

# 2004-05-12 Foundations of Buddhist Spiritual Life: Love (Week 3 Part 2)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

goodwill, people, kindness, buddha, person, equanimity, loving kindness, feel, practice, friendliness, develop, relationship, love, heart, loving kindness practice, cultivating, compassion, buddhism, life, walking

## SPEAKERS

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So that was a little taste of ancient Buddhist practice that goes back to the Buddha, meditation on goodwill, or usually in English it's called loving kindness. In, in the ancient Indian languages called metta and the word meta. My three in Sanskrit is a cognitive to the word for friend. In Pali it's the word meant to the word friend is Mita. And that those meta, and method is feeling loving kindness is a kind of friendliness or offering a friendship or friendliness to ourselves or to others or to our experience. The Buddha offer this as a practice for a lot of different reasons. One reason he offered it is as a concentration practice, to say these phrases over and over again, helps us stabilize and concentrate and focus The mind in the mind is really scattered, it's very hard to meditate. He also offered it as a protection that if we can go through our life with a sense of kindness or friendliness, you tend to be treated a lot different than if you go through life harshly or unfriendly. So it's a kind of protection and the tuition says it protects you from snakes and Scorpion bites, charging elephants in all kinds of things that I'm sure you're concerned about. And loving kindness practice is important because it begins working on our relationships understanding what it what they are and sometimes in doing this practice loving kindness will becomes very clear is we don't feel loving that's not what's going on the fact that he or one more will expression loving kindness, you know, you're probably gonna you know, choke the guy The sometimes just practicing on kindness can arouse anger in people, not because they're necessarily angry at the practice, but because it's kind of like you think of as loving kindness practice is kind of being a tenderizer. And there's a lot of crust and hardness around the heart. And as the crust of the heart tank is tenderize, what's in the heart gets released. And the heart carries a lot more than just courage, or love. Sometimes it carries anger and resentment and grief and a lot of different things. And as the heart begins to soften, those things can bubble up. And part of the functional and the kindness practice is as a kind of a cleansing practice that begins cleansing the kind of things that would maybe get in the way of being able to go really deep in meditation practice. So loving kindness practice considered called a purification practice. It kind of clears the heart with a deeper work that's going to follow it also as we do, as I said, with generosity, if you practice generosity, you get to see where you're holding on to where you don't want to be generous. You practice loving kindness you get to see where you're not kind where there's ill will or something going on or, or coldness or, or, or indifference or all kinds of unhealthy relationships to others. And it's considered helpful helpful to see that. So as as you're trying to explore, let's play with query Beatty. What do we need to be kind here? Can I find can generate goodwill towards others. We learn a lot about ourselves

in that process. One of the things we'll learn about is how we relate to ourselves. In the teachings of the Buddha, in doing loving kindness, practice, you're always supposed to start with yourself. And and, for many people, especially in the West, self is not a very easy person to do loving kindness to. Someone once said, that it's almost as if in the West, you're not supposed to like yourself. If you like yourself that's selfish and self centered. You're not supposed to, like you said he's supposed to kind of feel like you're somehow unworthy or not quite up to snuff and a little bit of embarrassment to human race. And, and the idea of kind of feeling good about yourself and feeling that you're precious and valuable, is doesn't really have a good place in many Western psyches. In Buddhism, the idea is to is that we are each of us individually very, very precious. human life is a very, very precious phenomena. And in that we have human life. It's a really precious and dear thing, it's a lovely thing. And it to feel that preciousness to be concerned about that preciousness and to have love for kindness towards it is considered to be one of the pyramids or the foundations of that pyramid. If you can generate a friendly relationship to yourself, or a friendly relationship to others, when you sit down to meditate, you're much less likely to be

