



AJAHN JAYASARO



*On love* 

by Ajahn Jayasaro

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## *Foreword*

This small book began life as a *Dhamma* talk given in the Thai language. After I had edited the transcribed version it was printed in Thailand under the title *Lak Rak*. One of the readers of that book, Varangkana Lamsam, found it useful and decided that she would like to arrange the printing of an English version as a gift of *Dhamma* to fellow lay Buddhists. Her cousin Pimkaeo Sundaravej, who had received the book from her, translated it. For my part I have edited the manuscript and clarified some points of *Dhamma* that I feel were a little vague in my own original discourse. I would like to express my appreciation of the efforts of both Varangkana and Pimkaeo to make this book possible.

May the virtues of the Triple Gem guide and protect all who read this book.

*Ajahn Jayasaro*



# *On Love*

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I've always liked stories, and particularly stories that require the reader to suffer a little bit and shed a few tears on the way before being resolved with a happy ending. Now the Eightfold Path is my favourite story; enlightenment is the ultimate happy ending. But in the stories that I cherished in my youth, happy endings almost always involved some kind of love, and I began to observe that in "real life" love is not always a guarantee of happiness and it rarely resolves anything for very long. One of the slogans of the day which impressed me the most as a teenager was the one that asked whether you were part of the problem or part of the solution. I think that this is a question we might ask about love. Is it truly part of the solution to our suffering in life or does it merely compound it? My short answer to this question is that it depends. On what? On the kind of love and how you care for it. Even the purest love needs to be constantly cleansed.

Why is it necessary to keep cleansing love? The easy answer is that it tends to get soiled. And the dirt that soils it is suffering and the cause of suffering: craving. Since we human beings do not desire even a shred of suffering and gladly accept every little bit of happiness that comes our way, it makes sense for us to ensure that all the various aspects of our life, including love, be as conducive to happiness and as safe from suffering as possible. Love is a part of life which we need to imbue with wisdom and understanding.

Love tends to get intertwined with other emotions, making those who have never considered it closely mistake the emotions associated with love for a part of, or indeed expressions of, love itself. Usually, for example, rather than considering worries and jealousy to be impurities of love, we take them to be a proof of it, and thus gladly harbour such feelings. We tend to blind ourselves to love's impurities. It is alarming how easily the defilements (*kilesa*, *i.e.*, negative mental states such as greed, hatred and delusion), which can destroy love, sneak inside a heart ignorant of the Buddha's teachings (*Dhamma*). Most people are like the owner of



a home with a wide opening instead of a door. Anyone is free to enter or exit such a house and it is no surprise that thieves abound.

It is intelligent to learn about love because knowing and understanding our own nature is the only way to the peace and happiness that we human beings can and should aspire to. The Buddha teaches us that absolutely everything on this earth can be a problem for those without wisdom, but is not a problem for those with wisdom. So it is with love. When our wisdom has developed sufficiently, then we can abandon sadness and practice the joyful side of *Dhamma* so that love will do no harm and instead be the engine that propels our lives to real happiness.

In learning about love, these are the kinds of questions we can ask ourselves: What is love? What are the advantages and drawbacks of love? How does love arise? How is love sustained? How does love decay and end? What are the impurities of love? What preserves and purifies love? How should we behave with respect to love so as to maximize happiness and minimize pain?

The first challenge in answering these questions is one of semantics. The meaning of

the word “love” is rather imprecise because the term is used to describe many different types of attachment. Sometimes we exclaim that we love something when we mean that we like it a lot, *e.g.*, we love swimming, we love seafood, we love such and such a movie. As this meaning of love is not relevant to my discussion, I won't mention it again.

Another type of love is the devotion to intangibles, to beliefs or ideals, loving one's country or one's religion for example. The attachment to an ideal can be so intense that people are willing to kill or die for it. This kind of feeling is valued because it gives meaning and purpose to our lives and relieves for a while the drag of petty concerns. But it also robs us of discernment and we need to refine this type of love carefully with wisdom to avoid becoming a victim or a pawn of skilful manipulators. In a conflict, if we are convinced we are good, right, pure and the other side is evil, wrong, impure, we have lost our way. People who are utterly convinced they are right are already on the wrong track. Thinking in terms of us *vs.* them, white *vs.* black, good *vs.* evil, is like a disease that has caused untold suffering in the world. Empathy,

the antidote to this childish way of looking at things, does not, as is sometimes thought, cripple action but makes it more intelligent. Demonizing others, or simply refusing to cede them their humanity, leads to cruel, intemperate actions that eventually rebound on the perpetrators. Self-righteousness is a form of intoxication. Seeking to understand people and situations leads to measured responses. When someone tries to persuade us to hate or look down on those with viewpoints different from our own, that person is not being a “good friend” (*kalyanamitta*). He or she is acting as a “bad friend” (*papamitta*), one who leads us in unwholesome directions. Once we adopt a way of thinking or philosophy, we should check its rightness with the power of *Dhamma*. Does it, for example, seem as reasonable when our mind has been calmed through meditation as it does when our mind is inflamed?

This second type of love is worth investigating because it has implications for social stability and peace. But here, I mean to stress the analysis of the third type of love which is personal love: love for parents, siblings, relatives, friends, spouses, children, and

grandchildren. And finally, the fourth type of love, which is lovingkindness (*metta*).

The initial observation I would like to make is that the first three types of love will always bring some suffering, be it a lot or a little, to our lives, because that's just the way love is and just the way of the human heart.

Mundane love has natural limitations simply through being a part of the world. It is always in some way deficient. That is the bad news. But the good news is that there is another, superior kind of love, namely lovingkindness (*metta*). It is an unconditional love, expressed universally without bias, for all living things. It is a truly pure love. When an attachment is boundless, it does not cause suffering. On the contrary, lovingkindness brings only happiness of a most satisfying kind, because rather than being a part of the unfulfilling world, it lies on the path to liberation.

The Buddha's teachings point out two significant drawbacks of mundane love: (1) The lover, the beloved, and the love itself are all impermanent by nature. Fluctuations and changes in accordance with causes and

conditions mean that nothing in the world, including personal love, is permanent or capable of being a real refuge. (2) The lover, as an unenlightened human being, will always bear in his or her heart negative emotions (known in the Buddhist idiom as defilements or *kilesa*) which render love unsatisfactory and may cause problems in loving relationships at any time. It is already naturally difficult for mundane love to last, and we make it worse with our ignorance and unwise desires.

Those who have what the Buddha called “right view” (*samma ditthi*) train themselves to see love in terms of the Four Noble Truths. They train themselves to acknowledge love’s inherent deficiencies, to try to find the appropriate value and meaning they should give to love in their lives. They attempt to abandon impurities in the heart that cause suffering in spite of the presence of love. Their goal is to avoid or minimize the suffering that arises from love, and to achieve and give as much happiness as possible. Finally, they use the Buddha’s teachings to train their action, speech, and mind to lead their love in the direction of lovingkindness as much as possible, inspired

by the awareness of the beauty of a love that is unconditioned.

