

Larry Ward  
*The Power of Boundless Love*  
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Hello. I'm Dr Larry Ward, a long-term practitioner in the Buddhist path, beginning with Zen in Chinese Buddhism and journeying through Tibetan Buddhism, all the way through to Vietnamese Buddhism, where I met Thich Nhat Hanh and where I became one of his senior dharma teachers. My pronouns are he and him.

The talk today is on boundless love. It's a little hard or tricky, I guess it's a better way to put it, a little tricky to describe why that's important right now, in a way that can be understood. I think that is the challenge of this talk. I'm going to do my best.

I think of boundless love as love without limit. Another way I think of it is love that I cannot measure. There are no numbers. It is not quantifiable. I remind myself of this reality of things when I sit on my back porch and look out over two acres of trees; too many trees to count and immeasurable in my experience. I cannot know all that is there. It goes beyond my constructs, beyond my language.

### **The Four Immeasurables of Mind**

And so that's why it is referred to as four immeasurables of mind, the first of which is the mind of loving kindness. Which is the mind of respect. Or in the Lotus Sutra of the Bodhisattva known as the never disparaging Bodhisattva.

This is the quality in each of us that we can cultivate to let everyone we meet know that we do not despise them. We have no intention of dishonoring their precious life. We are, in every way, concerned for their well being, as much as our own. That is boundless love.

In boundless love, self and other collapse into us. In boundless love, any rewards one experiences are not noticed. Another image I use is the ocean. I lived near the ocean here in Rhode Island.

To tell a story about the meditation I did at the ocean with Thich Nhat Hanh in Santa Cruz, California: We sat by the ocean without saying a word for an hour and a half. A very powerful experience of what is immeasurable, what is boundless. I could not see where the ocean ended.

So to cultivate the quality of this in ourselves, in our own hearts, energy, in our own nervous system and in our own mind, so they can be fully embodied, is the practice of boundless love.

And in the Buddhist tradition, boundless love is not simply a thought, it is an activity, it is a behavior. It is a way of thinking, it is a way of speaking, but it is also a way of behaving, which is why boundless love is a foundation of ethics, of deep care.

### **The Importance of Cultivating Boundless Love**

For me, it's important because it is what we need to cultivate in ourselves and between ourselves right now in the world. We live in a world that may not ever have known or cannot conceive of boundless love. Some people may have never experienced it in their life. Others have forgotten if they had that experience, so it has faded into the backgrounds of their memory.

I have been fortunate enough through the way I was cared for when I was adopted, to always be connected to boundless love, to see it as a very practical matter of caring and giving and nurturing and listening and speaking from the power of the heart.

Loving kindness can't be separated from compassion, which can't be separated from shared joy, which can't be separated from equanimity. It is all one network of awareness, one soup with those ingredients constantly interacting.

### **Visualizing Boundlessness**

What I do, which I would suggest you try, is visualize. I do this practice with the forest behind my yard. I do this practice at the ocean of finding that energy in myself, of expanse. That energy of myself, inside of myself that is beyond myself, that is not measurable in myself, that is not confined to myself, and in that I am able to hold—not get rid of—I am able to hold with care, the pain and suffering of myself and of the world.

Which I can do over and over and over again. That is part of the boundlessness of it. It is always there for me as a resource. As a reminder that a wave is not the whole ocean, but a wave is the whole ocean.

Boundless love transcends our hindrances of anger and ill will. It transcends our reactivity of sensual desire. It transcends our laziness and sluggishness of practice. It transcends our restlessness and worry, and it transcends our amazing capacity of being human, to doubt, to always question ourselves. Are we right? Are we going in the right direction? Is this the right way? Is this not the right way?

And the only way we know is by practicing going, practicing being present. Then we know through our own awareness, through our own mindfulness, we know deeply. In our world today, our habits of love have become so reduced.

I heard one scholar from China say we have gone from: “I think, therefore I am,” —which, of course is not a good summary itself— to: “I buy, therefore I am.” I don't know which is worse. We love things. To hear people talk about how they love their watch, their car, their trinkets, their this, their that. These are things you like, but love is not the word for that. We need to hang the word out on the clothesline so it can get dry from the mushiness it's been connected to.

### **The Transcending Quality of Love**

Love stands up for justice. Love stands up for peace, for everyone, for all beings. It has no timetable. It can go back to the beginning of time and forward to the end of time. It has no space limitations. It can go horizontal, across minerals, animals, plants and vegetables.

It can go vertical between earth and sky, this love. And every time we practice this love, we are healed, and everyone around us is healed. As we practice this immeasurable love, this boundless love, we have the courage to transform our institutions because we have separated our identity from being confined to the institution itself.

I learned this really in the civil rights movement, looking back now, that it was boundless love that allowed Martin to be beaten and to go to prison and to continue. I've been rereading about Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, which is a book I have. I've known of him for a long time, a Lutheran theologian from Germany who was hanged by Hitler for being in the plot to assassinate him. Boundless love is not running from history.

Boundless love is daring to take responsibility for love. It's daring to insist that love is not a place at the table. Love is the table. We have got to get that in our beings. Or we will fritter away our lives and the life of our precious planet.

### **Invitation to Meditate**

Take a moment to center on your own breathing and recognize when you breathe in, as the in-breath, and recognize when you breathe out as the out-breath.

When you breathe in, remember this is the planetary breath, and when you breathe out, it is the breath of all beings. When you breathe in the breath of trees, and when you breathe out, even the breath of your enemies.

Breathing in the breath of your ancestors, and breathing out the breath of the present moment.

Breathing in the inter-being of your breath, the interconnection of your breath to the whole cosmos and breathing out the impermanence of your breath, because it will not always be there.

Breathing in, finding space in your heart and in your mind to hold the suffering of the world and this promise.

Breathing in, know that liberation is already there for you, and breathing out knowing that liberation is not outside of you. The path is already in you to be chosen and swept clean by your own practice.

Creating space for boundless love. It is already there. It's a matter of growing the tree, watering that seed in you, however small it starts. It can grow and eventually have wonderful fruit that can be shared.

A few minutes every day I do this by remembering my grandmother, who took good care. Every day I try to remember her, so that my practice has emotion in it. It is not just ideas we practice with, or thoughts we practice with.

We practice with our body, and our body is charged with emotion, charged with electricity, also charged with promise and potential.

Boundless love cannot be measured. Boundless love cannot be contained. It cannot be imprisoned. It cannot be locked up. It cannot be killed. It cannot be marginalized.

It's forever present in the fabric of the cosmos in which we live.