

Dharmette: Love (14) The Power of Kindness

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January 22, 2026

Keywords: mettā, goodwill, kindness, love, mindfulness, fear, anger, hostility, Martin Luther King, Buddhist monks

Hello and welcome to this series on love and currently kind of introducing and connecting to kind of one of the foundational social attitudes, social emotions of Buddhism, which is *mettā*, which I like often to translate as goodwill, sometimes as kindness, sometimes just simply as love.

And I think of it as a wonderful force that spreads out into the world, into others.

And I've seen the power, the influence of this kindness to disarm people, to literally do that.

I've had two friends who somehow in... out and about in the world alone.

And someone came and held them up with guns.

And they didn't know, they didn't prepare this, but they looked upon this person with their gun who wanted to do harm.

And it looked upon them with a certain kind of non-aggressive kindness and said something like, what would your mother think about this?

I think one person said, your mother would be ashamed of you.

And just that somehow diffused the whole situation and the person was able to get away to safety.

Now, I don't recommend this as a carrier, as a technique.

It probably was situationally appropriate and something in the person recognized that.

But the idea that met with kindness...

And I've seen people diffuse very violent situations with their stepping forward into it with a kindness and joy and positive regard for the people who were angry and aggressive.

I've seen people present themselves forward in a way that's gentle and kind.

And the challenge to a fight was just dropped.

So this is not a universal recommendation, but the power of kindness is underestimated.

And the question is, when is it the better option?

And I think it's usually the better option.

It's hard to find a better option.

The option of meeting with anger, with aggression, with hostility, with harm sometimes accomplishes the task of something particular, immediate that we want to do.

But it does not create lasting peace.

It does not create lasting safety.

It does not create lasting benefits into this world.

And maybe kindness is not a universal kind of trick that we're supposed to always use.

But I can confidently say that this world is a better place because people's kindness, all the little acts of kindness throughout the day and families in the world, that it makes a huge difference as it builds up and spreads.

It's hard to find a time when anger, hostility, hatred is a better option.

And so this idea of... finding a way to touch into and come from a place of kindness is a phenomenally useful thing to do, to spend time considering it, living with it.

Don't overlook it.

Don't diminish it.

Don't think there's more important things to be done.

And one of the ways that this heart of kindness, this approach of care, of goodwill, can you see its power is if you start with yourself.

Of course we have all kinds of odd states of mind, difficult states of mind, emotions that come up.

There can be anger, that can be hatred and ill-will towards oneself.

There could be deep sense of guilt and shame and resentment.

There could be deep sadnesses and griefs that we live with that just kind of pull us into their orbit in such a strong way that we collapse or debilitated.

It's difficult to be a human being.

But one of the great influences is to meet our own difficulties, our own challenges with kindness, with goodwill.

And that's surprising.

So if you find yourself with resentment and hate, bring care, bring a loving attention, bring a parental love to that.

If, and I think maybe I've told this story before, but when my son was young, there was, he was in his twos, so could maybe speak a little bit and could walk around.

And we had play dates.

And there was one person, friends of ours, who had a son about the same age.

And he developed a... kind of anti-social behavior of starting to hit other kids he was playing with, and he would bite them, and very aggressive.

And the parents didn't know what they do, and they took him to a therapist, to talk about it.

And the therapist recommended that whenever the child started this behavior, remember the little boy somewhere in the twos, to love him, to pick him up and offer care, love, just smother, fill him with love.

And the parents said, no, but that's positive reinforcement.

And the therapist, no, no, you should do it.

And so they did.

And the violent behavior of this little two-year-old stopped right away and didn't start again.

So what was, I don't know exactly what the psychology and what was going on in that kid's life.

It's hard to grow up.

It's hard to begin understanding what's happening in this world.

And so... so anyways, but also very, it's a time where you want to provide all kinds of very important messages to someone who's very young.

And this kid got the message of love, of care, of respect, of being important and valued.

And it made all the difference and changed very quickly the behavior.

And so this is something for adults, maybe it takes longer to do that, but to begin entrusting and offering the world our kindness.

And one of the ways that this can be powerful is that people begin feeling safe around us.

They feel like, oh, this person's not going to harm me.

And when people can relax around us, then that's the field in which basic warm regard, positive regard to begin operating.

When there's fear, it's hard to do that.

And so we are malleable.

We can do that to ourselves.

And that's part of where we immediately see the power of kindness.

So if we are afraid to hold that kindly, to be the parent that loves, say, oh, here, let me hold you.

Let me hold this.

And the image that I like is for mindfulness is to have two cupped hands that come from underneath.

Right? where our fear is in our body, and just hold it safely.

Let it be there, and let it begin feeling the warmth of our positive regard, rather than seeing fear as a problem, or fear as an enemy, or fear as something that we have to believe or be under the influence of it.

We want to shift around, and rather than being influenced by our fear, we want to step forward.

Yes, I'm here with you.

I care for you.

Here, anger, hostility that we have towards ourselves or to the world, yes, I'm here to hold you, to love you, to care, which does not mean condoning it, does not mean going along with it.

It means allowing something to relax and soften, something deep inside that needs to feel the kindness, needs to feel the safety.

And to learn to do it for ourselves, then when we bring our kindness to the world, it's stronger.

It's fuller.

It's embodied.

It's not just an idea.

It's not just a little surface feeling or something.

But it's more full because we've filled ourselves.

We've learned how to hold ourselves in a wide, big way so that we can hold others in a wide, big way.

And so I want to read this poem again that I did during the meditation.

If you search throughout the world in all directions, you would not find anyone more dear than yourself.

Since each person is most dear to themselves, those who love themselves should not bring harm to anyone.

Those who love themselves should not bring harm to anyone.

It's a way of kind of putting ourselves in other people's shoes, that they are valuable.

They're important for themselves.

People cherish themselves.

They want to protect themselves.

They want to... they've loved themselves.

There's a desire to live and to breathe and to thrive in this world.

That everyone kind of has a love for themselves.

Or at least that's possible.

And because of that, putting ourselves in their shoes, we don't want to harm them.

To harm them is going to harm some things very, very precious and valuable in this world for that person.

And if we know what's valuable for ourselves, ourselves, our own care and love, we wouldn't harm ourselves.

And we harm ourselves by being aggressive and hostile towards others.

It's a tremendous self-harm.

And I've talked to people for many years who've had to deal with the repercussions of things they thought were okay to do that were harming others when they did it.

But soon enough they learned that it was not okay and they lived with remorse, regrets, guilt, the repercussions of that, the fear even that comes with it.

So this topic of kindness, love, is not as meant to be a sentimental thing.

It's not meant to be a superficial thing.

It's not meant to be something that makes us vulnerable and weak.

It's the opposite.

It's here to make us strong and safe in ourselves and in the world around us, safe enough to be able to meet the challenges of this world and even the danger of this world with the power of love.

And this week where... Martin Luther King week.

Let's remember the power of love of Martin Luther King and the Freedom Fighters and the marches through Mississippi, Alabama, where they carried the message of love, somewhat like the message of these monks who are now walking towards Washington and 18 or so these Buddhist monks walking with *mettā*, with kindness.

May we all walk with kindness.

Thank you.