

Dharmette: Love (21) Introduction to Metta Meditation

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So, hello everyone and welcome to Beginning of the Week, this long extended series on love. This week, the topic is *mettā*, more directly. And I'm hoping that the foundation of the last four weeks of focusing on this topic prepares, has prepared you for a richer kind of experience, a richer connection to your capacity for all the varieties of love. And I think it's a wonderful thing to not think of love as one thing, but that it's multifaceted in different circumstances, in different contexts, different times, that different forms of it come forward, and that it's a nourishment for us. It's something that we value, and we feel like it's healthy for us and better for us to live a life of love than the alternative, and that we take the time for that, that we maybe realize that life goes better when there's more goodwill, more kindness, more compassion, and more compassion.

And so the kind of one of the primary forms of love that's emphasized in our tradition is *mettā*, M-E-T-T-A, and sometimes translated as, I translate it as goodwill, sometimes translated with loving kindness, which kind of, for some people, kind of is quite inspiring, but also seems to raise the bar quite high. And sometimes just simply kindness. The word is related to the word *mitta*, which is *mitta*, which means friend. And so it's a kind of a basic friendliness. Some people have tried translating as amity, but I don't know how many people use that word in their active vocabulary. It just means related to friend.

And so we don't leave it to a chance that we have goodwill. We actually can spend time increasing our capacity for goodwill and increasing the amount of time that is present for us, that we live from it and go about from it. Not in a Pollyannish way, not naive, not because we're ignoring that there's challenging relationships, challenging situations, people, not to ignore that one of our challenging people is ourself. And we don't want to just kind of override our challenges or our ways we don't have goodwill. We want to be able to hold ourselves with goodwill as well.

In the ancient tradition, the formal kind of more structured practice of goodwill is usually done by starting with oneself. And the reason that's given, the earliest reference we have of Buddhists doing this is a thousand years after the Buddha, and now or so, 800 to a thousand. And it's a long time after, and the person who first wrote about this raises the question, almost like someone's going to critique him, the Buddha never taught goodwill to yourself. Why do you do it? And why are we doing that now?

And he explains that by having goodwill to oneself, one has a foundation for understanding other people better. Having goodwill for ourselves and feeling the goodness of that, the light of it, the happiness of that, kind of softening our resentment, softening our inner critic, softening the ways in which we maybe feel guilt or shame or all kinds of difficult emotions, to get through to that, to melt that, and to have a genuine kind of kind regard for ourselves, and to benefit from that. If we know that kind of benefit, that kind of maybe joy, then it is easier for us to be able to do it for other people. So that might have been true in India or in Asia, you know, 1500 years ago. And the question is, is that true for us here in the modern world?

And a lot of people I meet, a lot of people find it hard to begin with themselves. And so what I like to teach is begin with a person for whom it's easiest. And if it happens to be you, wonderful. But it might be someone else, and someone who really inspires a lot of it. It could be a small child that you know, neighbor's child, that just every time you see the child, you just have all this, everything falls away, all your problems fall away. Just such a delight, and you feel so kind-hearted to this child and delighted.

It could be a relative, a distant relative. It could be someone in your own family. It could be some inspired people. I know a lot of people who have used the Dalai Lama as the person with which they're practicing their goodwill. It's easy for people to have just delight and goodwill for him. So the principle here is to use who it's easiest, and then find a way to begin coming back to that regularly.

And in meditation practice, it's possible to make it the primary practice for a while. It's possible to get very, very still, very stable, steady, very quiet, in this kind of field, in healthy field, healthy glow of goodwill. It's not a superficial practice. It's actually considered quite a profound practice to really get centered and focused and unified around this notion of goodwill. And it's remarkable for, in meditation practice, to have ourselves unified or filled or like the whole focus of attention, the whole focus of the inner life, become centered on goodwill. To have that become kind of through and through who we are and what goes on.

