

Good morning and welcome to talk two of the Tricycle online retreat: “Romantic Fantasy and Everyday Disappointment.” In the last talk, I asked you to think about your romantic experience; the first time you fell in love. We looked at the way in which that kind of romantic experience doesn’t end the way that our culture tells us that it should. So we often feel confused and distracted ourselves about whether true love lasts forever. Why did my love not last? Why did it change? Why it is not as my culture has promised me? This is where the dharma comes in.

So today we’re going to look at why do we fall in love and why is romantic love such a huge thing for us in our culture? We’re looking today very much through a Buddhist lens about this.

It’s interesting what is said by my teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche: that so often we fall in love because we’re lonely. When we look at how things work for us we often feel that, if we could only fall in love with someone, then we would never have to be lonely again. We feel promised this by our culture: that true love means we’ll never have to be lonely again.

Let’s look at loneliness and the kind of love that comes out of just trying to relieve our loneliness. You could say that there are four possibilities with loneliness. The first is that we want to fall in love and we feel so lonely and we’re looking and searching for the lover. We’re trying to find the one. We know that if we could just find the one we will never be lonely again. Could that be you? The second one is we are in love but we still feel lonely, and it makes us realize that maybe this isn’t the real thing. So we feel like we should not feel lonely in our love relationship, but we do. The third one is we were in love and it was great for a while. Then things changed and suddenly I began to feel lonely again. There is some kind of feeling that this must not be true love. We have to look for a new lover because of that. The fourth category is being deeply in love and feeling lonely.

I’d like to talk about this fourth possibility. I’d like to tell you a story from many, many years ago—over around 35 years ago. I was meeting with Chögyam my teacher and I had just a few months before sat a month long retreat. While I was on the month long retreat, I met a man who I just went head over heels in love with. We just—it was complete magic and it was such an amazingly powerful thing to meet at a retreat. We got together after the retreat and the relationship continued. After about three months I began to feel this quality of loneliness beginning to really permeate my experience. I talked to Chögyam about it and said that, “You know I had fallen madly in love with this man and I felt incredibly lonely. The odd part was I felt like I was still in love with him, but if we’re in love aren’t we not supposed to feel lonely anymore?” Chögyam threw his head back and laughed and laughed. He said, “The practice is working.” It upset me so much. I didn’t want to hear what he was going to say next, but what he went on to say is: when

we really become practitioners, we begin to recognize that relationships are not about getting our needs met. It's not about never feeling lonely again. It's more that relationships are an opportunity to give. This really changed the basis for being with someone.

He and I had a number of conversations about love and they really have formed the basis of what I'm talking about today. I'd like to talk particularly about his teachings on loneliness because what he had to say was that when we begin to practice meditation, oddly, one of the things that begins to happen for us is that our sense of loneliness deepens and becomes more pervading in our lives. He said that we feel more haunted by our own aloneness. He explained that what it means is that we are lonely for our ego. He said that we begin to feel that there might be a problem but, as we continue to practice, that quality of loneliness grows and grows. As it grows, we begin to feel that loneliness is fundamental to our human experience. It's part of our humanity; feeling lonely. Of course when we feel lonely we feel resentful and like little children, “I need a partner. I need not to feel lonely.”

If we make our home in that loneliness, Chögyam taught, then we begin to change our relationship with loneliness itself. He said, “We begin to feel alone.” Aloneness is a noble and whole state of being. Loneliness is a kind of immature, emotionally demanding state of being. The genuine practitioner takes aloneness as the base state or ground of how we are in the world. As we practice and give up the kind of emotional patterns that fill and entertain our lives and begin to feel this kind of haunting quality of loneliness, we are to make our home there and be yogis in the mountains.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche says, “Great sages like Milarapa relate to the desolation of loneliness as their bride.” They marry themselves to the desolation of loneliness. They do not need physical or psychological entertainment. Aloneness becomes their companion, their spiritual consort and part of their being. Wherever they go, they are alone. Whatever they do they are alone. Whether they related socially with friends, meditate alone, perform ceremonies together or meditate together, aloneness is there all the time. That aloneness is freedom—fundamental freedom.

If we are to work in a dharmic way with our romantic relationships, we have to step over this screaming loneliness that drives us into relationships for our own needy reasons and ignores the other person. We have to begin to let go of that kind of expectation of relationships. Relationships always go awry if they come from our neediness about our own loneliness. When we begin to make friends with loneliness and move from loneliness to aloneness, we begin to grow up and develop some kind of ground for a genuine relationship with another person. The disappointment that dawns in relationship is our best friend because it allows us to mature and develop aloneness as the basis.

In our practice, every time we sit down, we sit down alone. We feel the freedom of aloneness. We feel the kind of richness and beauty of solitude in our practice. Whether we’re sitting in a group of people or we’re off on solitary retreat, this experience of the dignity and beauty of aloneness becomes and incredibly precious and special experience for us. This is the perfect platform for beginning to develop a genuine relationship.

Now in the Shambhala teachings of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, he talked about this kind of tenderness and sadness in our hearts as the most noble quality of our human experience. When we feel that we could consider our practice to be a cradle of loving kindness, which nurtures our ability to feel that freedom of aloneness as the fundamental state; the base state of our experience.

I would like to lead a short loving kindness practice for ourselves as we sit with our own aloneness. I will lead this very briefly. If you could take a good posture and close your eyes or leave them open. This is a Meta practice but in the Tibetan tradition we call it loving kindness or maitree practice. As we sit in the dignity of our aloneness, we wish for ourselves first. May I be free from danger? May I be free from enmity, violence and conflict in my life? May I be safe from injury or threat? May I have a sense of refuge and be free from torment? May I especially be free from the torment of loneliness? May I have mental happiness? When difficult times come, may I not nourish or cultivate the pain, instead finding peace and equanimity in the midst of difficulty? May I find peace of mind and joy in aloneness? May I have physical happiness? May I have good health and freedom from physical pain? When sickness or injury come, may I receive the physical pain with equanimity and practice in such a way that peace is the center of my life? May I feel contentment with aloneness? May I have the ease of wellbeing? May my life circumstances not be difficult? May my relationships be peaceful? May my livelihood, family life and friendships be harmonious and enjoyable? May the elements of day-to-day life be free from struggle and may they be accomplished gracefully and easily? May I be happy? May I feel free in my aloneness?

Thank you. During this week please do loving kindness practice for yourself and wish yourself peace and happiness in aloneness. Thank you.