



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOVE (METTĀ) IN THE THEREAVĀDA BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

As we all know love is an influential factor in our lives from the day we were born until the day we pass away. In general, we are born because of the love between our parents; most veterinary students love animals by nature; many people achieve success in their works because they have done them with love. In particularly Buddhism, love is presented as a beautiful thing, whereby the Buddha encourages us to love one another and has given us the right way to love ourselves to get the enlightenment or ultimate goal of life. It is also defined the good will or the mental quality of loving friendliness, which wishes happiness and well-being for oneself and all beings. But, it can be tangled with attachment (Sineha) by misunderstanding the reality of its significance. This article aims of studying the Significance of Love (Mettā) in the Thereavāda Buddhist perspective, by studying the concept of love, its classifications, its relation in universal and individual position, and its development.



KEYWORDS : Metta (love), Senaha (attachment), Mettabhavana (meditation of loving-kindness).

INTRODUCTION :

Buddhism is known as a religion of wisdom which concentrates on meditation practice in order to be liberated from suffering and the cycle of rebirth. Apart from this general viewpoint, some Buddhist scholars believe that Buddhism also focuses on love, especially in the social area of Buddhist people. Many Buddhists propose that Buddhism is a religion of love because love development is important to the achievement of the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Here the meaning of love and loving development in Theravada Buddhism are studied from the Buddhist philosophical and practical perspective.

CONCEPT OF LOVE:

In the Pali canon - Karaniya Metta Sutta, the Buddha did really emphasize love as one of his important teachings, such as the three Admonitions, namely, not to do any evil; to cultivate good and; to purify the mind. The issue of love is inherent in the last exhortation. In this Sutta it teaches not only to love and not to hate, but also how to develop this, that is to say, how to love and how not to hate, so that our virtue and good behavior become natural and spontaneous instead of forced and premeditated.

This shows that love development is a process of mind purification, which the Buddha not only encourages us to love, but also teaches us how to love, because the attitude of love is a basic factor of good conduct. In other words, love is an activity of the mind which is a crucial factor in Buddhism as

Buddhist scholars said that the mind is what experiences both good and evil. It is what does good and evil, and the results- good and bad, pleasant and painful all come down to the mind. This is why the Buddha taught, *mano pubbangamadhamma* - , 'the mind comes first', the mind is chief, the mind is the principle factor. This indicates that our actions stem from our state of mind, that is, when one's mind is wholesome his speech and actions are kind, but when his mind is unwholesome his speech and actions will be cruel. Therefore, the mind should be looked after to prevent having to experience unpleasant consequences. That is to say, the mind is both the means and the end of our lives, because it is not only the origin of our actions, but it also reaps the consequences of our actions. Both happiness and suffering are experienced by the mind. Thus if we detect an unwholesome attitude in our mind, we should stop it immediately before it brings about suffering.

In the Buddhist perspective, an expression of a kind mind is not only limited to kind speech and action, so we cannot judge the quality of other's minds solely by regarding their actions. But even though state of mind and a behavior are independent of each other, a wholesome attitude has a tendency to create both kind actions and peaceful co-existence, while an unwholesome attitude can only make us pretend to be a kind person. Therefore, the creation of love and other wholesome attitudes is needed for our lives. However, in order to create love according to Buddhism, we must know the nature of love we should cultivate and its actual and complicated nature.

Two kinds of Love interpretation in Buddhism: "Metta" and "Sineha": We have been using the word 'love' as if it had a clearly delineated meaning, even though we have realized that the meaning of this word varies greatly depending on the situation. For instance, we do not love cats in the same way as we love our parents; we love our friends differently to how we love our spouses; we cannot love our offspring when they are disobedient as equally as when they are obedient; and we can fall in love with someone who used to be our enemy. As such, we can ascertain that there are many types of love depending on the object of that love and various other factors. Furthermore, the nature of love is changeable both in terms of type and intensity. Thus, we must use this word flexibly depending on the situation with its various nuances.

