

Dharmette: Love (79) Commitment to Love

Gil Fronsdal

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So hello, and welcome to the final talk for this week's series on the expressions of love. And we are coming towards the end of this now almost seven-month series on love. And maybe there'll be one more week next week. We'll see.

But I thought maybe, coming to the end, as we have not had a Zoom community meeting for our YouTube community for a very long time, next Friday we could have, when this finishes at quarter to, that we could switch over to Zoom, and we'll provide the Zoom link in different ways. And maybe have some conversations, some questions, maybe some breakout groups, so we can talk to each other a little bit. Those of you who've been coming here for a long time might enjoy meeting each other. And we'll do that maybe for about 45 minutes or so. So I'll talk about it more next week.

But for today, the expressions of love. There is something about love, certain kinds of love, that is not meant to be just left to itself inside of us, but wants to be expressed. And I found that as I did meditation practice and long retreat practice, that something deep inside wanted to come out of me, wanted to live in some way. It was not just something that was static, a good feeling, something very personal, but something that I wanted to live in the social interactions of life, in the world itself. And there was a variety of things.

And one was, there was a period of time that I just wanted to bow to people. I just wanted to. I didn't need to say anything or do anything, but just something profound about putting the hands together in front of the heart and kind of opening the heart and bowing down to people as an appreciation, as a form of love. That wasn't required, but it was the heart's expression that wanted to be expressed.

But one of the expressions of love, deep love, maybe *dharmic* love, can have different kinds of names. And I'll go through the list of some of the words associated with it, and maybe one

of those words speaks to you, and some of them won't speak to you. But there can be a sense of commitment, an aspiration, a resolve. In some areas of Buddhism, the word vow is used. There's the heart's vow. There's a promise we make to ourselves that this is what we want to do.

So those are some of the words, and I'm sure there's other words. But what it is is that we feel like we're in touch with something inside, and it could be, in essence, the theme is love. It's a form of love that seems so important. So we value it so much. And we see that most other things we do in ordinary life, the reactive things we do, take us away from something: a profound sense of wholeness, profound sense of aliveness, connectivity, profound sense of meaning, profound sense of love that just is in a beautiful way.

And it's natural to see that difference, to see one is more desirable than others, one is more valuable, one is a way of being in the world that I can contribute more to the world than if I live in my reactive world, in my fear-based world, or my petty desire world, or my desires for comfort, or my preoccupations. But this place, this is really a place that life feels full, feels meaningful. It feels just to be alive is enough. Just to have this love to act in the world seems good.

And so there comes a time for this deep kind of love that there's hopefully a very natural form of desire that's not required. It's not that you have to do it before you're ready, or ever, if it's never the case. But there's a natural way in which there's a sense of a vow, a sense that this is where, this is the place I'd like to stand. I stand in my life on this. This is the orientation. This is the meaning. This is the place.

I won't always be here, but this is where I'm practicing for. This is why I'm living my life, so that this can be the source of the life, the source of what motivates me, what guides me in my life. And it can be a profound sense of love.

For me, the profound sense of love that arose for me in my Zen monastic time was, I characterized it as compassion. And that compassion seemed like the most important thing, the most valuable thing. And it came right hand in hand together with a deep sense of inner freedom that came with it, or was part of it. But this sense of compassion wanted to be expressed in the world. It wanted to be expressed in a commitment, in a vow.

I said, this makes sense to orient, like I make a promise to myself that this is where I want to stay rooted. This is important. This is so important that I don't want to lose touch with this. I don't want to flippantly kind of get distracted by things. I really want to stay close.

And so that vow I made to myself, this inner kind of aspiration that arose from deep inside,

then has been a guiding light for me in pretty much my whole adult life, and to live from this place of compassion, caring for the suffering of the world. And it's been very rewarding, and I still feel like this is really a central place. As I've practiced over these years, other forms of love have also kind of taken their seat in the same place. Kind of they coexist together.

A deep sense of *mettā* arose over time, and that wonderful sense of goodwill. There was a deep sense of *anukampā*, of care, and caring for the welfare of people. Its own form of love became part of it. And it felt like the most natural thing in the world to say yes to, yes. This is what I want to say yes to in my life.

