

# *The Practice of Kindness*

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In the Ancient Traditions we experience a sense of gentleness toward ourselves, and a sense of friendliness to others begins to arise. That friendliness or compassion is known and literally means "noble heart." We are willing to commit ourselves to working with all sentient beings. But before we actually launch into that project, we first need a lot of training.

The obstacle to becoming a kind and a good person is not having enough sympathy for others and for oneself--that is the basic point. And that problem can be dealt with by practical training, which is known as training of the mind. That training gives us a path, a way to work with our crude, literal, raw and rugged styles, a way to become kind.

Ignorant students sometimes think that they have to glorify themselves; they want to become leaders or guides. There is a technique or practice for overcoming that problem. That practice is the development of humility, which is connected with the training of the mind.

The basic vision is to work for the benefit of others and create a situation that will benefit others. Therefore, you take the attitude that you are willing to dedicate yourself to others. When you take that attitude, you begin to realize that others are more important than yourself. Because of that vision, because you adopt that attitude, and because you actually find that others are more important with all three of those together, you develop the practice of training the mind.

By working with the various forms of unmindfulness, we begin to become thorough and precise, and our discipline becomes good. When we are thoroughly tamed by the practice of kindness discipline, or mindfulness practice, as well as trained by awareness, in how to hear the teachings, we begin to develop a complete understanding of kindness and goodness. After that, we also begin to develop a complete understanding of how, in our particular state of being tamed, and how we can relate to others.

In the training of mind practice we talk more in terms of training the mind. That is the next step. The mind is already tamed, therefore it can be trained. In other words, we have been able to domesticate our mind by practicing kind, loving and uplifting discipline.

Having domesticated our mind, then we can use it further. It's like the story of capturing a wild cow in the old days. Having captured the cow, having domesticated it, you find that the cow becomes completely willing to relate with its tamers. In fact, the cow likes being domesticated. So at this point the cow is part of our household. Once upon a time it wasn't that way I'm sure cows were wild and ferocious before we domesticated them.

## *The Basis for Kindness Practice*

1. First, train in the preliminaries.

In practicing the slogans and in your daily life, you should maintain an awareness of the preciousness of ALL life and the particular good fortune of life in an environment in which you can hear the teachings of kindness.

2. The reality of death, that it comes suddenly and without warning.

3. The entrapment of karma that whatever you do, whether virtuous or not, only further entraps you in the chain of cause and effect.

4. The intensity and inevitability of suffering for yourself and for all sentient beings. This is called "taking an attitude of the four reminders."

With that attitude as a base, you should call upon your God with devotion, inviting into yourself the atmosphere of sanity inspired by kindness and goodness, and vowing to cut the roots of further ignorance and suffering. This ties in very closely with the notion of loving-kindness. In the traditional analogy of one's spiritual path, the only pure loving object seems to be somebody who can show you the path.

You could have a loving relationship with your parents, relatives, and so forth, your neurosis goes along with it. A pure love affair can only take place with one's teacher. So that ideal sympathetic object is used as a starting point, a way of developing a relationship beyond your own neurosis. Particularly in the "Training of the Mind", you relate to the teacher as someone who cheers you up from depression and brings you down from excitement, a kind of moderator principle. The teacher is regarded as important from that point of view.

This slogan establishes the contrast between the epitome of pain, imprisonment, and insanity and the root the embodiment of openness, freedom, and sanity as the fundamental basis for all practice.

## *Ultimate Kindness and the Paramita of Generosity*

The ultimate or absolute kindness principle is based on developing the paramita of generosity, which is symbolized by a wish-fulfilling jewel. Generosity means "giving," "opening," or "parting." So the notion of generosity means not holding back but giving constantly. Generosity is self-existing openness, complete openness. You are no longer subject to cultivating your own scheme or project. And the best way to open yourself up is to make friends with yourself and with others.

## *Traditionally, there are Three Types of Generosity*

1. Ordinary generosity, giving material goods or providing comfortable situations for others.
2. The gift of fearlessness. You reassure others and teach them that they don't have to feel completely tormented and freaked out about their existence. You help them to see that there is basic goodness and spiritual practice, that there is a way for them to sustain their lives. That is the gift of fearlessness.
3. The third type of generosity is the gift of generosity from your heart. You show others that there is a path that consists of discipline, meditation, and intellect or knowledge. Through all three types of generosity, you can open up other people's minds. In that way their closedness, wretchedness, and small thinking can be turned into a larger vision.

That is the basic vision of kindness altogether: to let people think bigger, think greater. We can afford to open ourselves and join the rest of the world with a sense of tremendous generosity, tremendous goodness, and tremendous richness. The more we give, the more we gain--although what we might gain should not be our reason for giving. Rather, the more we give, the more we are inspired to give constantly. And the gaining process happens naturally, automatically, always. The opposite of generosity is stinginess, holding back having a poverty mentality, basically speaking. The basic principle of the ultimate kindness slogans is to rest in the eighth consciousness and not follow our discursive thoughts.

