

# Aspects of Love (1 of 5) Care

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So hello and welcome to this Monday. We begin a new series that might be appropriate for this first day of turning towards the light, the day after the solstice. May we light the world with our attention. May we light the world with our care.

So what's on my mind, my heart, these last days is love. The practice, the expression, the idea of love. And I'm very aware that the word "love" in English is a very vague word. It has such a wide range of meanings that anyone who hears it being used might interpret it differently than intended. As far as I know, there's no good word in Pali, in Buddhist language, that covers the range of meanings that we have for this English word "love".

But there are five Pali words that represent or can hold this broad English word "love" that give it some clarity or some specificity that's helpful to understand; some potential of what can arise out of Dharma practice. These five words are *anukampa*, *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upekka*. In English, they would be care, kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity, equanimous love. Care is the foundation for all the other four. The other four, that we'll be talking about over the next few days, arise out of a sense of care.

Our expression of these different flavors of care depends on the context in which the care is offered. The bottom line is something very simple: whatever motivates this basic simplest form of care that we offer. If a neighbor is injured and we go do their grocery shopping, that is care. We might not love the neighbor, but we have a kind of care. Maybe we would call it compassion, but it doesn't have to be compassion. It could be just a simple desire to be helpful. It doesn't have to come with a lot of feeling. It's just a basic instinct to care for someone who needs help, needs support.

Maybe we care for ourselves because we've cut our finger. We know that if we don't clean it and put a bandage on it, it might get worse. So we care for ourselves knowing that not doing it might have bad consequences. Again, there might not be a strong feeling of love, of warmth, of tenderness. But still, it is offering care. It is taking care of something.

One of the big surprises for me in my life, a turning point in a certain kind of way, happened when I was going on an organized hike in a desert-like area. There were people, strangers, on that organized hike. And there was one woman who was not so capable of hiking so well. The hike was kind of rocky

and we had to climb over these rocks and these short, I don't know, five foot ledges and stuff to make our way through this desert environment. And I saw that this was all hard for her, so I hung back and stayed with her. I didn't assert myself, but I was just there, ready to offer a hand as she needed it. And she gracefully, graciously just received my hand, took the support I gave. I don't even remember if we did any talking about it. I was just there to offer what was needed. It was very matter of fact, and she was very matter of fact of receiving it.

What happened as I was walking, was I started having this really nice feeling inside. I started to have something tender and warm, something gentle, a kind of a joy, a feeling of well-being, of being a little bit more open. A feeling of being appreciative of this attentiveness, of being here and present for this person. There was attention, a kind of a samadhi, of my awareness, my attention, which encompassed the present moment in a clear way because I wanted to be ready for her.

So I wasn't distracted. I was just right there. But I was also enjoying the scenery and just walking peacefully and not trying to assert myself or following her too closely. Just gently kind of being available. This wonderful feeling felt very nice. There was a kind of a peacefulness to it, and a goodness that arose. After a while, I couldn't tell whether I was hanging back, walking with her in order to support her, or if I was walking in order to enjoy and appreciate this wonderful feeling that was arising in me.

This taught me something important. It taught me that there's a way of caring for the world where we're caring for ourselves at the same time. There's a way of being open and receptive, engaged in support, in care, that feels really good for oneself. This was a surprise. I think before that, sometimes I would get lost in the caregiving. I thought I had a responsibility, I better do it. I was obligated, I had to be responsible for the person, and stay very close to the person, be right there, ready to take care of things. It was a little bit fear-driven. It was a little bit duty-bound. It was a little bit... a sense of, I should, I must, and I must not fail in doing this.

This other way of doing it showed me a whole different way of caring, that it was possible to care for someone in a way that cared for myself at the same time, that felt good, that was supportive for me. And so it began to break the authority in me of shoulds and duty and fear around this notion of being a support for the world. That was a turning point for me and very, very valuable.

Another turning point — I had a lot of turning points— around what we might call love in English, was the growth of compassion. I had a lot of suffering when I first started doing Buddhist practice. The only thing I knew to do was to be present for it. To be present for it in a non-reactive way. To be present for it without trying to fix it or do anything about it. Somehow I had a lot of faith in Zen practice, so I kept showing up for my own suffering.

But I was not given any tools for how to work with it or how to fix it —just to be present for it. There was something about being present for suffering that was tenderizing, that softened, again, some kind of reactivity, some kind of defensiveness, some kind of assertiveness, some kind of anger, some kind of fear that I had that came along with my suffering. So I slowly got tenderized. And slowly, like walking in the mist and getting slowly wet, unbeknownst to me, I was becoming compassionate.

A similar thing happened to me in doing vipassana practice. I did not care or understand what the vipassana teachers were saying when they were teaching metta, loving kindness, and guided loving kindness meditation. So I tuned them out in meditation when they did that. But at some point, as I kept doing this vipassana practice, the barriers —things like fear, and assertiveness, and conceit, and the shoulds, and what I should do, and trying to make something happen —all this quieted down for me.

And something different began to arise. I started to feel a sense of well-being, a sense of peace, a sense of goodness, that was friendly. It had a very friendly feeling to it. And then one day when the teachers were doing guided loving-kindness practice, I had that feeling and I said, oh, that's what they're talking about.

So both this compassion and this love and care have become important parts of my life. They were not something that I searched for, were not something that I tried to make happen, but they started to happen to me. I learned how important it is to be available to allow these things to happen to me, to allow myself to be present for experience.

In that allowing, at different times, when the conditions are ripe, maybe you'll feel friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy in the joy of others, and a certain kind of equanimous love, loving equanimity. All of these are a manifestation that we care about ourselves, we care about others, we care enough to try to want to bring an end to suffering. We care enough to want to care.

This desire to care, the wish to be caring, the wish to love, the wish to be compassionate, is in fact the beginning of care, love, and compassion. This wish, hope, aspiration is one of the beautiful qualities of being human; they are beautiful qualities of human nature. It's invaluable not to diminish its role in our lives, but to make room for it.

Life unfolds so much better for everyone, for ourselves and others, if we can relax, accept and make room for the wish, the aspiration to make a better world for everyone, for ourselves and everyone else. That aspiration is ultimately an expression of awakening itself.

This was the Buddha's wish. That's what he lived for after his awakening. To whatever degree we awaken to what is in our own hearts, awaken to what's in our own minds, awaken to the wish, the aspiration, let's live with it. Let's care for it. Let's care for ourselves and let's care for others.

So, thank you very much and I'm looking forward to sharing this part of my life over these next few days with you. Thank you.