

## THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN AFFECTION AND LOVE

By His Holiness the Dalai Lama

**O**ur general condition in human society is that we all depend upon each other. We are social animals, and we must live and interact with one another. Yet it seems that we have lost any feeling of basic human affection or a sense of relatedness and closeness to others. Our society does not place any value on the idea of love or indeed show much interest in it. With material things being prized above all else, nothing is said, is it, about the importance of love for our fellow human beings?

Lacking any such feeling of love, instead we put all our energy into making yet more money. And if we are concerned solely with exploiting others whenever possible, exerting control over them whenever we can, forever hoarding and competing, we will end up using any kind of situation whatsoever to further our own ends. In such an eventuality, the principle of loving our fellow human beings will have no currency whatsoever. Yet without this ideal of human affection, there is no happiness in the family, no happiness between couples, and no happiness between parents and children. However many millions of us there are all living here together, in our hearts each one of us will feel lonely and isolated.

What about the feeling of joy in one another's company? What about caring for other people and feeling they are our friends? What about trust and confidence in our dealings with others? They all seem to be cooling off. They seem to be lacking, don't they?

The reality is that we all have to live together on this one small planet of ours, and, in this day and age especially, we have to depend on one another to an enormous degree. Circumstances dictate that we have to think of the good of the whole planet and of all humanity. Yet we stay stuck in our limited personal views, dominated by ideas of "me" and "us." In the worst of cases, this leads to open conflict. What is missing, or never occurs to us, is a sense of cooperation or pulling together, and this is a recipe for all kinds of disaster.



With the world population being what it is, it means we are facing real problems.

### THE MARK OF A GOOD HUMAN BEING

For us as human beings I believe our priority is to look into ways of getting rid of suffering and finding happiness within our own minds. Imagine if we were able to make significant, inner, mental progress alongside all our material progress and development. This, I feel, is what would truly give a purpose to our lives as human beings and, at the same time, definitely make a positive contribution to society as a whole.

# one of the main conditions

In my own life, I have experienced many joys and sorrows, and I have encountered many difficulties. But when I think about the difficult times, I can see there has always been one thing that has given me hope, whatever the circumstances. The main reason I can feel, in my heart, that my human life has had a purpose and been worthwhile is that I have based my life on the wish to help others. This is something that I know has definitely proved very helpful to me throughout my life. When I have encountered difficulties, this attitude has given me courage and a feeling that hope is never lost, that hardship is manageable and worth going through. And this has brought me a kind of satisfaction through which I am able to find, quite naturally, some small degree of relaxation – peace of mind and happiness, too. Without a doubt, it has also contributed to my physical well-being.

Now, one of the main conditions for us to allow our minds to relax is unquestionably the attitude of love and affection. This attitude is neither absent from our natural make-up as human beings nor something fundamentally new, which has to come from somewhere else. People say, for example, that while a baby is still in its mother's womb, it can recognize her voice. That ability to recognize the unique sound of its mother's voice is something that is naturally just present, it seems, and something that it will need for its survival. And because the child possesses a natural feeling of intimacy with its mother, it can recognize her voice from the start.

Take another example. Generally the first word that an infant gurgles, in any language, is "mama." It is a word that is so easy to say. Just the syllable "ma" – for "mother" – seems to evoke that feeling of closeness. Not many words are needed; just one will convey that understanding instantly.

In any case, mother and child feel a mutual love for one another. The baby is born and grows up surrounded by the special kind of love that exists between mother and child, and this creates the beginnings of a good and happy life.

The reason we can say that we all possess love and affection is that they are naturally and inherently part of us. So we have to enhance them, rather than ignore them and let

them disappear. This is of vital importance, because this love is one of the most essential qualities of our mind, something truly precious and crucial for a human being. Once we recognize how vital it is, then we can cherish and enhance it, although the basic potential that we are accentuating is already naturally ours.

Now, when a person embodies that attitude of love and affection, his or her conduct in life will be admirable and what we call that of "a true human being." In fact this is the mark of a good human being, rather than whether or not he or she is a spiritual practitioner. It also lies at the root of a happy and peaceful human society. How important it is, then, that we recognize this and do everything we can to enhance that attitude of love and caring for others.

Human beings naturally possess this love and affection, and so I feel it is the role of the religions of the world to bring out their potential and make these wonderful qualities grow. Isn't this why so many different spiritual views and philosophies have indeed evolved – so that we can develop these wonderful, natural qualities more and more? In a nutshell, this is the whole reason that we undertake spiritual practice: to become a good human being, someone who is patient, tolerant, altruistic, compassionate, contented, and self-disciplined. We practice because that is the kind of person we want to become. ☉

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