Whenever there is the absolute kindness principle, we have to have a basic understanding of absolute compassion at the same time. Loving kindness literally means "openness" or "emptiness." Loving kindness is basically understanding nonexistence. When you begin realizing nonexistence, then you can afford to be more compassionate, more giving. A problem is that usually we would like to hold on to our territory and fixate on that particular ground. Once we begin to fixate on that ground, we have no way to give. Understanding kindness means that we begin to realize that there is no ground to get, that we are ultimately free, nonaggressive, open. We realize that we are actually nonexistent ourselves. We are not or no, rather. Then we can give. We have lots to gain and nothing to lose at that point. It is very basic.

Compassion is based on some sense of "soft spot" in us. It is as if we had a pimple on our body that was very sore that we do not want to rub it or scratch it. During our shower we do not want to rub too much soap over it because it hurts. There is a sore point or soft spot which happens to be painful to rub, painful to put hot or cold water over.

That sore spot on our body is an analogy for compassion. Why? Because even in the midst of immense aggression, insensitivity in our life, or laziness, we always have a soft spot, some point we can cultivate or at least not bruise. Every human being has that kind of basic sore spot, including animals. Whether we are crazy, dull, aggressive, ego-tripping, whatever we might be, there is still that sore spot taking place in us. An open wound, which might be a more vivid

analogy, is always there. That open wound is usually very inconvenient and problematic. We don't like it. We would like to be tough. We would like to fight, to come out strong, so we do not have to defend any aspect of ourselves. We would like to attack our enemy on the spot, single-handedly. We would like to lay our trips on everybody completely and properly, so that we have nothing to hide. That way, if somebody decides to hit us back, we are not wounded. And hopefully, nobody will hit us on that sore spot, the wound that exists in us. Our basic makeup, the basic constituents of our mind, is based on passion and compassion at the same time. But however confused we might be, however much of a cosmic monster we might be, still there is an open wound or sore spot in us always. There always will be a sore spot.

Sometimes people translate that sore spot or open wound as "religious conviction" or "mystical experience." But let us give that up. It has nothing to do with any religion and moreover, nothing to do with anything else at all. It is just an open wound, a very simple open wound. That is very nice at least we are accessible somewhere. We are not completely covered with a suit of armor all the time. We have a sore spot somewhere. Such a relief!

Because of that particular sore spot, even if we are sophisticated beings we can still fall in love. We can still appreciate beauty, art, poetry, or music. The rest of us could be covered with iron cast shields, but some sore spot always exists in us, which is fantastic. That sore spot is known as embryonic compassion, potential compassion. At least we have some kind of gap, some discrepancy in our state of being which allows basic sanity to shine through.

Our level of sanity could be very primitive. Our sore spot could be just purely the love of tortillas or the love of curries. But that's good enough. We have some kind of opening. It doesn't matter what it is love of as long as there is a sore spot, an open wound. That's good. That is where all the germs could get in and begin to impregnate and take possession of us and influence our system. And that is precisely how the compassionate attitude supposedly takes place.

Not only that, but there is also an inner wound, which is called "kind nature", it is like a heart that is sliced and bruised by wisdom and compassion. When the external wound and the internal wound begin to meet and communicate, then we begin to realize that our whole being is made out of one complete sore spot altogether, which is called "kindness fever." That vulnerability is compassion. We really have no way to defend ourselves anymore at all. A gigantic cosmic wound is all over the place an inward wound and an external wound at the same time. Both are sensitive to cold air, hot air, and little disturbances of atmosphere which begin to affect us both inwardly and outwardly. It is the living flame of love, if you would like to call it that. But we should be very careful what we say about love. What is love? Do we know love? It is a vague word. In this case we are not even calling it love. Nobody before puberty would have any sense of sexuality or of love affairs. Likewise, since we haven't broken through to understand what our soft spot is all about, we cannot talk about love, we can only talk about passion. It sounds fantastic, but it actually doesn't say as much as love, which is very heavy. Compassion is a kind of passion, com-passion, which is easy to work with.

There is a slit in our skin, a wound. It's very harsh treatment, in some sense; but on the other hand, it's very gentle. The intention is gentle, but the practice is very harsh. By combining the intention and the practice, you are being "harshed," and also you are being "gentled," so to speak both together. You have to go through that kind of process. You have to jump into the blender. It is necessary for you to do that. Just jump into the blender and work with it. Then you will begin to feel that you are swimming in the blender. You might even enjoy it a little bit, after you have been processed. So an actual understanding of ultimate loving kindness, it only comes from compassion. In other words, a purely logical, professional, or scientific conclusion doesn't bring you to that. The five ultimate loving kindness slogans are steps toward a compassionate approach.

