

Dharmette: Love (80) Intro to Care (Anukampa)

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Hello and welcome to this last week on the topic of love. After many, many weeks now, six months of exploring love from a Buddhist point of view, we come to the final form of love, the one that perhaps is maybe, for some people, considered the most important, and that might be the one that most centers their life or orients their life as being how to live in this world. Certainly this last form of love is the one that is described in the ancient text as the one that primarily motivated the Buddha for his teaching and attention to the world, care for the world. Usually it's described as compassion. The Buddha was a compassionate person.

But in the earliest texts, and usually we think of compassion as being the word *karuṇā*, the kind of love in the *Brahma Vihāras* that we talked about some months ago. But there's another word, sometimes translated as compassion, that is not *karuṇā*. I think it's better to translate it with a unique English word so it doesn't get confused with *karuṇā*. It's different than what we normally think of as compassion. And the word is *anukampā*.

And *anu*, A-N-U, is a prefix meaning toward something. And *kampa*, K-A-M-P-A, means to quiver or to vibrate, to somehow quiver, vibrate, resonate, toward or with other beings. And this quivering or this resonating, I think of as something that is very peaceful and satisfying, something that's warm and sweet inside of us. A number of times in my life, I've been surprised by the gentle kind of warmth, the gentle sweetness, the gentle tenderness that seemed to arise in my chest or in my hands, my arms, in not loving someone, not even being a friend to them, but just offering myself to really tend to someone, care for someone, in very simple ways.

I feel, I don't know if it's true or not, but I often really appreciate times where I've gotten my hair cut. I don't often go to a barber. But there are times where I go to a barber, and sometimes the way that they care for my head, my hair, I feel very soft, I feel very safe, comfortable.

I feel tended to, cared for in this beautiful way. And the same feeling that arises in me when I care for someone else that way somehow arises for me in that kind of care.

Many years ago, I remember getting a haircut in Turkey. It was a whole well-developed, or well, I was surprised. I thought I was just getting my hair cut. But I got a massage, a shoulder massage first. They did hot pads for my face. I think they might have cleaned my hair. They used a little blowtorch for singeing my ear hairs. But the whole thing was so tender, so caring, so gentle, like I was just gently being touched and cared for in such a nice way.

And the story I like to tell of the love of my grandmother, when I was quite young, maybe I don't know if I was seven or ten, is of laying in bed in the early morning light, sunlight coming into this nice Norwegian wooden room with all natural products back then in the room, the wood and cotton and down, and my mother drinking, I was reading comic books, and my grandmother coming in with a tray. At the time, I didn't realize the big impact this had on me. I just kind of took it for granted, maybe to some degree, as I was reading my comic book. But in retrospect, years later, I realized something entered into me, or was remembered by that, that I thought of as kind of a love. But it was a kind of love that comes when you're doing something and caring for people in simple ways. Here, let me do this for you.

And sometimes I've seen nurses care for people. I don't think they love them. I don't think that, in a conventional way, they have compassion for them. But there's this gentleness and focus and tenderness and softness and really trying to care for the person just the right way, just not to cause any harm, not cause any pain, try to do it just right, be very attentive. There's something about that loving care.

And so this word care translates this word *anukampā*. It's a humble word, care. But it's also, I think, one of the most profound and moving words in all of Buddhism because of what motivated the Buddha both to teach. Repeatedly it says he taught out of *anukampā*, out of care. And when people asked him to give a talk, to teach, they would ask him, can you please do it out of *anukampā*, out of care?

And when the Buddha had the first people who trained under him become mature in this practice, he said this to them:

Go forth for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of care for the world, for the good, the welfare and happiness of gods and humans.

So it's very simple and very ordinarily human. It's not metaphysical, it's not cosmic, it's not some kind of great universal idea of truth. It's this very simple thing that we navigate as

human beings with our direct contact with others and ways of being with people, that we can't be too forceful, we can't force people to be happy, we can't retreat too much and just leave them alone too much maybe. Where do we go forth for the welfare and happiness of others? Yes. It's very simple. It's almost like not even religious in some kind of great way. It's just care for the ordinary humanity of people, for their welfare and happiness, out of care for the world.

And here we have this humble word, care. And one of the things I like about this English word care is that there are multiple meanings. It can mean, to care for something means you value it. I care a lot about, you know, I care a lot about my breakfast in the morning and having it. I care a lot about my meditation in the morning. I care a lot about my neighbors and my friends. It can have a lot of different meanings.

I care a lot about democracy. I care a lot about justice. It means we really value something. We value it in a way that is more embodied or represents something deep within us, maybe. So it means valuing something.

It also means attending to something to maintain it and keep it going and keep it clean or keep it well-running, to care for something. The kitchen means maybe to keep it clean. To care for children means to do a whole bunch of things and make sure they have food and they're clothed and they have a good living environment. There's a lot of things we do when we care for children. I care for my car occasionally, keeping it clean, getting oil changes. And so in some ways it can also be a tender, very ordinary way of tending and maintaining things. And it can be done with a lot of love, with a lot of devotion or wonderful feeling.

And then there's the care that means that we really give ourselves to action. We go there to care for someone in a crisis. We go and care for people who are recovering from having their homes burned in a large fire. That happens all too much now. We want to send a donation to someone, to some people or community that's been suffering in some tragedy not of their own making. And so we care. I mean, we are concerned with their welfare, but we also care by maybe sending a donation or sending a care package.

So this ordinary word care at the heart of Buddhism is humble, and it can be powerful, and can be very much what has kept Buddhism enduring all these years, the way that we care for each other and care for these teachings and this practice. So this is a topic for this week, the word care and *anukampā*. And it seems a fitting end to six, almost seven months now of talking about Buddhist aspects of love, because I see it as the culmination, as the final, fullest expression of it. This simple, humble, unpretentious, non-egotistical, non-assertive way to just offer simple care for this world of ours, care that can make a world of difference. If we

maintain it, sustain it, and we live a life of care.

So, thank you. And may this week of talking about *anukampā* bring us all a sense of maybe inspiration, maybe even wonder at this amazing capacity of the human heart, that one way or the other probably is responsible for you being alive and your life in many ways, and what you can offer to the ongoing well-being of this world. Thank you.

And then, as I said on Friday, this coming Friday, at the end of our 7:30 *Dharma Talk*, those of you who want, we'll switch over to Zoom, like we've done before for the 7 a.m. community meeting that we have occasionally. And I'll post a Zoom link at some point on IMC's website, and I'll talk more about that. But I thought it'd be nice to have a little community meeting to follow up, to end this whole series on love, so we can have some chance to talk about it, have questions, and so forth. Thank you.