



# Speaking of Love and Affection

**Buddhism in Every Step** (A12)

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# Speaking of Love and Affection

Most people associate love and affection with a man-woman relationship. This is not exactly correct. Love and affection also applies to relationships in families, between friends, and among a nation's fellow citizens.

The world of love is broad and expansive. We do not only love our parents, friends, or countries; we may also love many other things. Some people love plants and flowers; others love their pets. Some other people love to collect mineral rocks, stamps, or matchboxes, and they derive a lot of joy from their collections. It is just as natural to love sentient beings with whom we can share our emotions as it is to love insentient things that can not understand emotion.

Very often, we hear people raise the question: Where do we come from? The sutras tell us that we human beings arise out of love; in fact, it is said in the sutras, “When one’s love is not strong, one will not be born into the saha world.” In Buddhist literature, human beings are referred to as sentient beings. Love is the source of life and our existence represents a continuum of love and affection.

While some kinds of love are “healthy,” others are “unhealthy”; some are “giving,” others are “possessive.” What is love? Love has its pluses and minuses. From the perspective of its pluses, love gives us the strength to make sacrifices, to give, to encourage, and to be compassionate. Love is like a roadmap; it gives life direction and a clear visibility of life’s destination. Love is like a blanket; it provides us with warmth and security. Love is like a box of chocolates; it is sweet and full of surprises. From the perspective of its minuses, love is like a piece of rope; it can be binding and restrictive. Love is like a lock; it can shackle us and make us restless. Love can be blinding; it can keep us in the dark without our being aware of it. Love is like the honey on a sharp blade; it can entice us to lick the blade, even at the risk of cutting our tongues and risking our lives.

Love can be like a sea of suffering; its turbulent tall waves can trap us in its depths.

We all want to be loved by others. Some go a step further and want to share their love with the many that their lives touch. Regardless of whether we love or are loved by others, we have to be mindful that our love does not turn sour. Love and hate are inseparable, one shadowing the other. If we do not love properly, if we do not expand our love to all, and if we do not elevate our love for a few to compassion for all, love can turn into hate.

## **I. Everyday Love**

Everyday love is the most basic and common. This includes love between a man and a woman, between a parent and a child, among family members, and between friends. While love can be blissful, there are times when love can hurt. While most of us know or long for the joys of love, we may not understand why love can cause us so much pain. When love is finite in capacity, and limited in scope, it often becomes possessive and clinging in nature. There are three main situations where love causes us problems:

### *1. When the object of our love is inappropriate*

It is human nature to love someone with whom we feel a special affinity, but when the object of our love is inappropriate, our love can bring us much pain. When we love someone who is spoken for or is married to another person, our love is destined for trouble. It takes two to love; when we love someone who does not have feelings for us, it is like banging our head against the wall. Depending on the object of our love, we should moderate our intensity accordingly. If not, problems will ensue.

### *2. When our perspective of love is inappropriate*

One of the most common, though faulty, perspectives of love is to view it as some kind of trade. Some people believe that, because of their personal wealth, they can buy love. Others dare not love those who are more affluent than they are. Some people would not consider falling in love with someone without first considering that person's looks, education, profession, or the wealth of his or her family. In these instances, love is looked at as a kind of trade; this is an erroneous



perspective of love. True love does not speak of requirements and prerequisites; true love is about giving.

3. *When the manner in which we love is inappropriate*

Some people only love themselves and have little regard for how others feel. In their continual pursuit of personal enjoyment, some even engage in extramarital affairs. Others let their own emotions cloud their judgment; they become partial to people they love and overly critical of those that they dislike. Sometimes, love is like a pair of colored glasses, preventing us from seeing the true faces of those we love. No wonder we say that love is blind. There is a common Chinese saying that we can use as our guide, “Know the evil of those we love and the goodness of those we hate.” When we love properly, love brings out the best in each one of us.

