

Dharmette: Love (44) The Greatest Potential of Metta

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So hello everyone and welcome. And so we're now, I think, some 44 talks into the topic of love. And maybe about half of them are about *mettā*. And this will be, I think, the last talk on *mettā* and goodwill. And... The culmination of *mettā*, maybe there is just pure *mettā*, pure love. But in the Buddhist sense, the culmination of *mettā* itself leads to the liberation of mind with *mettā*, the liberation of mind with goodwill or kindness or friendliness.

And this liberation of mind is when... When first, everything, our world, gets kind of completely organized, coordinated, immersed in this state of love, of goodwill, where we're not scattered, we're not preoccupied by different things, we're not divided among ourselves, we're undivided, where everything is allowed to harmonize together, align with our capacity for goodwill. The way we look with our eyes, the way we hear with our ears, the way we taste and smell and feel with our body, the way that we think about people, think about the world, the way that our intentions, our attitudes, all of it is characterized by goodwill, kindness, by love. It's possible to be so completely kind of have that be the whole state that we're living in. And... And the whole practice of *mettā*, the practice of love, and reflecting on it and prioritizing it, allows us to begin to kind of let that become the central orientation with which we see life, we see ourselves, see the world around us. And it might seem unrealistic and might seem pollyannaish or too sentimental or something. But that's very unfortunate to have those ideas.

Because already many people are simplifying their lives, living in a kind of fantasy and unrealistic world, by being immersed in hostility, being immersed in greed or resentments, being immersed in their anger about things, seeing the world as somehow through the eyes of hostility and anger, immersed in conceit, immersed in ambition, where it's such a... Some people are immersed in fear. Any of those states, painful states, becomes how we see the world, how

we hear, how we feel and smell, how we think about people and situations. It's all characterized by being completely immersed in a certain kind of way. And we don't question it. And it's just kind of as normal.

It's possible to do the same way that we're so preoccupied and caught in some of these difficult states, to not be caught, but to be immersed in love and kindness. Just as it's possible to be immersed in anger, it's possible to be immersed in love. Just as it's possible to be immersed in fear, it's possible to be immersed in goodwill, generosity. And it can seem unnatural compared to how people normally live, but over time it can feel natural, it can feel more natural. Because it doesn't involve the strain and the tension and the push and the cognitive kind of spinning of stories and ideas that hate and fear and greed require. And so, just being immersed in it.

And what happens is we get more kind of more organized, more living more with goodwill as an almost second nature, that there's a freedom from hostility, freedom from anger. There's a freedom from fear. And there's a sense of freedom growing. Love is a movement towards freedom because love, which is a natural expression, is a freedom from the kind of unnatural ways, constructed ways, fabricated ways in which we live the world of suffering. As that feeling of freedom in love becomes clear... Then the love, the kindness, the goodwill, includes looking deeply at ourselves and really wanting, well-wishing ourselves, becoming increasingly sensitive to ways in which we still might, causing stress, causing suffering, causing... tension inside of us in a way that we can see this is not right.

This is not the best we can do. This is still a little bit unnecessary holding on to something. And so love begins to kind of cleanse itself. Love begins to appreciate that we don't have to do this to ourselves even anymore, even the slightest tension. And so there's a letting go into more love, letting go. At some point, the letting go, the freedom... becomes more wonderful than the love, than the goodwill. And it today comes when even we let go of the love.

Even we let go of all the ways in which even love is subtly constructed, subtly kind of involves certain kinds of thoughts, ideas, orientations. There's a little bit of activity, beautiful activity, required for this beautiful love to be there. And we see that we don't have to even do that activity. And the movement of letting go and quieting and becoming still is so wonderful. It just feels, yes, let's trust this and let go more fully. And then there's a greater freedom that can be found.

And so love is a powerful goodwill, *mettā*, powerful teacher of freedom. Freedom from attachments, freedom from clinging. And some people don't want to let go of attachments because they feel like, if I go of attachment, I won't love. I won't be connected to my partner

or my children or something. It's opposite. That as we let go of attachment, there's actually more love possible and the wisdom that can come from that.

That we will take care of things properly. And so... The liberation of mind from *mettā*, goodwill, is a powerful teacher that then supports us to go further and further. And the Buddha talks about this process of going from liberation of mind through *mettā*, and then seeing even that as just short of something that's even more wonderful, a deeper, fuller letting go. And what's wonderful about this deeper letting go, when we let go of something we think we shouldn't get to go of, why would we let go of something so wonderful as love? It seems cruel almost to talk about letting go of love. Is that if we can let go of that even, then the heart becomes much more fluid, adaptable, that it can respond to what's happening around us in different ways at different times.

Maybe there are times when the response doesn't need to be goodwill or doesn't need to be kindness. Maybe what's needed is compassion. Maybe what's needed in the situation or what the situation calls for is a rejoicing, an appreciation, delight and joy, sharing that joy and happiness and success of other people. And that shared love, shared delight. And sometimes what's needed is equanimity, the fourth kind of love. And sometimes what's needed is something much, much more basic, basic instinct to care, *anukampā*.

So the idea of freedom doesn't leave us without love. It leaves the heart available to morph and change to what's appropriate at different situations. And maybe the kind of love we think we have is not actually the one that's needed and might actually be too much for the situation or the wrong medicine for what the illness is. So to let go fully and then have the freedom to respond as needed when the time is right.

So, *mettā* is one of the primary social emotions taught in the Buddhism I teach from, the Theravada Buddhism. And it's a beautiful quality that the minimum is a kind of very generous friendliness, friendship, but it moves into a deep kindness-common. Goodwill, love, that wants the best for other people. And the absolute best we could want for other people is freedom, complete freedom from suffering and attachment. And for us to take this Buddhist path closer and closer to that full freedom gives us our own experience and proof that we can wish that for others, that we can wish them the greatest good, the greatest good, the freedom.

Freedom from all suffering. And so learning to do it for ourselves creates the conditions for knowing how to wish the best for other people, and to rejoice in the best in other people, to appreciate the best in other people, what's possible, and to appreciate the beauty in others. It's said in the *suttas*, something like, that the highest possibility, potential, to my paraphrase,

of *mettā* is, or the highest perception of *mettā*, is to see the beauty of others. So what a great gift to give. So to wish everyone the greatest benefit, the greatest welfare, the greatest happiness and smiles in their hearts, and to see them, to see their inner life, to see them as in their beauty.

Maybe the beauty they don't even see themselves. This is the possibility of *mettā*, the abiding in goodwill. So thank you very much. And I'm going to be going off to retreat tomorrow morning. I'll be gone for two weeks. And next week, he's wonderful teachers that come and replace me.

Next week is David Laurie, who's been here before. And the following week, it's Don Neal. Both of them graduated a year ago from the teacher training we have here at IMC. They're wonderful teachers. And I'm very happy that you'll have them for five days each. And I will be back. I think I'll come back on the 6th of April. Thank you.