

Dharmette: Love (16) With Appreciation

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So hello everyone and welcome to the beginning of the week. We're continuing this series on love and a particular sub-theme for this week is the five components of love. I think there's many people who offer love, elements of love, aspects of love. And so I don't suggest that I'm being complete here, or the only perspective on this topic. But I'll offer you what I think of five important elements of love. And the reason for this is that love is a vague word.

It's a general broad category word. Some people call it a meta-emotion, meaning kind of a broad umbrella term for a certain range of emotions. And this is also true to some degree with the four *brahmavihāras*, the four primary loves emphasized in Buddhism, loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, that these too have components to them, and maybe the same ones that I'll be talking about. These are very important, the elements that build them up, that they come together to really form them as important qualities of our life. And so the five are appreciation, respect, rapport, goodwill, and trustworthiness. So these are the five elements of love that I'd like to emphasize.

And ideally these and maybe other things are integral parts of the love we have for other people and the love we have for ourselves. And today the topic is appreciation. I believe another way of saying that is to value other people. It's the opposite of depreciation, of deprecating people or having a lack of valuing of people, seeing them as unworthy or something. And that could be that unworthiness that people, we attribute to people, can take very subtle forms, just that these people are not worthy of my attention or sitting next to or even my smile.

And so a certain kind of dismissing of people, if not being included in their scope of our goodwill, or valuing the very humanity. And I think of appreciation as a deep valuing of others, that their right to exist, their right for our attention, that appreciating our shared humanity, that we're all in it together. We're all humans trying to find our way, and in some way we're

all doing it in unison, and we'd like to be more in unity, in cooperation. And that effort begins with ourselves, that we want to cooperate. We want to be valuing others.

And so the far enemy, Buddhism has this idea of near and far enemy, the far enemy is clearly the opposite. So deprecating someone rather than appreciating them would maybe one form of the opposite. Seeing people as unworthy of attention, of our smiles, of our good-will, is opposite of appreciation, of valuing them. But then there's also the near enemy. And the near enemy, I'd like to suggest for appreciation, is appropriation.

And I use that word partly because it's a little bit similar to appreciation, but also appropriate is to make something one's own. And there's not a few people who associate love with a very strong desire to have. Love is more a desire for a strong compulsion of desire, sometimes biological sexual desire, sometimes desire for power and authority, sometimes a desire for possession to make something mine. And someone mine. And so the power, the strength, the flow, sometimes this desire for appropriation, desire for pleasure that the person kind of represents or is a medium for, it comes with a very strong pleasure.

And that pleasure can be confused with appreciation. It may be confused with even love. And so this appropriation, this strong kind of having someone be the object of our desires, is the near enemy. It can look like appreciation, but it can be fragile. It's appreciation that's only there if we get something in return.

And if we don't get something in return, appreciation can shift dramatically, very quickly, to deprecating, to hostility even. The person is wrong or bad, and we push them away, or we judge them terribly. And so, but the appreciation I'm talking about here does not involve appropriation. Maybe it doesn't actually involve a desire for having anything from the person, even their attention, even their friendship. There's just this broad, generous feeling of being kind of delighted in knowing that this person exists.

That kind of uplifting feeling, a kind of smile in the heart, maybe smile on this face. When we think about this person, we're just so glad to know them. There's something about how they are in the world, their goodness, their brightness, their generosity, just the way that they are, that may be for very personal reasons of our own, but we just really appreciate them and are just glad that they're alive, they're in our life, and we can appreciate them without needing anything from them. And so the question I have for you, have you ever been the recipient of such appreciation? Have you ever felt someone appreciated your very existence, that you just knew you were, they valued you, you were important enough for them to care for in some way?

And it could be a stranger, it could be a teacher who you're part of a larger class, but one teacher just seemed to appreciate you without wanting anything in return, or maybe the teacher believed in you, believed that you're good, or believed that you're capable. Maybe a friend, maybe a relative had that kind of appreciation that also involved believing in your capacity, your ability. And maybe there came along with it a level of trust, came along with a level of encouragement, came along with a level of certainty that you are good or you are appreciable. And they just held you in kind regard. I had relatives that surprised me that I was with them.

And even when I was maybe a little bit difficult to appreciate as a teenager, I was surprised by how they held me in a kind of unconditional positive regard. And they didn't seem to want anything from me or need anything from me, but there was a deep sense of appreciation. And I've had teachers who've been that way. I've had fellow Buddhist practitioners. I've had strangers.

And sometimes very brief. I've had people in stores, clerks who, just in a very simple, ordinary way, the way they smiled, the way they looked at me, it just seemed like there was a simple, ordinary appreciation that kind of buoyed my spirits a little bit. Have you ever experienced that, appreciation that is not an exchange, appreciation that is no appropriation, appreciation which just felt good for you? And is there something you can learn from that, from how you've been on the receiving end of it, of how you could then offer it to others? And in doing that, can you also offer it to yourself?

And what is easier for you? Is it easier to be on the receiving end? Is it easier to offer appreciation? Maybe offering is too strong. Maybe it's just, what I mean is no one has to know that you're appreciating them even.

But is it easier for you to appreciate others or some people? Is it easier to appreciate yourself? I'd like to suggest that these three areas of appreciation for others, for oneself, and from others to oneself, these all work together. That as we become better at one, it makes room for the others. That they're not separate.

That a genuine, healthy appreciation of self leads to an appreciation of others. A healthy, appropriate way of appreciating others, we can't leave ourselves out. And this healthy form of appreciation also works well together with receiving appreciation. Some people avoid it. Some people want to resist being appreciated by others.

But to live in an open heart, an open way where appreciation, delight may be coming with a sense of gratitude, grateful to know someone, celebrating that we know someone, cele-

brating this human connection that we have with others, with ourselves. These are possible. It's possible to appreciate deeply. And it's possible that it's possible to be nourishing. It's possible to be uplifting.

It's possible to have it in such a way that it's contagious, profound appreciation, valuing, that spills over to gratitude, generosity, all kinds of wonderful ways of being in our human relatedness. So I would encourage you for this next 24 hours to reflect on appreciation, reflect on these thoughts. Maybe some of you might want to journal on this topic or go for a walk thinking about this topic, or you might find friends or strangers that you can just explore this topic of appreciation and what your relationship to it, what your history to this topic has been over your lifetime, and where it is today. And what would you like to cultivate, in what way would you like to cultivate and develop greater appreciation as part of your daily life? May we all appreciate each other.

And in doing that, contribute to everyone's feeling like a valuable human being. Thank you.