Certain readers might not see any benefit in this training and might question why we should bother to meddle with love at all when it's fine as it is. To this I would answer with a query: Is it really fine, and if so, how long will it remain so? How do you know? The Buddha showed us that if something is real, it will withstand being put to the test. Only false things do not withstand examination. So if our love is genuine we should not fear putting it to the test. If we want to let go of falseness and reach authenticity, we must learn to examine our own hearts. That examination must include all feelings, including those dearest to our hearts such as love.

As spiritual practitioners we strive to understand love. When we examine love with a neutral, unbiased mind, attachments that have arisen from delusion will gradually dissolve along with the various impurities that have entered into our hearts and become bundled together with love. We will begin to appreciate the taste of non-toxic love, and finally in the

hearts of those who have practiced well will remain only a clear, clean and unconditional love that overflows naturally from a joyful mind.

The kind of personal love that we experience from the beginning of our lives is the love between children and their parents. As we grow up we tend to take our parents for granted because they seem to be as fixed a part of the world as earth, water, fire, and air. We feel entitled to our parents' love. Given how prone we are to complacency, it is a strong point of society here in Thailand that it places such emphasis on gratitude, encouraging people to remember how much they owe their parents and to experience the joy of reciprocating their parents' kindness. When finally our parents must leave us, our sorrow does not need to be tinged with regret. Our memories can be full of pride at having performed our filial duties well.

There probably isn't a parent anywhere who can insist that loving his or her children brings only happiness. It is rather that the suffering that arises as a consequence of parental love is considered to be redeemed by the joys of parenthood. Whenever their children suffer, be

it physically from an illness or emotionally from a disappointment or not being able to get what they want, loving parents often suffer even more than the children. Parents can endure their own suffering but find their children's suffering almost unbearable. In child-rearing, most parents are willing to sacrifice and endure years of exhausting physical and emotional hardship so that their children may be successful, capable, and happy.

Love for our parents and for our children is a natural attachment that is shadowed by suffering. It is a suffering that is for the most part willingly borne, but nevertheless we should be interested in learning whether there is any aspect of that suffering that we might relinquish without affecting our ability to be a good son or daughter or a good parent.

The kind of love that people are most interested in is surely romantic love. Nearly everyone hopes to be lucky, meet a soul-mate or a good life-partner, then to live together happily ever after. Truly loving someone and being loved truly by that person is the most popular of dreams. However, wanting to love



and to be loved in this manner is usually bound up with defilements such as delusion and lust. Therefore it is vital to master how not to suffer excessively from loving or being loved.

Poets have tended to praise love as the supreme experience in life. Some scientists, on the other hand, see love as merely a result of chemical reactions in the brain that have evolved to support reproduction of the species. Which is it? Which comes first, the chicken or the egg, the brain or the mind? These types of arguments have been around for a long time and never come to an end. A more interesting question is how we ought to behave with respect to love in order to derive the most benefit from it. Searching for the answer to this question begins with observing our own life, the lives of those around us, and the lives of the general population.

What is the appeal of love? In the initial stage, it is an effective antidote to boredom for those who find life stale, uninteresting, filled with only drudgery or emptiness, or for those who feel lost with no purpose for living. Love can create excitement and meaning. Falling in love

is intoxicating, a welcome agitation. Powerful emotional ups and downs—as if regularly falling into hell and then rising back into heaven—make lovers feel invigorated and alive.

Love has many other enticements. For couples living together, in addition to the ability to meet their sexual needs there is also the security of being the most important person in the world to the other person and a feeling of warmth and escape from loneliness. Having someone with whom we can be ourselves without pretension or concealment is a comfort in a busy, competitive and insincere world. Being sure that no matter what happens, our lover will not abandon us and will help us deal with our problems with empathy and sympathy, will encourage us when we are weary and in despair, will appreciate us genuinely, and will rejoice in our accomplishments—all these are certain causes of happiness. In addition, if our mate is capable, successful, and well-respected, we feel proud. Love has many charms.

Personal love wouldn't be so popular if it didn't have a lot going for it. But as one who

has lived the past thirty years as a celibate monk, I am probably not the most qualified to expand upon all of its joys; my readers will probably have to supply the points I've missed themselves. But after considering the good things that love can provide, please apply it to your own heart too: when we have determined the benefits of love and what we receive or want to receive from love, we might ask ourselves how much we in turn have given these things to our loved ones, and try to improve or correct our failings.

What are the things that we should share with our loved ones? Here are a few: joy, understanding, empathy, encouragement, respect, consideration, trust, patience, forgiveness, being a good counsel and the best of friends. At the same time, if we want these things from them we must also let them know. Don't simply assume that they ought to know it themselves without being told, because many things that people should know instinctively, they don't know at all or they used to know but have forgotten. Doesn't it make sense for people who love each other to work on clear communication rather than resorting to resentful sarcasm? It

should be more pleasant. Otherwise, what used to be sweet may turn rancid.

Love between two individuals gets a lot of attention. Movies, plays, novels, fairy tales and advertisements all seek to convince us that this type of love is the pinnacle of life. A life without it is portrayed as imperfect and tragic. However, if we stop and contemplate for a moment, we ought to be able to see that romantic love in our own life, even if we've been fortunate enough to experience an almost storybook love, is never a cure-all. Love can alleviate some suffering at a certain level, but it cannot extinguish all suffering entirely. Even loving someone utterly and for eternity is not enough. Many Buddhists think little of converting to another religion merely in order to marry someone they love. Few have any idea of how much they have sacrificed and how little, relatively, they have gained.

Young people often view love as the answer to every kind of problem in life. They think that simply loving and being loved is the main thing; with that in place everything else will work out by itself. But if we are willing

to look more closely, experience teaches us that what determines long-term happiness is not so much the presence of love but the quality of our actions, words, and mind. Ultimately, a spiritually untrained person who takes love as a refuge is creating the conditions for disappointment.

Have you noticed that a lot of people in love suffer precisely because they assumed that love would mean an end to suffering, that it would resolve something? They tend to feel disappointed and cheated when things don't work out that way. They feel that it wasn't meant to be like this, that it's not fair. Once the first flush of love has faded, we cannot blind ourselves so easily to the ways in which, despite the best will in the world, emotional and spiritual immaturity constantly undermines us all. The Buddha kept pointing to the fact that we suffer through the cravings that arise when we don't understand ourselves. Suffering ends because ignorance-based cravings (*tanha*) end, not because I love you and you love me.

Hoping to end suffering with love is starting out on the wrong foot, but the problem

isn't so much love itself. Love is just what it is, no more, no less. But not understanding (or misunderstanding) ourselves, we demand love to give us something it cannot. We make ourselves into victims of unrealistic expectations.