consumed by anxiety, or consumed by animosity or consumed by desire or a lot, a lot of things get in the way that wouldn't get in the way of basically this very simple relationship of friendliness, to be friendly towards yourself. I know a lot of meditators have rather than have an unfriendly relationship to their thoughts is if thinking is their enemy. If you use your own mind and just shut up like that I can really sit and meditate. We would like to try to develop a friendly relationship to any part of our experience. Be friendly towards our thoughts friendly towards our feelings friendly towards our body, friendly towards the whole realm of existence. working there, massaging that seeing what it takes to get that working with the difficulties of finding that is a very, very important spiritual practice in its own right. So the loving kindness practice begins with ourselves. And then it the prime as a meditation practice is extended to records others. And the first other person it's done towards is someone else for whom it's really easy to have goodwill. And in the tradition that's assumed assumption is that that's your benefactor. Someone who's you've kind of just been really generous to you and helpful to you in some way. And so it's an uncomplicated relationship and you just kind of offer your kindness back then you do it to a friend and a friend you might have a lot of care for, but a friend might be a little bit more little bit more complex. You feel a lot of friendliness towards your friend for the good but you know, they didn't take your car or your car wants in return Oh, but scratched. You know, you know, you feel a little bit more complicated, you know, a little bit you know, with friends can be but so you started working with developing that open hearted goodwill with someone is easy for and you start working kind of working to expand it outwards. To people for whom it's not quite as easy, and then not quite as easy, not quite as easy. So you go from benefactor to friend, and then you go to a neutral person, someone who you don't really know very well but could be encountered casually, and you don't have much of a feeling for them and for against you see if you can develop kind of a basic sense of goodwill towards that person also. And then you try to do it to someone who is considered to be a difficult person for you to jerk. Can you see what what does it take for you to somehow have find the capacity to have some basic goodwill for someone who is difficult in your life? That's not an easy endeavor. But it's considered to be a spiritual practice in Buddhism to work that edge to explore what did it take to ask the kind of questions I asked, you know, how do I do that? How do I see someone with compassion or loving kindness was a jerk and you're not the important thing to realize if you don't do it. For that person's sake, you're doing it for your sake. Because the opposite of have been having a capacity to be loving or kind and open hearted is to be closed. The assumption Buddhism is just is something like, the basic nature of the heart is to be loving. And it's not loving. If there's crossover, there's resistance or holding back or fears or angers and we want to return best we can to the natural

state of goodwill, natural state of love. That's the nature of the heart. So a very important Buddhist practice is to work with this goodwill. Some people don't like it. When I was introduced to this practice of goodwill of loving kindness. I did not like it. I actually thought it was ridiculous. And I thought it was artificial. Because it wasn't even generating love feelings of goodwill, and it's either there or it's not there, but you don't kind of muster it up. That's not really sincere. And so I basically ignored my teachers for quite a while. And they didn't seem to mind with this particular instructions. And then at some point, in doing in doing the mindfulness practice, the heart began to dissolve. And all this loves sort of shiny fourth kind of being there. And then I understood what this practice of goodwill was all about. It was kind of natural, strong sense of goodwill naturally arose as the mindfulness practice purified my heart. So some people will put it off and forget about this layer of the pyramid because it's just too difficult and go to higher level. And then it kind of goes works backward also, on some people with the classic path is to develop this layer, a layer of relationship of goodwill, and many Buddhists will start a session of meditation. With five or 10 minutes of doing this loving kindness meditation first

