

Dharmette: Love (73) Love (72) Unconditional Positive Upekkha Samadhi 4

Gil Fronsdal

July 09, 2026

Keywords: upekkhā, Vipassanā, Shinzen Young, unconditional positive regard, Carl Rogers, samādhi, mettā, karuṇā, muditā, mindfulness

Hello and welcome to this continuous series of love, this time continuing talks on equanimous love, *upekkhā*. And this is such an important love to have in certain circumstances. And one of the ones I'm thinking about is there's a friend who's a brilliant and innovative *Vipassanā* teacher. His name is Shinzen Young, and he developed an approach for teaching mindfulness to young teenage boys.

And so he developed it and trained some people to do it. I don't know how common it is anymore, but for a little while it was operating. And the way it worked was that there were never any instructions, no mindfulness instructions to these teenagers. Nothing they had to do or were expected to speak, no technique or anything of mindfulness.

Rather, they were invited to bring some of their own music that they liked listening to, to the session. And the instructor would ask them a series of questions before and after listening to the music. I don't know what the actual questions were, but those questions, the questions of how they listen maybe, or how they hear it in their body, or how it affects their thoughts, what touches them the most, the most deeply, I'm just making this up, but I'm sure the questions are probably even better than that. But they were simple questions.

And those questions, to respond to them, required an inner attention, kind of feeling oneself, sensing oneself, being present for oneself before, after, but more important, maybe during the music. And then they report back. And that reporting back also helped everyone in the group kind of feel more connected. And, incidentally, they were all becoming more mindful, more present, more here in their bodies and minds, and really kind of waking up in a nice way.

But one of the reasons I'm telling you this is that one of the most important parts of this approach was that the facilitator of it had to practice unconditional acceptance of whatever they said, unconditional positive regard. No matter how they answered, how they reported, there was never any response from the facilitator that they were wrong or hadn't understood or had missed the boat or something. It was all just very appreciative and welcoming and held it all. And this idea, the feeling was that anything else, any kind of thing that would be instructive, what they had to do, what they could fail, anything that felt like there was any judgment about them, they were going to be highly sensitive to.

And they had to just practice this unconditional positive regard. And there's no mistakes. They could make no mistakes in doing this. Nothing was wrong. So that's a situation where this unconditional positive regard, equanimous love, has a big impact, big benefit.

I believe that the expression unconditional positive regard might have come from Carl Rogers, famous American therapist, psychologist, who cultivated this way of being in relationship to a client. They had unconditional positive regard for whatever they said, and gently repeat, mostly just repeated back what they said, not verbatim, but just maybe in a slightly different way, as a way of acknowledging and naming and making room for what they had said. And lo and behold, that would just give people a chance then to build on that, to expand on that, to go deeper with it. And it was remarkable.

There are videos of Carl Rogers doing this work. And it's remarkable to watch how it deepens and helps and moves people. There's no advice given, there's no instructions and no judgments, just unconditional positive regard, mirroring back to them what's there. And some of these videos are from the 50s, maybe early 60s, so maybe the language, the culture was a little bit different than it is now, so it might seem a little stilted, but at the time it was revolutionary. Right?

And so there are times for this unconditional positive regard, which is a modern English way of saying equanimous love. And from time to time, that's the medicine for the situation. And so to learn to do that is a phenomenally useful skill. And it's not easy to learn. And so it really takes a lot of self-understanding, a lot of mindfulness, awareness of oneself to not get tripped up by the judgments, the ideas of right and wrong, justice, what has to happen, tripped up by the fears, preoccupations, the ways that we get caught in our own inner doubts.

But to keep the playing field of the heart wide open and clear so that what flows out of us is equanimous love, balanced love, non-reactive love, love that has a continuity to it where it's not being disturbed by a lot of the doubts, a lot of the exceptions, a lot of the complaints, a lot of what if, what of those situations. Or remembering, oh yes, this is fine, but there's other

times where it's not easy. And then we are galloping off into thinking about the times that are difficult. But to really appreciate that there's a time and place to come here and discover and work through whatever is going on within us that keeps us from a continuity of unconditional positive regard, unconditional, to be calm and gaze upon the world kindly.

And so one of the things to appreciate here is that it's quite appropriate and very human to take time to do particular things without it being a betrayal of other things that we do as a human being. Many of us will, you know, go home from work in order to sleep at night. I mean, imagine what chaos it would be if everyone in a big company, everyone just worked all the time. They all slept in their office and slept there, you know, there. And it would just be very different. People wouldn't get the rest and the recovery that they would need to come back to work.

And so we go home, and there's no betrayal of work. It's just within the rhythm of life that way. And so with meditation, it's like the analogy I gave before, it's like washing our hands. Washing our hands is not a betrayal of the world, not betrayal of dirty hands. It's not a waste of time because the hands will get dirty again later.

It's appropriate and it's nice, and it prepares the surgeon for being able to do surgery without infecting people. And so when we do have time off from the world, that's what meditation is for. And it's powerful, amazing to give yourself permission to drop the worldly concerns the best you can and allow for there to be an unconditional positive regard, to gaze upon the world kindly, to gaze upon yourself kindly, and to do it with continuity as *samādhi*, to dip into it and immerse yourself in this cleansing process of equanimous love.

And we do it by building on the love that we've created through *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, goodwill, compassion, appreciative joy. And then to have a simpler love, a more basic love, to sit on the park bench where there are strangers walking by. It's very safe. It's a nice day. Everyone's in a good mood for the most part.

Some people are smoking cigarettes. Some people are maybe doing things that you normally wouldn't approve of. And maybe some people are even arguing. And you're sitting there watching the world go by with unconditional positive regard, with equanimous love, independent of whether they deserve it or not, just because it's so phenomenal, so wonderful to finally be able to be at peace yourself and to radiate, to feel and sense a positive regard in all directions.

And so, but to do this, it's a practice. It's not just something, it's not an ideal we can just snap our fingers and drop into. It's something that we are slowly working our way towards, un-

derstanding where it's difficult, understanding where we get tripped up, and having a warm, unconditional regard towards ourselves. We can never do it wrong, in a sense. We're never being judged for ourselves.

We're like the young teenagers who really benefit from that. But we can keep asking questions, we can keep opening up, we can keep discovering, oh, this is how it is, this is how it is. We can be present for the difficulties we have in a way that supports greater interest, greater opening, greater discovery of sensing, oh, this is it, as if that's what we're doing, opening to more, here for this, making more room, more space to hold everything until everything can be held in our freedom. Everything can be held in our kind regard, where freedom and kind regard, freedom and love are inseparable.

What a phenomenal direction to go in our lives. And this practice is leading us to that direction. That's the North Star, the heart set free so that it can have this simple universal love for all, for all. So thank you very much, and we'll have another day with equanimous love tomorrow. And may it be that you begin maybe today, you look over the next day, and what is the ways in which being free from attachments, free from contraction, free from clinging and grasping, free from pushing and resisting, free from being stuck, right there you can discover love, positive regard, being deeply at ease and gazing upon the world kindly. Thank you.