

Brahmavihāras: Loving-Kindness (4 of 5)

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mindfulness, kindness, *mettā*, love, healing, medicine, pond, thirst, peace, release, concentration, unification, warmth, goodwill, wealth, radiance, radiate, safety, spread, anger, tenderness

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In the ancient teachings, there is a record of someone coming to the Buddha with great enthusiasm for mindfulness. This person says that when people practice mindfulness, everything goes better for them. Everything works out well for people who are mindful. The Buddha says that actually it's a little different. It is when people have mindfulness and loving-kindness that everything goes well, everything is good in a certain way.

It is remarkable that the Buddha, who emphasized mindfulness so much, brought in loving-kindness as a companion or a partner to mindfulness. It is the experience of many, including fellow teachers and myself, that as mindfulness gets stronger – or as loving-kindness gets stronger – they kind of merge. With well-developed mindfulness, loving-kindness seems to come along with it. And with very strong, developed loving-kindness, mindfulness comes along with it.

Strong mindfulness can open up and release all the places we are held back and closed, so that natural tenderness can be there from which care, goodwill, and love can radiate. As loving-kindness gets stronger and stronger, we are more and more in the present moment. We are not thinking about other things. When *mettā* is strong, it is so compelling to be here and now that mindfulness comes along with it. So mindfulness and loving-kindness can be seen as partners.

Some people find they do not need to practice loving-kindness in order for it to grow. Others will intentionally practice loving-kindness. They do meditations on loving-kindness. They might go on *mettā* retreats where the primary thing they're cultivating is loving-kindness.

It's quite something to have the primary focus of the mind be love and kindness. If you are focusing on breathing and getting concentrated until you are right there with every breath, it feels delightful to finally be in the present moment with the mind not scattered and distracted. You can do this also with the practice of loving-kindness.

Rather than the primary characteristics of the mind being anger, resentment, hurry, fear, and desire – things that often preoccupy a person in daily life – the mind is occupied with loving-kindness. *Mettā* becomes the primary focus and characteristic of what we think, feel, and experience in the body, and what motivates us. There is a kind of gathering together, a unification, a oneness with loving-kindness.

It's a phenomenal thing to have *mettā* become strong. This way of being is saturated and filled with goodwill and love. It's a way of experiencing deep peace. For some people, the practice of loving-kindness is phenomenally healing. As loving-kindness gets strong, it begins to be medicine for the places inside that are wounded, hurt, frayed, or closed. Its warmth tends to settle, relax, and open things for us.

The Buddha gave this visualization. He said:

Imagine that there is an easily accessed pond with clear, delightful, refreshing, cool water. If a tired, parched, thirsty, and hot person – scorched and exhausted by the hot weather – came across the pond, the water would be used to quench both the person's thirst and the hot weather fever. It's the same for a person who becomes a practitioner and, after learning the Buddha's teachings, cultivates loving-kindness, for this person gains inner peace and, because of this inner peace, cultivates what is appropriate for the path of liberation.

So here, loving-kindness can provide a cool and refreshing sense of peace to a person. I'll point out that I emphasized warmth in the guided meditation, and the Buddha, in his example, mentions coolness. This might represent a difference between these two cultures. The English language evolved in cold England, where warmth was a nice thing. Whereas, in India, a very hot country at times, coolness is valued.

The practice of loving-kindness can be developed through meditation. That one would have a designated time to develop and expand – or I'd like to use the word "release" – the goodwill within us is a great gift to the world. Loving-kindness is a precious resource that the Buddha called wealth – inner wealth. Let that become strong. Don't leave it to chance. Don't leave it to: "Oh, it'll just appear when it does. It's here some days, and other days it's not." Take the time to sincerely cultivate loving-kindness, to make loving-kindness strong and easily called upon.

Here is one description of a state of meditation. It's a very strong state of meditation, so it's what, perhaps, is possible. Hopefully, it's inspiring to know that this is a human possibility – to have the feeling of *mettā* be as strong as the text describes. The first half of it describes someone preparing to have very strong loving-kindness in meditation:

Delight is born when one sees oneself purified and freed of greed, ill will, anger, revenge, contempt, bossiness, envy, deceit, and wrong view.

So isn't that kind of great?

The text continues:

When delighted, joy is born. When joyful, the body becomes tranquil. Someone whose body is tranquil feels happy. For someone who feels happy, the mind becomes concentrated.

Now, with a concentrated mind, here is the description of a very strong state of loving-kindness:

One abides pervading the east with a mind accompanied with loving-kindness, and likewise the south, the west, and the north. Above, below, and all around, everywhere, and all over, one pervades the whole world with a mind accompanied with loving-kindness, extensive, expanded, limitless, free from hatred and ill will.

Even if it were just a mind free of hatred and ill will, it would be wonderful since those are so painful for this world of ours. But to actually cultivate the sense, the radiance, the fullness of loving-kindness so it feels as if it spreads out in all directions – east, south, west, north, and all around, everywhere, filling us, filling the field of our awareness, filling what seems like the whole world – is a wonder. It's that strong. It's that pervasive.

We sometimes say that someone with anger has a cloud hanging over them. You feel a radiance of anger or hostility from them. It's possible to feel a radiance of love and kindness in oneself. It radiates and spreads outward. It's phenomenal that we can get centered, focused, and absorbed in these beautiful, beautiful states.

Some people say: "No, it can't be true," or "It's too artificial," or "It's too sweet," or "You can't be safe in those states." Here, we're talking about a meditation state. What we do when we come out of meditation is perhaps different. But it's said that loving-kindness is one of the ways to create tremendous safety for ourselves.

Some people will feel that practicing this way is selfish, self-absorbed, or just doing something for one's own pleasure. But I would say that it is the opposite. We benefit, certainly, from loving-kindness practice, but it also allows us to benefit the world – to be better citizens, to not cause harm, and to care profoundly about others. I hope we can have a world where we care about each other and live together with goodwill, kindness, and support.

Today I offered what is sometimes called the practice of radiating loving-kindness. This differs from the more classic way of practicing loving-kindness, which uses phrases and spreads loving-kindness progressively to different categories – oneself, a benefactor, a neutral person, an enemy. Both are great practices, but some people find radiating loving-kindness to be a simpler practice. This seems to be how the Buddha taught loving-kindness. The Buddha gave no instructions for the different categories and the use of words to cultivate loving-kindness.

Someone in the YouTube chat asked for a citation. I read a few different things, but one is from the *Middle Length Discourses*, discourse 40.

I hope you will reflect today on loving-kindness, care, and goodwill. Maybe you can have conversations with people about their experiences with goodwill – how they evoke, practice, and spread goodwill, and what value they see in it. Experiment a little and see if you can go about the day practicing a bit more goodwill than you would have if you hadn't heard this suggestion. Thank you very much. We will finish this series tomorrow with the topic of *mettā* and liberation.