

2006-04-10 Loving Kindness

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SPEAKERS

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So in my 30 years or so, actually more of 30 more than 30 years now, doing Buddhist practice, meditation practice. One of the things I can say is that my anytime that I thought that this is what the Buddhist life was all about, I finally got it. That would change. And I go through another phase. And there's all these different phases to the practice over the years, and I've talked to people, a lot of people in the practice and they say the same thing that they did say that Buddhist practice is one thing that says To kind of diminish or narrow at all, much too quickly. We go through phases and different things that emphasize different times and different things seems really the essential thing, an exchange and something else seems essential. So that's a kind of a preface to the topic for today, which is loving kindness. And so as I talk about loving kindness, I hope you don't think that, Oh, I'm not that way or this is not for me or doesn't relate to me or something like that. But rather that maybe be open to the idea that as you go through a lifetime of engaging in your life and doing something spiritual practice, that experience of love Well, maybe at some point, become an important element of it. And maybe not today or tomorrow or next year but at some point might be a phase where love becomes very important. And so for me, there are phases in my practice where love loving kindness, kindness, compassion really became very important became strong motivators for me. And there are many different flavors to what I would call love. And sometimes, there were times when the my motivation to do meditation practice into Buddhist practice was very much motivated by kind of like being in love, like falling in love. And the amazing thing about falling in love with the kind of with practice is it's kind of like love without an object. So that's kind of strange usually think there's an object for the love. But many of the feelings that the person can have and falling in love would also happen with the Dharma with the practice, experiences of practice are the engagement of practice. And I found that I found that there are times when the Buddhist practice seems relatively dry, emotionally dry, and times when it's emotionally quite rich. And I don't have this idea that has to be one way one way is better than the other. But certainly the times when it's been emotionally rich has been very important part time basis, and I've gone through and it's hard to imagine that over some period of time of practicing Buddhism, that there won't be times when they emotional life becomes quite rich quite strong. And in particular

the emotional life around love and love is something that many people desire. And there's a lot of money to be made then people's desire for love. And of course, lots of lots of said about it. And it's also been said that there are different kinds of love. And there are remitters romantic love. And there's the love of friends. There's spiritual love to tonic love, different kinds of love. In Buddhism, there are four primary forms of healthy love that are championed. And these four kinds of love are called met. Karuna, mudita and Rebecca. Those are the Pali words and the English usually translated as loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. So, four kinds of love. And in the particular tradition that IMC is part of the Theravada tradition, the first one, loving kindness is considered to be the foundation for the other three. So, in other Buddhist traditions, sometimes they put primary emphasis on compassion. And sometimes compassion is seen as the foundation for the other three. But in our tradition, I don't know if it matters which one is asked should be the foundation because I don't think you can go wrong either way. But when our tradition of loving kindness is the foundation, and the idea that loving kindness is that loving kindness is basic good Will that is expressed in wanting someone some being to be happy. So as a goodwill we want you have goodwill for someone made that the person to be happy made that person succeed and that person be safe, healthy, just, you know, be the person continue to be well or something. And sometimes that's seen as kind of being an open heartedness, being open hearted, or kind hearted. And when that kind hardness, encounter someone that's suffering, then that kind of hardness morphs a little bit and takes the form of compassion and compassion is when is the desire the motivation to want that person to be free of their suffering. So it's a particular flavor of goodwill. When we encounter suffering, when the basic goodwill encounter someone who is experiencing A lot of joy, a lot of success and it's been really wonderful to happen to them. Then that basic goodwill takes the form of appreciative joy or sympathetic joy. And you feel delighted. Wow, that's great. And then, the fourth one equanimity is for many people, the strangest one to equate with love. Because equanimity in the popular mind sometimes can be seen as being kind of being emotionally flat or aloof or balanced or even situated, whereas the emotion there. And in order to kind of illustrate, try to illustrate the kind of love that equanimity might be, is sometimes referred to as grandmotherly love. And so it's the kind of mind state that the grandmother has towards the children, the grandchildren. That's sometimes very different than the parents. Whereas the parents, especially new parents, can fret over every possible meaning and every possible spill and scrape so consequential in all little details, whereas the grandmother has raised children has seen it all before. And so if the child says to the parent, I hate you, the grandmother, you know, they know that four year old say that proudly. And they also know that it's also possible that 10 minutes later, they'll ask, will you marry me? And, and so there's a certain kind of, you know, you see it in perspective. And so you're not caught by it. Worse first time parents the first time they hear me the kids say, I hate you. It's like, oh, should I get a psychologist? Yeah, this is really terrible. Run around. So if that's the best example, but illustration, but the idea being that the grandmother seen it all and it's much more kind of balanced around some of these crisis's that might happen and so there's no there's love there and the grandmother, but does love is more balanced. And even so, for four forms of love, and when I came to do Buddhist practice I started I had no interest in equating or love with the practice. And I had no idea that it occurred to me that there should be love was part of the prac package. I thought it was about enlightenment and wisdom, important things like