While the excessive love of a parent for a child can spoil the child and be harmful in his or her life, the love of a parent, in moderation, can give enormous support for the child and help him or her grow up well. I still remember some twenty years ago, when Venerable Tzu Chuang decided to renounce

the household life to become a monastic. Her parents came to witness the ordination ceremony. With tears in their eyes, they gave her warm smiles. Why were they both happy and sad? Although it is quite common now for young college graduates to enter the monastic life, it was quite unusual at that time. On the one hand, her parents wanted to spend the rest of their lives with their child; on the other hand, they recognized their daughter's love and dedication to the Dharma. Their tears, as well as their smiles, left a strong impression in my memory.

At this point, you may think that there is no room in Buddhism for the kind of love that exists between a man and a woman, or between a husband and wife. This is not the case at all. Buddhism does not disapprove of wholesome love between a man and a woman; Buddhism disapproves of love that is unhealthy and unsound. It is unfortunate when love becomes the cause of problems and heartbreak. When one reads in the newspaper about the many alarming stories of love-driven assaults or even homicides, one cannot help but lament how tragic it is not to love properly.

Love is about giving. Even if we cannot make huge sacrifices for our loved ones, the least we can do is not hurt them. In the *Records of the Warring*

*States*, Yue Yi once said, “When a gentleman breaks off a friendship, he does not speak ill of the other party. When a patriotic official is asked to leave the emperor’s court, he does not try to clear his name.” Similarly, while most people would like to see their romance develop into marital bliss, it is important to know how to handle a relationship when it fails. When friends part ways, they should do so amiably and not bear a grudge against the other party. How can one make an enemy out of someone whom one has once loved? To defame or destroy another person just because of a failed relationship is unnecessary.

Some people describe how people love this way: Young people love with their words, middle-aged people love with their actions, and older people love with their hearts. This means how we love matures with age. Likewise, our love also evolves as we grow in spiritual maturity. From loving ourselves, our love extends from loving just our families to loving the entire human race.

## **II. Heroic Love**

What kind of love is heroic—remarkable and extraordinary? How does it differ from the everyday

love we talked about in the previous section? Here are a few examples to help answer these questions.

### *1. Selfless love for one's country*

Da Yu was a well-known virtuous man of ancient China. During his time, there was a major flood, and many people lost their farms and homes. The emperor assigned Yu to the job of diverting the river water and lessening the floods. He was away from home supervising the project for thirteen years. He was so dedicated to finishing the project and thus relieving his fellow countrymen of further pain that, during these thirteen years, three times he passed his house and three times he did not stop to visit with his family. In his love for his country and fellow countrymen, there was little time for himself and his family. Such selfless love for one's country is a very good example for all of us to emulate.

Qu Yuan was a government official during the Warring Period in ancient China. He was patriotic and was trusted by then Emperor Chu Huai. When some of the corrupt officials began to see that they were losing ground to Qu Yuan, they began to spread rumors about him. Unfortunately, the emperor believed

the rumors and distanced himself from Qu Yuan, finally dispatching him to a faraway post. Even then, Qu Yuan loved his emperor and maintained high hopes that his country would not fall into the hands of these corrupt officials. He would rather give his life in patriotism than to compromise with the political parasites. When he was ordered by the emperor to implement a policy put forward by corrupt officials or face death, he chose death. He jumped into Miluo River and took his own life. Since the villagers could not recover his body, they rowed about the lake in boats and made loud noises with their drums so that the fishes would be scared away and not feed on his body. In fact, this is the beginning of the Dragon Boat Festival. From many of the letters left behind by Qu Yuan, we can see his steadfast love for his country. He would rather give his own life than to watch helplessly while his country declined. This is another example of selfless patriotic love for one's country.

During the later years of Song Dynasty, China was divided into Northern Song and Southern Song. When the poet Lu Fangweng lay on his deathbed, he told his sons, "As I lay dying, I should know that all phenomena are empty; however, I grieve because I did not see the unification of the nine states. On the

day General Huang reclaims the north, please do not forget to tell me the news when you make your ancestral offerings.” This kind of love for one’s country is another example of remarkable love.

