

# Love and Compassion in Everyday Life

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 5th September 2004.

The most important thing when we listen to teachings, give teachings or engage in and Buddhist practice is to correct our motivation. If we have a positive mental attitude it will make our practice genuine and effective.

The most profound motivation is to commit ourselves sincerely to altruism, and to have that profound motivation for whatever we do. This will also make us happier in this life as well as bringing us closer to enlightenment.

To achieve altruism we first need to develop love and compassion. The altruistic intention is the result of these two great qualities of mind, love and compassion. Just as nothing grows without a seed, so we need the seeds of love and compassion to develop the altruistic mind.

Also, for true happiness in this life we need love and compassion. It's easy to see that when we are very young and when we get old, we depend heavily on the affection of others. New born babies cannot survive without the love and care of others, and sometimes when we get old we cannot look after ourselves. During the stage between, we can usually look after ourselves and do not need the support of others. But, thinking more deeply into this, even when we are young and capable, without the love and care of others we could not survive, as all our basic needs come from others.

Also, if we are spiritual practitioners we need others, for example it would not be possible to practice The Six Perfections and so forth without relating to others, so we are heavily dependent on others throughout our lives.

Sometimes, in big cities people feel lonely. This is not that they lack human company, but human affection and as a result of this their mental health can become very poor. On the other hand, those that grow up in an atmosphere of human affection have a much more positive and gentle attitude. Children who grow up without human affection will develop negative attitudes. This is basic to human nature; human beings need peace of mind and the lack of it has a disturbing effect on our health. The whole structure of our health is dependent on an atmosphere of human affection.

Our mind has a great effect on our physical health, so if we are able to cultivate peace and gentleness in our mind we will become more energetic and healthy; physical and mental health go hand in hand. Also, our potential for love and compassion is there, and whether we develop it or not is in our hands, it's up to the individual.

In his teaching, Buddha said that he gave us the "road map" to enlightenment, and whether we embark on the path or not is up to us.

We should realise that we have all the potential and conducive conditions, but if we choose not to use them that's our choice, no-one else can do anything to make us do this. So, if we make the effort, it's possible to develop love and compassion.

The meaning of love and compassion should be understood properly. The Buddhist definition is that genuine compassion is based on a clear understanding that others, just like us, want happiness and to overcome suffering. We all have this basic right. Compassion recognises this and develops concern for the welfare of others, and develops love and compassion towards all other beings equally. Looking at the others in this room, we know that all of us desire love and compassion equally, and we should try and extend this to all beings. If we develop a strong concern for the welfare of all other beings this indicates that we are developing real compassion in the Buddhist sense.

Our love and compassion towards our friends however is usually attachment. It is not based on the realisation that all beings have an equal right to be happy and overcome suffering. Instead, it is based on the idea that something is ours - "my friend" etc., or that something is good for us.

*So good feelings towards friends and relatives is not compassion  
as it is usually mixed with attachment.*

When someone we love changes their attitude to us, our feeling of closeness disappears. For example, if we have a new friend, who then shows a negative attitude towards us, our love and affection disappears, which shows that our loving feelings are mixed with attachment.

If we have love and compassion for others, based on the understanding of equanimity, our feelings towards them will always be caring and affectionate. That is the meaning of love in the Buddhist context. Likewise, if we develop concern for others, irrespective of their attitude to us, recognising that as a fellow human being they have a right to overcome suffering; that is compassion in the Buddhist context.

So, we can see that there's a difference between ordinary love and compassion, and love and compassion in the Buddhist context. This is unbiased and based on wisdom, whereas attachment is narrow minded and biased. Genuine compassion and attachment are therefore contradictory. To develop genuine compassion in Buddhist practice, we need first to practice the meditations of equalisation and equanimity. To generate love equally towards all beings we need to practice equanimity, without which we will feel close to some people and distant from others.

*We need to put effort into this and train our minds.*

The first step in this practice is to bring to mind someone we love and examine our feelings towards them, then try and apply it to all beings. Secondly, we should focus on someone we are indifferent towards, someone we neither like nor dislike and someone who does nothing for us, and examine our feelings towards them. Thirdly, we should focus on someone we dislike, our "enemy", and examine our feelings towards them.

An untrained person will feel warm and affectionate towards the friend, have no particular feelings towards the neutral person and feel discomfort and hatred towards the "enemy". This attitude is mistaken. We can see that nothing is fixed; friend can turn to "enemy" and vice versa at any time. We've all experienced this when our friend's attitude towards us changes and we no longer feel warm and loving towards them, or someone who has been difficult may start to show warmth or kindness towards us, which changes our perspective and we become close friends. If we understand this properly we can change our attitude as we will see all living beings as equal and develop sincere love and compassion towards all of them. If we do not do this we will always have problems and encounter disharmony.

If we have sufficient love and compassion we will experience happiness in this life, be able to relate with other easily and contribute positively to our community. However, the main consequence of the practice will be experienced in future lives. So it is important that you know how to develop love and compassion and how to promote it with understanding.

(Translated by Tsering Samdup: Transcribed by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi: Typed out by Yvette Phillips: Lightly edited for Dharma News by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi.)