

Dharmette: Love (15) Silent Contemplative Love

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So hello and warm greetings to our ongoing series on the Buddhist versions of love. And I'm kind of delighted to be able to spend these days on this topic. And today I'm doing, I'm sitting at the Insight Retreat Center in Santa Cruz, IMC's residential retreat center. And so mostly what you see behind me is a different Buddha. But it's very nice to be here.

So what I want to emphasize, well, first of all, I want to, yeah, so start this way. That what I'd like to emphasize today is a contemplative, spiritual experience, way of being silent. A contemplative silence that's rich and kind of heartwarming, soulwarming. It touches us in the silence that feels like it's pregnant with goodness. And so what that means is a silence where the mental chatter quiets and where the preoccupations with desire and hate quiet. Where all preoccupations quiet, and so there's a higher sensitivity.

So a kind of contemplative silence that allows for a deeper sensitivity than the sensitivity that comes from thinking about things and planning things and judging things and having stories about things. And so it's a willingness to be present, willingness to be just here, in the silent awareness. Sometimes it can help to actually be in a silent place. And I think some of the times growing up where I began to have a feeling for this contemplative silence was in actual contemplative spaces in certain churches and cathedrals and the presence of some monasteries, some places in the natural world that just had a kind of delightful or profound or peaceful silence or quiet to it, that it resonated with an inner quiet, an inner silence that felt rich. It was almost like it was full of life, full of sensitivity, in a way that being full of thoughts would not allow.

And so to have this rich inner silence that allows for greater sensitivity, allows for a different kind of love than if love is based on our fantasies. Love is based on kind of our desires even. Love is based on calculations or ideas of what we're going to get or ideas of exchange or all

kinds of things that get much more complicated. Will the person accept me, will I be loved in return? And there's all this kind of busyness in the mind that can go on with the topic of love, let alone when we're not thinking about love. We're thinking about things we hate or want or are afraid of.

But to give ourselves time, I like to call it sacred time, for a kind of a contemplative silence that allows for a deeper sensitivity, a sensitivity that's in the midst of a kind of inner gentleness, the kind of gentleness with which you would hold a newborn baby. And so in that same gentleness, you'd hold yourself, not to be weak, not to be somehow overly sentimental or something, but rather there's a kind of strength of goodness there, strength of the best qualities we have that we want to bring forth at important times in life when there's a crisis with someone. And we want to just be with them and care for them. And so, but it's a deep, and the reason I want to emphasize it, is that there's a deeper sensitivity that we become attuned and recognize more of the subtlety or the details, the underlying attitudes and emotions and thoughts and ideas that we can touch with care, that deserve or are appropriate to hold in kindness.

If we know ourselves well, if we know the depths of who we are well, if we drop below the mental chatter and the shoulds and shouldn'ts and the ruminations of self-criticism and blame and delusions of grandeur and all kinds of things that go on in that surface, but if we know ourselves well really down into our deeper self, chances are you'll recognize that this is where care is needed. This is where love lives. This is where love is useful. And we can kind of have this caring love, caring gentleness, contemplative love for all of who we are. Nothing left out. Because we feel it, we see it, we know it.

It's like being with another person. Maybe they're a stranger at first, and maybe you hold your distance, maybe you're afraid, maybe you have all kinds of guesses about who they are. But then you have a chance to talk to them and you find out that all your ideas were wrong. And as they talk, you feel like you're getting to know this person in a deeper, deeper way. You know what they're feeling, you know their challenges in their life, you know the joys of their life. And the more you learn and the depth of the person, something in your depth begins to resonate, is ready to meet them, ready to care for them, ready to delight in them.

And maybe even there's a time when you start discovering this more silent way that just feels good to be with them, to share with them the silent existential challenge and joys of human life. And if they're suffering, that gentle, contemplative love is there to offer our compassion and our support. If they're delighted and happy, then we're ready to meet that with our own delight and joy and life. Happiness, the love has a quality of sparkle, sweetness. But the

emphasis here is the silence, the silence of the chatter.

And what do you feel? What do you discover in yourself when you allow for the chatter to quiet? And whatever you discover in this deeper silence, maybe you don't feel like it's contemplative silence, but if you let the chatter quiet or underneath the chatter, the quieter, deeper place inside, that's where there can be an all-embracing love, an all-accepting love. A love that's capable of holding everyone in all conditions, in all of you, in kindness, in goodwill, in care. In that way, this deeper contemplative love is not something we're negotiating. It's not something we're figuring out.

Not something we're involved in all kinds of thoughts and desires about. It doesn't have fireworks. It doesn't have the thrill of excitement that, you know, falling in love might have. It has something that's much more deep and satisfying and close to feelings of contentment, close to feelings of wholeness. So silent love, silent awareness, is the seedbed, is the source for our capacity to have empathy for others, and including empathy for ourselves.

And so, and without that, I don't know what will happen to our world. And I'm very struck that today, that a place that we both see a lack of empathy and the presence of empathy, a lack of caring for the humanity in the depths of other people. And place we are seeing that is in Minneapolis. And this is a time, I think, for us to hold in our contemplative love the people in Minneapolis who are meeting violence with nonviolence, cruelty with care and love, and lack of respect with a deep respect of neighbors, of friends, of people in the community, maybe people they have never met and talked to.

They're coming forward to support and to help and to include in their civic responsibility, in their care, in their inclusion. It's remarkable what's coming out. And may this day of silent love, silent contemplative love, may it be one that is used together to be in solidarity with all beings, all the suffering beings, including both sides and all sides of the challenges in Minneapolis. Let's hope and create a world where we can make space to all of us come together and know each other with empathy and care and with value and respect. And may this contemplative love, contemplative silence, be a phenomenal source of good in this world.

So thank you very much, and I appreciate very much the chance to teach here from IRC. And next week, I'll be back at IRC. I'm going home today, and then I'll be back on Sunday for a one-week retreat at IRC. And while I'm here, Kodo Conlin, who is a teacher for us and also the managing director, co-managing director of the Retreat Center, he'll just be, you know, a hundred yards away from where I'm teaching, offering you teaching for you for YouTube at seven o'clock next week. You're very lucky to have Kodo, and I'm delighted that his love and care and joy of the practice and joy of sharing with people will be with you.

And I'll be back the following week. So thank you very much. And please, let's bring love, not hate into this world. Thank you.