Love and Relationship

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14:28

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I've chosen this topic of love and relationship. Well, as you know, huge amounts of literature are written on love from philosophers, psychotherapists, self-helpers, all religions. So I don't think I'll be covering everything, but I just want to mention a few of the essentials, really. So this is just love in general. It's not specific. I'm not going to talk about parental love or falling in love, all that.

I think the first thing that I always find important is just this sense of care. Love is a little bit abused, the word love itself. But it's just understanding that interconnectedness we have. And it's funny that with COVID and all that, a lot of people rediscovered neighbourliness. And I think this is really part of this journey.

Neoliberalism—most people think of neoliberalism as an operating system, an economic operating system based on the market, but actually it's an ideology. It's on the understanding that everything moves if everybody can just be an entrepreneurial individual. And what it does is it excites my greed to get things and have experience, to get lots of money. And by doing that, of course, I see you as a competitor. So this is the system we're in. We're in a system that supports greed and competitiveness. It's not about coordination, it's not about interconnectedness.

And I think this manifests clearly now with this COVID. Because the rich countries, just like individuals, are just looking after themselves and to hell with everybody else. But unfortunately, the interconnectedness is biting back. And I'm hoping that it has some effect on the actual system that we're under at the moment.

But just that sense of caring for somebody. I'm not talking about people who are sick or need help, but just a general attitude of looking after people, being aware of their needs, no matter what it is, caring for them. I think that's a really important part of that whole syndrome that we call love. And if we don't do that, if we don't have that attitude, then I think we can shade off into controlling people, using them. I mean, abuse is at the far end, but you can also just use people for your own benefit. A presumption that they will help you, but you don't have to help them. But I think that really undermines a relationship when a person finds that they've been used.

I think the other thing is kindness expressed through a certain affection. We manifest that with hugging and holding hands and hand on heart, tone of voice, all that. I mean, the danger is it becomes a bit

mawkish, a bit sentimental, huggy-wuggy, touchy-feely stuff. But I think it's important that there's an expression of affection. And I don't know about you, but when I remember acts of unkindness that I've committed, there's always a bitter sorrow that goes with it. How could I have behaved like that? And all that really just depends on this sense of being kind. It's a lovely word, kind.

And when we put these two together and we wonder about how to live with other people, sharing spaces, whether it's intimate or just in an office, doesn't really matter. There's this occasion in the scriptures where the Buddha comes across three Arahats living together. I think their name—I was trying to find it, I just couldn't find the passage—but I think they're called the Anuruddhas after the chief monk who was with them. And he asked them, how did they live so peacefully together? And he says, "Well, when I get up in the morning, I say to myself, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?"

And of course, if everybody says that, then you have this wonderful harmony. But if you're the only one who's saying it, then you'll probably get used. So it's a case of, if you're with somebody, it doesn't matter where it is—the office or an intimate—just to get that feeling in the group that you're prepared to put aside what you want to do for what somebody else wants to do if it's more beneficial. I mean, it could even happen on holiday, where you've decided to go here and somebody else has decided to go there. And there's a big rumpus over which one to do. That doesn't necessarily have to happen if people have the attitude of putting aside what they want. In other words, not being attached to what one wants to do. It's a lovely attitude.

But I think underpinning all relationship, actually, are these two qualities of gratitude and forgiveness. I mean, if we develop this constant sense of gratitude, of being in debt, of wanting to manifest how much we appreciate what's been given to us. I mean, there's always that desire to help, to communicate, to be with somebody in that grateful way.

And you can't have a relationship which at some point isn't going to hurt. They're going to say something or do something which is going to upset you. And if you can't let go of that, if that grudge stays within us, a sense of resentment, that really undermines the relationship. It comes out just in the way we speak and in how we ask them to do things. It's there within our communication. And I think that's really important. And I would have thought that most relationships begin to collapse when one or the other side just holds onto these grudges, these resentments.

I remember somebody telling me who was a lawyer for family cases. And there was a divorce. It was quite bitter. And he kept saying to the husband, "There's no point in going to court for this because you will lose. It'll be a complete waste of time for you to go to court and get all this out in court because you will lose the case." So he tried to get it across to him, but he wanted to go to court. He wanted somewhere where he could explain all over the place. And that's the anger and the bitterness that can come with holding on to resentments.

There's a lovely—I read something quite lovely about this journalist. She'd gone down in America. She'd

gone down to see how dolphins are trained. And what she saw was that whenever a dolphin didn't jump through the hoop or play the trick or fail to do the trick, nothing was said, absolutely nothing. And then they did the usual routine and the dolphin would complete the trick. When the dolphin completes the trick, the trainers jumped up and down with great joy, shouting and whooping and making all sorts of great noises.

So she thought, "Well, I wonder if this would work on my husband." So when she went back home, she never criticised him. She never said anything. But every time he did something that pleased her or he did something the way she wanted him to do, she would jump up and down with great joy and blow trumpets. And he changed completely without knowing it. It was very harmonious. And then of course she went and told him. And so he found that also worked, even if it's conscious, even if it's a conscious thing that the other person knows what you're doing. It actually works. So holding back on criticisms and all that and really rejoicing when the person does something which is to your benefit seems to be the trick, really, of getting people to do what you want them to do.

And the final thing is, of course, our spiritual well-being. I mean, obviously, if you're living with somebody who's on your path, then that's a tremendous boost, isn't it? I mean, I've known people who've taken to the Buddhist path, but their partner really just doesn't like it. The spouse doesn't like it. And it's been a point of contention. But if you happen to be living with somebody who's actually practising with you, it's obviously a massive support. And it's the same with any friendship that does it.

And just to end with this lovely quote from the Buddha. So he's Ānanda, who was with him for the last twenty years of his life as a personal assistant. He always thinks he knows a bit more than he actually does. And on this occasion, he said to the Buddha, "Bhagavan, this is half the spiritual life: good friendship, good companionship and good comradeship." And the Buddha says, "Oh, not so, Ānanda, not so. This is the entire spiritual life: that is good friendship, good companionship and good comradeship. For when someone has a good friend, a good companion and a good comrade, it is to be expected they will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path."

So that was his understanding of what friendship was. And of course, if we remember, he was with his five friends when he left them. They all thought he'd gone soft. Remember, he was practising this ascetic asceticism, which was basically not eating, letting go of the body. And he was with five friends, five close friends who were all practising together. And we all know that practising with people in a group is so much more encouraging than doing it by yourself.

So all these points—I mean, there's a lot more, of course, I'm sure that you could think of them—but just bringing to mind that sense of care, affection and kindness, especially kindness. I don't know, it's a big thing with me. These underlying attitudes of gratitude and forgiveness. And then finally, just that ability to be with somebody without—open to their ideas, to their understandings, even in conversation. What if I put aside my ideas, my views, my opinions and open up to what the other one has to say? So often we

don't like to do that because they might change our minds.

So it's a case of looking at our relationships from this point of view of being with another human being who's like us. So I'm a human being and you're a human being. And just remembering that. And that, I think, produces for us that relationship of kindness and care.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and I have not caused any confusion and that you will, by your practice of loving kindness, be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

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