When we do regular mindfulness practice, the comparable thing is also to become very steady and settled and feel a thorough feeling of clarity and peace and calm. At some point, even

joy as we sit there in this field of mindfulness, field of awareness. And so a similar thing can happen with goodwill, but it has a different quality, a character, because it's infused with the qualities of goodwill. And so we're growing that capacity in a meditative, contemplative way. It's one of the great joys.

Some people find it a lot easier to do goodwill meditation, *mettā* meditation. Some people find it much more difficult. If it's easy, develop it for a while. It's really a wonderful thing. If it's difficult, also develop it. It might also be a really good thing to be up against the challenges of it and understand oneself better, understand what's needed to be let go of, to understand, to heal, so that there can be an easier kind of flow of goodwill towards others. It doesn't have to be dramatic, but goodwill becomes improved. Or ill-will lessens.

So the meditative practice on goodwill involves a number of component parts. It involves, and different people find the different parts resonate the most. So it's not like you have to use all of them. But one is to think of a person that it's easy for you to have goodwill for and then choose someone for whom it's uncomplicated. It's like, don't choose someone that you're romantically attracted to, and so that complicates the goodwill to its desires and other things. And maybe you have a lot of goodwill for someone who also is a difficult person at times, and so sometimes it flows back and forth between the love and the irritation or the love and the overwhelm of the other things that go on.

So choose someone who is relatively easy and clean and simple. And sometimes it's someone maybe you don't quite know so well. You haven't had a chance to build up a difficult relationship with them. And some people can visualize, and so one part of it is to visualize their face. Maybe visualize them with a smiling face or visualizing. I've sometimes visualized them as a child sitting around the kitchen table with their family on a very nice, happy family gathering, and everyone's kind of delighted and happy to be with each other. It's clearly a happy time for them.

And with that kind of visualization, wishing them more, wishing more of that. May they have more. This would be great. What a good idea. And so then another component part is that wish, the well-wishing, the intention. And sometimes it's said that in the practice of loving kindness, you don't have to have feelings of loving kindness. It's enough to have the intention, the wish.

Right? It's kind of a focal point of the mind, of the heart, that this is what you're just wishing. May they be happy. And then that is given actually concrete form in repeating this phrase, may you be happy. Some people like to just have one phrase over and over again. It keeps it really simple, as long as it can be a living kind of felt sense, kind of this is valuable and kind

of you're into it.

Sometimes it can be more phrases, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you be peaceful, may you be free. Usually, the usual practice is to have four phrases. So that's relatively simple, you don't have to be thinking about it. And I find it really helpful to emphasize the last word, to somehow imagine that you have a pebble dropping into a pool of water and allowing the ripple of happiness, the ripple of safety, the rippling of goodwill to flow out, kind of like I'm opening up, I'm allowing myself to feel that goodwill spread out around me. And all along, being careful not to let the thinking mind take over.

So I also like when saying this last word, to let the thinking mind become quiet so that the ripples can flow more fully out into me, into the world around me. And to do this repeatedly in meditation as a way to begin quieting the discursive mind, quieting the distracted mind, and to start getting settled and focused and calm. And over time, when we really let go of the discursive mind, that's quieted down, and start getting into the flow of the phrases, the words, the goodwill, the feelings of it, the joy of it, until it begins to become a flow, a glow that we center ourselves in.

So for today, you might want to spend some time thinking about the people or peoples or animals or children for whom it's easy for you to have goodwill. And maybe kind of create in your heart or in your mind or in a piece of paper kind of a list of people for whom it's fairly easy for you to have goodwill. And just begin appreciating that you have these feelings, that you have this goodwill, appreciating your good fortune that you know such people and that they are part of your life in some way or other. So it's kind of like a wonderful treasure to spend a day kind of reminding yourself of where your goodwill is, where your goodness is, where you're well-wishing, where this kind of love is. And kind of begin exploring the different component parts, the different aspects, physical, emotional, heartfelt, mental, memory that come into play when you're staying connected to the goodwill you have for other people.

And then we'll build on this tomorrow. So thank you all very much, and certainly I'm wishing you all well, and lots of delight, happiness, the satisfying, and a warm hearted day. May you all be happy. Thank you.