Summary Keywords

goodwill, aspiration, kindness, beneficial, wishing, word, loveliness, loving kindness, love, ill, wealth, welfare, people, friendly, goodness, open, nourishes, benefit, friendliness, encounter

Speakers

Gil Fronsdal

So this is the second talk on this week's theme of loving kindness as one of the divine abodes, immeasurables. And so the word for, the Pali word, the Buddhist word for loving kindness is mettā, m-e-t-t-a. And it's a cognate to the word mitta, which means friend. And so part of the connotations of mettā is friendliness. And friendliness is a basic attitude of respecting people, being kind to people, appreciating people, being open to kind of a friendly exchange, a kinda exchange with people. And it's possible to be friendly with people who you don't really like or who are challenging in variety of ways.

And so the word loving kindness, which is I think, a beautiful concept and word in English. For some people, it might not really represent mettā, as fully as other English translations. Some people the idea of love as a very high bar. And to have loving kindness, kindness which is filled with love. It's hard to do for people who are challenging for us. Maybe there are people who we find difficult to love, because they're just, you know, maybe I don't have to explain why, but there are challenging people that exist in our lives and we encounter. And so to love them might be unreasonable. And to hold ourselves up to some kind of standard we're supposed to love everyone might not be realistic. But it is possible to have goodwill for everyone. To be friendly for everyone. And friendly towards the strangers. A sense of hospitality for anybody that we encounter. And so it might be that a word that translates mettā more appropriately in English is the word goodwill. Where there's an aspiration and intention, a willingness to spread our goodness. To extend our goodness to others. So they feel safe with us. They feel happy with us. They feel that we have their best interest in mind. We have their good interest in mind. We're there to support their welfare. Not there to support their ill. We're not there to try to undermine them or be critical of them or diminish who they are in some way.

So goodwill. I also like the word kindness as a translation of mettā because kindness has, for me, implies more than just a feeling or an attitude. Kindness has connotations for me of actually something, an extension towards other people. There's an expression of we have kind words, we have a kind gaze, we have a kind action. That goodwill can just be that you kind of radiate a sense of well wishing for...
someone. But kindness implies a little bit more action for me. And so I like the word kindness. Just simply kindness as a translation for mettā.

In the ancient Buddhist texts, mettā is described this way. The primary characteristic of mettā is to promote the welfare of all beings. To promote beneficial conditions for others. So this idea of wanting to benefit, wanting things to be beneficial. And it says beneficial conditions. So it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be the one who provides them with those conditions. But there's a genuine wish that may the conditions of their life be such that they have happiness and well being. May they experience welfare. And while it's a big difference between simply wishing that and doing something for it. We shouldn't underestimate the tremendous value of having goodwill for others. I know I've been the recipient of people simple goodwill, and it makes a difference. Something inside of me kind of opens up or is buoyed or inspired by just knowing that people are thinking well of me.

It says that that the core of loving kindness is focusing on what is beneficial. So it requires some sense of what is beneficial. To simply wish someone win a very big lottery ticket, and to get really amazingly wealthy. Is that really for their benefit? As I said enough times that there has been studies made that people who win big chunks of money in a lottery, a year after winning it they're less happy than they were before they won it. So to really wish people what's genuinely beneficial. What is really supportive for them and nice for them. And it might not be wealth, it might not be status, it might not be material goods. It might be that sometimes it can be so simple. Some of the simplest things are some of the most fulfilling and happy. I think that learning how to breathe with breath is just easy and easeful breath is a phenomenal wealth. The Buddha said that for a monastic who is not - monastics are not supposed to acquire money to have money, or wealth. He said that wealth for a monastic is mettā, is loving kindness, is goodwill. And this is a wonderful kind of kind of juxtaposition that having goodwill for others is a wealth for oneself. There's so much goodness in that aspiration, that the goodness of the aspiration kind of benefits and feeds or nourishes something in us.

And this idea that we're focusing on the beneficial, both for others and for ourselves. It's kind of this mutual way. And this is where I really love this English word aspiration. As I've said earlier that aspiration is a beneficial desire that Buddhism champions. Aspiration is a good thing. And that it's a desire which is opening. Desire which is freeing. Desire which helps us feel more connected. It contains within it beneficial seeds, beneficial goodness in it. So then when we breathe with aspiration, inspiration, that we get filled with something good. It nourishes something there for ourselves. And so they have the aspiration for others welfares. We're benefiting ourselves as we're benefiting others.

