

# 2011-10-09 Loving Kindness

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kindness, people, friendliness, loving kindness, practice, buddhism, loving, thoughts, mind, friendly, life, buddha, person, thinking, settled, attitude, heightened sensitivity, buddhist, heart, feel

## SPEAKERS

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Morning. Good morning, everyone. And I did say last week that I would continue my series of talks on generosity today. And, and I'm going to put it off for a week. So I hope I didn't disappoint you too much. But what instead I'd like to do is talk about loving kindness. And it has a similarity, number of similarities with generosity. Maybe one of the mentioned is that probably the four most important practices in our Buddhist tradition would be mindfulness, ethics, being ethical, loving kindness, and generosity. So there are other important things as well, but I think that's kind of like the card Little ones. So it's useful to look important to look and consider loving kindness little bit. And, and so what I want to do first is to step back and kind of introduction. I think that people come usually to a place like this to IMC or to Buddhist group or to project any religion at all. In order to benefit from that encounter with the religious tradition they're in. And people are often feeling that their life outside of their outside normal life maybe is not going as well as they'd like it to go. And they see there's possibility of living a better life having a better life somehow. And better life can mean different things for different people. One is it can be mean a life that has a greater sense of purpose or meaning. It can be a life that has a greater sense of self Worth, dignity, that personal value, it can be a life of greater connectedness to other people feeling part of a community. It can be a life that somehow is happier, less suffering feel safer. And, and those can be quite powerful drives for people. And even if people don't necessarily think in those terms, often I think behind what motivates people to come and engage in religious practice are those things. One of the important aspects of Buddhism in the pursuit of meaning purpose, worth self worth, connectedness, safety, peace, is the degree to which it's up to us to do it. We don't Buddhism doesn't generally offer as a or doesn't predominantly offer, the idea that there's some someone's going to take care of you That you're going to somehow there's not an external force or being or reality that you can just kind of ultimately rely on completely rely on, it's going to take care of you. In fact, the idea of relating to something external to you, which is very important in certain theistic religions, doesn't have the same value or importance in in Buddhism. And Buddhism begins with just focus on what we can do for ourselves. And, you know, the kind of the opening in a sense, so the Buddhist Bible, if there is that there's no beginning in Buddhism, but if there is one, it would be the Dhammapada. And Dhammapada begins by saying that the mind is first the mind is the forerunner, the precursor, the creator of our, of our happiness in our unhappiness. And if you tend to your mind, tend to your heart that's what Has that that's what

will create these greater value that the Buddhist tradition offers us. So it's a little bit foreign to some people coming out of a theistic background, perhaps the degree to which Buddhism comes back on the individual. It's up to us. Some people can see that maybe it's being a little bit too self centered, it's all about you. However, being self centered and conceited, arrogant way, is a source of suffering is a source of stress and the Buddhist tradition as you engage in it, alleviates that stress or kind of helps dissipate or relax. The self centeredness that might be bringing us into the practice initially are part of it.

But it's up to us. It's up to what we what we do we engage in and, and so then, and that's interesting, because so then the question is, what do we do? Given it's up to us, what do we do? There's no external authority in Buddhism that says Thou shalt, so then what do we rely on? Some people will say, well, then we rely on rules. There are commandments or rules, you know, and the universe has certain moral built into it moral commandments that we should follow. And certainly some Buddhists will teach such things in that kind of way. But in the tradition of Buddhism that I've been familiar with, there's been a great reluctance to offer, you know, rules by which to live your life your hard and fast rules, like there's some out commandments from the universe, that you should live this way. But the alternative has been not not a free flowing ethics, do whatever you want. It's up to you anyway. So you might as well you know, do whatever you want, but rather, the focus has been on cultivating a heightened sensitivity, heightened awareness, heightened attentiveness to Life, the full range of our life, from our hearts from the depths of our minds. And what's remarkable is that in the depths of our hearts and minds, there seems to be ethical sensitivity, there seems to be care and concern for the well being of others and the well being of oneself. There seems to be a care and concern. There's a recognition of those movements of the mind that cause suffering and stress and tension. And those movements of the mind or heart that alleviate that to bring out the opposite. And so in that we rely on ourselves. In Buddhism, it's a big A lot of it has to do with relying on our own ability to observe or feel or sense, what makes a difference in our lives. What makes it what what does give us a sense of healthy purpose, what gives us a sense of worth and value what gives us a sense of, of peace and freedom and peace. And, and so you can track and watch in your own mind what does that and, and maybe it's watching and tracking in small steps and small areas of life. But those small areas build build up to create huge, you know, impact or philosophies of life for for how we live. And so how we live so it's up to us in Buddhism and the way I was trained. What we did how we discover what how to live is through developing a sensitivity and mindfulness awareness of that heightening that this heightened sensitivity. And from that we'll know what to do. Now one of the remarkable things that can happen as people take this approach where you're cultivating awareness, cultivating mindfulness, and discovering your own capacity to find your way through this heightened sensitivity, is that the heightened sensitivity of the heart part of that is love. friendliness or kindness, as we become as the shields of our life settle down as we become less fearful, less caught up in our desires and worries, and less guarded.

