

Liberation Through Loving Friendliness

Dhammapada

128 (spoken by the Buddha).

*“He abused me, he beat me,
He worsted me, he robbed me.”
Hate never is allayed in men
That cherish such hostility.*

*“He abused me, he beat me,
He worsted me, he robbed me.”
Hate surely is allayed in men
Who cherish no such hostility.*

*For hate through hostility.
Is never in this world allayed;
It is allayed by friendliness and goodwill —
That is an ancient principle.*

The word “love” — one of the most compelling in the English language — is commonly used for purposes so widely separated, so gross and so rarefied, as to render it sometimes nearly meaningless. Yet rightly understood, love is the indispensable and essential foundation no less for the growth and purification of the individual as for the construction of a peaceful, progressive and healthy society.

Spiritual love that looks for guidance to the love of a mother for her child. This love uplifts itself to the ideal of the pure fount of concern for safety, welfare and spiritual health (a mother best cares for her child if she guards her own well-being and health). It is this kind of love which the Buddha takes as the basis for his teaching of universal love.

Where Greek distinguishes between sensual eros and spiritual agape English makes do with only the

one word “love.” But the Pali language, like the Sanskrit, has many words covering many shades of meaning. The word chosen by the Buddha for this teaching is metta from mitta, a friend (or better “the true friend in need”). Metta (loving-kindness) is defined as follows: **“Loving-kindness has the mode of friendliness for its characteristic. Its natural function is to promote friendliness. It is manifested as the disappearance of ill-will. Its footing is seeing with kindness. When it succeeds it eliminates ill-will. When it fails it degenerates into selfish affectionate desire.”**

Then there are certain types of persons towards whom loving-kindness should not be developed in the first stages. The attempt, at the outset to regard a disliked person as dear to one is fatiguing, and likewise trying to regard a dearly loved friend with neutrality, and when an enemy is recalled anger springs up. Again it should not be directed towards members of the opposite sex, to begin with, for this may arouse lust. Right at the start, the meditation of loving-kindness should be developed towards oneself repeatedly in this way: “May I be happy and free from suffering” or “May I keep myself free from hostility and trouble and live happily” (though this will never produce the full absorption of contemplation). It is by cultivating the thought “May I be happy” with oneself as example, that one begins to be interested in the welfare and happiness of other living beings, and to feel in some sense their happiness as if it were one’s own: “Just as I want happiness and fear pain, just as I want to live and not to die, so do other beings.” So one should first become familiar with pervading oneself as example with loving-kindness. Only then should one choose someone who is liked and admired and much respected. The meditation can then be developed towards him, remembering endearing words or virtues of his, and thinking such thoughts about him as “may he be happy.”

When this has become familiar, one can begin to practice loving-kindness towards a dearly beloved companion, and then towards a neutral person, or finally towards an enemy. It is when dealing with an enemy that anger can arise, and the Metta can become the solvent to dissolve it.. Allowing the attention to notice this happening, one will become aware that they are able to regard an enemy without resentment and even with loving-kindness in the same way as one does the admired person, the dearly loved friend, and the neutral person. Loving-kindness can now be allowed to flow towards all beings; or to certain groups of beings at a time, or in one direction at a time to all; or to certain groups in succession.

Loving-kindness ought to be brought to the point where there are no longer any barriers set between persons, and for this the following example is given: Suppose a man is with a dear, a neutral and a hostile person, himself being the fourth; then bandits come to him and say “we need one of you for human sacrifice.” Now if that man thinks “Let then take this one, or that one,” he has not yet broken down the barriers, and also if he thinks “Let them take me but not these three,” he has not broken down the barriers either. Why not? Because he seeks the harm of him who he wishes to be taken and the welfare of only the other three. It is only when he does not see a single one among the four to be chosen in preference to the other three, and directs his mind quite impartially towards himself and the other three, that he has broken down the barriers.

The incomparable value of a mother’s love provides a wonderful example. It’s place above all other kinds of loving kindness, lies in the fact that she understands her child’s welfare — her love is not blind. Not love alone, nor faith alone, can ever bring a practitioner all the way to the cessation of suffering, and that is why the Buddha, as the Supreme Physician, prescribes the development of five faculties in balanced harmony: the faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and understanding.

