

## **Self criticism and self love**

Many Western practitioners ask me how to develop love for themselves. Most of the people who ask are very good people. So why are they so self-critical? And why does simply being nice, kind or positive toward themselves not seem to really help very much. Where did we get so screwed up, they will ask? Perhaps way back in the misty past?

In the modern age, however, with wealth and technology, science and psychology, we have become so capable in so many ways that there is no end to the things we could do for ourselves or for others. In my eyes, unless we can find some limit to all this, we will always feel guilty for not doing enough. My solution to all this has been the Buddha's contemplative teaching. Through true wisdom we can look at the greater, longer term perspective and realise that we are not as able as we thought to control or change things. If we see this in the right way this can be very liberating.

Drawing on a relevant example from modern sociology many young men get depressed because they feel that they are no longer needed. This is because women are now so much more able to do without them with modern childcare and employment opportunity. The positive side of this, that the sociologists are trying to emphasise, is that men are also much freer than previously to do their own thing. In this way, useless is good. We can live with gay abandon, can we not? But where is the love in it? In our ability to set others free in turn. If we find this freedom we realise that it leads to a different kind of love, a transformation of love into something that is deeply true and deeply freeing for all of us. We find we can abandon, along with all the rest, the very self that we found it so hard to love in the first place.

I offer this for your reflection.

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