

Appreciation (5 of 5) Love

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

compassion, obligation, suffering, listen, AURAL

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We have come to the end of this week of focusing on appreciation as a foundation for compassion. There is one more invaluable element that I associate with appreciation. I will introduce it this way: without love being there first, I worry that compassion is not really compassion. Love is a necessary component of compassion.

I say this because sometimes people care for others out of feelings of obligation. They feel alarmed, worried, or upset about the suffering in the world and in others. They feel fear in relation to suffering, and they carry with them a strong sense of obligation, as in: “I’m supposed to, I need to,” or a strong sense that, “I have to address this and deal with this because I’m so uncomfortable.”

Then when they address suffering, trying to bring that suffering to an end, the actions can look like

compassionate actions, but they are not informed by love. They are not informed by deep appreciation, valuing, and understanding of others.

I would like to suggest the first four themes of this week are also necessary for healthy love. There needs to be an appreciation of others, an understanding of them, a respect for them, and a certain kind of acceptance of them. Without a healthy dose of each of these, love can easily become skewed and problematic. There might be other important elements of love, but I think these four are really invaluable and lead us to a healthy kind of love.

Love is almost like appreciating the beauty of others. It appreciates and values the wonderfulness of connection, of a feeling of warmth, closeness, delight, and a real appreciation for the wonderfulness of people, and a sense of gratitude for them. We are grateful and happy to be in their presence.

Love is many different things. For each person and each situation, love is different. I offer this to you as a reference point for investigation, for really grappling with compassion and considering it deeply: without love, there can't be compassion. The last element of appreciation is love. We know that there is a wide range of what people mean by love. I'd suggest that there is not only a wide range but also different degrees of

strength with different forms of love. Still, some form of love needs to be there for compassion.

So, in what way do we love people? Can we have a love for others without some love for ourselves? If we don't have something like love for ourselves, can our love arise from a healthy place? Can our love for others arrive from a good place, so that people delight in our love and our appreciation of them? If love comes from fear, from a sense of loneliness, or from the desire for the other person to provide something for me, maybe that love is not really suitable for compassion, which is genuine respectful care for the suffering of others.

I've known people for whom the reason they loved others (what they called "love"), the reason why there was a strong attraction and orientation towards others – a strong desire to be with them – was that the other person provided love. The other person loved them, valued them, and delighted them. It was not exactly the other person they loved. What they loved was how the person treated them. What they got from the person made them feel good and happy. Or they felt needed.

Maybe that is a form of love, but I am referring to love that is not coming from need – love that is a pure appreciation of the person, independent of what we receive from them. In compassion, loving care for others' suffering brings an appreciation of them, an

understanding of them, respect for them, and acceptance of them. These take precedence, then love can arise. We appreciate others. There is gratitude, and there's delight. We see the preciousness and the inherent value of others, the worth of others, and that is what we delight in. That is what we love and appreciate.

One of the teachings of Buddhism is that, as we develop a greater appreciation for our own beauty and capacity for Dharma beauty within, we have eyes to see the beauty in other people. No matter whom we see, even our nemesis, do we have the capacity to see something that's beautiful in their hearts and their minds? Can there be some kind of love for that beauty that is not naive? We still protect ourselves, and find some way to care for ourselves. We do not overlook the fact that their behavior is unacceptable, but we see and love the beauty.

The five qualities for this week are appreciation, understanding, respect, acceptance, and love. The acronym for this is AURAL, meaning to listen or having to do with listening. I chose this acronym because can there be appreciation without the receptivity of listening deeply to someone? This means the kind of listening that happens before we speak – the kind of receptivity and taking in of people and their situation that happens before judgments, ideas, and solutions. We really listen

deeply so that we can appreciate others, delight in them, and respect them in deep ways.

What form of love can you have that is realistic, that doesn't have such a high bar that you need to gush over others, or you need to somehow forgive them, or you need to even like them? Is there a deep fundamental love that is possible when you find something to appreciate in others, when you understand them in a deeper way, when you have respect for them, and you have acceptance of something there? What is that kind of love for you?

Rather than offering you finished, complete ideas, I would like this last talk to be more of a challenge to you. The challenge is: what form of love is needed if you want to have compassion for the world? What form can that love needed for compassion take that is appropriate for you and right for you? Rather than agreeing or disagreeing with what I said, I challenge you to find how this can be true on your terms, in your way. How is it true for you that something called love is the important precursor for compassion? What is the nature of that love? That is the challenge I would like to leave you with. Thank you very much for today.