

Love

From a Buddhist perspective

The first aspect of true love is *maître*, the intention and capacity to offer joy and happiness. To develop that capacity we have to practice looking and listening deeply so that we know what to do and what not to do to make others happy. If you offer your beloved something she does not need, that is not *maître*. We have to see her real situation or what you offer might bring her unhappiness such as, giving your loved one chocolate and flowers just because everyone else does this, when she may be allergic to flowers and feel sick when she eats chocolate. That is an example of love without understanding. Your intention is good, but you don't have the correct understanding.

Without understanding, your love, is not true love. You must look deeply in order to see and understand the needs, aspirations, and suffering of the one you love. We all need love. Love brings us joy and well-being. It is as natural as the air. We are loved by the air; we need fresh air to be happy and well. We are loved by trees. We need trees to be healthy. **In order to be loved, we have to love**, which means we have to understand. For our love to continue, we have to take the appropriate action or non-action to protect the air, the trees and our beloved.

Maitri can be translated as "love" or "loving-kindness." Some Buddhist teachers prefer "loving kindness," as they find the word "love" too dangerous. But I prefer "love". Words sometimes get sick and we have to heal them. We have been using the word "love" to mean appetite or desire. We have to use language more carefully. Love is a beautiful word; we have to restore its meaning. The word *maître* has its roots in the word *mitra*, which means friend.

In Buddhism, the primary meaning of love is friendship.

We all have seeds of love in us. We can develop this wonderful source of energy, nurturing the unconditional love that does not expect anything in return. When we understand someone deeply, even someone who has done us harms, we cannot resist loving him or her. Shakyamuni Buddha declared that the Buddha of the next eon will be named "Maitraya", the "Buddha of Love."

The second aspect of true love is "*karuna*", the intention to and capacity to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows. To develop compassion in ourselves we need to practice mindful breathing, deep listening, and deep looking. Compassion contains deep concern. You know the other person is suffering, so you sit close to her. You look and listen deeply to her to be able to touch her pain. You are in deep communication, deep communion with her, and that alone brings some relief.

Our compassionate word, action or thought can reduce another person's suffering and bring him joy. One word can give comfort and confidence, destroy doubt, and help someone avoid a mistake, reconcile a conflict, or open the door to liberation. One action can save a person's life or help him take advantage of a rare opportunity. One thought can do the same, because thoughts always lead to words and actions. With compassion in our heart, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle. I sometimes wondered how Buddha did not become overwhelmed by all the suffering. Later I discovered Buddha has enough understanding, calmness and strength and so is able to smile at suffering because he knows how to take care of it and to help transform it. We need to be aware of the suffering, but retain our clarity, calmness, and strength so we can transform the situation. The ocean of tears cannot drown us if "*karuna*" is there. That is why Buddha's smile is possible.

The third element of true love is "*mudita*, or joy." True love; always bring joy to ourselves and the one we love. If our love does not bring joy to both of us, it is not true love.

Some say mudita means “sympathetic joy or altruistic joy” the happiness we feel when others are happy. But that is too limited. It discriminates between self and others. A deeper definition of mudita is a joy that is filled with peace and contentment. We rejoice when we see others happy, but we rejoice in our own well-being as well. How can we feel joy for another person when we do not feel joy for ourselves? Joy is for everyone.

The fourth element of true love is “*upeksha*”, which means equanimity, nonattachment, nondiscrimination, even mindedness, or letting go. “Upa”, means “over” and “iksh”, means “to look”. You climb the mountain to be able to look over the whole situation, not bound by one side or the other. If your love has attachment, discrimination, prejudice, or clinging in it, it is not true love. People who do not understand Buddhism sometimes think Upeksha means indifference, but true equanimity is neither cold nor indifferent. If you have more than one child, they are all your children. Upeksha does not mean that you do not love. You love in a way that all your children receive your love, without discrimination. Upeksha has the “the wisdom of equality” the ability to see everyone as equal, not discriminate between ourselves and others... In a conflict, even though we are deeply concerned, we remain impartial, able to love and understand both sides. We shed all discrimination and prejudice, and remove all the boundaries between ourselves and others. As long as we see ourselves as the one who loves and the other as the one who is loved, as long as we value ourselves more than others we see ourselves as different from others, we do not have true equanimity. We have to put ourselves “in the other person’s skin”, and become one with him if we want to understand and truly love him. When that happens, there is no “self” and no “other”.

Without upseksha, your love may become possessive. A summer breeze can be very refreshing; but if we try to put it in a tin so we can have it entirely to ourselves, the breeze will die. Our beloved is the same. He is like a cloud, a breeze, a flower. If you imprison him in the tin can, he will die. Yet many people do just that... They rob their loved one of his liberty, until he can no longer be himself. They live to satisfy themselves and use their loved one to help them fulfill that. That is not love it is destroying. You say you love him, but if you do not understand his aspirations, his needs, his difficulties, he is in a prison called love. True love allows you to preserve your freedom and the freedom of your beloved.

For love to be true love, it must contain compassion, joy, and equanimity. For compassion to be true compassion it has to have love, joy, and equanimity in it. True joy has to contain love, compassion and equanimity. And true equanimity has to have love, compassion and joy in it. This is the interbeing of the Four Immeasurable Minds. But we must look deeply and practice them for ourselves to bring these four aspects of love into our own lives and into the lives of those we love.

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