



I wish to speak to you about another significant and important aspect of “selfie” existence that shows itself in the language of the heart. In the language of the heart, we often hear about the language of self-love and self-compassion and this has found its way into our spiritual dynamics, into the fields of meditation.

First, I'd like to address the positive side of the lovingkindness meditations, the metta meditations, and then express my concerns. On the positive side, sometimes our life is stressful—we hardly have any time to be with our self, so to speak. We're involved in doing, doing, doing, and those may be good things and healthy things, or unhealthy things and unethical things in the workplace or our personal life, and at some point the inner life is screaming for attention. There arises a sense within oneself that there has been and continues to be an enormous amount of neglect for oneself. This is when one should come back to oneself. The coming back might include some psychotherapy or psychology, it might include some quiet periods, going on retreat, attending workshops, engaging in mindfulness programs, learning to be in the silence, or learning to love some solitude and taking time out from others. All of this expresses something important—important for you, important for myself, and important for others. The view is what we want to take an interest in here. The view may be: “I can see that in the past I have neglected myself. I obviously didn't love myself enough,” and therefore love and the self become connected.

Then, we might hear about and engage in some metta meditations: lovingkindness meditations, love-for-oneself meditations, friendship meditations. A teacher or guide from an online retreat gives us the guidelines and we then look inwardly. We cultivate our lovingkindness, generate more love for ourselves, and extend it out to include all sentient beings.

It generates an authentic warm feeling in the heart. It generates expansiveness in the consciousness. One's got oneself in the picture and includes others as well. But then, the



question has to be asked here: “Am I doing it just to feel better about myself? Is this what the dharma teaches us about? Is that what metta and friendship really mean?”

Some people may say, "Oh Christopher, I've been engaged in these lovingkindness meditations and the outcome of my regular practice is that I *do* genuinely feel much better about myself, which is a good thing, and it's really made some changes. I've noticed the reduction of negativity, anger, and irritation through the power of such meditations." One has to recognize, and appreciate, and applaud, the benefit of these kinds of meditations.

Still, this view is a little concerning. If I just concentrate in such a way and keep generating this kindness outwardly in my meditations while sitting on the cushion, where is my power to actually *act* purposefully, deliberately, and to make real changes in the lives of others? Where is the power going to come from to find one's authentic voice?

There is a terrible vulnerability that arises from excessive practice of these kinds of meditations. One starts to confuse the critical voice, which is a powerful voice that can have a lot of authentic love in it, with the negative voice, the blaming voice, the fault-finding voice, the old reactive voice. And it takes wisdom and clarity to be able to recognize that love expresses itself as action; it can express itself as real concern personally, socially, in the office, in the factory, in an environmental event, and in global, political issues, and that we have to keep that alive. There's a terrible tendency in the Buddhist and spiritual world to be pleasing: not to say anything that shows any kind of criticism because it might, God forbid, sound judgmental. The “niceness” coming out of these meditations could—and does—have the real potential to block the movement for radical change.

So friendship, love, and kindness can have the gentle, soft, skillful, loving voice, which is precious and beautiful, but what's required as well is that fearless voice, which is willing to question authority, to initiate and trigger change, to stay true to something, and take a



risk. In the voice of criticism there may be a great deal of love and it can be that in the all the sweetness, niceness, kindness, gentleness, non-judging voice there is a fear within us of speaking up. It's a little similar to self-compassion: It's a concept. It's an idea, which people have grasped onto. It can, unfortunately, carry the view that with the problems and dynamics that go on around us that somehow it's our responsibility. It's all my fault that I do this to myself, beat myself up, give myself a hard time. When I see the self as the creator of all my problems, then, in order to get out of that story, I begin to generate self-compassion.

The inquiry into causes and conditions is another way of saying that the teachings are “non-self” teachings. It's not about compassion for self—it's about the exploration of what has built up in our minds, the *sankharas*. (Sankhara refers to the building-up process.) We find clarity when we identify the essential change or changes which are needed to dissolve the story, change an event, or to have a fresh attitude. This interest and commitment to making a deep, fundamental change opens the way for love. When something is understood well and someone is understood well and clearly, love comes out of this understanding—the voice comes, quiet authority comes, commitment to change comes.

Dharma teachings, of course, place much emphasis on love and much emphasis on wisdom. The self doesn't have to be in the picture. It is, after all, seeing the emptiness of self, the emptiness of “selfie” existence. There have probably been times in your life, and in my life when I've said to myself, looking back at an event that took place with hindsight, "What was all that about?" It may have been a drama in a relationship. It may be a flurry of thoughts, and ideas, and imaginations that we've had. It maybe some kind of encounter and things were said and not said and it may all be very complex and confusing. We look back and say, "What was all that all about? It was so empty. What was the point of all of that?" That hindsight is another way of seeing the emptiness of the event, the emptiness of self-existence, the emptiness of that little soap opera that we get caught up in.

Christopher Titmuss
Week Three, *Emptiness of Selfie Existence*
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"Taking the Self Out of the Picture"



Through hindsight, through reflection and looking back, we find something authentically liberating. When we have the opportunity to see through something—the emptiness of it, the non-clinging of it, see through what built it up—we know we've seen its emptiness. There's a genuine sense of liberation; it's freeing. The teachings keep pointing to this again and again. Liberation is close at hand. Don't forget!