



## **COULD THIS BE LOVE?**

Perfect. Just one look and your heart goes wild, you break out in a cold sweat as a delicious feeling of warmth spreads through your body. You've dreamed of this. Could this be it? Could this be love?

A bit exaggerated perhaps, but to some it's right on target. We know that everybody loves differently and every situation is unique, but for years writers and philosophers debated the true nature of love. A psychologist, J.A. Lee, has distinguished no less than nine different types of love. Most of us, however, believe there is only one "true love" and we measure our relationships against this fantasized ideal. This makes it especially difficult to distinguish between the heady euphoric attraction known as infatuation and the perhaps more sedate but especially satisfying love that can develop into a mutual, lasting relationship. Although the two states may seem similar, there are a few fundamental differences.

For instance, can you see and accept the shortcomings of your partner as easily as the strengths? Do these "flaws" detract from your attraction? Do you believe your partner will change or that you can change your partner? Infatuation is an extremely powerful emotional state that often hides that which is less desirable in the other person. It is associated with intense passion and elaborate fantasy as we imagine the wonderful rewards and pleasure the relationship will bring. We gloss over faults and smooth over problems as we anticipate our "knight in shining armor" or "the girl of our dreams." The result, when reality sets in, is often disillusionment and disappointment.

Long lasting love is quite different. There is a willingness to face each other's faults and feelings. There is true liking and acceptance. There is often conflict, but conflict represents an opportunity for negotiation that can lead to increased intimacy and higher reward.

The feelings produced by both emotional states also differ greatly. Infatuation is an intense emotion often based on physical or sexual attraction. By its very intensity, it is doomed to fade. Love includes a sexual attraction but is more multi-dimensional, taking into account a variety of qualities and traits.

Another good indicator is the presence of feelings of jealousy, uncertainty, and possessiveness. The intensity of infatuation produces a desire to cling to one another, leaving little room for individual growth. It is often self-focused and indulgent, with little real communication. The sheer thrill of being identified as part of a relationship and the focus on passion often don't allow the couple to develop the skills to deal with inevitable conflicts. Love, if nurtured, produces a willingness to be both responsive and responsible to each other. There is always the "I," but there is also the "we."

Keep in mind that love must pass the test of time. It requires sharing, patience, mutual acceptance and understanding. Few instances of "love at first sight" ever develop into a long lasting relationship. Infatuation may "feel" like love, but it is often a hurried and haphazard version of the real thing. It fizzles as quickly as it exploded on the horizon, while love endures and blossoms. So, enjoy your infatuations because they can be exhilarating, if sometimes painful, learning experiences. Nevertheless, try to recognize them for what they are--enjoyable learning experiences but rarely the real thing.

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