

Lavish Goodwill

October 15, 2021

As Ajaan Lee would often say, when you're sitting here meditating, you're sacrificing your opportunity to make wealth outside, but you are creating wealth inside. And as the Buddha said, goodwill is a monk's wealth—and here a “monk” can be any practitioner. It's a currency that you can create as much as you want to.

It should be easy: “May all beings be happy. May all beings understand the causes for true happiness, and be willing and able to act on them.” It should be a thought that you can think over and over again.

But often we're challenged by other people's unskillful behavior, and it becomes hard. Or, sometimes we have difficulty thinking goodwill for ourselves: looking at ourselves, seeing our drawbacks, and thinking that we're not worthy of our own goodwill.

But the Buddha certainly didn't encourage that idea. Goodwill has nothing to do with deserving. It's your free creation of the motivation to act skillfully, to not cause harm. And for the sake of your own protection, for your own well-being, you want to be able to generate as much of that as you can for yourself and for others. If you don't have goodwill for yourself, how are you going to have it for others? And if you don't have it for yourself, how are you motivated to do what's skillful, what's in your own best interest?

So, take some time to create some inner wealth. The Buddha's image is of a person blowing a conch shell trumpet. You blow the trumpet and the sound goes in all directions all at once. Then, as the description says, “through the all surrounding universe, up and down and around... abundant, free of hostility... goodwill for the entire world.”

As with any form of wealth, you want to protect it. That's what the image of the mother and her child is all about. You have to remember that back in those days, if you were a woman and you had one child, that was your only hope for the future. So you'd take care of that child with your life.

I've heard people complain that they've heard that the image is saying that you should cherish all beings the same way that a mother would cherish a child, but the Buddha's not saying that. He's saying that you should protect your goodwill in the same way that a mother would protect her only child—with her life.

After all, there are cases where mothers don't love their children. We've seen a lot of that, but if you lived in a society where your entire hope for the future lay with your one child, you would protect that child as best you could. So be that fastidious in protecting your goodwill, that earnest in protecting your goodwill.

Think of the image of the bandits cutting you up into pieces with a two-handled saw. The Buddha said that if you had any ill will for them at all, you wouldn't be following his teachings.

Even with them, you start with them, extending goodwill to them, and then spread it out for the whole cosmos.

You're protecting your goodwill even as you're sacrificing your life, because you realize your goodwill is more important. If you maintain your life but lose your goodwill, you're going to do a lot of things you'll later regret. But if you maintain your goodwill, even if you die, you're guaranteed a good place to go. So it really is worth protecting with your life.

And you can be lavish with your goodwill—for all beings. Whether they ask for it or not, you give them goodwill. For people who are small-minded, you give lots and lots of goodwill. For people who have done unskillful things, lots of goodwill.

After all, who in this world has not done unskillful things? We've done unskillful things, just as other people have. If you think that only pure people deserve your goodwill, who are you going to extend it to?

Then there's that aspect of wealth where you don't have to calculate that so-and-so deserves this much, so-and-so gets that much. Just give everything you've got, and you find that you have more coming. That's why it's such an excellent form of wealth.

It's like those magic bags in fairy tales where you reach into the bag to pull out treasures. The more you give the treasure to others, the more appears in the bag. The difference here is that you can give goodwill to yourself and not deplete the bag at all.

So, spend some time making your goodwill lavish, abundant, measureless. That's the meaning of that passage in the chant that the Buddha gave about spreading goodwill to snakes. It says, "Unlimited is the Buddha, unlimited is the Dhamma, unlimited is the Sangha." They're unlimited in their goodwill.

Of course, the Buddha and the Sangha have goodwill. As for the Dhamma: You have to remember that when the Buddha taught the Dhamma, he was very selective in what he chose to teach, out of all the things he gained in his awakening. You know the image of the forest where he's sitting in the forest and he picks up some leaves and asks the monks which is greater: the leaves in his hand or the leaves in the forest? The answer, of course, is the leaves in the forest. He then says that in the same way, the things he knew through his direct knowledge but didn't teach were like the leaves in the forest. The things he *did* teach were like the leaves in his hand.

And why didn't he teach those leaves in the forest? Because they weren't connected with the goal, weren't connected with the rudiments of the holy life, did not lead to dispassion, disenchantment, stilling, awakening, unbinding. Whereas the leaves in his hand did—and the leaves in his hand stood for the four noble truths.

So, the whole teaching of the Dhamma has a purpose, and its purpose is the happiness of all. Now, it's not going to make them happy by saying pleasing things all the time. But it is going to make them happy by giving them instructions, or giving them things to think about that they will then *act on*, and find true happiness as a result.

So, the Dhamma has its *attha*, it has its purpose, and its purpose is happiness. That's the Dhamma's goodwill. And it's limitless: It's not only for monks or only for lay people, only for Asian people or only for Americans, or for any particular group of people at all. It's for everybody, because it's not specifically tailored for any one group.

It points to a problem we all have, which is we're creating suffering for ourselves. And it's basically saying, "Look, this is how you can stop!"

When you stop creating that suffering, you're not left with just an empty, neutral state. You're left with true happiness, which goes beyond abundant, beyond measureless. But to get there requires that you develop some measureless goodwill.

So, think about that: You don't give just so much to one person, and so much to another person. It's not the sort of thing that you have to divvy out that way. The wealth of the world has its limits. You can't give an infinite amount to everybody. But goodwill does have that potential: You can give infinite goodwill to everybody. Each person gets infinite goodwill. You can keep on giving more, and you never have to run out. That's the best kind of wealth there is.