According to dictionary definition, love means a strong feeling of affection towards oneself and others, for example; the love between parents and child; the love between couples; the love of one's country; and so on. According to Oxford English Dictionary; love means a strong feeling of affection and sexual attraction for someone; this word love is meant the 'desire' or 'attachment'. The 'desire', the meaning of love according to its definition is incompatible with the actual occurrence of love in our heart.

In the Pali canon, the Buddha used many different words in order to refer to the attitude of love according to the various contexts of human relationship. Some of the same words are 'piya'; 'raga'; and 'chanda'. They can be divided into two kinds of love

according to their roots in the Pali language as the followings:

*Metta means friendliness, love, goodwill, sympathy and understanding; the desire to create benefit for all beings, both human and animal. ..Sineha means love and attachment toward a particular person, such as in *puttisineha*, a parent's love of child and *pariyasineha*, love of wife. Sineha is a cause for the arising of bias, known as *chandagati* (the bias of affection) ... This is affection, sineha, not goodwill. True goodwill is impartial; it leads to a state of mind which is free of both selfish impulses and aversion."*

According to the explanation of literature, there are two kinds of love. The first kind is *metta* (universal love) which is the love towards all beings and the second kind is *sineha* (particular love) which is affection towards a particular person. Even though he used various words to explain *metta*, it notes that the word 'love' is used to define both *metta* and *sineha*, in that, "*metta* means love without attachment" whereas "*sineha* means love with attachment.;" This implies that *sineha* is 'impure *metta*' because it is contaminated by attachment. Attachment is the crucial factor which differentiates these two attitudes from each other. While *metta* is based on non-attachment (*anupadina*) *sineha* is caused by attachment (*upadiina*). That is to say, *sineha* is a limited type of *metta* directed solely towards a

particular person, such as a mother who has metta for her kids or has more metta towards them than other children. Metta itself is the love towards all.

As a result, if we think that all beings are our friends we will be inclined to treat them as friends, namely, to wish them happiness, to sympathize with them in both painful and joyful situations, and to understand them any time. This implies even in the case of our enemies. The Dalai Lama, in his academic article, *Buddhism with an Attitude: The Tibetan Seven-Point Mind -Training*, exhorted us to:

"Love your enemy. It doesn't mean love the person you hate. You can't do that. Love those who hate you".

His statement shows that generating love in our minds does not depend upon the attitude of the other person towards us, because we can cultivate love towards all people even those who hate us. This mind which depends upon other would make it impossible to attain to pure universal love at all because we still harbor some hatred towards some people at sometimes. Regardless, the state of the universal love is not impossible as it has been achieved by the Buddhas and Arahants. So, following the example of the Buddhas and Arahants, we should cultivate universal love towards enemies without exception the same as them.

The Relation between Universal love and Particular love: It confirms that in Buddhism, the word 'love' refers solely to universal love and do not include particular love. This means that the appreciative kind of love in Buddhism does not correspond with the word 'love' as we use it in daily life and as it is defined in dictionaries. Moreover, it seems that not only are two kinds of love different, they are also in opposition to each other as follow stated by some Buddhists:

"Metta then defined as an unattached, non-sexual, unselfish, altruistic and unconditional kind of love as opposed to sineha which is love of a sexual, attached, and mutually dependent nature"

If this were the case, when one's particular love is strong then one's universal love will be weak, and vice versa.

So it seems that our minds can attain to both kinds of love simultaneously, and the nature of love itself is unstable because it is based on the proportion of universal love and particular love in our mind. In other words, at a moment, these two kinds of love try to dominate each other in order to influence our actions. Whenever the proportion of universal love in our mind is larger than the proportion of particular love, a person will behave in accordance with the influence of universal love, which usually brings about happiness and benefit of all. In contrast, if the proportion of particular love is dominant at that moment, a person will be influenced by attachment and the likely outcome will be unskillful action that leads to suffering.