There's a natural sensitivity, when we start to feel in the presence of someone else. I think we, you know, we've we've kind of taken the person and we take in a person, it's hard to be angry with someone you'd really taken in. It's hard to dismiss them if you really taken the time to let them into you. It can be as simple as a clerk in a supermarket. You could it's possible to go through the lines by your things to the supermarket line without really paying attention to the clerk. And kind of basically ignoring just paying and saying thank you and leaving. So also possible to stand there on your two feet and really focus on the clerk as if the person really matters. Taking the person into your consciousness into your awareness and who is this person What kind of life this is personally? What's it like to stand there? how long they've been there that day? What is their demeanor? What is it what what's what what is it like person and you take that person in with a heightened awareness. Most people I think will start feeling I don't know friendly is the right word. But certainly beginning to not feel like this is a person to dismiss or ignore. It's a human being there. It's a valuable important human being. So with a cultivation of mindfulness, we're developing a heightened ability and sensitivity to pay attention to things. So things register in our hearts and our minds in different way. And hopefully a willingness to let things come in. And from that I've discovered, at times comes a strong feeling of loving kindness. loving kindness, the word is metta in Buddhist and Buddhist language nhta and loving kindness. In coming from the word meta the word meta is cognate to the Buddhist word for friend, which is Mita And so it's defined sometimes that loving kindness is friendliness, being friendly. Having a friendly attitude to the people you encounter encounter. It's also defined as having goodwill towards other meaning that your will your

desire is for their happiness, their well being. And so when you encounter someone, you have their well being in mind, as opposed to, you know, screw them, you know, just ignore them or something. And, and even someone who's difficult person for you, maybe someone who you don't necessarily want to let into your life. You can keep your boundaries with them while still in your heart having goodwill for them. They may be well, maybe they'll be helpful. Maybe they be maybe they helped in their lives, but, but May they not get too close to me

and You know that sometimes that's appropriate to have boundaries like that. But it doesn't mean we have to be close to them or feel lack of ill will. And if they do come up to us, maybe they'll feel our goodwill for them even though we feel like you know, this is not a person I want to stay involved in, but they can feel that we're not being unkind or shutting them out. Sometimes the, the description of loving kindness is compared to that of a parent, usually a mother, loving her child. And the kind of a classic description is a mother has only one child, I guess. She's supposed to be a hiking club, then maybe or something. But so it's kind of parental love or care, which is more than being your friend.

