

2009-07-13 Emotions Loving Kindness Part 2

Fri, 8/14 4:43PM • 39:20

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

soften, emotion, contraction, expansive, people, kindness, love, person, expanding, feeling, bit, compassion, relationship, feel, relax, present, healthy, desire, contract, expensive

SPEAKERS

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In this evening, I'm going to continue my ongoing series, looking at emotions, and mindfulness practice. And last week I began with last week was a discussion about loving kindness and loving kindness being a form of taking any kind of emotion. And I thought I would continue a little bit on that area, that field of love or loving kindness and talk for a little while, and then I'd be curious to take questions and hear what questions or concerns you have around this topic. Sometimes I find it interesting or useful to divide up emotions into two categories. those emotions that involve some form of contraction, and those that involve some form of expansion and so forth. If I suddenly get greedy for something, you know, I kind of kind of tighten up a little bit. Or my eyesight gets very focused The thing that I want, there's a kind of general kind narrowing, that goes on. Or if I get irritated or angry or versiv, there also can be a contraction contractive movement that goes on. If I feel genuinely generous, it's often comes with a feeling expansive, expansive, feeling, an opening feeling. In fact, the more open we feel, the more likely we are to be generous, or to be kind, or to be loving. So there's those emotions that involve contraction and those that involve more expansion or openness. And if we then expand in relationship to contracting emotion, it dissolves the contraction. If we contract around the expanding emotion, we destroy the expensive emotion. So if, if I get really tense out of my desire something then if I enter into that world of desire feel it'd be very present for it, and then open up, relax, soften with it, then it's hard to keep engaged or caught or attached or preoccupied by that desire. If I feel some expansive generosity, or love, and then I get afraid of that, those ideas, those feelings, then and I kind of contract or resist, then it tends to push away or cancel out. The feelings of generosity might be there, or covered over diminished in some way. But if I feel it Expensive emotion, and I softened into it, it tends to get stronger. If I feel contracted emotion in that contract further, it tends to reinforce it. So this is a very simple idea, maybe it's over it's kind of generalization kind of idea, but there's two kind of movements or directions and emotions is useful. Because it explains that if you soften around whatever is going on, if you be present for it, then allow yourself to kind of relax. Relaxing is kind of a form of expect expanding around it being spacious around it being allowing soft, it tends to counter the momentum of contractive emotions. If we resist the expansive emotions, we tend to diminish those. But if we soften around the expensive emotions, they tend to get stronger and more stable and more in Interesting. So in in meditation practice, meditation is a kind of relaxing 10 is meant to be, to some degree, to be relaxing to be kind of more expansive, the mind the heart, the body tends to feel more open, more relaxed, more expansive, more spacious. And that doesn't come with neutrality, you don't end up being kind of a neutral blob as a result. But it tends to create a big template or big kind of opening door for a whole series of emotions which can be belong to this more expansive way of being in the world. And some of the things that people we value the most, most people I think, as a society, at least we value the most like, generosity and kindness and friendliness and love, compassion, all belong to that category that have expansive emotions.

