

Loving Kindness (2 of 4)

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Sometimes our intentions are called seeds, and those seeds are nourished and sprout and grow into things when they're acted on, spoken of, somehow expressed in body, speech, or mind. And what we water. The seeds we water affect who we become, you know, much of our experience. And if we water unhealthy intentions, then it tends to produce a disease—not necessarily physical illness, but it tends to create unhealthy states of mind. These unhealthy states become stronger and stronger and become our dispositions, how we're disposed to act, respond, live in the world. And if we act on, act or speak, or in some way live those intentions which are healthy, that tends to produce mental health, or tends to create a healthy disposition to be disposed to act in healthy ways in the world, speak in healthy ways, relate to others in healthy ways.

And so starting last week, I started a series of talks this month on one of the most healthy intentions a person can have, and that is loving kindness. And *mettā* or loving kindness, goodwill, is an intention that is very popular in Buddhism among Buddhist practitioners to act on, to feed, to nourish. And it's been said that in some Buddhist countries, like in Sri Lanka, loving kindness meditation is the most popular form of meditation among Buddhists, much more than following the breath or any other kind of meditation. It's loving kindness practice. And certainly you find many people in Asia who know, have memorized the loving kindness chant, or know the very basics of loving kindness.

Or even if they don't meditate with loving kindness, they're thinking about it or express it somehow in the course of their daily life. Loving kindness, in our particular Buddhist tradition, is considered to be one of the real rooted or foundational attitudes towards life, to others, to ourselves, that is to be cultivated and developed. It's also one of the primary reference points for when we come to a juncture and have to make a decision about something—about

what we're going to say to someone, a difficult conversation perhaps, or act in certain ways, and we're not sure. We're not sure what the wise thing is, what the wise way of acting is. Loving kindness is offered as one of the reference points to help you decide. Is it kind? Does it express goodwill in what you're about to do?

And if it doesn't, watch out in some way or other. If it doesn't express your goodwill, watch out. And I guess the opposite of goodwill is ill will. And it's so easy, I think, to have ill will. When I was coming here this evening, I thought about that. You know, how easy it is to have ill will.

And I say I surprised myself because here was a little thought in my mind that wasn't mine, that went something like—not quite a thought, but it was something of the nature of how easy it is because they deserve it, those people. And in fact, loving kindness practice is meant to be the medicine that cures ill will. And sometimes it's taught in Buddhism: if you have a lot of anger and animosity, to cultivate actively, cultivate the seed, nourish the seed of goodwill, of loving kindness towards others. And in fact, if you read some of the classic manuals or texts, the ancient Buddhist texts about loving kindness practice, there is certainly one in this one book that is an ancient book, a fifteen hundred year old book of meditation instruction. It's a big book, and now a lot of instruction has a big fat chapter on loving kindness, and most of the chapter is taken up with how to overcome ill will.

Ill will, when it operates, is considered to be the thing to oppose or destroy or at least our tendency or our motivation to have goodwill, loving kindness. And so it's very important to overcome it. And so classically, Buddhists are often working on this, looking at their ill will, looking at their anger, their hostility, and learning to practise with it. And in some ways, I think it's very realistic that this big instruction on loving kindness focuses so much on anger and ill will. It means, in my mind at least, as I interpret that, that we're not meant to be kind idealistically, you know, or pretend and sugarcoat things and pretend all you can be kind and ignore the fact that I'm, you know, really pissed. We're meant to really, at least, be very realistic and very honest about what we're feeling, what's going on.

And then, in honesty, if we're angry, then to delve into it, look into it more deeply. And maybe more important, most important, to question it. Is it really to your best interest and the best interests of others for you to kind of dwell in that anger and ill will state? And one of the classic reflections around this is the reflection of who's really being harmed when you have hostility, when you have anger. And the answer, of course, the tradition wants to give is, it's yourself. So the tradition says, Buddha says, Sohi, like something like very vaguely, something like when you are angry at someone, you're doing your enemy a favor.

You're causing harm to yourself that your enemy could never do on her own, his own. Because the enemy is outside of you, you know, and they can wave and do all kinds of things, you know, insult you, but to get it into your mind, into your heart, and turn it and poison it with ill will and anger and hostility—that's really gotten deep into you. And so you're doing your—you now, that's what your enemy wants, to harm you. And now you've done it for yourself. And there was one of the—Brian Keenan, his name—one of the hostages. Back in the nineteen eighties, there was an English journalist, I think, who was kidnapped in Lebanon and was held hostage for many years.

