

Dharmette: Love (81) Care as Non-Clinging.

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July 21, 2026

Keywords: *anukampā*, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, non-clinging, clinging, compassion, loving-kindness, early Buddhism, craving, ill will

Hello and welcome to this next talk on care, on *anukampā*. And it's the, I call it the most important form of love that the Buddha was about, that motivated the Buddha. That was what he wanted to see in the people, and matured in the practice that he taught, that they would have *anukampā* for the world, and they would go out and care for the world with *anukampā*. And I translate this word *anukampā* as care, if we understand it to have within it all the meanings of care in English, which I think makes it very rich and kind of encompasses a lot of who we are. And that it's a form of love, or in the family of what we call love.

But today what I'd like to emphasize is why this word *Anukampā*, this idea of *anukampā*, is so significant for the Buddha, and why it's there with the maturity of practice. It is that, in and of itself, *anukampā* has no clinging. It's radical. It stands out, comes forth. It's always there, perhaps, but it comes forth more fully the less clinging there is. Clinging is the source for reactivity, for agitation, and that gets in the way of really feeling the deeper sensitivities that we have.

It's like the deepest nerve endings in the hand are mostly on the palm of the hand. But if you hold your hand in a fist all the time, those nerves are not really available to feel and touch the world, and to shake a hand or put your hand on a friend's shoulder. Putting your fist on a friend's shoulder is not going to do quite the same thing. And so, as we begin to open up the fists of the mind, fists of the heart, we begin opening up to the deeper sensitivity of who we are. As clinging decreases, the deep inner sensitivity, the places where the strongest nerve endings are, in a sense, for our interpersonal relationships, for our sense of care, become available.

Then care arises. Care becomes one of the most prominent motivating forces in a person's life. Sometimes this form of care is understood or translated as compassion, and it certainly

overlaps a lot with compassion. It can look like it. And some people use the word compassion when they feel this deep sense of care.

But the difference between compassion and care is compassion is oriented towards suffering and the end of suffering. Care includes that, for sure. But care, this *anukampā*, is more oriented towards the positive side of the welfare and happiness of others. It's a simple orientation to support and help the welfare, the well-being, and happiness of others. And if suffering is not the predominant state that someone's in, it's not quite appropriate maybe to have compassion. But it's always appropriate to have care in the present moment.

It's always appropriate to have an orientation to promote welfare, to promote happiness, to support that in the world. And that too is a form of love. Very simple. Sometimes it looks like *mettā*, loving-kindness, goodwill, because it's not about suffering. But both compassion and goodwill, *mettā* and *karuṇā*, they both are a little bit more of a purposeful state. There's like a wish or a desire in it.

Whereas care almost has no desire, almost has no forcefulness. It's just there in a very simple way. And the other day I was at the neighbor's house, and the dog came over to put its nose into my elbow. And it wasn't that I had goodwill for the dog. I had, of course, but it wasn't active. I didn't have compassion for the dog.

But there was a very simple, tender feeling of care, and just the care. The dog was looking for something, wanting something. And okay, I just put my hand on the head of the dog and petted a little bit, to just kind of offer something, some care, some presence to it. And I didn't want anything. I wasn't really trying to do much for the dog.

I was just kind of expressing, here I am. You're letting me know you're there. And here, let me let you know I see you. I know you. I'm present for you. I care about you. I value you.

And let me just acknowledge you for a little bit with that gentle, tender kind of stroking of the head. And in the case of the dog, that wasn't enough. But for those few moments, it was simple for me. And so we can care sometimes for objects. And some people can have a very loving relationship to an object, really care for it well, put it away properly. It's something we cherish and value and really care for nicely, beautifully.

It's kind of embodied or represented with, if you've ever seen a tea ceremony, the care and the love that goes into holding a cup. You don't have compassion for your cup. You don't have goodwill for the cup. It doesn't make sense. But there is a kind of very personally beautiful feeling that, by offering this little care to the cup, like it's precious, you're holding it carefully, tenderly, you're appreciating it.

And something happens inside where there's a shift from reactivity to greed to aversion to being busy, to this simplicity of just this ordinary care of an object that can feel peaceful and settled and quiet. Right? Tea ceremony sometimes is supported by a peaceful, quiet setting for that to happen. And so the important thing I would like to say here in this week's discussion about *Anukampā* is it involves, the primary characteristic of what it involves is the absence of clinging.

And there's a tendency in early Buddhism to describe the full potential of spiritual maturity not with the presence of something, but with the absence. Sometimes they talk about peace, but maybe peace is an absence of agitation, activity, busyness. But essentially the full maturity of practice is to be in absence: absence of craving, absence of clinging, absence of ill will, absence of preoccupied, discursive thoughts. And the advantage of mentioning the absence is that it is not defining it in any kind of way where the human tendency is to latch on to the definition.

So if you define it as peace, that can feel nice and wonderful, but soon enough peace becomes the object. You're holding it there: I'm not peaceful, it should be peaceful. Or if you define it as love, then it's like it has to be a certain way. But when you define love by an absence, if you define freedom by an absence, then it can feel really wonderful. And you're giving reality the gift of letting it be itself. You don't have to define it. It just feels healthy. It feels good. It feels right.

And so here we have a love that is defined primarily by absence of clinging. And in my practice, over these years of practice, I've seen that my relationship to love has shifted over time. And that at some point, as my clinging diminished, I started having a love that I initially called compassion. But over time, it grew and grew in such a way that that didn't quite seem like the right thing to call it anymore. I didn't know what it was until I learned about this early Buddhist idea of *anukampā* that's characterized by non-clinging.

And I could see, oh, non-clinging, non-grasping, non-craving, non-hate, that's becoming a powerful state within me. That becomes a reference point. And in there, there's a deep sensitivity that doesn't have to be acted on, but is oriented towards very simple acts of care. And it could be as simple as seeing the dishes in the sink and feeling that that's where the expression of care goes. Let's clean the dirty dishes.

It could be that it's being with someone who's sick, or someone who's suffering, and sitting with them, just sitting with the care and being very simple. Not feeling like we have to solve the problems of the world, but we can offer our care, our presence. And sometimes it becomes something that's a source for another motivation to really put a lot of time and ef-

fort into something that's worthwhile to do. But it always has this reference point of non-clinging.

And this has become, I think, one of the great turning points in Buddhist practice, when the orientation towards non-clinging becomes stronger than the orientation towards clinging. It's not becoming. It's more like non-clinging is water flowing downhill. Clinging actually is pushing the water uphill, which is a difficult task. Non-clinging just feels more and more the natural way of being. And there's no need to give it up.

What needs to be done in the world, what needs to be responded to, can be responded to with non-clinging. And if we discover that in that space created by non-clinging, the fist has opened up and the sensitive part of our inner hand, the sensitive part of our heart, now is available and present for the world to care for it, then why not let go of clinging? Why not let this profound inner place of care be the source of our actions in the world? Whether it's the dishes that's next, cleaning the room a little bit, tidying it up, whether it's saying nicely hello to a friend, stopping to check in how they are.

There's all these different manifestations of what care can be that's discovered moment by moment by the care instead of by you. When you belongs to that reactive mind, reactive tendency, it belongs to the world of clinging in some kind of way. And when care doesn't belong to the world of clinging, care has its own way of meeting the world without clinging.

So, thank you very much, and I hope that this makes sense for you, and that maybe you could spend the day looking in yourself. You know, when there's anything like love or the absence of love, is there something like clinging involved in either? And is there someplace deeper, quieter, subtler, maybe almost invisible, where there is some kind of non-clinging that points to a different way of loving? So, thank you very much.