that. And, and kind of creeping in through the back door of my psyche, my mind, there crept into, I was kind of focusing on enlightenment, wisdom creeping in and kind of almost unbeknownst to me, was I was being changed by the practice, and some of the important changes was that I wasn't Getting enlightened. I was getting compassion. I was getting compassionate, that slowly my capacity for compassion, and their sense of compassion became something that was really beautiful. And something that I really came to cherish and love. You know, the capacity to me, it's kind of next thing compassion because you're also feeling suffering in the world. But also, it's actually also something quite beautiful. And I don't know if I told that to you here last week or some point recently, but there's a very interesting study, or discovery they've made about compassion. And that is that when there's healthy, compassionate, meaning when there's compassion that doesn't get colored by anxiety, or anger or something, when that when the compassion is clean, and simple, that it seems that compassion releases chemical in our system called oxytocin. And oxytocin has number of functions, but one of the functions it does it creates a sense of well being. And so you know, when there's compassion is clean, it does feel kind of rightness or feeling of wholeness or something feeling a sense of goodness, well being in the person feels compassion. So it's no surprise, then that the Dalai Lama would say that if you want to be happy, the route to happiness is cultivate your compassion. be concerned about the welfare of others. And for some of us, it's counterintuitive because we think that, you know, my happiness is about me, right? So I got to get in there to me and fix me and change me or get the world to be aligned itself with me. Because, you know, it's reasonable to be happy. And so and happiness happens to me. So it's all about me. And then we're told, actually, if you want to be happy, maybe you have to, in some ways, loosen the focus on me, and put some serious focus on others, and the kind of focus that somehow or other evokes compassion. And if you do that, then it seems like it's mechanistic, mechanistically reductionistic, to say, Well, in that case, if you do that, oxytocin will flow. You know, we don't do it just for that, right. It's interesting. And then it's interesting that, you know, one of the functions of oxytocin is that it's supposed to stimulate or stimulates labor when women are pregnant. And one of the things that inhibits oxytocin is a drug And so if you get afraid, and adrenaline flows, then that inhibits the oxytocin. Now it said that this was really helpful when you're, you know, out there on the savannahs of Africa giving birth, and the lion comes along, because then the adrenaline kind of stops labor. And you get out of there, you can run. So it was a wonderful kind of dynamic there. But I wonder how many of us can experience you know, clean, compassion, compassion, sudden mixed up with fear, anxiety or anger, something. So I kind of like this biological idea fact. Because, to me, it's kind of indication that compassion is kind of hardwired into us. So that's something that's foreign to us and you don't have to kind of Go towards great spiritual, metaphysical beliefs to kind of justify compassion. It's kind of like somehow in our physiology, there that the sense of feeling connected to others feeling some concern for others and evoking some kind of a kind of love that I'm calling compassion. Can you hear me okay? working? My voice is a little bit of a cold. It's one of things that happens when you have kids. And they speak louder. Go dry. have compassion for me. So that's one of the things that happened to me as I practice was that I became more and more compassionate. And that was a surprise. And I did notice that it made me feel a certain kind of way feel better. And I didn't think about the feeling better much but I noticed that and then As I continued my practice, I remember original practice was in the Zen tradition. And back when I practice

