

2004-05-12 Foundations of Buddhist Spiritual Life: Love (Week 3 Part 1)

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SPEAKERS

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We could start with some questions if anyone if you have some questions or thoughts from last week or last two weeks or comments or thoughts about virtue or generosity. One of the things you should know about

the Buddha's teaching on karma is that it said that you create very good karma for yourself. If you ask questions.

There a lot of time

Of course and I really just thinking about being generous

start listening to them. It wasn't easy to do,

how generous how much so you saw yourself much better. And, and, and you saw how difficult it is to work with yourself and you saw the situation worked out better if you were a little bit and a little bit more generous or also. So I think that's very instructive that what you said that it was difficult or difficult. It is the Practicing generosity and practicing virtue sometimes can be quite difficult. But the place where our practice occurs, a place where we get to learn about ourselves and work with ourselves is kind of can be really obvious. And sometimes we sit in meditation and close your eyes. It's not so obvious where the edge of practices. So it's really wonderful to think of Buddhist practices including generosity. It, it highlights things, it shows things, it shows where practice should be. Really, really well. I'll say more about that. Yes.

I think being generous to yourself is as important as being generous to anyone else. The interesting thing about Buddhist spirituality here is that there is there's no basis upon which to treat someone else as being more worthy than yourself. that each person is inherently precious and important. And you would treat yourself as you would treat anybody else. to denigrate yourself or put yourself last is considered to be kind of a kind of unhealthy to put yourself first maybe a little bit unhealthy too, but a treat yourself is kind of equal to everyone. And you would be just as generous to yourself as you would somewhere else. So if you're stressed out that you need to give yourself time to relax. If you have a

certain kind of need, yours worthy of that need is anybody else. And if you don't take care of yourself properly, take care of your body properly, your mind your heart properly, then you can't you're not really going to be very good for helping others and being generous to others. When we're deeply settled on ourselves, it's a lot easier to be generous.

is not really going to do much better.

Yeah. Yeah, it's it's a it's a lot of reflection. A lot of a lot of thought goes into that those kinds of concerns and I think it's very valuable and are really are our relationship to society at large is a very important question. And to to and it's there's no clear answers, I think, but to be up against the edge of these questions of what is appropriate and how far can we go and it's something I think a healthy person is always considering and wondering where the balance is. So we're not looking for a spirituality that kind of gives us final answers. answers, were giving kind of partly we're giving spirituality which is putting us at the puts us at the edge, so that we kind of are exploring a realistic relationship with the world around us. So that's one of them. The other thing about giving \$1 to someone's homeless is that you might reframe what you're doing. And now think about it so much about it's the money if the money's not gonna make much difference, but think about it, that you're offering your kindness. And they should have it just happens to be through the vehicle of \$1. And, and some people need more human connection than they need the money. And if you go down the street and use kind of like, look the other way, when they're giving you the dollar that has a much that's very different than actually stopping and saying, you know, hello, here, I'd like to give you this and actually say, I'd like to give you this. So they sense a human connection. And so generosity is very different than those two circumstances.

relationship between friends.

The other question is What about not lying? And using humor that might be exaggeration or bantering might not be really honest to what you're saying, but it's in the bantering and playfulness will be with friends, is that breaking that precept? And that's really for you, to you to reflect on. I think the intention behind what you're doing is important if you're intending to deceive someone, that's much more the issue. If you if no one's being deceived by your jokes, then, you know, I don't think it's really lying. It's It's you know, it's kind of transparent what you're doing perhaps. You know, there's a lot of times in society, it's kind of like, pretty accepted that there's a kind of a white lie that most people say. But may Some people say as many times a day, and that is, you know, how are you? You know, and the expected answer is fine. Or Okay. And then they want to talk about something else. It's like, it's like a little formality to kind of, like a ritual kind of get people kind of lined up. And if you say, Oh, thanks for asking, you know, sit down, let me tell you. That's not what they want. So it's kind of like, you know, so we have this ritual, like, you know, and it involves, you know, sensing you know, maybe even not saying the truth. Now, it's possible to kind of, you know, turn it around and say something more honest and say, Well, I'm getting by, you know, or Okay, I guess it okay, because Okay, so what does that mean? What does that mean? But I think if people understand what you're doing, then I don't think it's a lie if your job but some humor belongs to the category of malicious speech. So it's not, you know, it might not be exactly lying, but it's at the expense of someone else's dignity or someone else's happiness. And, and so, part of Right Speech and Buddhism not just refraining from lying, but also avoiding harsh speech, malicious speech, and gossip. So, Buddhism, the Buddha offered a path and it called in, in, in Sanskrit called Marga. In Pali, which is the language we use kind of a derivative of

