

Goodwill Plus

December 4, 2020

When we think thoughts of goodwill, it's important that we make it a comfortable place for the mind to stay. Some people have difficulty with that; other people have no difficulty at all. It depends on your attitude toward happiness. If you've come with the idea that happiness is something selfish, that you shouldn't be happy when other people are out there in the world miserable, then it's going to be hard. But you have to think about happiness in another way. Only when you have it can you share it with others. If you don't have any, what are you going to share?

So when you think, "May I be happy," it's not a selfish thought. The Buddha says you can make it a basis for concentration, what they call the immeasurable concentrations, where you're focused less on the body and more on the whole world, thinking of goodwill in all directions. The image the Buddha gives is of a man blowing a conch trumpet. As soon as he blows it, the sound goes in all directions at once.

I know some people who were told that goodwill is an innate quality of the mind, or one of *the* innate qualities of the mind, and so they get troubled when they have thoughts of ill will for people as they're trying to do goodwill meditation. This is where you have to remember that ill will and goodwill are equally innate. It's just as easy to feel ill will for somebody as it is to feel goodwill. Especially if the person has been doing something unskillful, acting in ways that have been harmful or intentionally cruel, it's very easy to feel ill will.

You have to remember that the Buddha never said that goodwill is innate. He said it's a form of mindfulness, it's something you have to keep in mind. And it's a determination, something you have to make up your mind you're going to do. Now, when we think of determination, it sounds like a duty. But think of it as something you really *want* to do. You want to be able to have goodwill for everybody.

That's because only then can you trust yourself. If you have goodwill for everybody you meet, it's very easy to act in ways that are going to be skillful around them. You're not necessarily going to be doing what they want, you're not going to be a doormat for other people's desires, but you *are* going to be thinking about, "What would be for this person's true happiness, true well-being?" You make up your mind you're not going to do anything to get in the way of that true well-being.

That way, you can live in the world without a lot of recriminations, without a lot of second-guesses. Because when you make a mistake based on goodwill, it's a lot easier to notice the mistake, admit the mistake, and learn from it. If you make a mistake based on ill will, it's hard to live with, hard to admit. And if you can't admit it, it's hard to learn from it.

So try to be on friendly terms with goodwill, and make it a regular part of your practice.

In the forest tradition, we don't have examples of people spreading nothing but goodwill all day long, but it is a framework for the practice. One of Ajaan Mun's students, Ajaan Khao, had come to his ordination with a lot of anger. His wife had cheated on him, he'd been so angry that he'd contemplated killing both the wife and the man she'd cheated with. Then he realized that that was not going to solve any problems, so he decided, "Okay, enough of that," and he ordained.

Ajaan Mun had him memorize a chant that spreads thoughts of goodwill in all directions to all kinds of living beings. A very long chant, because it goes through all the different kinds of living beings there are, lots of different categories, ten categories altogether. It takes quite a while to do the chant. He said, "Do this every day, several times a day." And it calmed Ajaan Khao's mind. So if you find it calming, work on it. Think of all the living beings out there, and all the different categories, and how you want to have goodwill for them all.

This doesn't mean that you wish that they be happy simply as they are. You're wishing for them to be skillful. You don't necessarily have to *make* them skillful. In fact, you can't. Your only responsibility is that you're not going to act in a way that's going to interfere with their becoming skillful or with their true well-being. That's a good promise to make to yourself, and it's a good promise to be able to hold to.

But, as the Buddha pointed out many times, goodwill in and of itself will not take you all the way to the goal of the practice. He said you have to add another practice, and that's the practice of the seven factors for awakening. And how do they connect?

First off, the first factor for awakening is mindfulness. You remind yourself, yes, this is something you have to be mindful of, the fact that you're going to try to have goodwill for everybody you meet. Even when you meet up with dangerous animals or dangerous people, people you don't like, you've got to remind yourself: This is something you hold in mind. You have to see it as a kind of mindfulness.