A lot of you seemingly, very shockingly, are not particularly compassionate. You are not saving your grandma from drowning and you are not saving your pet dog from getting killed. Therefore, we have to go through this subject of compassion. Compassion is a very, very large subject, an extraordinarily large subject, which includes how to be compassionate. And actually, kindness is preparation for ultimate kindness. Before we cultivate compassion, we first need to understand how to be proper; that is, how to love your grandma or how to love a flea or a mosquito or any living being. This will develop in you later. The relative aspect of compassion comes much later. If we do not have an understanding of ultimate loving kindness, then we do not have any understanding of the actual working basis of being compassionate and kind to somebody. According to Ancient Traditions, we are told that we can actually arouse twofold loving kindness: relative kindness and ultimate kindness. We could arouse both of them. Then, having aroused kindness, we can continue further and practice according to the kindness example. We can be so called active kindness.

In order to arouse absolute or ultimate kindness, we have to put them together so that they cover the whole of our existence our behavior patterns and our daily life everything. In that way, in both meditation and prayer practice, mindfulness and awareness are happening simultaneously, all the time. Whether we are sleeping or awake, eating or wandering, precision and awareness are taking place all the time. That is quite a delightful experience.

Beyond that delight, we also tend to develop a sense of friendliness to everything. The early level of irritation and aggression has been processed through, so to speak, by mindfulness and awareness. There is instead a notion of basic goodness, which is described natural virtue. This is an important point for us to understand. Natural virtue is the fundamental state of existence, or consciousness, before it is divided into "I" and "other," or into the various emotions. It is the basic ground where things are processed, where things exist. And its basic state, or natural style, is goodness.

It is very benevolent. There is a basic state of existence that is fundamentally good and that we can rely on. There is room for tolerance, room to open ourselves up. We can make friends with ourselves and with others. That is fundamental virtue or basic goodness, and it is the basis of the possibility of absolute kindness.

Once we have been inspired by the precision of kindness, we find that there is room, which gives us the possibility of total naivete, in the positive sense. The naivete means "carefree" or "let loose." We can be carefree with our basic goodness. We do not have to scrutinize or investigate wholeheartedly to make sure that there are no mosquitoes or eggs inside our natural virtue. The basic goodness of virtue can be cultivated and connected with quite naturally, in a kind way. We can develop a sense of relaxation and release from torment from this and that altogether.

## *Relative Kindness and the Paramita of Discipline*

That brings us to the next stage. Again, instead of remaining at a theoretical, conceptual level alone, we return to the most practical level. In the "Training the Mind" our main concern is how to awaken ourselves. We begin to realize that we are not as dangerous as we had thought. We develop some notion of kindness, and having developed this kindness we begin to switch into compassion.

The development of loving kindness is connected with the paramita of discipline. It has been said that if you don't have discipline, it is like trying to walk without any legs. You cannot attain liberation without discipline. Discipline or "obeying the rules," literally speaking. So trim could be translated as "rule" or "justice." The basic notion of kindness goes beyond giving alone; it means having good conduct. It also means having some sense of passionlessness and non-territoriality. All of that is very much connected with relative kindness.

Relative kindness comes from the simple and basic experience of realizing that you could have a tender heart in any situation. Even the most vicious animals have a tender heart in taking care of their young, or for that matter, in taking care of themselves. From our basic training in kindness, we begin to realize our basic goodness and to let go with that. We begin to rest in the nature of virtues not caring and being very naive and ordinary, casual, in some sense.

When we let ourselves go, we begin to have a feeling of good existence in ourselves. That could be regarded as the very ordinary and trivial concept of having a good time. Nonetheless, when we have good intentions toward ourselves, it is not because we are trying to achieve anything we are just trying to be ourselves. As they say, we could come as we are. At that point we have a natural sense that we can afford to give ourselves freedom. We can afford to relax. We can afford to treat ourselves better, trust ourselves more, and let ourselves feel good. The basic goodness of our heart is always there. It is that sense of healthiness and cheerfulness and naivete that brings us to the realization of relative kindness.

Relative kindness is related with how we start to learn to love each other and ourselves. That seems to be the basic point. It's very difficult for us to learn to love. It would be possible for us to love if an object of fascination were presented to us or if there were some kind of dream or promise presented. Maybe then we could learn to love.

But it is very hard for us to learn to love if it means purely giving love without expecting anything in return. It is very difficult to do that. When we decide to love somebody, we usually expect that person to fulfill our desires and conform to our hero worship. If our expectations can be fulfilled, we can fall in love, ideally. So in most of our love affairs, what usually happens is that our love is absolutely conditional. It is more of a business deal than actual love. We have no idea how to communicate a sense of warmth. When we do begin to communicate a sense of warmth to somebody, it makes us very uptight. And when the object of our love tries to cheer us up, it becomes an insult.

