

Narcissus healed

How do we grow with sex and love?

Based on SD 59.5 (2.3.1)

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Sex in the suttas

The Saññoḡa Sutta (A 7.48) records an interesting and instructive observation by the Buddha on how we are attracted to our own sensual nature: *our looks, pride, desires, voice, adornments*. We are aroused by them and delight in them. Then, we notice these same things in another of the opposite sex, and we are struck by the differences of those *looks, pride, desires, voice, adornments*.

Perceiving this as what we lack, we *want* them. Psychologically, this is the desire for another **body** for its *physicality* (bodily features or qualities): we seek union with the other so that we can enjoy and *have* what we lack. This, basically, is the nature of **sexuality**. [A 7.48, SD 8.7]

Interestingly, this lack is only a perception: we *recognize* from our own personality and past experiences that we lack what we see in others. In other words, these are really *psychological and emotional lacks*. This explains why sexual attraction is not always between opposite sexes, but rather between or amongst individuals.

Like ATTRACTS

The reality is that **we are attracted to like** (we literally “like” it) and we want it all. Hence, when we see this *likeness* [2.3.1.3] in others, whether in one of the opposite or the same sex, we desire it: we want to have what we *recognize* as our “self” in that otherness: we see others in our own image.

It is not the difference that attracts us, but the apartness, that gap, that lack, that we want to have and to fill up the hollowness of our own being. **Sexual attraction**, then, is our profound sense of inner lack or incompleteness, that a part of us is missing and found in *that other* or *others*. It is possible that we have never been really loved as children; hence, we never learned to love.

What we did not get, we do not have; so we feel this. What we do not have, we cannot give; so we think this. But what we only get in sex is **lust**, which is our desperate cry for our image in the other, like Narcissus and his image on the water surface. We can never have this lust because it is *not* there: It is merely our own projection of an inner lack.

Love gives

While lust takes and wants more, **love** fills and gives and gives. When we have been loved when young, we learn to love: we are filled and runs over with love so that we freely give. To love, then, is to *give*. Only in giving love, we are loved. More than what we get, love is what we truly *have*, what we really *are*. This is the emotional grammar of **the present moment**, seeing it as it really is.

Love, then, is rooted in **joy**. It is a joy that lives forever in the present, *seeing it as it really is*, with need for neither the past nor the future. It is a profound and powerful curiosity of the present moment, a total interest in it, being present with it, living it.

It is Narcissus when he learns that he is that image in the water; that, even without looking into that image he *is*. There is no lack; without *lack*, there is no *want*; without want there is no *lust*. He is happy with himself because he *is*. He is able to see others in the same manner: that they, too, are really like him.

Making one of two

Love, as Plato (quoting Aristophanes) says in *The Symposium* (189c-193e) is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole. Primordial man, says Greek mythology, was whole, with 4 arms, 4 legs, 2 sets of genitals, and a head with 2 faces. Fearing their power, Zeus splits them all into two. When one half meets the other, they are lost in amazement of friendship, intimacy and love. **Love** calls back the halves of our original nature together. It tries to make *one* out of two, and heal the wound of human nature.

On a deeper level, in Buddhist terms, when **the mindheart** is two, it is beside itself. The Buddhist cultivation (*bhāvanā*) is that of making the two one, mating mind with heart, transcending thinking and feeling. Hence, when this oneness is gained, there is joy, the joy of oneness, the mindheart is whole: the whole is one, the one is whole.

Mother and child

Love, then, is the vision of ourself as truly and fully *a part* of the other; we are both self and other, mother and child. It is like **a mother** who, after bearing her child for 9 months in her womb, frees him to have his own life. The happy mother sees the child as forever a part of her, even though they are both *apart*. She does not need to *have* him because *he is her*, the same flesh and blood, as it were. She is happy even to see him just as he is: this is **lovingkindness**, unconditional love.

R779 Inspirations 449

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