

When Does Love Become Control?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

The Buddha points out that there comes with the sense of self a desire to control. The self feels safe when it is in control. And why do we want to control? Is it not that it is necessary for us to gratify an unwholesome desire in order to feel happy. This strong desire is often called a 'need', though a 'need' really ought to be applied to something essential – food and sleep on a physical level, for instance. Such unwholesome 'needs' include anything we feel we controls us– need for praise, for success; for sex, for romance – even addiction to drugs and porn. This need, that has become so essential for my happiness, stems from a lack of self-love, self-acceptance. A deficit of inner worthiness. A want of dignity. And such is the strength of the desire it cannot see anything but from the vantage point of 'me'. In other words, it very much becomes a definition who 'I' am. At the point where a desire, take it or leave it, becomes a desire I need to fulfil, the other becomes the 'one' to fulfil that 'need'. If the other can't or won't do that, then there comes the need to control. All sorts of tactics are employed: anger, withdrawal of services, silence, ignoring. Blackmail – if you don't .. I will. Petty spite. Threats of revenge. Threats of self-harm, suicide. Accusations of not really loving me. Anything to bully them into doing what we want them to do. This way we can control children, friends, workmates, partners and spouses and all the rest of our relationships. So paradoxically such unskilful needs that control us drive us to control others to fulfil them. And the more we feed them, the more they demand. It's a vicious circle. It's not that we don't love the other. We show that when we treat the other as equal to us, not there to serve us, yet they may do so. Just as we are not there to serve them, yet we may do so. We will know when our love is turning into control by our reactions whenever the other person refuses any of our requests. Can we hold still? Wait for the unwholesome state to pass. Communicate with the other as other. If unable to, to postpone – let's talk later. And to find the time to contemplate our unwholesome 'needs' and resist their demands. At least then we feel we are gaining back some control. But it is often the case that all we have to do is allow the need to manifest, hold it in kindness, let it speak its feelings without words. Wait for the turbulence to exhaust itself. The heart knows how to comfort itself. It knows how to heal itself.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.