in, in America, and in Japan, there was never any discussion about love. And nothing about loving kindness. In fact, if someone brought up to me, I would have said that just sentimental. And when I eventually I first heard about the Buddhist practice of developing loving kindness, or developing compassion, my idea was, that's artificial. You know, actually kind of, you know, do this practice to make you feel some kind of loving kindness or love. I mean, that seems, you know, love shouldn't be fabricated. So, it's kind of sentimental, you know, Zen students don't get sentimental right. So, I just, you know, right to the heart of the matter, cut through everything. Sword of wisdom, you know, and, and the sticky sticky gooey stuff of love You know, that's, you know, Just get in the way of the story. So then when I encountered this tradition that we passed nutrition Theravada tradition, and some of the teachers started trying to teach me loving kindness. I did the thing that some people do sometimes was I just tune them out. You know, it's not for me if somebody's interested in that. And continued my merry way with doing what I was doing. And then what happens what happened to me I think what can happen is that the mindfulness practice that we do here is also a tenderizing practice. It kind of softens the crusts on the heart, or say a different way. that some of the ways in which we keep ourselves defended or afraid or blocked or at hatched or preoccupied or caught up in ourselves and all kinds of things that always weighs in that that are standing like crushed or barriers towards the hearts being open to the heartbreak sensitive of the heartbreak flowing, all those attachments to get addressed, get looked at gets softened to get let go of. And so the practice mindful is kind of tenderizes the heart eventually eventually the crusts fall apart, fall off, and then you find yourself with this tender heart. And some people don't want to have a tender heart, because you have a tender heart. What can happen you don't know. You can have a broken heart. They can hurt. And I know people who just don't want to get close to that because it's gonna hurt too much. So I love this story from the Jewish tradition of the schooling like Shiva. Where they had a plaque on the wall that said, in this school, we placed the teachings on your hearts. So, some student then asked at some point, why does it say you put the teachings on our hearts? Why don't you put it in our hearts. And the teacher said, Oh, only God can put it in your hearts. We put it on your hearts. So when your heart breaks the teachings fall in. So, dare I say there are advantages to having a broken hearts. There are often the pain and the way we relate to the pain doesn't allow us to kind of see how the teachings gain control in the learning there are that there's actually maybe even more tender place. To be touched. So at some point as I practice this tenderness just started growing feeling of warmth for me warm sensitivity in the chest area, feeling of wholeness. And you know what i have what I call love, kindness. And I was taken aback when I was really surprised. Where'd that come from insensitive. And this is not a fair characterization of them. This is just my you know, silly, naive, uninformed projection being any little bit of a machos then students. So so then when the teacher started talking about loving kindness, then I had a ready record. Wow, it's right here. I feel it. That's what they're talking about this thing here. And when I felt that here, then the practice of loving kindness they were teaching made a lot of sense to me. And the practice of the practice entails, you actually do loving kindness as a practice is you think of some person that can be yourself, or it can be anybody else. Do you think of someone for whom you want to have goodwill for we have goodwill for and you think about what your wishes are for that person that expressed that goodwill? Usually, we say the intention you have for them. And so hopefully your goodwill for people especially think about it takes a form of wishing something for them. May they

