

Joshua Bee Alafia

*The Three Beautiful Roots: Cultivating the Three Wholesome Qualities in Unwholesome Times*

Week Two: “The Strength of Goodness”

May 14, 2022



The second wholesome root of the mind is *adosa*, or goodwill. Goodwill is a multifaceted process. The word *dosa* means ferociousness or aggression. Having no ill will, we keep ourselves from harming ourselves and others. It also speaks to this bodily purification that is *sila*, this attention to our impact on others and ourselves, this vigilance in adjusting and finding the appropriate wholesome response.

I really like how Plum Village and Thich Nhat Hanh, may he rise in power, phrase the five precepts as the five mindfulness trainings. The first training is to protect life, to decrease violence in oneself, in family, and in society. It's very basic, but this path of not harming is a huge undertaking, and it begins with ourselves. The second training is to practice social justice, generosity, not stealing, not exploiting other living beings, and not taking what is not given. It requires vigilance. The third practice is to be responsible of our sexual behavior in order to protect individuals, couples, families, and children. This is such a wise training when looking at the impact on society and how much harm is done with sexual aggression and how much trauma is created by our sexual misconduct. The fourth practice is the practice of deep listening and loving speech to restore communication and reconcile. This is very beautiful practice. I could be so harsh with my words, especially as a teenager, and it's really been a lifelong refinement to go a little easier, to be a little more conscientious of how words impact others. They really can get lodged in our subconscious and stay there. I have to be very careful with my son in this regard. The fifth is about mindful consumption to help us not bring toxins and poisons into our body or mind. This is really one of the first steps of being loving to ourselves. It can be simple, like reading the ingredients on things, having the awareness of what we are putting our bodies through when we eat, and practicing moderation. Sobriety was a real process for me. It took me until the end of my 20s to really have a mature enough notion of self-care and self-love to be able to decide to really commit to clarity. It's not always easy because we live in a culture that's very fixated on distorting clarity in one way or another.

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Developing and cultivating this goodwill, *adosa*, isn't just purely the purification process of *silā*. It's also a branch of the root of *metta*, or lovingkindness or loving friendliness, as I like to call it. It's an act of meeting everything and infusing our mindfulness with this friendly welcoming, which isn't always easy as the heart has broken so many times. So many times, the heart breaks, so naturally, we are conditioned to be careful and defensive around our heart. And yet, just as a muscle breaks to increase volume and power, the heart is empowered with this ability to love even stronger, to be welcoming with even more recklessness and abandon as it breaks, as long as there is this mindful intention to continue to love. And this really begins with ourselves. I always start my mentoring sessions and certain online courses with self-metta because it's so important to be able to go back to all the wounds in the heart, to all of our traumas, and be a guardian angel to ourselves by giving ourselves metta in that moment. It's very much an adaptogen like ginger is an adaptogen. When you have a sore throat, ginger goes to the throat. When you have something going on in the stomach, ginger goes to the stomach. Metta goes where it's needed. It goes to mend the wounds, wherever they may be.

So we have this practice of actively healing by activating this goodness in our heart. Metta was a practice given to the fearful. It was given to the fearful nuns and monks when they were really terrified of practicing in this forest, and the original instruction was to radiate goodness inwardly and radiate goodness outwardly. By doing that, the wild animals and the angry deities were completely tamed and made benevolent. This speaks to our ability to tame our own toxins that we give ourselves. It speaks to our ability to be able to heal those wounds that condition our actions and have the courage to love because love takes courage.

There's a beautiful passage where the Buddha, Siddhartha and Yasodhara, speak on cultivation of integrity: “There is a case where a person of integrity is endowed with conviction (wise effort),

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conscience (ethics), concern and caring (lovingkindness, metta, loving friendliness). They are learned and aroused with persistence and mindful and wise discernment (wisdom). This is how a person of integrity is endowed with the qualities of integrity.”

So our integrity is a checks and balances system. It’s a way of refining our actions, a loop of feedback where our heart is endowed with this vigilance of bringing awareness when we make mistakes and being preemptive in disrupting our reactivity. We’re going to make mistakes a lot, and hopefully we learn from them. I’m very thankful for the shift as I’ve matured to look in and learn from my mistakes instead of being defensive and self-righteous, seeing the mistakes as an extension of self. Another beauty of our practice is letting go of everything being an extension of self. That takes time and vigilance.

So we balance this really empowered refinement of actions with our integrity and our loving friendliness that is bringing warmth to everything we do, to our awareness, to our self-talk, to the way that we communicate thought to ourselves, which can be one of the most impactful modifiers in our lives. How do we talk to ourselves? So often, it’s so negatively. As we cultivate adosa, we speak clearly, authentically, truthfully to ourselves with warmth and care. I think it was Tara Brach who was using the analogy of petting a dog or a puppy. It might have been Jack Kornfield.

Adosa is a process. I’m very thankful to Larry Yang. I was listening to one of his talks on love and integrity, and that’s where I pulled the quote from the Buddha. He’s been very instrumental in my own process of refinement. So has Gina Sharpe. We lean on our teachers to empower our inner teacher, and we have the humility to be able to be real with ourselves. Next time we’ll be talking about *amoha*, or clarity or wisdom, and the cultivation of clarity that is our practice of meditation. Thank you so much. Be well.