

Dharmette: Love (34) Metta Samadhi 9

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So hello and welcome to our series on love. And today I'm thinking that almost a synonym for this form of love that Buddhism encourages or guides us in developing is almost a synonym for the gift of fearlessness, the gift of people having nothing to fear when they're with us. We live in a world of anxiety, of fear. We have our own. Some of it's quite deep, quite ancient even. But more ancient, more deep inside of each of us is the capacity to love, to feel safe, have a place within.

That's the safe place to go. To not be so tied all the time to the conditions in the world around us, our history, but to know there's a time and place to go to a place of safety. And one of those places is, hopefully, when you sit down to meditate. Maybe to consciously reflect on this as a time where, for the time being right now, this is relatively safe. There are people in war zones, people in dire poverty and challenges, that if they could be here, they would relax. They would be settled.

And now I'm sitting here. This is your turn to discover a place of deep, deep safety, even that you can carry with you when things are unsafe. But a place of safety is a source of goodwill that's reassuring, goodwill that is really genuinely available not to harm anyone, not to cause any further distress in this world. And part of the gift of *mettā* is that gift of safety. And the second sentence, may all beings be safe, is being emphasized.

So part of also about *mettā*, *mettā* meditation, the idea is to kind of, in a slow, loving way, gentle way, begin gathering yourself, focusing on ourselves. So we're undistracted. So all of who we are, in a sense, becomes coordinated around this topic of kindness, of goodwill, so that we're completely in it. We're completely for it. We're completely engaged, absorbed, immersed in this particular activity for this particular time.

It doesn't have to be all the time. Don't have a high standard that now you're supposed to be loving all the time. It's just now in this situation, meditation and the safety of here. And one of the faculties that we have that can be brought in to support all this is our imagination. We can imagine.

For example, just simply imagining a person that you're going to offer your goodwill to. And how do you imagine them? It might be imagining their face. If it's easy for you to visualize, you can visualize. If visualizing is not easy, maybe you can hear their voice in the inner kind of ear. Maybe you can just simply remember a time that's not complicated, not a big story where you get pulled into distractions, but maybe a scene where you remember sitting with them having tea or walking with them in a park.

And so you're very simple, that you use your imagination to feel more connected. And imagination can be very rich. Imagine, they say a picture is worth a thousand words. There's something about imagination, that visualizing or thinking about it, that can touch us in all kinds of ways and evokes different parts of ourselves than straight prose, just ordinary thinking, or the engineering mind that's trying to do a technique. That might be very dry. But if the way of practicing is supported by some simple, ordinary imagination that's not going to pull you into a distracted story, not pull you away from the very simplicity of just offering kindness, then it can be very supportive.

So we bring our imagination together. So as this loving kindness to different categories of people develops, then imagination can be very supportive for this. So, as I've said, the classic instruction is to start with oneself. I like to say start with the easiest person. And then progressively move to where it's a little bit less easy, a little bit less easy.

Spreading and taking your time to feel the challenges there, the reason why you hold back, why you hold a little bit of your goodwill in check, why it's not as wholehearted as it is for the easy person, and see, is there some way that you can spread and open? And because all of our faculties are being included, there might be a time where it's appropriate to do some reflection, contemplation about this. Why am I holding back? Maybe not in meditation, but to really engage in this process and maybe consider that the natural state is to have goodwill for anybody and everyone. And if that's the natural state, why am I holding back?

And is it because of fear? What are you afraid of? Is it because of resentment? Is it necessary to have the resentment get in the way? Maybe there's a reason to be cautious around a person. Maybe there's a reason you feel hurt around a person.

But does that have to stand in the way of goodwill, of basic kindness? Yes, the basic idea that

you would like them to feel safe. You want to be a person they feel safe around. And so we're exploring this. We're in all kinds of ways.

And some people, when they do a *mettā* meditation, so that the meditation itself is not very contemplative, not thinking a lot, the thinking part happens outside, that they begin living a life where they're contemplating what the *mettā* is like, what's the hindrance to it, where is it useful, how does it work now. So we're massaging it, we're exploring it. Not to make it artificial, not to make it pollyannaish, but to make it real, make it sincere, make it something that feels like it's very rich.