made it may they be happy? May they be well, maybe they healthy, maybe they peaceful maybe these, you know, really great, something maybe something so you consider what your wishes might be for that person. And then, in a way that some people like into prayer, they use the word prayer occasionally for this practice, though, some people cringe at the word Buddhists do. The practice usually involves then saying, repetitively a few phrases that express that wish you have for that person. And usually, you can use no more than four phrases. So you kind of, it's kind of repetitive, you do the same thing over and over again. And repetition allows you to kind of massage and work that intention and let it somehow begin working inside of you. In order for it to work inside of you, you have to be connected to the sense of that person. The presence of that person, somehow the image Some people like to visualize the person and you need to kind of be connected to your wish for that person, your intention for that person. And then those phrases so those three elements are the key elements loving kindness practice. So some way of holding the sense of the person in your mind, or your heart center at the same time of holding your wishes for that person. And then kind of in your mind, saying those phrases that express that give voice give expression to those wishes. And occasionally, there'll be a fourth element. And as they say, they'll be actually feelings of warmth, their feelings, emotions of goodwill and love that come with it, but they're not required to have the feelings. And then taking those three or those four elements together, and kind of just kind of keep keep that and keep coming back to it and come back to it. Don't let the mind wander off the mind will wander off, but you keep coming back and let that be the focal point of the mind. And, and it's a kind of a concentration practice, we have to learn to keep the mind centered and eventually the mind learns to be pretty Hasn't focused stabilize them doing that. And then as you get stabilized there is a mic is keep doing it, then there's a chance sometimes that the tenderness or the heart or the love of the heart, or the goodwill of the heart can grow and become stronger, more focused, and more present for you. Were a resource for you and your life. And sometimes in meditation, they can get quite beautiful, quite strong, when that's the primary concern of your mind is goodwill. You have worried about your taxes, you know, within a few more days, kind of do it. This and that. They're not concerned about what you're gonna have at dinner, who yelled at you at work or, you know, all these kinds of concerns we might have, who likes you Who doesn't like you and what kinds of things but all the ways in which we mind gets fragmented and caught up in the traumas of life. They can fall away and we get absorbed in this state in this practice. goodwill, in the same way that you get absorbed in reading a really good book. And that is really great. I mean, that's not a bad thing became absorbed and goodwill. Can you imagine? Like a lot of worst things you can do. So it's really a beautiful thing. And you're the you're even though you're having goodwill for others, you're one of the primary beneficiaries of that, that somehow it it kind of reorganizes a little bit, the psyche and your priorities and how you understand yourself. So it's very common in our tradition, to recommend loving kindness practice to people who have a lot of personal struggle. So for example, some people have a lot of self loathing. I feel very unworthy. insecure about themselves. In sometimes loving kindness practice is a wonderful medicine for them, sometimes doing mindfulness practice, and they see what they're doing. They see their self loathing, then they have more reason to love themselves more. This is terrible. I'm doing this. So sometimes mindfulness is actually counterindicated for certain kinds of conditions. And with loving kindness, we learn to cultivate some kindness towards yourself, is a wonderful antidote to hating yourself. And so it takes a while to

