

The Implications of Goodwill

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Close your eyes, watch your breath.

Have some goodwill for yourself, goodwill for the people around you. In other words, get some control over your mind.

Goodwill is not just a nice thought. It's a determination, as the Buddha said. You determine that as you develop attitudes of goodwill in your mind, these attitudes will come out into your words and your deeds. In other words, you wish for happiness. You don't wish for anyone to be harmed; you don't wish for anyone to harm themselves. And the same for yourself: You don't want to harm yourself either. This becomes your motivation. It's part of right resolve.

Remind yourself of what it means to have goodwill. You wish for a long-term happiness and you know that long-term happiness has to come from good causes. So think about the ways in your life where you're doing things that are not conducive to long-term happiness and think about how you might change them.

This is a useful type of thinking. We're not just floating around in the present moment. We're actually shaping our lives by our actions, so we want to be really careful about how we act.

This is another term the Buddha has for goodwill: restraint. Any thoughts that you might have of hoping for somebody to suffer, and when you just say to yourself, "Well, maybe not too much, just a little enough to give me some satisfaction." Well, that's ill will, and it doesn't help anybody. Most people, when they start suffering, don't suddenly realize the error of their ways. They just get worse. So you really want people to see the error of their ways and then change if their ways are bad. If their ways are good, you want to encourage them. You're not jealous of other people's happiness; you're not jealous of their well-being. We're not in this to compete. We're here because each of us has a disease inside, the disease of craving and ignorance that causes us to cause suffering. We're here to treat that disease, but at the same time we want to make sure that our treatment doesn't have a bad effect on other people.

So it's good to think about the implications of goodwill. It's not just a nice pink cloud that you spread around the world. It's a determination that you want your actions to follow in line with your aspirations for true happiness. You're trying to get yourself in line, straighten out your priorities, and make them clear. If anything doesn't fit in with those priorities, you can put it aside.

It's in this way that goodwill is related to discernment and wisdom. Because it's the basis for all the Buddha taught in terms of how to put an end to suffering, and why putting an end to suffering is a good thing.

So do your best to cultivate it. And allow the thoughts of goodwill to become your motivations for acts and words of goodwill as well.