

Dharmette: Love (5) Love Free of Self.

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January 09, 2026

Keywords: Buddha, mindfulness, liberation, freedom, social emotions, self-concern, love, goodwill, compassion, equanimity

Hello and welcome to this fifth talk in the ongoing series on love from a Buddhist point of view. And to culminate this week, which is more an introduction to the topic and preparing us for going deeper into the practice of love, the... Part of what Buddhism is addressing is the certain form of preoccupation, attachment that humans have that have to do with self-concern. And it isn't that we're not supposed to have self-concern, but preoccupation with that, and attachment to that is exhausting, is tiring, it's very limiting. It's kind of like over-preoccupation with one thing, and we miss the whole. And the whole of our experience is much more than anything that we can think about as me, myself, and mine.

And part of what we're doing in Buddhist practice is opening up to the whole. Opening up to that which arises, exists, is present. Right, when attention is not limited, not held in check, not caught in preoccupations. And when we come to the practice of love in Buddhism, it's very easy to approach it from the point of view of self, self-concern, self-preoccupation, what's in it for me. And sometimes there are people who are looking for a good feeling. They're looking for how to feel good or how to feel better about themselves.

And of course those things are healthy to do, but it's still involved and caught in this little world, or big world, of me, myself, and mine. And Buddhism is pointing to something radically different. The liberation and freedom that Buddhism is pointing to is a kind of freedom from this self-concern, self-preoccupation. And a wonderful way that this is described in the Buddha's teachings, he describes that as we practice, we start having insight. We clearly see how some of the social emotions we have keep us in check, how they limit us, how they disturb us. So the Heelig is a list of 17 different social emotions.

So greed can be social if we want what other people have. Ill will and hatred can often be about other people. Envy and jealousy is often that way. Annoyance, spite, resentment...

And then he goes through all these different things. And the idea in practice is to be very honest about these.

This practice of mindfulness is meant to be a radical honesty about what we're doing, not a headlong rush into some kind of alternative liberation, someplace that goes beyond it too quickly. The idea is to stop and really be present and see clearly what's going on here. See how there's self-concern involved, me, myself and mine. There's attachment involved, there's clinging involved. To really see the constructed nature, how resentments arise with thoughts and ideas and memories and hurts, to really see the ecology of these things. Until we see them as being constructed, we see them as being conditioned, to see them as phenomena that comes and goes, see them as not even personal exactly.

They're just the nature of phenomena coming and going. And rather being stuck with them, to have this very clear awareness of them, that we see that they are inconstant. They come and they go, they arise and they pass. So much so that we don't have to identify with them. We can let go. We see that they're not permanent.

They pass, even if they return. And in that passing, in the times when they're not there, to appreciate that in a profound way and to be inspired, that it is possible to be free. It is possible not to have these social emotions, social attachments. They're all the time. And then so to begin to relax into that, to really see in a profound way the possibility of being alive, maybe in meditation, where we're radically free of all these social emotions born of attachments, born of clinging, and to know that this freedom is possible. And to be inspired by that, to be glad by that, to kind of fall in love with that.

And to begin shifting the way that we experience ourselves. So we're now experiencing ourselves in what's in it for me, what's happening to me, who am I in relationship to this? I'm a wrong person, I'm a good person, I deserve something. I'm, you know, there's a certain attachment to being, feeling like you're overly responsible for everything. And that some people feel like they shouldn't exist. And Buddhism is a problem sometimes, because you say, well, there's a self here and I'm not supposed to have a self, and therefore I'm a bad self.

And so it goes. And to have all that come to a stop, to see it as conditioned, as constructed, to see the other side of it, it's not always there, to begin intuiting and sensing a freedom within that's not based on that whole world of social emotions. And to discover this, that there is something else that arises naturally. And here the way the Buddha describes this is that he doesn't talk about the practice of love, he just talks about the radiance of love. That when we realize in some deep, deep way this an alternative way of being alive, that's not self-

preoccupied, not other preoccupied, preoccupied in other people, then there is something here which you can't take as being yourself in the conventional way, but there's something that radiates, something that emerges, something that just flows.

That cannot flow for stress, that cannot flow if we're caught in anger and hostility. And if we see the world through those lenses, it's actually impossible to see that there is a gentleness, a tenderness, a warmth, a kindness, a caringness. There is love that has no object. It doesn't have to have a reason to be there. It's just a natural radiance, the natural warmth of the heart. And you become warmed by that, without needing anything in return, without needing anyone to love you.

And it's just a natural warmth of love, of goodwill, of compassion, of deep loving appreciation, deep loving equanimity. There is a natural capacity for love that doesn't require us to practice it for it to be there. But it does require us to get out of the way. And I offer this not because it's easy to do, but I offer this teaching today so that you put a little question mark behind it the common human tendency to be self-preoccupied. What's in it for me, me, myself and mine. And put a question mark, it doesn't have to be this way.

It isn't a matter of, you know, figuring out a better way to be a self, to get what you want or to feel good. That's just rearranging the deck chairs in the Titanic. It doesn't really provide access to this deeper experience of freedom, which in a certain kind of way is impersonal, a certain kind of way is universal, a certain kind of way is arising out of you. It's not arising out of anybody else. And one way that I understand it is that we don't, in this practice of Buddhism, we're becoming free of being self-centered. We're also becoming free of being other-centered.

Right? Centered on other people and their concerns. But the alternative to those two is to be situation-centered. And situation-centered means that you're in the situation that's there, that's much more than just you, but it happens to be that you are the center of it. There is no other center for your direct experience than what's right here. It happens to be a coincidence that in your experience you're the center.

And that the world is born out of you, awareness is born out of you. This is where radiance of attention arises, is here, centered here where you are, in the natural functioning of your mind and body. And it doesn't stop with you. We're situation-centered, so we're deeply aware of what's here. Aware of our feelings, emotions, our thoughts, our physical experiences. But without that extra gripping, holding me, myself and mine.

And so then we're taking, we're not ignoring other people. They're an extension of our situa-

tion that we're in. We include those in our scope of our attention naturally. When we're not limiting ourselves... And so this ability to settle, relax, open deeply, being situation-centered, so that a peaceful kind of love, peaceful goodwill, peaceful care, peaceful tender gentleness, peaceful resonance can spread from us into the world.

And this is the wonderful way that love in Buddhism is taught. Love doesn't need an object, but love can have an object if it runs into one. So this different orientation. So if what I said made sense for you today, maybe now over the day and over the weekend, you can see and explore for yourself. Is there for you some form of love that needs no object, needs no reason, some form of love or something in the family of love that is simply here when you're relaxed and settled in a deep way, when you're the most relaxed, most settled, is there a quiet inner sense, movement, gentleness, warmth that might just might be a small seed of love that can sprout and grow.

May you discover that. And we'll continue next week and for a few weeks now on this topic of love. And I hope that this gives you a new way of being with yourself, being in the world. And may it benefit all of us. Thank you.