get the hang of it, but it's a wonderful medicine. Or sometimes it's a medicine for fear. There's a lot of fear, to cultivate this loving kindness. And it's said in the tradition, that cultivating loving kindness this way, is a protection for you. It protects you. And I think in the modern spiritual Buddha circles, people don't think of Buddhist practice. For the purpose of protection, though, I think in ancient India, it was a big concern for people to not be protected from the difficulties of life, the struggles of life. And they said that loving kindness will protect you creates a kind of a field. So how does that work? Is it really a protection? And I think, you know, it's kind of straightforward that if you encounter the world with kindness, and warmth, the world will tend to treat you better. There's no guarantee, but it tends to make you better. And there's been a lot of stories and a lot of situations where I've entered where people have entered difficult tense relationships and it wasn't even antagonistic relationships. And rather than kind of entering a situation guarded, you know, ready to run ready to attack or do something entered with some goodwill for the person and a disarm the person can come with a gift and There's a boy in my son's second grade class, who's now starting to be some of the other kids are being kind of mean to him. And now he's physically a little bit awkward. Some of the girls are kind of rubbing in him a little bit. And so what the mother has done is she started to invite these kids are mean to her son over for playdates. And the idea is that they can play together and get to know each other, they'll have a different kind of relationship. So it's actually kind of opening with some goodwill with a situation rather than meeting him in antagonism or, or defense or you know, talking to the principal and it has to do something. So, it's a kind of, it's a kind of, it's a changes the whole ecology of the social relationships that can come with goodwill and generosity. Another reason why loving kindness is said to be a protection is, I don't know, when we're saying next day's true, but this is a part of traditional Buddhist psychology. It says blue psychology says that loving kindness. goodwill is a healthy state of mind to have. And whenever you have a healthy state of mind, the mind will always as a partner to that healthy state of mind will always be mindful, to always be mindful as part of that. In other words, you always be paying attention. So, of course now this means that blind love doesn't work, right? People head over heels in love with someone and, you know, you wake up the next morning and say Who is that? That's not clear. See? Right. But the loving kindness, this kindness of goodwill of loving kindness, which is considered quite healthy, comes together with mindfulness with clear seeing. And when you see clearly, you're protected, you're more likely to know what to do in a situation, how to take care of yourself. So then after I discovered this, by accident, you know, this loving kindness thing. Then I started getting into doing the practice of it. And then eventually, I got to the point where when I didn't feel the goodwill, I thought, you know, this is a great practice. I think I'll try it. And it didn't feel artificial anymore. didn't feel like I was making something up that shouldn't be there. But it felt like Actually, it's something that's, that's maybe in a sense, always they're available, but sometimes I have to kind of Warm the engine and so to make it part of my life again so loving kindness, goodwill, different ways of translating the word metta loving kindness, goodwill. Another way of translating is friendliness. Let me first say it's related to being friendly. And then when it's done as a meditation practice, then we're supposed to start with a person for whom it's easiest to do a towards. Now, the Buddha, or these ancient Indian Buddhist teachers, they had never been to America. So and apparently never occurred to them. That It can be difficult to do to oneself. So in the ancient texts, they say start with yourself. And then from yourself, then go to the next person, next most easiest because

assumption is yourself as the easiest. And then you go to the next most easiest to kind of, kind of you kind of, you know, doesn't have to be every single person, but you kind of go to categories. And the idea is that you start where it's easiest. And then you're trying to do is to universalize that goodwill universalize that love. So it's not just limited to you, not just limited to your family, not just limited to the people, you know, your friends. Anybody you've been spreading it out into the wider and wider realms of humanity and being you know, beings in the world. So, you know, it's one thing to, you know, have goodwill towards a better factor, or to some relatives or some friend or someone. But what about having the same level of goodwill? to someone who you don't really know, you've seen? You know, sometimes you see it the clerk in the store, a mail carrier or some someone who you kind of see occasionally but you'd have no contact with? What is it to actually have a strong sense of goodwill for that person, like you would have for a good friend. So you're asking this practice to start doing that. And that raises raises a lot of questions for people. One of the questions being, why should I? Why should I do for the mail carrier? And is it safe to do a mail carrier? Because you know, then the mail carrier is gonna want to, you know, come in for tea. You know, if I smile or something, or ask How are you? How are you or something, you know, it's not safe. Or, you know, why should I do people who I don't care about, you know, what's that about? So those are things and then we grapple with these kinds of issues. And the hope in the traditional instruction way is we then come overcome those, those those obstacles, and actually begin to develop a very strong sense of goodwill to people who are called neutral in our lives. And then, if you want to take the practice further or further instructions, and then you go and start doing it with people who have a difficult time with so first you maybe do have to use a teeny bit difficult time with just kind of kind of exercise that muscle, can you have goodwill for someone who irritates you? And then you have to ask yourself, why should I? That person doesn't deserve it? And all kinds of issues come up and exploring those issues and grappling with them as part of the process? What is it you know, you know, what is it to see another human being? What is it what isn't it what is a human being? And how do we look at human beings and how what can we see in human beings? Do we see them through the filter of our preferences, our likes and dislikes? Do you see them through the filter of what they can do for us? was both good and bad? Do you see them through the filter of filter of, you know, some particular group that we're a part of, and they're not part of our party or something? Or can we see some kind of basic humanity? In anybody? That basic humanity, anybody where we would wish to wish to have some goodwill toward them? We want them well, we want them to be happy, even someone who has made us angry or something. So it becomes a very challenging practice. At some point when you if you take it that far to begin exploring how can I do this for difficult people? And in fact, the traditional word for this is not difficult people, but his enemies. So the Dalai Lama has this expression. Remember, but he says so. What was he saying? Forget so how is it to have love or kindness or goodwill towards people who even, maybe even want to harm you? So there's beautiful story it's told of a Buddhist monk, Tibetan Buddhist monk who was put in prison for the Chinese. It's been many years there. And then at some point, it was released or escaped and made his way to Dharamsala, India, and he was asked about his experience and he said, You know, he was he was very difficult. And what was the only difficult we ever in real danger? I said, Oh, yeah. When they were torturing me, I was in danger of losing my compassion for the tortures. Isn't that amazing? Why would someone say that? There was a man then taken hostage in

