

With Goodwill for the Entire World

January 24, 2018

“With goodwill for the entire world”: It’s a phrase from the Metta Sutta. It sounds nice, but it’s not easy. Look at the way the world has been behaving. Pretty venial. And yet still we have to have goodwill for everybody. It’s not necessarily because they deserve it, but we need it. Regardless of what other people do, our actions are what will determine our future and our present moment: the amount of suffering we’re going to feel in the present moment.

So we have to be very careful about our actions. This is why we have to have goodwill for everybody: not wanting to harm anybody, not wanting to see anybody suffer. If we *do* want to see somebody suffer, we’re going to act in unskillful ways toward that person. That becomes our karma and piles more opportunities for suffering on top of us.

So we have to have goodwill for everybody. We want to think about what is in their true best interest. We don’t use other people, we don’t abuse other people. We think of them as beings who want to find happiness, too.

As the Buddha said, you could go around the entire world and not find anybody that you loved more than yourself. But everybody else loves themselves as fiercely. So if our happiness depends on their suffering, that happiness is not going to last.

So you have goodwill for everybody, always hoping that they will understand the true causes for happiness and be willing and able to act on them. You’re not going to get in the way of that. Whatever you can, you help.

But there are a lot of areas where you can’t. This is why goodwill has to be paired with equanimity. We want people to be happy, but a lot of people are doing things that won’t lead to happiness—and you can’t stop them. In cases like that, you just have to say, “Well, that’s their business. We each have to take care of ours.” Because the things we’re responsible for are our actions. All too often, if we’re concerned about the actions of others, we forget about our own actions and start getting careless.

So try to understand what goodwill means and cultivate it all the time. They say that Ajaan Mun every day as soon as he got up, the first thing he did was to spread goodwill to everybody. After his afternoon nap, he’d spread goodwill to everybody. Before going to bed at night, he’d spread goodwill to everybody. That was the framework for his practice.

So it’s always good to keep that framework in mind. As the Buddha said, it is a form of mindfulness, a skillful quality that we should want to develop.