

Appreciating the State of Peace

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There's a sutta we chant often: the Karaniya Metta sutta. Most often we focus on the metta—the goodwill. And it's easy to see why, because so much of the sutta is composed of expressions of goodwill. But the *"karaniya"* is also important: "What is to be done?" In other words, the practice of metta is not floating without context. It has a context of actions. And the actions are incumbent on us if we, as the Buddha said, "are skilled in aims and appreciate the state of peace." In other words, we appreciate that the true goal is expressed in the third noble truth: the ending of passion for our craving and, as a result, the end of suffering. This is where we aim if we're "skilled in aims." So there's a lot more to be done than simply spreading thoughts of goodwill.

Toward the end of the sutta, the Buddha says that you have to be determined on this mindfulness. In other words, you keep goodwill for all beings—including yourself—in mind, and it's something you do with determination.

You may remember that determination has four qualities, and they're all expressed in the sutta. The four qualities are discernment, truth, generosity, and calm.

The discernment, of course, is expressed in our realization of what the true aim is—the most skillful aim: to put an end to suffering. This gives a context to the practice of metta. It also helps us understand the content of metta as well.

In terms of the context, we realize if we really have goodwill for others, we have to behave in ways that are consistent with goodwill. And our goodwill for others should be expressed not simply with the idea, "May all beings be happy at heart"—which the sutta says several times—but also, "May they not despise one another or wish one another ill." In other words, you remember that other beings are going to be happy not because you wish them to be happy, but because they act in ways that lead to true happiness. They, too, should develop thoughts of goodwill. That's your wish for them. So that's the content of metta.

As for the context, you want to behave in ways that are consistent with being truthful in your goodwill. You have thoughts of goodwill whether you're "sitting, standing, walking or lying down," as the sutta says. And your behavior has to be in harmony with thoughts of goodwill. This is where your metta is true.

As for generosity, you think thoughts of goodwill toward other beings not because you think they deserve it, but because it's part of your following the path. You give goodwill freely without any conditions. This means you're going to have to put up with a lot of other beings.

Think of that image that the Buddha gives in another sutta: the bandits who have pinned you down and are sawing you into little pieces with a two-handed saw. Even in cases like that, he said, you should have goodwill for them. In fact, that's where you start your goodwill:

focused on them. Of course, you're doing this both for them and for yourself, because you realize if you were to die at that moment, you wouldn't want to die with ill will in your heart. The desire for justice, the desire for revenge, in cases like that, would lead to another miserable life. Whereas if you can have thoughts of goodwill—even though the bandits may not seem to deserve goodwill—you benefit. It helps you to rise above the situation, so that your death is not a narrow and confining and downward-heading one.

Then there's the element of calm. As the sutta says, you live with "peaceful faculties." In other words, you exercise restraint over your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—your engagement with the world.

You look at the world not with the eyes of anger or the eyes of greed. You listen to the world not with the ears of anger or the ears of greed. You don't rile up defilements through the way in which you engage with the world. That allows you to be content—*santussako ca subhara ca*—living lightly. You're content with just enough to practice. You don't have to struggle with anyone to get things better than they are. It's a lot easier to have goodwill for others and a lot easier to live in a way that expresses that goodwill when you can be content with your material possessions.

Toward the end, the sutta says, "Not taken with views"—in other words, the kinds of views that would get you in arguments, such as views about the nature of the world: Who created the world? Was the world created? Was it not created?

We see so much conflict around these issues, because views don't just sit there in cafés where people argue them while they sip their coffee. They get into the world. Then, when they're affected by people's greed, it can take them all over the place, leading to all kinds of clashes, all kinds of conflict.

So you're "not taken with views" but you are "consummate in vision." In other words, you see clearly what's going on in your mind. This is where being calm leads back to discernment. You see that the real issues are not out there. The real issues are in here, so you're not trying to fight anyone off to gain your little square inch of territory here in the world. You're willing to give up your claims in the world, so that you can focus on where the real problems are. The real problems are inside. This is how you have goodwill for yourself. And in this way, the Buddha says, you never come back to a womb again.

That's one of the best things we can do for the world. As you see, there're so many people and there's so much greed. When you come back, you have to feed, and it's hard not to let that need to feed lead to greed. And that will lead to more conflict. But if you're going to live in such a way, think in such a way, act in such a way, speak in such a way that you don't have to come back, that's a genuine gift. One less mouth in the feeding chain.

When you think in these ways, this is how you think about the world in line with the phrase, "appreciating the state of peace." You really appreciate what the Buddha had to say: that this is the best thing that people can do, putting an end to suffering by following the noble eightfold

path, and being determined on that path with discernment and truthfulness, generosity and calm. That's the context for goodwill. It also gives you an idea what the content of goodwill should be, what it truly means to wish yourself well, what it truly means to wish others well: May we all find that state of peace.