simply means that the word “love” must be qualified and specified, to avoid confusion.

### “PSEUDO-LOVE”

The confusion involved in using the word love acts as a disguise for some “pseudo-love” (fake or imitation love) concepts. In pseudo-love, the word “love” is applied to emotions and actions that have little to do with any of the Greek or other definitions of love. “Love” is a positive and socially-acceptable word which can cover up some sinister and definitely unloving attitudes. *Below are two kinds of pseudo-love.*

#### 1. Obsessive “love”

This kind of pseudo-love is best known to teenagers and those with mental and emotional problems. At first glance, it looks like loyalty and devotion, but if left to mature in its evil way, it can become dangerous, as in the case of stalkers, who become so obsessed with the person they “love” that they would rather see that person dead than lose the ability to “love” him or her.

Such obsessive love is based on selfishness and the need to control another person. Using the definition for agape love, obsessive love is not love at all.

Yet people in the grip of immature feelings can confuse obsessive love with real love. The pleasant feelings of being with someone you love can turn into a single-minded need to be with the person you love, at any cost. Stalkers may break the law, disregard court orders of protection and even murder their loved one to fulfill the obsessive need for control of the person they “love.”

Most people move beyond obsessive love and enter into more realistic relationships based on the exchange of love; each partner loves the other in a balance way.

#### 2. Self-centered “love”

This love focuses on how you make me feel. If you make me feel good, you must love me; if you make me feel guilty, or obligated, you don’t love me. This is not love at all, but rather an attempt to avoid personal and spiritual growth by finding people who won’t make you change.

### TRUE LOVE?

Perhaps agape love is the closest to “true love.” People who practice agape love place the interests of others above their own, and want to help them grow into mature, well-balanced people who can be happy in the world. Certainly agape love would be the best love in a diverse, multicultural world, as it places the welfare of others above one’s own will. It is unselfish; it is more about others than about self.

Having only one word for love in English is a problem. Total strangers may tell you that they love your shoes, or your accent! “Love” is a catch-all word in English; it can cause funny or painful misunderstandings. The best advice for the word “love” is use it generously, but with caution!