

## **Attachment versus Love**

Many of our teachers say that attachment will be our major source of suffering at the time of our death: attachment to this life, to our loved ones, to our possessions and most of all to our body.

Therefore, before we die, and whilst we are still capable, we should spend some time trying to pin down the meaning of attachment, what we are attached to, and learn how to overcome attachment and replace it with loving-kindness ('love').

The well-known nun, Thubten Chodron, has written a book about the main questions she has been asked over the years. The book is for those interested in Buddhism as well as those who have studied or practised it for many years but who are still unclear about some points.

### **What is the difference between being attached to other people and loving them? Why is attachment problematic?**

In Buddhism, says Thubten Chodron, *attachment* is defined as an attitude that exaggerates other people's good qualities or projects good qualities that aren't there and then clings to these people. With attachment, we care for others because they please us. They give us presents, praise us, help and encourage us.

On the other hand, with *love*, we want sentient beings to have happiness and its causes simply because they are living beings just like ourselves.

When we are attached to others, we don't see them for who they are and thereby develop many expectations of them, thinking they should be like this and they should do that. Then, when they don't live up to what we thought they were or should be, we feel hurt, disillusioned and angry.

When we love others, we don't expect anything in return. We accept people for who they are and try to help them, but we aren't concerned with how we'll benefit from the relationship. Real love isn't jealous, possessive or limited to just a few near and dear ones. Rather, it's impartial and is felt for all beings.

### **If we stop expecting things of others and give up our attachment to them, isn't there danger of becoming cynical and losing trust in people?**

As a society, we expect certain manners and behaviour from others according to the situation. For example, we expect to be greeted by our co-worker when we greet him or her. We expect the people with whom we are working on a project to do their share. Such expectations are normal.

The difficulty sets in when we become hurt or angry when someone doesn't fulfil our expectations. We may think, "Okay, I just won't expect anything from anyone." Such an attitude is cynicism, which is just another negative emotion and should not be confused with giving up attachment. The attitude we want to develop still hopes others will be reliable, but does not expect them always to be so. We still have a basic trust in people being kind, but we can accept it when they aren't, for we remember that they, just like us, are sometimes overwhelmed by negative emotions or confusion.

### **If we're detached, is it possible to be with our friends and family?**

'Detachment' isn't an accurate translation of the Buddhist concept. 'Non-attachment' may be better. Detachment implies being uninvolved, cold and aloof. However, in the Buddhist sense, non-attachment means having a balanced attitude, free from clinging.

When we are free of attachment, we won't have unrealistic expectations of others, nor will we cling to them for fear of being miserable when they aren't there. Non-attachment is a calm, realistic, open and accepting attitude. It isn't hostile, paranoid or unsociable.

Having a balanced attitude doesn't mean rejecting our friends and family. It means relating to them in a different way. When we aren't attached, our attitudes to others are harmonious, and, in fact, our affection for them increases.

Extracts from *Buddhism for Beginners*, by Venerable Thubten Chodron, Snow Lion: Ithaca, 2001 page 30, selected by Len Warren