

# GENTLENESS



To be gentle (soracca) is to speak or act in a careful, mild and kindly way that causes no harm to others. The English word is derived from the Old French gentil meaning 'of the same clan' and referred to treating others as if they were one's own family. The Pàëi word comes from sorata meaning placid or soft. The scriptures often mention the value of gentleness. 'Those who love the noble Dhamma, who are pure in word, thought and deed; always peaceful, gentle, focused and composed; they proceed through the world properly'(Ja.III,442). The Buddha usually linked gentleness with mildness (maddava) and patience (khanti) and very clearly the three mutually support each other. Gentleness adds a special dimension to our practice of Right Speech and Right Action. Sometimes it is necessary to criticize or correct someone and although we may do this with the best of intentions, it may still cause hurt. Wrapping such words in a mild tone and delivering

them slowly and quietly, may lessen this hurt and make our words more likely to be accepted. It is possible to act with kindness and yet still do so in a rough, careless or rash manner. Again, doing what one does with gentleness will make such actions even more helpful and appreciated. Gentleness can become more a part of our behavior in two ways. (1) Reflecting on the Buddha's gentleness will act as both a reminder and an inspiration to be gentle to us. (2) Speaking and acting with good intentions but doing so with mindfulness also, will let us see where the things we are doing can be enhanced by gentleness.

Unfortunately, gentleness is sometimes looked down on because it is associated with weakness, timidity and lack of fortitude, which it may be sometimes. But if someone is gentle because they have chosen to be, because they see its beauty and value, this need not be so. The gentle person may actually be strong while only appearing to be weak (Th.501). The Buddha said that the person who is gentle, mild and patient and yet is still firm (ajjava) and able to get things done quickly (java), is worthy of the highest respect (A.III,248).