The lover, the beloved, and love itself are *sankhara*: conditioned phenomena unable to maintain themselves continuously in one particular state. Separation from loved ones is thus natural and unavoidable. If not today then at some time in the future, it is inevitable that we will have to part from all of those we love. Death is a completely normal affair for all living things in this world, without exception. But those who have never taken the time to examine the nature of life leave themselves extremely vulnerable. The magnitude of the suffering that they undergo as a result of separation varies in accordance with the degree of attachment. Great love results in great grief; modest love results in modest grief. Sometimes even before the ultimate separation of bereavement, there may be significant separation due to illness. For example, mental illness or senility can make someone who once loved us profoundly unable to even recognize our face. The nature of change

accords with causes and conditions and heeds no one's desire. However ardently we may pray, beg or make offerings, separation will, sooner or later, always arrive. We would laugh at anyone imploring a sacred being to prevent the sun from setting, but the state of mind lying behind the refusal to accept the certainty of death is hardly different.

In romantic love, lovers feel impelled to insist upon or exclaim their love at frequent intervals. In this age of cell phones they might say or text the magic words several times a day until it becomes a daily routine. And expressions of love become subject to a certain linguistic inflation—people promise to love forever or (despite being unable to recall past lives) claim to have loved each other in many previous existences. What does it mean when we make such incredible statements? People who say this probably mean that at the time of making the statement (assuming they are sincere) they feel a great love and at that moment can't imagine ever feeling any other way. But who can guarantee their own feeling to that extent, when the intensity of a feeling is not a proof of its endurance?

It is worth noting that what lies behind this insistence on love is a worry, because without a deep-seated fear that one day love would no longer exist (or exist in the same way) why would anyone feel that they have to insist upon it so much? If love is something that occurs all by itself without any intention just like falling into a pit, how can we be so sure that in this life our pit or their pit will be the only pit? At any rate, once love has been declared, from then on it has to be declared continuously to reassure the other person that it has not changed. If the frequency of the declaration declines, the other person can feel let down or suspicious. It's a kind of pressure.

If someone says to us, "I love you," is that a good thing? Maybe, but not if we don't love that person back. Unrequited love amongst classmates or co-workers can cause awkward situations. Sometimes people, put on the spot, lie that they love the other person too because they don't want to hurt the other's feelings with rejection. Men may see an expression of love as the price to pay for sexual favours. But for whatever reasons they're uttered, once the words "I love you" are out there, they take on a



life of their own, and a relationship is irrevocably changed by them. Some people don't mean to be dishonest but just don't know how to label their own feelings. Out of confusion, they figure they might as well call what they are feeling love since they don't know what else to call it.

This thing with the simple name of love is a complex phenomenon, blended with other mental states that are so ingrained in our hearts that they lead us to believe them to be a part of or an expression of love. Worry and concern are good examples. These emotions are frequently considered to be the proof of true love: no worry, no love. When a son or daughter is out late and not reachable by cell phone, the mother is already stressed out, checking the time more and more frequently while her imagination runs wild. But few mothers would consider that worry to be a mental impurity that they need to relinquish. More likely, they reject anyone else's plea to calm down and stop worrying, repeating simply that they can't help it, just can't help it.

Concern and worries are by-products of attachment in an uncertain and dangerous world. They're almost like a love tariff.

Attachment causes us to accept another person's suffering as our own. Any physical or emotional pain experienced by our loved ones torments us. Sometimes our suffering exceeds theirs. Nevertheless, *Buddhadhamma* tells us plainly that mental suffering is caused by mistaken ways of thinking about life, not by particular events or relationships. What happens to us can only be a condition or trigger for inner pain, not its cause. Our challenge is then how to love with the least amount of suffering. Developing mindfulness (*sati*) to govern our thoughts and prevent our minds from running on into excessive proliferation is an art, a life skill which can greatly ease this kind of suffering. Mindfulness allows us to distinguish normal and ordinary concern from the unnecessary pain of mental agitation and stress. We must learn to take responsibility for our own mental health because no one else can do that for us.

Excessive worries can be extinguished with the power of mindfulness together with inner stability and calm (*samadhi*). Rational concerns can be managed by reminding ourselves that things occur according to causes and conditions.

All we can do is do all we can, accept the outcomes, and learn from them. Worrying is a destructive habit that helps nothing. It makes us unhappy, adversely affects those around us, and detracts from our ability to act well and wisely. But it takes time to develop awareness, inner calm and wise consideration. In the meantime occasionally singing to yourself a verse or two of *Que será, será* may help. To my mind, it's one of the great non-Buddhist texts.

Another difficulty that may accompany love is discomfort with our partner's families. Sometimes our partner's parents or siblings don't like us; sometimes they do but we don't like them. Sometimes there's a particular issue involved, but it's often just a clash of personalities. Many people will admit that if they had a choice they would not want to have anything to do with some of their relatives at all, but they put up with them out of a sense of duty in order to keep peace in the family. Some may be fortunate and get on well with everybody, but for many people relationships with the family and friends of the ones they love are a burden attendant on love rather than a bonus.

The aim here is not to denigrate love, but to develop a more rounded, nuanced understanding of it. We may observe for instance how love relationships can weaken other friendships. Jealousies can flare up. It is difficult for us if an old friend doesn't get on with the person we love—or if they seem to get on too well. Without love this suffering would not occur; it occurs as a direct result of love. Discriminating boundaries and bias are inherent in personal love. The fact that you have stronger feelings for your partner than for the people you pass on the street every day is precisely the point. Its specialness is its allure. But this love, for all it gives us, cannot lead to peace.

One of my relatives used to look up to Mahatma Gandhi as his hero when we were at school together. He was very impressed by *Ahimsa*, the non-violent method of opposing oppression that Gandhi developed. After six years as a monk in Thailand I went back to visit home for the first time. One day while talking to my relative, I asked him if he still admired Gandhi. He said that he did but that as his life had changed so had his views on non-violence. He was by then a father of two small

children and he confessed that if anyone tried to hurt his children he would not hesitate to kill them if he had to. He was now devoted to non-violence except in exceptional circumstances. Afterwards I reflected how, while I sympathized with my relative's feelings, it seemed to me that once you allow for a concept of "unfortunate necessity" or "special cases" then non-violence is effectively lost. *Ahimsa* with exceptions is not *Ahimsa*. That day I realized how love, even the beautiful love between father and child, can undermine our life's ideals.

Some lucky people have excellent life-partners. After years and years together they still greatly enjoy each other's company. They don't grow apart, they still go everywhere and do things together; they speak to each other sweetly without grumpiness or nagging. But even this kind of happiness, idyllic as it sounds, tends to have a long-term disadvantage. It tends to make us negligent and too complacent to commit ourselves to spiritual training. It's like sitting comfortably on a cushy sofa and not wanting to get up to go to work. Finally, no matter how much people love each other, eventually they must part in accordance with

the ironclad law of nature. Obviously, those who have become too dependent on their partner will suffer from having developed no strength of their own.

To summarize, love gives many benefits. It guards against loneliness and brings warmth and companionship to life. But it is not an unalloyed good: it is still bound up in the cycle of birth and death, inherently incomplete. It can cause suffering at any time for all who lack wisdom, and without spiritual education the difficulties that it brings to our lives are unavoidable or at least difficult to avoid.