## 2. *Selfless love for others*

One of the Buddha’s cousins was a general by the name of Mahanaman. He was responsible for guarding the city of Kapilavastu. When the city was attacked and was about to fall into the hands of the enemies, he pleaded with the other general, “Please do not kill my countrymen. But if you have to, can you please wait until I resurface after jumping down to the bottom of the river.” The other general was none other than the fierce King Virudhaka. He looked at Mahanaman and answered, “Right now, you and your countrymen have no escape and must die. But I will grant you your last wish.” Mahanaman then jumped into the river and disappeared. A long time passed and he still did not float back up. Virudhaka was getting impatient and sent his people to the bottom of the river to find out what happened. They found Mahanaman at the bottom of the river with his hair tied to a tree root. In giving his life, he bought some time for his

fellow countrymen to escape from the city. This kind of willingness to sacrifice oneself for others is a form of fearless love. It is, indeed, extraordinary love.

### 3. *Selfless love for the Dharma*

Within Chinese Buddhism, we have all heard of Master Xuanzang. He was also referred to as the “Confucius of Chinese Buddhism.” Master Xuanzang was remembered for his determination to go to India to learn about Buddhism and bring sutras back to China. To do this, he had to cross over eight hundred miles of desert. One day while in the desert, all of the water that he and his entourage were carrying suddenly spilled out of its containers. The situation was grim because there was little chance they could cross the desert without water. Under the fierce sun and with dying thirst, he made this very famous vow: “I would rather die trying to take my last step to the west than try to make it back to the east alive.” This fervor for truth is also a form of remarkable love.

If you look at how the Japanese live, eat, and dress, you will see that there is a heavy Chinese influence. Who was the first to introduce Chinese culture to Japan? For this, we have to credit Master Jianzhen

of the Tang dynasty. He was a forefather of the area of Yangzhou. In order to realize his dream of going to Japan to spread the Dharma, he tried to cross the sea to Japan on seven different occasions over a twelve-year period. Once he was stopped by government officials; another time, he was robbed clean by bandits. On another attempt he had to turn back because of bad weather and turbulent seas. There was even one time when he was betrayed by one of his disciples. After six difficult attempts, he finally arrived in Japan at the age of sixty, blind in both eyes. Even with all these hardships, his resolve of spreading the Dharma in Japan remained unshaken. He also made this moving remark about his experience: “What is the risking of life in the face of great undertakings?” He did not hesitate to give up his life for the chance to spread the Dharma. His compassionate desire to spread the truth to all showed a remarkable love for others.

#### *4. To love one's parents to the best of one's abilities*

The Buddha's disciple, Maudgalyayana, was a filial son. After his mother passed away, he learned with his supernatural powers that his mother was



suffering in hell. His love for his mother was so great that he did not hesitate to go to hell to help console her. Maudgalyayana's dedication to his mother moved the Buddha, the Buddha told him that only the united efforts of the whole Sangha could alleviate his mother's suffering. This is the beginning of Ullambana. In this way, not only was he able to save his mother, many others are now able to help their deceased relatives. This form of filial behavior is the direct transformation of a remarkable love.

Chan Master Daoji of North Qi dynasty was another example of a filial son. When he traveled about spreading the Dharma, he carried his books and mother in baskets suspended from a bamboo pole set across his shoulders. When others offered him a hand, he would politely decline and say, "This is my mother who gave me life and raised me. I should be the one to take care of her." Chen Zunsu of the Tang dynasty was a very accomplished Chan master who was also very attentive to his mother. He earned his living by mending shoes; thus, he was also called Chen the Shoe Repairman.

There are many other examples of selfless love for one's parents. Filial love is a true and pure form of emotion; it is also a manifestation of extraordinary love.

