

# *Anukampā* (3 of 5) Care as Resonance with Others

April 29, 2020

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

*anukampā*, Buddha, relational, relationship, care, resonate, *karuṇā*, empathy, *mettā*, *muditā*, *upekkhā*, compassion, equanimity, sympathetic joy, loving-kindness, support, innate, caring, ethics, goodness

## Gil Fronsdal

I feel some happiness to be able to talk about the Buddha's use of the word *anukampā*. The part *kampā* means “to shake” and *anu* means ‘towards’ or ‘with.’ In modern English, I like to think of it as “resonating with others” or “to have something inside that can resonate.”

I think the best translation for *anukampā* – this resonance – that I can come up with right now is ‘care’ or ‘caring.’ It's a basic concept that appears in the Buddha's teachings. Oddly enough, it's emphasized a lot. *Anukampā* is used much more than the word *karuṇā* – compassion. While the Buddha put tremendous emphasis on the cultivation of the heart, *anukampā* is never something that a person cultivates. It's almost as

if *anukampā* is an assumed part of the human being – that our capacity to care is innate.

Of course, we all care for each other, provided that we have somehow settled and let go of all of the obstructions to caring. When we're caught up in preoccupations, anger, greed, delusion, or fantasy, it might be very hard to give space to feel where we resonate, have empathy, and feel in relationship with other people.

The Buddha seems to assume that this is the case, and that people will act from there. Parents will have *anukampā* (care) for their children. Friends will have care for each other. The Buddha himself acts in the world not out of *karuṇā*, but out of *anukampā*.

Here are some of the things that the Buddha says he does out of *anukampā*. Maybe it was a common colloquial expression in ancient India, but when someone was sick and requested the Buddha to come to see them, they would ask, "Please, out of care." It could be out of compassion. But I think the request was to visit out of care and consideration. The Buddha also says that one teaches out of care. When people want to give him food, he receives it out of care – it's accepted out of some kind of relationship to them.

One of the things I want to emphasize today is that the word 'care' is a relational word. It is a concept that occurs in relationship to people. For the Buddha, it seems like he assumes that we live in a relational world. He emphasizes this a tremendous amount – but without using a word corresponding to the English word 'relationship' or "in relation." I can't remember seeing this in any English translation.

How we translate some of these words from the ancient language can be a little arbitrary. But we find a lot of words that are closely connected to relationships. It seems that the Buddha was regularly thinking in ways that imply conditionality. That's the English word we use. Things exist in relationship and because of conditions – in 'dependence' is the English word often translated from the Pali.

Things exist in relationship to each other on the basis of other things. Some things are said to exist like two straws of reed (the plant). They lean against each other and hold each other up. So they exist in relationship to each other, holding each other up. They can exist because they're in relationship.

For the Buddha, everything that exists is said to be conditioned. This means that everything exists in relationship to other things. As far as I can read, the Buddha repeatedly took the religious and spiritual

teachings of his time and reframed them in the context of relationships to other people. He did this in terms of what we might call ethics, or how we would relate to people out goodness: non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion – as opposed to relating to people out of greed, hatred and delusion.

The tremendous emphasis on greed, hate and delusion in the Buddha's teachings – and becoming free of them as a definition of liberation – puts liberation in a relational context. Greed, and especially hatred, have a lot to do with the relational way we are in the world and with other people. Over and over again, the Buddha came back to this.

One of my favorite ways in which we see this is when the Buddha defines a person of great wisdom as “concerned with the welfare of oneself, others, self and others, and the whole world.” So where does this concern for the welfare of everything come from, if it doesn't come from obligation or from a logical idea that this is what we should do?

When it comes out of someone who spends a lot of time meditating, chances are that it wells up as a response to this relational world that we live in. We are influenced by others. We feel others, and they feel us. As this capacity to settle deeper and deeper grows, and obstructions fall away, we touch into this place of

resonance or *anukampā*, which may be close to the English idea of empathy.

Ethics then doesn't come from following rules. It comes from being in touch with this place where things resonate and where goodness exists. It comes when, in a deep, heartfelt way, we feel in relationship to the world around us in a way that is mutual supportive.

The Buddha seems to assume that we are in this place. It's assumed that as we develop spiritually – more and more, that's where we'll operate from. It seems like the Buddha's care for the world and his way of engaging and teaching within the world comes out of this place of *anukampā*.

For a number of reasons, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity) come from a different place than *anukampā*. One reason is that *anukampā* encompasses all four of these qualities of love.

It may also be more basic and simple. *Mettā* is friendliness. It's a cognate with 'friend,' so it's a way of being friendly and having goodwill. It's a little more conceptual and active than *anukampā*. Compassion is really in connection to people's suffering, and it's also a bit more engaged or specific. Certainly sympathetic joy – recognizing something wonderful happening – is

conceptual. *Upekkhā* (equanimity), as a *brahmavihāra*, is understood to be a wisdom factor. It involves having the perspective of a bird's-eye view on what's happening, and this too is a little more activated than the deep, settled, quiet place where care exists. This place of care can then be manifested in loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. But it's something much more basic, simple, and relaxed – and which doesn't require a lot of thinking or conceptualization. It's just resonance and place of warmth and kindness.

The Buddha doesn't say that this is innate in us. He just seems to assume that it's there, and that this is how people will operate. I find it very helpful to have this as a reference point – that there is something very peaceful and at ease that doesn't easily get troubled. It is a warm caring, and a way of living in relationships that recognizes that relationships are important.

From the very beginning, this Dharma practice we do is very much connected to our relational world – to people, animals, beings, and the Earth itself. Of course, in all kinds of fundamental ways, we only exist in dependence on other things. We only exist because certain conditions come together to hold us up. We only exist because we're leaning against other things that are leaning against us, keeping us going and alive.

In this deep relational way of being, what happens when the deep abode of empathy, connection, warmth, and care comes from a place where there is no greed, neediness, attachments, or fear? Can we settle in and discover this deep place of goodness within, and then let that be the support for how we come into the world? If we can do that, I think it becomes second nature. It becomes a natural thing to want to care for others and for ourselves.

The idea that Dharma practice cultivates and develops people who care in strong and wise ways is very inspiring for me. I hope that all of us, as we continue to develop this practice, clearly see the connection between our practice and becoming people who have *anukampā* for the whole world.

Thank you very much.