It is not the goal of Buddhism simply to find faults in love, but to teach us to open our hearts to the true nature of things. We should do this because contemplation and understanding of the way things are is the path to the end of suffering. One method of doing this is to regularly reflect on the simple truths of life and let them soak in. We remind ourselves that it is natural for us to get old, we cannot avoid getting old; that it is natural for us to become ill, we cannot avoid becoming ill; that it is natural for us to die, we cannot avoid

dying. Separation from all of our loved ones and treasured possessions will happen, sooner or later, without a doubt. So we are free to love if we wish, but it is wise to constantly bear in mind that the time we have to spend with our loved ones is limited. It might be for a short period of a few months or years, or a longer period of 10 years, 20 years, 50 years. But no matter how long we are together, ultimately it is merely a temporary association.

The human body is composed of elements borrowed from nature, and we may have to relinquish it at any time. If we reflect on the impermanence and uncertainty of our lives together, it should be easier for us to let go of mutual annoyance and to forgive each other instead of bickering over unimportant matters. All those pointless arguments and huffs and sulks are a sad waste of time for people whose time together is limited. We don't have the luxury of heavenly beings. If they have petty quarrels over small godly things it doesn't really matter because they have millions of years to patch things up while they sit around stringing garlands, singing songs and so on. We human beings don't have that much time. Even young

people die every day, from diseases, in accidents and wars. Reflecting on the fragility of life and impermanence makes our love more intelligent and gives it the protection of wisdom.

*Dhamma* practitioners reflect on separation and death every day in order to train the mind to accept the undesirable truths that we find difficult in accepting. Without complacency, we need to do this consistently and for a long while, not just occasionally. If we do so, then when someone dies, even when it's someone close to us or someone we love, even if the death is sudden, the very first thought in our mind will be that all things (*sankhara*) are truly impermanent and how correctly the Buddha taught us. For spiritual practitioners, the sorrow that occurs is tempered by the firm right understanding of the way things are.

*Dhamma* practice involves looking closely at our mind, its thoughts and emotions. It involves recognizing, for example, the role that desires play in determining our experiences: how we often see what we want to see. Suppose, for example, that we have decided that those whom we can love must have such and such qualities.



But then when we fall in love and it turns out they lack some or all of these qualities, many of us will fool ourselves that this is not so. We do this by projecting the ideals in our minds over the reality of our loved ones until we finally see only what we want to see in them. This is obviously not the best foundation for a healthy relationship. In extreme cases it will turn out that we are hardly relating to the persons themselves at all but to our idea of who they are. It is unsurprising that when they act in ways that conflict with our idea, we can feel an irrationally bitter sense of hurt. Learning how to recognize the ideals, desires and expectations that we project onto the other is a difficult task but an important one if we are to reduce our suffering. How often do we feel upset about the way a loved one has acted, not so much because of the action itself but because of its implications for certain of our most cherished assumptions?

Learning about ourselves gives us a better understanding of others because, essentially, in looking at our own mind we are studying the nature of the human mind itself. We start to become more empathic and see that good intentions in the absence of wisdom are not

always enough. Women who recognize the faults of their partners often decide to make a project out of reforming their loved ones. Although they approach their task with love and sincerity they often act in ways interpreted by their partners as a criticism of who they are, leading them to feel hurt and become stubborn. Loving our partners ought not to mean being obligated to turn a blind eye to their deficiencies or to side with them in every case. But to be able to help them to change we need patience, perseverance, and a respect for and acceptance of the present situation. Starting off from the position that they should be other than the way they are is one extreme to be avoided. Assuming that they will always be the way they are right now is the other extreme. The middle way involves an understanding of causes and conditions, and of the art of the possible.

Giving an exaggerated importance to love has many drawbacks. In extreme cases the deification of love can lead to violence or murder. Crimes of passion are classic tabloid fodder: perhaps a jilted lover kills the one who has rejected him, or kills her new lover, or kills them both, or kills himself, or kills them both

and then kills himself. Such tragedies may not occur so often but how many people unhappy in love dream of violence every now and again? A huge number I would imagine. The true culprit is not a person but an identification with love, thinking that a life without loving a particular person is worthless and meaningless. Such thoughts are a sign of low LQ. People with low “love intelligence” are capable of killing or destroying anything except their own ignorance.

Another distressing situation concerns the huge number of women all over the world who routinely get beaten by their partners (I once saw British police statistics showing almost 500,000 cases of reported domestic violence a year). Women with bruises all over their bodies, broken arms, broken ribs, *etc.*, are being treated in hospitals daily. Some die. And why do so many tormented women agree to go back and live with their abusive lovers? Some tolerate it for the sake of their children, some out of fear, some out of inertia or because they have nowhere to go, but perhaps most often it is because of love. A lover, no longer drunk or enraged, often insists in tears that he loves

his partner. He apologizes and asks for the last chance, and she then admits she still loves him and agrees with hope that things will be better from now on. So he's given one more chance over and over again because the abuser's regret easily dissolves, usually in alcohol. So many awful things in the world are justified in the name of love. And domestic violence is not a one-way street. Violent acts perpetrated by women against men are widespread, at least in the West, and hugely under-reported.

In the early stage of love our lover probably looks good in almost every way. Even visible flaws seem adorable or seem at most like a tiny imperfection that true love should ignore. We think it doesn't matter that there are differences whether generally or in *kamma*, character, value, viewpoint, and belief. We think it doesn't matter—we love each other!—everything else will fall into place. But after being married for a while, irritants that used to lurk quietly in the background tend to move to a more prominent position or even take centre stage. A couple wise enough to let go of their viewpoints, adapt and make compromises can survive. But many couples begin to learn a bitter lesson that love is

an unreliable vaccine against suffering. When pride and opinions collide, the words “that’s not how it is,” “that’s not how it should be,” “I can’t accept that,” “no way,” “no!” keep coming up. Do we still love each other? Yes, but...

The Buddha taught that the principal condition for a couple to live together happily is a shared standard of conduct, beliefs, and values. Naturally, we are advised to consider this point well before rather than after agreeing to join our life with another’s. We might, through love, be able to put up with fundamental differences of opinion and conduct with our partner, but it won’t be easy, and things become more fraught with children in the picture.

Love may well form part of an emotionally fulfilling and stable life, but it must be founded on morality, accompanied by the cultivation of inner virtues, and above all, governed by wisdom. That wisdom is initially founded on a reflection on the *Dhamma* principles that all things are impermanent and uncertain. All impermanent things are inherently imperfect. When we want something impermanent to be permanent, and something imperfect to be perfect, we create

suffering for ourselves. An interest in learning how to look at our life free from bias is vital if we want to transcend our destructive habits. The fundamental thesis of the Buddha's teaching is that as long as our hearts and minds are infected with negative qualities we will never experience true happiness. But while love cannot replace the need for spiritual development it can support it. What is needed is for us to help each other overcome our negativities by learning the *Dhamma* and applying it.