And now, when he was finally released after being held for five, seven years, he was asked, Did you have any resentment towards your captors? And he said something like, No, I never had any resentment towards them, because then they really would have harmed me. That's a pretty neat statement. So his cultivation of love and kindness—it is, it's easy to be excessively and ugly sweet about it. Long before I knew about Buddhism, Buddhist practice at least, when I was a freshman in college, somehow I decided I was going to be really nice one day, really nice. I don't know what got into my head, and rather be really nice.

And I remember running into this woman, another freshman, on the steps of the library, and I was really nice to her, and she left, and I can let you leave holding your nose or something, you know? So I stopped trying to be so nice that way at least. So to look honestly at our anger, and not to overlook it, not to pretend it's not there, but be realistic about it. And in being really realistic about it, one of the functions of loving kindness practice is to help purify us, heal us of that. And the question is, how can we do that in a healthy way as opposed to just kind of paper it over?

It's interesting that some people who speak about, teach about loving kindness, will talk about it as being selfless love. And certainly here in the West, there is a huge ideal around selfless love, that somehow that's love, that you're not in the equation, not anything that—now I suppose it means that there's nothing in it for you. The selfless about it, just offering the selfless love. And in some ways, that's nice, because oftentimes what we call love in the West is, from a Buddhist perspective, entangled with a lot of other things besides love. So there might be love and kindness, which might be genuine, but then it's mixed up with maybe lust.

One of the problems in Buddhist monastic and Tassajara, where I was for three years—a Buddhist monastery of men and women—and people sit there for long periods of time, and so in deep meditation and retreat, and in that kind of context, you know, the deep and less ponderous national wilderness far from, you know, television and news, and you know, life as

normally lived, very still, very peaceful place, and so much kind of emptiness. The heart just can become so open, and in that openness where everyone feels so open—guess what? It's so easy to fall in love. It's so easy to have these warm, tender feelings for other people. And one of the problems in the monastery is that they have warmth and tenderness and appreciation in a very pure way, which is rather unfamiliar for a lot of people, maybe outside of their family, or since, you know, outside their family.

And so it's often then confused with sexual desire, or sexual desire kind of entangled with it. And sometimes it becomes a disaster, the thing gets too mixed together in that kind of context. Sometimes it works out, and you know, it's so easy to have love entangled with a lot of things. It can be entangled with desire. Certainly it's more than just sexual desire. There can be all kinds of desires that are trying to fulfill, trying to fulfill ourselves, trying to get something—comfort, safety, many things—through the relationship.

Sometimes love is confused or mixed up with hope. There's hope, I think something wonderful can happen here, and that excitement or that aspiration or that is, you know, somehow I feel so good, and it's mixed up with a feeling of love or tenderness or care. So a part of the task of loving kindness practice is to help us tease apart all the other things that might be there together with the love or the goodwill. So certainly so we don't make big mistakes, but we need to tease it apart so we can be there in a pure way. And now some people recognize that certain kinds of love are filled with attachment and clinging, and then they want us to throw it all out. Forget that, I'm not at any of that.

And that's sometimes a pity because sometimes it's throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Sometimes the fact that there might be some lust doesn't mean that—it's unlike a composite, different emotions operating together. In fact, there's lust. That doesn't mean that there isn't also some really beautiful tenderness and tender kindness and goodwill that's there as well. So how do we tease those apart? How can we drop the attachment, the clinging to lust, and let the purity be there by itself?

So I get a bit sidetracked with the idea that this is some pure, selfless idea of love. Some people talk about *mettā*, Buddhist loving kindness, as being selfless, but I think it might give the wrong impression. It's selfless in that it's loving someone else. It's having goodwill for someone else where the love is expressed in wanting that other person to be happy. The love, as is felt or expressed, is in wanting that other—having a desire for the other person. Is that the right way of saying it? Desire, not desire. How do I say it? Carefully here, not desire for the person, but desire that the other person—for the other person's sake. That's right, that the other person, you know, be happy. Not that you be happy by getting into good relationship

with a person, but that you are hoping, you're wishing for happiness for that person.

That in Buddhism is a pure expression of this goodwill. That's called *mettā*. And so, in that sense, it's selfless in that you're concerned about—you don't, you are not looking for love in return. It's not an exchange from that person. You know, it may be sometimes nice to feel back, friendship back, or love back. But that's not the point. That's what the loving kindness is. In fact, if there is an expectation or desire for an exchange, for receiving something back from the person, that's a different motivation, different attitude or feeling than loving kindness, this *mettā*.

