

To understand the true nature of love, you must recognize its four traits.

What do you think of when you hear the word “love”?

Many of us associate the concept with a particular kind of desirable partner – ideally a good-looking and successful one!

But that’s not true love.

To grasp this, you have to first understand the nature of love.

True love isn’t about what you stand to gain, but rather about recognizing and understanding the suffering of others. Love lets you see suffering from the perspective of another person, and that makes it easier to help them. Another way of describing this quality of true love is empathy.

It’s not hard to recognize true love when you find it. It reveals a world of beauty and feels both refreshing and solid. It gives you a sense of freedom, tranquility and joy. If you think you might be in love, ask yourself whether you’re filled with a sense of pure joyfulness. If you aren’t, chances are it’s not true love.

Joy is complemented by reverence. In many parts of Asia, there’s a custom that spouses should be treated as reverently as guests by one another. That’s an important part of maintaining a relationship, and even long-term partners should be treated with the same deep respect.

The final attribute of true love is its expansiveness. In the beginning, love is focused on a single person. But in time it grows and begins to extend outward to encompass all living things.

To recognize true love you should pay heed to its four defining traits.

These are loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.

Let’s unpack those concepts.

Loving-kindness is about using mindfulness to make others happy. Put differently, it's our ability to make the sun shine in even the most overcast heart.

Compassion lets us see the suffering of others and identify ourselves with their plight. Once we're attuned to their suffering, we become empathetic – we are able to see truly and listen deeply.

Joy is lasting and deep happiness. To bring joy to others is a great gift.

The final trait is equanimity. This can also be called inclusiveness. It's the ability to dissolve the boundaries between yourself and another person so that their suffering becomes your own.