So this heightened sensitivity that we take in some other person, at times can lead to feeling goodwill. To feeling love or kindness or friendliness towards others, it's quite remarkable that a person can feel kindness without being in the presence of someone else. In some people who meditate and sit and quiet and get kind of relaxed and settled and let all their stresses fall away, that there can be a kind of innate or natural kindness that seems to be there, a tenderness and gentleness that if you did encounter someone, you'd probably meet them with a certain degree of kindness. You probably wouldn't occur to you to, to, to, you know, swear at them, or be unkind to them when you're settled, relaxed and calm and peaceful yourself. So So, so, what I discovered through doing this practice was loving kindness and kind of tenderness or candor, kindness was awoken in me when it was awoken in me and I recognized it and valued it then I became interested in how can I live from this place more often? How can I be guided by this feeling of being friendly or kind? How can I it's felt like such a valuable thing and felt like gold. You know, like to feel this way to feel this, you know, you know, forget about other people for the moment, it just feels so good for me. You know, it's like, you know, so precious, to have to not be guarded, to not be tense, to be open, to be loving to be at his kind rate, radiance coming from me. And so I was interested in how to live that more. And then I became interested in the practice of loving kindness, and which is to begin exploring how to expand my capacity for kindness for friendliness, and how to touch into it more often. Not as something to overlay on top of me like pollyannish thing, no way of kind of being sweet, but rather to touch into this place in my heart, which I knew was there more often. Now one of the very interesting exercises to do that recommended is to watch your thoughts. Watch, watch what you're thinking about when you're brushing your teeth. And do it over a week or two. And because I think for many people brushing your teeth is kind of like a mean some people practice there for sure and pay attention, you know, careful. But I think most people brushing your teeth is like this happens in the cracks of the day. Like you're not doing any religious practice, you're not doing work, you're not relating to someone else. You know, you're not, you know, it's kind of like this. I suspect for many people, it's a little bit of a unconscious time, where just kind of normal patterns or habits of the mind can just kind of do what they're doing because we're kind of mindlessly brushing our teeth and so if that's the case, For a few weeks, watch what you're thinking about when you brush your teeth, and then evaluate what you're thinking about, and see the pattern of what you think about how useful is it? how beneficial is it? What value does it have the usual thoughts you have when you're brushing your teeth. So then see that and, and then remember a little saying the Buddha gave enough teaching. He said that whatever you're regularly and frequently think about, that becomes the inclination of your mind. Whatever you regularly think about becomes the inclination of your mind, becomes a habit that becomes the way which we tend tend to want to kind of an attitude which we bring into the world. So if you're always thinking about what you want in life, the things you

want material things that you want. If you're always thinking about always thinking about it, that becomes the inclination of the mind, the attitude of the habit of the mind to keep thinking about wanting, wanting, it's one of the reasons why some people find that getting is not so satisfying, because the habit to want is so strong. So I want more. Or if the habit is to be afraid to have fearful thoughts, then then it creates a habit. If the habit

is to have self critical thoughts, there's certain kinds of self critical or, or kind of depressing thoughts that brings on depression or augmented. They found that they've you know, they've the number of kinds of therapies or interventions, people are depressed, they've been helpful. And then they've tracked Well, what what happens to people where the helpfulness of that therapy decreased, somehow they got depressed again. The thought of the number one thing that helps people get depressed again, is what they're thinking about. And if people can be trained to pay attention to their thoughts, and not give in to taught thoughts which undermine your well being, that are self critical. That's one of the most useful things, not guaranteed, but one of the most useful things can be done to prevent the relapse of depression. So what we think about regularly affects the inclination of the mind. So how many times in your day? Are you thinking things, which maybe is not the best use of your time? And how easy is it to simply change what you're thinking about? It pretty appropriate way. So for example, here's another, you know, supermarket, waiting in line scenario, because I think maybe many of you have stood in lines in supermarkets or stores. You know, and so there's a lot of choices of what your mind can do what you can think about when you're standing there in line. There, you could, you could be very interested in the National Enquirer and have all kinds of thoughts about that. You could be an analyzing the details with the person in front of you who has bought, and then have all kinds of commentary and judgments about, you know, how could they buy so much bacon? And so then you're a little bit, you know, thinking a little bit angry at all the people who you know, or you could be focusing your attention on the checkout clerk. And it could be thoughts of, you know, why are they so slow? You know, they realized that to get somewhere, there's also competitive lines standing. Where, if you know what you could be doing scanning up and down the different lines in the supermarket wondering which one's going To go fastest, and then you can go back and forth a little bit then and there's this kind of amazing thing often, you know, I choose the wrong one I don't know if it's a one of the rules of nature and so then my one of the choices My mind is I could start criticizing myself, you know, you're such a bad line chooser. You know, always choosing the wrong line, you are better off before and you can never sit you can never settle, you know, what you have, it always has to look somewhere else. And, and if you know, and so you know, so it's a lot of choices, what you can do with your mind. And but how often do we exercise that choice? How often do we kind of like an automatic pilot and we just, you know, on this line kind of remind Doesburg does. If we realize we had if we really if we track what we're thinking and realize that we have choice, would we then continue thinking what we're thinking? Just that I mean, the independent of actually changing in If you know what you're thinking about, you know, have a choice. How often would you simply would you continue thinking what you're doing? often just with that just change the whole psychology of the mind? And then what about thinking thoughts of goodwill? What about thinking thoughts of their friendly or Kinder? Some people immediately will protest. No way. That's it's kind of pollyannish sweet kind of Buddhism that's insincere. Just kind of being caught, you know, imagining we're, you know, pretending to be kind, or it's not safe or it's not realistic number of protests people can have. But the attitude of kindness and friendliness is one of the most beautiful ones human beings can have. And if you have a, have an experience of it and know its value for yourself, then perhaps you want to touch into it more often. It's not a matter of making yourself feel loving. But maybe it's simply starting to think about friendliness or kindness, the theme, thinking, you know, I could remember a time I was friendly or someone was friendly to me how nice it felt. Or I wonder if that that person in front of me who's buying all the daikon, I wonder, you know,

