"True love"? could it be true? [1]

Dear Alice,

Is there such a thing as "true love?" The reason I ask is that my observations of the world today indicate that there are more people getting divorced, getting cheated on, and breaking up than there are happy couples that are in love and stay in love. I mean, are humans mentally and physically capable of staying in love with someone and being faithful to each other?

Answer

Dear Reader,

If we base our idea of what true love is on fairy tales, we might think that finding prince charming or an enchanting princess and living happily ever after is the ultimate goal. But for most mortals, striving for such ideals is unrealistic, and may even leave us feeling unfulfilled or let down. The reality is that being and staying in love takes continual work and patience, even though this might not seem utterly romantic, in that storybook sense. Couples who have healthy relationships find ways of working together, and this in and of itself could be considered a sign of true love.

It's true that in many cultures, people who are "in love" create long-term partnerships and/or get married. We may hear of the high divorce rates, but lots of these couples do actually stay together. Yes, there are couples that have been married for 60 years and still feel passionately in love, and there are others who care deeply for one another even though the lust is gone (or maybe never existed!). Of course, sometimes we may not even want to hear about the happy, lovey-dovey couples because we're feeling romantically unlucky or lovelorn ourselves.

Keep in mind that the reasons why some relationships don't last are as varied as the different kinds of people we are; in many cases, the partners simply grow apart because they have grown and changed as individuals, and seek different, more fulfilling opportunities for love. If a particular couple "falls out of love," yet each partner goes on to seek a more satisfying love with another person, could this be an example of "true love" in action?

Love can also vary by degrees: some couples feel deeply intense and passionate, while others appreciate one another for intellectual reasons or admire one another's ambition, dedication, or creativity. When is the last time you read a fairy tale where the main characters
appreciated each other's brilliant musicianship, eloquent writing, or compassion for humanity? (Well, maybe in Shakespeare's writings....)

Love is not an easily definable concept but it may be helpful to try to spell it out. A psychologist, Richard Sternberg proposed that love is the result of three components—intimacy, passion and commitment. The love is strongest when all three of these components are strong. John Lee proposed an alternate theory by identifying six styles (or colors) of love. How do you define love?

Perhaps, just for fun though, it might help to look at this elusive "true love" in another light. Look around you and see all of the expressions of love in our world: people devoting huge chunks of their lives for the human rights of others, people setting aside time to volunteer in their community, parents and caregivers protecting and nurturing their children and families, young people learning from and sharing things with their grandparents. Or, how about giving and receiving unconditional love to and from the animals in our lives?

So, are humans capable of staying in love? Sure they are, as there are lots of models around us of people who love and care deeply about one another. Some people follow the philosophy of "better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." Instead of looking at all the heartaches around us, why not look to all of the examples of the different types of love in the world? Perhaps if we think of love as a broadly defined term, it's possible to see "true love" all around us.

Love always,

Alice!

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