

Dharmette: Love (7) Mindful with Deep Love

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So welcome to this series of talks on the kind of Buddhist ideas of love, as I've come to understand them. And love is one of the really important central aspects of Buddhism and Buddhist practice. Sometimes it's expressed through the idea of *mettā* or kindness, loving kindness, goodwill. Sometimes it's expressed through the idea of compassion. And sometimes it's expressed towards some kind of basic nurturing care that we can have. That may be deeper and may be simpler than both loving kindness and compassion.

But one way or the other, love is at the center of it all. And so exploring it, discovering it, not assuming that we know everything about love, but to be engaged in an ever-growing, deepening discovery of what it is and all its parameters and ways and means. And certainly for me, it's been one of the great joys of these decades of Buddhist practice. It's to keep discovering new areas, new ways that this operates for us. New capacities for love, for care.

And so, as I said in the meditation, there's a famous verse in *Dhammapada* that goes, love, no, it goes, hate is never overcome by hate. By love alone is hate overcome. This is the ancient truth. And we know all too much and all too painfully how much hate there is in this world, how much hate now exists in this country where many of us are in the United States, how much hate there is elsewhere in the world, and how much violence, how much deep disrespect, disrespect is saying it too lightly, ways in which people treat each other in this world. And it's very easy to hate hate. It's very easy to meet hate with more hate.

But what is it like to overcome hate by love? And can we be motivated to do so, to discover what that is, from this ancient teaching, that hate isn't overcome by hate, by love alone, is it overcome? And we've seen, you know, we see so much these cycles of hate that it goes on and on and on. Can there be cycles of love?

So... Part of this reason I wanted to highlight this poem is that we don't want to condemn hate or hate hate. To really transform it, we have to discover something about love and how to hold all of it with love. And I propose that it's, or my assumption is, it's actually a much harder thing to do than to meet hate with hate. And it requires much more from the person who's going to love, much more self-understanding, much more attention, much more discipline, much more strength to be able to do this in an effective and intelligent way.

But one way or the other, we want to, part of that is to understand well hate or ill will itself. And that's one of the wonderful aspects of mindfulness practice, is that we want to be present for things. Right? So if we can't, maybe we can't love our hate or love ill will. But in mindfulness practice, we want to step towards it and feel it and know it and have a non-reactive relationship to it, not to give into it, but in order to not give into it, but to respect that even ill will, even hate, represents something very deep in us, very important part of a human being.

And to condemn it, we might actually create the very conditions to perpetuate it. Because in order to have ill will, we're kind of living in a very limited way. We're living on the surface of our whole psychophysical human being. We're not allowing the full range of who we are to be here. But condemnation is the same thing. It limits us.

There's this art of becoming present and attentive to ill-will, to hatred, not to give into it, as I said, but rather to be part of this movement to be inclusive, to be able to feel and sense the fullness of our humanity. I understand hatred and ill-will to partly be a survival mechanism. And so when we live for the purpose of survival, we're kind of living in our muscles, living on the surface of experience, ready to react, ready to fight, ready to run away. And sometimes that's effective. Sometimes hate manages to succeed in getting rid of what is hated. But the cost is huge.

But if we begin opening up to the fullness of ourselves and settle on ourselves, then it's no longer about survival. With our fear, it gets quiet enough, settled enough, soft enough, relaxed enough. If our ill will relaxes enough, as we begin sensing and feeling from a different place, knowing from a different place, from some kind of inner depth. It's the inner depth that is also a source of survival. But it's the survival in the long term.

How we create healthy babies, healthy children, is to love them. If you yell and hit a little newborn baby because it's crying too much, you'll create the conditions for a very distorted upbringing and maybe the conditions for violence or violence, terror, fear. But if that newborn baby is, even though it's crying and crying loudly, if it's held with care, with love and appreciation, warmth, this creates a very different future. So this whole question of hate and

love has a lot to do with what future we want to create. And we don't want to just focus on short-term survival, but also long-term survival.

That works best if we don't create any enemies. Works best if we meet the world in a way of this deeper place of nourishment, nurturing. And maybe it's not the muscles, but maybe it's more hormonal. Maybe it's more elements of the heart or something deeper in the nervous system. And so one of the ways of finding this is to make a radical, almost paradigm change from how many people live.

And that is we often focus on the objects of attention, what we can see, what we can know, what we're thinking about. And of course that's an important part of life. But what we begin doing in mindfulness is take that backward step where we're not identifying with what we see, identifying with what we're thinking about, identify with what we're feeling. But we become interested in how we know, how we see, how we feel. And when we start doing that, we learn so much about ourselves.

We learn how limiting it is to see the world through hatred and aversion. We see how limited it is to see the world through greed or fear. We see the cost it has on us, the tension, the stress, and how so much of ourselves, who we are, full human being, is left out. And so to be able to ask, how are we in a deep way? And to discover that is a lot to do with what mindfulness is about.

And so to repeat myself, part of the principle here is not be so concerned about what you know, what you're thinking, what you're seeing, what you're experiencing, but rather how you're experiencing, how you know, how you see, how you feel. It's possible to see and know and feel calmly. It's possible to know and feel non-reactively. And it's possible to know and feel and how we think is from a place of love, from a place of care.

The kind of love that is maybe a very mature adult for a variation, development, extension, of the kind of care we would give a newborn baby, the kind of care we would give to a wounded animal that... or a friend who's in distress, or the kind of care we would give to something we think is beautiful and we care for and want to polish it and take care of it and keep it clean. The deep kind of loving, a deep kind of that comes from some kind of inner warmth, inner depth, inner clarity, an inner strength that knows that love doesn't, a love that doesn't need a reason. Of freedom that doesn't need a reason, a generosity that doesn't need a reason. It's just the nature of the good heart to love, to be generous, to be kind, to be respectful.

And in a sense, we're almost doing those things for ourselves. Because we've discovered that to not do that, to not live that way, is in fact a way to harm ourselves. Why would you make

things worse for yourself by hating? And the only way that I can convey that to you believe me is if you really do this practice of mindfulness to really see for yourself. How are you? What's the effect of how you live and how you see and how you feel and the attitudes that you're living by?

You'll learn what limits you, what holds you in check. And you'll learn about the depth of beauty, the depth of love that you can offer to the world, not because you want to, but because that's what the nature of this love is, is to radiate, be present, independent of whether anyone deserves it or needs it, but because it's kind of our nature. This deep, nurturing nature that we see in new parents, that we see in how we care for maybe an aging relative on their deathbed, dying peacefully, but us caring gently for them. We can live our life this way. It doesn't have to be just at birth and death that this comes out of us.

But throughout our life, hate is not overcome by hate. By love alone is it overcome. This is the ancient teaching. So thank you.

And just a reminder, or for those of you who haven't heard, I'm having a public conversation this evening at 6 p.m. with Mosin Madani, who is the wonderful proponent of what I'm teaching today. It's a coincidence that this year I'm talking about love. And he's a wonderful Buddhist practitioner who teaches about love and to come from love and not fear and And this wonderful message that he has, has placed him, maybe not by choice, in the public eye, because he's one of these Palestinian students at Columbia University who was arrested and detained and almost deported.

And he's a bright proponent of love, of care, and building bridges of care between different communities that are normally challenged by each other. So this would be a wonderful conversation, and you can learn about it at the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies, sati.org. And on the calendar there, you'll see it. You have to register to get the Zoom link. So may this day of yours be bracketed by conversations on love and everything in between. And thank you.