

Brahmavihāras: Loving-Kindness (5 of 5)

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We come now to the last talk on the *brahmavihāra* of *mettā*. When the *brahmavihāra* of *mettā* becomes strong, it is said to be immeasurable, without boundaries, limitless, and spreading out in all directions.

In the teachings of the Buddha, he held loving-kindness up as a very important way to live a life. It is a reference point or teacher that helps us to be kind and to have goodwill in our speech and interactions with other people. If we must have difficult words with someone, the Buddha said, “First, make sure you have goodwill in yourself. Prepare yourself for the conversation with goodwill.”

If there is no goodwill, then that becomes your teacher. That becomes the material for mindfulness and really seeing what is going on. Chances are, if there is no goodwill, you are not really granting or giving other people their freedom. I like to think the freedom Buddhism champions – the liberation Buddhism is about – is less about *your* liberation or *you* becoming liberated – but more that you give liberation to all things. All things become free of you.

Cultivating goodwill – is very helpful and healing. It is a wonderful way to develop a non-striving, non-conceited approach to mindfulness practice. A good background to our practice is developing concentration and mindfulness in a field of goodwill.

As marvelous as goodwill is, and as strong as it can become, it is also associated with the Buddhist path of liberation. As the *mettā* practice deepens, there are a variety of steps along the way. Liberation is part of it. The Buddha emphasized that when one's goodwill is strong, one is liberated from ill will and hostility.

The Buddha says that if there is *mettā*, it is impossible to have any ill will, aversion, or hostility. Cultivating and developing *mettā* – understanding it, and having it accessible – helps us to be free of ill will. The idea is to make it accessible. Become familiar with it. Develop *mettā* as a habit. Practice it; think about it, so that when you need it, it is available. Know how to find it in yourself, evoking it in a genuine way – a way that has real integrity. It is not just a surface coating of ourselves.

As our *mettā* meditation practice deepens a person becomes liberated. They are freed from the hindrances. This is appreciated so tremendously that it is called a preliminary liberation. We are no longer caught in the hindrances.

This means the mind is no longer under the sway of desires, aversions, sloth and torpor, restlessness and regrets, and doubt. It is a phenomenally wonderful way of being when the mind is no longer under the sway and power of the hindrances. It clears the heart. It clears the mind. Loving-kindness has a clear field in which to develop with less interruption. As a meditation practice, it can deepen and become boundless in all directions.

When loving-kindness fills us and becomes strong and all-pervasive – this is not the end of the path in Buddhism. If you want to follow the Buddhist path to liberation, it is important to not take the experiences of boundless love as ultimate. Some people have wonderful feelings of love, goodwill, or kindness, which have no object but seem to radiate in all directions. Everything is touched with our goodwill, love, and kindness – like Midas' touch. It is sometimes called wet love or moist love because everything gets moistened by our goodwill and kindness.

But go further. Loving-kindness practice – when done well and strongly – can be a foundation for liberation itself. Do not stop with loving-kindness. Go further.

There is a story in the ancient texts about Sāriputta, a disciple of the Buddha. He was visiting a man who was dying. He taught him the practice of the *brahmavihāras*. The man was able to practice them quite deeply. He was able to die in a beautiful state of one of the *brahmavihāras* – goodwill or compassion. When the Buddha heard about this, he told Sāriputta something like: "Well, that was nice. But actually, why didn't you teach him liberation as well? That man was poised and ready to really set his mind free."

It is possible to do loving-kindness, and then go one step further – really do the ultimate act of kindness for oneself and for the world. Let go and be liberated in a very deep way. Let go of every remnant and every trace of the foundation of the forces within us that lead to suffering. The fundamental letting go – liberation – is a letting go of clinging. Without clinging, what is there? What is available? What sensitivity is there? What receptivity; what feelings and connections do we have to the world? Letting go of clinging makes room for love – more love.

To use loving-kindness as a basis for liberation requires a variety of insights. One of the insights occurs when the mind is very, very still, abiding in love. Imagine that! Everything the mind feels, touches, and experiences is touched with a kind of pervasive love. It characterizes the mind.

The mind is very stable, and then the insight that this also is conditioned arises. This also is, in a certain way, constructed. Do not make it the absolute, like: "This is the nature of the universe. This is the nature of the cosmos. Everything is love."

It can feel that way, but in Buddhist meditation, we do not want to stop there. We can see that: "Oh, this too, in some deep way, is a construct, or a movement of the mind. It is an activity of the mind – to experience loving-kindness in this way." The deep letting go of clinging can happen when we see it as being constructed, impermanent, and inconstant. We can see that there is something beyond it, between it, or underneath it – something which has vast space.

We have some sense, that there *is* something more. As profound, and ultimate as great love can be – in a deep, stable meditation practice, an intuition or a sense comes that there is something else. There is freedom. That freedom is not a thing. It is the absence of clinging.

To be in this tremendously pleasant, enjoyable, safe, satisfying, and healing place of love, and then understand: "Oh, I can let go further. Whatever sense of self I have – as the one who loves – that is not the end of the path. There is something beyond that sense. I can just put that down and have no self-referencing – letting go of the last little leaning into and wanting. There is something more beyond love."

In a certain way, even love drops completely away. This boundless field of goodwill drops away in liberation. This place of radical non-clinging is one of the safest, most wonderful, and peaceful places a person can ever experience. It is the culmination of a wish to be free of suffering. If we know that freedom, and come back to it without clinging, then the compassion and goodwill we have been cultivating and developing can feel connected to others, open to others, and can have love for others.

There is no need, and no desire to cling. There is no need to get something back from someone else or rely on other people for our safety, security, status, admiration, sense of worth, satisfaction, or pleasure. Then love is a beautiful thing. We can offer our love to the world, and the love is safe. People are free from us in our love. It is a fantastic thing to be able to love. The love carries with it the gift of freedom, where everyone becomes free of us.

It is a deep interconnection, without any need. Then people can be as they are. A really wonderful thing is when two *free* people meet in love, goodwill, and kindness. Neither one needs something from the other. Each one can delight in and enjoy the other and the goodwill between them.

So, thank you. That is our week on *mettā* and loving-kindness. On Monday, we will begin with the next *brahmavihāra*, which is *karuṇā* – compassion. I wish you all well. May you spend this weekend reflecting, thinking, talking about, and practicing with loving-kindness and goodwill wherever you go.