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Facing Fear
Week Two: “The Deep Impact of Lovingkindness”
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This is the second session of our four-part practice. We've been talking about the four immeasurables and how we can use them to overcome negative emotions and problems in our life. The topic for these four weeks is how to use the four immeasurables to overcome our fears. Last time, we talked about the definition of the four immeasurables and how sentient beings are numberless. [These are] wonderful [concepts that can help us] develop the good qualities of our mind and our heart.

Last time we practiced equanimity. We talked about how we could practice and maintain equanimity within ourselves, with others, and with the circumstances that come up in our lives. We talked about how to maintain that equanimity using the eight worldly dharmas: praise and blame, gain and loss, happiness and despair, and fame and infamy. These are a big part of what we consider to be important in our lives.

With that sense of equanimity, let's imagine that we've practiced a little bit and that we've developed some equanimity, which means that we've moved beyond our likes and dislikes. This means that we're able to look at everybody in our experience without having to define them as either friends or people that we don't like. Let's imagine that we can look out into the world and realize that everybody is equal to us because we all just want to be happy. [This realization] allows us to relate to others instead of seeing them through what separates us and makes us different.

Then, we can see how we can move on to wishing all sentient beings happiness. This is the definition of lovingkindness. Some people call it love. Some people call it lovingkindness. Lovingkindness is a sentiment of caring concern for others and for their well-being. [It means] wishing them all the things that make them happy. When we speak of [sending] lovingkindness towards all sentient beings, we wish them not only happiness but also the causes of happiness. In my tradition (Tibetan Buddhism), I'm an ordained nun. Before we sit down to listen to the teachings, we say a prayer called the four immeasurables. [The lovingkindness part] goes like this: *May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.*

The reason why we begin any practice or any teaching with the four immeasurables is because it sets up the right motivation. Motivation is very important. Whatever it is that determines why we're doing something, whether it's spiritual practice or not, determines our perception of how things turn out in the end. If the motivation is right, positive, beneficial, and free of ego, then whatever we do in our lives, spiritual or not, is bound to have a positive impact on ourselves and others.

When starting any of these immeasurable practices, your motivation is key. When you wake up in the morning, as you start your day, you can say: "May whatever I do today make others happy." This is like a magic spell that you cast on yourself. "May what I do help my family, my pet, my neighbors . . ." Even if you work alone at home, you will begin to see that you are connected to other people. Even though you don't see them or hear from them, it's important to know that no matter what we do, no matter what we think or say, we impact others. It's inevitable.

When you realize that, you'll begin to see how your life has value. You'll begin to see how you matter to people that you come in contact with, and even to people that you may never meet. You might change someone's life without even knowing it. This awareness gives us true conviction and true faith that our life is very meaningful. Our human minds are capable of imagining how we can help all sentient beings. Even though animals have a mind, and even though they can love and care for their young, animals cannot conceive of helping all sentient beings. That's what's called *bodhicitta*: the wish to help all sentient beings achieve enlightenment. Only human beings can do that.

For that reason, our teacher, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, is constantly reminding us to value our life because we can imagine all sentient beings and wish them happiness. That's what makes a human life precious. It is a special capacity to imagine all sentient beings; to make them happy and help them and guide them and inspire them and cheer them up and give them what they need. In this way, we can begin to value our life and begin to be inspired to do something meaningful and beneficial for ourselves and others.

Motivation is key. That's why we begin with the four immeasurables practice. With lovingkindness, we wish them happiness and the causes of happiness. Happiness really means whatever makes them happy. It could be temporary happiness, but it could also be the long-lasting, perfect, unchanging, true happiness of enlightenment. Until they obtain that, we can wish

for them to be safe. We can wish for them to be successful. We can wish for them to be healthy. We can wish for them to be loved by others and respected by others. We can wish for them to have positive circumstances in their life. If they're dharma practitioners, we can wish for them to enhance their practice and to attain enlightenment very quickly. If they're not dharma practitioners, we can wish for them to meet a good, true friend.

We can wish for them to have good teachers if they're in school. We can wish for them to have good colleagues and guides at their jobs; to be surrounded by people who will inspire them and uplift them so that they gain confidence in themselves and so that they value themselves and are able to find positive meaning in their life. All of these things mean wishing others happiness. That's what's called love, or lovingkindness.