Once we have the "right view" about love through reflecting on its pros and cons we should also try to encourage that same kind of clear-sighted habit in the minds of our children before they become infected by the commercial images that surround them on all sides. Look at Valentine's Day: an example of a tradition that has not grown organically from our cultural values, but has been manufactured for commercial reasons. Consider what it tries to tell us about the relationship between love, sex and material consumption. After last Valentine's Day someone told me of seeing a seven- or eight-year-old boy getting out of a car, carrying a beautiful bouquet of red flowers into his school.

They were a present for his “girlfriend.” Is this picture a cute or an alarming one? To me, the parents who bought those flowers for their son were not acting wisely. It is a small thing of course, an innocent gesture, but it is through an accumulation of such small things that a child’s values are moulded.

Craving or *tanha* is the ringleader of the defilements. We crave to get, to possess, to have or to be, not to have or not to be. Defilements occur sometimes because of love, sometimes in spite of love, and whenever they occur, suffering follows. We tend not to see defilements as negative states that can and should be abandoned. Or if we do recognize an undeniably negative trait then we may often justify it as part of who we are. Or perhaps we just feel guilty and tell ourselves we’re bad. It is for reasons such as these that defilements are so resilient. But when we are aware of their danger, we will know that apart from spiritual training there is no way to fix things. There is no choice; we must control the dark *kamma*.

The goal of right practice is to open our eyes and ears to the nature of our actions,

words, and thought. Learning to see the things that contaminate our lives with impurities, we develop our conduct, emotions and wisdom faculty simultaneously in order to escape from all problems.

Sex is a natural part of romantic love. Sexual desire or need is considered a defilement in the Buddhist teaching because it is a hindrance to the development of inner peace and wisdom. In transcending attachment to body and mind an enlightened being transcends sexuality. But for a householder, intelligent governance of the sexual drive rather than abstinence is the standard. The Buddha recognized that few people are interested in liberation from sexual desire and so he emphasized conduct that does not cause harm to self or others. The third of the five precepts (*sila*) for lay Buddhists requires refraining from adultery and abusive and coercive sexual conduct. The inner restraint that he urged means not becoming infatuated with sex, not becoming its slave, not letting sex become the main focus of married life.

A couple's appetite for sex may differ in intensity. Its role in a relationship may not be



agreed upon. Having sex can mean different things to different people: one person may see it as the supreme expression of intimacy, the other as an unnecessary adjunct to it. The pleasure sex affords can be undermined when people become exhausted through stress and overwork. Sex can easily become a cause of quarrels, frustration, disappointment, and aversion. Furthermore, excessive sexual desires can easily lead to infidelity, destroying domestic peace and trust. A couple who once loved each other deeply may never want to see each other's face again. Divorce can be harsh and is often emotionally devastating. If the couple has any children, divorce is likely to adversely affect their long-term happiness and mental health.

Defilements have their own logic. Those who break the third precept (against sexual misconduct) usually have reasons they find compelling. Men like to cite their natural instincts as an excuse. For women it tends to be love. Neither side accepts responsibility for its own behaviour. Instead, they claim that it was their body's desire or their love, rather than they themselves, that was responsible. While it is true that human beings routinely

face physical or emotional temptation, we need to be clear that the violation of precepts takes place for no other reason than the desire to do so. If our morality only persists in the absence of defilement, then it's not morality at all. The essence of the Buddhist education of conduct is the cultivation of the intention to refrain, and that is developed most crucially in the presence of the desire to indulge. Precepts are designed to be a boundary that protects us from unwholesome actions and their consequences. Training to develop patience and restraint, using precepts as a grounding for mindfulness, is the way to avoid unwholesome actions and remain safe.

Marriage and stable relationship prosper when we make the commitment to our partner not to seek sexual pleasure elsewhere. Such a commitment requires us to be willing to sacrifice physical pleasure for the sake of fidelity, and in order to enjoy the sense of well-being that comes with being an honest and loyal partner. It is good to feel the wholesome pride and self-respect that arises when we can skilfully govern our actions. Furthermore, by keeping precepts and caring for the quality of our actions, we

create the foundation for achieving the joy of concentration (*samadhi*), which is incomparably superior to sexual pleasure.

Even if we are happily married it is unlikely we will find ourselves completely immune to the charms of at least some members of the opposite sex. But whereas we cannot prevent a flash of feeling, we can prevent ourselves from doing or saying anything to add fuel to such feeling. We can avoid engaging in private conversations, phone calls, email, *etc.*, with the person we like. We can refrain from encouraging that person to think or do the wrong thing. Most important of all, we can refrain from taking pleasure in such feeling, from allowing the delight in our minds to stimulate mental proliferations. Indulgence in fantasies is not an innocent distraction; imagination can plant seeds in our mind that result in overpowering discontent and unwise action. Honest and patient people who shrink from unwholesome deeds, who have an intelligent fear of their consequences, look at lust as fire burning their hearts. People who value rightness can conquer their hearts if they truly wish to. When the feeling has passed away, we gain the insight that as compelling as

the feeling was, it was just that, just a feeling. No more, no less.

Defilement tends to be a complex matter. Middle-aged men with younger mistresses are often not just indulging in the physical pleasures of sex, but reacting to a barely conscious fear of death. In middle-age, deterioration of our body begins to manifest, and with it the uncomfortable realization that old age and death are real and are really going to happen to us. To me! For sure! That's a dreadful thought for most people, and those who have never examined their minds in any systematic way can experience a sudden sense of hollowness and rage. Sex is the age-old response: "I'm not finished yet, not by a long chalk. I'm virile, I'm attractive. I'm important to someone. How could I die?" Very easily, would be the Buddhist response, but even the most rational of people are prone to this kind of magical thinking. Times of war reveal stark evidence of the relationship between the preoccupation with sex and the fear of dying.

Sensual pleasures may console us, they may conceal or help us forget some reality of life for a while, but they also harm us by weakening the

resilience of the heart and mind. When we get used to seeking this easiest and quickest escape route from emotional problems, our wisdom faculty starts to atrophy. Finally, in old age, we can find ourselves physically unable to enjoy the sensory world in the same way as before, but with no alternative sources of meaning and happiness. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha described a person in such a state as: “pining away like an old heron at the edge of a fishless pond.”

The most reliable guarantee of security from defilements is to understand our emotions and know how to manage them. The violation of the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct has many causes. We should seek to discover these causes and train ourselves to deal with them wisely. We need to comprehend such things as the conditioned nature of sexual obsession, the desire for new things to spice up our routine lives, the excitement of keeping a secret, the desire to be someone’s special person, and the pleasure in doing what we know to be wrong. Understanding the causes we seek to let them go. What we cannot yet relinquish, we must patiently restrain.

Love can lessen our selfishness. The happiness of our loved one might seem more important than, or at least as important as, our own happiness. The shift of perspective away from self-absorption is beautiful to see. But, overall, the protection against suffering that love provides is superficial, and if the consolations of love make us forget our capacity for liberation then we are in danger of wasting a precious human birth.