to kind of set the tone, to set the kind of atmosphere of goodwill friendliness in which the practice is going to occur. It's also interesting that as you do this practice of goodwill for others, that your relationship to those people will probably change. It's very interesting, for example, with neutral people, someone who's neutral, you know, you know, someone, you know, maybe the mail carrier, someone's relatively neutral, you hardly ever noticed the mail carrier, you're not home much during the day when they drop off the mail. You know, you've kind of like use the person, you know, drop the mail off, it's nice. And then you you start including that person in your living meditation as you're neutral person. And lo and behold, after a while, you see that person and the person just brings you to life, hey, that's my person. You know, I've been sitting for the last week at home, thinking goodwill towards this person. You know, and you know, it's no longer a neutral person. And now it's a really sweet thing to do. The Buddha put a lot of emphasis on the importance Love. He didn't use the word love because it's an English word. But it comes to the same thing. What he hasn't talked about. You know, in some in some Western languages, they distinguish different kinds of love, which we don't do very well in English, I believe. But like in Greek they have a gap in arrows and field philia. In same thing in Buddhism, there's different words for love. And some love forms of love, are understood to be hinged or intermixed with clinging, with neediness with attachment. And that kind of love. The Buddha said is not very helpful for the spiritual path. But there are other forms of love, that are untouched by attachment or clinging or neediness. And he gave for given right he pointed to a variety of kinds of love, but for primary ones the first one is one of loving kindness, this basic feeling of goodwill of kindness towards others. And it's considered to be the foundation for the other three. So if you have a basic attitude of goodwill towards someone, and you encounter that person in day the person's suffering, that goodwill gets transformed to compassion. and compassion is the feeling you have inside of you and your heart. It's kind of an uncomfortable feeling a little bit. But it's kind of empathy for that person suffering. And the wish that person be free of that suffering. There's more than just empathy. Because empathy is just kind of sharing in the suffering of someone else. So the joy of someone else, this is actually wishing that person suffering the alleviate and you if you have the ability, you might act on that you might not but it's the wish for it. It's a form of love. Compassion is a very profound and important for mobile. If you encounter the same person final day the person is really happy has some great success and cancer, great, wonderful things are happening in person just delighted. And then the goodwill gets transformed to what's called sympathetic joy. You feel the empathy of their joy, and you wish that joy to continue for them. This is really great. You're happy for them, and you won't go for it. And I hope this stays with you for a long time. You wish to wish them well. If you encounter the person on a day, when everything's kind of going well. Things are going

really well. There's no suffering, there's no great happiness, everything's going smoothly and easily for the person. Then, that love takes the form of something called equanimity, we feel is equanimity towards that person. Where, which sounds a bit strange in English to call equanimity is a form of love. So I'll give you an analogy that's used in the Buddhist texts for this kind of love for these four. A mother has four children. The first is a newborn. And just wonderful, you know, to have a newborn everything the birth went well baby's healthy, and sleeps well through the night. And, and, and then the, the mother just has all this goodwill towards his baby wishes to pay well and wishes The baby has a good life and is happy. And they have a baby blessing the friends come over and they wish to pay this baby be happy and well may grow up and have a successful life. Just all this goodwill is there. And the mother has an older child who is maybe a teenager, but has a lot of difficulties, a lot of health issues, a lot of personality challenges, has trouble making friends does human health and the mother feel so much compassion for this child. And you know, maybe this wants to help to stop this child to be free of his or her suffering. does what you can to help the child in the form of love the mother takes for that

Child Support with compassion. The child has noticed the mother has another child who maybe is 21 is left home for a few years of graduate from college perhaps or something like that. And, and maybe graduated from college with good grades and just gotten a good job and just feels the top of the, you know, has a wonderful relationship and just the top of the world everything's going really great. And then mother just feels all this delight. And the love takes the form of sympathetic joy delight, yes. And then the mother has a fourth child, who's you know, middle, middle middle age, whatever, you know, has, has happened. And, you know, is and, and has, you know, established in life to careers going well, as families going well. grandchildren are well established and getting going well. And the mother of their has this quality of equanimity. Another another analogy for equanimity the kind of a love is called grandmotherly love. It's the kind of love that a grandmother has. It's a grandparent has that sometimes lacking in love their parents has, especially new parents. And, you know, grandmother has seen it all before and doesn't get all round, you know, excited about these things. The kids crying and has a temper tantrum and, you know, the first time parents like, they're like walking on eggs, you know. But you know, the grandparents, you know, they see it at all, they have all this love for the child, but they have a lot of space for the child to be who they are, and they're helpful and all that you get the idea, right. So creativity is a kind of love. So, as part of the Buddhist path for those who are interested to do this, cultivating goodwill is an important part. cultivating Love is a very important apart, some people will do it intentionally, will actually do practices like meditation practices to cultivate goodwill, some people will act or act on it in their life. Remember body, speech and mind are the truth three sides of the pyramid. So that some people will speak words of goodwill, or words of compassion are words of sympathetic joy. May you be happier, wish you well, or whatever. And some people will cultivate it in in their hearts, through their minds. They'll generate to generate it and increase the capacity for feeling love. Love in Buddhism doesn't have to be an accident. It's something we can we can develop and strengthen. It's kind of like a muscle. That if you work the muscle, the muscle gets stronger. If you allow the possibility for yourself to love. If you let more you can love the warrior loves like growing a muscle. Some people don't give themselves much chance to learn little story. Maybe it's not a good one. But when my son was my oldest son was, I think maybe he was a year older. I don't know. We're pretty young, maybe younger. I was carrying him down the street in Palo Alto. And we're kind of walking down slowly. And this guy walks by. And he's really looks serious. Like maybe he likes really upset, or moody or stern or serious. And he's walking down the street. And my son sees this guy. And he gives him the most amazing smile. You can imagine. If you ever seen a little baby give a smile like you're like the most amazing thing that ever seen in your life. They're just an OG and it's like,

