

Dharmette: Love (24) Benefitting from Loving Others

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Hello everyone and welcome to this series on the topic of love, love in Buddhism.

And love in Buddhism, to really be that topic, it's really a topic on love in you, love in ourselves, our capacity for love in all the different forms of love. There's many forms of love, many ways in which we can deeply appreciate and respect, resonate the ways that we can have goodwill and warmth for other people. And Buddhism doesn't leave this to chance. There's intentionality behind cultivating this or remembering to do this and making it more part of our life, both for our own sake and for the sake of others. And to be able to know how to benefit both self and others at the same time is one of the great gifts and skills of Buddhist practice.

So that to only love other people, to have compassion for others, *mettā*, loving-kindness for others, to only have the one direction where we don't aware of ourselves, we don't understand ourselves, we're not deeply attuned to ourselves, means that we don't really have all the information about what our subconscious is doing, what our biases are doing, what our desires are doing, and it can be even a little bit dangerous. If it's all about ourselves, and we just love ourselves so much, and we don't really care about others so much, and this is what really counts is how we are, then we're not really living in our full social self. A very important part of the human being is who we are in relationship to other people. Even hermits live in relationship to others, hopefully in a very healthy way, in a beneficial way. And sometimes when people go on self-retreats in Buddhism, where they're not really connecting to other people directly, there's often a strong feeling that they're doing this for others, that they're doing this to contribute to a better world by really clarifying their own hearts, clearing their own hearts, and being able to come back a freer person, a more loving person, to be able to support this world.

So the art of this is somehow 50% of the attention is with oneself and 50% attention with others, and tracking both. And when we're doing *mettā*, doing loving-kindness, goodwill practice for others, I'm not so enthusiastic about spending a lot of time doing loving-kindness towards oneself. It certainly is wonderful to do, and I'll talk more about that tomorrow. But I want to today emphasize that it isn't that we are focusing on ourselves solely, and it isn't that we're focusing on others. But there's a way of focusing on others so it's not so self-focused, while at the same time appreciating or feeling or knowing how we benefit, or how it's coming from our own deeper feelings of well-being.

That if we love, if we care, if we have friendliness, if we have goodwill, just very simple ordinary goodwill for others, that that is good for us. We benefit from that. It's satisfying. There's a pleasure. There's a goodness. There's a healthiness that's possible in having simple goodwill for others.

The absence of goodwill is a little dangerous. The absence of goodwill, chances are it is not that you're just neutral. It's maybe something more is going on. There's a little bit of aversion, a little bit of tension or a little bit of conflict or a little bit of excessive desire or conceit. And even neutral is maybe not really neutral. That's hard to know if there's really neutral.

Neutral is really kind of a pulling back or shutting down because the social self that we are, where human beings are designed to a great degree, and varies from person to person, a great degree to some degree to somehow live in, attentive and understanding and attuned to others, in relationship to others. Without that we would not have grown up in any kind of healthy way if we had just been ignored from the time we were born and there was no one relating to us or caring for us. We wouldn't have learned to speak, we wouldn't have learned to self-regulate, we wouldn't have learned to understand ourselves, we wouldn't have learned to feel safe and connected in this world. And so this deep way in which we are some, one way or the other, social beings, means that there's a two-way street here, two-way directionality. So to love others, feel the goodness of that, appreciate the delight, the yes of that.

But don't love others so you can have only this, it's for yourself. So that, and that's the danger of love, is to just do it for the pleasure it gives yourself, the benefits you get from it. But don't ignore those benefits either. That feeling the way it opens you, feeling the way that it delights you and inspires you to have love for others, care for others, goodwill for others, supports it to be more, supports it to grow, supports it to be cleaner and more open. And if you're aware of that satisfaction, that goodness, that pleasure of it, then you also can be more attentive to how it gets a little bit more complicated than it needs to be. The way in which fear operates, or greed or desire that's selfish operates.

The way that we resist it or resist ourselves or the way that we have doubts. There's all kinds of things that come into play that we want to see clearly so they don't trip us up. So they might see them there, but we don't let it interfere with our kindness. Maybe they help us to check in balance so that kindness is wise. That it has a little bit of street smarts to it, so we're a little bit attentive to the cause and effect, the impact it has on others and how it fits in.

But to be able to have a genuine and generous goodwill to others, even in times of danger, even when there's people who are hostile, it can disarm others. And this is one of the great arts, that how to be kind in a way that disarms hostility, and it can happen, but it can't happen unless we try, unless we offer it. But the key to all this is really to understand oneself enough so that you feel how you benefit from being compassionate, being kind, being loving, support to others. And so the Dalai Lama says, if you want to be happy, have compassion for others, care for others.

And so related to that, it's a very important principle that if you want to grow in a healthy kind of way in love and kindness and your social self and to do that in a kind of way in which you become freer, one of the great skills for that is to have goodwill for others, care for others, be generous to others, in a way that nourishes you, not in a way that stresses you, not in a way that involves self-sacrifice, where you don't count and you have to get exhausted. That is not the way of Buddhism. The Buddhism way is to do this love thing in a way that nourishes you. If anything, it de-stresses you rather than creating more stress. The Buddha said, don't give yourself away. Don't lose yourself in the world of others.

Be fully here. You have more love to give. If you lose yourself, you have less. So to feel how you benefit from caring for others. Just enough that that supports you and inspires you and inspires that attitude of yes to goodwill, to kindness, to friendliness.

Yes to all of it, to the person you're with, to yourself. Yes to what's possible here in the goodness. And there's an art to this yes that can disarm others. You might disagree with what they want or what they're doing. It might not be right. But there's a way of stepping forward with a big yes that is not the yes I agree with you, but a yes of there's something more important happening here.

Let's hold it in this love. Let's hold it to this generosity and see what happens. And see what happens if we talk about the challenges we have. So, it's repeating myself, and that may be too many times, but it's important. Practice loving-kindness today. Practice goodwill.

Practice stepping towards people in simple, ordinary, friendly ways. It doesn't have to be dramatic, but just a little bit more than you normally would. To strangers, to people you know,

colleagues. Look for opportunities to kind of step forward with kindness, with friendliness. But as you do it, see if you can understand how it's good for you to do that, how it can come from a place that feels satisfying, opening.

There's a pleasure in you for doing this. And you might have some fear around doing this. Don't let that get in the way. Kind of imagine the fear is just sitting on your shoulder. Maybe it could give you a little more caution about what you're doing, but look for that way in which it supports you to open up. It supports you to have an inspired feeling of goodness and warmth, how it softens you and makes you a better person.

May each of you benefit in the way that you care for others. May we all grow together. May we all become better people through this practice, through our practice of kindness, loving kindness. And if you grow this way, it's not selfish. It's a way that you then... You can keep growing in your ability to love.

Each day may be loving more. So, thank you very much.