

Dharmette: Love (83) Care for Self and Others

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Hello and welcome to this perhaps penultimate talk on love in this series on love. I feel quite inspired by coming to the culmination of it, and what seems most important to talk about is the foundation of all these different things. It's over 80 talks now, I think, on love. And it's very meaningful for me that this week the theme has to do with care. Yesterday's talk was about ordinary care, ordinary love.

So it doesn't have to be fireworks. It doesn't have to be dramatic. In fact, the simplicity of it all, the simplicity of practice, is probably where the practice is most profound, where Buddhist practice is most profound. In the ordinariness of it.

But as I practiced in my years, and all these years of practice, when I practiced more intensely in the monasteries, it became clear at some point that the primary motivation to keep practicing was not for myself. The idea that I would be improving myself or becoming freer or have less suffering, that somehow this concern with myself, it kind of began to feel kind of not so interesting, not really motivating, not really the heart of what was most important. But to practice for the sake of others, that became the primary motivation.

But practice is very personal. So it wasn't ignoring myself in order to practice for the sake of others. And it wasn't being preoccupied with myself. There's this wonderful way in which, in practice, as it deepens, that me, myself, and mine begin to drop away. And there's a kind of wonderful freedom from self, emptiness of self, but not in a way that's disconnecting or aloof. It's the opposite. We're deeply connected.

We're deeply connected to ourselves and, through ourselves, to the world around us. It's just the mental constructs, the control towers concerned with me, myself, and mine, what I want, and who I want to be in relationship to others, the social games we might play. At some point, we feel safe enough, connected enough, and not so in need of rectifying the

social world around us and our connection to everyone else, that there's a dropping away of self-concern, while there's a deepening onward movement of continuing to practice to clean and clarify and open and settle this practice of ours.

And so when that gets combined with doing it for the sake of others, it can be very motivating. It can be very inspiring. And maybe the only way we can really give ourselves over to practice in a really deep way, at least it was for me. This idea is encapsulated in some schools of Buddhism, where people dedicate themselves to practice until they can awaken everybody. Their practice is concerned about the awakening, the liberation of all beings everywhere.

It's kind of like the impossible dream. Having the impossible dream is just, not that it shouldn't do it, but that's kind of what makes the heart sing. That's what makes the most wondrous and wonderful thing to do, to just be dedicated to something that has so much meaning and purpose that maybe will help some people. But the generosity of it is just to be interested in supporting everyone.

And part of this depth, as we go deeper into it, is to begin appreciating that there is a third entity in our relationship to others. In a sense, it's the relationship itself. It's the dynamics in the connection. It's what only exists when two people are in relationship to each other, because there's a relationship itself. And it can be a one-way relationship. Someone doesn't even know who you are, and you can have some thoughts, ideas, feelings about them.

But the rapport is what goes on between them. And it's the rapport, or the mutual kind of way in which there is an interactive quality, a bridge between the people maybe, that the bridge is shared. There is a dynamic that happens between people. And so caring for that dynamic, so it's not self-focused on ourselves, and it's not necessarily other-focused just on the other people, but there's this third entity, the dynamics between you, the rapport.

And that's a very special place, because to care for that is, in fact, to care for both self and others at the same time. You can't really have an unhealthy rapport with someone else without having something going on in you that's unhealthy for you, unwholesome. And if you have a rapport, if you're contributing something healthy and wholesome to the rapport, then something wholesome and healthy is living in you. So you're not exactly caring for the other person, but by caring for the rapport, you care for both self and others. And what a great opportunity that is. What a nice thing.

And so there too is practice. So when the practice gets deep, one of the core ways of saying this, maybe practicing for others, another whole other way of saying it, is that we're practicing for the sake of the ending of suffering, wherever it is. At some point, personal suffering

diminishes. So where's the suffering then? Well, we feel the suffering in the rapport, the tension and conflict that's there. So we want to practice with that.

Sometimes we feel the suffering is in other people. Suffering is in society. And there's still suffering. And the motivation to meet suffering, to work with suffering, find a way through suffering, make a difference, and make things better for others, that's the core motivation of Buddhist practice. And once our own suffering is somehow settled enough, or maybe freed enough, there's still work to be done.

There's still a natural impulse to meet the suffering wherever it is. It's just a natural quality of the good heart. It doesn't have to be driven. It doesn't have to be neurotic. It doesn't have to be ambitious. It can be the most natural, ordinary care that you can imagine.

And it can feel natural, even if you're doing big things. It's just that it's the most natural thing to care for suffering wherever it's encountered. And this idea of self and other begins to soften. It doesn't really matter so much if it's our own suffering or the suffering of others. It's whatever comes our way, we're ready to stop, be present, be with it without clinging.

If there's clinging, there's suffering. And if we're the one who's clinging, that's our suffering for us to be responsible for and care for. If it's a cling that others have, we can't be responsible for that. We can't kind of fix that. But we can have a rapport where we offer safety, we offer kindness, we offer goodwill, we offer companionship that maybe supports the other person to be able to settle and look at and resolve their suffering, maybe create the environment for it.

There's a lot that can happen in that rapport. That's where we become a good listener, a companion. We accompany people in their difficulty. We listen to people. That's how this healthy rapport happens.

So this word *anukampā*, care, is an ordinary and simple and very significant and broad-scope feeling of meeting the world and caring for it as it is, whatever way, whatever is needed. But if you understand that you're also caring for the rapport, the rapport is the means of bringing freedom to self and others. And as I said earlier in meditation, we are deeply social beings, that we are deeply influenced and shaped and connected to others. Even if we end up being hermits and not seeing anybody for years, that connection to others is quite deep and an important part of being a human being.

And as their clinging gets released, then maybe each person finds where that world of where we fit into society, where we are in relationship to others, how we can care for others, respond, be responsive to the suffering of the world. We'll discover what that is. And it has to be right

for you. It has to be in the way that you can create a good rapport.

And if your way is to make meals for people, and that's what your way is to have that rapport, have that means to create goodness for people and care for them, maybe you're a cook. Maybe you're a musician. Maybe you're a chaplain. Maybe you're a meditation teacher. Maybe you work in the medical field. There's all these different ways where this can play itself out.

It's not like one way, but sooner or later in this practice, I believe it doesn't make sense to do this practice if it's only for yourself. It makes sense to do it when it's for the whole world, for everyone. So may it be that the goodness of our practice, the benefits we get from this practice, spill out into the world, to the people around us. May this practice we do benefit the whole world. So thank you very much.

And a reminder that tomorrow, at this time in 24 hours, we will provide a Zoom link. And those of you who want can come over to the Zoom link for about 45 minutes. And we'll have a community meeting. You can ask some questions. I can hear a little bit from you about what it's like, this community, you know, seven-month-long journey in love.

We can do a small short breakout group so you get to meet some of your people. Maybe you'll meet some of the people whose names in chats have been up here. And for those of you who can't or don't want to be in the Zoom, I'll leave the YouTube on so you can kind of participate, just, you know, in this YouTube way as well, in this community meeting.

And I'll post later today, maybe this evening, the Zoom link on IMC's website and what's new. Also in the IMC calendar, it'll be listed there. And maybe some of you can post it, have it ready. Some of you who are more connected to IMC can post it in the chat at the end of the Dharma talk, the end of this little talk.

So thank you very, very much. And I'm looking forward to what happens for the concluding talk on this long series of love. Thank you.