they're just so delighted. I mean, you're like, you know, better than the breast, you know, just like it's just like they're just eyes. And then and my son was looking at this guy and that way, and we were kind of walking side by side for a while my son was just staring at him and I was one of the eldest I pay attention. Pay attention, you're missing this chance of a lifetime. The opportunity for him to feel some love in return and feel this the light was right there in the sidewalk. But he didn't make it available to himself. He didn't take he didn't open himself up to make us preoccupied, I guess. Are there are more opportunities for us for all of us for you to experience love, then that isn't easy to do. Your partner comes home or a friend comes to visit and you leave the television on you go like this. No.

It's a great thing to Do I don't know, you know, it's maybe a good thing and it's really important what you're watching and it's really neat. But it's a lost opportunity, isn't it? You know, use for some someone walks in the door, it's kind of like, you know, it's an opportunity there to kind of connect. So the suggestion is that loving kindness is something you can work on, both in terms of developing it. And in terms of availing, availing yourself of what's already here. If you just kind of relax a little bit and look around and make the connection. When's the last time you told someone you love them? I remember a friend of mine, who, when someone who knew died, he went around afterwards to all his friends and said, I love you. I love you. Because he really regretted he hadn't said to that person. He didn't want to miss a chance again, no way. No. It was. I was one of the recipients of that. I think he's so happy was so great. I love you and it's a great But of course, it's sentimental. And you don't want to be that way. Right? And, and also, it's dangerous to do that, right? Because if you do that, then you're opening yourself up to other people, and they're gonna take advantage of you, aren't you? Aren't they? Aren't they? No. being kind to people, doesn't mean that you avoid using your wisdom and good sense. being kind to people doesn't mean that you know when to say stop or no, doesn't mean when you kind of take care of yourself, doesn't mean that you have to open your door to all the homeless and let them sleep in your bed or whatever. It's fine to say, wisdom is an important part of this. So part of this working of loving kindness is is beginning to develop a healthy kind of relatedness to other people. exploring what does it mean to be kindness holochain What's wise kindness? To be kind involves taking some risks. And what happens if you start taking a little bit of risk with people? How do you do it in a wise way? How do you do it with healthy limits of how much you offer yourself to develop start developing healthy relationships that are based on kindness and goodwill is understood in the Buddhist tradition to create a really good foundation for you to be able to do the very personal work of meditation itself. The deeper kind of meditation work is more personal inter interpersonal.

So what do you think of that? What's your questions now? Now's your turn. Yes,

Don't think it's so accurate in differences not equanimity is a relationship, a feeling we have in relationship to someone else. This character that we would characterize is kind of a loving relationship. It allows the open heartedness to be there. But if someone is making poor choices in their life, and you can't do anything to change their choices, equanimity, can sometimes equanimity arises when you realize you are making your choices. I can't make them for you. I don't wish you harm I don't wish you suffering. But you're making these choices. And that understanding of how people responsible for their own choices can help cultivate equanimity and that love. So we're not kind of tumbling over ourselves or feeling we're After feeling bad or being, you know, all kinds of problems might arise. So I think of equanimity as a form of love, because it's a relationship that happens in relation. It's something that happens in relationship to other people. It's a very positive, very warm, beautiful emotion, the heart or the mind is, it can be, well, people can't when it when when equanimity