Sanskrit, it's *marga*. It calls it a path and different traditions of spiritual in India, each offer their own *Marga* their own path and so it wasn't so much in Islam that Buddhism is, you know the word Buddhism is a Western invention, you know that. The, there is no such word in the word religion is a Western invention. And when English or Western languages came to like places like Sri Lanka in Japan and different places in Asia, they scratch their head for a while, What in the world? Are we gonna translate this word into our language? We don't have any word religion. Can you imagine how culture doesn't have a word for religion? But do we know *Marga* was one a path we offer a pair? It was obvious with using the word path is that it's something you do is something you walk, you have to walk your Walk, walk your talk or whatever. And whereas *ism*, in many people's mind implies a belief, I believe something and there's a huge difference between believing something and walking it and some scholars make a distinction between religions which focus on orthodoxy versus orthopraxy. Those words, orthodoxy. *doxy* means teaching. *ortho* means right. So some, some religions focus on right to teaching, and other religions focus on right to practice, like Judaism, some people consider is more orthopraxy than orthodoxy. It's more about helping you do the things you do. And Buddhism also is more of an author, praxic religion, that orthodox religion, it's more interested in what we do than what we believe. And in fact, it's been said that it doesn't really matter so much what you believe, as long as what you believe helps you get to liberation, or doesn't stand in the way of it. So when many of us went to Asia in practice, they never asked us what we believed in. And they never tried to tell us what to believe. They said, try this practice out. And then they gave us all kinds of opportunities to practice and they didn't care who you would make Christian or Jews or mother Whatever. That was kind of beside the point for them. I had one. I was a TA at Stanford in a Buddhist studies class. And there was this freshmen from Kentucky. And she came just I don't know, she's, you know, she probably just came out of rural Kentucky and never seen the world before. Maybe that was the impression I had. And she took this freshman class, you know, Introduction to Buddhism. And I said to her that,

in Buddhism doesn't see religion as an issue of exclusivity. That is, you know, you get to choose Buddhism over something else, you know, either your Buddhist or your Christian, we can't be both. Either you're a Presbyterian or a Unitarian, but you can't be both. Yeah, that works. But, you know, you know, Western religion has this thing about you know, your, this is who you are your identity and you can't be more than one at a time. And that's like a foreign idea to Buddhist culture. If you do it when they do a census of it. Japan, there's about 100 million Japanese. And they'll do a census to see what religious affiliation Japanese have. And it's something like 70 million, or Buddhist, something like 60 million, or Shinto. And something like 30 million are Christian. And you know, it adds up to a lot more than hundred million. Because they have very comfortable with the idea that you know, that religions aren't something you divide people, just you would go to for different reasons, you'd have different to the affiliations. So Buddhism offers a practice that is a path to practice that anybody can follow. And so this idea of a pyramid that I've been emphasizing is in walking that path, you want to have really good foundation for walking that path. And so you want to create a strong foundation at the bottom, and then it becomes a lot safer to go into some of the depths of the wilderness that that or whatever it is, The height of the path will take you. And another analogy about the kind of the path and how it develops. I don't know if I use this, I talked about sandpaper to you. I said sensitive. Some of you heard this before, but maybe not in this class, I can do it again. You know, if you take a piece of wood, it's coarse and rough. You start with rough sandpaper. And then you kind of do as much work as the rough sandpaper can do. And then you take a finer sandpaper and you do what that can do. And then take a finer sandpaper and do that can do it finally, just down to piece of cloth, you know, in the last little polish, and so the same thing is true with spiritual growth. It works better if you start with coarse

