

## Dharmette: Love (69) Wisdom Supported Love

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Hello, welcome to this fifth talk of the week on *Equanimous Love*. And this is basically a two-part, two-week series in our long series on love. And this week is laying down the foundation for understanding well what equanimous love can be. And the hope is that you understand foundations for it, how to support it, how not to doubt it, how not to question whether it's even possible, but to really appreciate the glow, the place, the ability to love in a balanced way, in a sacrificial love. I mean, there's all kinds of ways that we get caught in other beliefs and conclusions and meaning-making that almost says, no, we can't do that. We can't love right now. We have to be angry. We have to be sad. We have to be agitated.

And so, how to have this equanimous love? One of the foundations for it, and perhaps one of the great foundations for it, is wisdom. It's to have some profound insight, understanding, that helps support what goes on. And ideally, this wisdom comes from experience, repeated experience. It's over and over again. We say, "Oh yeah, this is true, this works."

And one of them is the idea that I said in the guided meditation, is that things will change, everything changes. But in Buddhism, you have to really appreciate that, at least in the early Buddhism, this idea that everything changes is mostly applied to our inner state, to our psychology, our mental processing, our reactivity, our conclusions we have, the attitudes we get stuck in. This inner world constantly changes and is in flux. And sometimes it stays the same, but then it changes.

And not a few people I know, a lot of people I know, have gone through something that was really hard in their life. But it turned out that even though it was hard and there was a level of grief around it, it changed their life. And their life is so much better because of the event. And in hindsight, they see that event with gratitude. It is not always that way, but things change. And we're not in a good position to know what the real conclusion, the real meaning, the real long-term effect this will have.

And someone might win a lottery, a lot of money, and think that now their life is made. But after a year, it's been said, studies have shown that most people who win big lotteries are less happy a year after winning it than before. And so we don't know the effect.

So there's a famous Chinese story of a farmer, an old farmer, a very poor farmer, who barely ekes out an existence with his son and has an old donkey that helps them plow and take care of things. But then the donkey dies, and the neighbors say, "Oh, you poor man, things are going to be hard for you now." And the old farmer says, "We shall see." And then, sure enough, a wild horse comes out of the mountains, and the son is able to catch it and tame it. And people say, "Oh, how wonderful, how fortunate you'll be. Now you're able to have a strong horse to help your farming." And the farmer says, "We shall see."

But then the son falls off the horse and breaks his foot, breaks his leg. And the people say, "How unfortunate." And he says, "We shall see." It turns out the local king goes to war with the neighboring kingdom and recruits all the young men to fight. But because the son has a broken leg, he can't go to fight. And the neighbors say, "Oh, you're so fortunate your son's not going off to war." And of course, the old farmer says, "We shall see."

And so he has this equanimity. He takes everything in stride. He's not going to jump to conclusions about what this means and where this is going. And I imagine this old farmer has experienced a lot, and he's seen over and over again that our conclusions are not conclusions. They're predictions. And the predictions we do, let's wait and see.

So this kind of "we shall see" about the state we're in, the mind, the attitudes we have, the beliefs we have, this whole inner landscape that we live in, that offers us the interpretations, the lenses through which we see this world, those lenses can shift. We shall see. And because of all the shifting nature of it all, the other piece of wisdom is don't know. I don't know how this is going to go. I don't know where it's happening. Let's find out. We shall see.

And so these two pieces of wisdom are very significant when we love. I'll be very careful with our love so we don't sacrifice it, so we don't destroy it, we don't lose touch with it. If we can look upon the world with wisdom, then we can sometimes leave it, we can just continue to love. We don't have to compromise our love. And love can beam forth, right? And so this is where equanimous love comes into play.

And in Buddhism, this love of equanimity has its strongest presence and role and value when goodwill, loving-kindness, compassion, and appreciative joy are not really appropriate. When people are making choices that may be not healthy for them, not good, and we have no role. We can't get involved. We can't interfere, you know. And sometimes we have to just

accept that people are making choices. We have to accept the conditions and hold it with love, hold it broadly with love, and not give up the love because of it.

But love anyway, knowing that we don't have a role for or against, that we don't have a role to help or to do something. And so that's a form of wisdom, to recognize, let's not sacrifice this love in a situation where I have no ability to make anything happen because the people are making choices that are maybe not healthy, good.

Or there's other situations where one of the pieces of wisdom that sometimes hospice nurses will provide to families of people who are dying, some occasionally with slow deaths, there's a stage of dying where the dying person will get angry and hostile even to the people who they're most close with. And it's very confusing to the relatives and friends because everything has shifted. They've been so close before, and now the person's angry and hostile. And it can be devastating and disappointing, and we take it so seriously. This ruins the whole lifetime of love we had and care.

But the hospice nurses will warn people, this is a common phenomenon. This is a stage people go through. Maybe it's just, you know, different chemicals are being released in the brain. And I've known people who have been told this, and sure enough, their loved one goes through this stage, and they're prepared. They know not to take it personally. They know it's a kind of a phase of some kind of maybe chemical processing, neurological processing, and that this too will pass.

And they don't have to interpret this as something that casts light on the whole past of how they were together. It's just the conditions that are right now. And their love of their parent, spouse, friend, doesn't have to diminish. They can hold it equanimously. They don't have to believe or get caught in the anger, just be wise about how to handle it. So it's an example where love can be equanimous because we have understanding, we have wisdom.

And so in this way, equanimous love is not naive. Equanimous love is not simplistic. Equanimous love is really based on a wise perspective on this world that we live in.

And the final wise perspective that I'll offer, it's very important in early Buddhism, is that the orientation is not what brings short-term happiness, which is maybe a good thing to be concerned with. But the primary orientation is what brings long-term happiness. What brings long-term benefit? And to have a sense of that.

And the love that has the long view can be more equanimous. The love that has a short view sometimes gets caught up in the drama of the moment. But in the long view, maybe we don't sacrifice that love, or we don't get caught in the drama as much. We offer the love that brings

happiness in the long term, not the anger that does something in the short term, not the desires that are mostly about the short term.

And so, how do we care for the long term? Equanimous love, love that's not caught by the details of the moment, still responsive to it, but maybe not caught in it.

So, for today and through the weekend, I'd suggest that you reflect on, and if you like to journal, write about, or find friends to talk to about, what wisdom, what reliable wisdom do you know that can support a non-reactive love? And maybe ask people, do you have any sense, ask people, ask strangers, that you have this assignment. And what have they learned? What wisdom supports non-reactive love, equanimous love?

And I hope that this gives you wonderful conversations, wonderful connections to others, and prepares you for our *samādhi* of equanimous love that will start on Monday, next time we meet. Thank you very much.