

Mettā - Love

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 7:23

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I was going to talk about *mettā* tonight, which is just what we've done, this practice of goodwill. It's something which balances the practice of *vipassanā*. In *vipassanā*, we're trying to find a very objective position to ourselves. We're trying to experience what we normally call ourselves as objective experiences. So when we say the body and we're looking inward, what is it that we're actually experiencing? When we say an emotion, what do we actually mean by that?

So we take this position of the objective observer, one removed. That isn't the final position. The final position is even to get rid of the observer so that we're into a pure state of observing. But the downside of that is the equanimity that we get can so easily turn to indifference. And somehow we have to re-engage with the psycho-physical organism so that the wisdom that we have can actually be expressed. And to do that you have to drop the wisdom into the heart, the right attitude, and then the attitude will express itself through the rest of the Eightfold Path in right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

So whenever you do *vipassanā*, it really is important to finish with *mettā*, even if it's only a minute, just to bring yourself back into a relationship with the world. And what we're trying to do is to establish an attitude.

So the mistake that is often made is that we're trying to get an emotion going, a loving, sweet, touchy-feely emotion. And that's a disaster. You have to pretend that you're feeling loving. So abandon that. It's useless. The idea is that you're training your will, your will to think lovingly, loving relationship, a loving thought. You've got to be careful with thought, but it's an attitude. It's a position you're taking of goodwill. And eventually the heart will respond. You do feel lovely when you're offering your goodwill to somebody. But then the danger is that you start doing this loving business in order to feel good.

And that's when it becomes corrupted. So your attention is always on the other. Your goodwill is going outwards towards the other as an intention. You'll notice that we turn it also towards ourselves, so that's also another mistake that you're very loving to everybody else but you beat yourself up. That's not a good thing to do either. So you have to offer yourself your goodwill. And in so doing, what you're creating is a basic relationship to all beings. That's what you end up with.

So you start with the particular, which is easy — somebody who's helped you. That's easy because of the gratitude that comes up. And you go through these stages where you're basically opening out, but you're

offering the same offerings, so you're not distinguishing. And you're trying to get a universal attitude. Sometimes the word detached is used, but that makes it rather cold.

But it's a universal attitude that no matter who or what — it could be an animal, whatever is standing in front of you, whatever is there before you — whether you like them or dislike them is irrelevant. You still have the same goodwill towards them. And that's *mettā*. It's also a platform from which all the other relationships towards people arise too.

Because when you have that basic friendship towards somebody, you can see that if they fall into misfortune or they fall ill, compassion arises naturally. You don't have to work at it. You just feel compassionate. You have an attitude of compassion. And in the same way, if a person has good fortune, wins the lottery and all that, you naturally feel joyful for them. And once that basic goodwill is established, these others arise naturally. You don't have to work at it.

And you'll notice that we have these four basic blessings. The one, to be safe. I mean, that's really fundamental to our human life, to actually feel safe. That's what you want from the government. You want safety from outer attack and safety from economic collapse. That's your basic ground. You want to feel safe. So you're offering people safety, but also safety from dangers that arise within ourselves, from our own angers and so on.

Everybody wants to be well, physically well. You want to be happy. And the last one, which I have used to be contented and in harmony with the world, is also translated as well-being, or to have an ease about your living, to be at ease with it. So those you offer. You offer through all these different stages. And in that way, you build up this universal love, which is not dependent on whether you like somebody or not. And that's really what *mettā* is.

And just to leave you with a final example of the Buddha's own way of expressing it, he talks about the mother. So a mother has four children and to one, occasionally, she's a friend, just a friend, talks. When the child gets sick or when one of the children becomes sick, she tends to that child, so that's the compassion. When one of the children has great success, she feels naturally joyful, her child. And when that child leaves home, there's no clinging on. There's an ability just to let the child go. And that's the other attitude of equanimity, which is another topic.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

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