sandpaper. Don't use analogy too much. Imagine that too much but but you kind of want to work with what's most obvious and easiest word which stands out You know, most dramatically, you don't want to get into the work in the fine details in the practice before you're kind of taking care of that what's more considered easiest take care of. And so in a tradition is considered a lot easier to take care of your behavior than this take care of your speech, it's a lot easier to take care of your speech, then it's take care of what your mind is. So you start with your behavior. So things like ethics, is concerned has a lot to do with behavior, you're not going to punch your neighbor out. That's behavior, right? You're not going to steal, you're not going to lie, you're not going to do these kinds of things that are behavioral. And what happens as you as we, as we try to negotiate that kind, of course, behavior, it's kind of obvious, for the most part, if we're punching someone out or not. And so you can see what you're doing. You see that impulse, what you can do, and you get feedback right away. Even if you don't do it, you can feel the impulse you feel what's going on. And you can work at this relatively coarse level, and try to refine that coarse level smoothly. So that your virtue is settled. generosity belongs to that same level, it's something you do you give you give you offer something. And so we're taking care of kind of a coarser level first. And the suggestion I have to you is that it's a lot easier to engage in personal development and spiritual development, if you develop it in areas first, that are kind of in the obvious realm. And my suggestion is that ethics and generosity are much more than obvious realm. Then, the subtlety of a very concentrated mind. You know, when you get really, really concentrated, at what point you will let go of, of the initial application of attention or point you let go of a sustained allocation of attention, at what point you let go of your equanimity, can you see the difference between equanimity and this is a subtle difference. Between joy and happiness. I mean, that's what a very concentrated mind can do. But in meditation, but you shouldn't get ahead of yourself. So the idea is work on this larger level. First, the coarser level or the more obvious level first of your life, take care of that. And when that's taken care of, then you can go to a finer piece of sandpaper and work on something that's more refined, in this case, start doing meditation practice.

What I want to talk about today is the next layer of the pyramid, or the next finer sandpaper that you can use and that is, the Buddhist teachings on love. And love and kindness are very, very important aspects of Buddhist spirituality. Many of you know the Dalai Lama has said that his religion is kindness. He doesn't say his religion as Buddhism. He says his religion is kindness and that inspires a lot of people. Have you put at the forefront of his religion? There is a, what, 10 years ago or so. There was a meeting of Western Buddhist teachers, gathering of Buddhist teachers from different Buddhist traditions, Zen tradition, Tibetan traditions, be passionate about tradition. And they met to talk about issues they had in common. And they spent many weeks together. And at the end of that week, they wrote an open letter that they all signed. So it's kind of like a pothole platform maybe or view or understanding they all shared that they felt was important to get out to the world. And this is one part of this letter. Our response our first responsibility as Buddhists is to work towards creating a better world for all forms of life. The promotion of Buddhism as a religion A secondary concern, kindness and compassion. The furthering of peace and harmony, as well as tolerance and respect for other religions should be the three guiding principles of our actions. Kindness as teachers, kindness and compassion, that's the first furthering of peace in harmony, the second, and tolerance for other religions. The third, those are the guiding principles that these teachers all felt they could share. And I think it's pretty marvelous that these different Buddhist traditions Can she can come together and make a statement like this. And rather than thinking that they're making a statement, which is the common denominator, they're kind of the light stuff they could all agree on. I take this to be something very profound, very significant. So the of kindness and compassion video that we our lives, we live our life in relationship to other people. That it's not just a self serving approach to spirituality, but that we live our lives. As if

other people matter. And as if our relationship to other people matter. That's a very important part of this path about this, another layer of this foundation. It's a relatively coarser thing than the more subtle work of deep meditation. But it's very important to take care of that. And in fact, I think that these people and I would say, if you had to choose one over the other subtleties of concentration and states of rapture and all that, or being kind and compassionate to the world around you, choose kindness and compassion. It's better for them. The world is a lot better for you. Guaranteed

