

Dharmete: Love (2) Chosing Love

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So welcome now to this second talk on love. Love is an integral part of Buddhist practice and a Buddhist life. And of course, the word love in English has so many different meanings. But it's still a valuable word to use because almost it touches so many different ways in which the heart can radiate warmth and goodwill and kindness. And so in Buddhism we don't leave love to chance, to accident. There's actually an orientation towards supporting and growing our capacity for a kind of deep, healthy love, goodwill, kindness, compassion, care, deep appreciation, joy, that it's an important part of human life.

And the kind of love that Buddhism focuses on is different than romantic love, it's different than certainly sexual desire. It's different than a kind of holding on attachment to ways in which we are praised or held up. There's a whole many ways in which people associate love that's complicated and involve some attachment and clinging and conceit. And there's a way of love that does not involve conceit, does not involve attachment, that speaks to the goal of Buddhism, which is liberation. And one of the forms of liberation, one of the ways to attain this liberation, is liberation through love, through loving-kindness, through compassion.

And it's remarkable that these sentiments of *mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*, goodwill, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity, that they exist within us and we can cultivate them, we can grow them, we can develop them, and that they come with non-attachment, that they support non-attachment. They support a softening and relaxing of all the places we are attached and clinging and tight and afraid and angry and resentful and desirous, greedy. There's a way in which it's one of the ways Buddhist practice unfolds is not only through mindfulness but through the influence, the wonderful power of this softening power of love, where it's hard in the face of love to stay angry. It's hard in the face of love to stay afraid. It's hard in the face of this deep, heartfelt love to stay caught in desires. And it's remarkable to allow this to spread and to open and be part of this.

And the two go hand in hand, that mindfulness in some ways helps us to relax our attachments, our preoccupations, our clinging, which opens up to love. And love then does the same action and begins softening and relaxing. But then we open up more to being mindful, to being present. The fullness of love only happens when we can really be present. The fullness of being really present opens up to love. And at some point, not a few people discover that to be aware, to be really settled in the present moment, very attentive, very attuned and connected to oneself, that that kind of mindfulness is synonymous or is continuous with, or deeply intimate with, love.

And love is deeply connected to mindfulness. Mindfulness is not dry. Mindfulness is not this abstract kind of way of being attentive. That it's filled with a warmth, it's filled with goodwill and kindness, compassion as these different ones are needed. So the power of love is represented in this very famous poem from the *Dhammapada*. And this poem is very much associated from the time of the Buddha, down through history, to just a poem itself to be very transformative of people in quite dramatic ways.

Right. And maybe it touches something in the heart. So the poem goes something like this:

Hate is not overcome by hate. Hate is only overcome by love. This is the ancient teaching.

And in the time of the Buddha, this was a verse that was associated with a man who was quite evil. It was a murderer Āngulimāla. And that somehow he was transformed in the context of the Buddha. And this was his understanding. Maybe he had a lot of hate. That's why maybe he was so terrible. But to try to make the world better for yourself through more hate, getting rid of everything, it doesn't really work. It's only through love.

There's a famous story of the first kind of major emperor of India named Aśoka, that apparently he was quite a cruel, conquering king in his early monarchy, and was involved with great battles, with tens of thousands, the texts say 100,000 deaths in the battlefield. And there's a story of him standing in the middle of the battlefield. Apparently he won the battle. But he was standing there in the battlefield in the midst of all this carnage. And coming across the field was a Buddhist monk who walked in a very stately, mindful, peaceful way. He just was walking through the field on his way to some place. And the king had never seen anybody like this. He only knew war and soldiers and anger and aggression maybe.

And so he asked the monk a question about, you know, what is your teaching? What are you about? And the monk said to him, hate is not overcome, hate is not overcome by hate. Hate is only overcome by love. This is the ancient teaching. And somehow to hear that out of the

mouth of this peaceful sage, this transformed King Ásoka. And then he became a nonviolent king and became known for his dedication to nonviolence and stopping the slaughter of animals, all kinds of things.

More recently, at the end of World War II, Japan had been conquered, had been vanquished. And there were different powers at that time who claimed stake to different parts of Japan because it was a conquered nation. Mostly United States was in charge. And about eight years, I think, six years after World War II was over, there were something like 30 or 50 nations that gathered in San Francisco, I think at the Opera House, to have a big meeting to discuss what was supposed to happen to Japan. Would Japan get carved up, and different nations would take different parts to become their own, since Japan had been conquered? Or would Japan become an independent nation again, which people were afraid of?

They were afraid of Japan becoming strong again and becoming a, you know, a, you know, a conquering country. And they couldn't decide. And the foreign minister from Sri Lanka stood up in these difficult conversations and disagreements, and gave a speech talking about his brothers and sisters in Japan, and how Japan was kind of part of the family of nations, I believe, he said. But then he recited this poem, hate is never overcome by hate. Hate is only overcome by love. This is the ancient teaching. And when he said that, the way this story of this, all these prime ministers and foreign ministers of all these countries in this difficult conversations, they all relaxed, and they all then decided that they would allow Japan to become an independent nation again.

So the power of love... And how can we tap into it? How can we learn to recognize it more often? And the suggestion I have is that your capacity for love, for care, for kindness is actually much more often available than you avail yourself of. It's there. If you can somehow look past your fear, look past your anger, look past your desires, look past your anxieties.

If you can somehow not be living in anxiety, living in desires, living in aversion, in a way that if we... But can you be mindful? Can you be aware in a different way? If you're aware anxiously of your anxiety, it feeds the anxiety. If you're aware angrily of your anger, it feeds your anger. If you're aware desirously of your desire, it feeds your desire. But if you can be aware of your anxiety, kindly, gently, softly, it doesn't feed it.

If you can be aware of your anger and hatred, kindly, softly, it doesn't feed it. If you can be aware, softly, kindly, it feeds your kindness. It frees your love. May you begin now at the beginning of this year to take love and kindness a little bit more seriously than you usually do, to follow along now as we set out this course of practice around love and kindness, to explore it, to consider it, to think about it, to talk about it. May it be that we are on a journey

of love, which takes us to the heart of what the Buddha had to teach. Thank you.