Anguttara Nikaya: 5:161 (spoken by the Buddha)

There are these five ways of removing annoyance, by which annoyance can be entirely removed by one when it arises. What are the five?

Loving-kindness can be maintained in being towards a person with whom you are annoyed: this is how annoyance with that one can be removed. Compassion can be maintained in being towards a person with whom you are annoyed; this too is how annoyance with that person can be removed. Onlooking equanimity can be maintained in being towards a person with whom you are annoyed; this too is how annoyance with that person can be removed. The forgetting and ignoring of a person with whom you are annoyed can be practiced; this too is how annoyance with that person can be removed. Ownership of deeds in a person with whom you are annoyed can be concentrated upon thus: “This person is owner of their deeds, heir to their deeds, one’s deeds are the womb from which one is born, one’s deeds are one’s kin for whom one is responsible, one’s deeds are one’s refuge, one is heir to one’s deeds, be they good or bad.” This too is how annoyance with that person can be removed. These are the five ways of removing annoyance, by which annoyance can be entirely removed when it arises within.

Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 21 (spoken by the Buddha)

There are five modes of speech that others may use when they address you. Their speech may be timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, for good or harm, and may be accompanied by thoughts of loving-kindness or by inner hate.

Suppose a man came with a hoe and a basket, and he said, “I shall make this great earth to be without earth”; and he dug here and there and strewed here and there, and spat here and there and relieved himself

here and there, saying “Be without earth, be without earth.” What do you think, would that man make this great earth to be without earth? — No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because this great earth is deep and measureless; it cannot possibly be made to be without earth. So the man would reap weariness and disappointment.

Suppose a man came with or indigo die or carmine die, and he said, “I shall draw pictures, I shall make pictures appear, on this empty space.” What do you think, would that man draw pictures, would he make pictures appear, on that empty space? — No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because that empty space is formless and invisible; he cannot possibly draw pictures, make pictures appear there. So the man would reap weariness and disappointment.

So too, there are these five modes of speech that others may use when they address you. Their speech may be timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, for good or for harm, and may be accompanied by thoughts of loving-kindness or by inner hate. Now this is how you should train yourselves here:

“Our minds will remain unaffected, we shall utter no bad words, we shall abide friendly and compassionate, with thoughts of loving-kindness and no inner hate. We shall abide with loving-kindness in our hearts extending to that person, and we shall dwell extending it to the entire world as our object, with our hearts abundant, exalted, measureless in loving-kindness, without hostility or ill-will.” That is how you should train yourselves.

Anguttara Nikaya, 11:16 (spoken by the Buddha)

When the heart-deliverance of loving-kindness is maintained in being, made much of, used as one’s vehicle, used as one’s foundation, established, consolidated, and properly managed, then eleven blessings can be expected. What are the eleven?

One sleeps in comfort; one wakes in comfort; one dreams no evil dreams; one is dear to human beings; one is dear to non-human beings; the gods guard him; no fire or poison or weapon harms him; one’s mind can be quickly concentrated; the expression of one’s face is serene; one dies without falling into confusion; and, even if one fails to penetrate any further, one will pass on to the world of the Divine, to the Brahma world.

Samyutta Nikaya, 20:3 (spoken by the Buddha)

Just as clans with many women and few men are readily ruined by robbers and bandits, so too any practitioner who has not maintained in being and made much of the heart-deliverance of loving-kindness is readily ruined by non-human beings. And just as clans with few women and many men are not readily ruined by robbers and bandits; so too any bhikkhu who maintains in being and makes much of the heart-deliverance of loving-kindness is not readily ruined by non-human beings. So, you should train in this way: **The heart-deliverance of loving-kindness will be maintained in being and made much of by us, used as our vehicle, used as our foundation, established, consolidated, and properly managed.** That is how you should train.

Metta Sutta, from the Sutta-nipata, vv. 143-152 (spoken by the Buddha)

This is what should be done

By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech,

Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied,

Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm and wise and skillful,

Not proud or demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing

That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
 May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
 Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
 The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
 Those born and to-be-born —
May all beings be at ease!

Let none deceive another,
 Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
 Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
 Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
 Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
 Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
 Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
 Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
 One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
 By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
 Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.