contribution

It's a fair, it's a fair question. So he said that if you focus on this, these kinds of things, you know, virtue and generosity and kindness and compassion, a lot of religions, so all religions kind of teach that too. And so, you know, doesn't, it's not talking to what Buddhism has to offer that unique. And, and so that's fair enough to say. So one way to look at that as part of the pyramid, is that what's unique about Buddhism is the top of the pyramid, not at the base basic shares, or what's at the base, or various foundations, as you go along, is shared by a lot of different religions. It's kind of common sense, rather than Buddhism. But you need common sense in order to be the top of the pyramid. So you have to be patient for the you know, the for the, for it to before you get the climax. What do we work with Buddhism focuses on, but even so, I think that kindness and compassion is so central to what good is do even people who take Buddhism all the way to the point of liberation kindness and compassion still become an operating principle for their lives. For many Buddhists, the motivation to reach the top of the pyramid is because of their compassion. So that you don't let go of compassion as you go up, the compassion and sense becomes more and more important, the higher up you go, the deeper or more mature you become in your practice, the further you want to go, the more important compassion becomes to support you along the way. So is it profound? Or is this kind of superficial support? Is it the cutting edge what Buddhism has to offer? I don't know. Somehow, it doesn't work for me to ask that question, even though I think it's fair what you're saying. But my heart doesn't want to go in that direction that question because I think compassion and kindness are so centrally important to the whole Buddhist tradition. That we want to don't want to lose sight of its centrality and its importance.

is compassion foundation

very first already said if you can it is that basically said it's a reciprocal relationship that you can't really be ethical really be kind, really compassionate unless you've done a fair amount of practice to you know, the practice supports compassion and compassion supports the practice. Ethics supports practice and practice supports ethics they kind of work on each other. So what's happened here? I'm what I'm giving you is a traditional model of the Buddhist path. Here in the West. What a lot of people have done is turn the pyramid upside down. Since a lot of people start with meditation, and then what they find after they do some years or some period of time meditation, they realize that take care of their ethics and have to take care of their generosity kind of develop that also, or it could attend to helps naturally, that they've made people say as they meditate. So there's a reciprocal relationship with all this. But I've seen a lot of people for whom doing it lopsided, starting with meditation and going, you know, even going long retreats hasn't served them very well, because they didn't have a good foundation. In terms of dichotomy between practice and ethics and practice and generosity and practicing kindness and love. I don't see that dichotomy. ethics, generosity and love are all part of the practice they are practice. And as practice develops, those become stronger. Especially

The, it helps if you can distinguish between their actions and their hearts, their actions and their being who they are. If you if you identify their actions with who they are, then it's hard. But if you can separate them a little bit, then it gets easier, a little bit easier. And then if you can separate out their actions and their effect on you, and look at how they suffer. If they're suffering, then then it's a lot easier if you can tune into the fact they're suffering, then it's a lot easier to have compassion for them. But if you don't know where they're suffering while they're being a jerk, it's a lot harder to have compassion. And, and then the question is, are you willing to stop long enough to notice if they are suffering? No, that person does not doesn't deserve it. You know, so you don't stop but encourage you to always just stop and see, can you tune into that part? So I want to move on. Now we've had some questions. Yeah. Well, we'll talk about that we're going to get into this in the next slide. This is a subject of today is love. And as introduction to this, I want to read this letter, to give you a sense of how important compassion and kindness love is seen by many Buddhists, including these teachers who wrote this open letter.

So, one of the reasons why the whole issue of love and a relationship with the people is important is so we have a sense that our spiritual life is occurring in a network of other people. And as I said, it's a lot easier to take the practice really deep. The motivation for it, if you realize you're doing it also for the sake of others. If you're just doing it for your own sake, at some point, I think most people everywhere At some point, we'll stop the practice. At some point if the only motivation is to improve yourself, it's not going to take you as far as can really take you. So as sooner or later I think the pros are going to walk the path of hallway, some level of compassion, some sense of that practice occurs in the field of other people is essential. Okay, so if you'd like to stand for a few seconds to stretch, and then we'll do a meditation

Taking a comfortable alert posture, sitting up straight and gently closing your eyes and then setting your body at ease. Inner perhaps a little inner softening gentling of your body, your body be at ease

your awareness, travel, travel around your body, feeling your body attentions, energies, various kinds of sensations and vibrations. And as you feel that you sense your body. See if you can have some ease, physical ease about how things are.

Perhaps it helps to soften the belly, relax your belly.