So for example, if we encounter suffering, someone a friend of ours is suffering in some way. It can be painful to be with that. Today I talked to a friend of mine who was just re-hospitalized after surgery because of complications and he was in a lot of pain. And so you know, it was, it was present, and it was painful kind of to feel his pain. But then to so how do I relate to that pain relate to that discomfort around being around my friend. Now if I contract around it, because I'm afraid of it or resist it or whatever, then one thing happens. But if I enter into the world of that discomfort, and allow myself to feel it fully soften with it, relax into it, not not fight did not resist it. Then it tends to give birth or allow for some beautiful things to happen. And one of the most beautiful is compassion. And it's counterintuitive sometimes because the intuitive things we should resist or turn away from suffering or shut down or do something. And in fact, sometimes what we think is compassion is not really compassion. Sometimes we think we're trying to help someone who's suffering. And sometimes it's not a notic compassionate movement, but rather it comes out of fear or resistance or aversion to the pain, we want to fix it. So we don't feel uncomfortable. If we soften and soften and softness lobby present, then some very different relationship can happen to the discomfort. And it might be for example, that compassion, pure compassion can be there. And compassion is also motivating. Compassion also then wants to do something about it. But suffering maybe help in some way. But it's not trying to resist it or make it different. And again, it can be counterintuitive, it's very idea that we should be open and soften to that which is difficult. So meditation practice, I think is a training and learning how to open up learning how to be expensive learning how to relax or Learning how to soften with whatever is present. So if there's whatever it is, whether it's beautiful, or whether it's difficult, we bring presence to it. And that presence then kind of softens around it. And so it kind of can open up. So I think of, we looked at Love, love is, you know, maybe we can if we consider Love is an emotion. There are many different kinds of love. And so it's interesting to distinguish between things that we label as love and are contracting. And things we call love that are expanding. So if there's a lot of strong desire, connected to the, to the love, I want that thing I want that person, I have to be with that person, then it's not an expensive moving rather narrowing down and tightening down. So for example, I fell in love with a girl when I was 13 I think happened once. And, and my friends and I we met her on the street one day and we followed her home to where's the street near where she lived. So I knew what streets you lived on. But I didn't know where she was coming from all the way. And I knew her first name. So of course, since the desire was strong, and I wanted to see her again. We went through the phone book. And I went from the front and my friend went from the back. And we called everyone who lived on that street asking for that person and until we found her and her last name wasn't like m star with M or something. So it took a while to get middle of the phone book. So That was an expensive form of love or, you know, that was pretty focused.

And so what does love come with? You know, does it come with feeling more expansive or contractive? Or sometimes it oddly enough, it can do both at the same time. And so what is love come with? What is it? What is love want is a very interesting, interesting question, what is love want? And you say you love something or love someone? And then you say, Oh, that's nice. But what is that love want? What's the desire that's with that love? What's the motivation that goes with it? And a lot of emotions. Plenty of emotions are connected to it. Motivation is something we want. So in terms of love, what's the desire there? So if the desire you know, sometimes we say we love someone, you want to possess them, or do you want to be recognized that he wants something from that person. Other things There's love for someone, and we don't want anything from them. Rather, what we what what love seems to want is love wants to appreciate, want love wants to care. Love wants to reach out, wants to radiate onto the person. So it's not so much what we get from the person, but rather what is expressed in us. And it's wonderful to be able to meet someone and express our feelings or to meet them see them. And it's not about getting something in return. So when there's love, what is it we want? So as I said a little bit last week, and Buddhism, there's a variety of different kinds of love, the one that we tend to champion the

most, mainly to which one is compassion, and the other is loving kindness. And I sometimes prefer to use the expression goodwill to loving kindness. Because goodwill implies a goodness there's a goodness in that We'll in that willing, until will implies an intention. And we are will we don't use the word will very much in English, but will is a very significant way of talking about intentionality or motivation to have a strong will, can be a beautiful thing, though sometimes you criticize people for being strong willed. But I think to have a strong will is actually a very useful thing to do, because if we have a healthy desire, when there can be momentum behind it to actually accomplish it. So, goodwill is, I think of as kind of comes from a kind of strength. Whereas, often times people think of kindness coming from maybe a weakness, so, a strong sense of coming from a strong sense of goodness, where the will wants the good for the other person. So, that's the expression of kindness. So, if it's only kindness Without will, then we're not going to act on it. If there's only a will, without kindness without goodness, then I'm afraid that we might kind of manipulate people or kind of roll them over, roll over them or you know, kind of do something. But if the goodness is there, together with a will, then perhaps we can do, do something helpful in the world, help our friends or do something. In Buddhism, we add a third thing to there's the there's the emotion like there's love, there's the motivation that goes with it. And then there's the wisdom that's tied to it as well. And that wisdom is often connected to skillful means the skillfulness the street smarts we have. So it's not just a matter of having love or having goodwill towards someone loving kindness toward someone, but it's having the wise understanding about it. How is it that I can act on that? How's it useful? What are the different ways to maneuver to enter into that world in a way that is not offensive because sometimes kindness can be offensive that's not interfere with people. That doesn't get us in trouble because we get into involved people and expect something we don't want. So how do we enter into the world skillfully? How do we understand what's happening there in the relationship to know what the different expressions that are appropriate in different times? They're often often with a world of love that can be very good we can very confusing for people because what one person calls you know, loving kindness, someone else thinks it's romantic interest. And so then, you know, a little bit confusing. Or this these expansive feelings of love can be very seductive. When I was in I spent the A number of years at Tassajara, which was a coed Zen monastery.