is very strong, the mind of the heart because quite radiant, and radiant to the hearts is often associated with love. So I think you've seen it as well. So what some Buddhists will do is they'll actually specialized for a while at cultivating these meditation practices. And, and it's really a phenomenal thing, the capacity of the mind the heart, to generate loving kindness, generate goodwill, and to be saturated and filled, almost like you'd be filled with white light. Nothing else kind of is filling your, your presence or feeling your mind or your heart, then uses radiance of love of kindness which kind of goes On all directions, it's considered to be a very deep form of meditation. So it's something to be worked with it's very, requires a lot of concentration. But there are a lot of Buddhist meditation practitioners who go on retreats or go spend a long time. So they're like, cultivating is very, very deep, concentrated mind in which they could have this very, very radiant goodwill or compassion or equanimity. It's one of the great things in places like in Thailand and Burma, there are monks and nuns, who spent 20 3040 years doing the practice of loving kindness. And it said that if you go in their presence, there's like a field around them of kindness and love and goodwill, you know, that, you know, not just not just, you know, a foot away from them within a field, you're going into the presence and just feel so wonderful to be around them. So to repeat myself a little bit, one of the reasons why this is an important foundation for the pyramid is that In experimenting and trying to cultivate a healthy relationship to people around us, we have to come to terms and deal with the unhealthy aspects of our relationships. And to be honest about that, and to work with that is part of the spiritual life. You don't want we don't want to do a spiritual bypass and become an enlightened jerk. I mean, it's possible. There are people who attain certain levels of enlightenment. And I know people who attained certain level of enlightenment, and they became worse, because they got kind of arrogant around it. And so it's possible you take that route to spiritual bypass. But what the Buddha was emphasizing is it's actually better if you do the pyramid approach, where you actually kind of work on yourself more holistically. So you so your relationships are very important part of who you are. As you'd work on healthy relationships, you get benefits from that lot of benefits. It's not just used for They're so good for your sake also. And, and you sleep better at night. Because you know, you know, which is nice. You feel safer when you go into society because you know that you know, you're basically a good person. You also get the benefit that that you begin your motivation for spiritual life is is fueled or supported by your relationship to other people. That your care, your compassion, your desire to help others fuels your attempt to try to develop yourself spiritually becoming a better person. So you're not just doing it for yourself. If some of you are, if you're really plagued by anger, it's really good for you. to somehow try to resolve the anger and the angry it might save you from a heart attack. But it's really good for your neighbors too. And if you sense how good it is for your neighbors, it's part of the motivation. So, cultivating love, opening ourselves up to the possibility of

appreciating love and kindness in the world around us, recognizing it and others and telling them that you appreciate it. I see something really beautiful in your Thank you. It's really great. Somehow beginning to help create a field of kindness around you is it belongs to this area of Buddhism that are this layer of the pyramid that I'm calling. Next week. We'll go further. And then we're taking care of the sentimental stuff. So those of you who are uncomfortable with this, like I would have been when I started. You could use you know, bite your time, come back next week. We do have a couple more minutes if someone else has a question like task. Yes. Talk about love in the context of a specific example, right now regardless of political persuasion, to find somebody in Rocky situation.

Well, that's a whole theological question about our people fundamentally some way or is it kind of? Is that who they are at the essence? Or is it some kind of layer that's covered over the essence? And,

