

Dharmette: Love (72) Upekkha Samadhi 3

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Hello and welcome to our continued exploration of love. For some of you, you've been with me exploring this topic now for over six months. May it be that you're learning to trust love more, to value it more, and to find it in yourself more, and to appreciate that loving is better than what is worse than loving, that loving is better than hating, loving is better than objectifying people as objects of your desire, love is better than being praised, and that loving is better than being loved.

And so there is a kind of resilience, there's a kind of self-sufficiency that comes with *dharma* practice, that kind of deep settling onto ourselves. And the whole path to that resilience, that settling, this real kind of feeling at home with oneself, can take a long time in practice. Some of you have been along here for this time, and we did a whole six months or so last year on *samādhi*, the gradual deepening of this deep ability to settle deeply in ourselves, independent of the concerns around us, to not be tied always to what happens around us. Of course our social relationships are important, but it's also important to develop some inner balanced strength, a strong balance inside where there's a kind of independence of sorts, right?

And so the Buddhist path is gradually building this over time and moving into this love that we've done now six months on, and now on that foundation, beginning to explore this idea of equanimous love and to do it gradually. Today the introduction was a friendship that's light, a friendship that is a friend, but it's easy, it's uncomplicated, maybe because you don't know each other that well, you don't have that much at stake in your relationship. So it's relatively easy to have it. And so then begin exploring what it is to have equanimous love for someone for whom there aren't the complications.

What will often happen is that it's very difficult to stay on track sometimes in these kinds of things, because the very doing of one thing will bring up the exceptions, bring up the places

where it's hard otherwise. And so we don't give ourselves the simplicity of the exercise now, trusting that we'll get to that. We're slowly growing and developing and exploring ourselves. And now we're exploring today with this easy friend, a friend that's easy to love in some way.

And then to begin exploring, in order to really appreciate this equanimous love, that equanimous love is not to be disconnected from people. Some hesitation people have around equanimous love is that equanimity just seems like a disconnect, like being aloof, being detached, being somehow unavailable, being blank, being neutral. And so there's nothing there, and so there is a lack of connection. But the opposite is what's going on. Actually, equanimous love involves a deep connection that might only be one way. Connection doesn't have to be reciprocated. We can feel connected. We can feel present for people.

And we can also then begin learning how we disconnect, how we give up the connection. If someone doesn't treat us just perfectly the way we want to be treated, then there's a little bit of resentment. We feel disrespected. We feel discounted. We feel betrayed. We feel hurt. All kinds of things we feel.

They're very human to feel, these things, but in feeling them, there's a subconscious choice that's made to step away from the connection and allow yourself to be disconnected by this. Sometimes we come with justifications. Of course we should be disconnected. They've disconnected. Is that really the case? Is it of course?

In the calm and the peacefulness of meditation, is that a place where you need to maintain the disconnect? Yes, what's it like to maintain the connection? And I guess the analogy for this that I'd like to offer, I think it comes from Christianity, and I'll use this analogy without really understanding its Christian context, so I apologize to the Christians for this. But there is this idea that I've heard, and it goes around in our society, this idea of if someone hits you, offer them the other cheek.

And there's something very profound about this, but it's not a Buddhist approach. There's never any idea in Buddhism to give the other cheek, to allow them to hit you again. Rather, if someone hits you, either literally or with their words, we're not there to stand there and just kind of receive it passively or kind of crumble. Rather, the idea is that that's the occasion not to give the other cheek, but to look them in the eye, hold their gaze, be present, be even more present than you were before. Really establish a presence, like, "I am here," and look at them. Not glare at them, not with anger, but look at them with the human sense of friendly connection, concern, love, compassion. Hold the gaze. Stay present.

And so this analogy is the idea that you don't give up the connection. And I've seen many times people treating me this way, I've treated other people this way, I've seen it between people, that keeping that friendly connection going, just being present, almost like just not reacting to what the other people say, but staying friendly, staying relaxed, staying non-reactive, can be an amazingly good medicine for the situation. What they're doing can't survive, can't continue, because of the warmth coming.

And of course, there needs to be some real skill in having these kinds of conversations, difficult conversations with people. And that's something to be learned over time. But the reference point of learning and exploring this in meditation, where in meditation itself there's not much at stake, is important. You can always not do it, and it's very private. No one needs to know that you're doing this.

And there, to explore your amazing miracle of capacity, your capacity for love, your capacity for kindness, for friendliness, for open-heartedness, to gaze upon the world kindly, to gaze on others with friendship. One of the definitions of love is a friendly, open space in which to receive others. Equanimous love is a love that doesn't lose that connection for anything. It doesn't lose that connection because the person is going to give you whatever you want, and it's just so good, and you're just going to get overwhelmed with gratitude, delight, and filled with love.

But there's something lost in overwhelming gratitude and joy and appreciation and conceit around getting exactly what you want. Maybe there is a way of staying equanimous even if you're being praised, and then when things are not going well. And so to learn how to maintain that equanimous, open, caring, friendly, open space no matter what. For today, the emphasis is to do that with a person for whom it's uncomplicated to do.

You don't quickly come with exceptions, don't quickly come with reservations, why you shouldn't, why you can't. When they do that, they're going to do that again. You can't do it because they'll take advantage of you. When you're meditating, or when you're doing this in your own private kind of situation, try not to come up with the exceptions. Try to just, and don't worry about whether they deserve it or not. That's not the name of the game.

The *samādhi* of equanimous love is to find a way genuinely, honestly, completely to immerse yourself in this world of love, to hold it constant, to hold the connection constant, the flow, the warmth, the open, friendly space. Just keep it there. Breathe with it. And let that become the only thing you're thinking about, the only concern you have. Because as a meditator, hopefully over time, we're learning how to let go of our preoccupations, let go of our thoughts that take us away from the task at hand, and to give ourselves over fully to this.

And to learn the amazing experience in meditation, or in the privacy of your own life when you're not in complicated relationships, the amazing gift and the medicine of being able to have equanimous love in all situations, to be able to gaze on the world kindly, to not turn away, to not turn the other cheek, to not attack, to not blame, to maybe not get angry, but to meet the situation honestly, wholly, completely, with kindness. "I'm here."

And so as you go, continue now, if you want to continue with doing this in the next 24 hours before we meet again, see if you can find the people, a variety of people through the day, that privately, on your own, no one has to know you're doing this, people for whom it's relatively uncomplicated. See if you can hold the gaze of kindness. See if you can value not the ideas, not the history, not the memories, not the challenges of the relationship that exist, but the simplicity of an open, friendly gaze, open, friendly heart. Breathe with it. Stay with it. Just give yourself over to it, whether it's for a minute, five minutes.

Explore it. Feel it. And see what that highlights for you, of how you lose that connection, and that losing that connection is maybe something you don't have to do as much as you're doing it. To stay connected, stay present with love, equanimous love, that's a great gift. So thank you very much.