In the ancient language of the Buddha, one of the primary words for this in *Pāli* is *adhiṭṭhāna*. And *adhi* means higher, and *ṭhāna* is an ordinary word for stand. So a higher stance. This is where I'm going to stand. I'm going to stand on this.

The Buddha talked about standing on peace, standing on wisdom, standing on generosity, standing on truth. And those are the four stands that he emphasized. And I'd like to emphasize that in addition to those, it can be love. It can be *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, *upekkhā*, *anukampā*. It can be generosity, love that's dedicated to non-harming.

That's where we're centered. Nothing else, we're never going to give up that vow, that commitment, that orientation, because it doesn't make sense to. There's not possible, not something inside of me prevents me from intentionally causing harm or killing any living being. That's a love. I don't have to make that commitment. It is the commitment. It is the commitment. It's here. It's just, it's not even a choice.

There's the love that is kind words, kind speech, to be in relationship with people in a way that supports friendly relationships. There's the love of respect, the deep appreciation, maybe the kind that, you know, you're willing to bow, even if you disagree with people. There's something about respecting them without agreeing to them.

And then the vow, the love of the vow, the vow of love. Yes, this is what I want to base my life on. This is what my life is based on, and I want to remember this. So part of the vow simply is expressed in the idea of I'm committed to remembering this part of me, because this is what I want to base my life on, or what my life in its most meaningful way is based on. And I don't want to lose touch with that. So I'll stay in touch with it, with a commitment, with touching, with a hand, with fingers, with the etymology of the word commitment.

And so, as we practice the *Dharma*, as we practice this kind of deep meditation, at some point we touch something inside of us that's going to guide how we live our life from this place of peace, from this place of freedom, from this place of love. Some people might call it a calling.

Some people call it an inspiration. Some people might just call it love by itself. And there's a natural sense, yes, this is what I want to do.

And it can change whole lives. People realize that the life they have been living is not based on that. Maybe the life they were living was based on becoming wealthy. And that has a kind of, at some point, has a hollowness to it, maybe. Or becoming famous. Or there's all kinds of things that, as we get older, professions, different things, begin to be questioned a little bit because of the root motivation of why we're doing it.

And as practice reveals a deeper, more meaningful motivation of how to live a life, some people then will change their jobs, change their work, change the direction of their life, so they can enact and live from this deep place. So I offer this to you not as something any one of you is supposed to do, but I'm offering this to you that you might recognize this in yourself. At some point, someday, through the practice, through the practice of love, that you might find yourself, oh, look at that. This is what Gil was talking about. This living me, this wants to be my guide.

This is what I want to base my life on, even if it means I have to do some major changes in my life. Or maybe this is how I want to base my life on. I don't have to change anything, but I'm going to change how I do those things in my life. I'm going to approach them differently now. I'm going to approach them as opportunities to love, opportunities for kindness, friendship, opportunities for freedom.

So you might, over this weekend, reflect on this word, vow, commitment, aspiration, deep intention, and see if you find, if you spend time thinking about it, reflecting on it, what is your deepest intention. What is your deepest intention? What is the deepest place that you say unqualifyingly, yes, this is the source. This is the guide for how I really want to live, if I could.

And explore it and discuss it. And don't settle on the first answer. Maybe there's different answers. And there is an ecology of answers that somehow have some common denominator. And if you have friends you can talk to about this, if you can journal about it, if you go on walks by yourself and reflect on it, explore this area and see what is the depth inside of you. What do you recognize there?

And if that doesn't kind of open to something inside, then you can switch the question to, if nothing that Gil talks about is relevant for me, what is my life based on? Is there a guiding principle? Is there a guiding principle, orientation, intention, desire? What is it that drives my life?

And if you can't find anything at all, then I worry a little bit that then people are all too easily led by others who tell them the answers, tell them what they should believe, or tell them what they should do. And in this practice, we become the agent for how we live our life.

So thank you very much, and I look forward to coming back for at least one more week for this lengthy theme of love. Thank you.