Lebanon many years ago, 20 years ago, Brian Keenan, I think, who was asked about, you know, Aren't you angry at the people who took you? Don't you want virgin vengeance? He said no. Because if I have resentment and anger and vengeance against them, and I'm harming myself, and I don't want to harm myself, I want to add to the harm has already been there. So we start talking about, you know, bringing love and kindness to the enemies. It's a pretty tall order. And it can start entering into the realm of Oh, that's for this, you know, the great spiritual geniuses of the ages. And not for You know? But what is it to begin stretching a little bit into that realm as it maybe it's possible for me to stretch myself expand myself and begin moving a little bit net direction as a possibility without stretching ourselves open to some new possibility. You know, I don't know if there's a spiritual practice, the spiritual life needs to do something needs to be some challenge. And what better place to challenge ourselves then, in cultivating love, and kindness. So, as I think many of you know, the Dalai Lama is often a reference for many things and Buddhist has said publicly many times that his religion is kindness. Rather than saying his religion is Buddhism, he says, my religion is kindness. Or the famous story of godless Huxley, who was kind of studied all these different religions took a lot of This signatory drugs and suffix devices, exploration in the spiritual realms, wrote about it was asked at the end of life, you know what he had learned from all this what was important after all this study? He said something like, I still embarrassing to say that, say say this, he said, but just try and be kinder. Just be kinder. Is that good enough? It's recognized in the tradition that teaches loving kindness, practice, that sometimes doing it, you're not going to feel kind but instead you're gonna it's going to evoke anger. And that's considered to be in a certain kind of funny way kind of healthy, because as the crust of the heart fall away What's buried in there has a chance to show itself as it needs to show itself. And if anger is buried in there resentment or grief or something, it needs to have its time to come out and be shown. So rather than being distressed when something like that happens, and doing the practice, the instructions are to be actually in certain kind of way inviting them it is appropriate, because we're trying to revisit a cleansing process is going on. So it's interesting principle, that if you want to be happy, don't focus on yourself. But somehow, in particular ways focus on other people. Not what they can do for you. But rather than what you can do for them, or your love for them, your kindness to them. And the last thing I'll say about the Buddhist notion of loving kindness, this metta Is that it's usually described as a kind of love, that doesn't require anything in return doesn't require the person to love you in return. And that's actually a very important quality of it. Because the kind of love that needs something in return is not the same thing as loving kindness not sending as meta. And so the kind of, you know, the kind of love that's going to generate happiness and well being is the kind of love that actually doesn't want anything from the other person. And that itself is a whole challenge. What's that about? And why should I want that and? And is that fair? That's right. So can it raises all kinds of issues? And it's really well worth working through those issues. So I have no idea what this talk on loving kindness has done for you today. But if you you know, it might actually be really good. If some of you didn't like the talk. If you didn't like it for the right reasons, of course, but you were upset by or disturbed by it or something. You're kind of like me, my hero is in my Zen time, you know, like, What's this? It's artificial, didn't seem right. There's all kinds of issues directed, kind of you have all these protests in your mind about it. Because I was very protests might be the place where there's some wisdom can grow. It's an exploration. So I'm sorry I talked so much. And, and it's my intention to give

the next three or four so Monday evenings, to talking about these four states of love. loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Thank you.