

## Loving-kindness, Starting with Ourselves

*I celebrate myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good  
belongs to you.*

~Walt Whitman

The first of the *brahma-viharas* is loving-kindness. Cultivating loving-kindness towards oneself can be difficult. Many of us have been taught to focus on our faults and overlook our wholesome qualities; or, we may have learned to elevate ourselves through the use of comparing mind. As we nurture loving-kindness within ourselves we can expose these misguided perceptions and learn to deal with them.

The practice of self-love and self-acceptance enables us to see clearly all the places where love and acceptance are absent. In the process of self-study we usually uncover deeply buried and unresolved difficult emotions, and loving-kindness provides us with the parameters for viewing these problems in a new light. It becomes our job to strengthen our self-love so that we can escort any entombed emotions to the surface for resolution. The power of love, a power that is greater than any state of suffering, provides a stronghold for exploring the shadowy corners of our consciousness. It can be very difficult, but avoidance is far worse.

A pivotal practice for turning the mind toward self-appreciation is to learn to honor in yourself what you would honor in others. If you can appreciate another's acts of generosity, can you learn to appreciate yourself for your acts of generosity? For instance, if you can recognize and honor the generosity of a friend, can you honor yourself for your similar actions? Or, notice and appreciate how someone acts with integrity, and then recognize that same quality within yourself.

There can be a lot of inner resistance at first. With practice you can learn to allow others to become positive mirrors for you. Just as you can use the phrase “what you say is what you are” to scrutinize your faults, you can also use it to nourish self-love.

The differences between self-love and conceit are substantial. In our culture it is not unusual to confuse self-love and conceit; however, the two feelings are quite different. Self-love is an experience of profound self-acceptance. It is the total acknowledgement of our honorable qualities as well as our less than skillful habits. Self-love brings on a feeling of connectedness, of worthiness, where we feel an uplifting unity with all of life. Conceit, on the other hand, is a feeling of separateness, of superiority, a mind state where pride and the comparing mind are in charge. If your feelings of worthiness are unifying, that is self-love. If your feelings of preciousness are separating and have flavors of superiority, that is conceit.

Be loving with yourself. Honor yourself for your good intentions regardless of results. Note difficulties that surface as you do this exercise, and learn to appreciate yourself nonetheless. Celebrate yourself!

### **Reflective Journaling**

Study your intentions and actions regarding each of the ten *paramis* (Chapter Three) and how you have manifested them in thought, speech, or action today, yesterday, or within the last week. Write out answers to each question, and spend time writing and reflecting on your responses to the affirming statements.

**Generosity:** I have acted with generosity by \_\_\_\_\_.

I act with generosity.

**Ethical conduct:** I have acted ethically by \_\_\_\_\_.

I abide by the five precepts.

**Renunciation:** I have acted with renunciation or simplicity recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I let go of that which doesn't serve me.

**Wisdom:** I have acted with wisdom recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I honor my wisdom faculty.

**Courageous energy:** I have acted with courageous effort and energy recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I have heroic energy to do what is necessary.

**Patience:** I have acted with patience recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I am patient, tolerant, and forbearing.

**Truthfulness:** I have acted with sincerity or truthfulness recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I am sincere and truthful.

**Determination:** I have acted with determination recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I have fiery determination to walk my spiritual path.

**Loving-kindness:** I have acted with loving-kindness recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I act with love, kindness, and friendliness.

**Equanimity:** I have acted with equanimity recently by \_\_\_\_\_.

I respond in a balanced and peaceful manner to circumstances.

## **Meditation**

Use these phrases in synchronicity with the breath. Spend two to five minutes on each topic.

For example, taking the wisdom *parami*:

(In breath) May I have wisdom.

(Out breath) May I learn well.

If these phrases become too wordy, the meditation might reduce to:

(In breath) May I

(Out breath) learn well.

Or it might reduce to even fewer words. Allow for the words to slip away, maintaining your concentration on your skillful actions and intentions, as well as your innate goodness.

- **Generosity:** May I be generous and helpful.
- **Ethical Conduct:** May I be virtuous and well disciplined.
- **Renunciation:** May I be able to live simply, to renounce.
- **Wisdom:** May I have wisdom, may I learn well.
- **Courageous energy:** May I have courageous energy for positive change.
- **Patience:** May I be patient.
- **Truthfulness:** May I be honest and truthful.
- **Determination:** May I have fiery determination.
- **Loving-kindness:** May I be kind, compassionate and friendly. May I love well.
- **Equanimity:** May I be balanced, calm, quiet, and serene.