

Dharmette: Love (11) Practicing Metta

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January 19, 2026

Keywords: mettā, loving-kindness, goodwill, Satipaṭṭhāna, Buddha, mindfulness of breathing, fearlessness, aversion, friendliness, loving-kindness practice

Hello and welcome to this ongoing series on love in Buddhist practice. And today with the 11th talk, we begin kind of turning towards actually the practice of love, the practice of loving-kindness, of *mettā*, of goodwill. And we have a capacity for some basic human friendliness, kindness, goodwill that might be different for each of us. Some of it might be more heartfelt, emotionally based. Some people it's more cognitively based, rationally even based. Some people it's more coming from some deep generative intention, from deep down within.

Right, maybe deeper than emotions. Sometimes it's very simple and ordinary. Sometimes it seems extraordinary. As we go into the practice of goodwill, of *mettā*, please think of it as being something that's very personal for you. Something that you are, it'll be, you define for yourself what is right for you, your way of doing this, as opposed to trying to fit into a, some other person's idea, my idea, or what you assume is the right way. So there's a way of kind of having a deep kind of care and respect and attentiveness to ourselves and our life.

And what is it that brings forth our basic friendly attitude, attitude of goodwill? And one of the things that can inspire that is knowing that the opposite or the absence of that maybe is worse. That maybe there's a tendency to aversion and ill-will. Maybe there's a tendency towards fear and anxiety. Maybe there's a tendency to conceit or being caught in wanting. That is not really a useful and beneficial thing to repeat and stay with.

It's so easy for human beings to repeat over and over again, ruminate with thoughts, ideas, feelings, which are not that healthy. And they can come with a lot of strength, a lot of authority. But still, they're not very healthy for us. And what we're trying to do here is to connect to something healthy. And it's not meant to push away or ignore how we feel, but it's supposed to be somehow deep inside to be able to meet all of how we are with goodwill, with the basic kindness or friendliness to everything. And so we can grow it and develop it and bring it into our world.

It's a powerful force, goodwill. And it can melt hostility. It could melt all kinds of difficult relationships. And it could create, promote peace, calm in difficult situations. It's a way of being present that others don't feel threatened. And when people feel threatened and people feel afraid, it tends to bring out the worst in people.

Partly they want to protect themselves. Partly they want to push away. And so to be able to meet people with the gift of fearlessness where they don't have to be afraid of us, and then be strong, then work for whatever we need to work for to change with that healthy relativity, relationships that's there. So the idea of love, goodwill, kindness, friendliness, we don't leave it to chance in Buddhism. It's actually something that we can foster and cultivate and develop and make strong to make it a part of our disposition, even part of our character, that it's there and ready to meet the world in this kind of way.

And we do this through a practice, a practice of goodwill, practices of *mettā*. And this is a meditation practice that goes back all the way to the Buddha. And it's remarkable. And even before the Buddha, it seems like if you take literally what's said in the ancient Buddhist texts, the practice of *mettā* already existed in India at the time of the Buddha. So it's just an ancient, not necessarily Buddhist, it's just a human that we know how to meet the world.

We have this capacity to meet the world, meet others with kindness and friendliness. Maybe in the way that a mother takes care of her only child. As a parent cares for its young, there tends to be a goodwill, an instinct to nurture, to care, to protect in a very soft, protective way. And it's inspiring sometimes to see how parents, parents of very young children, are so careful, so kind, so loving to... So we have that capacity. And the Buddha was explicit.

He talked about taking that capacity of a mother caring and loving her only child and spreading it to bring that kind of care and love to the whole world. Not at the expense of the child, but maybe it's actually for the benefit of the child to spread that goodness out in the world so the child grows up in an environment where there's safety been created. There's been love created all around for ourselves, for our friends, for everyone. So there's many ways of practicing loving-kindness. For this first week, I want to focus on something very simple that doesn't require much cognitive effort and rather just somehow find a way to connect to some attitudes, some sentiments, some emotions, some radiance of willingness to for goodwill, for friendliness.

To kind of find out a way that there can be kind of a radiance, kind of a glow, kind of an attitude, kind of a, for people who are more cognitively oriented, kind of a flow of cognitive thoughts of kindness and goodwill that evokes a softening, a gentling, that is an alternative to fear, alternative to feeling unsafe, an alternative to aversion. And for that to happen, it

helps when we sit down to meditate, we try at least locally, very close in within the confines of our body, to appreciate where there is safety. And even if there's fear, which many people carry, anxiety, is to hold that safely, to see where in this body can we hold and orient ourselves that here and now there is some modicum of safety. So if we have fear, we receive the fear into that sense that this is right now here and now in the meditation, it's a safe time, safe place. And it's safe enough for my fear to be held and be kind of softly so that it too receives the goodwill.

It too knows this attitude. You too are my friend. You too are being gazed upon kindly. And then to sit there, and then it can be helpful to say a single word verbally or sometimes people can do this non-verbally. So it's really a quiet, still place in the mind. And say a word that you associated with goodwill, friendliness, kindness, *mettā*, love, if you wish.

And you gently say this word and some people find it helpful to say it on the inhale, some people on the exhale. This morning I was suggesting on the inhale, because part of the tradition of this practice of *mettā* is to have the *mettā* somehow radiate and spread outwards. And so on the inhale, there's the expanding of the chest, and that expansion, maybe then the... You can imagine that the friendliness radiates or spreads or moves out into space. Right? Our capacity for spatial awareness then comes into play so that we kind of sense and feel that the attitude, the gaze of kindness goes out into that space around us.

Some people find it useful to do in the inhale, on the exhale, to let go and relax into it. And this effusion maybe is more of a settling and spreading rather than a lifting and spreading process. Last year when we were doing *Satipaṭṭhāna*, a number of ways I've been practicing, teaching last year with mindfulness of breathing, that the focal point for it is kind of the settling place, the grounding place, maybe deep inside. When we do this *mettā* practice, then the focal point sometimes may be in the chest and the heart area, that somehow the breathing somehow is associated or goes through that or arises out of that or spreads from there, so that the breathing and the friendliness become kind of closely associated with themselves. And... And if you feel tired or feel like saying these words are not so useful for you, it's fine to just kind of breathe with, breathe through whatever feeling of friendliness or kindness you have.

Or any capacity you have to gaze kindly on things, breathe with it, focus on it. But be careful that sometimes using a very simple, maybe one syllable word, good, kind, love, is, can be, just *mettā*, can be a way of, turns out that it's better than the alternative. The alternative, if we wander off in thought and start thinking about our issues and problems and aversions, it doesn't really serve very well, but maybe saying this very simple word keeps us on track,

keeps us connected. And not to say it like a mantra, but say it as a opening, as an invitation, as a recognition. Here there is friendliness. Here there is goodwill.

Here there is *mettā*. And acknowledging it, giving it room, opening to it and letting it spread. So this is a practice that can be as a practice, because what we practice is we're not necessarily good at, but we practice it so that it becomes, we get to develop the skills, we get the habit, we get the ease and the fluency of how to do it. And it's really worth doing this, spending time with this meta-practice, and maybe keeping it so simple right now, the way I'm saying it. And maybe through your day, maybe find three or four times, maybe plan ahead, maybe set an alarm, maybe something, some event that transition that you're in, where for one minute you close your eyes and do this loving-kindness practice.

So three or four times through the day, if you can do more, just kind of as you go through the day, drop your word, have your word there, have your word written on a sticky note above your screen so that you're reminded. Be reminded. Touch into, drop into, open up into your natural capacity for kindness. More often you normally would. Let it grow in you. And then we'll continue tomorrow. Thank you.