

*The Four  
Aspects of Love*

ACCORDING TO BUDDHISM, THERE ARE four elements of true love.

The first is *maitri*, which can be translated as loving-kindness or benevolence. Loving-kindness is not only the desire to make someone happy, to bring joy to a beloved person; it is the *ability* to bring joy



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and happiness to the person you love, because even if your intention is to love this person, your love might make him or her suffer.

Training is needed in order to love properly; and to be able to give happiness and joy, you must practice *deep looking* directed toward the person you love. Because if you do not understand this person, you cannot love properly. Understanding is the essence of love. If you cannot understand, you cannot love. That is the message of the Buddha. If a husband, for example, does not understand his wife's deepest troubles, her deepest aspirations, if he does not understand her suffering, he will not be able to love her in the right way. Without understanding, love is an impossible thing.

What must we do in order to understand a person? We must have time; we

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must practice looking deeply into this person. We must be there, attentive; we must observe, we must look deeply. And the fruit of this looking deeply is called understanding. Love is a true thing if it is made up of a substance called understanding.

The second element of true love is compassion, *karuna*. This is not only the desire to ease the pain of another person, but the *ability* to do so. You must practice deep looking in order to gain a good understanding of the nature of the suffering of this person, in order to be able to help him or her to change. Knowledge and understanding are always at the root of the practice. The practice of understanding is the practice of meditation. To meditate is to look deeply into the heart of things.

The third element of true love is joy, *mu-dita*. If there is no joy in love, it is not true



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love. If you are suffering all the time, if you cry all the time, and if you make the person you love cry, this is not really love—it is even the opposite. If there is no joy in your love, you can be sure that it is not true love.

The fourth element is *upeksha*, equanimity or freedom. In true love, you attain freedom. When you love, you bring freedom to the person you love. If the opposite is true, it is not true love. You must love in such a way that the person you love feels free, not only outside but also inside. “Dear one, do you have enough space in your heart and all around you?” This is an intelligent question for testing out whether your love is something real.

#### Love Is Being There

TO LOVE, IN THE CONTEXT OF BUDDHISM, is above all to be there. But being there is not an easy thing. Some training is necessary, some practice. If you are not there, how can you love? Being there is very much an art, the art of meditation, because meditating is bringing your true presence to the here and