## 5. *To love one's students like oneself*

The following examples serve to show how past masters loved their students and followers. To teach and train their students, they used various methods and seized every opportunity possible to get their messages across. With love and dedication, the bond between a teacher and his students was forever sealed.

It was recorded in the *Confucian Analects* how heartbroken Confucius was when he learned of the death of his student, Yen Hui. He wailed and cried repeatedly, "The heavens have let me down!" His tears fully captured his feelings for his students. He was saddened by the premature death of his student; he grieved at the loss of someone with great potential. His love for his student was most compassionate and remarkable.

Milarepa<sup>1</sup> traveled far and wide looking for a teacher. After extensive searching and traveling, Milarepa finally found Marpa to be his Dharma teacher. His teacher asked him, "You said you wish

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1. Milaraspa (1025-1135) was a famous enlightened Tibetan; also referred to as Milarepa.

to call me your teacher. Let me ask you, what do you have to offer me?”

Milarepa prostrated respectfully and said, “I can offer you all of my actions, speech, and thought.”

With this, Marpa agreed to accept him as his disciple. One day, Marpa told Milarepa, “You are a young man. I want you to build me a stone house so I can store all my sutras. Once it is completed, I will teach you the Dharma.”

Milarepa was most delighted. When he asked his teacher for a sketch of what he wanted, his teacher told him, “I want you to go to the tip of the east face of the mountain and build me a circular house. The roads are steep and treacherous, but your hard work can help you burn off your bad karma.”

Milarepa worked day in and day out. When it was about half finished, his teacher came up the mountain. He took off his half-moon shaped topcoat, folded it a few times and left it on the floor. He then turned toward Milarepa and said, “This does not look like a good spot. I want you to take the house apart and move it to the west face of the mountain. I want you to build me a house that looks like this garment here.”

Frustrated and speechless, he complied. When he was about halfway done, his teacher again came

up the mountain and said, “The house still does not look right. I want you to take this apart and move all the materials to the north face of the mountain. There I want you to build me a triangular-shaped house to symbolize what a true cultivator I am.”

Milarepa again followed his teacher’s direction. Rain or shine, he worked nonstop, hoping to finish the house. It was about a third completed when his teacher came up the mountain and asked him, “Who told you to build this house?”

Nervously, Milarepa replied, “You personally asked me to build this house for you.”

The teacher looked puzzled. Scratching his head, he said, “Oh! I can’t really recall anything like that. Why would I ask you to build me a triangular-shaped house at this poor location? It looks like the type of altar used by cults. Do you want to do me harm? Take it apart! Take it apart! I want you to go to the south side and build me a square-shaped house. I want it to be nine stories tall, on top of which is to be one more floor for storage, for a total of ten stories. Once it is completed, I will teach you the Dharma!”

With just a few words, all of Milarepa’s efforts were washed down the drain. In this way, building and tearing down, many months and years passed.

He was exhausted and physically beaten. Some of his fellow students could not bear to see him suffer alone and so offered to help him move tiles and bricks. When the teacher found out, he exploded and scolded Milarepa, “I asked you to build me a house. Did I say that you could ask others for help? Why are you so lazy and why do you ask others for help?” His teacher did not only yell at him, he also gave him a few blows with a club. When Milarepa could no longer bear the pain, he let out a little squeal. Instead of comforting him, the teacher continued to reprimand him, “Why are you crying? When you first came and wanted to be my student, did you not say that you wanted to offer me all your actions, speech, and thought? I am just striking what is mine, and I am only yelling at what is mine. What is there for you to cry about?”

What Milarepa had to endure is beyond our imagination; he tacitly accepted all kinds of hardships. After a few years, Milarepa attained enlightenment and became an arhat. On the night that he attained enlightenment, his teacher embraced him crying, “When I first saw you, I realized you were one of those rare individuals with great potential. That is why I had to put you through the toughest

tests so that you could soon attain enlightenment. When I reprimanded you, hit you, and was outright unreasonable toward you, my heart ached with pain. But when I thought about the good it would do you in the future, I had to hide my pain and continue to challenge you.” What looked unreasonable on the surface was in fact a teacher’s love for his students. It was his way of grooming his student for greatness.