Untreated defilements in our minds are always ready to cause distress. Initially, for instance, it may be easy to forgive and let go of grudges against our loved ones. But after a while as familiarity and complacency increase, we show negative emotions more readily. We suppress our anger at co-workers for fear of professional repercussions, then we bring the lingering anger home and take out our stress on our spouse, treating our loved one as an emotional garbage can.

So many issues can cause difficulties in relationships. Disagreements over sensual and sexual needs are compounded by arguments caused by pride, and by differing views over

status and responsibilities, finances, child-rearing practice, and where and with whom to spend free time. We may get angry at another precisely because we love each other. We can't just shake our heads and walk away. So then what should we do? Wise reflection helps a lot. We can consider, for instance, how our partner is a teacher to whom we owe much gratitude. We can remind ourselves of the things that we have learnt in the relationship. Even in challenging times, our partner is helping us to see our defilements. And if we don't see defilements how will we ever be free of them? It's certainly painful when a loved one presses our buttons, but if they didn't get behind our defences, we might be negligent and stuck with our blind spots for much longer. Thank them for that (at least in your mind). Even if we're totally miserable at the moment, we can reflect that only by engaging in spiritual cultivation can we hope to be free of the mental suffering that arises in the course of a relationship.

There are different levels of love. The lowest grade of love is that which is dependent on the other person's giving us something we want. It is a love conditioned by such coarse

rewards as the receiving of sexual pleasure, wealth, position, social recognition or fame from the other person. If love is dependent on such things it is unsustainable. In fact it's hardly worth the name of love at all; it is more of a business transaction.

A slightly more refined way in which conditions are placed upon love is when they are used as a tool to get our own way. Husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, or even parents, can use love as a weapon. They may say things like "If you really love me, you'll do this for me," or "If you don't do this then it means you don't really love me." It's what we call emotional blackmail. So what to do if we encounter this tactic? Sage advice is to separate the issues: insist that we still love them, but that to us, loving and feeling gratitude for someone is not the same thing as following their wishes in every matter. Once we have made this clear, then we must prepare to resist the power of tears, the power of harsh words, the power of upset faces, the power of pleading, and so on. Difficult as this may be, it's worth enduring. Otherwise this pattern of manipulation can become a family tradition, making it extremely difficult



to sort out the confusion among love, needs and desires, rights and obligations.

Ignorance (*avijja*) is not knowing, or having wrong knowledge. We lack an accurate, unbiased experience of the reality of life. We assume incorrectly that ultimately we are a self (*atta*) that feels, thinks, is unhappy or happy, is permanent and independent, and owns and dictates our life. The corollary of this mistaken view of the way things are is endless and unnecessary craving. Once we've been deluded by the idea of self, then our life becomes bound up with how to get or not to get, to have or not to have, to be or not to be.

In the sentence "I love you," what does "I" refer to? Where is the real "I"? Is "I" the same today as yesterday? How about the "I" of a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago, twenty years ago, is it the same person? Not quite the same person, right? Not quite a different person, either. This is what is so confounding about something that looks at first sight to be the most obvious and solid thing in our life.

The Buddha said that a true and permanent self does not exist. What we are

directly experiencing moment by moment is actually attachments to the body and to feelings, perceptions, thoughts and emotions as “me” and “mine,” constantly arising and passing away. The situation is akin to that of an insane person who, believing himself to be a slave, struggles to do everything to make his master comfortable and prosperous, when in reality no such master exists. Why do we want so much? Why are we always so restless? It is because we seek to protect and nourish this imagined self. But “I” and “me” are names we affix to an impermanent, unstable stream of phenomena. Taking a natural process to be a thing, a verb to be a noun, is the root cause of our suffering.

The lack of self (*anatta*) is a difficult concept to grasp because it goes against the grain of common sense; it must, however, be understood by anyone who wishes to let go of suffering. It is through the failure to penetrate the truth of *anatta* that feelings of deficiency, of imperfection, of loneliness, form the backdrop of human life. Such failure is the reason for the extreme longing for love and the reason that the love acquired is prone to impurities. The delusion that there is a self that owns our

life, and that is lacking, threatened or isolated, makes us struggle for love and feel that “I *have* a problem,” when in fact the problem lies in the “I” itself.

At the very least, if we have the courage to look at ourselves and examine our loneliness, fear, worries and various suffering in our heart, then our longings and expectations of others will naturally diminish. We will begin to see that those things are not real. They are only emotions that naturally arise and fall away. People who are selfish because of their tenacious clinging to the sense of “me” and “mine,” and who persist in nurturing these illusions, become increasingly selfish. They tend to think they are smarter than others, when in fact their arrogance bears within it a profound foolishness. The more they search for their personal gain, the more they encounter mistrust, loneliness, anxiety, pride, open fear, and aggression.

The wish for someone to fulfil a missing part of our life places limiting conditions on our relationship. Wanting something from someone, believing that failure to get it will cause us serious pain, inevitably leads to fear and tension. If we

gain our object, the fear of separation becomes intense. If we pin our hopes for happiness and security on a particular person, we suffer from the unpredictability of that person and the inevitability of the separation from that person that awaits us in the future. People who do not know themselves and do not accept the reality of nature will suffer a great deal. Loving too much and wanting what others cannot give are painful.

Reflecting on love's deficiencies isn't likely to cause people who truly love each other to stop loving or to love any less. What it does is allow love to be governed by a measure of wisdom. The awareness that suffering is the shadow of love helps us accept more readily the nature of life and not expect love to give us what it cannot give. When we view love not only as a desirable part of life but also as something incapable of giving us true and permanent happiness, the importance of spiritual practice should become clear.

*Dhamma* practice is training ourselves to be intelligent: intelligent in preventing defilements that have not yet arisen from arising, intelligent in dealing with defilements that have already

arisen, intelligent in creating wholesome qualities that are not yet arisen, intelligent in sustaining and perfecting wholesome qualities that have already been developed. For this reason *Dhamma* practice is not restricted to certain times and places. In one form or another, it is always possible right here and right now.

Those untrained in the *Dhamma* tend to be prey to misunderstandings, confusion, and self-contradiction about life, especially in the case of the two things that ought to be the most important subjects of our studies: happiness and suffering. For the most part, our education systems are of little help. By emphasizing the kind of knowledge that can be tested, and by being focused primarily on preparing children for future careers, they neglect the development of wisdom. As a result, we have an epidemic of ignorance and confusion as to how to live a wholesome life. However highly educated we may be, if we are unable to detect the rise and fall of mental states we will always endure unnecessary suffering. We will always miss out on certain kinds of happiness that are the birthright of those with good enough *kamma* to have been born human beings.

The Buddha wanted us to see clearly that all things in life are impermanent and uncertain, that they flourish and decay according to causes and conditions. Wholesome things can decay, and unwholesome things can be purified. It is wise to guard against what would diminish a wholesome relationship or, if such relationship is already decaying, to promptly arrest the cause of such decay. It is important to develop ourselves to the extent that we have the capacity to do that. We need to open our eyes and ears to the reality of nature, to accept impermanence and uncertainty, and to lead our love increasingly toward the path of lovingkindness (*metta*).