In the case of parental love, even though it is called 'puttisineha' because it is a kind of love towards a particular person, parents usually express their love towards their offspring according to the powerful influence of universal love in their minds. Thus, this proportion implies that these two kinds of love have a reverse relation to each other when one kind of love is powerful, the other kind will be weak. That is to say, universal love can be developed in two ways, namely, to directly generate universal love, and to destroy the attitude of particular love.

Besides, although we try to lessen the influence of the particular love and enhance the power of the universal love, it is not easy for the average person to attain to pure universal love, because their minds are already enslaved by attachment and other defilements (kilesas). It shows us how tenaciously defilements occupy our minds and deceive us to think and act unskillfully. Thus, even great parental love may be tainted by the influence of particular love. For this reason, many Buddhists claim that the occurrence of love in our heart is usually equated with particular love. Even if universal love is the dominant influence at a given moment, it does not mean that the attachments which are the root of particular love have disappeared from our minds. Rather, they have been suppressed temporarily. Therefore, it seems that we cannot attain to pure universal love until we have entirely destroyed the root of particular love, in other words, our attachments. As long as our love is still fueled by defilement we will still suffer as a result of that love.

The Two Levels of Universal Love - Permanent and Temporary: Although we realize that it is difficult for the average person to attain to pure universal love at the same level as Buddhas and Arahants, Buddhists believe that it is not impossible. As the Buddha taught, although we may be able to maintain the attitude of the pure universal love all the time in the same way as the noble ones, we can generate it a number of times in one day, especially if we practice regularly. This implies that there are two levels of pure universal love, the first one is permanent and the second one is temporary. Therefore, the average person can train himself by increasing the frequency with which this attitude occurs until his mind is filled with pure universal love permanently on the same level as the Arahants.

An Important Factor of Universal Love Development: According to Buddhism, if we would like to create pure universal love we should start by getting rid of the attachment which is the root of particular love. This is the ultimate fulfillment of our potential as a human being.

By knowing the difference between them, we can see that universal love is not an attitude related to unwholesome love such as sensual desire (kama), craving (tahna), and affection (sineha). Then, to cultivate pure universal love, these desires must be eliminated completely. Therefore, it claims that these types of unwholesome love can be classified as particular love, because they are directed towards particular persons or things and are based on attachment. Thus they are in opposition to universal love.

In Buddhism, the appreciative kind of love we should cultivate is universal love, which means friendliness towards all beings without exception. The opposite kind of love is particular love which is based on attachment towards a particular person. These two types of love have a reverse relation to each other. Therefore, according to the Buddhist perspective, we should increase the proportion of universal love in our minds, in order to weaken particular love, thus disposing of attachment and its roots. And even though the average person may not be able to attain pure universal love permanently as in the case of the Buddha and Arahants, they can attain it in some moments a day by training their mind regularly.

Universalization and Equalization: As discussed above, one who loves only oneself or loves oneself more than one loves others has fallen into the attitude of particular love, not the universal love. As a result, one should expand his love to the other groups of beings until he can love all beings equally. Visuddhimagga stated that:

"Equally to all classed as inferior, medium, superior, friendly, hostile, neutral, etc., just as to oneself; equality with oneself without making the distinction 'This is another being', is what is meant"

This clarification shows that love development consists of two steps, namely, universalization and equalization, which implies that to merely love all beings is not enough for creating universal love, but we should love them to the same degree that we love ourselves. That is to say, this development is composed of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The process of universalization is the quantitative dimension because it involves an increase in the number of people we love, whereas the process of equalization is the qualitative dimension because it prevents us from prejudice. For example, if a man loves only his own self, the equalization is not needed, but if he extends his love to others, then the equalization is required. That is to say, universalization precedes equalization. To love all beings without equality will incline to bias and suffering. A man who loves only himself will live self-centred because he concentrates only on his own benefit and disregards the needs of others.