When I became a monk as a young man many years ago, I was lucky enough to be educated in a similar fashion. On the day we entered the hall to be ordained, all the precept masters were seated in a row. I remember the precept master asking us sternly, “Today, you are here to be ordained. Are you coming here today because you want to or because your teacher wants you to?”

Someone immediately answered, “It is my desire to come here today to be ordained.”

When the precept master heard his reply, he took up his rattan stick<sup>2</sup> and began beating this student. Afterwards, he said, “How dare you come here without being asked by your teacher!”

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2. In those days in China, corporal punishment was an acceptable teaching tool.

It was another precept master's turn; he asked us the same question, "Are you here today because you want to be here or because you were asked to be here?"

The other students saw what happened earlier, so one of them got smart. He stood up and said carefully, "Please be patient with me, I am here today because my teacher asked me to come."

He thought he was very clever; instead his answer did not put him in any better light. The precept master gave him a beating and said, "If your teacher had not asked you to come, does that mean you would not be here today?"

Upon reflection, the precept master did have a point. Did we have to be asked to get ordained? Did we not have the commitment to become monks on our own? Next, it was another precept master's turn. Like the two before him, he asked us the same question. With both experiences behind us, we thought we knew better. One of us said, "My teacher did tell me to come to be ordained, but I myself also want to come." He thought that such an answer could not go wrong. He could never have guessed that his answer would also bring him the same punishment as the two other students before him. After the punishment, the precept master said, "You are too clever."

Next, we were told to appear before another precept master. This time, the question was quite different. The precept master asked, “Have you ever violated the precept against killing?” Now, killing is a very serious offense, so we all shook our heads and said, “No, we have never violated the precept against killing.”

The precept master then said, “Impossible! Are you telling me that you have never swatted a fly or stepped on an ant before? It is obvious that all of you are lying.” With this, the precept master gave each one of us a few strokes. I suppose he was right. We were not telling the whole truth, and we deserved to be punished. Then, another precept master asked us if we had violated the precept against killing. This time we replied, “Yes teacher, we have violated the precept against killing.”

“This is a violation of the precepts and calls for punishment.” With these words, the precept master gave each one of us a few strokes with a whip. As the day progressed, we did not want to answer any questions put before us. Helplessly, we just said, “Teacher, if you want to punish us, please do so.”

On the surface, this teaching method looks ridiculous and unreasonable. As it turned out, what our teachers wanted to do was use the unreasonable



to teach us to let go of our rational reasoning and to teach us how to deal with our emotions without feeling. If we could surrender ourselves in the face of the unreasonable without feeling, then would we not be more apt to accept the truth? Their demonstration of being unreasonable and without feeling was, in fact, a tool to teach us to let go of our stubborn delusions. It was out of compassion that our teachers were so unfeeling. Looking back, I was indeed very lucky to have the opportunity to be trained the old-fashioned way. The training was tough and painful, but without pain, how could there be greatness? If we do not throw iron scraps into the smelter, how can we get steel? The stringent tests we had to go through were a blessing. The youth of today do not have the opportunity to be so tested; the education of today does not instill in our youths the spirit of toughness and endurance. When coupled with compassion and remarkable love, discipline is a means for teachers to truly prepare their students for greatness in the future.

### **III. Enlightened Love**

There are many levels of love. When we extend our love from our spouse to our siblings, to our relatives

and friends, to our neighbors, to our fellow countrymen, to all animals, and to all sentient beings, our love matures. In this way, basic love first transforms into heroic love, which further matures into enlightened love.

