

Dharmette: Aspects of Love (5 of 5) Equanimous Love

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So, hello, and welcome to this fifth talk on the different aspects of love, different forms of love. And today's topic is the fourth of the *brahma-vihāras*, the divine abodes. The fourth being usually just called equanimity, *upekkhā* in Pāli. And many people can't quite understand, often people can't understand, that equanimity can be a form of love, because equanimity might be closely related to indifference, to not caring. But in fact, this equanimity *brahma-vihāra* definitely comes with care, definitely comes not with indifference, not aloofness or passivity, but rather it's with a realism. It's love that has a realistic assessment of the situation.

And one of the ways that it's, so it's love with wisdom. And one of the ways that this manifests itself is to recognize that sometimes we cannot help someone. You can have all the compassion in the world. You can have all the kindness in the world. But people are going to suffer. They can make the choices they do that are going to make their life hard for them.

And so rather than despairing, rather than giving up love, there is a love that still remains. There is a love which is equanimous. That is, it doesn't get caught in despair, doesn't get caught in anger, doesn't get caught in, I should be able to do something, and kind of relating, you know, taking responsibility for someone else. But we realize everyone has a certain degree of self-responsibility. The dignity of allowing people to have their autonomy to make their own choices is one of the great forms of freedom we give to people. People who don't have autonomy feel somehow stuck and feel oppressed.

And so there's a way that sooner or later we have to allow people to make their own choices. And so the equanimity of this love that can be present, and be warm-hearted to people, while not being somehow dispirited by the challenge of the person you're with. And so with this

kind of equanimity love, it's a love that can accompany people. We're not rejecting people. We're still there with them. And we still offer our care, we offer our kindness, we offer our presence.

And maybe our presence is enough, that we're there with our love. And maybe this is where it's a love that's not dependent on anything in the world itself. It's not dependent on the person getting better, not dependent on the person making right choices. It doesn't depend on anything. And it's a love which is stronger than the vagaries of change. It's stronger than all the different possible directions and ways that things can unfold.

Love is there. And it's related to a form of peace. I think of this equanimous love as being a peaceful love, a love which is not ruffled by what's happening in the world. And it's very difficult, this kind of equanimity. It's considered a very, kind of, it comes with a lot of practice, because with mindfulness practice, we're slowly learning how to separate out all the impurities, the dross, the dust, that's in the way of our love.

There can be kindness that we offer, but we want something in return. We want to be appreciated for our kindness. We want to be thanked. We want to be recognized as a kind person, get a badge for how kind we are. Or we want to, I remember the first time that I was sickeningly kind to a young woman was I was attracted to her. And so I was trying to act really kind to make an impression.

And when I finished that conversation and left, I felt I was a little bit sickened with myself. So there's a lot of extra stuff that came into it. And same thing with compassion. Sometimes the acts of compassion are more about trying to take care of our own discomfort and make our own discomfort go away than it is caring for someone else. Appreciative joy can be complicated. Sometimes there could be joy and appreciation, but maybe there's an over-identification with the other person.

So we're kind of allowing our happiness to be dependent on the happiness of someone else. And so equanimity is when these things have been kind of cleared out, and there's very little ego, very little, you know, self-centered desire, self-centered aversion. There's no self in the picture of this kind of objectless love. It's just love that's there in a peaceful way. And to see it as a strength, I kind of think of it as an impersonal strength. It's personal in that it arises from you in a certain kind of way, but it's not personal in the sense that it's not something you construct or choose or do.

It's something you tap into, something you allow, something you can feel, and then let it be there. Let it be with a situation. And this is invaluable because it allows us to love in difficult

situations. And some situations certainly call on it, and it doesn't, you know, sometimes it's the best thing we can do. And this equanimity *brahma-vihāra* is sometimes called grand, I usually originally heard it as grandmotherly love, grandparently, grandparents' love.

With the idea, and I've been a single parent, I'm not a single parent, but a new parent. And as a new parent, you know, every little thing was a drama in concern, and should we call the doctor or something. It was such, but the grandparents, they took it, their kids' grandparents took everything much more equanimously. They had raised kids, they'd been around little kids. They knew that when a kid fell on the playground and scraped their knee, that this didn't mean calling 911. This just meant to be calm and loving and caring and be present for the kid in a non-anxious way.

To stay equanimous. The kid doesn't feel like the situation has gotten out of hand because the parent now is losing it. The kid feels like, oh, there's stability, there's a known world, there's a safe world here. And what's happened here is in the realm of the safety, the safe world. What's happened to me is painful, but I'm being cared for by someone who's calm and present and certainly cares about me, but, you know, offers the kiss to the knee, but is not activated, anxious, not alarmed by it.

So this grandparently love, that sometimes we don't need to be alarmed. Sometimes we don't need to be caught up in what it means to us personally. We can just show up with love, show up and see what happens and see what emerges. And sometimes that's what's needed. Many people don't need to be fixed. Many people, and they don't need us to fix them.

Many people need to be loved, need to be cared for, need to be in the presence of someone who is willing to see them with clarity, but with a simplicity of love. Maybe a love that doesn't need anything in return. And maybe sometimes that might seem a little passive because many people want an exchange. They want something to happen. They want to know. They want to get praised. They want to have something in return.

So it can be a little bit awkward for some people. But generally, I think that if you stay present in a caring way and engage in the conversation, I think that you'll win them over, or you'll demonstrate something powerful for them. So the love of equanimity, and one of the phrases that's used for this kind of love, is, the choices you make are your own, and I still love you. And so may we love everyone, and may we know the appropriate love in these different circumstances we're in. I think of care as being the foundational, from which the other four grow.

I've heard people who believe that equanimity is the foundation. Equanimous love is the foundation for the other three *brahma-vihāras*, that the other three arise out of this more

fundamental love of equanimity. So, however it is, your way is the right way, if you're loving any one of these five different ways. And may the end of this year be one that stays you close to your capacity for care, kindness, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity. So that you can begin this next year having that be one of the primary characteristics of how you go through the year. May this next year be one of love.

So I offer you these wishes for the new year, because I won't be here next week. And I'm having a little vacation time with my family. And next week, I'm going to see who it's going to be next week, is Kim Allen. So you're very fortunate to have Kim. Wonderful teacher, with tremendous care in how she teaches, and intelligence and kindness. And so she's wonderful to follow up, and she'll guide you into the new year.

I'll be back the following week with the first day I'll be at IRC. And what the plan is for the beginning of the year is to, in the last few years, I've been giving a long series of instructions that are basic meditation instructions. I did a *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. I did *Ānāpānasati Sutta* for a whole period of time. The four foundations of mindfulness, the mindfulness of breathing. And what I'd like to do this next beginning of the year is to do instructions on concentration practice, on *samādhi*.

And *samādhi* and mindfulness, I'll talk about this. I don't see them as being two separate paths, but they work together. But it is useful sometimes to just kind of focus on the *samādhi* aspect of it. So that's what I'll do, and we'll do it slowly over these days and weeks. So hopefully you'll follow along well enough and get some benefit from this very important topic.

And finally, if I may mention that if any of you are interested in supporting IMC and IRC, there is an end-of-the-year letter that I wrote that you'll find on, I think a link to it that you can cut and paste is on the YouTube channel for this show, this presentation. And then, but also on IMC's website and on the donate page. So thank you for everyone for your support and for your kindness and for your participation here for this last year. And I find it's phenomenally wonderful that we have this time together and that we'll go forward into the new years. So thank you very much.