

Loving-kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness

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Source: *Shambhala Classics*, ISBN 1-57062-903-X <http://www.shambhala.com>

Extract from Chapter 2 – Relearning loveliness

The Pali word *metta* has two root meanings. One is the word for "gentle." *Metta* is likened to a gentle rain that falls upon the earth. This rain does not select and choose—"I'll rain here, and I'll avoid that place over there." Rather, it simply falls without discrimination.

The other root meaning for *metta* is "friend." To understand the power or the force of *metta* is to understand true friendship. The Buddha actually described at some length what he meant by being a good friend in the world. He talked about a good friend as someone who is constant in our times of happiness and also in our times of adversity or unhappiness. A friend will not forsake us when we are in trouble nor rejoice in our misfortune. The Buddha described a true friend as being a helper, someone who will protect us when we are unable to take care of ourselves, who will be a refuge to us when we are afraid.

Once, when someone described to the Dalai Lama how much fear they were experiencing in their meditation practice, he said, "When you're afraid, just put your head in the lap of the Buddha." The lap of the Buddha epitomizes the safety of a true friendship. The culmination of *metta* is to become such a friend to oneself and all of life.

The practice of *metta*, uncovering the force of love that can uproot fear, anger, and guilt, begins with befriending ourselves. The foundation of *metta* practice is to know how to be our own friend. According to the Buddha, "You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."