A lot of us have heard about Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. Before he became a bodhisattva, he practiced at the hills of Jiuhua in Anhui. This was a region of very steep hills and few people. At that time, there was a young boy living with him. One day, this youngster could no longer bear to live in such isolation, so he asked to leave the temple and go back down to the village below. Ksitigarbha escorted the youngster down the mountain and offered him a poem as a parting gift. From the sentiments in the poem, we can see the transcendental love that bodhisattvas have for us. The poem was:

*Within the quiet gates of this temple you long for  
your family;  
As you descend the mountain, you say goodbye  
to this temple in the clouds.*

*You love to ride bamboo horses within bamboo  
fences;*

*Rather than collect gold sand in this land of  
gold.*

*Do not try to pick up the moon in the water  
while filling the vase;*

*Or try to play with the flowers in the water while  
washing the basin in the pond.*

*Go, and do not shed a tear for me;*

*This old man has the clouds in the sky to keep  
him company.*

In the first couplet, Ksitigarbha captured the feeling of the youngster: how lonely he was within the gates of the quiet temple and why he wanted to return to his home in the village. In the second couplet, Ksitigarbha described what he was giving up in leaving the temple. He described the little boy's desire to ride bamboo horses and play games rather than practice within the walls of the temple. In the third couplet, Ksitigarbha left words of advice for the youngster to keep in mind. He told the little boy that when he took a vase to go to the river to fill it with water, he would see the reflection of the moon in the water. He warned the boy not to try to pick up the moon in the

water for it was just a reflection. Life in the world is illusive, too. Ksitigarbha also told the boy that when he washed the basin in the pond, he should be careful not to mistake the reflections of trees and flowers in the water as a flowery world in the pond. In the fourth couplet, Ksitigarbha comforted the youngster so that he would not feel guilty about leaving him. He told him to go and do not feel sorry for him. Although he, Ksitigarbha himself, lived in the quiet temple on the mountain, he could still find company in the fleeting fog and the floating clouds of the sky.

From this poem, we can see the love and affection bodhisattvas and arhats have for us. The feelings Ksitigarbha had for the little boy are multidimensional. He knew how the little boy felt, provided him with guidance, and even comforted him. Each word was superbly chosen and rich in meaning.

When Venerable Daoji of the Tang dynasty was the abbot of the Fugan Temple in Yizhou, he opened the temple to many lepers, many with open, putrid sores. Venerable Daoji was not at all put off by their condition; he even lived and ate with them. He also dressed their sores and helped them bathe. Some of his disciples made excuses and tried to keep their distance from the lepers. Finally, someone asked the

Venerable, “Venerable, you spend time with the lepers every day. Are you not afraid that you will also become infected?”

Venerable Daoji smiled gently and said, “What we call clean or dirty is the result of our discriminating mind. If we do not have any dislikes in our minds, how can aversions arise? When our mind is pure, everything and everywhere is pure. If even a monk like myself cannot let go of this bit of delusion and let compassion arise in its place, I should be ashamed of myself for not living in accordance with the Dharma.”

Such is the love of arhats and bodhisattvas. Their love is all-embracing, their compassion knows no discrimination, and their view of self and others is rooted in equality.

Mahakasyapa was one of the Buddha’s great disciples. He was also an arhat. Mahakasyapa’s parents were very affluent and wanted him to get married. This was not in his plans, for he wanted to dedicate his life to Buddhist cultivation. After being repeatedly pressured by his parents, he had no choice but to appease them. In order to buy some time, he asked a goldsmith to sculpt a statue of a beautiful young maiden. He took the sculpture to his parents and told them that he would marry only if he could find

someone as elegant as the gold sculpture. In order to get his son to marry, his parents asked a few servants to carry the sculpture around the country and look for someone that could match its beauty. The servants first spread word that the golden statue was really an image of a deva and would bring good luck to all the young maidens who would come pay respect to her. This way, all the young maidens heard about this wonderful statue, and they all came forward to pay their respects. Among the many who came, there was one who was so striking in her beauty that the gold statue paled in comparison. She was the beautiful maiden Subhadra. They finally asked for the permission of her parents and brought her back to Mahakasyapa's parents.

