

Dharmette: Love (12) Metta as Spontaneous Friendliness

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Hello and welcome to this 12th talk on the topic of love.

And there's many kinds of love or many things in the family of love. And so each person has their own specialty or what is easiest for them. And so you're all welcome to define what works for you, what warm-heartedness, kind-heartedness, what you would call friendliness or kindness or *mettā*. But the focus here now is on *mettā*, the form of love that in the Buddhist tradition is most clearly associated with friendliness, friendship.

The... So there's an ancient definition of *mettā*. *Mettā* is goodwill because it is friendly. It refers to a tender friendliness, a gentle friendliness. It is known as *mettā* because it arises in one's relationship to a friend, *mitta*.

So, what is the smile that comes on your face, on your heart when you see a good friend? A friend whose relationship is uncomplicated, kind of clean, simple, happy relationship. Or maybe a friend you haven't seen for a long time and then you see them. And to... So maybe each person, I think the way that they experience friendship, or it maybe varies, but the characteristics of maybe being undistracted, being available, being really present for a few minutes, because you're still delighted to see someone, present and kind of a generous spirit, maybe a generous spirit, maybe a willingness to... to great willingness to do almost anything for your friend within reason, but just willing to do whatever is needed now, to be generous, to be caring, to be respectful and inclusive.

Not because you're working on it, but that which is natural, that which is kind of almost spontaneous for you, that your heart moves or sings or smiles in a way that you want to move forward and delight and appreciate, and maybe offer what you can, offer your attention, offer your interest, offer your questions of how they are, knowing how they are, offer them tea. Please come, it's so good to see you. And what I want to emphasize here is the spontaneity of

that as opposed to the working at it, as opposed to trying to engineer friendliness or warmth or *mettā* or goodwill, but to recognize kind of a spontaneous, almost natural place in which that can exist in us.

And so this is why mindfulness meditation, meditation in general, *samādhi* as well, is so phenomenally useful. Because doing a practice that helps us to be undistracted, to be not only undistracted, but in a certain kind of way, unresisting, undefended in a safe environment, sitting and meditating, that we start feeling... free of preoccupations with desires, preoccupations with resentments, preoccupations with stories and conversations and pasts and futures. But we start kind of being attuned, tuning into a natural capacity, spontaneous capacity for the heart to resonate or to vibrate, or like the heart is an antenna, and the heart center as an antenna that then picks up the signals coming from others just by how they're seeing them, hearing about them, hearing their voice.

But as we get quieter and quieter, less and less distracted, and the thinking mind becomes still, it allows for the feeling heart to be, to operate freely, the feeling heart to kind of radiate or vibrate or resonate or become, maybe the word I like is become sensitive, a deeper sensitivity. And often the heart is encrusted and mindfulness practice, meditation practice, is the tenderizer of that crust so that the natural sensitivity, the natural functioning of that antenna that both receives and radiates can operate.

So it's not so much the doing something as it is allowing. Not so much a matter of mustering something up as it is letting things go, but not just letting go kind of without a purpose, but letting go and letting go into the sensitive heart, letting go into a tender heart, a gentle heart, letting go into the kind of heart that can smile, a smiling heart, letting into a kind of peaceful heart, where what comes into the range of that peaceful heart is met with, almost without a doing, just met with safety, met with openness, met with space, where whatever comes is allowed to be there, whatever person shows up, is allowed to be that way in the embrace of our appreciation.

And whatever *mettā* is, it's closely connected to appreciating others, appreciating what's there. And it's sometimes said in the ancient texts that one of the stimulating causes, stimulating conditions for this *mettā* is appreciating the beauty in others, appreciating beauty. And the amazing thing is that if we are undistracted, unpreoccupied, at ease, at peace in ourselves, it turns out that it's easier to see beauty in everyone. Maybe not always how they behave, maybe not always how they appear. But there is something profoundly wonderful about resonating with the humanity of others, the life form that another is, that allows us to appreciate and delight in every human being in the way that maybe some people delight in

every cat, delight in every deer they see in the park, or every squirrel, or maybe every robin sitting on a tree.

That we begin kind of dropping our social conventions, our social history, our social conditioning around people and our fears and our desires around people, and allowing something very simple, natural to be there, where maybe we see beauty in ourselves and beauty in others, beauty in the simplicity of a being. And that from that there might be a radiance or a warmth or a light or a tenderness or a delight, a joy of friendliness. Saying a yes. Almost like, not necessarily literally, but almost like we step forward with our arms open and say yes to the person worthy. Yes, I'll be a friend. I'll be friendly at least. Maybe we can't be friends, but I'll treat you with friendship, with basic human goodwill.

So as you go through today, I'd encourage you to allow yourself the luxury, the gift, the phenomenal gift of staying present a little bit in an undistracted way, in an unpreoccupied way. Just have tea, just sit there, just sit and be open and available. Maybe you can go to a park bench or sit someplace where you can watch people walk by. And what happens if you're undistracted? You're not commenting on everyone, judging everyone, caught in your stories, but just very simply, being open and available to appreciate and have your heart say yes. Yes to everyone who walks by.

Is there in you a natural, spontaneous capacity for goodwill, for friendliness that is there when you are not distracted, not preoccupied, not afraid, not angry? See if you can find occasions through the day where you are that way. Maybe you can put all that aside even for three minutes. Breathe, relax, soften, and see what is there in your own heart that can say yes in appreciation of others. May we learn... the art of spontaneous friendship so that it can be directed towards all beings. Thank you.