According to the steps of love expansion listed above, after developing self-love, we should radiate love to our dear friends, neutral persons, and enemies respectively. The process is designed to start off easy and progressively become more difficult as the power of our love increases because loving a beloved friend is easier than loving a

neutral person, while to loving a neutral person, such as a stranger, is easier than loving an enemy, especially someone who has hurt us. However, Buddhaghosa also cautioned that a beginner should not start off by radiating love to his dear friends of the opposite sex. Through developing loving-kindness towards her he was fighting against the wall all the night. That is why it should not be

developed specifically towards the opposite sex" That is to say, it is not easy to start off expanding love towards the opposite sex, especially in the case of an intimate relationship, such as a couple.

Therefore, a lustful mind is an obstacle on the path to develop universal love, as clarified by Buddhaghosa:

"The divine abiding of loving-kindness has greed as its near enemy, since both share in seeing values. Greed behaves like a foe who keeps close by a man, and it easily finds an opportunity. So loving-kindness should be well protected from it. And ill will, which is dissimilar to the similar greed, is its far enemy like a foe ensconced in a rock wilderness"

This statement indicates that both ill will and lust are enemies of the universal love. Only getting rid of ill will does not ensure that we still attain universal love. Thus, we should be careful that our mind not to fall into the trap of lust towards a particular person as this will create biased or unequal love. Particular love is a failure of universal love development.

To extend our love to neutral persons who are neither friends nor enemies, according to Buddhist perspective, we can love others to the same degree as we love ourselves and our dear friends by thinking about what they do for us. This implies that whether we have a close relationship with them or not, we can love them equally as friends. In the case of enemies, to overcome anger and ill will towards enemies, we can reflect on the possible causes and conditions of the harm they give us. Perhaps I harmed him in a previous life and he is simply repaying that harm. Consideration arises from awareness of the law of karma. If we have hurt others in the past or in a previous life, some day we will be hurt in turn. Therefore, in order to radiate love to both a beloved person and a hostile person in equal measure, we should contemplate the law of karma so that we can maintain a neutral state of mind-neither happy nor unhappy.

Additionally, to extend our love to others equally, we should not treat others in a way that we would not want to be treated ourselves. Likewise, we should treat others as we would like to be treated. Although this concept may seem simple in theory, many people have high expectations for the good conduct of others, while not being able to live up to such conduct themselves. This is an example of the selfish mind, which is a great obstruction to creating equality of love between self and others.

CONCLUSION:

According to the interpretation of the concept of love, there are two different kinds of love in Buddhism. The kind of love we should cultivate is universal love, not particular love. These kinds of love have a reverse relationship to each other. Particular love tends to occur naturally in the mind of the average person on account of attachment towards particular people. As long as particular love is strong, universal love will remain powerless despite it being inherent in the mind of all beings. Therefore, universal love must be purposefully developed in order to overcome the influence of particular love. A major obstacle to the development of universal love is attachment. Thus, the process of attachment is an effective way to transform particular love into universal love in both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Thinking of the kindness of others and of the relation between cause and effect is a skillful way to overcome attachment. From the Buddhist perspective, to universalize and to equalize universal love cannot lead us to the final goal of love development, due to the fact that there are other qualitative dimensions of love to be developed by facing the various situations in life.

In Buddhism, an important principle concerning the four forms of love or Brahmaviharas, namely, universal love (metta), compassion (karuna), sympathetic joy (mudita), and equanimity (upekkha) are more essentially justified than the particular one. Although these forms of love are all wholesome qualities that should be cultivated, they are become applicable depending on the situation. Many Buddhist scholars have elaborated and justified on this point according different models. They ultimately defines that Metta (Loving-kindness) is very beneficial to calm and concentrate the mind. When coupled with bare awareness, it will quickly give rise to insight and liberation from all attachments, which means the freedom from all suffering.

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