In summary, to live wisely in this world involves learning and understanding the nature of love and contemplating its disadvantages as well as its advantages. The *Dhamma* teaches us to abandon cravings which are the cause of the suffering and the harm that accompany mundane love. We should aim to be one who neither suffers from love nor causes suffering for others on its account. We should purify our love so that it takes on more and more the qualities of *metta*. Learning from experience leads us to the truth of things. When we see the way things

are, the love that is fuelled by ignorance and craving will diminish or disappear altogether. The love based on wisdom, understanding, and the desires that spring from them will persist and mature.

The Buddha did not teach by using the threat of hell or the promise of heaven. Rather, he announced that he was “a knower of all worlds” (*lokavidu*), that he had clearly seen the way things are and was expounding it. He said the *Dhamma* was verifiable and he encouraged people not simply to believe in it, but to put it to the test. He said we must analyze and consider for ourselves whether or not what he taught is true. Personally, I really liked this style of teaching from my very first exposure to it. Coming from a secular background, I found it refreshing to discover a religion that did not consider doubt in the teaching to be a sin or an insult to the teacher. I was happy to discover I could investigate Buddhism without feeling a need to anaesthetize my intellect. And yet it was far more than a profound philosophy.

The issue of love is then a matter for investigation. We are not expected to adopt a

particular Buddhist attitude to love, but simply to take a deep interest in looking at it in the wisest way. The Buddha wanted us to learn carefully what it really is because all parts of the world are always ready to create suffering for those without wisdom, and always ready to lead to happiness for those with wisdom.

From my observations I would say that the problems of householders are caused less by the lack of love, and more by not being good friends (*kalyanamitta*) to each other. Love and wise friendship do not necessarily go together. To be a good friend of someone we love, we must train ourselves to have virtue, to develop generosity, morality and meditation as much as possible, to try to understand ourselves and them, and to try to help them understand themselves and us. We should keep developing good communication skills. Let me repeat my point that good communication does not come by itself with love like free software in a new computer. It is an art to be mastered. We can't expect to communicate well simply because we have functioning mouths and ears. If a couple with different views become protagonists and refuse to give in until they've won the point,



they are violating the principles of *Dhamma*. One side may win a small little war, but both sides lose the peace. A better way is to see that we are on the same side: we are a team with a problem to solve together. We must listen well and speak well before we can succeed.

When two people lead their lives with *Buddhadhamma* as a refuge and try to be each other's good friend, they have a chance to enjoy life-long happiness in their family. Cultivating *Dhamma* together will make the couple's relationship absorb more and more *Dhamma* principles, and become less and less of a hindrance to reaching the goal of spiritual liberation. Householders who are each other's good friends trust each other and give encouragement when times are hard and their partners feel dispirited. They know how to listen and speak to each other and to act as a calm and prudent counsel. They understand and forgive transgressions by accepting each other as unenlightened human beings with defilements. They harbour no thoughts of victory over, or of taking advantage of, the other. Instead, they have the courage to point to what is truly precious with respect and good intention at the appropriate time and

place. At the same time, they are always ready to listen to suggestions, comments and cautions from each other. This, at least, is the ideal to move toward.

So let me summarize one more time: Love is a part of the world. It has a bright side, a dark side, and a grey area. *Buddhadhamma* teaches us to learn about love in order to find the way to minimize the dark and grey parts and maximize the bright part. We were born saddled with ignorance and cravings. Love is a part of life involved with defilement. Some kinds of love are like a poison and grow directly from ignorance and craving. Some kinds of love are controlled by ignorance and craving, but can be freed from them in the way that one can remove a fish bone from one's throat. Some kinds of love contain only a little ignorance and craving and can be used to fuel the development of a wholesome life. The pledge to be good friends (*kalyanamitta*) is a life's ideal and is important to such development. In addition, we must learn to understand the nature of love and make lovingkindness (*metta*) a clear objective and a part of our way of life.

In *Dhamma* practice, wisdom acts as the direct antidote to ignorance by examining the reality of life and the world with a stable, stilled and unbiased mind sustained in the present. The direct antidote to craving is the systematic and integrated development of wholesome mental states. In the case of love, the most prominent of these virtues are lovingkindness and the effort to be a good friend. Training ourselves to practice restraint, to keep track of our emotions, to let go: these are at the heart of the negating side of the practice. But at the same time we need a positive ideal to cultivate. That positive ideal is provided by the pure love called *metta*.

The distinguishing characteristics of a pure love are:

1. It is unconditional.
2. It is boundless, a wish for all living beings to be well.
3. It is not a cause of suffering.
4. It is governed by wisdom and equanimity (*upekkha*).

It is a miracle that such a love exists, and

that every single human being has the ability to develop it. When we watch the news and see the cruelty and heedlessness of our fellow human beings, the feelings of depression and despair that can arise may be dispelled by reflecting on our innate ability to feel *metta*. It's true that human beings can be awful creatures, but it's also true that they have it within them to be better than they are.

Given the nature of *metta* outlined above, practicing to educate our love means to:

1. Make our love less conditional.
2. Make it less discriminatory and less preferential.
3. Reduce its capacity to cause us suffering.
4. Cultivate wisdom and equanimity.

*Metta* is a pure love because it is free of attachment to the idea of self (*atta*). With *metta* we want nothing other than the happiness of living beings. *Metta* is love which flows out naturally from a fulfilled mind, rather than an agitation in a mind that lacks refuge. *Metta* wishes for nothing in return, not even love

or understanding. The Buddha said that the unconditional love a mother bears for her only child is the closest approximation to this love in the world at large. But for the one who cultivates *metta*, that love is not restricted to one's child, but is felt for all that lives.

In our practice, once we have contemplated the drawbacks of conditional love and the beauty and nobility of the unconditioned mind, then we will have courage and faith in the value of our own development. We can begin to examine our love for the people closest to us to discover the conditions that we put upon it, and seek to reduce them. We reflect on our intention to give and on what we want and feel we need from outside ourselves. As we reduce our expectations and demands from others, then on the occasions that they say and do things that make us happy, we feel those experiences to have an especially wonderful flavour.

The quality of *metta* which is perhaps the most difficult for lay Buddhists to develop is universality. Personal love by definition lacks universality. It is bound up with bias and boundaries, and although they can be much

reduced they are unlikely to disappear altogether. One reason Buddhist monastics practice celibacy is to prevent personal love from obstructing the flow of *metta* in their hearts. For householders, although opening up one's love is difficult, gradual improvement is still possible. We must be vigilant and with mindfulness oversee the heart so as not to give too much weight to thoughts of us and them, inner circle and outer circle, near and far. We should reflect on the reality that all living beings are our companions in the cycle of birth, old age, illness, and death. We should try to treat all others with equal respect, consideration, and goodwill. This is another way of purifying love.

