

Dharmette: Love (82) Ordinary Love

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Hello and welcome to this talk on continuing this whole series on love. For those of you who have been following along since the beginning of January, now we're getting close to seven months of doing this. It's quite a journey to spend so much time on this topic in all the different ways. We're coming to the end of this series, and so what are the concluding words to say?

In that context, that kind of meaning of coming to the end and concluding, one of the most important conclusions, results, manifestations, full expressions of this practice of love and attention that we do is very ordinary, very simple. Almost so simple and ordinary, it might seem like it's easy to overlook, or this can't be so important. It's not so exciting. It's not deeply evocative and deeply inspiring with great kind of spiritual themes and experiences.

But I propose or offer to you that concluding with the most ordinary way of being means that the practice of love, the practice of attention, has matured so that it will be carried with us in everything we do in our life. Nothing is left out. And if we leave things out because we have more important things to do, we're getting somewhere, we're involved in the world of desires and aversions, then we've lost an opportunity. It seems exciting maybe to get more things or to accomplish things and do things, but we lose a touch. And maybe you want to lose touch with it. Maybe it's not so important for you.

But we lose touch with something that in Buddhism is profoundly important. Our freedom, and our freedom to be able to care, freedom to love. And right at this place where we have freedom, freedom to love the ordinary things of life, the simple details, the next step we take, the next breath, opening a door, picking up the striker for the bell. Whatever simple thing it is, do not say, well, that's not treated as unimportant, not treated as something to get over with and move on to the next thing. We have important things to do after all. Let's do it efficiently

and listen to a podcast while we're doing it so we don't have to get bored by just cooking our meal.

But to be able to give ourselves to each thing we're doing and stop measuring it by how much we do, how quickly we get through our to-do list, what we get out of it. But rather, it's almost closer to what we offer. And it's not offering from desire. It's not offering from ego. It's not offering from anything assertive. And there's no clinging, after all, in this kind of care, as I said yesterday.

But still, it's this beautiful meeting of every detail of our life in a way that cares for the thing, and is a profound care for ourselves because we're coming from that place entirely, of mammalian care. We're coming from that place of very ordinary, simple, friendliness, care, tending. The Buddha's example that he uses, very evocative, is the care of a mother to a young baby, the only child. It's the care of the elderly. It's the care of neighbor. It's the care of someone who is hungry or someone who is somehow deeply troubled and we dare to be with them.

There's the care of how we put down our dinner plates at the dinner table for setting the table. We don't just throw it down, but we care in such a way so that people who come to join us for dinner see a cared-for, generous place. And there's a love in putting down the plates, attention to detail. This is good. But again, not because we should, not because of obligation, not because we're trying to be perfect, but rather because it's an expression of some profound place of care, profound place of just this detail is what's important.

Many years ago, when I was—one of the, I don't remember the name of the book or the author or anything—but it was one of my favorite books, in a way that was quite beautiful and wonderful. It had this series of questions. I think someone was asking a child these questions. One of them was, what's the most important time? What's the most important place? And of course, the time was now, the place was here.

But then, who's the most important person? In that case, the answer was the person you're with. That's the most important person. And this idea, what is it we bring in a caring, loving way? Whatever the thing of the moment, the person of the moment, is where we offer our care.

And this is the—I'm repeating myself to say it, try to say it better. It's so important. That care is not an obligation. It's not work. We're caring for ourselves at the same time because we have a deep place inside of gentle tending, attending, where it just feels so tenderizing for ourselves to stay present calmly, subtly on this moment, just kind of lovingly taking care of

something.

And that we can't do if we have this long list of things to do, long fears, long anxieties, long kind of feeling of being the victim, feeling to be the consumer of reality, the victim of reality. We have to be the doer of reality. But it's somewhere just being here to meet the details of the moment, to meet this moment with this beautiful kind of bridging place where the two ends of the bridge is where it's going and us, where it's coming from in ourselves, that both of them are meeting. And we are benefiting from how we tend as much as what we're tending to.

To dry the dishes in the kitchen and then put them away can be done in a hurry. It can be done efficiently, matter-of-factly, and without any real doing the job well and without breaking anything. But we don't benefit from doing it. But there's a way of being really present that's more than just being mindfully present and developing present-moment mindfulness. There's something deeper that's going on where there's actually an act of love, very mild, very ordinary, very simple, but something that is healthy for us, beneficial for us.

We feel, ah, of course, this is nice. And to not give ourselves that time to question it, what's going on? Why are you not doing that nurturing, healthy kind of way of being with every detail? Is the alternative better? Is the alternative involved in desires about getting someplace else? Are you ambitious? Do you have an expectation that the next thing you do is going to be the thing that's going to be inspiring and wonderful and fun? Maybe. It's okay.

But why sacrifice? Maybe there's a life of slowing down a little bit, doing a little bit less, so that everything you do can be close to an act of love, care, attending to what you're doing. Everything that's in the present is important. And so the combination of mindfulness to the present and love of the present in the most ordinary way can be represented by this simple, humble, four-letter word in English, care.

It's a longer word in Buddhism. It's *anukampā*. But today I want to emphasize the ordinary of it, the simplicity of it, the humbleness of it, and that it's something that we can do throughout ordinary life. And for that to be the culmination, to be the consequence of years of practice, these months of practice, these months of exploration of love, this is good. This is fantastic.

This is how we are developing a deep contemplative life, a deep life of love, a deep life of freedom, a deep life of practice that's onward leading and keeps growing and developing in us. And it's the coming together of mindfulness and love, where they don't have to be separate. It's the next moment to meet it, not with attention, but with attending, where attending is this rich, wonderful combination of awareness and love to what's happening now.

So I'd encourage you, if this is meaningful for you, what I said today, see if you can maybe do a little bit less than you plan to do today. Maybe simplify your to-do list. Give yourself a little bit more time between things, more time with things, and see if you can have that attention to detail, that attending to whatever is happening in the moment, so that you find that it's healthy for you, it's good for you, it's loving for you. You love, you care, you attend in a way that brings a kind of deep sense of satisfaction, warmth, flow, glow, tenderness, gentleness of love to you as well, that you feel benefited from it, benefiting the world and benefiting yourself together.

So, thank you. We'll continue tomorrow. And again, as I said, we'll have a community meeting on Zoom, which we've done periodically, when we finish here at 7:45 on Friday. I'll be posting the Zoom link on IMC's website, and I'll announce it more tomorrow and on Friday, and hopefully it'll be easy to find the link.

And we'll switch over there and then have some discussion and question and answer and follow-up from these many weeks of love, and a chance for maybe a breakout group for some of you to meet each other and say hello and talk a little bit about what it's been like. Until tomorrow.