Then set your heart at ease, your emotional body, your heart, feeling feelings. It's fine to feel the way you are feeling. Whatever it is, beauties about it

then your thinking mind your mind Have you had a very busy mental day to day duties with your mind, whatever way it is even if it's uncomfortable theories about it.

These with body heart and mind

then with some perhaps tenderness or gentleness. Take a long slow deep breath in the breath bit gentle feeling your torso with air, expanding your ribcage and as you exhale, soften But go settle in.

Taking a deep breath in as you exhale softly your shoulders and shoulder blades

As you exhale like your face relax. Soften your skin muscles of your face. Relax away from the bones and as you exhale, let your weight of your body in the lower part of your body settle. Almost move into your chair or your cushion. weight of your abdomen relaxes down into your pelvic cavity.

PhDs with your breathing, like your breath, the natural way of breathing wants to breathe.

And get a sense of the rhythm of your breath. Walk in breath, and out breath and out breath following in breath.

Getting a sense of how long the breath is how long the breath is

Becoming aware of what parts of your body respond to the process of breathing, movements of your chest, your belly, expansion of the ribcage.

Sincere sensations of air going in and out through your nostrils.

As you exhale, you might see if you can let go of your thoughts or what your concerns are about for now. These minutes sleeping just feel the breath more fully. like riding wave. You're riding the waves of create Breathing in and breathing out.

And then, feel your body, become aware of your body, sense of presence of your body or solidity or vitality Being in a body we're having a body, physical body

and then see if you can generate some goodwill towards your body. Well wishing this body that's carried you for so long as body that's been with you, this body that will carry you further. Hey this body be healthy. May this body heal well. If you can generate some kindness or goodwill caring for this body that you have

So this may be that this body feels at ease.

party doesn't have to feel at ease. Let's see if there can be an inner goodwill or to the body perhaps an appreciation of it

For some people, it's quite an unusual thing to have goodwill towards the body. These few minutes here, there'd be some kindness there.

And perhaps if it's available to you, you can become aware of some tenderness within you in the body with gentleness tenderness, about towards this life of your body tenderness within

Now see if you can have some goodwill to yourself, not just your body, yourself in whatever way in your Think of yourself, sense yourself who you are as a person.

Could you find some goodwill towards yourself some feeling about who you really would be really great if you yourself could be happy or peace or say the great thing that would be

I'm going to repeat a few phrases, classic Buddhist phrases and after I say it silent silently to yourself, repeat these phrases and see if you can somehow sink into the intention of the phrases or see if these phrases can somehow give some focus to Kevin goodwill towards yourself.

May I be happy?

May I be safe

May I be

May I be at ease

seeing the phrases again at the end of each phrase letting yourself sink into the meaning of the last word or the possibility of it or the inspiration or the happiness of the word happiness of goodwill. May I be happy?

May I be safe?

May I be

May I be at ease

now bring to mind some person who has been a benefactor for you, some person who has been kind for you been concerned about your well being. We really felt this person was concerned or interested somehow is involved in your well being. Someone for whom the relationship is relatively uncomplicated feel you should feel this wonderful person who's been a benefactor in your life.

If you can, if you're able to visualize, you can visualize Then in front of you, perhaps visualize them with an expression of happiness. This possibilities of happiness is something that they can manifest. And then see if you can find within yourself a feeling or sense of goodwill towards this person. And feeling that, yeah, it would be really nice if this person could be could be happy or say for help. In fact, you might even if you couldn't smoke this in small ways, help the person you went off for yourself, extend yourself for that purpose.

And then I'll say the phrases over again this time for this other person, you can repeat them silently to yourself. Letting the phrases somehow be a channel. Be an expression of your goodwill. This person May you be happy,

may you be safe.

May you be healthy.

May you be at ease.

It is a very Beautiful Thing. When people have goodwill for each other, the wheel can bring gladness to the heart for delight. Such things exist. As you say, your phrases of goodwill for your benefactor your friend, you see, allow yourself to feel even just a picture's a teeny teeny bit. some sense of delight or well being or happiness. Your goodwill exists. May you be happy.

May you be safe

May you be healthy

May you be at ease.

And then we'll take the last couple of minutes which was sit quietly nothing needs to happen. Nothing you need nothing you need to do, except sit here in the quietness of This room