This is a very aggression-oriented approach. In the contemplative tradition, love and affection are largely based on open love which does not ask anything in return. It is a mutual dance. Even if during the dance you step on each other's toes, it is not regarded as problematic or an insult. We do not have to get on our high horse or be touchy about that. To learn to love, to learn to open, is one of the hardest things for all of us. Yet we are conditioned by passion all the time. Since we are in the human realm, our main focus or characteristic is passion and lust, all the time. So this teaching is based on the idea of communication, openness, and being without expectations.

When we begin to realize that the nature of phenomena is free from concept, empty by itself, that the chairs and tables and rugs and curtains are no longer in the way, then we can expand our notion of love infinitely. There is nothing in the way. The love provides us that emptiness, so that we could fill the whole of space with a sense of affection love without expectation, without demand, without possession. That is one of the most powerful things that kindness has to contribute.

People who are practitioners of loving kindness are very keen on the path of individual responsibilities, not causing harm to others. They are very reasonable, good-thinking and polite people. How can you be polite while smiling twenty-four hours a day on the basis of individual loving kindness alone, without doing anything for others? You are doing everything for yourself all the time, even if you are being kind, nice and polite. That's very hard to do. At the higher level, the sense of affection and love has a lot of room immense room, openness, and daring. There is no time to come out clean, particularly, as long as you generate affection.

The relationship between a mother and child is the foremost analogy used in developing relative kindness practice. According to the Ancient Traditions, the traditional way of cultivating relative kindness is to choose your mother as the first example of someone you feel soft toward. Traditionally, you feel warm and kind toward your mother. In modern society, there might be a problem with that. However, you could go back to the ancient idea of the mother principle. You could appreciate her way of sacrificing her own comfort for you. You could remember how she used to wake up in the middle of the night if you cried, how she used to feed you and change your diapers, and all the rest of it. You could remember how you acted as the ruler of your little household, how your mother became your slave. Whenever you cried, she would jump up whether she liked it or not in order to see what was going on with you. Your mother actually did that. And when you were older, she was very concerned about your

security and your education and so forth. So in order to welcome relative kindness, relative wakeful gentleness, we use our mother as an example, as our pilot light, so to speak. We think about her and how much she sacrificed for us. Her kindness is the perfect example of making others more important than yourself. Reflecting on your own mother is the preliminary to relative kindness practice. You should regard that as your starting point. You might be a completely angry person and have a grudge against the entire universe. You might be a completely frustrated person. But you could still reflect back on your childhood and think of how nice your mother was to you. You could think of that, in spite of your aggression and your resentment. You could remember that there was a time when somebody sacrificed her life for your life, and brought you up to be the person you are now.

The idea of relative kindness in this case is very primitive, in some sense. On the other hand, it is also very enlightening, as kindness should be. Although you might be a completely angry person, you cannot say that in your entire life nobody helped you. Somebody has been kind to you and sacrificed himself or herself for you. Otherwise, if somebody hadn't brought you up, you wouldn't be here as an adult. You could realize that it wasn't just out of obligation but out of her genuineness that your mother brought you up and took care of you when you were helpless. And because of that you are here. That kind of compassion is very literal and very straightforward.

With that understanding, we can begin to extend our sense of non-aggression and non-frustration and non-anger and non-resentment beyond simply appreciating our mother. This is connected with the paramita of discipline, which is free from passion and has to do with giving in. We use our mother as an example, and then our friends and other people generally. Finally, we even try to feel better toward our enemies, toward people we don't like. So we try to extend that sense of gentleness, softness, and gratitude. We are not particularly talking about the Christian concept of charity; instead, we are talking about how to make ourselves soft and reasonable or how we can experience a sense of gratitude toward anybody at all. Starting with our mother and going beyond that to include our father as well and so forth until we include the rest of the world. So in the end we can begin to feel sympathy even toward our bedbugs and mosquitoes.

The starting point of relative kindness practice is realizing that others could actually be more important than ourselves. Other people might provide us with constant problems, but we could still be kind to them. According to the logic of relative kindness, we should feel that we are less important and others are more important any others are more important! Doing so, we begin to feel as though a tremendous burden has been taken off our shoulders.

Finally, we realize that there is room to give love and affection elsewhere and everywhere, to more than just this thing called "me" all the time. "I am this, I am that, I am hungry, I am tired." We could consider others. From that point of view, the relative kindness principle is quite simple and ordinary. We could take care of others. We could actually be patient enough to develop selfless service to others, and the relative kindness slogans are directions as to how to develop relative kindness in a very simple manner.