

Dharmette: Love (22) Smiling to Oneself

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Hello and welcome to this second talk this week on the practice of *mettā*, of goodwill, of loving-kindness, kindness.

As the classic instructions for this practice has come down to us from a famous teacher from the 4th, 5th century named Buddhaghosa. The practice includes offering loving-kindness to oneself, goodwill to oneself. And sometimes that can be quite difficult. Sometimes it's quite beautiful and inspiring to do it. But maybe it helps to understand that this act of goodwill, this expression of goodwill, that attitude of goodwill to oneself, is meant to be pretty simple. Simple enough that it goes underneath the resistance or the doubts or the criticisms or the blame or the shame or all kinds of things or the fears that stand in the way.

And understanding how simple it is maybe helps us to really be able to meditate with the fear with an attitude, a feeling, a flow of kindness to ourselves, to hold ourselves in a kind regard. So, as I said in the guided meditation, that it can be experienced as a tremendous act of kindness that someone listens to us without judgment, without reactivity, listens to us with interest and presence. Right. Sometimes even listening is not necessary, just simply being present for us. Maybe we're silent. And they're just there with us.

You're clear that they're attending to us, they're aware, they're present. They don't want anything. They're not reacting. They're not judging us. And it can feel like a tremendous act of kindness to have that kind of attention from someone. And there's something about this human nature of what we are and how we resonate and can live together with others, that to be able to someone to have the time, the respect, the care, to listen, to be present, to accompany us, it can feel like an act of kindness.

And maybe we end up saying thank you for just them spending that kind of time with us. And so this speaks to how mindfulness and kindness, mindfulness and goodwill, mindfulness and

mettā, friendliness, kind of at some point becomes clear, they kind of merge. They kind of, for a period of time, seem like they're not different from each other. That the act of mindfulness is kind, and the act of simple kindness involves mindfulness. And appreciating this allows us maybe to have this very simple kindness towards ourselves, because the same thing is offering simple mindfulness to ourselves.

And so to meet ourselves, to be present for ourselves, and to do that with goodwill, kind of not holding yourself ill-will towards ourselves, not putting aside all the reasons we think that we're not worthy of love or care, all the reasons we might think that we're not kind of a good person, all the ways in which we are caught up in shoulds and shouldn'ts, agendas, and needing to do things and be a better person for other people in some way. When we come to meditation, this is a special time where we were allowed to put aside all the shoulds, all the agendas, all the social expectations, all the ideas we've inherited about how a human being is supposed to be, and to instead offer to ourselves the gift of simple kindness, simple goodwill, simple attention, that you might be willing to offer a friend, or maybe you've experienced receiving it from someone, maybe a stranger, that had no reason to give you a kind attention, be present for you in a nice, friendly way, do you a small gift, share something with you, offer a smile. They had no reason to, but they did. And you maybe say thank you in return. Thank you.

These simple acts of kindness that we kind of deny ourselves to ourselves is what in this practice here, a *mettā* practice, we begin to awaken this capacity, discover it. And it might seem like it's too self-centered to do that. But the resonance between our capacity to offer kindness to others, our capacity to feel it from others, and our capacity to offer it to ourselves, all work together to create a heightened capacity to do the very same thing in all directions. If we want to really have a strong ability to be kind to others in an effective way and meaningful way, it's more meaningful if we're happy ourselves, if we kind of hold ourselves in kind regard, than if we feel miserable about ourselves and terrible at ourselves, then our kindness kind of becomes mixed up with those difficult emotions. And of course we have difficult emotions, but one of the great things that can happen with loving-kindness meditation is we allow ourselves to be the way we are, just like a good friend who sits with us, listens to us, just allows us to be the way we are, even if we're gloomy or something.

And we offer, we can offer basic kind regard, positive regard, kind regard, to what's difficult in us. Rather than being held by it or caught in it or driven by it or influenced unduly by it, we learn to meet it with kindness, meet it with care. And so we're not denying that we feel bad sometimes, but we're finding this place inside where we allow us to wish ourselves well. You

don't have to feel kind to do this. It's enough just to want to do it. Even just wanting to want to do it, any movement, positive movement towards kindness is the right directions.

And to kind of appreciate that, call on that, so we're not caught up in what's difficult. So mindfulness practice is a powerful practice of self-monitoring and learning how to self-regulate. And so we're monitoring our inner state, our mind, our heart, and regulating it in a way that feels organic or feels appropriate so that we don't just kind of barrel ahead, go ahead, with ways of being which are not healthy for us. If you're spending a lot of time thinking thoughts of resentment or a lot of times thoughts of, you know, greed for something or whatever it might be, if you don't see it, then it just perpetuates, goes on and on perhaps, until reality interrupts you. But to know what you're doing and say, is this the best way to go? Is there an alternative? Can I regulate this?

And one of the great skills is to self-regulate both with mindfulness. Let me be present for this and with kindness. And kindness towards yourself. And the more you can do this in a simple way, the more you'll have to offer others, the more you can contribute kindness and friendliness to others. So it's well worth spending time exploring how to be friendly to yourself, how to become your own best friend, how to meet yourself with goodwill.

And the suggestion is you do this intentionally. You take time to do this, just like you'd go for a walk in the park, maybe with a friend who's troubled. Go for a walk with yourself in the park and sit with yourself there and listen to yourself, hear yourself, self-monitor and see if there's appropriate ways of self-regulating with loving-kindness, with goodwill. And offer that to yourself. See if you can awaken a smile on your heart or a kind regard, to gaze upon yourself with kindness.

And one of the ways we do that in our tradition is to say simple words that are not trying to force the issue, not trying to paper over what's going on, but simple words that kind of open a reminder of that place deep inside that where kind regard, warmth can exist. So we have the very important four words. May I be happy, may I be safe, may I be peaceful, may I be free. There's different words we can use, and sometimes it's useful just to use one word, or sometimes it's useful just to say yes. And the word yes I find is a remarkable thing to my inner system. I don't have to even say yes to anything, or it's yes to being present, yes to awareness, yes to being kind.

And don't leave it to chance. Spend time every day kind of familiarizing yourself with the world of kindness, with the inner world, with being kind. And so today, the emphasis is towards yourself, or towards parts of yourself, the difficult parts. And I would encourage you as you go through the day, find a way to periodically just evoke, be reminded about self-

kindness, self-goodwill, and see if to kind of be reminded and relax. Maybe say yes. Maybe sit and close your eyes and do a few rounds of saying these phrases.

Make it a familiar part of your day. Sprinkle it through the day and see by the end of the day how it has affected you. What has changed because of a regular touching in to goodwill? So thank you very much, and I look forward to coming back tomorrow.