We can practice this in the more formal way. Please get yourself a cushion or a chair. We begin with posture. The posture is very important because if the body is upright, our mind has the opportunity to stay clear. If we slouch or if we lean or if we lie down too comfortably, our mind will get sleepy and our practice will deteriorate. Sit up and perk yourself up a little bit and take a few deep breaths that will refresh your body and your mind. If you need a little time, you can [turn off your phone or computer] and then turn it back on when you feel that you're better prepared to practice.

Once you have a good posture and your breath has settled a little bit (meaning that it isn't speedy or choppy or erratic, but instead calm and even), then feel the surface that you're sitting on. Do that to make yourself feel grounded and stable whether it's your sitting bones on the chair or the ground or the cushion. Feel yourself connected to the earth. Feel yourself rooted or plugged in. This gives your mind a sense of stability. It reduces the flightiness of the mind. Try that. It's very helpful.

Then begin to say in your mind a few of the statements that develop love and lovingkindness. Include yourself in this. When we wish any of these immeasurables for all sentient beings, you are included. Sometimes we forget that. Include yourself. You can say things—out loud or in your mind—like: "May I be happy. May I have the causes of happiness."

Lovingkindness is very important to practice for ourselves. Sometimes we feel that if we wish ourselves good things, we're being selfish. But if we don't wish for happiness for ourselves, we might be subtly punishing ourselves. We might be subtly bullying ourselves or being too hard on ourselves without any reason. When we do that, we're punishing others, even if we love them

and we don't mean to. This is a mental pattern which includes being hard on ourselves and others. Practicing love and lovingkindness for ourselves is a good way to learn to practice it (and teach it and cultivate it) for others.

We move on to wishing love and happiness and health and safety and success to somebody that we love. Bring that person or those people to mind. Then we can wish it towards their friends and their family. We can wish it for all sentient beings that we know of, that we see on a daily basis, on the street, even people we see when we read the news or watch TV. We can expand our scope of people that we are aware of in our life. Beyond that, we can wish them the causes of happiness. The causes of happiness are good deeds, performed out of positive emotions and out of care for others. These deeds are free from attachment, free from aversion, and free from unawareness or naivety or ignorance.

Any deed that is free of those concepts is called a positive deed. These positive deeds bring forth happiness. It could be immediate happiness, or it could be long-term happiness. This is what we wish for ourselves and others when we wish for happiness. Practice that.

Take a few moments right now, even if it's for only two minutes. You might see that in the span of even just a couple of minutes, something will change within you. That is a sign that you're able to be inspired by something within yourself that allows for a transformation. By practicing every day, [this transformation] can become more stable. "May I be happy. May all others be happy. May I be at peace. May I have success, good health, be surrounded by loving, supportive people that help me. May I have success in my job, with my relationships, with my friends. May all others have the same." Practice like this.

The result of lovingkindness is that we begin to break down the separation that we feel from ourselves, from our world, and from others. We begin to realize that we don't need to know them personally to have a sense of connection to them. They might be strangers, but we're not alien to each other because we can tap into our own desires for happiness and therefore understand the wish of all beings. Even plants want sunlight and warmth. That's their version of happiness. All sentient beings want some happiness. This absence of isolation begins to make us more fearless when talking to people, when meeting strangers, when going to new places, when having to confront situations or people that make us uncomfortable and insecure and which [force us] to face shame, fear, embarrassment, and isolation.

Long-lasting results won't come about right away. They take a little time. They depend on how much we practice, how sincerely, how focused, and how consistently. This why they're called "immeasurable." They will help you see your boundless capacity for these positive emotions. If you practice and you feel that you come up short sometimes, that you lose your temper, that you find yourself wishing for not-so-nice things to happen to people, don't worry. We're all beginners. It's not until we become enlightened that these qualities will be perfect, but that's not to say that these practices are meaningless, because at the very least they will imprint these positive states on the mind. We will work to become the type of person that will possess these qualities. Eventually we're working to become a *bodhisattva*, a buddha who can truly help all sentient beings in the way they need.

The path is not easy, but that's no reason not to practice. We have many, many challenges. That also is no reason to practice. Give yourself a chance. In changing one life, you will change many others. These are practices that might seem simple, but they're very profound and they have a deep impact. I hope that you practice them starting today, and discover for yourself how your life and others' lives can change in a positive, meaningful, wonderful way. Thank you so much.