And so one of the beautiful things I've seen, if you go back and read about people and the history of Buddhism who are recorded as exemplars of loving kindness—and there are such people—you can find those people around who specialized in developing, cultivating loving kindness, and then there can be an aura or field of this loving kindness around them. It's really something to be in their presence, to feel that someone has spent ten, twenty, thirty years cultivating this particular state, and they are described, or they talk about having a boundless love for people, but they're never described as wanting to be loved. And I think that for many people, the idea of loving love is mixed up with wanting to be loved. And from a Buddhist perspective, and this is—I offer you a challenge, go home and talk to your friends about this challenge. From a Buddhist perspective, the human heart has a need to be loved, but it does not have a need to be loved unless you're a child. I think children need it, and children didn't get it as children, then it gets almost confusing when you get to be an adult.

But I think a person who grows up in a healthy, normal way, that the spiritually mature person doesn't need to be loved. In a sense, needs to love. That's the natural expression there, isn't that interesting? That principle should be there. And then there might be protests, "Well, that's a poor life. That's kind of, wait a minute, no one's going to love me. Wait a minute, that's going to get lonely." You know, kind of dry, but it need not be dry. Because the idea is, as you cultivate this very strong disposition that fills you so much that it just, you know, there's no space to want to be loved, you don't feel empty. You don't feel like a lack because you feel so full of this kind of feeling, this attitude, this disposition.

And it's really an amazing thing to feel, almost like welling up. And welling is a good expression, like a deep current that wells up from the deep ocean, and it comes up, is deep welling up inside that kind of fills your chin, your chest, or your torso, into your arms, everywhere, and just feels like there's a flow of *mettā*, of loving kindness. Sometimes without even having a person as an object. Sometimes it's called objectless love. Just love a day. Love is flowing there. So beautiful. And I liken it a little bit to if you're cold, you might go look for a heater.

But if you're the heater, you don't need any other heaters. So if you develop this very powerful glow, this warmth, this very strong warmth, you don't need to go and find someone else's warmth to warm you up. You're warm.

So in that sense, loving kindness is selfless. Where you're really concerned about the other person's welfare or someone's welfare and wanting them to be happy. It's a beautiful thing to want to be happy. When I can feel it in a pure, beautiful way, it's almost like—and the closest I can describe to you—it's almost like I have this inner sense, the inner feeling that I have a twinkle in my eye and a nice, you know what? I can feel it for someone, or be good if I can be happy. I like that. That's really great. What a neat thing. I wish that for that person.

And in classic Buddhism, I don't think it gives—it does give the wrong impression to call it selfless, because you don't want anything from the other person. But Buddhism also emphasizes the benefits you get from having that kind of love, and it's OK to want those benefits for yourself. Buddhism does not make a very strong—it doesn't make that kind of strong, hard and fast duality between self and others that leads sometimes to a motivation or this idea you're supposed to be altruistic, you know, you don't count. I don't think it counts just to help other people. You do count. I wanted to express one of the expressions of loving kindness, of *mettā*, is to have goodwill towards yourself. You're important too, to want you yourself to be happy.

And it turns out that having all this desire for other people's happiness, it's beautiful. Love for others is one of the ways of feeling happy yourself. Not because, "Oh, you're such a good person. You're so great. Because you're so loving." Not because you don't care what other people think about you in that way. But because just the nature of that kind of purity of heart is happy-producing from within, and it's not considered selfish to pursue the benefits of loving kindness for yourself. That's not as not-self. It's not selfish to want the benefits of loving kindness for yourself.

And it seems a little bit odd, the juxtaposition—wanting this kind of pure love, well-being for other people, and at the same time to want to have some of the benefits of loving kindness for yourself. But I don't think in classic Buddhism that's a paradox, it's not. Those two things can coexist. So I wanted to read to you the seven benefits—not now, the eleven benefits, the eleven benefits of loving kindness. And people who do loving kindness meditation like that as a regular practice are encouraged to memorize these eleven. It's just kind of a habit there, and helps you feel kind of happy or delighted about the possibility of what you're doing.

So these are the eleven benefits that can be expected. Now you have to do it. You have to practise it well, you know, really get into it. You can't just kind of, like, do a little bit and then

expect all these like that. But you have to—loving kindness has to become one's foundation. It has to be steadied, consolidated. That's you, not just kind of casual.

