

The Removal of Grudges

*yasmim̐ puggale āghāto jāyetha,
mettā tasmim̐ puggale bhāvetabbā.
evam tasmim̐ puggale āghāto paṭivinetabbo*

*If you give birth to a grudge towards any person,
cultivate loving kindness towards that person...
Thus the grudge towards that person can be removed.*

—*Anguttara Nikaya 5:161*

This passage demonstrates one of the practical applications of loving kindness (*mettā*). We may be used to thinking of it in a rather abstract way, as a generalized care for the well-being of all sentient beings, or as a type of formal meditation in which one is absorbed wholly in an immeasurable field of loving kindness. But here we see a more modest and particular approach to its practice.

In a manner entirely characteristic of Buddhist psychology, the presence of a grudge is seen to be a problem for its subject rather than of its object. Western thought more naturally faces outward, and would tend to resolve the situation by exploring ways the person toward whom the grudge is held might be reformed, made to apologize, or somehow held accountable for their transgression. “If the other person changes in some way, I can let go of the grudge I hold (because, of course, I am justified in holding this grudge).”

In this case, though, the reason for the grudge is entirely irrelevant. Whether “right” or “wrong,” the holding of the grudge is doing damage to oneself; it is a toxic and unhealthy emotion to be nurturing, since it is kept alive by repetitive thoughts of ill will toward other person. The Buddha thus treats it as an affliction that needs to be healed

for the sake of one's own well being. And the antidote to this malady is loving kindness—preferably in massive doses.

Manifesting loving kindness actively in one's own experience, moment after moment, has the effect both of counteracting any ill-will that might otherwise arise, and of strengthening the healthy roots of one's own beneficial unconscious dispositions. Indulging the grudge will only make one become more unhealthy and unhappy, while removing the grudge will contribute greatly to healing.

Notice that adjusting one's own attitude does not necessarily mean giving in or acquiescing to what the other person has done. The person to whom I direct the grudge might still be entirely "guilty" of some transgression, but in this view two different components of the situation, the content and the process, are to be disentangled. Even if the **reason** for the grudge is legitimate in some way, the impact of the **experience** of holding the grudge is harmful to oneself. One can still follow through on whatever **actions** are appropriate to deal with the implications of the behavior, but should take care to do so with an **attitude** that is imbued with loving kindness.

Which brings us to the practice, which is simple but not easy. Can you manage, even in the face of the full-on grudge you may hold toward someone, to also at the same time generate an intention of loving kindness toward them? Without necessarily forgiving the matter that induced it, can you nevertheless find something about that person that can act as the anchor point of an internally generated emotion or attitude of friendliness toward them? Yes you can. Try it.