

Ten Protectors (6 of 10) Dharma Love

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Good day. This week we will continue with what I usually call the “10 protectors,” the “10 supports,” or the “10 helpers.” Today's protector is the love of the Dharma or Dharma love.

What do we mean by Dharma? I would like to propose that the essential meaning of Dharma, more than the teachings of the Buddha, more than anything else, is non-harming. So, we will consider the love of non-harming. That is the protector.

It seems a wonderful coincidence to emphasize this on the day the United States celebrates Indigenous People Day. We honor and remember the people who have

suffered hundreds of years of harm from the European colonialists and settlers who came to this land. They sometimes committed tremendous genocide, even right here in California. It is also the Monday after the weekend when there was horrendous violence in Palestine and Israel.

As human beings, we have so much experience with endless cycles of violence and hate. When two people hate each other, the only solution seems to be to kill each other. The cycles of hate escalate and then just continue, on and on. The 100-year cycle of violence in Palestine has shown that violence doesn't provide a solution.

The horrendous damage done here to the Native Americans in the United States, Canada, and much of Latin America, has also shown how much harm can be done. It continues for generations after the original harm was caused. There must be another way. The way that the Buddha taught is non-harming. He taught a radical commitment to non-harming.

The love of the Dharma is not a love of the teachings. That is possible. It is not a love of the practice, but a love of the very foundation of what the teachings and the practice are about – a life of non-harming.

The Four Noble Truths are all about non-harming. The word for harm is “*dukkha*.” It is usually translated in English as suffering. The Four Noble Truths are usually applied to oneself. We are looking at suffering within ourselves – the cause of suffering that we have within ourselves, and the ending of that. We could also say the harm we experience from ourselves and the ending of causing that harm.

There are no pronouns in the way the Four Noble Truths are taught. They can apply equally to the world around us. We can understand suffering, and the causes. We meet this with an attitude and a way of life that is non-harming. This is primarily represented by living the Eightfold Path. Non-harming is embedded in the whole Eightfold Path enterprise.

The love of the Dharma can be referred to as *dhammakamma*. The description says one of the protectors is loving the Dharma and having affectionate conversations. I love the idea of affectionate conversations with others, coming right after loving the Dharma. The practice and the way of life inspire us. Here the word for practice is “*Abhidhamma*.” The way of life is “*Vinaya*.” For monastics, this means the life of restraint. For non-monastics, it is a life of restraining from harming.

If we want a love that is reliable, universal, and profound, it is the love of non-harming. This doesn't mean naive non-violence. It doesn't mean that we are being hostile to our tendencies toward hostility and hate. We are not committing ourselves to the impulses of hate, hostility, and violence. Rather we allow them to surface, we see them clearly, and we see them with non-harming. We see them with non-participation. We see them without believing them, or believing we must act on them.

This is a hard belief to come by because sometimes it seems that we must harm others to protect ourselves. The Buddha said something similar for monastics. He said that a monastic is allowed to strike out against an attacker for the purpose of escaping, provided that the monastic has goodwill and *metta*.

With non-harming, we do not just sit here quietly. There is a time and place to act. That action is done in a way that doesn't harm others, mostly to avoid getting hurt. Exactly how that applies in different situations in life is a huge question. We must remember that not harming does not mean being naive. We don't just allow other people to roll over us.

It is profound to live a life of non-harming. Many people in this world have never experienced safety and have never felt that someone is safe for them. Safety is part

of the value of monastic life. It is a life that publicly gives the impression that monastics are people who are not going to harm. They are not going to live with aggression, anger, and hostility. People can relax around monastics. People receive them in all kinds of circumstances in life because they represent a radically different way of living than many people have experienced.

Today I want to emphasize the love part. There can be a delight, an inspiration, and an affection for the Dharma, for practice. This can be a great love. For people who like to anthropomorphize these things, it can be our beloved. It can be something that we take up. One of the interesting things about the idea of the beloved and loving the Dharma is that some people will love the Dharma more than anyone else.

Our partners might get upset. “What, I am second best to the Dharma?” It would be good to explain to them how it works. Having the Dharma at the center, there is a love of the Dharma, and that allows our ability to love others to increase. So yes, our partners might be second to our commitment to the Dharma, to practice, and to non-harming, but if we didn't have the Dharma, our love for them would not be as clear. Our love for our partner would not be as pure, open, rich, or forgiving. In essence, they get more love if we are allowed to love the Dharma even more. Everyone benefits.

In the end, there is no conflict of interest. We cultivate the ability to have heartfelt warmth and affection for a profound, reliable universal form of love – non-harming. That is the essence of the Dharma. Everything else about the Dharma – all the different teachings – are attempts to expand on this basic premise. We study how non-harming applies, and how it is supported in all different ways. The essence is not harming ourselves, and not harming others.

It is an ethical transformation to be a liberated, enlightened person. It means becoming a person who is incapable of intentionally wanting to harm anybody else. Someone who is fully awakened is incapable of killing or stealing. They are incapable of wanting to cause harm.

If someone is committed to or feels the need to be committed to the possibility of harming others, then the Dharma is not going to be so good for them. If we take non-harming all the way, we are not going to be capable of causing harm.

On the way there, there is the love of the Dharma, the love of non-harming. Even if we decide that it is necessary to engage in something harmful or violent as a form of self-protection, don't let that diminish the possibility of loving non-harming. In this teaching, the

love of the Dharma is a protector. It protects us from the forces of harm within ourselves and others.

People tend to relate to us very differently when we are living a life of peace, a life of non-harming, than if we walk around angry. I have known very aversive people. They feel that everyone else is mean all the time. They don't realize that people are challenged and may be aversive to them because of the aversive way in which they show up. It is a self-fulfilling prediction. People are mean, so we show up being mean, and then of course they are mean back. If we show up with non-harming, love, caring, and attentiveness to others, they will respond differently to us.

We love the Dharma as a way of making ourselves safe and as a way of protecting others from us. It also protects our Dharma practice. In this way of life, it is difficult to remember to practice and to stay inspired by the Dharma. We keep coming back to the inspiration we get from the affectionate conversations we can have about the Dharma. This is a way of keeping the momentum, the inspiration, and the motivation alive. We refine the tremendous value and wisdom of living a sophisticated life of non-harming. It is not a naive life, but a life of loving non-harming.

It makes me very happy to consider this wonderful idea of loving the Dharma and living a life of love. It is a love

that I hope is contagious and spreads peacefully throughout this world that needs it desperately. I hope that violence will soon be seen as completely counterproductive to the welfare and happiness of everyone.

Thank you.