

# *Anukampā* (4 of 5) The Continual Act of Care

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

*anukampā*, care, caregiver, Buddha, compassion, suffering, friendliness, resonance, loving-kindness, *karuṇā*, ill-will, hatred, conceit

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I'll continue on this fourth morning to talk about the Buddha's teachings on *anukampā*. I tentatively translate this word as 'care.' In doing so, I'm bringing into Buddhist language a new English word, which is rare. I don't know that it's ever been used. It's certainly not prominent in the translations of the Buddha's teachings from Pali or from many of the other languages of Asian Buddhism.

Why English translators haven't chosen the word 'care' is a topic in itself. I don't know the answer to that. But by translating *anukampā* as 'care,' I am connecting it consciously with a very simple, common word in English, which I think has a certain humility. It's really important in many central areas of our lives.

We talk about health care. If you go to a hospital, there are many departments that have to do with care. There's the intensive care unit, palliative care, and spiritual care where hospital chaplains work.

We use the word 'caregiver' in English. This can be someone who's a health caregiver. Or a caregiver can be someone who offers care for children, or for the elderly in a nursing home. A caregiver can also be a family member who provides unpaid care for a relative in their home.

The English word 'care' often means to care for someone's needs – physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social. As human beings, we all have these needs, and we offer care for others. What's nice about the word 'care' in this comprehensive sense is that it's not just caring for people because they have the potential for suffering and we want to help them not suffer. But there's a much broader sense of caring for people – just because they're people. They are human beings, and they have needs. They have possibilities, and we want to live in a world of mutual care.

This idea of caring is so central to human culture and societies, but it's often forgotten as people become adults. I've known people who, only when they had children themselves, were able to realize what their

parents had done for them – the tremendous amount of caregiving offered to a child as they grow up. Hopefully, that's what's offered.

Sometimes the tables are turned. When parents become elderly, it's the children who become the caregivers, offering care in return. A lot of this happens quietly within families. It's not big public news that the couple down the street has been staying up all night caring for their crying, sick baby. It's a remarkable act of care that this happens in all kinds of ways.

We care for people when they're happy. We provide them with more opportunities. One of the great ways people care for children who grow up in their communities is by volunteering to coach them in sports, like soccer, baseball, and volleyball. We offer care and create a healthy environment for children to grow up in.

I see the word 'care' as being broader in application and concern than the word 'compassion.' And this is what we seem to see in the teachings of the Buddha. As important as compassion is in the ancient teachings, the word *karuṇā*, often translated as 'compassion,' is really reserved for a very deep meditation practice and a state of mind and heart that's radiant, abundant, and expansive. But that word is not used in terms of expressing the motivation for supporting people and

doing good in the world. The word used for this is *anukampā*.

As I've been saying, it has another meaning than just caring for people's suffering and avoiding causing suffering. It is caring for people's welfare and happiness, which is broader.

The Buddha never talks about cultivating *anukampā*. It seems that he just assumes it's there. In that sense, the Buddha seems to suggest that *anukampā* is what's there when one has abandoned ill-will and hatred. "One abides with *anukampā* for the world," he says. One abides having *anukampā* – having care for the world – when one has abandoned ill-will and hatred.

It is letting go of ill-will and hatred. Those are big, powerful words, but they also represent the small, subtle ways that ill-will, and even hatred, might be present in our little frustrations and irritations with others and with ourselves. The slightest bit can be there when we are critical, or have aversion to people, things or ourselves.

When the mind-heart has really shed its ill-will, hatred, aversion, and tendency to complain, and it really becomes quiet and open, it is then that *anukampā* for the world arises.

In this sense, *anukampā* is not doing something. It's not conceiving and thinking about "May all beings be well. May all beings be free of suffering." It's the absence of something allows this part of our heart to shine and to be here. It has certainly been my experience that the more I've shed, settled, and been opened through meditation practice, and the quieter and more sensitive I've become – care seems to arise, and this sometimes takes the expression of compassion, loving-kindness, or friendliness.

But 'caringness' is more fundamental. The sense of caring – the feeling of tenderness and resonance with people – is broader and simpler. It's humble, because it doesn't come from active thinking and reflecting.

When someone is a caregiver in a hospital, we don't ask or even expect that they love or have lots of compassion for the sick people who are there. But we do expect them to care for those people.

It's possible be caring for people for whom we don't have a particularly strong feeling of friendliness. Care can be a much simpler, more direct activity, which doesn't require as much from us as does compassion, friendliness or loving-kindness.

I don't want to diminish the value of compassion and loving-kindness. They're fantastic, powerful parts of

human life, but they do require a little more from us. To have it in the forefront all the time, and to call on it in different ethical situations might be more difficult for some people than to have simple, ordinary ‘caringness’ for what is there.

Care is so much a part of human life that maybe we’re not human *beings*, but at the heart, we’re human *carings*. We’re social creatures. We depend on the care of others, and they depend on our care – perhaps in ways that may be the most fundamental aspect of a human life. It may be more fundamental than the idea that we are either matter or spirit, or that there’s some essence inside of us. It may or may not be a spiritual essence. It’s kind of a material aspect of human life, and this approach is certainly not the way in which the Buddha talks about human life.

But what if what’s fundamental is not some essence or core aspect of who we are – but rather if the fundamental aspect of what it means to a human being able to care?

Over and over again, we see in the teachings of the Buddha, both directly and indirectly, that he expresses care. He cares about relationships between people. Many of the teachings of the Buddha have been interpreted to be ethical in nature, because they have to

do with taking care of how we relate to people so that we don't harm them, and we don't harm ourselves.

The Buddha said that one of the motivations for not harming people is not *karuṇā* (compassion) – but in this teaching at least, the motivation for not harming people is in fact *anukampā* – this caring.

Perhaps caring is a bit of an activity or an action. That goes along with the Buddha's tendency to understand human beings in terms of their actions, rather than in terms of some fundamental essence.

If *anukampā* is an activity more fundamental to who we are, then it comes from letting go of all the things that get in the way, including conceit and self-preoccupation. It's almost as if *anukampā* (caring) is something that comes from the heart when we're most settled, open, and present for our experience.

*Anukampā* is not a thing. It's the activity of being human when we're most grounded, centered, and quiet. It's simple and humble, because it's not connected to concepts and ideas of who we are. It allows for the heart's capacity to care. We become the caregivers of the world – not because we should, or because it's an obligation – but because it's the fundamental functioning of a liberated heart and mind.

So, care for the world and your relationships with others. It's a beautiful thing. I hope I don't have to convince you of that.

What I really hope is that you're inspired in meditation or just mindfulness practice to discover that – underneath the layers of reactivity, fear, desires, and attachments – there exists a flow out of us, which may be *anukampā*.

Maybe you'll choose a different word to translate it other than 'care.' That's fine. We're not sure exactly how these words should be translated. What is important are these fundamental, beautiful qualities of being that we allow to operate from this deep, Dharmic place inside.

Thank you for the chance to talk this way, and to think about this. We'll continue with one more talk on *anukampā* tomorrow.

Thank you.