

Some Pointers for Mettā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 15:41

I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

I wanted to say something about *mettā*. Today we practiced *mettā*. The people who were joining the weekend retreat—actually it's a three-day retreat, it goes on till Monday—we practiced the whole process of developing *mettā* and then we went into forgiveness and finally into determination, how to practice determination.

I just want to say something about *mettā*. So often it's translated as loving kindness or tender loving care, those sorts of things. And they are the emotional relational feelings that we have, but they're not necessary in order to develop *mettā*.

So love has a huge spectrum from erotic to romantic to siblings to your spouse, your partner, to your boss. Everybody has a relationship, and hopefully it's one in which there's general goodwill. And that's really the operative word: goodwill. So it's to do with attitude. Attitude is something that sits behind the emotional life.

And as we practice this goodwill, of course, the heart rises to it. That's what's supposed to happen. But that doesn't mean to say that when we're practicing the *mettā* practice, if we don't feel loving, we feel depressed, anxious, et cetera, it's not working. It is working. Because every time you make an act in the mind of a determination—may you be well, may you be happy, et cetera—you're developing that attitude. It's as simple as that.

And the same of course in the opposite. So if you keep saying to yourself, "I am depressed, I'm so depressed," you know, "May all beings be depressed," then that also will bring about more depression. So we have to be very careful what we say to ourselves. So if we translate *mettā* just as the attitude of goodwill, it manifests in three different ways. From feelings of aversion we move towards love. From feelings of selfishness, we move towards generosity. And from feelings of cruelty, not being nice to people, sarcasm, we move towards compassion.

So having said that, how does it manifest in our speech? So here's the Buddha speaking to his monks. Remember, although I say monks, it's anybody who's listening.

"There are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you: timely or untimely, true or false, gentle or harsh, beneficial or unbeneficial, with a mind of goodwill or of inner ill will. Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way. They may address you in a true or what is false," and then he goes through it. "In any event, you should train yourselves. Our minds will remain unaffected and we will

Speak no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to the person's welfare with a mind of goodwill and with no hate. We will keep pervading him with awareness imbued with goodwill. And beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, free from hostility, and free from ill will. That's how you should train yourself."

Now, the operative phrase for me in this is "awareness imbued with goodwill." So it's an affectionate awareness. If you just try it, if it comes very rarely to you, but if you look kindly upon all people whom you meet or see, even in the street, you'll see that it's a sort of background, sort of backdrop to the way you behave. It has a direct effect on the way you speak and your facial expressions.

So he's very big on speech. Get the speech right. And of course, the speech comes right when the thought comes right. So he's always saying that the mind comes first. What you do with your mind, what you do with your thoughts and your imaginings, they precede everything.

So the next thing is in action. One acts from a position of goodwill, you are connecting with somebody, and it might be that you fall into the error of a do-gooder. Everybody does it at some time or other. And that's when we are willing to do good, we want to do good, but we're not actually listening to what the other person needs. And so you end up doing something, and you can't understand why they want you to leave. Why are they not big on thank yous? Because you've done your best. So you have to be careful when you want to help somebody out of goodwill that we open up. We ask them, "What do you need? What do you want?" And if, of course, you can't fulfil that need, well, you have to say, "I can't do it."

On that level, sometimes I think, definitely true for me, too quick to say yes. So somebody says to you, a friend or a family member or somebody says, "I've got to do, my garden's overgrown, et cetera. I want to do a lot of gardening this weekend. If you've got a spare moment, I'd really appreciate your help." And you immediately say, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'll come over Saturday. Yeah, I'll give you a hand." And then when you leave, you think, "Why did I do that? I don't want to go over there doing the garden." And, of course, come Saturday morning, you've got a headache, you don't feel good, you've lost your spade and things like that.

So it's always good, I think, when somebody asks you to do something, to just spend a moment and just say, "Well, give me a moment there. I'll think about it. I've got to see what I've got to do." Just delay a bit of time.

