



## UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Everyone would like to have unconditional love: the esteem, regard, understanding, and approval of others, regardless of our achievements or mistakes, our successes or failures, or our strengths or weaknesses, to be loved just for who we are. There's just one problem. How can anyone receive such love unless others give it? And who is willing to give such love? Probably the closest thing to it is "motherly love." Yet not even all mothers are able to give this, and it seems that being able to give it requires that it first be given. More profound than the "chicken-egg" problem is that of which came first: love or loving?

And is there really such a thing as truly unconditional love? When a couple vows to love one another "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health," haven't they already found something about each other to love? And isn't the lack of opportunity to make such conditional romantic connections what Americans find so strange about the custom of arranged marriages? Yet even in our free society, half the people who pledge such undying unconditional love to one another later change their minds.

Perhaps the only really unconditional love is that of "motherly love," as in someone's having attributes "that only a mother could love." But biologists might say that a mother's love for her offspring is really the most conditional of all. Notwithstanding "selfish gene" considerations, mothers invest a great deal of material and physical effort in their offspring so it would be expected that mothers would go to the greatest extremes to protect and defend their young.

Is the yearning for unconditional love part of the reason why humanity invented god(s) and theology? Is an imaginary friend better than the regard of most other humans? Or better than no friends at all? Might this also be the source of zealotry when it comes to things theological: that with loss of faith might come the loss of someone's only authentic sense of being loved? Even if the love itself is not real, the sense of being loved can be more important.

An honest effort to make sense of such puzzles suggests another way to kindle a sense of unconditional love for others. Just as not all endangered species are cute and cuddly and scien-

tists may study "disgusting" things in which they come to find a certain beauty, every other human being in the world, regardless of all their individual attributes, whether trivial or noteworthy, attractive or repulsive, lives in a unique, private, and subjective world. And from each of these worlds comes – or can come, if we listen, and pay attention, and think – stories of what it is like to live in that world. Everyone has a story to tell and everyone, like the subjects of the most obscure scientific disciplines, has something to teach us. To love others for this quality – just for being human and therefore offering something to learn – is a kind of unconditional love that goes even beyond that of motherly love.

As the saying goes, "it is better to give than receive." This is true especially of unconditional love. We yearn for unconditional love and, when we find it, we exult in receiving it. But then we find another benefit which is greater. Unconditional love – love that we don't fear losing – helps us to discover the confidence and capability to turn outwards towards the world and others and begin ourselves to give unconditional love. And then we find that the loving is even better than the being loved. It is then, and for many it may be late in life, that we find, as Max Ehrmann put it in his famous poem, *Desiderata*:

"With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams,  
it is still a beautiful world."

Today's guest speaker, Johnny Tan, describes his life as "like a pot of the famous Louisiana Gumbo, 'richly flavored by my nine moms.'" Mr. Tan grew up in Malaysia and learned from his mother that the kitchen is a place where not just physical sustenance is prepared but also "food for the soul, recipes for living," the subtitle of his book, *From My Mama's Kitchen*. After coming to the United States as a young man, Mr. Tan extended and deepened his education in discovering success and happiness in life with the help of eight other women who also showed him the power of "motherly love." His book is a potpourri of such material, and he plans more to come.

# OCTOBER 12: FREETHOUGHT DAY

Next week Tuesday is the 318th anniversary of the effective end of the infamous Salem Witchcraft Trials, an event that Freethinkers mark as "Freethought Day."

Why? Because it was on this day in 1692 that then Massachusetts Governor William Phips wrote the Privy Council of the British monarchs William and Mary, saying that after returning from being engaged with hostilities with the natives he:

"understood what danger some of their innocent subjects might be exposed to, if the evidence of the afflicted persons only did prevail either to the committing or trying of any of them, I did before any application was made unto me about it put a stop to the proceedings of the court."

In other words, one of the chief difficulties recognized as a result of the hysteria was that of reliance on "spectral evidence," which is to say, "evidence" that was only accessible to the accusers. When the trials finally resumed in 1693, such "evidence" was largely discounted. As we know, such "evidence" would be completely disallowed today, but we forget what a long, hard road it has been to get to our present standards of evidence and, especially, that of holding people accountable under the law to that expected of "a reasonable person."

Freethought Day is a commemoration of this watershed event in American and in human history: of the recognition that allegedly supernatural "evidence" is simply not sufficient to the needs of the political and judicial institutions of civilized society. Nor is this recognition unique to Freethinkers, as all of the players in the Salem Witchcraft Trials, including those executed in the affair, were good Christian believers all.

**SOME INTERESTING FACTS:**

- 1) No one was burned. 19 were hanged, 1 was pressed to death with stones.
- 2) The hysteria was not confined to Salem Village and lasted for many months, making it unlikely to have been caused, as some claim, by ergotism from spoiled rye grain.

**COMING NEXT TIME:  
NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER BRING  
THANKSGIVING AND MYTHMAS!!**

OUR HOLIDAY SERVICES WILL BE APPROPRIATELY THEMED. WE MIGHT EVEN HAVE SANTA CLAUS COME SEE US AGAIN! THESE SERVICES ARE THE MUST ONES! (or you'll be darned to heck!)

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS  
TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED,  
APPRECIATED,  
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

**TEENS PLAN AN OUTING TO SEE HENRY IV  
AT 2PM AT THE ATT PAC - WYLY THATRE  
IN DALLAS - YOUTH TICKETS ONLY \$15 !**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar (if it doesn't work, we're working on it!) , or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) -

**JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP to get email updates too!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Golden Corral Buffet and Grill in Grapevine, located just across from the Grapevine Mills Mall, at 2605 E. Grapevine Mills Circle, phone (972) 874-7900. To reach Golden Corral from the Wyndham, take the SOUTH exit from the parking lot (turn your head left as you walk out the main entrance), then drive across Esters Blvd onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114). Then take the first exit RIGHT onto International Parkway (121), then Grapevine Mills Parkway exit. Turn LEFT on Stars and Stripes Way, continuing on to E. Grapevine Mills Circle.

**Freethought Salon:** Get together to discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest to Freethinkers. Second Sunday monthly, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine this month; see the meetup site!

**Game Night:** The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

**Secular Singles:** Freethinkers have met their life-partners with whom they have begun families through the Secular Singles group. Check the meetup site for the next date, time and location!

**TEXAS FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION OCT 8-10  
SEE/HEAR Dr. MICHAEL NEWDOW AND OTHERS!  
[WWW.TEXASFREETHOUGHTCONVENTION.COM](http://WWW.TEXASFREETHOUGHTCONVENTION.COM)**



**DFWCOR**

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought  
A Fellowship of Unbelievers

Music by "Faithless Companions" Jay Purrington,  
Ed McGuire,  
Cathy & Kevin Smith  
and Scott Williams

Equipment Wrangler: John Hendricks  
Videographer: John Gauthier

Ministers: Dr. Tim Gorski and Lu Whipple LPC  
P.O.Box 202447, Arlington, TX 76006  
(214) 347-7590

Website: [www.churchoffreethought.org](http://www.churchoffreethought.org)  
Email: [info@churchoffreethought.org](mailto:info@churchoffreethought.org)