

Dharmette: Love (30) Bathing in Unlimited Goodwill

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Oh, welcome to this next talk in the series on love.

And the focus this week is that is *mettā-samādhi*, the way of being absorbed or immersed in goodwill, and two things that I emphasized in the last meditation of those two things. The thing that has been a motivating factor for me for decades is the idea that I practice for the sake, for the benefit of all beings. And it isn't that that's, I'm so wonderfully compassionate or filled with love or something. But it started because it just didn't make any sense at some point to practice only for myself. Somehow there was something about this self-focus which felt kind of not so interesting or not necessary, or maybe a distraction, maybe a limitation, and that I didn't want to live in that limitation.

It's natural to kind of step beyond that limitation, and that stepping beyond it in practice was to have a clear sense that I was practicing for the sake of all beings, out of compassion, out of love, and that it still meant that I did a lot of practice, went on retreats, really engaged. It wasn't like I ignored what was here with myself, but that the motivation for it, the inspiration for it, came from a deep sense of being together with everybody else on this planet. That we're not separate, independent beings, that in a sense that my love, my care, my support, is somehow unaffected or completely separate from others. And so when we're practicing *mettā-samādhi*, really going into *mettā*, the Buddha, when he described *mettā* practice, did not describe it in terms of *mettā* for oneself. He also didn't describe it as *mettā* for others.

The classic practice that came later in Buddhism was a systematic way of starting with self, then with a friend, then with a benefactor, and then a friend, and then a neutral person, and then the traditional language is to an enemy. But in Buddha's teaching there wasn't really any sense of this systematic way of doing *mettā*, but rather it was a *mettā* that was radiating all-inclusively. No one left out. And so this idea for me, this, and I'm practicing for others, was

a way of breaking out of that shell of self and starting to see this better place, this better for me, to not be so focused on me. It's better for me to open up and not be limited or contracted or tight or preoccupied here. And I could feel this openness.

And so the expression of that was, I'm practicing for the benefit of all people, not a compassion for the world. And that became an orienting principle for my life. So when we're doing this *mettā* meditation, to sometimes having the clear sense that it's something more precious, more valuable than just doing *mettā* here for oneself. Feeling good, feeling nice, having pleasure for oneself. It's having this pleasure of *mettā*, having this goodness of *mettā* that's not for oneself only, but it's something that's bigger and wider. And I think this allows for a kind of deep, full forest bathing, *mettā* bathing, where we feel that it's not, it's not just what we're doing.

It's not like up to us to engineer or to huff and puff to get the *mettā* going. But there's some deeper capacity here in us to practice for all beings, means to step out of the limiting, self-preoccupying world that's so easy to live in. And that means also to open up to something wider within ourselves. That there are natural abilities that we have that can operate without our needing to make them happen. Rather, we allow them to happen. We attune ourselves to it.

We make it get quiet enough and unpreoccupied enough that this deeper wellspring of goodness can begin unfolding, of wholesomeness. And so we can bathe in it, so we can absorb it, we can immerse ourselves in it. Yes, yes, so we can relax like all the tension, not all, I mean, careful. So the tensions of our body can begin kind of melting and dissolving in this kind of field, in this bath, in this radiance of something that we call love. And that something we call love doesn't have to be dramatic. It might be very subtle, it might be very small and quiet, but we don't have to, you know, ignore it.

We can open to it, allow it. This is what's important. Rather than opening and taking what's important, anxiety or desires or aversions, of course we'll have those. But that's not where the treasure is. That's not where the really important thing is. And so to begin to kind of reprioritize where we put our precious attention, where we immerse ourselves in, what we allow to come through us, so that we feel nourished, we feel supported, we feel this is where our yes is.

Yes. As opposed to inadvertently saying yes to more anxiety, more fantasy, more delusions. Yes to this kind of sense of love and care for, that doesn't have to have an object. And I think that was one of the wonderful things about this practicing for the sake of all beings, was in a certain kind of way, it even got bigger than that. This keep letting go of the limitations of the

mind, keep letting go of the preoccupations. And at some point, even the idea of all beings becomes too much, becomes a limitation.

And even that just *mettā*, just a radiance of *mettā*, just a bath of *mettā*. And everything we touch is *mettā*. Everything we see is *mettā*. Everything begins kind of, you know, part of this field of *mettā*. Just as on a warm day, everything is warm. So loving kindness, goodwill.

And I hope in these weeks we've been doing this now that we have enough foundation, enough reference points, that you can really kind of begin making this more your own. There's enough doorways into it that you find that you have your own flavor of love, your own way of connecting to it. But then you start kind of doing it more and living in it more and referring back to it, remembering it more throughout the day. Don't overlook this treasure that you have. The Buddha said that wealth for a monastic is, monastics who don't have any money, that their wealth is their goodwill, is their *mettā*. And so it is for you as well.

So next week, we're going to continue with this *mettā-samādhi* theme, and I'll gently take you through the traditional way of practicing, which I just mentioned, of these five categories, self, benefactor, friend, neutral person, an enemy. Sometimes in English we say difficult person. And I'll do it with a light touch. And for some of you, if this feels like a nice direction to kind of keep expanding, opening, not having your love be limited by anything. And that's one of the great practices of *mettā*, is to go, do it just far enough. You come up against where you're not so sure about doing *mettā* to that person.

Your heart's not quite open yet. And what is that about? To explore that edge until we're, and to move in the direction that you can, just like you can love a good and dear friend, there's a kind of way of having *mettā*, even for difficult people. So, that's the plan for next week. And I'm looking forward to continuing this way and with meditation in particular.

And in the meantime, find ways to stay more in touch with this topic of love and your own capacity for kindness and goodwill. No one needs to know you're doing it. Maybe doing it in your own privacy of your own kind of free time or little places. Might be a more connecting way to let it grow in an unconfused, distracted way. And think about what I said about practicing for the sake of all beings. And how maybe that frees something up inside of you.

It's not an obligation. It's a freeing up that gives more room for your love. So thank you.