you know, the whole question of what is evil. And I haven't actually studied this very much myself, so I'm not gonna feel qualified to say what evil is. I just know I have a bias towards seeing people not as evil, but seeing actions as evil, but you're ready to see people as you know, as as If not pure at their essence in some way, they have the capacity for the potential for it. And in Buddhism, we have a story which very important story for Buddhists. A story about a man in unclean mala, who was a time of the Buddha was a mass murderer. It said he murdered 999 people. And he had a garland, a necklace that you were on his neck, with the finger of each of those people. And you go around, people are frightened of him. And the Buddha or window, this and so he went into the forest where he was and performed a little miracle play. And where Buddha's walking very commonly down the forest, and this man started walking after him with his sword, kill the Buddha and, and the faster the man walked. He started running. He couldn't catch up to the Buddha, even though the Buddha was walking really calmly and slowly. There's magic Right. And now it's finally here that the man yelled out, stop. And the Buddha continue walking. He said, I have already stopped. Why don't you stop? What do you mean? It's up to your walking, I'm going to stop things telling you to stop. Or I've stopped being harmful to all beings, but you're still harming them. And, and something in that exchange caught his attention. And he was ordained as a Buddhist monk, and with a relatively short time became enlightened. And so the idea that people are redeemable even, you know, mass murderers that agree that they have the capacity is held up in the Buddhist tradition because of that story. But the important thing about this one, one important thing about your question for me is that is that important part of loving kindness practice is you're doing for yourself. Not For someone else, you're doing it. So there's no cross over your heart. You're doing it so that your heart is not closed. And even if you're encountering evil, does your heart have to be closed? It might mean that you say no. And like me, you put the guy in jail. You might do all kinds of things that are healthy and appropriate. But you don't quote you don't, you're not going to close your heart. You're not doing for that person sake. You're doing it for your sake. Because if you close your heart, you're hurting yourself. There's a saying in Buddhism that goes. If you're angry with your enemy, you're doing your enemy, a service. You're causing a harm to yourself, your enemy could not do himself because your enemy can't get into your heart. Only you can get there and cause it to suffer. And when you're angry, you're suffering. So kind of you see it's like you're doing for yourself. That doesn't mean you have to be condoning. It doesn't have to be mean it You'd have to be soft and warm and fuzzy to evil people. It means that you don't close your heart. And then you do all kinds of ones things. Put them in jail, plus one, maybe two more could be quick and it will stop saying the words I can say that I'm very verbal. And I can also say it in a way which is very much in my body. experiencing a warm, almost full body experience seems to be it seems to be a lot fuller experience. And I'm wondering if that's the right direction. It's a great it's a it's a good direction. It's a healthy direction to because direction to be encouraged. If it happens. But a little bit more can say the right direction, because then you might feel other ways, directions might be wrong. It's not so you sit down to do this kind

of practice, and it's all kinds of things might happen. You might not have a capacity, access to work. And sometimes it is just a mental thing because that's all that's available, and still useful thing to do. The important thing in loving kindness, practice is not how you feel. So you don't have to be all warm and loving. Exactly. It's the intention. It's an intention of goodwill. I wish this person well. I don't feel so soft and warm, but have this wish that they'd be well, they'd be happy. And what we're doing is strengthening that intention. Because intention is one of the most important aspects of your of your psyche in Buddhism. It's like a seed that you want to water and develop and strengthen your feelings when you have a lot of warmth and all that. That's much more like the weather. intention is something much deeper and much more One last thing and more, more support for

myself for protection.

Can you speak

could do it in a variety of ways. It could do it very directly for some lucky people, where you just kind of developing that loving kindness it grows and grows some feeling of warmth, or some feeling of love or kindness or tenderness and just kind of feel like there's a radiance that grows and grows and grows and from the inside, just dissolve The cross. That's one possibility, you know, we lovely, it could be that way all the time. Other times what happens is that as a person tries to develop loving kindness, they become more and more acutely aware of how they're holding themselves protected, how isolated they feel alone, they feel, and they feel the pain of that person's only protected because there's some pain inside. And so you feel that pain, and you might have to your heart might have to break before you can actually discover that capacity and drop the protectiveness and you might need to cry for a while, you might need to somehow let yourself open up to depths of difficult emotions. That feeling rejected is never allowed you to open up. So that's another route that it takes. Sometimes it works by as you do loving kindness practice person becomes aware of anger or resistance or something is going on there. Susan Become aware of it. They let go of that loving kindness practice. And they switch to mindfulness practice. And they practice mindfulness on those feelings, how to work through the little victories and things like that. Spend more time with babies.

It's, it's a very worthwhile thing to do in human life is to work through and try to lower the barriers or barriers that we carry with us. It's really worthwhile to spend one's life trying to do that. So thank you.