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Maitri (Metta) or Universal Love

V.F. Gunaratna,

I am happy to be able to inaugurate this new series of talks entitled “Thoughts of Maitri.” I am happy to take this opportunity to speak to you on one of the grandest and noblest qualities that man can ever possess, namely, the quality of Maitri or Universal Love.

What is Maitri? It is love in its purest, highest and widest sense. It transcends the limits of ordinary love which is selfish.

It is a sublime attitude of perfect benevolence and utter compassion towards all without a trace of selfishness. It is to be directed not to a select few but to all. Hence the English rendering for Maitri is universal love.

One must radiate Maitri at all times and under all circumstances to all beings, friend or foe, known or unknown. It must extend even to those who are ill-disposed to us. Yes, it must extend even to our bitterest enemies who are openly working against us.

If it is confined only to those who are well-disposed to us, it is not Maitri. If it is confined to human beings only, it is not Maitri. It must extend to every manner of being in whom that mysterious thing called life is pulsating. Yes, it must extend to the stray dog in the street, to the fierce animals that roam the forest and even to the meanest worm that crawls the earth.

For these very reasons, Maitri has a wonderful refining influence, a wonderful uplifting influence on the mind of the person practicing Maitri, not to speak of the soothing calm and sublime tranquility engendered by this attitude of mind once it becomes habitual.

Friends, depend upon it, Maitri is the best attitude of all attitudes of others towards us towards the friendly attitude as well as the hostile attitude of others, towards the tolerant attitude as well as the intolerant attitude of others.

To start the day with a mind radiating with Maitri is to equip ourselves with the best frame of mind to face the various situations desirable or undesirable, pleasant or unpleasant, that may present themselves to us during the course of the day. Indeed with Maitri looming large in our minds we are best prepared and best fortified for the battle of life.

Maitri, like any other quality of mind, increases with systematic and regular practice. Hence while Maitri continues to fashion our general attitude of mind, we cannot ignore the regular and systematic practice of radiating thought-currents of Maitri each day at some particular time.

For this purpose, there must be a set place and a set time each day, and when that time arrives one should put aside everything else and engage himself in the practice of radiating thought-currents of Maitri to all and sundry for a short while. Even ten minutes is enough if the practice is carried out fully and intensely.

Early morning immediately on awaking is the most convenient time to most of us. It can with profit be repeated at night also before retiring to sleep. It may be asked why this practice of Maitri is so highly spoken of and so strongly recommended. What makes it so great and important?

In the first place this concentration of thought-currents of Maitri on

all beings at a fixed time each day, if undertaken with sufficient enthusiasm and seriousness will uplift you to a sublime and lofty plane of thought. It dispels all low and mean attitudes of mind towards others with whom you come into contact each day.

Gradually, all thoughts of anger hatred and jealousy will leave you, and your mind will be imbued with strong feelings of purest love and utter compassion towards all with whom you come into contact.

As you progress further in this practice, this strong feeling of purest love and utter compassion will be felt by you towards all beings known and unknown, beings with whom you have come into contact as well as those with whom you have not come into contact.

Maitri thus practised will sooner or later give you not merely a sense of great calm and tranquility, it will also give you that most sublime feeling of being at peace with every one—at peace with the whole world. This is a deep spiritual experience known as Samatha and having attained this, higher spiritual progress is available to you.

Another aspect of Maitri should now be considered. The element of compassion in the man of Maitri will enable him easily to do something which others cannot always do with the same ease, namely, to rejoice at another's joy and grieve at another's grief. The man of Maitri by reason of his boundless compassion is able to appreciate the other man's point of view. He can also readily see and appreciate the good, points in a bad man. Maitri is known to have succeeded in subduing the hardest of hearts.

The language of Maitri is sweet, pleasing to the ear and goes direct to the heart. It is the language of kindly expression. When a man of Maitri finds fault with a wrong-doer this language of, kindly

expression is used. It leaves no sting behind and provokes no resentment.

On the other hand when a wrong-doer is angrily and harshly reprimanded, the wrong-doer adverts not to the wrong he has committed but to the angry manner in which he had been spoken to and this rankles in his mind. His wrongful tendency is not cured, not corrected. At the most it is only stemmed and temporarily driven underground.

Maitri is so important that it is one of the ten paramitas or perfections that have to be developed in order to enable us to reach the state of Buddhahood. Maitri along with three other kindred qualities are collectively referred to as Brahma Vihara. which literally means living with Brahma, that is to say, living a divine life.

In short, Maitri opens up a path to the divine heights.

Let us now see how vividly the Buddha in the Karaniya-Metta Sutta describes how Metta or Maitri should be radiated: “Even as a mother at the risk of her life would protect her son, her only son, so let one cultivate towards all beings this boundless love. Let one radiate with a full heart this loving Maitri towards all the world, without hindrance, free from all hatred or unfriendliness—above, below, and in all directions. While standing, walking, sitting or reclining—so long as one is awake—let one maintain this attitude of mindfulness which is spoken of as the Highest Living, or the Divine Living.”

I will now conclude with an enumeration of the eleven, beneficial effects of the practice of Maitri as mentioned in the Mettanisansa

Sutta: --

“Happily he sleeps.
Happily he awakes.
He sees no evil dreams.
He is dear to human beings.
He is dear to non-human beings.
Fire, poison, and weapons do not touch him.
He is able to gain concentration of mind quickly.
His countenance is serene. He dies composed in mind.
He attains to Arahantship immediately after death, or if
 this is not possible,
 he is reborn in the
Brahma heaven happily as