what, how, what, what are the ways I could think of, I could think about that or be aware of that person. They're more likely to make me feel friendly to that person. Are there ways of regarding that person, they would simply evoke my kindness as opposed to me assuming I'm supposed to be kind. And then I look and I see, well, that person is buying a lot of food. It's more than that person could possibly eat for herself or himself. This person is probably buying food for our family or friends or community. This person is connected and has come to the market and is supporting someone is trying to help someone do something. Something you know connected to a circle of other people. And maybe their choice of food is not my choice. But isn't it something that this person is connected seem seemingly connected to a large group that they're buying? And if I start thinking those thoughts, then I think my mind My heart goes towards kindness goes to be a little more friendly disposed, without me making myself friendly by having those kinds of thoughts kind of questioning thoughts or wondering thoughts. So the prince what I'm suggesting is that if you know you have a choice in what you think, and if you're tracking like your think, other better things to be thinking about. And I would say often there is and it's not insincere to start thinking thoughts that are, you know, more beneficial that incline the mind in other directions. To regularly think about loving kindness to be friendliness is going to then incline your mind to a greater friendliness than you might run into someone, a stranger someplace in difficult situation. And you might be more of a more inclined to be friendly than not. And that little inclination might make all the difference. And, and so I want to list some of the differences that the Buddha gave for what can happen when when you're Kinder friendly. One of the one of the one of the differences makes is that Buddha said, the practice of loving kindness protects you. It's a protection practice. And the Buddha actually taught loving kindness practice as a way of people protecting themselves. primarily in the ancient tradition. They talk about protection from animals, like snakes and wild animals. And I known people who said that that their attitude they have towards dogs in the street can have a big impact on how the dog relates to them. And if you're afraid of the dog that's up some dogs, they'll pick up the fear and they'll relate to you accordingly. Or if you glare at the dog's owner apparently dogs are very tuned in to where the eyes of, of strangers are looking into the eyes or staring at the owner. That's, you know, it's a little bit threatening to the dog. So you know, so anyway, so to have a kind disposition. So then ancient tradition they talked about, maybe a little bit magical thinking, to have this idea that if you were suffused with snakes with loving kindness that they would not bite you. But that's what they taught. That protection practice is a story I don't know if it's a true story of someone who tried to kill the Buddha had one enemy that we know of. A number of times tried to kill him. And the story was that he let loose or one of the kings in the clinic King had an army in the army they had charging elephants, you know, fighting elephants. And he said it loose down the street to attack the Buddha. And, and the Buddha stood there he stood his ground and sent his loving kindness towards this elephant and the elephant stopped. It might be a myth. There's another story which maybe feels less mythic. There was a man who had certain degree of animosity towards the Buddha. And he came into the Buddhist presence to cause some trouble. And the Buddha's response, what he did was he just suffused or kind of directed his kindness, his loving kindness towards this man. And the man felt it and he relaxed and he and his anger, his hostility to the Buddha went away. And I've seen that actually happen in my life and other people's lives. Where I've you know, I certainly, maybe many years ago have been hostile towards someone was met by kindness. And it disarmed me. And there's been a few situations where I've been recipient of someone's hostility. And I've returned it with friendliness,

