

## *Undefeated Goodwill*

*May 5, 2021*

The chant just now spoke of goodwill as a *determination*. In other words, it's not an innate quality of the mind. You have to make up your mind that you're going to have goodwill for everybody: goodwill for yourself, goodwill for all beings.

So to understand goodwill, you have to think in terms that the Buddha used to describe determination: What is a good determination? What are the component factors? The first factor is *discernment*. You don't "neglect discernment," as the Buddha said. You think about what goodwill means, what true happiness means—how it's going to come about. It's not going to happen simply from the *wish*. As the Buddha said, if we could get things like happiness, long life, beauty, or wealth simply by wishing for them, everybody would have them. There would be nobody who was poor, or ugly, or have a short life.

So happiness is going to have to come from actions—which means that if you have goodwill for yourself, you're going to have to get your actions in order. This is one of the reasons why we meditate: Actions come out of the mind, so the mind has to be trained. Again, it's not innately skillful. There are a lot of voices in the mind that want to get a quick and easy happiness, with no concern for the consequences.

There was a book of positive psychology I read a while back when I was asked to review it for a Buddhist magazine. They asked me to provide a Buddhist take on positive psychology, and I pointed out that there was no mention of the karmic consequences of your search for happiness in that book at all. People would look for what made them happy, and the author rated different types of happiness, but as for the idea that looking for happiness in a moral way was better than doing it in an immoral way, the author said, "Well, we as objective scientists can't make a distinction there." But that's really foolish. If you look for happiness in a way that's going to harm other people, they're not going to stand for it. That happiness won't last.

So realize that if you want true happiness, you have to get your act in order, and you have to be conscious of and sensitive to other people's well-being too. Of course, where is their well-being going to come from? It's going to come from their actions, so you don't want to act in a way that deliberately inspires them, say, to break the precepts, or to give rise to passion, aversion, or delusion.

When there are conflicts, you have to figure out, “How can I deal with this conflict in a way that I’m not necessarily giving in to the other person, but I’m also not getting the other person to flare up?” That’s part of goodwill too, because you’re not only thinking, “May they be happy,” but also, “May they understand the causes for true happiness and be willing and able to act on them.” Just as we wish that for ourselves: “May we understand the causes and be willing and able to act on them.”

When you think about it, the ways of looking for happiness that would be safe and effective come down to generosity, virtue, and meditation. This is where we look for happiness—if we have goodwill for ourselves, goodwill for others.

The second quality that goes into determination is *truth*. Once we have thoughts of goodwill for ourselves and for others, we have to carry through with actions and words of goodwill. We don’t just sit here spinning cotton candy and sending nice pink thoughts out around the world. We have to think, when we act on an intention: Is it going to be for our true well-being or not? Is it going to interfere with the true well-being of other people? We have to be very careful.

This is where the principle of *purity* comes in, as in the Buddha’s instructions to Rahula: Look at the intention behind your action, look at the action and at the results coming out of the action, both while you’re doing it and when it’s done. That’s how you check to make sure that your actions really, *truly* embody goodwill.

The third quality is *relinquishment*: There are a lot of pleasures you’re going to have to give up if you have goodwill for yourself and for other people.

And, then fourth: As the Buddha said, “You train only for calm,” because that’s where the true happiness lies. There’s a passage that’s sometimes translated as, “There is no happiness *higher* than peace.” Actually, it says, “There is no happiness *other* than peace.”

We might object and say, “I can think of lots of times in the past where I was happy, and it wasn’t very peaceful at all.” Well, what was happy about it was that it was something that you could hold in the mind for a period of time. And the mind was able to *rest* with a particular perception. That ability to rest and not be disturbed: That’s where the mind’s peace is, that’s where its happiness is.

So again, if you really have goodwill for yourself, you meditate. This shows the connection that the Buddha often talks about between right resolve and right concentration. As he says, when you’re getting the mind into right concentration, you’re secluded from sensuality, you’re secluded from unskillful mental qualities. In other words, you’ve successfully acted on your right resolves—which are to resolve on *renunciation*, resolve on *non-ill will*, resolve on *harmlessness*. So you bring the mind here, and you look for your happiness here, your well-being here.

As the Buddha said, if you don't have this level of happiness or pleasure, then no matter how much you may realize the drawbacks of sensuality, the mind is going to go back to sensuality. Because for the most part, we see sensuality as our only escape from pain, and the mind can't live without pleasure. This is why the Buddha compares concentration to food, to shelter—to places where we can find well-being.

In his analogy of the fortress at the frontier, you've got mindfulness as the gatekeeper, and you've got right effort as the soldiers who are fighting off the enemy—and they need to feed. Concentration is there as the food. This way, your concentration maintains your right effort and your mindfulness—just as they protect your concentration.

So if you're going to stick with your determination to have goodwill, you realize that there are a lot of difficult people in the world, and it's hard to have goodwill for them. They seem to keep thinking up new ways of being evil all the time. But you can't let that get you down, and you can't let it make you give up on your goodwill.

You may say, "I don't see much hope for the human race," but even then you've got to have goodwill. There's where the truth comes in again—you've got to stick with it. The calm allows you to be true to the fact that you're holding thoughts of goodwill for beings that are sometimes not all inspiring.

Here again, you bring in your discernment—all these aspects of determination have to help one another along. You realize that if all you see are other people's bad side, it's going to get harder and harder to have goodwill, so you try to find something good about them. Remember the Buddha's analogy: You need to see their good side in the same way that someone crossing a desert needs water, even if it's in a little puddle—it helps keep you going. So, never give up on your goodwill. Regard it as a strength. Regard it as protection, as a determination that you want to see through.

After all, it is aimed at your true happiness, a happiness that's responsible all around. You could say that that's what the Buddha's teachings are all about: the *responsible* search for true happiness. You think about the consequences of your actions, and how your search for happiness has an impact on other people's happiness—and you want it to have a good influence all around. It's only then that your happiness is safe.

So even though we can't make the whole world a better place, given that other people have their free choices, we *can* make it better a little bit here, a little bit there. Even though there may be people who seem to be determined to destroy

goodness, we've got to maintain our own goodness, and be determined to see it through.

So, be determined on it, and be *strong* in your determination. Never give up.