

Holding Oneself Dear

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To see, you know, I'm still learning how to use my hearing aids. So I thought, what if I leave them in but turn them off? Because if I keep them on, then my voice will get even lower, which doesn't work. But I thought, maybe if I turn them off, that maybe I won't... But then it just found it really funny. So... That was a little experiment. Sorry to give you more details than you need.

So there's a famous story coming out of the ancient texts of a conversation that a king and queen had with the Buddha. It seems that the queen, or the king, maybe he was... I could imagine that maybe he was a little bit conceited. Occasionally, that's what happens to kings. And it kind of makes it richer, the story. Right. For me.

And so he says to the queen, who do you hold most dear? The word is *piya* in *Pāli*, p-a-p-i-y-a. It could also mean who do you love the most, who do you cherish the most? And I imagine that he was just expecting her to say, well, you, my dear, which maybe is kind of what many people want their partner to say. And to his surprise, she said, myself, which in some circles would be, what? That's conceited. You're not allowed to cherish yourself more than anybody else. That's too self-centered or something. But she said, no, myself.

And that was didn't... So there was a different opinion here between the couple. So they decided to go and ask the Buddha. They explained to the Buddha what the conversation was. And he said, the Buddha said, she's right. Each person holds themselves most dear.

And so I don't know if everybody does that. That seems a bit of a bold statement to make that claim for everyone. But how I take it is that for the Buddha, he felt it was appropriate to hold yourself dear, to cherish yourself, to value yourself. Each person is most dear for themselves. And he didn't say that as a way to promote selfishness, self-preoccupation, and ignore other people. I think it's the opposite.

If you hold yourself most dear, then you want the best in you for yourself, which is not to win the California lottery and such things. What the best for yourself is to learn to become free of all the impulses, all the drives that inside of us where we harm ourselves, so that we can experience the profound capacity for peace, for love, for goodness that we are, and offer that to the world. And I've sometimes, I think maybe I did it here at some point recently, but I kind of counsel people sometimes that it's okay to tell a spouse that you love the *Dharma* more than you love your spouse. But this is the reason why it's okay, and hopefully you'll get away with it. Thank you.

And to love the *Dharma* really means this. You take yourself most dear and you're doing the practices that are freedom, the practices really lets go of your hindrances, lets go of your attachments. Is that if you really dedicate yourself to the *Dharma* and you love the *Dharma* more than your spouse, your partner, then you have more love for your partner. So they get to choose. Would you like to have less love? And it's mostly directed to you. Would you like to get more love? Because I go along with my love of the *Dharma*. So hopefully, my idea, if they would choose, allow you to love the *Dharma*, because they benefit more from that.

The idea of exclusivity, that's a little bit maybe a source of suffering. So this idea of cherishing oneself, caring for oneself, loving oneself, seeing oneself as dear, done the right way is not selfishness. It's the opposite of it. It leads to a kind of profound freedom from self-preoccupation and conceit, and allows us to live in the world in a very generous way, open-hearted way, caring way, that maybe helps us to see the beauty in others that we can't see if we don't see it in ourselves. If we don't cherish ourselves, don't value ourselves, don't love ourselves, we might not be able to really do it in a genuine, full way for others also.

And I know it's hard to do that for oneself. Some of us have internalized all kinds of things from family, society, religion, that gets in the way of really feeling it's okay to have this kind of love, I dropped the word self-love, the self. Just love for what's here, caring for what's here. At some point, this kind of cherishing, loving, recognizing the depth and the beauty and what's possible within ourselves, it no longer needs the word self around it. In fact, sometimes you'll feel at some point when you're really settled into it that somehow the little word self and the self-orientation is a little extra, a little grating, grating even.

It's just kind of this very radical simplicity of the here's where the love is, cherishing this, valuing this. This is important. This is invaluable. And if you're not able to do that for yourself, and there's a way in which no one else can really do it for you at some really deep, profound place. So this teaching of... Each person holds themselves most dear is, I take it as an encouragement, to really care for yourself well. And that's what the *Dharma* practice can be

for.

And then we care for others. And that's also another story that's famous in the tradition of, that's worth repeating, if you've heard it, the acrobat story. There was an acrobat and an acrobat's assistant or trainee. And apparently they did acrobatic tricks on each other's body. One of them would stand, the other one would do balance on their head or somersaults on the shoulders or something. I don't know what they did, but whatever acrobats do on someone else's body. And now climbing up on top.

And so the master acrobat was going to stand below and the apprentice was supposed to stand on top and do something. And the master said, I'll watch over you and you watch over me and that way we'll both be safe. And the apprentice said, no, I'll watch over myself and you watch over yourself and that way we'll be safe. So again, they had a disagreement. He said, let's go ask the Buddha. And I don't know if the Buddha knows anything about acrobats, but maybe it was more like an analogy, a metaphor for him, but he said, yes, it's true.

But then he said this very interesting statement that kind of made them both true. But he said, yes, if you care for yourself, then you're able to care for others. If you care for others, then you can care for yourself. So he both, he kind of agrees with the apprentice, but then he says something that kind of agrees with both of them. And I thought that was quite lovely. Both are true in their own way. Caring for others, caring for others is a way of caring for ourselves. Caring for ourselves is a way of caring for others.

And so this spirit, this idea that we hold ourselves dear, we care for ourselves, maybe we'll care for the world better. And that would be wonderful. So please... care for yourself. Each of you is beautiful, each of you is profound, each of you is precious, and you're worth caring for. May you care for yourself carefully and well, and may we together care for this world. Thank you.