not sweet kindness but just kind of being open and present and friendly to the person and it's disarmed the person. So one of the values of loving kindness is it protects one protects you. And other value is that it creates social harmony. The Buddha talked about the importance, especially of his monastic community, that they should regard each other they should treat each other with loving kindness or friendliness. And he said that you should do it in three ways. They should do it in their thoughts. They should do it in their word with our words, and do it in their actions. So thoughts, words and actions, to



engage in doing things that are kind or friendly or supportive and do That he said it creates social harmony. And the analogy he had for social harmony was, you'll be he said, you'll be like milk and water, and milk and milk and water just mixes. And the contrast was oil and water, which stays apart. And so somehow, rather than having people in society be repelled in the way that water and oil is repelled, they'll be more harmonious when we practice with loving kindness. Another reason for practicing loving kindness is to help us with our sleep. And Buddha said that if you practice more kindness in your life or more friendly attitude, that you'll sleep better and you wake up better. And, and one of one of the things that I sometimes do as I fall asleep, I try to remember the last thing I tried to do fall asleep, is to think thoughts of loving kindness are kind of touch into Um, how being kind or kind attitude, because I believe that it helps me sleep better. And I've noticed that, you know, if I'm anxious about something, anxiety sometimes carries into my sleep. And sometimes like, I'll be like I was concerned about someone's health, some months ago, relative's health. And it was a low grade kind of little worry that I had about this relative. And, and like clockwork, at two o'clock every night, I'd wake up. And I traced that waking up at that time. So I don't know what the what clock was going on. xiety clock was going on inside of me. But, but it seemed I was directly related to my worry about my relative. So you know, what we carry with us during the day can affect our sleep, I believe. And so, what we do in the last minutes before we go to sleep, I think has an impact on our sleep. And so one of the things to do is to do a practice of loving kindness There's other things you could do that are beneficial. That's one of the things I do occasionally is to do that then another benefit of loving kindness practice is that it's a win. It's a practice we can learn about ourselves. And sometimes it's useful to have a reference point from which to see ourselves better. And, and so the reference point of kindness or friendliness, just the idea of it is very interesting. To see ourselves better by even just, you know, ask the question, well, what's the kind thing here? If I was kind, what would it be? You might you might notice, more acutely that you're unkind you are or how angry you are, or resentful. You are how afraid you are by just Raising that question, you want to raise the question, you know, what would be the kind thing here without then criticizing yourself for what you discover. But the practice of loving kindness, one of its functions is to flush out things that need to be resolved or work through inside of us. And so we discover, oh, you know, I'm uptight, or I'm scared, or I'm angry, or, you know, whatever. And then we, we then we have some choice. What do we do when we see that, and one of the choices is, is to try to resolve it, dissolve it, overcome it, purify it. So part of the function of loving kindness practice is to be a reference point to help us understand ourselves better, and then perhaps to purify ourselves. And some people who do loving kindness practices as strong medic regular meditation practice will report that sometimes when they do the practice, they end up feeling the opposite of more Kinder friendly, rather than more kind. And that's not that's not because the practice ism is being done wrong. Sometimes the practice like that stirs things up,

stirs up the mud that's kind of settled for a while. And so sometimes we have people carry a lot of anger or a lot of fear. But sometimes it's settled down or it's covered over for a while. And the practice of calming down and developing some concentration with loving kindness, sometimes opens up what's been, you know, been, you know, opens up things that are festering, and so then they come in full force. And then usually the instructions are at that point, to either drop the loving kindness practice and focus on mindfulness nonreactive, non judgmental awareness to really look more deeply what's going on here. Or interestingly, some people find it useful to direct loving kindness to their anger or their fear. May my fear be safe made by fear, be happy. Some people find that helpful and others function of loving kindness practice is and this has to do with it is to develop concentration. And this happens mostly as a meditation practice and wonder that kind of amazing things for me when I discovered this in Buddhism, the idea that you can actually do a meditation practice, where the sole theme, the sole focus of the practice is loving kindness. Now, if you kind of consider, I don't know what your mind is like, but the kind of generic human mind is busy, it's going around doing a lot of different things. It's kind of

