

Love and Compassion: its many splendors



"Courtly Love" comes in a basket



"Court of Love" in Provence,
southeastern France, during the 14th Century



"Courtship" of a kiss

Many scholars identify "courtly love" as the "pure love" described in 1184 by Andreas Capellanus in *De amore libri tres*:

It is the pure love which binds together the hearts of two lovers with every feeling of delight. This kind consists in the contemplation of the mind and the affection of the heart; it goes as far as the kiss and the embrace and the modest contact with the nude lover, omitting the final solace, for that is not permitted for those who wish to love purely That is called mixed love which gets its effect from every delight of the flesh and culminates in the final act of Venus.

The traditional Chinese character of love consists of a heart (in the middle), inside the "accept," "feel," or "perceive," which shows a graceful emotion.



In his 1960 book, *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis (1898-1963; author of the series *The Chronicles of Narnia*) identifies four key types of love, in part, based upon the ancient Greek words for "love," and exemplified in Christianity. Lewis warned, that just as Lucifer – a former archangel – perverted himself by pride and fell into depravity, so too can love. To love "love" is to become corrupt by presuming love to be what it is not, i.e., for one's self and not for others.



1. **Affection** (*storge*) is fondness through familiarity, especially between family members or people who have otherwise found themselves together by chance. It is the most natural, emotive, and widely diffused of loves – "natural" in that it is present without coercion; "emotive" because it is the result of fondness due to familiarity; and most "widely diffused" because it pays the least attention to those characteristics deemed "valuable" or worthy of love and, as a result, is able to transcend most discriminating factors. It is the love that is necessary to rear a child.

Ironically, its strength, however, is what makes it vulnerable.

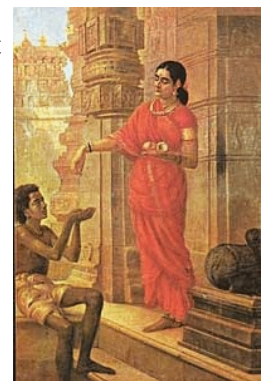
2. **Friendship** (*philia*) is a strong bond existing between people who share a common interest or activity. It is a dispassionate virtuous love, the concept of which was first developed by Aristotle. It includes loyalty to friends, family and community, and requires virtue, equality and familiarity. While it is the least associated with impulse or emotion, it is the most admirable of loves because its focus is on the relationship between people, and not on the people per se. People beyond or above themselves, and are freed from jealousy. This is the love necessary to create the community around which the child will be nurtured and grow.



3. **Eros** (*eros*) is love in the sense of "being in love." It can be passionate love, with sensual desire and longing. While distinct from sexuality, which Lewis calls Venus (Roman Goddess of love and fertility), he identifies *eros* as indifferent. As such it promotes appreciation of the beloved regardless of any pleasure that can be obtained from them. It can be bad, however, because this blind devotion has been at the root of many of history's most abominable tragedies. In keeping with his warning that "love begins to be a demon the moment [it] begins to be a god," he warns against the danger of elevating Eros to the status of a god. This is the love necessary to create a child.

Famous *Life Magazine* photo
by Alfred Eisenstaedt

4. **Charity** (*agape*) is a love directed towards one's neighbor which does not depend on any lovable qualities that the object of love possesses. This is the greatest of loves, the **love of compassion** and sharing with those in need, without regard for some sort of return on the deed nor even acknowledgment of the fact. Lewis warns that those who exhibit charity must constantly check themselves that they do not flaunt it, and thereby warp this love. "But when you give to someone, don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing," Matthew 6:3. This is equivalent to the Hindu saying in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "act, renouncing the fruits of one's action, and the Coeur d'Alene Indian value of the "ethic of sharing." This is the love necessary to provide for a child. This is the Buddhist notion of



Giving Alms to the Poor

"compassion," within which the boundaries of "self" and "other" are devolved, and each is truly understood as an extension of each other, as you would remove a snail from the trail so as not to get stepped upon – you are a part of the snail, the snail a part of you.