And one of the things that I find very helpful is to really understand that *mettā*, goodwill, is intimately connected to safety, to being a safe person for others. And that gives it a certain gravitas, it gives a certain realness, because we're now engaging in the world of anxiety to meet it, to hold it, maybe our own anxiety, to be able to hold that from a place that's maybe more peaceful, more safe, more stronger that can provide reassurance. And say, it's okay. I'm here with you. Here, for now, just now.

It's okay. You're safe. There's goodwill. I care for you. I care for my anxiety. I'm not trying to chase it away. I'm not trying to fix it. I think there's no aversion for it, just goodwill. I so like to say we're trying to make our fear feel safe.

And so then as we do it for the easy person, and we stretch it out to the people less and less easy, at some point we come to the person that's called the neutral person. And the neutral person is someone who's not literally some kind of neutral feeling, but there's no real strong feeling for or against. There's not a strong reason to... You don't know them very well. There's no strong reason to be inspired by them or delighted by them. But there's no reason to not be. There's no challenge around them.

It could be someone we see kind of casually on the way to work. It might be someone we see we never talk to, but maybe it's the bus driver for the bus we go on. Or maybe it's somebody who works in a store, maybe not even the checkout person who you talk to, but someone who stocks. And you see them regularly, but they're just stocking the shelves. But someone who kind of is uncomplicated, where you don't have a natural kind of love or friendship for them, and now extend the kindness to them.

Let your smile of goodwill have them included. So if you see them, you're ready to smile. You're ready to appreciate them. You're ready to respect them. You're ready to kind of be present with them. So there's a resonance between you and them.

And not that they have to know that, but that there's a resonance. You feel them. You're kind

of like, they're human too. They have a human history. They were born. They had the first day of school. They had challenges with maybe bullies at school, they had challenges with family, they had challenges with finding their way as an adolescent and finding their way as a young adult.

They might have health problems, they might have losses, that there's all kinds of, so many things that makes for the humanity of this person. Something, if you knew them, of course you would be kind. Of course you would be friendly. And so to begin expanding out to the neutral person.

Now, this is understood that we're going from what's easy to what's less and less easy. So the neutral person, of course there might be some resistance. Of course there might be a feeling, wait a minute, this is not where I want to go. Or here it's not easy. I don't see why I should do this here to this person. This person's never done anything for me.

So we begin exploring what goes on there when we start bringing this wonderful smile of goodwill to the neutral people in our lives, and to take it as a place of learning and growing and stretching, and maybe coming into this place where it becomes natural to have goodwill for them. It's a natural capacity. It's like the heart wants to be kind. The heart wants to have goodwill. The heart wants to resonate with people without the heart being closed or tight or irritated or injured in any kind of way, it wants to just be there in a simple, ordinary way.

Not inviting them home, not having to get entangled in their life, but just a very simple, open goodwill. So begin discovering how to do it for the neutral person. So with these words, maybe you can spend some time with your imagination, sitting, having tea by yourself, imagining some of the neutral people in your life, and imagining and thinking and contemplating, what is it to have a natural goodwill to them so that when you see them, you would want to smile, appreciate them?

Maybe in meditation, you begin including them in your goodwill. Maybe as you go about your day, there will be lots of neutral people you encounter on the streets, and they don't have to know anything of what you're doing. But maybe just kind of from the sides of your eyes, so they don't have any idea, look upon them. If it seems appropriate enough to do, like people watching, sitting on a park bench watching people go by, then gaze upon them to see how you can have an ordinary, simple feeling of friendship or goodwill, wishing them well.

That you want them to be safe and happy. You want to be that safe person for them, at least as they walk by. And let that be a theme for the day as it's easy for you. And perhaps this is more important than some of the things you'll be doing today, to discover this wonderful

human capacity for goodwill, something the world needs a lot. And so we offer ours... Thank you very much.