

Dharmette: Love (49) Compassion Samadhi

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So hello and welcome. And I started this series on, this sub-series of love, this series on compassion, at the beginning of the month, beginning of April. And now, two weeks later, I do another week, this week, on compassion *samādhi*, the meditation explicitly on compassion. And it's remarkable that it's possible to settle into a profound state of easeful, tender, gentle, warm, sweet compassion that becomes kind of like the field we abide in, just like we would abide and rest in the sunlight that lightens up the day.

Right? Maybe we've been out in the dark and the cold, and the sun rises, and not only is it light, but it also starts to warm up. And maybe we just sit and enjoy the light and the warmth, or we just know that it's there as now we can go about our life, doing all the things we do during the daytime, but accompanied by light and warmth. So we can be similarly accompanied by compassion. It has a sweetness to it, a joy to it.

That is surprising because many people associate compassion with feeling suffering themselves. They feel the suffering of the world, of others, and it pains them. And they think that compassion is somehow, that pain is part and parcel of that compassion. But compassion is not a painful state, and it's possible to be free of suffering for oneself, for suffering in relationship to what's happening in the world, and have a profound state of care for the world that is actually nourishing. It's actually good. It feels tender and caring, gentle.

So two weeks ago I talked about compassion and talked about the importance of knowing one's own pain well, and having it settled enough so that we don't project our own suffering onto others who are suffering. That somehow our own pain, our own challenges, our own unresolved places and issues within ourselves don't get triggered in the meeting and encounter with the suffering of others. And so we have to know ourselves well. And part of that knowing ourselves well is to know the hindrances, the kind of unfortunate ways in which we react to

the suffering or distress or challenges in the world or within ourselves, and to know how to work with them. And to know that there is a possibility of a profound equanimity with compassion. Equanimity that is a form of love, or that supports the love of compassion, but to be at ease, to be relaxed.

I brought up two weeks ago, and also just now, the image of Kuan Yin, Avalokiteśvara, that embodiment of compassion, which is a very famous depiction of Kuan Yin sitting kind of on the edge of a cliff, one leg up, and leaning over, resting on that leg, and then gazing upon the world from that cliff, seeing everybody and everything, and completely at ease and at peace. And we might think that that's too passive, but Kuan Yin gets involved with all suffering, that's there to help in this mythology of Kuan Yin. Kuan Yin transforms into whatever being that a person needs to be helped by. And it's always ready. Some statues of Kuan Yin are images that Kuan Yin has a thousand arms and a thousand hands, each with a different tool that's needed to help someone. But never without losing its ease, its fluidity, its relaxation.

And so this idea of compassion is very closely related to what we spent a longer time with, which was *mettā*, goodwill. And both of these states of love involve a deep attunement to others. And we can't be attuned to others if they're static on our side. And so a lot of the, it's not necessarily easy to have this kind of clear, clean compassion. But it's one of the great treasures.

And I believe I talked about it a few weeks ago, that in Tibetan Buddhism, they have this expression that comes out in a chant. They do *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. *Maṇi* is jewel, and *padme* means a lotus. And it's the jewel in the lotus. And the lotus that opens up is the awakened mind. And a lotus is quite beautiful, but there's even something more beautiful at the heart of it, which is this beautiful gem that is compassion. Compassion.

So it's heralded in Buddhism as one of the great capacities of a human being. And so to cultivate and develop it, and to do that with all the *Brahma-vihāras*, is the classic way of doing it, is to begin by considering, maybe imagining, using your imagination, your thoughts, your memories, to consider some person or some maybe animal or some imagined situation where it's really easy for you to have compassion, and it's really easy to have a compassion that is untroubled. There's no distress. It doesn't trigger your own fear, your own anger, your own distress. It's just kind of just, of course, it's nice.

It's usually something that's very simple. It might be that a child is upset because it spilled its milk on the floor, and maybe milk on its shirt. And you just kind of tenderly come there. You're there. You reassure it, you have a lot of care and compassion, but you're not distressed, not upset, not angry. You're not upset. Accidents like that happen.

And so you just want to show the kid who's upset and crying some gentle care and love. You have compassion for them. It's hard to be a child. It's hard to have things, you know, the world malfunction this kind of way. And so you demonstrate calm, clarity, everything's okay. And you maybe wipe up the milk, you get them another shirt, and maybe you give them another glass of milk.

So the idea is to find something where it's easy. And I know some people find it that they think of some cute animal. You know, some people can do it with a dog or a cat. Some people, squirrels. Some people it can be some other animal, quail, or some kind of cute animal, rabbit or something, something that elicits this warm-hearted suffusion of not only goodwill and love, but one that cares for their well-being, wishes them well, and sees them in some kind of challenging situation.

And of course, we went, may you be well, may you be well. And maybe it's a cat that's been chased up a tree and is afraid, right, by the dog underneath. And you go over and just there nearby, reassuring the cat, you care for it, everything's good. So the idea is to find something, find some way to connect to this quality of compassion and care which is simple, easy within you.

These examples might seem kind of silly, but compassion is not silly. Compassion is a very strong, very powerful way in which we can make a difference in the world. It's one of the most beautiful jewels and treasures for our social life and interactive life. And to learn how to have it in a clean way, in a deeply respectful way, attuned way with others, where we're not there to have a vertical relationship, where we're looking down upon them and caring for them as we're the great healer and carer. But it's a horizontal relationship, kind of that we're there together with others as fellow sufferers, fellow beings challenged in solidarity with them, attunement with them.

But to have this beautiful feeling that for us is beautiful. It just feels nice inside. And because it feels so good to have it, this gentleness, this tenderness, this sweetness, this flow, this current of compassion, that it's easy maybe for others to receive it or to be around us. We're not pushy for them, but we're meeting as equals in a certain way, almost like we're equals in this suffering world.

So that kind of state can be developed. And rather than having a fragmented mind, preoccupied mind, rather than being caught up in the difficulties of life, it's possible in meditation to make that the sole object of attention, just like you would maybe slowly take a focus on the breathing. But to really kind of enter into this world of compassion, feeling. Let it grow, let it expand, let it be the main focus of attention.

And I find it very useful to continue with meditation on the breathing, but the breathing now recedes a little bit in the background, and the breathing is there to kind of keep us connected. It's almost like the breathing is the vehicle, is the channel by which we're touching the places of compassion within. Or it's like a gentle fanning of a flame, to get larger. There's a gentle fanning of this warmth, so it can spread and get bigger.

And all the benefits of meditation can come, plus others. The mind can get quite calm, quite concentrated, quite still, and it can feel easier, sometimes, qualities of well-being and joy and warmth that also can fill one as we develop into the *samādhi*, the *samādhi* of compassion. So that's the topic of this week.

And I'll be here just for this week. So then I go away again. This next time I go away for almost a month. A big part of that is a vacation that I haven't had in a long time. And so, and we'll have wonderful people coming, and at least one of the guests will continue the topic in his own way, talking about compassion, I think.

And so, thank you. And for today, maybe you can consider what is your relationship to compassion, to *karuṇā*, to this profound way of caring for the suffering of others, and having a warm-hearted, open relationship to the suffering of others. Wants that suffering to go away. So what is your relationship to that?

And you might, if you have friends you can talk to about, whether you journal, you can journal about it, go for a walk, and make this topic of compassion a theme of your reflection today. What is your relationship to it? And what is your history with it? Well, how would you write your autobiography if it was your autobiography in relationship to compassion?

So thank you very much, and I'll see you tomorrow.