

The Implications of Metta

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You should start every day with thoughts of goodwill and end the day with thoughts of goodwill, to keep your intentions in line. Because the major motivation for our practice is that we want a happiness, a sense of well-being that doesn't harm anybody. We have to follow a path of practice that doesn't harm anybody. But it's so easy to think thoughts of harm. So we have to consciously train the mind not to think those thoughts.

You have to reason with it. You can't browbeat it into submission by just saying, "May all beings be happy, be happy, be happy." That doesn't do it. You have to think about what that means, and particularly what it means in terms of your own actions.

On the one hand, you realize other beings are not going to be happy unless they actually put together the causes for happiness, genuine happiness. Think about that for a bit and you realize that's a thought you can think about anybody without any kind of hypocrisy, even people who've been really miserable in their behavior, people who've been really cruel. If they could change their behavior, the world would be a much better place. Now, to change their behavior, you can't go out and make them do good things, but you can be a good example.

As the Buddha said, the people who work for the benefit of others are those who do what is right and then encourage others to follow their example. This means you have to turn around and look at your own behavior. In what ways are you acting that are not going to be leading to true happiness? You've got to change those.

So for the good of the world, you have to change your own actions. That's why we have to think about this every day, every day. It's not just an idle thought. It has to turn around and really have an influence on the way we act, the way we speak, the way we think. If you want the world to be a better place, this is where you start.

So think about the implications of metta, the implications of goodwill, and all the other brahmaviharas. There will be people out there who will not follow your example: You have to accept that fact. But you can't let that undermine your original intention that you want to do something here that is beneficial for yourself, beneficial for others. And the question of whether other people will pick up on that influence, that's their business. But you keep trying to create a good example, acting in ways that don't harm anybody.

That's how you express your goodwill for the world.