

Guided Meditation: Loving Respect

Gil Fronsdal

July 16, 2026

Keywords: love, respect, mindfulness, generosity, non-harming, kind speech, agency, autonomy, causes and conditions, meditation

Hello and welcome to this week's series on love. And the particular orientation is the expressions of love. It's one thing to feel love, and it's another thing to express it. Sometimes when people love, the primary orientation is to receive something. We love someone, and we can't wait until they love us back, or we want them to love us back, or we focus on what we receive. And another whole orientation, which is closer to the heart of love, is not what we receive, but what we offer, what we give, the expressions that come out of us.

So we talked about generosity, about non-harming, kind speech. And today I'd like to offer respect as an expression of love. Because how can we love without respecting the people we love? If there's no respect of others, then our love is probably not that perfect, clean, or it might not even be love. It might be a strong urge for desire, because desirous urges are so compelling and maybe have a pleasure to them or a promise of pleasure, and can be mistaken for love. But mostly it's desire, and without the kind of deep respect that the kind of love is that we're practicing and developing here in Buddhism.

And respect, I love the word respect because it implies, I think, that we see others as being worthy of attention, that they're worthy of us just being present for them. They're worthy of us being present for them, to see them, to know them, to hear them, to treat them as full-fledged humans with agency, autonomy, choices of their own, that what they have to say is valuable and important, and that that would be the beginning stance. And why would we have that wish? Again, not because we should or we're required to, but because it itself is a natural expression of love. Love which is not tinged by strong desire of wanting something, that gets impatient, that is in a hurry, that overrides all kinds of other things. That's not the love we're looking at. What we're looking for is the love that has time and space, that has a feeling of generosity and openness to our experience.

And so, I think, I remember many years ago, I was at an airport where a very famous politician came. And so he was going down this line, picket fence, I guess, kind of shaking people's hands. And so I was there with my hand out. I felt so fortunate to be able to shake hands with this very famous person. And as this hand went into my hand, the hand went limp, and the person was already looking down to the next people in the row. There was no contact, there was no respect, there was no value. It was almost like an afterthought, or almost like, you know, the purpose of the handshake had disappeared as soon as physical contact had been made, and it just felt kind of, you know, yucky.

And so this idea of not really stopping and being present for people in a clear, kind way, to have our opinions, our stories, our needs override the simple respectful presence for someone else. I have a very kind of important experience I had where I greeted a friend when he suddenly showed up, and we were kind of good friends and kind-hearted, a little bit joking when we saw each other. And he walked into the room, and I said something kind of offhand and joking and happy to see him. But it was a little bit, you know, teasing maybe. And I hadn't taken time to register, to feel, to know, recognize, to respect the person before I came forward with my own agendas, my own thing, overriding whatever might have been there.

And one of his best friends had just died. And that was not the time to be joking or teasing myself. And I felt, wow, I didn't take my time to get to know him, to just check in and feel him first, rather than have my own agenda, my own drive, my own joy even. It was kind of joyful to see him, but still, I overrode the moment with that. If I'd waited three seconds or five seconds, I would have recognized what was going on, and I would have approached the whole situation differently. Or that five seconds of, if he had been in a normal state, maybe then I could have brought forth the joy of our relationship in that way.

So the idea of taking time to respect people, it's a difficult topic because some people seem to behave in ways that shouldn't call our respect. Respect doesn't mean we approve of people, approve of what they do. Respect in this mindful way is that we respect people enough to be present, to really see, to listen, to convey to others, you count enough that I'm going to listen, I'm going to hear you, I'm going to sense you, I'm going to accompany you. And it doesn't have to be for a long time, but that's that second look. The word respect, I like to interpret it, the Latin word, the second look we give.

And as I said in that meditation, there are these two wonderful aspects of mindfulness. There's discovering the awareness, which doesn't require any agency, any choice, that just settles back and just allows the unfolding of experience as it comes naturally into awareness. And we don't interfere with it. We don't get ahead of ourselves. We don't judge. And in deep

meditation especially, this is quite powerful and significant, to have this experience of any kind of a natural awareness just kind of flowing through without there being an agent doing it. It does itself.

But there's a whole other side of attention and awareness, and that's the part that we use, where we have autonomy, we have agency, right? Just like we want to grant, when we have respect, grant other people their agency, their autonomy, their ability to choose, their ability to come forth in an important way. So we have our own. And so that's giving the second look. The first experience just arises. The second is what we add.

So, for example, if there's a thought that arises in our mind, the first thought, in a sense, is not our responsibility. It just arises from causes and conditions. But the second, the next step, do we pick it up? Do we get involved? Do we believe it? Do we recoil? Do we judge it? How do we relate to it? And one of the choices is to be very simple and choose to give it a second look.

Look at that, that thought. That was a difficult thought. That's not a pleasant thought. What does that feel like? Where is it? What's happening here? What's going on with me? Let me be present here. As opposed to, oh no, I'm a terrible person. That's a terrible thought. And reacting.

But everything has its respect. Everything is there for causes and conditions. And we can be present. And what we learn in mindfulness is that respectful presence, respectful love, changes the whole ecosystem in a wonderful way. And we don't have to intend to change. We don't have to judge and have agency and do things. The agency we can have is the agency to give it a second look, a loving look, a respectful look.

And so an expression of love, this deep kind of love that we've been exploring for the last six months, is from that love, to tap into it, to be close to it. There will be an expression, maybe a natural expression, of respect, of giving people, giving others, giving ourselves a second look. And that second look carries with it the love. The first look might not. The second one, we settle back on ourselves. I'm going to be here now and be present, and do it with kindness, with kind speech, generosity, non-harming.

I'm going to be here with valuing this person just because they're alive, just because they're breathing, their heart is beating, just because they are a human like me. I don't have to agree with them. I don't have to argue with them. I don't have to fix them right now. I can be present, and I don't have to give in. That doesn't mean I give in to them. It doesn't mean that I somehow am being taken advantage of, because in this powerful stance of that second look,

we're not giving in. We're just really being present here, as if we respect, not as if, because we respect.

So the way in which love is expressed as respect, I think, is a very profound aspect of love. I'd like to think that there can't really be a genuine love without respect for others. And I know that many people override respect because their love is filled with desires of how it should be, what they want to have, what they need to have. But then the respect doesn't have a chance.

So what I'd like to propose to you for the next 24 hours, explore for yourself. In what way can this idea of respect be supportive for you to help the cultivation, the growth of love? How is there a respectful love coming out of you? What does it mean to love people with respect, to respect people with love? And maybe in this exploration, you'll have to come up with your own definition of what respect is. Maybe not rely on what I said. And this might be a fascinating conversation to have with friends, with strangers.

What is the connection between love and respect? And see what interesting conversations you have today. See what interesting contemplations you have on your own today. Connecting love and respect, respect and love. So thank you very much. And may your respectful love of others benefit this world.