This is why, when they say that goodwill is innate, they're making it hard for you to gain insight into it, because you actually have to see that it's something manufactured, something fabricated, something that has to be kept in mind,

particularly in cases when you're trying to extend goodwill to people who are difficult.

That's where the second factor for awakening comes in, which is analysis of qualities. You think of what you have to put together in your mind in order to maintain that state of goodwill, to get the mind into a state of concentration settled around goodwill. How are you breathing? Are you breathing in a way that shows goodwill for yourself? How are you talking to yourself?

Probably one of *the* most difficult parts of meditation is learning how to talk to yourself in the right way. Because we've been listening to all kinds of garbage talk in our families, from our friends, or through the media. The whole culture here is training us to talk to ourselves in horrible ways, which is why it's good to read the teachings of the *ajans*, to read what the Buddha had to teach. He gives you examples of how to talk to yourself, so that you can talk yourself into having goodwill even for very difficult people: goodwill for yourself, goodwill for everybody.

Then there are the perceptions you hold in mind. Hold in mind the perception that you *need* goodwill. One of the images the Buddha gives is of a monk who needs some cloth to make a robe. He's found a piece of cloth, but part of it has been soiled, so he rips off the soiled part with his foot and takes just the good part. So remind yourself: You need to see the goodness in other people. That helps to nourish your own goodwill. So you focus on their good habits, their good behavior.

You can give rise to a feeling of ease and well-being around the goodwill by getting the right perceptions, the right way of talking to yourself, the right way of breathing. You do that to develop the quality of goodwill, and then you start analyzing it further if you want to go beyond the goodwill.

You can think of it in terms of the factors of name in name-and-form. On the side of form, you've got the different elements or properties of the body. Of course, you're focusing on the breath element, to get it steady, easeful, nourishing. Then you look at the mental factors. There are perceptions and feelings, and here the Buddha adds attention and intention: What are you going to pay attention to as you deal with other people? You pay attention to the fact that they want happiness. They may have some pretty confused ideas about what happiness is and how it's found, so when you wish them goodwill, it's not necessarily that you're going to be falling in line with their ideas. But you do want to do what's actually good for the other person. Pay attention to that, and make that your intention.

So there's a fair amount of mental construction that goes to creating a state of goodwill. And once you've been able to construct it, then as you bring in the

factors for awakening, you're going to deconstruct it again, so that you can see how even this very comfortable and pleasurable state is something fabricated, something you want to get beyond.

Then, based on that, there's the factor for awakening which is persistence—you stick with this—and that's followed by rapture. It's a different kind of rapture from the ordinary rapture of when it feels really good to have goodwill. This is the rapture that comes from insight, when the mind begins to understand how it fashions reality in the present moment. After looking at the state of goodwill that you've been creating, you can apply the same lessons to other states of mind you've been creating, and there's a sense of real fullness that comes with that.

From that, the mind calms down to an even deeper level than it would have ordinarily with just the goodwill. This brings in the remaining factors for awakening: calm, concentration, equanimity. It's in learning how to understand goodwill or compassion or empathetic joy or equanimity as fashioned states that you're going to learn how to go beyond them.

But for most of us, the issue is not going beyond them, the issue is getting there.

So focus first on learning how to put together a state of goodwill, through the way you breathe, through the way you talk to yourself, through the perceptions you hold in mind and the feelings you can engender in these various ways of fabrication. Learn how to find nourishment there. When we talk about taking care of yourself with ease, this is a very immediate way of caring for yourself: learning how to find pleasure in things that are skillful, blameless.

And as you do this, think of it as something you enjoy. Don't think of it as an onerous duty. Learn how to find joy in having goodwill for people that you had trouble with before. Think of what Ajaan Fuang said about meditating: treating it like a game, something you play with—not just playing around, but as something you want to play well. If you can bring that attitude to it, then you've got the right mental feeling tone that'll carry you through.