



## Neighbors Are Our Practice, by Tenzin Palmo

Meditation is only one of the many qualities that is emphasized. It's a very important one because we have to understand our mind, and we can only understand our mind by looking at it. But to be a well-balanced practitioner and reach our aim of being a totally integrated and realized being, we must develop many other essential qualities. Among these are generosity, tolerance, patience, ethics, loving kindness, compassion and so on. Now if we take something like ethics or loving kindness, it's obvious that one needs other people in order to practice. It's very easy living up in a retreat to be ethical, because there is no one to steal from, no one to lie to. It's no big deal to be patient. And to be generous, it is only necessary to throw out a few crumbs to the birds. Yes, very generous!

We need others. We need society in order to really exercise these essential qualities. So we start where we are, within the family. Again, it's very easy again to sit on our meditation cushion or to come here to a dharma centre. We sit here and we chant, "May all beings be well and happy, may they all be at ease, may they be endlessly filled with bliss." All those little sentient beings are out there on the horizon, over there somewhere. Somebody told me exactly this the other day. She was sitting meditating on loving kindness and compassion. Then her kids came and knocked at the door and said "Mum we want this and this and this. And she found herself screaming at her children, "Go away, I'm doing my loving kindness!" Whoops!

The point is that our children, our parents, our partner, our business colleagues, the people we meet, our neighbours these are our practice. [...]

The Buddha described patience as the highest austerity. He said that austerity is not about flagellating yourself or doing tremendous fasting, not sitting in the midst of fires in the way the way the Indians did. He said to forget these ideas of austerity, these tremendous tortures of the body. The real austerity is being patient with others. Everybody encounters in their life often in their daily life people who seem to be born only to have the function of pushing all our buttons, who seem motivated to be difficult and to cause us problems. Instead of making us angry or wanting to retaliate, these people are actually our greatest spiritual friends. Because while it's very pleasant when everyone is being nice to us and all the situations in our life are running smoothly, we don't learn anything. It's easy to be loving towards people who are loving. That doesn't take any talent. The real test is to feel warm and have a sense of "May you be well and happy" towards someone who is really creating a lot of

problems for us.

--Tenzin Palmo

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