And it's very interesting to spend a year or so in a monastery, where there's a lot of meditation practice a lot of spiritual practice, and, and to have your heart become very open and relaxed and spacious, expansive, feel very relaxed, open. All this kind of feeling of goodwill or love is there and it's very easy to see other people on a very generous, loving kind of way. And it's very easy for them sometimes to see you in a generous, loving way. Well, it's just the right recipe for people falling in love with each other. And it's not uncommon for people to fall in love, it does a heart with each other. And then they leave Tassajara and they say what was I thinking? Or to fall in love with someone asked for it to be inappropriate. I had when I was first year I was there. That's a horror I fell in love with a woman and she got her while she can't care up to Gil. This is inappropriate. You know cuz i was little bit kind of maybe following her too much.

And so she left She told me she was very willful, very kind very have a lot of goodwill like kindness should go Forget it. And

so how to how to rest in feelings of goodwill kindness, loving kindness love to kind of generous, generous spirit of, of the heart where we really it's a bit hard to define what love is, I think someone defined it very nicely last week for us. To find it in terms of loving kindness, I thought, but I think a love often comes I hope it comes with an appreciation of someone if it's love for a person, a sense of delight in reflecting or thinking about the person and sense of kind of maybe softening expansiveness that occurs in relationship to that person wanting the other person to be happy and well, there's some other

kind of more positive aspects of loving someone. And then there's the other things that sometimes get confused for love or connected to love by some people. Where there's a wanting something desiring something the person so it's all great. But what happens if we allow ourselves to be very present for our feelings, for the whatever the loving feelings might be, no matter how romantic or they might be or not romantic, how much desire there's part of them how little desire this part of them, just kind of be present for it. Soften, relax with them. And my experience is this. They're being relaxed, softening presence and really be present for it tense. It's kind of like removing the chaff from the wheat. It's kind of like some of the things that are kind of unskillful some of the movements which are not so healthy to have in relationship love, tend to return to fall away. And so I find it really great to have a practice like meditation, where I can be present for these things as they arise, or have it sit the movement of mindfulness be something I use in daily life, where I can really recognize the feelings that I have, be present, be present for them, and then have a softening or relaxing with them. And I have got I've managed to stay out of trouble many times because of doing that. Realizing, oh, you know, so my motivations my desire, shift and change. Depending on how I connect and be present for these feelings, and it's a beautiful thing to do, because that way that approach, because it means that nothing has to be done denied. When you say, Oh, that's bad, you shouldn't I shouldn't feel that way. I feel this way towards somebody and I shouldn't feel that we're not supposed to feel that way. Who's to say you're not supposed to, but it saved me which I feel it. It's okay. But then be present for yourself in a way where you don't act on it immediately. But see what can soften and relax. And chances are if you soften and relax enough feel expensive than anything, any aspect of that feeling, which is unhealthy or inappropriate, we're probably fall away because the unskillful approaches involve some form of contraction of tightening up. And also as we get more expensive and relax into it. There's a beautiful way where there's less than less desire or a wish that self centered Because to be self centered around what selfish about our feelings is, is a form of contraction. And so as we kind of enter into the world of expansive attention or relaxation or opening or whatever we want to call it. One of the things that softens, relax, let's go over releases is a self selfishness and to our selfishness, it relaxes, then we're again, we're not so likely to act selfishly. And good, high percentage of how we act and skillfully and healthfully in the world can be traced back to some form of selfishness. So what does love look like? For you, when you're not selfish? When you you don't want anything in connection to those that feeling when the love is there, without any self reference to what you want for yourself? What's it? What's it like then, and this suggestion I have is that you probably discover that it's quite beautiful. It's not an easy Do you think to come to it because sometimes it can be very difficult to let go the self centeredness and be self holds on to itself quite tenaciously and is afraid to let go, but to let go and to soften. So those are my thoughts. And so now this has been two weeks I've talked about or talked around love. A little bit. So now I'm curious to hear what your concerns are your questions, your wisdom around this topic that you'd like to bring up?

