

Self-love and Self-Acceptance

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

Self-love sounds like being selfish! This would be a big mistake. In the practice of Metta, traditionally it begins with directing love towards oneself on the understanding that you can't love others until you love yourself. If you consider someone who is full of self-hatred, self-criticism, self-recrimination, self-blame, it's hard to see how they have the heart space to love another person. We might try to practice Metta in the belief it will get rid of the self-hatred, but in fact it is an overlay for it is developing another mental state, loving kindness, on top of the self-hatred. It's like covering a mouldy cake with icing. So a good place to confront all our negativity is right there on the sitting cushion. We turn inwards towards any negative presenting feelings and opinions about ourselves. The first act of self-love is self-healing. And this can be very hard to do since we have identified with these inner demons. So that's the first step to identify clearly the mental states and emotional turbulences that come up. Once identified we have to develop a right relationship with that negativity. When we find ourselves in a state of self-loathing, not good enough, useless and so on, we have to hold it in a caring embrace. It helps to talk to it. 'I can feel your hatred and anger'. Describe the qualities, 'so hot, so turbulent'. In this way we can distance from these states and in so doing find ourselves with them but not in them. So now we are not identifying with them. That little distance means all the world for we realise that there is not that second level of suffering that the Buddha refers to as the second arrow. Isn't the first arrow, the presenting state, enough! Do we have to add to it by hugging it as me. And when we do that, we employ the mind with its conversation and imaging to create a story around it and so add fuel to the fire! That's the insight. The self-aversion is not me, not mine and not my self! But we are so committed to old habits that we have to keep repeating the insight until it is strong enough to undermine the habit of indulging all self-denigration. The bright side is to develop the positive and there is no end of virtues the Buddha lists for us. But rather than try to develop all the virtues all at once, it is a good start to develop the opposite of the unwholesome habit we are undermining. If we suffer, for instance, from feeling not good enough, the first port of call is to ask, to whom am I comparing myself? And is this a wholesome way to go about life? What is the point of such comparison? If I were to compare myself favourably with someone whom I judge to be inferior to me, I would call that conceit. So, adversely comparing myself as 'inferior' is an inverted conceit. I am worse than them. Or it might be a hurtful parental voice. Then there may also be that I have some idea of perfection in my mind which, by definition, cannot be achieved. So, I am always going to disappoint myself. Far better to stay in touch with the situation as it is and agree that this is the best I can do. What more can I ask of myself? And what more should another ask of me? So now I have a strategy to undermine all that 'not good enough'. I conscientiously complete whatever I am doing to the best of my ability. I acknowledge it and feel satisfaction. Then we develop self-esteem by reminding ourselves of our accomplishments, whether great,

small or insignificant. In this way we can take any form of self-criticism, self-blame, self-recrimination, self-doubt and slowly work against it and develop the opposite. We just need to do it ... diligently. <https://d.docs.live.net/763255e8cfc4ccf0/01%20Tips/01%20Tips%2024/3%20TIP%20Compassion/The%20Four%20Great%20Elements%20Moon%20and%20TIP.docx>

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