

Dharmette: Sources for Caregiving (3 of 5) Goodwill and Friendliness

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Hello and welcome to the series of talks titled The Sources of Care. I'm considering five different areas of sources, attitudes, and dispositions that evoke the instinct to care for others. The last two days, I started with the disposition to non-harming. Buddhism has a radical orientation towards non-harming in all directions, including towards ourselves. Then yesterday was generosity. I think of generosity as a mammalian attitude; it comes with being a mammal.

Maybe other living creatures also have generosity. That generosity is to provide people, to provide others, to provide our fellow species with benefit. It's what parents do for their young children. Today the topic is goodwill. In Pāli, the word is *mettā*, M-E-T-T-A. It's one of the foundational practices of our Buddhist tradition.

Mettā is usually translated into English as loving kindness, a kind of inspiring combination of two words: loving and kindness. Sometimes it raises the bar too far, making it seem like a lofty ideal. The word *mettā* is cognate to the Pāli word *mitta*, M-I-T-T-A, which means friend. Sometimes it's said that *mettā* is an attitude of friendliness—friendliness towards oneself, towards others, to strangers, and even towards enemies—a basic positive disposition. That's also a simpler, more straightforward translation: goodwill. To have a basic attitude of goodness, positivity, respect, appreciation, and wishing others well—well-wishing.

Even our enemies, we can wish well. We can do a little bit for our own sake: if our enemies can be happy, maybe they would not be so angry or so mean. If we find someone who we have a lot of animosity towards injured on the street, with a broken leg or something, and no one else is taking care of them, probably we'd offer some care. We might bring them some water or do something simple, or maybe something big. A simple attitude of goodwill

or well-wishing is important. There's an intimate connection between well-wishing, friendliness, and happiness.

When we're happy, it's really clear that almost a natural orientation we have is to be friendly to the people around us. We're just happy, and the expression of happiness is a kind of kindness, appreciation, a smiling attitude, and delight with the people we're with. One of the sources of goodwill, of well-wishing, is our own well-being. One thing we can learn from that is that there is a form of goodwill that, when we're happy, it's nicer, better, and more easeful to have goodwill than it is to have ill-will. If we switch for some reason to ill-will, we can feel the stress it has on the happiness. It takes away the happiness.

We feel the tension that the ill-will produces and the rigidity that we maybe feel in the body and the mind. Well-being and well-wishing have a softness, openness, and ease to them. It's also possible—an amazing discovery—to discover that it's actually easier sometimes to have goodwill for others, in terms of the amount of energy expended and tension involved, than it is to have ill-will. Sometimes ill-will has so much pressure behind it, so much habit and force, that it feels easier to give into it than to have goodwill. But if we can really be sensitive and feel what it does to our whole psychophysical system, we probably find that we're actually much better off, and it's much nicer and easier to stay with the goodwill than to get caught in the cycles of ill-will and all the things that that involves.

It's also possible to discover that, because of the connection to happiness and well-being, there doesn't have to be an object for goodwill or well-wishing. First and foremost, it's an attitude, a disposition. Just like there doesn't have to be an object out in the world causing our happiness or a reason for our happiness, we can just feel happy being alive. There's no reason for being happy; we just are. It's one of the great gifts of meditation, deep meditation, that we quiet all the calculating, transactional ways of thinking so that we find ourselves at ease, at peace, happy just to be alive. Just to be alive is enough.

It's almost like if you come into harmony and homeostasis in ourselves through meditation, the whole system kind of hums happily. But once the mind gets caught in things, preoccupied by things, frozen, resisting things, caught in loops and ruminations of negative thinking, it's hard to imagine we'll ever be happy because of the strength of those. As meditation settles us and brings us into a kind of deeper harmony and homeostasis, we start feeling a well-being that translates to goodwill, to well-wishing. That just seems natural. We begin understanding and appreciating that there can be well-wishing, goodwill, *mettā*, without a reason for it. It doesn't have to have a dear friend as the object to have it.

It doesn't have to. Some people evoke their *mettā*, their goodwill, by thinking of a pet. One

person I know thinks about really cute monkeys that he spent time with in a certain forested jungle area. But it doesn't require anything. It's just kind of the disposition that comes out of the... So it's helpful to know that it doesn't have to have an object, so that when we do start having well-wishing or wanting to have goodwill for others, it doesn't require so much from the others—that they have to behave just perfectly, or it doesn't have to be transactional.

We're just happy to be kind, happy to be friendly. There's an ease in friendliness. It's easier to be friendly, even to someone who's angry, than it is to meet anger with anger or for us to shut down. We have this basic disposition, maybe a biological disposition, that's available to us: goodwill, friendliness. It gets used in everyday life, maybe in places where it's easy. If we have a friend that we're happy to see, we're happy to be with them, then it's kind of natural to have a lot of goodwill.

To begin learning how to have that sense of inner safety, inner well-being, and translate it to a basic ordinary friendliness, goodwill for everyone that we encounter—this is the great possibility. To live with goodwill. Of course, there's no requirement to do this, and I don't want to give that sense. But it is one of the sources for caring for others. We offer basic human care to them, caregiving. We might nurse someone, offer them some support, some help, go shopping for a neighbor, cook a meal—all kinds of things we might do.

It just comes from a basic goodwill and friendliness. It might be the friendliness that's a source for generosity that I talked about yesterday. Goodwill is, as I said, goodwill, *mettā*, is one of the foundational practices of our form of Buddhism, Theravāda Buddhism. It's well worth becoming intimately familiar with it or to call upon it regularly—to not just leave it to chance, but to practice it, to think about it, to be reminded of it, to let it be a thread that runs through your daily life, maybe side by side with mindfulness. Life is a lot easier, better with mindfulness. Mindfulness supported by goodwill is even better.

The two together make fantastic partners. You might want to see if you can infuse or sprinkle throughout your day mindfulness-guided, mindfulness-informed goodwill, and goodwill-informed mindfulness. See what you can do, and maybe there's some way of setting up some kind of regular reminder. Maybe every 10 or 15 minutes, there's a gentle reminder—some sign that maybe other people don't even recognize and know that you're doing it, just like a little bell that goes off or a little signal or something. Maybe every time that you do something regularly—regular things through the day. Maybe every time you go to the bathroom, every time you drink or eat, every time you check an email, every time you look at a screen, every time you're walking.

Choose something so that you begin being reminded to touch into your natural capacity

for well-wishing, kindness, friendliness, and perhaps even happiness. May those two go together. May those support you to lovingly, kindly, friendly, and with friendliness, care for this world of ours. May all beings be happy. Thank you.