

Love (36) Metta Samadhi 11

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Hello and welcome to this ongoing series on love from a Buddhist perspective.

And the sub-topic for this week is *mettā-samādhi*, the ability to be immersed in our own capacity for goodwill, to not be scattered, not be divided, not be distracted, but to have a whole full engagement with our capacity to love, like you would if you were absorbed in reading a book or in doing a craft or being with a good friend.

So I'd like to emphasize today something that we can call a sense of self. This is not a technical term, it's not meant to be a metaphysical term, doesn't have to necessarily refer to something that literally exists in some kind of metaphysical way. But I think it's ordinary enough to have some sense of centrality, some sense of inner focus, some sense of inner presence, attention, someplace where our generalized sense of self maybe exists, maybe resides. And it's completely ordinary, it's maybe not a particular thing, it might be a combination of different capacities we have that coordinate with each other.

But it's not to be dismissed, this sense of self, because we're Buddhists. Buddhists have this idea that there is not a self, or this teaching on not self, and therefore anything that looks like self or smells like a self should be dismissed or ignored or somehow, you know, doesn't count for attention. But we do have some sense of agency, some sense of our locations. There's a whole bunch of apparatus, sense apparatus that are involved with really connecting to ourselves in a very important way to get around.

If you are playing with a volleyball or a beach ball, and just being battered, thrown back and forth, there's a clear sense of your location, your location in relationship to the ball, where to be, how to place yourself, and there's a very clear sense of this is a body, this is my location, this is what needs to happen in relationship to that ball. If you go into an elevator, and one other person's already there, you don't become one with the elevator and just not even

notice the person. It doesn't matter that you go in and just step, you know, right up against their nose. There's a natural way. We know ourselves, we know the person, we know something about our spatial distance, we have some sense of what's appropriate for providing others with safety, maybe providing yourself with some ease, how you position yourself in the elevator.

All that, there's a lot of things that go on there. The choice not to stand there facing them directly in the elevator. Most people just face the door and are side by side. They don't look at each other, strangers. There's a whole sense of things of how to be that involve some general sense of agency and capacity and impact and impact on others and how we're going to be impacted.

And that sense of agency, place of agency, location for agency, the location for thinking, location for decision making, for reflection, for awe and wonder, a location for being hurt, being afraid. There's a sense of, a sense of there's something here which is uniquely ourselves, that is what we identify with, that's important, that is what we want to track and take care of and act from. And that general sense of self can be sometimes, can be localized. We can find it inside of ourselves.

Some people have a lot of sense of self is really tied up to thinking. There might be a sense of pressure or contraction in the head someplace. Someone else's sense of self is very much connected to some emotionality, might feel a sense of self in their body someplace, in their chest or something, in this belly where the emotion is kind of most activated. And it's maybe hard to find the exact place where it is, though sometimes the body's tensions and holdings come into play.

Some people's sense of self is very much tied up with responsibility, and so some way or other. And so there's a sense of heaviness or contraction, like weight on it, a pressure on it to do something or to figure something out. And sometimes the sense of self has no pressure. Sometimes there's a sense of lightness and freedom and contentment and ease. That, you know, it's kind of clear it's happening to oneself and where is that joy being elicited.

So rather than dismissing the sense of self, we work with it, we practice with it. And there are times when it's appropriate to embrace it, to appreciate it, to give attention to it, and at times when it's appropriate to put it down. Just like you would take off a sweater if you started to get too hot, there comes a time when it's appropriate to put to rest, to give a vacation to that sense of self. It's not needed. But to be able to do that, to know when and when not to have it, it takes some attention to it and care to it and noticing it.

And if the Buddhist idea of not-self kind of keeps dismissing it and not paying any attention to it, then you won't know when to put it down, when to take the sweater off or when to put it on. And so to find, so one of the questions is, where is that sense of self? And does it involve some kind of coordination, some kind of coming together of different capacities, sensations, body parts? Does it come with a little bit of pressure? Does it come with a little bit of activation, or a lot of it? Does it come with a sense of flow?

Does it seem more like a spring inside, than what water is flowing out? Or is it more like a black box that's, you know, safe and hard and tight, and you don't quite know what's in there? There's a whole bunch of ways it could be. And the reason to emphasize it here in a series about love is a number of reasons. One is that that sense of self can, if that is strong, if it's confident, if it knows how to be really present, then the love that we have for others has more value. It's seen more. It has more its fullness.

If I just kind of settle back deep in the couch, you know, relaxed, easeful, not really caring about anything, and just kind of, oh yeah, I love you. May you be happy as I kind of check my phone. The fact that you love someone that way, it doesn't carry much force. It doesn't carry much seriousness or fullness. But if you sit up in your fullness and fully there with all your whole body, and you say, I love you to someone, then there's much more behind it. It's like you're really in it. You're bringing all of yourself. You really mean it. You're completely connected to it.

So this idea that to really bring the sense of self into the practice of love, yes, you take that sense of self, feel it, know it, and bring it so that the love has much more power, much more strength, much more fullness. So it can be a *samādhi*. It's not casual. It's not, I'll get around to it.

But also, in that sense of self, sometimes it's easier to bring love to that, kindness, goodwill to that. And sometimes there's a long tradition of offering love and kindness to oneself. But sometimes that oneself, that way, is very generalized. But if you identify someplace within, which is your sense of self, even if it's provisional, it's sometimes easier to offer love for that because it's almost like doing it for another person.

Sometimes it can feel selfish to do it for oneself, but for one sense of self. That sense of self that supported you and guided you and troubled you and been part of you in some kind of undefined way all your life, undefinable way, maybe it's easier to appreciate it. Appreciate this companion. Maybe the sense of self, for a little bit you can be its friend. Maybe you and it can go side by side.

But to offer your love, offer your, may you be happy. May that sense of self not be troubled. May that sense of self not be the victim. May the sense of self not be the one who's overly responsible, has to figure everything out, even though that's what has been its mission. But to just may you be happy. May you be at rest. May you be at peace. May you know that you're appreciated. May you not be, you know, you're no longer my enemy. You know, I'm no longer trying to get rid of you. Here, this sense of self, may it be well, may it be well.

So, I don't know if what I'm saying now makes sense to all of you, but to the degree to which there is some sense of a location within an activity, a way of being, thinking, or feeling, or emoting, or reflection, contemplation, or agency within that is somehow connected to a general sense of self, generalized sense of self, maybe the coordination point for all those things, to wish it well, support it to relax, support it so it smiles, so it feels like there's someone here who's caring for it.

And I know it's a little bit of a paradox to say that for you to offer loving-kindness to your sense of self, who's the you who's doing it. Don't worry about that. Don't get caught up in the questions. Just do it. Just do love.

So as you go through this next day, maybe spend some time reflecting on, exploring, feeling your way into what your sense of self is, that you have permission to get to discover it. Maybe you haven't spent a lot of time really getting to know it, even though it's been there with you all the time. Get to know it, feel it, sense it. Take times, different kinds of time in the day, meditation, going for a walk, sitting, have tea, where you kind of reflect, what is this sense of self? Where is it? How does it function? Is it different ways? Is it felt differently in different times?

And as you feel it, appreciate it. Love it. Have goodwill for it. Wish it well. And then we'll continue on this theme tomorrow, how the sense of self can support us to develop this *mettā-samādhī*. Thank you.