The description goes on and says the manifestation of mettā is the removal of malice. The removal of ill will. So we know that loving kindness is present in a stable, strong way, when there's absolutely no ill will. There's only a goodwill that's there. And it's proximate cause is the loveliness of beings. What a great expression. That the proximate cause, the proximate condition that brings about this mettā is seeing the loveliness in beings. So how do we see the beauty in other people? I think that one of the things that it requires is slowing down. Taking the time to pay attention to that. Our minds go fast, they pay attention to all kinds of things, we have a lot of desires, we have a lot of wants, we have a lot of preoccupations, concerns, fears. And so when we encounter someone, sometimes all these different
things are swirling around and making the mind fast or caught up in things. But to stop and take time. Doesn't have to be anybody notices you're pausing that not long, but to learn to appreciate the loveliness of beings. The beauty of other people. Everyone has loveliness. Everyone has it. And to begin to tune into that. And that's why again, if we go back to meditation practice. As we discover our own loveliness. As we start to sitting and opening up to our beauty, the beauty within. The capacity for integrity and wholeness, of lack of conflict, lack of ill will, lack of hostility, lack of greed. This beautiful place inside that where this kind of whole other way of being lives, is with us. And we recognize the beauty in our in ourselves, then it's more and more easy to see that and other people. It's there. And if we don't see it in other people, one principle you might want to consider - as a principle, not as a truth - is that maybe just maybe you don't see it in others because you haven't seen it in yourself. And if you really see it in yourself, you'll see it even in even in people who are quite difficult. You'll see there, the seed. Maybe it's hidden even from them. But it's a seed, it's a potential, it's something, something lovely to appreciate in others.

And it says, the last part of this description, is that mettā fails when it leads to, the translation here is a sticky affection. So affection for others, which is a neediness and wantingness and a graspingness. So that's not mettā. Mettā as open handed. The hands don't grasp, don't hold on to anything with mettā. It is just like a freely offered, things are just offered freely. And here you can have it. You can have my goodwill. And it's offered freely and I'm not going to hold on and demand anything in return.

And mettā is an aspiration. For all the emphasis we do in mindfulness about being in the present moment, that's not really the full story of a full liberated life. That there's also a place for having a sense of potential and possibility for others. And wishing that for them. Certainly wishing it for them that they could have it now. But a sense of the possibility they can grow into that, and may it be so. May it be. And so that aspiration, this is what I would like. My wish is. My heartfelt wish, my wholehearted wish, is really that other people feel well and happy.

You don't have to tell people that you have this wish for them. You don't even tell people you have goodwill for them. Sometimes some relationships are such that it's too complicated if you tell them. And because there are people with sticky affection or people who will, you know, or even mean sometimes and all kinds of difficult ways of being. So the wonderful art of mettā is knowing when to do it privately. And just to have goodwill for others. And I've had goodwill and I've heard stories of people say that they have very difficult person in their lives. And they decided to just have goodwill for them, kind of privately, sometimes they do hold them in their loving kindness when they're not together. And when they are together, they're kind of just kind of reflecting on their well wishing for that person. And nothing special is said, nothing specialist done that expresses the goodwill. But just that attitude seems to change this circumstance and the person seems to become kinder or less threatening or less difficult to be with.

Finally, this brahmavihārā, this practice of loving kindness. It's both an expression that can be in present moment, just to express, to live with loving kindness and goodness and wishing well being or friendliness to others. But also as I keep saying an aspiration. An aspiration is a choice. And it's possible to marshal together a choice, a decision, a wish. Yes, I want to be kind here. I want to be
friendly here. I want to wish this person well. I see what's beneficial. I see their loveliness. And to live that life, where we choose to have that aspiration. To be part of what rises out of us and it opens us. So what it means is you don't have to feel loving kindness. You don't have to feel friendly. Maybe those feelings will follow in the wake of the aspiration. But the wish is something deeper than a feeling. And we do have some choice over that. So don't wait to have the feeling to have the wish. And if the wishes is an aspiration, it'll carry with it goodness. It'll carry with it welfare. And you'll benefit from having that wish, if it's sincere. May all of us have this sincere wish to benefit ourselves and others. And may we be carried and expanded and come to fullness in our kindness and goodwill. And may you for this day that we, next 24 hours until we meet again. Why don't you do some experiments, take some risks. And see if you can make a little bit this mettā, loving kindness, goodwill, a kind of a theme you carry with you through the day. And reflect on it, think on it, extend it to others. And see what you learn about the loving kindness that in the next 24 hours that you didn't know, you don't know and right now.

So thank you very much. I look forward to our time tomorrow.