

Goodwill in Heart & Mind

June 18, 2020

We try to make goodwill the framework for our practice. After all, it was the framework for the Buddha's practice. He wanted a true happiness. That was his way of showing goodwill for himself. And he wanted a happiness that was blameless. That was his goodwill for others. Beyond that, once he had found the way to that happiness, he wanted to teach it to others, so that they could find that happiness, too. That was a lot of goodwill.

We think of the example of Ajaan Mun, who would spread thoughts of goodwill to all beings at least three times a day. We give the practice a try. I've heard many people complain that they can think thoughts of goodwill, but they don't get any warm feeling out of it. Well, it's not necessary to have the warm feeling, as long as you think about other people's well-being and take that into consideration as you plan your actions. That's an awful lot right there.

After all, you're going to be having goodwill for spiders and snakes, for people for whom it's very hard to have a warm feeling. And those are actually the cases where goodwill is most necessary—as a protection for yourself, so that you don't do anything unskillful around those beings. You don't dismiss them, saying, "Well it doesn't matter what I do with them." You have to take everybody into consideration, and "everybody" includes animals as well as people, and bad people as well as good.

We don't pretend that there are no bad people out there. We don't turn a blind eye to their bad habits, but we keep remembering that *we* need our goodwill—that's why we do it. We don't give it only to people who deserve it. We give it to everybody. If the question of deserving comes up just ask yourself, "Do *you* deserve goodwill?" And the answer may be "No," if you look at your behavior. But then, that's still no reason not to have goodwill. The question of *deserving* shouldn't get involved.

You want your goodwill to have an independent source inside, one that's independent of other people's goodwill and other people's goodness. Because again, it's your protection, and you want to be protected on all sides. Think of the image that Ajaan Chah picked up from Ajaan Mun, who said the practice should be in the shape of a circle—all around. In other words, it's not something you do only at certain times, and only with regard to certain people.

It's like a fence around your house: If the fence is 95% around your house, that still means there's a 5% opening where animals and other things can get in. You want the fence to be 100% for total protection.

So goodwill is not necessarily a warm feeling. Now, feelings of the heart can come in. Remember it's *metta-cittena*, with a *citta* of goodwill—that's how you spread it. And the word *citta* can mean both heart and mind. In Buddhism, they don't see a clear distinction between the two. In this case, you lead with the mind, reminding yourself of the reasons for why you need to have goodwill, so that when you meet up with people who you don't like, you still can have goodwill for them. It may not be warm and gentle and tender, but it still is friendly in the sense that you don't mean anyone any ill. After all, your main work is inside, and you don't want to stir up any outside entanglements or conflicts that are unnecessary, that will get in the way of the work that really needs to be done.

This is why we say that goodwill is the framework, or the fence. It surrounds the field inside where you really have to do your work. As for the sense of joy, well-being that you would share with others, that's going to have to come from your cultivation of your own potentials for happiness inside the fence: developing right view, right effort, right mindfulness. As the Buddha said, these three qualities surround all the factors of the path. You want to make sure they're strong.

It's like making sure that you've got the right crops growing in your field so that you've got your basic nutrition covered. Right view tells you that the suffering you're experiencing, the suffering that's weighing down the mind, comes from within. A lot of us resist that: "This is because of so-and-so," we tend to say. "It's because so-and-so did this." Or, "So-and-so has this attitude toward me." That's looking outside the fence, and looking in the wrong way—you've got to look inside.

The fact is that you're hungry because you haven't provided yourself with food. But the more food you have inside, then the more you have to share. This is when the quality of the heart begins to grow—when you do have a sense of well-being that comes from the practice. The mind can settle down, be with the breath in the present moment, and simply breathing in and breathing out is a refreshing experience, an energizing experience, a calming experience: whatever the mind needs at that time. When you've got your own true happiness covered, then it's a lot easier to have a warm feeling for other people. You feel sorry for them because they're missing out on the food you've got.

So it's by taking care of yourself that you develop that quality of warmth—where it's appropriate. Simply repeating thoughts of, *May they be happy, may they be happy*, doesn't necessarily bring warmth. But if you've got some good qualities

that you've nurtured inside, then the warmth will come. The *heart* side will come, because your *own* heart now has been satisfied.

So to make metta a quality of the heart and the mind, you have to do more than simply metta practice. You've got to work on the problems inside—the way in which you're creating unnecessary suffering for yourself—getting past any of the obstacles in the mind that refuse to admit that, refuse to see that. Because as long as you refuse to see that, you're going to continue to create more suffering.

Then you take that suffering out on others. Ajaan Maha Boowa has an image of having dirt inside you. When you start thinking about other people, you just fling your dirt around at them, criticizing them for being dirty. But when you've got a sense of goodwill inside you, for *yourself*, in the sense of well-being inside you—when you've found that, yes, you can provide for your true happiness—that's when the goodwill begins to round out.

Then it's not just a mental quality or something you say to yourself. It's something you feel. But you don't feel it so strongly that you get blind to the fact that there are bad people out there. Even then, you have to be on your guard. But the goodwill takes on added dimensions because you're looking after yourself well.

So try to have both a good fence around your field and a good crop in it. You're protected, you're nourished—and that's when you have more than enough warmth and goodness to share.