

Mettā: A Mature Emotion

Question: My activist neighbor is going to Nevada to register voters. It's difficult to convince myself that I'm sitting in meditation for the benefit of all beings (not just giving myself a "gift"), let alone explain a week of sitting to her. Could you comment?

Answer: There are a couple of different layers there. The main one that leaps out is that I don't think you need to explain yourself to everybody, especially in the light of loving-kindness. It is usually not an act of loving-kindness to try to compare and then explain yourself to others. That's usually an exercise in judgment of yourself in which you, invariably, come up short. The very impulse to have to explain yourself to others is almost always generated from the sense, "I must be doing something wrong, and therefore, I have to explain myself." You're inevitably going to come up short.

A good question is: "Is this an act of kindness towards myself?" And then, "Is it a real act of kindness to explain myself to other people? Do they actually need to know?" It's something of an American compulsion to explain yourself to others.

I remember the very first year that I came to America to help found Abhayagiri. We were invited on almsround to a neighbor's house, which is about seven miles from the monastery. You walk down Tomki Road and East Road on almsround to get to their house. It's a long walk. A woman pulled over and asked, "Where are you going? Do you need a ride?" I had misjudged the time and we were running a bit late, so it was quite good to have a ride. There was still maybe a mile or a mile and a half left. It wasn't that far, but in the