Now, I trained myself, I mean, this is going back ages, to if I said yes too quickly, no matter how I felt, I would actually go and do it and go through the pain of doing something that I really didn't want to do. And that way, it had some effect on me stopping saying yes too quickly, but actually to recollect or to consider whether I had the time or the will. You don't always have to want to help somebody, you might have other things to do. So you have to be careful that we don't fall into the do-gooder syndrome.

When we love somebody in this mettā way, it doesn't mean to say that you won't be hurt. You have to

accept that because you have an attitude of goodwill to somebody that they're not going to be huggy huggy wuggy you all the time. Sometimes people are cruel, sometimes people say nasty things, sometimes we do nasty things, and yet you still have to have that goodwill.

Often I think in a relationship there's a sort of underlying resentment that grows because somebody is not being as generous as you are. The other person not being as generous as you are, or they're doing things you don't want to do and you keep swallowing it, and the resentment grows and then there's a big blowout, a big argument, and all that's really unnecessary. It is just a case of being open to the other person.

And this is where the problem can lie when love moves towards control. How do you know that you are moving that way? Well, it's when you're getting angry with somebody. If you're getting angry with somebody, they're doing something you don't want them to do. That means you want to control them. Now, that doesn't mean to say that what they're doing is skillful or is wholesome, but the anger is not necessary because the anger is manifesting your desire to control them. And as soon as you realize that, you sort of just wait or go out of the room for a little while, go for a walk, count ten, and then come back. And when you're coming from a place of non-aggression, then of course there's the ability to discuss something.

It doesn't mean to say that at times we can't be assertive, direct. But the anger really builds up a bad energy between people. And if it's not resolved, it remains there as resentment. And before you know it, there's a lot of bad feeling. And you can end up in a very nasty sort of divorce or separation. So you have to be careful of that.

And generosity. So generosity is the ability to give. I mean that's what it is. Whenever the Buddha's talking to lay people he always starts with generosity. He even points out that thieves can be generous. Having saved a thousand pounds, he might give it to needy people in his family and so on. So generosity is just that basic willingness to share of your wealth or of your time for the benefit of another.

Now, this is really a great virtuous circle because when you give something, you're renouncing. Remember that renunciation is the path, renouncing me, me, me, mine, mine, mine all the time. And so this effort to give, to let go of something for the benefit of another is a process of renunciation. Giving up of your time which you could have done something which you personally like for the benefit of another, that is also an expression of renunciation. Letting go, putting the other first. Now of course you don't always have to do that, it depends on the circumstance, but just that ability to give.

Now we will give more when we develop the attitude of gratitude. So if you look back through your life and just see what we've received from our parents, the education from society, the health service, and when you match it all up, you see that it's impossible to repay it. We've been given an enormous amount. It might not feel like that when you're paying taxes and all that, but when you go back to your life and think of all the things that were given to you until eighteen and then you realize that it's not repayable,

you can't repay what has been given to you. And that really is part of that ability to bring up a gratitude.

Now when you have a lot of gratitude, very easy to give because it's part of that barter. I don't want to, perhaps that's the wrong word. It's not a mechanism. It's not a business contract. But there's a desire to want to give something back.

You'll notice now that even these very rich people, Gates, Bill Gates and all those people, they've got a massive amount of money. Well, it's in the American tradition. Philanthropy going right back to Rockefeller and all these people where they've amassed an enormous amount of money and they're putting it to good use. So there's a lovely circular process there where you begin to think of how thankful you are for all the things you've received and how you want to give something back depending on a situation. Every time you give with the heart of letting go, you're renouncing something. And that means that there's less and less clinging in the system, less and less clinging.

Now this sort of pure generosity doesn't undermine the fact that sometimes you have social contracts in your family. Somebody, a sibling or somebody might buy you a bottle of wine for Christmas, non-alcoholic, of course, and you send them a box of chocolates. And it's normally an equal exchange. If you send a box of chocolates that cost thirty pounds and they sell you a seven pound bottle of non-alcoholic wine, well, you can feel very upset about that. But even so, because of the heart of generosity, you still continue to send great big parcels of chocolate.

So generosity is a core value which manifests this mettā. That's how mettā manifests.

So I think I've actually done my little bit there. That's all I wanted to say about love, just a sort of résumé of love itself. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that hopefully you can send mettā.

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