- First, one sleeps happily.
- One wakes happily.
- Isn't that nice? Waking up happy.
- One has no bad dreams.
- One is loved by others even though we don't want it—hahahahaha.
- One is loved by non-humans, so animals.
- In Buddhism, one is guarded by devas, by the gods. It's nice, like guardian angels.
- And here it gets a little more exciting or more: fire, poison, or sword won't touch one.
- One's mind becomes concentrated quickly.
- One's complexion becomes clear.
- Then one dies with a mind free from confusion.
- If no higher attainment is reached, one is reborn in the Brahmā realms, up there with the Brahmā gods, a certain realm in the heavenly realms where the experience of people born in these particular mythological realms is their entire kind of subjective experience is that of loving kindness, this kind of warmth, love, tenderness, goodwill of loving kindness.

The other benefits of loving kindness is loving kindness practice is often taken, understood to be a protective practice, and down through the centuries many Buddhists will use loving kindness practice to protect themselves in situations where there's danger. And I've used it sometimes that way when there's been an interpersonal danger or something I experienced worried me about my safety. Then I've cultivated loving kindness towards the person, and I don't know. I don't have any way of knowing this for sure. But my impression is that when I've been able to shift, sometimes when I've been able to shift my inner state from fear to goodwill, that the hostility that I'm feeling somehow changes. If a person drops, hostility is lessened in some way.

And so that's one way it protects us. When people feel kindness from us as opposed to fear or hostility from us, then they're more likely to treat us in better ways. It's also said that the animals will do the same thing, and I have known a lot of people who tried that. I know one person who tried it with a dog—got bitten anyway. So be careful, read the fine print. But too, down through centuries, it's been a very common Buddhist practice to cultivate loving kindness for its protective benefits, but also to chant. And there's a number of chants of loving kindness. *Metta Sutta*, the discourse on loving kindness, which I'll read next time, next

Monday, and one of its functions is to memorize and chant it, is supposed to create safety in the seen and the unseen world for oneself.

So is it selfish to be wanting those benefits for yourself? In doing loving kindness, it can be done selfishly. It can be, but it doesn't have to be. And in fact, if you do the loving kindness practice or the loving kindness attitude in its healthy form, you can't do it selfishly. Because selfishness entails clinging, and loving kindness—you can't cling if there is pure loving kindness, so the two can't coexist. If you're able to free yourself of clinging, then the desire for benefits for yourself and the desire for the welfare of others can coexist.

The last benefit of loving kindness practice is that loving kindness practice is also understood to be a liberating practice that leads a person to liberation, and it leads to liberations of two kinds. It leads to a particular form of liberation called the liberation of heart based on loving kindness, or liberation of heart through loving kindness. And this is where the loving kindness practice is not just an intention, but the intention grows to such a strong feeling or field, a dispositional field that becomes so strong, such a glow, such a warmth, such a furnace, that it radiates out from us without any limitations, hesitations, resistance, and without any divisions between the people who you know, any people at all. It goes out to everybody equally. You say, "Well, I'll do it to all my neighbors, but not that one down the street, you know?" Then there's a limitation to it. There's a barrier to it.

So when it goes out and becomes—it's called boundless or without limits. When it's not an easy thing to do, to do that, what's really complete? But when that's really done, that's held in such high esteem in Buddhism that it's called a form of liberation of heart. And you know, that's kind of like the end in the direction of Buddhism is all going to liberation, a beautiful state. And then to go further, one step further from that, and to use that limitless state to turn around and look at the nature of the heart or the mind is a very deep way, because the mind is so purified, so some say, so simplified, so clarified. In that state, there's no conflict, confusion, agitation. It's a very, very simple and clear, clarified state.

And when the mind is, the heart is very clarified, and it's possible to see it very clearly, and we can see into the depth of it, like you see into a pond, and you see right down to the bottom of the pond. Then you know what's there. And when the mind is clarified, the heart is clarified, you can see deep into it. You see deeply what's there. And then it's possible to uproot the mind and attain what's called the unshakeable liberation of mind or of heart. And the unshakeable liberation of mind or heart is the liberation that comes when we've uprooted the tendency—not just the young, the tendency to cling of any kind at all. So you might not even cling, "I'm not clinging today," but the tendency is there, so that tendency is even given

up.