scattered. It doesn't you know, it's it's fragmented is concerned with many different things at the same time, or almost the same time. jumping around in LA is your thoughts jumping around, but your feelings and sensations in your body are, you know, fragment or, you know, you could come here and meditate and you're still kind of your body's still feeling the repercussions of Being tense over the last week, and you can use the tension in your body hasn't just dissipated because you're here, the tension is still here. And that but then you're also going to, you know, maybe you're going to go to a really difficult meeting after this later in the afternoon and you're worried about it. And so your stomach is a little bit, you know, tense or a little bit, you know, butterflies, she has attention from the anxiety during the week you have butterfly because we're worried about this talk you're going to give. And then you're also thinking about maybe some wonderful lunch you could have, and, and you're fantasizing how much pleasure you'll have if you get to have whatever. And so the mind is scattered going off in different directions. What happens in meditation is that the mind has gathered together and unified and it's not jumping around or scattered. But the theme or the or the focus of the mind is all around one theme. And to have all of us, the mind, our thoughts, our attitudes, that sensations of our body. Everything centered and stabilized or focused around love or kindness is a phenomenal thing. Imagine that

you know, if your mind was many different streams, many rivers going off in many different directions and going over rocks and rapids and all this stuff, it's, you know, it'd be kind of scary to ride it right? But when the, all the streams of all the different streams come together into the same Lake, and sits in the lake lake is a nice bowl that you know, that holds all the water and all the water just sits there together. In that beautiful, calm lake. It's settled and relaxed. So same thing when the mind is not all these different streams going off in many different directions and the rapids of your hearts. But all the all the all the water, all of your of your life flows into this is held and settles and rests in your heart at peace, and it's all all kindness, all love is all it's about 100% it's a phenomenal, beautiful thing, and that the human being human heart has the capacity is one of the great I think one of the great wonders. You don't necessarily keep it but in meditation, it's possible to have that, that experience. It said that that experience is healing. It's very deeply healing. It's one of the benefits of loving kindness practices that as the cells in the marrow of our bone, deep inside, starts feeling the nourishment of this love and this kindness. It begins to you know, nourish or relax deeply relax, the tension or the health or some holding that sometimes been carried deep in our marrow in ourselves or somewhere in nerves over a lifetime and there's something about stable Realizing feeling stronger loving kindness that allows us healing to happen. loving kindness is also the last benefit I'll give supports the practice of liberation of freedom. That as we develop greater sense of kindness softness. We know it's hard to be tense if you're are being friendly, you're kind it's hard to be have a lot of shields up. It's hard to be clinging and holding on to a lot of things. And so as as our clinging or holding on softens and relax as our attachment to a strong sense of self relaxes. Then, it becomes easy to easier to let go more and more and it might also be more motivating to let go more because you're more motivated to Let go. Let go for into more love into more kindness into more friendliness is witness speak good to let go because I can feel if I let go. I drop into this deep Heart. And this deeper heart that we can experience is is something that we can trust. I think that's what Buddhism teaches is you can really trust what you find deep inside yourself. It's tremendously beautiful. Each of us contains a tremendous beauty, or potential or fitness potential for beauty as the heart gets clarified and free. And we can trust that how we live our lives, our ethics, the choices we make for how to live our life will be wisest, when we can be in touch with that deep heart. And so we come back to where we began to talk. That it's up to us. And we have within us a resource we have with As a beauty we have a penis, something that's wise that knows that can help guide us to the important important things that need to be done in this life. I'm not going to answer all the questions you need about where to invest your money, you know, complicated questions. But it will help you know how the attitude with which you go about figuring out which car mechanic to fix your car. If you don't have to come to come to it with an attitude, where the heart is at rest or at peace, as we make go

through, and we're more inclined to be kind and friendly and generous. So loving kindness is a beautiful practice. It's a beautiful attitude that's central to the whole Buddhist enterprise. And one of the things that Buddhist practitioners will often do is to spend time reflecting, coming on loving kindness coming back to the theme of loving kindness asking themselves, what would be the kind thing here? Are we the friendly thing here? What do you think about frequently becomes the inclination of mind.

And you're responsible for what inclination or habits your mind have. And so I think thinking more often about loving kindness is a really good thing to do for your beautiful minds, beautiful hearts. So I hope that wasn't Pollyannaish or overly sweet. I hope it was challenging. And you'll take it as a challenge. So thank you very much.