Mahakasyapa had no choice but to keep his promise to his parents, and the two were married. As it turned out, this young lady also wanted to dedicate her life to cultivation, and she complained to Mahakasyapa, "This is really my parents' idea. They wanted me to marry you because of your family's wealth. As for me personally, I would rather live a life of cultivation." When Mahakasyapa heard this, he told her, "Good. I also want to live a life of cultivation. Why don't we practice separately?" She agreed

and though they were husband and wife in name, they both continued their own course of cultivation. After twenty years when both sets of parents had passed away, they finally got their wish to renounce the household life and live a monastic life. They became a bhiksu and a bhiksuni respectively. Although Subhadra became a bhiksuni, her beauty still attracted the attention of many men. When she went out to beg for alms, men would follow her and tease her. She was so taken aback by all the unwanted attention that she dared not go out to beg for alms. When Mahakasyapa saw what was happening to Subhadra, whom he once called his wife, he felt compassion for her and shared with her whatever food he got from his alms round. Others misread his compassion and began to circulate rumors by saying, “Look! They said they were only husband and wife in name, but they are still a loving couple even though they are now in the Sangha.” Subhadra lamented that her physical beauty was in fact a burden, so she disfigured herself in the hope that she could become a bhiksuni who was ugly in appearance but beautiful in her cultivation. From this, we can see that the enlightened love and affection of arhats is different from the worldly way that we normally perceive love.

Most people think that arhats, who are no longer bound by worldly emotions, are without emotions. This is not true at all. Though arhats have severed the ties of emotions, they are rich in emotions. They are enlightened individuals who are rich in personality and true to their character. When we say arhats are empty of emotions, what we mean is that they have transcended the limited scope of the man-woman kind of love, and that they have expanded their love for a few to a limitless and selfless compassion for all. From loving one's spouse, children, and family, we extend our love to the Dharma and all sentient beings. Thus, true love does not speak of possessing others. True love is the touching of others' lives and the giving of ourselves for all.

#### **IV. The Buddha's Kind of Love**

The Buddha is a fully enlightened individual; what is the Buddha's emotional life like?

The Buddha's mother died seven days after giving birth to him. The Buddha, who had always wanted to teach the Dharma to his mother to thank her for delivering him into this world, finally fulfilled his wish and went to Trayastrimsas Heaven to teach



the Dharma to his mother. When King Suddhodana, the father of the Buddha, passed away, all the princes expressed their desire to be pallbearers. Though the Buddha was the fully enlightened one and was most revered, he still insisted on being one of the pallbearers for his father. When everyone saw the Buddha carrying the coffin, all were very moved. The Buddha was indeed a filial son and a greatly enlightened individual. He gave us a very good example of how to love our parents.

The Buddha loved everyone, friends and foes alike, equally and without discrimination. Before the Buddha renounced his household life, he was married to Princess Yasodhara of Devadista. Many years after the Buddha attained enlightenment, the Buddha went back to his hometown to see his family. Princess Yasodhara had not seen the Buddha for all these years and wondered how her husband had changed. Filled with hope and uncertainty, she was anxious about what to say to the Buddha, who was once her husband. After the Buddha met with his father, the imperial court, and various royal cousins, he finally met with Princess Yasodhara. She thought to herself, “I really have to tell him what I think and how I feel and ask him why he left me.”

