

## Dharmette: Love (65) Equanimous Love

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So hello everyone, and welcome to the beginning of the next sub-series for this long series on love. And today we start with the love of equanimity, equanimous love. That is considered to be the divine abode of equanimity. And in Buddhism, there's a big emphasis on this word *upekkhā*, meaning equanimity. And it seems that the etymology of the Pāli word *upekkhā* means to gaze upon, so to have a bird's-eye view, so we're not caught in the middle of everything, the drama. We see everything spaciouly and can kind of step back and not be entangled in things.

And there are many different ways that kind of equanimity can exist for us, but one of the ways is as a form of love. It's usually considered the fourth of the four divine abodes, not because it's last and least important, but because maybe it's the culmination. It's the full maturity of the other forms of love, of goodwill, of compassion, of appreciative joy. Those are the foundation to be able now to expand outwards into an equanimous love, a love which is non-reactive love, which is non-agitated. It doesn't get agitated, doesn't get reactive, and it's not for or against.

Because in the earlier forms of love, there is a little desire or movement for and against. Loving-kindness, goodwill, is having a will, a desire for the well-being of others. Compassion is a desire for people's suffering to end. We don't want the suffering, so we would like it to end for people. And appreciative joy is also a movement towards and saying yes, celebrating with people. And equanimous love does none of that. It just stays very peaceful, but it stays very present.

And that's kind of the richness of this equanimous love, that there are times when it's not appropriate, it's not in the circumstance, to actively have goodwill towards people, to be kind to them. It's not going to be received. It's not going to be wanted. People want to be

left alone in their challenging circumstance. The same thing with compassion. People don't want our help, our support, don't want our compassion.

And there are times when there's nothing to celebrate. There's no particular joy. But we don't have a role. People are not letting us in. It's not a situation where you can do something. It's not the name of the game. But we can still love. We don't have to run away, close down, abandon the situation. We can stay present.

And this is one of the very powerful, very significant lessons in the world of spiritual care that hopefully goes into human life all over, everywhere, is that in spiritual care, the greatest, the most important offering we have to give people is to be present with them. To be present with our ears, really to listen. Present with our eyes, to really be, not stare at them, but really show that we're here and attending to them, respecting them, being with them. With our body, that somehow, without being dominating over them, without an assertive posture, but not a posture that's pulling away or not present, the body shows we're here. And sometimes, so there is where we can do the equanimous love.

And to get a sense of its power, the value of this for ourselves and maybe for others, was the purpose of the guided meditation we just did now. I wanted to try to give you a taste of what equanimity could be like that's building on meditation practice you've been doing, and what we've been doing for the last six months, and the topic of love. And can we build on that love, can build on this *samādhī*, to make it grow and become larger? Like our capacity to hold things, our capacity to be present, becomes more and more fuller, wider.

So in the beginning, if we're stressed out, if we're strained, if we're caught up in thoughts and fears and doubts, we might, you know, might be a very small little thing that we're concerned with. We might feel like, you know, I don't know what, that might feel that, you know, uncertain that we know how to put on our shoes. And we've done it for decades, but, you know, it's so difficult in imagining, you know. But maybe we have new shoes and they are difficult. But with equanimity, you know, I can figure it out. It's a shoe. It's not a problem. I'm not afraid of the shoe.

And we have space. We have capacity to work with the shoe. Sorry to use such a silly example. But we expand our capacity. And it grows and grows and grows. And so the capacity for kindness, goodwill, the capacity for compassion, the capacity for appreciative joy, can all grow. And the more it grows, the more room there is to hold everything without reactivity, without buying into it or pushing it away or being for and against it.

And it grows into this vast equanimous love. This is the most useful, most powerful form

of love at times, where nothing else is asked of us except to hold the world, hold others in our love, and stay present. Hold it in a love that's not reactive, that's not anxious, that's not agitated, that's not for and against. But we're offering the gift of presence, kind, warm-hearted, respectful, caring presence. And it's an invaluable form of love, this equanimous love.

And I'm taking this approach to introduce it because for some people, the word equanimity seems to be close to the word indifference, or close to the idea of not caring, or being at a kind of a cold distance from the experience. And so there's a resistance even to hear the word. And it's kind of incomprehensible that there's a love this way. But there is. And so this way of introducing it today was meant to kind of open the field, like, oh yes, give you a flavor, a taste of how wonderful it is to have a capacity to hold all things with equanimity, all things with love, that care, that is not for or against.

And that's not always evaluating or thinking about or planning, or that we don't always feel like we're responsible to fix something or help. Sometimes we can't. And just to learn how to be with it, with love, is a phenomenal gift we give to people. And it's a love which can grow and develop, and we'll explore it here for the next two weeks.

And it's akin to a love which has no reason for, in the sense that many times people love, and this may be an exchange. It's a contract almost. If I pay attention to you, if I want you, then you should want me. Some people love what their idea of love is, the pleasure, the light, the inspiration of someone else who wants you or adores you. And so it is not so much we love another person so much as we love them because they adore us. And it's exchange. We get something in return.

And with equanimity, with the *Brahma-vihāras*, that's not the idea with any of them, but with equanimity even more. There's no exchange. Nothing's required in return. The other person could be a slob. The other person could be angry, could even say things that are mean or something. But in certain circumstances, it can be quite appropriate to expand and hold that person, hold that event, in that same equanimous love.

It's not the time for goodwill. It's not the time for compassion. It's not the time for appreciative joy. But we don't have to give up our capacity for love just because someone's being mean. That's allowing the mean person to have a deep effect on us, for us to contract around it. And at some point in Buddhist practice, it becomes really clear that it's not so interesting to sacrifice our own well-being because of how someone else behaves.

And this is a difficult stage to come to. There's a lot of practice. Maybe it has to go into it

beforehand. But to begin appreciating that there's love, and we don't have to give it up. We don't have to sacrifice it. We don't have to close it down. We don't have to close our hearts to anyone.

And the reason for it is not because we have to keep it open. There's a requirement. But rather, we see clearly within ourselves that when we close our heart, we are harming ourselves. We are contracting ourselves. We're limiting ourselves. And why would you want to do that? Why would you do that? Why do you want to allow the other person to have that kind of effect on you? Maybe that's what they're hoping you'll do because they want you to suffer.

So this equanimous love. So I offer this as something for you to reflect on today. I did give a talk on this *Sunday Morning Talk* yesterday to warm myself up to give this talk this week on equanimity. And some of you might want to listen to it.

But the important thing here is that as you go through the day today, the next 24 hours, see if you can remember some of the things I've taught here. And see if you can somehow feel your way or imagine your way to how to be with people, maybe strangers, maybe safe people, maybe people in public you don't have to have any relationship with, and see if there's some kind of equanimous love that you can experiment with and touch into. A love that doesn't want anything, doesn't need anything, doesn't try to get away from anything. A love that's just a warmth, warm-heartedness that's open to all things without being for and against it. Experiment with that. See where you are with that. And then we'll continue tomorrow. Thank you all very much.