

Dharmette: Love (76) Non-Harming as Love

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So today we continue with the theme, the idea of the expression of love. And after all these months of exploring the topic of love, an important element, sooner or later, different people at different times, will begin to recognize that love also can be expressed in our words, in our deeds, in our eyes, and in how we are in the world. So to be able to recognize and appreciate that love also can be expressed, like it has something that flows out of it, is an important part of recognizing the fullness of love, to become familiar, become fluent in the language of love, the nature of love, that we've been looking at for these last six months.

And yesterday I spoke about generosity being an expression of love. Generosity can be an expression of other things besides love, but it also can be an expression of love. And today I want to emphasize that a very important expression of love, the kind of love that Buddhism cherishes and values, is non-harming. And to love non-harming, because love is non-harming. At its essence, the kind of *mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*, the kind of goodwill, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimous love that Buddhism puts a lot of value on, is a form of non-harming. Because harming goes clearly against it.

That ill will is a form of harm, the opposite of goodwill. That hostility and cruelty, the opposite of compassion, clearly harms. And so to begin appreciating that there is a momentum, there is a desire, there is an orientation, a love for non-harming that is part of love. And there's two sides of that. One is that as we become simpler and quieter, and all the extra things that get added to love, get confused for love, as they settle away, we feel that something really is precious here, valuable here, in this way of being, and we don't want to make it worse. So we don't want to harm ourselves or others. The Buddha said that in harming others, we harm ourselves.

And the other is that not just simply wanting to not harm as a kind of keeping some better state present, but that also non-harming is almost like its own force. It's almost like its own

power or energy or state. That's what wants to come out of us as non-harming. And maybe it's hard to understand unless you've tapped into some of the depth of peace and calm that's available inside. Do you really feel that the expression of love is non-harming, wanting to not cause harm? A resistance, an allergy almost, to causing harm. I don't know if allergy is the right word, but an unwillingness.

And part of what helps us to find that is to appreciate, to understand, that there are a lot of things that get confused for love. That sometimes the strong drive that feels biological, that feels compelling, that feels like this is who I am, this is where there's energy, even that this is where there's vitality, that that is a form of love. But if it's a desire for pleasure, like sexual pleasure, if it's a desire for safety, which is very important, it can be an expression of love. But to confuse the desire to be safe, when the source of that desire is maybe anxiety, we're probably not connected to love in the deepest way. Some people confuse love with the pleasure that comes from being adored, being valued, being praised. And some people confuse love with the wonderful feeling of belonging or safety that can come from some people who provide that by their very presence, their involvement, or their connection.

And so there's nothing necessarily wrong with those kinds of things, but they are more activated states. They are more energetic states. They're more needy states sometimes. And what we learn in meditation is that slowly, slowly we learn that we can settle those away, settle the activated states, settle the reactive states, settle the emotions that are born of some kind of attachment, some kind of insecurity, and find a deep sense of well-being there. And there, with time, we start discovering love. You don't have to even want to have it, but it can sometimes just appear on its own.

And to know enough of this, it might not even be a feeling, but to know something about non-harming, something about love, can translate when things are really difficult for us. When we are agitated, when we are restless, when we are caught in things, there's a way of not condemning that, not harming that, but a dedication to, okay, this too needs to be held in this non-harming way. This too needs to have space. And it doesn't mean that we can do it well, but it means that we're oriented towards where's the non-harming? How can I hold this? How can I include this in this field of goodwill, of kindness, of friendliness?

And maybe it's by taking some deeper breaths and relaxing. Maybe it's finding the places where the body is tense and saying, here I can relax. Or maybe it's finding the places where the body is soft and relaxed and peaceful. Maybe there's one little square centimeter somewhere in the body that can be a refuge, that can allow us not to get caught up in the restlessness and the preoccupations and the hostilities we have. Just to stay. Stay here. Don't act

on it. Don't give in to it, but don't deny it. Don't push it away. Hold everything with goodwill. Hold everything with a non-harming attitude, a non-harming awareness.

And so there's a way in which, as practice, Buddhist practice, develops and grows over time, there becomes a baseline of kind of orientation to non-harming that is not a strong feeling or something we strongly identify with, but it is a baseline. It's always there like a hum, like an orientation. And some people call it a vow, a commitment, a resolve, that there's a natural form of a vow, commitment, natural kind of promise, natural kind of idea: this is really important for me. This is where I want to be committed, even when it's hard, even when it's not close by. Love, goodwill, non-harming.

And there in Buddhism, sometimes the dedication to non-harming is a phenomenally powerful vow that people take. Sometimes with taking the precepts, it's kind of like a vow or a real commitment. Not from the outside. It's not imposed or something we take on. But rather we realize that this is the heart's deepest wish. This is what I want my life to be about. I don't want to give myself over to the forces that are opposite to love. I don't want to give myself over to the forces that are opposite to love. They'll be there for me. But that's not where my commitment is.

That's not where a vow is. That's not where the *adhiṭṭhāna*, the dedication, the resolve, where I'm going to take a stand. In early Buddhism, the word vow, the closest word to the word vow, means to take a higher stand. This is what I stand on. And to stand on non-harming. And for some people, it's so powerful that they would rather die than to kill someone else. There's no question in their mind: if that's the choice, I'll die first. And I'm not suggesting that has to be that way for you, but what I'm suggesting is this very strong sense: this is what my life is based on.

This is so important. Who wins the World Cup, how much money I have in my bank account, all kinds of things are really a distant second to this. This is what I might, if nothing else, this is the core orientation that I live in. So for some Buddhists, it's non-harming. And what I'm proposing here today is that there's a way in which this non-harming is not an obligation, it's not a duty, it's not a should, but rather it's a natural arising from being quiet enough, still enough, to recognize the inner core of love, of kindness, of goodwill that is inclusive of, or includes, non-harming.

And may it be that we all love non-harming, a life of not causing harm, and transform the world. We need it in this world so badly, so fully. May we contribute to the flowering, the expansion, the growth, and the recognition of the beauty and the love of a non-harming heart. Thank you.