Seems like, so Christians talk a lot about forgiveness. It seems like a lot of what you're saying is the softening to the hardness is similar to that, that instruction, is that a little bit of what you're saying does that does that resonate with that?

It doesn't resonate, and I wasn't thinking as I was giving this talk, I wasn't thinking about forgiving this. at all, but earlier in the day, when I was thinking about giving this talk, I wondered about talking about forgiveness. And forgiveness about forgiveness is not an emotion. It's more action, more like that. So there'll maybe I'll not talk about it. But now you brought it up, which is quite nice. I like that. And so yeah, I think that forgiveness is necessary when there's resentment when there's anger. So that's a contraction. And so forgiveness is a beautiful word, you know, has to do with giving to give that generosity and so I think it is a kind of movement towards being more expansive or relaxed or softened, I think is a very, very important practice to do. Very useful.

occurred to me that

it occurred Give me that.

For those who have children, and you're not in an aversive relationship or a point in time with that child or children, who that the love that one can express to one's offspring is, is much cleaner and much more giving and much more supporting for that individual individuals then you might find in other types of relationships and also the emotion that you might find for a grandparent. And then where there isn't that buffer of the parent that whatever can also express the really nice, giving, loving, open relationship.

Yes, it can. What's interesting, especially with parents and children, is that that definitely can be there but they can swing the swing so quickly.

Only after they get out of adolescence.

I was on the phone with a friend of mine this afternoon with who was in the hospital was clearly distressed and in pain and kind of seemed seemingly quite exhausted from many many days of dealing with his pain is had been finally took morphine for it. And so I was talking to it and my six year old son really wanted my attention and he's discovered knots making knots that he wanted somehow to even put my finger inside the slip knot. And I kind of you know, do you think I was talking to my friend was kind of intense. So I said not now not now and I put my finger over my my lips up now. And I you know, I wouldn't respond. So as I tried to kind of show angry face you know, and, and finally, I think he got it. All right, got up and walked away. And but then when I finished the phone call for a phone call went over and found him. And they said, you know, anyone needs to tell you that when I am on the phone and I tell you silently, like, you know, with my hand that leave me alone, I'm only going to do that if there's a really important need. And this need was my friend is in the hospital, he was in pain, he really needed me. So you should know that in the future. I'll only do it if I really need it. So that's my response to you was my attempt to try to, you know, express my care and my kind my love for him at the same time as explaining why there was some strong, you know, lemons needed to be said said,

I don't think discipline gets in the way of love or love in the way of discipline doesn't

get in the way.

It's right back there, please.

Thank you. I'd like to know when love is a contraction, emotion and if that exists, really so is that really love? Or is it an obsession?

So when is love the contraction? And most contracted emotion? Yeah, and when is love not that? Or that the question or when? Or is it? Is it in fact ever contractive exactly the last one I think I think that's for you to answer. But I wonder if I you know, if you listen to all those popular love songs, they use the word love a lot. Are they as expansive or contractive? Love.

I have a feeling that love is free. And it doesn't go with contraction in my vocabulary at least.