The Buddha wrote, Amirah, he said, Imagine that there is an easily accessed pond of clear, delightful, refreshingly cool water. If a tired, parched and thirsty person, scorched and exhausted by hot weather came across this pond, the water would be used to quench both a person's thirst and hot weather fever. It is the same for a person who becomes a monk and, after learning the Buddha's teachings and discipline, cultivates loving kindness. From this, the person gains inner peace. Because of this, inner peace cultivates what is appropriate for a monastic. So most of us are not going to become monks, monastics. But this is equally true for us, like a deep pond that refreshes us from our thirst. So loving kindness will give us a deep sense of inner peace. The peace that the Buddha was pointing to, that it's possible for all of us, so is a whole series of benefits from doing loving kindness practice.

But it starts with having the intention to wish welfare, well-being, on someone. It can be yourself, or it can be someone else. And primarily, when the practice gets developed, it's primarily for other people. Initially, it can be for oneself, and at some point, it gets shed, like a snake that sheds its skin. And then it can be primarily for other people, for others—not just people, but to other beings. And we start doing it for other beings. It always begins with the beings, the people for whom it's easiest to do.

And some people, when they've looked around for the easiest being to have loving kindness for, I've known people who've chosen their dog because, you know, that was just the one—people are complicated. Or I've known people who've chosen individuals whom they never met. There's a fair number of Buddhists who choose the Dalai Lama because it is so easy with this beautiful smiling face. But the idea is to find someone. Find out who it is in your life and who you have the purest form of this kind of goodwill, desire for their welfare, delight in their welfare, a kind of friend, strong feel, a friend, friendship, friendliness towards this kind of loving kindness for that person. Where it's pure, it's not mixed up with sexuality, sexual desire, not mixed up with other desires, not mixed up with wanting something back from that person, you know.

Sometimes a baby, you know, a baby, you know, baby's not necessarily going to do anything for you, you know. He hardly sees you goggle, and maybe is sleeping, right, but you have—you just feel almost like a natural kind of loving kindness. You want to want the best for the baby. So some people choose babies for that reason. But what I'm trying to say is, I recommend to you, spend some time going through the people you know and find the people who you feel the most pure loving kindness for—it doesn't have to be completely pure. Don't beat yourself up because you can't get to that hundred percent mark. You know, seventy

percent is good. Seventy percent is great. But if all you can get to is twenty percent, it's, you know, even twenty percent is good. It's a lot better than nothing.

So whatever it is, don't worry about how pure it is. But find the person, a person for whom it's purest, strongest, easiest for you to have this delightful wish for their well-being and welfare. And then once you find that person, exercise that wish. It can be exercised through simply kind of thinking about it some more, wishing it, saying the phrases of loving kindness to that person. It could be exercised through imagination, imagining that person being happy. It can be exercised through action. Maybe it's doing something nice for that person, sending them a card, sending them some flowers anonymously, or not, making dinner, inviting them over. I don't know. So find some way, whatever way is appropriate for you, to water that seed of intention that wants that person's welfare and gives you delight, where you feel delight that you want that person's welfare.

Yes, one. I'll repeat it. So interested in it for me. I am very much—yes, I, I, I, I want. It reads here always in Yes, I, ali, only Mateo saying. So two things occur to me. One is that it might be valuable then to look more deeply at what does, what's going on with you, with those fears. There might be some deep attachment, some deep thing going on there. I'm not saying this is you at all, but I know for some people that when it's very strong, their anxiety over such things, it can be a symptom of sometimes unresolved issues for themselves, sometimes unresolved pain or wounds they have from the past. And so maybe there's some way of working through and looking more deeply at what's going on.

Or it's a symptom that you've been watching too much local news, you know? Yet it's a local news thing. Yes, it may be. I don't dare—don't watch the local news, as local news has all those stories about the babies that were kidnapped, right? So national news is—or usually what they do sometimes, and then I don't know. It's a demi-epidemic. And so anyway, to look at some of what's going on, and try to understand and see if there's something there you can work through. That's one part. The other thing is that if you have anxiety that comes up when you do it towards someone, that's not the person that should be your first person. Even though it is easy in some way, the anxiety—find someone else for whom anxiety is not going to happen, and just do that person.

And classically, classic instruction is that the first person you choose after yourself is your benefactor, someone who picks a category, a benefactor, someone who's actually been concerned with your welfare and supported you, and a teacher or someone, mentor in your life, rather than a friend. And because that's kind of supposed to be easier to have this kind of easy, pure concern for their welfare, whereas even with, you know, even really good friends,

there's often a little complication—you know, I love that one so much, but so on. So anyway, my suggestion is to find where it's easiest for this week, and then find some ways to water that seed. And now I'll find many ways to water it, if you like. If it doesn't make you happy to do that, don't do it. So thank you. So thank you.