

Question 28: In English when we talk about love we use three words: love, compassion and devotion. How do these three differ from each other or are they just the same thing? *From Henrik Hagnell*

Answer: The word “love” is a very broad term which commonly means a feeling involving desire, affection and attachment. Strong good feelings are sent to the other person, but with expectation of some kind of reciprocation, some attention, from that person. So love usually is tainted with some degree of selfishness, such as possessiveness, expectation, or desire for admiration and affection. Romantic love is, of course, also tainted with lust. Even without selfishness or lust, the attachment causes pain of being away from the loved one, or fear of losing him or her. While these “taints” do have good functions - possessiveness and expectation have a function of maintaining orderly and stable families and society, and lust has a function of continuing the human race - they lead to disappointment, worry and frustration, which in turn lead to anger, jealousy and other impure states of mind.

Compassion means understanding the suffering of another being, along with wishing to relieve the suffering. The focus is on the other person and thoughts of good will, so it is not selfish. It is love directed outwardly to another being without expectation of reciprocation, possessiveness or recognition. Compassion is different than sympathy, which can include feelings of injustice, sadness, fear, or vengeance against persons perceived as responsible for others’ suffering.

Devotion (to another being) means adoration of and yearning to please another being, and dedicating one’s time and energy toward that end. One can be devoted to God, or to one’s spouse, child, parent, friend, or lover. It is love pulling the other being toward oneself. The yearning and attachment involved with devotion can be painful in some instances.

Pure love is selfless and unconditional. It may involve forgetting oneself in concern for the other (compassion and loving-kindness, *karuna* and *metta*) or forgetting oneself in adoration of the other (devotion, *bhakti*).

Love which is of the highest purity involves equanimity, loving all beings equally without attachment, bias or preference. A person who is enlightened does not just see a person as he is in the present with all his defilements, but sees the divine nature of the person. When one sees all persons as having a divine nature, he sees them as equally worthy and only temporarily in a state of defilement. He understands that he too had a very polluted mind in past lives, so he does not have contempt for anyone, but only wishes the best for all. He has no more disfavor toward an unwise person than he has for an unripe fruit – in time, both will ripen to attain goodness. This pure type of love is no less intense than love with attachment, but is more intense. When the heart is not burdened with fears, worries, expectations or delusions, then there is more energy available for love.