When Princess Yasodhara saw the majestic look of the Buddha, she could not help but kneel before him. The Buddha looked at her and said to her in a calm and stately tone of voice, “Yasodhara, I have to ask for your forgiveness for what I did to you. Though my leaving home to cultivate was not fair to you, I am most true to all sentient beings. Now, I ask you to rejoice for me for it had been my wish for many kalpas to become the Buddha. My wish is to teach the Dharma and help all sentient beings, including yourself, cross the sea of suffering.” His voice was compassionate, his appearance was august, and his words transcended all worldly love. Everyone was moved, and eventually Yasodhara also renounced her household life. From the way in which the Buddha handled his relationship with Yasodhara, we can see that to truly love a person is to help him or her grow and stay on the right path; to love a person does not necessarily mean a fairy tale life of living together happily ever after.

The Buddha did not just love his family; he also loved those who were hostile toward him. Though his cousin, Devadatta, treated the Buddha like an enemy, the Buddha did not bear any grudges against him. In fact, the Buddha used to tell everyone that Devadatta

was his good teacher and instrumental in helping him with his cultivation. Without darkness, how do we appreciate the light? Without evil, how do we appreciate the goodness of truth? Without Devadatta, how do we see the greatness of the Buddha?

The Buddha did not just extend his compassion to the rich and the mighty; he was equally compassionate to all sentient beings without discrimination. When his students were sick, the Buddha would prepare medication or deliver water to them. When older bhiksus failed in their eyesight and could not mend their clothes, the Buddha would personally help them thread needles or mend their clothes for them. The Buddha loved his disciples like a loving mother cares for her children. To his disciples, the Buddha was a source of light and strength. The Buddha is most compassionate and gives us limitless hope!

The Buddha was also a very patient teacher and adapted his teachings to the student and the occasion. When Nidhi, who made his living disposing of night soil for others, felt inadequate and tried to avoid the Buddha, the Buddha purposely went out of his way to meet with him. With Ksudrapanthaka, who was very slow and had trouble even memorizing a simple gatha, the Buddha spent extra time teaching the

Dharma to him. When his disciple, Katyayana, who was teaching the Dharma in another area, sent one of his young students to pay respect to the Buddha, the Buddha made sure that this young student was well cared for. The Buddha told his disciples, “Now that the young student of Katyayana has arrived, please set up a cot next to my bed for him to rest for the night.” The great Buddha found time for everyone, even for a young student. In showing his concern for the youngster, the Buddha was also showing his love for his disciple who was away teaching the Dharma. The Buddha often thought about Aniruddha, who lost his sight because of long hours of cultivation and not getting enough rest. Only after Aniruddha attained supernatural vision did the Buddha stop worrying about him. The Buddha also worried about his cousin Ananda, who was very handsome and often attracted the unwanted attention of women. Only after Ananda became successful in his cultivation did the Buddha feel a sigh of relief for his cousin.

Thus, when we speak of love and affection, there are actually many levels of love and affection. Love starts at home. We love our spouses, our children, and our siblings. From there, we extend our love to our relatives and friends. Further, our love

encompasses all human beings and then all beings. A possessive kind of love matures into a giving kind of love, and finally into the enlightened love that bodhisattvas have for us. This kind of love is the great compassion that is described by the saying, “I long for all sentient beings to be free of suffering, but I would not seek pleasure just for myself.”

Love is like water. On the one hand, it can nurture our lives; on the other hand, it can drown us. Thus, if we do not know how to love properly, love can bring us many problems and ruin our lives. How do we love properly? Consider the following four guidelines:

- a. Love wisely—We should use our wisdom to purify our love.
- b. Love compassionately—We should use our compassion to manifest our love.
- c. Love in accordance with the Dharma—We should use the Dharma to guide our love.
- d. Love morally—We should use morals and ethics to direct our love.

Love is such an important subject in our lives. How do we love selflessly and offer our love to all?

How do we transform a possessive love into a giving love, to a love for the Dharma? How do we purify our love from one of discrimination to one of great compassion? How do we love in the spirit of this common saying: “Cultivate our kindness without conditions, and ground our compassion in oneness”? These are very important questions for us to ponder. When we offer our love and affection to serve the community, then our lives will be that much fuller and that much more everlasting!

Fo Guang Shan  
International Translation Center



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