

LESSON 17 – LOVING-KINDNESS (METTA)

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Have you ever accidentally stepped on a tiny creature, such as an insect or a worm? How did you feel about it?

Story: Kathina

There were many bhikkshus in the Sangha, and they traveled in large groups from place to place by walking on foot, whether it was hot, cold or rainy weather. When the bhikkshus traveled in such large groups, they made a path on the ground, trampling the grass and other plants and creating muddy areas when it rained. The people in the villages noticed this, and observed that monks of other teachers stayed in one place during the rainy season and therefore did not trample the grass and make muddy paths. The people noticed that even birds stayed in their nests during rain. They complained about the Buddhist monks, and said that they were ruining the plants and harming the little creatures on the ground, like insects and worms, by trampling them.

The bhikkshus heard about the complaints, and went to tell the Buddha. The Buddha felt loving kindness to the small creatures and tender plants that were being trampled in the mud. And, he knew that it was difficult for the people to find the bhikkshus when they were so often traveling. But, the Buddha knew that it was important for the monks to travel around so that many people can hear the Dharma and have an opportunity to serve the monks.

He then decided to allow the monks to stay in one place for the rainy season (Vassa). From that time onward, the bhikkshus stayed in one place during the three or four months of Vassa. The people always knew where the bhikkshus would be during the rainy season, so the people could easily visit them and hear them teach the Dharma. And the people could easily supply the monks with their needs, like food, shelter and medicine.

The Buddha set rules for the monks during the rainy season, requiring them to be in retreat, so they could not leave the place they were staying for more than 7 days, even if someone was sick.

A group of 30 bhikkshus wanted to visit the Buddha at Savatthi. On the way, the rainy season started, and they had to stay at a place called Saketa on the way to Savatthi. They knew that the Buddha was close, but they could not travel to see him. After the three months rainy season, they started to travel, but the road was wet and full of puddles. Their robes became soaking wet and muddy, and they became uncomfortable and tired traveling in their wet robes.

When they finally reached the Buddha at Savatthi, they bowed to him. The Buddha asked, “Did you have any difficulties? Did you get enough food? Did you spend your retreat in peace, with friendly discussion without quarreling?” The

monks responded, “We had no difficulties, we got enough food, we did not quarrel. But we could not reach Savatthi in time to be with you during the rainy season, so we stayed in Saketa. You were so close, but we could not see you. We were anxious to see you, so we traveled here quickly, and now we are tired and wet.” The Buddha noticed how wet and muddy the robes were, and how uncomfortable the monks must feel. He felt very kind and loving to these monks who obeyed his rules and were so disciplined.

The Buddha then announced that all monks who obeyed his rules and stayed in one place during the rainy season could accept new robes at the end of the rainy season. People could bring cloth for the monks’ robes to the monks so they could change any wet and muddy robes. They could also receive from people the Eight Requisites (Attapirikara) for monks: three robes, belt, bowl, razor, needle and thread, and water strainer (to strain out insects and dirt from drinking water). This ceremony at the end of the rainy season was called Katina, when the people offer the robes and the Eight Requisites.

Another tradition for Katina is that one monk in the group who performed his duties and discipline very well would be chosen by agreement of all the other monks to receive from the community a special robe (chivara), which was stitched and dyed while monks are chanting. All robes were made from ten pieces of cloth stitched together, because one large piece of cloth is valuable and may get stolen. A robe was sometimes made from cloths put on dead bodies or pieces of cloth that were thrown away by others. The cloth pieces were washed carefully and dyed an orange, yellow or brown color.

Questions after the story:

1. Why did the monks travel around so much?
2. What happened on the ground when they traveled in the rain?
3. What did the Buddha think when he heard about the complaints of the people?
4. How did the Buddha feel toward the monks who had gotten wet and muddy?
5. What happens at the end of the rainy season?
6. Why are robes made of several pieces of cloth stitched together?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“Apādahehi me mettaṃ, mettaṃ dvipādahehi me, catuppadehi me mettaṃ, mettaṃ bahuppadehi me.”

“I give my loving-kindness to those with no feet, I give my loving-kindness to those with two feet, I give my loving-kindness to those with four feet, I give my loving-kindness to those with many feet.”

Khandhaparitta

Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:

We say that the Pali word “Metta” means “loving-kindness,” not just “love.” Do you know why? It is because we may *think* we have love for someone, but if we do not speak words of kindness, act with kindness, or think of ways we can be kind to that person, we are not having genuine love. If we have real love, which includes kindness, then we speak words of kindness, act kindly, and think kind thoughts about the person.

How did the Buddha show metta for the insects and worms that would be trampled by the monks, and for the people who complained about it? How did the Buddha show metta for the people who could not find the bhikkhus because they were always traveling? How did the Buddha show metta for the monks who were tired and wet when they arrived? How did the Buddha show metta for monks who did their duties and discipline well during the rainy season?

It is easy to have metta for friends and family, and cute animals. But can we also have metta for people we don't know, or for people who are not friendly to us? Can we have metta for someone who just upset us, or for someone who hates us? Can we have metta for creatures like insects and snakes that we don't want to touch? Can we have metta for fierce animals that we are afraid of? Can we have metta for people who misbehave?

This is real metta, to have loving-kindness to those beings who are not so loveable. Usually, we just don't think about having metta for them; it's not very easy.

How do you feel if you step on an insect or tiny creature you don't like, like one with no feet or with many feet? If you were afraid it would bite or sting you, you might feel angry at it and hope it is destroyed. If you accidentally stepped on him, you may want to just forget about it. But if we do that, we get a habit of not caring about other creatures, and maybe not caring about other people. We then become uncaring and selfish.

Instead, we can remember that each tiny creature is afraid of pain and dying, just like us. He wants to live safely and get his food, like us. If we remember that, and respect his life, then we can have metta to the tiny creature. We can wish him a good and happy rebirth. That way, we increase the love in our hearts. We can also think that way toward fierce animals and those we don't like to touch. We can understand that they are fierce, and that they have their type of body and ways of protecting themselves - like claws, big teeth, scales, or a stinger - because that is how they can survive, to get their food and avoid being hurt.

How can we have metta to someone who we don't know, or who is not friendly to us? Many people who don't know us or who are not friendly to us would love us very much if they really knew us. They may ignore us because they cannot see the love in our hearts. Some people are shy, or envious, or judge us without really knowing us. We can smile at them, say some kind words, or help them in some

way, and maybe they will smile back and become friendly. But if they don't, that's okay, they are just not ready to accept us yet, or, they are not happy. We can wish they become happy and more accepting and open-hearted.

How can we have metta to someone who upset us or who hates us? We can think that if that person was a really happy and loving person, he would not upset us anymore, he would not treat us badly, he would not have any hatred. So, we can wish he becomes a really happy and loving person!

We can have metta to people who misbehave, too. Should we be friendly with people who misbehave? We can be polite to them, but we should avoid them so we don't get involved in misbehavior too. But we can wish that they learn to behave better and make a better future for themselves, having compassion for them because they will have to suffer the results of their misbehavior. We should be careful not to wish that they suffer, though – that is unkind. Instead, we can wish that good things happen to them to give them happiness so they stop misbehaving.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Teacher prepares cardboard cut-outs of hearts and lotus blossoms. Each student, on a piece of paper, traces around a heart or a lotus flower cut-out, writes “Metta” inside the heart or lotus, and may color it. Around the heart or lotus, students draw people, animals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, etc. Arrows may be drawn from the heart or lotus to the various beings around it, to represent metta being sent from us to all beings.

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā! May all beings have happy minds!