Love that is born of ignorance and contains defilements tends to lead to a bittersweet life in which pleasure and pain seem hopelessly entangled. In contrast, *metta* arises from abandoning the concern for self and from perseverance in relinquishing defilements. *Metta* is a part of the Eightfold Path that leads to liberation. It is a virtue that is always present in the mind of enlightened beings. To follow in their footsteps we should thus seek to recognize and abandon jealousy, envy, vengefulness and

other defilements that make our love a heavy burden.

Although we want others to be happy, sometimes we can't help them; they have their own *kamma* to work through. In this case, if we don't reflect on the law of *kamma* we can suffer a lot. The task of wisdom here is to constantly remind us of the way things are so that we don't get carried away by kindness. Equanimity, the neutral, unbiased state which arises from wisdom, is a place to rest our mind when we are unable to help our loved ones achieve happiness. We learn to do what we can and then let go. In addition, wisdom also has an important role in devising skilful means to help others be happy. Good intentions are usually insufficient by themselves. We need to be sensitive to factors such as the personality of the one we are seeking to help, the appropriateness of time and place, and the most effective way to communicate.

Another role of wisdom and equanimity is to prevent *metta* from leading us to act unethically out of good intentions. The end does not justify the means. If we help someone to escape the consequences of their unskilful

actions, they will definitely be happy about it. But in the long run, we may be harming them by undermining their sense of responsibility and restraint. In helping someone out of kindness, we may create a bad example for others. Wisdom is our compass in complex matters. We must remember at the very least that bad *kamma* is created by the specific intention to act or speak in unwholesome ways—say, to lie—not by the initial overall intention which may be praiseworthy—say, to help someone.

One who is able to give such a pure love consistently is one who is happy internally, who knows how to give love and to forgive oneself. Giving *metta* to oneself is a significant source of internal happiness. The way to begin to do this is by thinking of the virtues that we most desire such as peacefulness and the absence of anger, about how good and beautiful and impressive they are, and then to speak silently in our own heart: May I be happy. May I be peaceful and calm. May I be without stress. May I be free of depression and worry. May I experience joy and contentment. Experiment to find the wording that gives the best result, an inner calm and exultation.



By saying “May I” it isn’t that we are requesting this from anyone. It is more a confirmation to ourselves about our spiritual goals. In addition to fortifying our determination, these words serve to remind us if the way we live our daily life is compatible with our desired virtues. In this way it acts as a form of mindfulness or recollection. Whenever we do, say or think something that conflicts with these virtues, the recollection of these good wishes to ourselves that we routinely practice will give us pause. When jealousy and vengefulness arise, we will feel, hey wait a minute, what I’m thinking now is directly opposite to what I aspired to this morning. The power of aspiration increases our awareness in daily life.

In our meditation periods, when we have spread *metta* to ourselves until we feel a sense of fullness and joy, we may dispense with the words and focus on the feeling of *metta* as a foundation for *samadhi* and deeper insight into the way things are. Or we may choose to follow the *metta* practice further by spreading thoughts of *metta* to others. The important principle here is to start from what is easy, *e.g.*, wishing *metta* to someone of the same sex whom we respect,

then pass through immediate family members, relatives and friends to those beings we have no strong feelings for, and then finally to people we dislike or who are enemies to us. Do not rush. Pace yourself with the state of your mind, not a clock or a calendar.

Another method for spreading *metta* is to use a mantra in conjunction with the breath. A one-syllable word such as “joy” can be used for each inhalation and exhalation, or a two-syllable word such as “happy” can be split into “hap” on the inhalation and “py” on the exhalation. Mentally reciting the word helps sustain the attention on its meaning. Breathing in, think of happiness spreading into every part of your body and mind. Breathing out, think of happiness spreading to all living things, think of yourself as a light emanating brightness in every direction.

Finally, may all of us learn and understand love: What kind of love is defiled? What kind of love is pure? What kind of love makes us weak? What kind of love makes us strong? What kind of love gives only a second of happiness? What kind of love gives long-term

happiness? And what kind of love enables us to give happiness to others without conditions? After determining the path, keep practicing it. Never mind if you stumble at first. Practicing the *Dhamma* in order to give meaning to life is not so easy, but it's not impossible either. But ultimately, I hope that you will have to admit that it is unquestionably worth the difficulties. In fact, even if it were many times more difficult than this, it would still be worthwhile.



# *Glossary*

*Anatta*: The lack of a permanent, independent self, or the “owner” of experience.

*Atta*: Self.

*Avijja*: Ignorance; not knowing; mistaken knowing.

*Buddhadhamma* (Sanskrit: *Buddhadharma*): Buddhist principles and practices.

*Dhamma* (Sanskrit: *Dharma*): The way things are; the teachings of the Buddha.

*Ditthi*: Belief and value.

*Eightfold Path:* Actions taken to achieve liberation from suffering. These are (1) right belief and value, (2) right intent, (3) right speech, (4) right conduct, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration.

*Four Noble Truths:* These are (1) suffering, lack, unsatisfactoriness, (2) its cause, (3) its cessation, and (4) the path to its cessation.

*Kalyanamitta:* A good friend; a teacher of the good and true.

*Kamma* (Sanskrit: *Karma*): Actions created by intentions; effect of such actions.

*Kilesa:* Defilements; things that defile or sully the mind, *e.g.*, greed, anger, hatred, delusion.

*Metta:* Lovingkindness; the desire for all beings to be happy. One of the four positive emotions. The other three are: *Karuna* (compassion),

*Mutita* (rejoicing in the happiness of others), and *Upekkha* (equanimity).

*Samadhi*: Stability of mind; concentration.

*Samma Ditthi*: Views, beliefs, values that are congruent with the way things are.

*Sankhara*: Mental formations; existences; a deep mental impression produced by past experiences. Also means “thing” as in the Buddha’s last words: “All things are transient; strive earnestly.” In Thai, the term is often used to refer to the body.

*Sati*: Mindfulness.

*Sila*: Precepts or code of conduct for moral behaviour. In Buddhism, the five precepts for lay Buddhists are: (1) refrain from killing other beings, (2) refrain from stealing, (3) refrain from sexual misconduct, (4) refrain from lying, and (5) refrain from using intoxicants.

*Tanha*: Craving and desires originating in *avijja*, specifically: to get, to have, to be, not to get, not to have, not to be.

*Upekkha*: Equanimity.







## Ajahn Jayasaro

Born in England in 1958.

Ajahn Jayasaro joined Ajahn Sumedho's community for the Rains Retreat as an anagarika in 1978.

In November 1980 he ordained as a Buddhist monk at Wat Nong Pah Pong, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand with **Venerable Ajahn Chah** as his preceptor.

From 1997 until 2002 Ajahn Jayasaro was the Abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat.

He is now living alone in a hermitage at the foot of Kow Yai mountains in the northeast and offers dhamma teachings at Bahn Boon, Rai Thawsi on a regular basis.