Good. So this is this. This is something for each person to find out for themselves. I don't want to define it. But I tried to what I wanted to do was to give these people cause so many different things. Love People use the word so easily. And sometimes the word because it's so easily used is also used to justify things that shouldn't be justified. So by by giving the, the using the movements of contraction devalue and contraction expansion as an evaluation, it might begin to kind of tease apart and more carefully the different aspects of what some people will call love. And if you don't call anything that's going to contract with love on the expensiveness that has no selfish desire. It's just great. It's really wonderful.

Thank you.

Yes. I'm curious how you contrast the softening to tolerance

to tolerance. Say while you're asking me a question, well

A lot of times

we use this term tolerance I think especially in this country but as as a way of somewhat distancing ourselves from something allowing it to be there but still in opposition to it. And I get the impression that that's not really what you're what you're saying either it's just this is more of an embracing kind of approach.

Yeah, allowing and being present for where our consciousness or awareness encompasses or holds or receives what's there. I think of tolerance as necessary. When there's a version you know, it I really don't like it. But I'm gonna hang in there and so we it's kind of a double layer of tightening up you know, I'm already have tightened up but I'm so uncomfortable. I have to type that even more so I don't react unskillful II, perhaps I mean, depends on it's a bit of a big As how these words are defined, but so I mean, the contrasting words that might be interesting is acceptance. So what's the difference between tolerating someone and accepting someone? And certainly the things we shouldn't accept. And I think being able to tolerate things is can be a form of personal strength. It's a good quality I think to have. But I think it's also useful to look behind the tolerance. And why why is tolerance necessary? What's going on inside of you that you need to tolerate something and maybe there's some already some contractions, some, some fear or some aversion or something that it's not really necessary for to be there. It's your movement is your reaction.

One of the

more interesting experiences I've had doing loving kindness meditation was the point where you Come to a difficult person.

And I remember one time

where in that practice, there was definitely the feeling of loving kindness to the person was definitely the feeling of generosity. And what was necessary in that moment was also a very healthy boundary. And so you talked about acceptance, you kind of talked about embracing. But I would also say that in many times for that for to be skillful, that also needs to be very healthy, not necessarily averse, and the SE version, but a good healthy boundary between two people. Yes, I think so. And so, I think of there's a difference between what we do with our awareness and what we do with our action, what we do with our heart and what we do with our actions. So, the mindfulness practice that is a practice that where

awareness, or the heart is able to accept and receive everything without the resistance But the situation might require our actions to say no. But we don't mind doesn't contract. The heart doesn't contract, even though we're able to say no, not not, not now not. So thanks very important to make that distinction. Because sometimes in our tradition when people talk about mindfulness as being acceptance, learning to accept, it's too easy to sound like we're supposed to condone it just go along with what's going on. And there's a very important distinction between action and consciousness. Consciousness accepts everything. And that's part of the skill. And if consciousness can accept everything, then there's a lot more wisdom to know how to act. And sometimes acting has to be ferocious. ferocious No. And then in terms of doing loving kindness for people we don't like i think it's it's very helpful to realize you don't like someone to love them. counterintuitive perhaps. And in fact, what's what's benefits both people is the healthy boundary. Yeah. Is that a benefit to both? I think so.

It's not a question. I just want to share some thought the observations are a little bit technical, though. So from what I see the love and it doesn't have to be directed towards person, or people in general, just this state of expanding laugh, exist when we are in our alpha, in our alpha brainwaves, okay, okay, so this is expanding state. The difficult that I'm dealing with, when I need to be focused, that's the batter. Focus on any business issue or anything. sharp focus. That's almost contradict to the state of expansion. Because focus is its narrow, sharp, laser sharp limit in any way, right this is how mind works if needed, there is self and there is a destination. So this expansion of love, I cannot figure out how to squeeze it there, how to integrate it it's almost exist in two separate worlds I'm either completely relaxed, there is no destination mind is everywhere and I am love or I am mind. So I would like to hear maybe someone has something to say,

Sure. I'm off the hook.

