

High-level Metta

March 3, 2016

Start the meditation with goodwill: with goodwill for yourself, goodwill for others. Remind yourself that's why we're practicing the Dhamma. All the Buddha's teachings come out of goodwill. When he taught the four noble truths, he focused on the issue of suffering because he wanted to have people find a way to end suffering. Goodwill underlies everything.

So if you find there's some part of the day when you begin to get a little lazy in the practice, ask yourself, "Do you have goodwill for yourself if you're getting lazy?" Because goodwill doesn't mean just being nice and sweet. It means doing what's truly in your own best interest and truly in the best interest of other people. Fortunately, those two things don't have to conflict when we get to the level of inside happiness. The more you develop your own inner resources, the more you have to offer to others. There's nothing about your true happiness that has to cause any suffering to anybody else. Because their true happiness, too, will be coming from their own inner resources.

So use this as motivation for your practice and to give energy to your practice. As things begin to get lax—say, in the middle of the afternoon, when the afternoon seems awfully long—remind yourself that you don't know how much longer the afternoon's going to last, you do know you have this moment right now. What's the best thing you can do with this moment? To train your mind. That's a way of showing yourself goodwill. In this way, goodwill and heedfulness go together.

In Thailand they talk about some of the teachers having high-level metta, which means that they're willing to say things that may not sound pleasant but are actually for your own good. They're willing to put themselves out in that way. It's a lot easier just to say the pleasant thing and let people go. And it's the same way in your own mind. It's very easy to say, "I'm just going to go with this and be gentle with myself and kind with myself." But sometimes being gentle and kind is not what you really need. Sometimes you have to be a little bit more harsh with yourself. Other times you need to use a little bit more humor. You've got to learn how to read your situation so what you're doing is skillful—not just nice and pleasant, but actually skillful.

That's how goodwill really gets expressed because it aims at true happiness. That means it aims at what is needed to be done to find true happiness, which sometimes is easy and sometimes is not. But the goodwill has to underlie both sides for it to be really effective. It has to learn how to express itself in whatever way is appropriate: in line with the precepts, in line with the basic principles of the teaching, by figuring out what you need to do to apply yourself to your mind right now and then carry it through.

That's how your goodwill, how your metta, becomes high-level as well.