The it's I don't I don't have a you know, definitive answer response to you for this. I think it's very healthy to be able to go back and forth between the more expansive places and more focused in that like one is bad necessarily one is always good, but it's useful to be able to come back For someone who's excessively expand, expanded, doesn't have the ability to narrow down and focus might not be able to take care of their life that Well, someone who's always narrowed and focused and might never be relaxed. And the ability to go back and forth is in a healthy capacity. And so be fluid with that. So it's so useful and to look at the ways in which might we might be attached to expensive states the way we might be attached to contract the state's look at how we hold ourselves in it. The relationship we have today is very important. And that might be helped you is to look at when you're in a more expensive, what else is going on there. You might be 90% expansive or 10% contracted or attached to that state. There might be a little bit of fear there might be a judgment or idea that you can't trust then innate intelligence that operates in a relaxed state. And you feel like you have to kind of figure it out or get actively involved and One of the beautiful things that I've just, you know, I don't know, I didn't discover it, but when I learned from this practice is to trust the innate intelligence, that is not me. You know, I'm not the one who's doing it, I just sit back and something comes. And then I evaluated before hopefully before I speak, but, but, but the, you know that this is kind of, so you might experiment at some time when you feel very expensive. And then you have to do something, to see if you can relax and trust some deeper bubbling up of ideas of thoughts and motivations of action that comes out of that field, a broad field. To give you a very simple, maybe it's maybe it's trite example

20 years ago, I used to translate or read Chinese texts, Buddhist texts. And there's All these pages full of Chinese characters, and sometimes I had to find a character that I was looking for in this big page of hundreds of characters. And, and I found that if I if I, if I narrowed my focus and look down the line searching for the character, I would get kind of tired after a while will take a long time it often miss it. But

if I kind of set in my mind, I had to find this character. And then I relax and look at the whole page, then sometimes the character would jump out at me.

Notice this helps even kind of funny analogy. I take a dance class and I struggle, struggle struggle. I'm awful compared to most of the people. And

it takes a lot of obviously

focus to pick up what everyone else is doing very easily. And I

struggle a lot but I find I'm able to pick it up the best

when I saw for myself to the fear and awkwardness, because if

I fight the fear and the awkwardness and the self consciousness, I have a harder time picking up. But if I just let it all be with fear, and awkwardness and self consciousness, like everything up a little better.

So maybe last one back there and oh in the back.

I'm really struck. After listening to the last two times you talk about loving, loving kindness that 95% of what I experienced this in romantic relationships is really a need versus alone. And in general, it seems that it In the very beginnings of any relationship, when there is an attraction, strong attraction of two people, it really is need base versus expanding expansion of giving compassion. And to me that really devalues to some degree romantic relationships. And I'm a little bit struggling with how to make these kinds of connections more meaningful in the context of my practice?

That's a great, great question. It's a fair question. And, and my first response to you is it and maybe it's really good for you to struggle with this. Maybe it's a good struggle. And it's I think it's really help it can be a life that doesn't struggle with these kinds of issues, doesn't look at them deeply and question them and look and try to figure out is the life which is maybe not so you know, not very reflective, not looking Deeply if what's what's really going on. And so I value that point you brought up. And I would encourage you to look more carefully. And not only not only look more carefully, but also experiment with different ways. And so you might want to experiment a little bit with the relationships you're in and see if there's other ways that you can connect and be involved in a relationship that's less need based. And, and what happens if what happens if you meet someone without need, but rather meet out of some expression of love rather than need for love? Take some risk and find out. If your question of course deserves a much longer, more thoughtful answer, but in some ways, but maybe the better. I really feel the best answer will come from you if you struggle with it. I don't want to take the struggle away. Okay, so may you all struggle for this week. If you're struggling with love, it's maybe good and interesting. You'd be so lucky. Thank you.