

You're absolutely right. It takes an egg as well as a sperm to start a Nobel laureate. Every one of them has had a mother as well as a father. You can say all you want of fathers, but their contribution to conception is really rather small.

But I hope you weren't seriously proposing an egg bank. Nobel laureates aside, there isn't much in the way of starting one technically. There are some problems, but nothing as hard as involved in the other kinds of breeder reactors. . . .

But think of a man so vain as to insist on getting a superior egg from an egg bank. Then he has to fertilize it. When it's fertilized where does he go with it? To his wife? "Here, dear," you can hear him saying, "I just got this superior egg from an egg bank and just fertilized it myself. Will you take care of it?" "I've got eggs of my own to worry about," she answers. "You know what you can do with your superior egg. Go rent a womb. While you're at it, you'd better rent a room too."

You see, it just won't work. The truth is what one really needs is not Nobel laureates but love. How do you think one gets to be a Nobel laureate? Wanting love, that's how. Wanting it so bad one works all the time and ends up a Nobel laureate. It's a consolation prize.

What matters is love. Forget sperm banks and egg banks. Banks and love are incompatible. If you don't know that, you haven't been to your bank lately.

So just practice loving. Love a Russian. You'd be surprised how easy it is and how it will brighten your morning. Love an Iranian, a Vietnamese, people not just here but everywhere. Then when you've gotten really good at it, try something hard like loving the politicians in our nation's capital.

The longing for love and the movement of love is underneath all of our activities. The happiness we discover in life is not about possessing or owning or even understanding. Instead, it is the discovery of this capacity to love, to have a loving, free, and wise relationship with all of life. Such love is not possessive but arises out of a sense of our own well-being and connection with everything. Therefore, it is generous and wakeful, and it loves the freedom of all things. Out of love, our path can lead us to learn to use our gifts to heal and serve, to create peace around us, to honor the sacred in life, to bless whatever we encounter, and to wish all beings well.

Spiritual life may seem complicated, but in essence it is not. We can

find a clarity and simplicity even in the midst of this complex world when we discover that the quality of heart we bring to life is what matters most. The beloved Zen poet Ryokan summed this up when he said:

*The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away,  
and the weather is clear again.  
If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are  
pure. . . .  
Then the moon and flowers will guide you along the  
Way.*

All other spiritual teachings are in vain if we cannot love. Even the most exalted states and the most exceptional spiritual accomplishments are unimportant if we cannot be happy in the most basic and ordinary ways, if, with our hearts, we cannot touch one another and the life we have been given. What matters is how we live. This is why it is so difficult and so important to ask this question of ourselves: "Am I living my path fully, do I live without regret?" so that we can say on whatever day is the end of our life, "Yes, I have lived my path with heart."

#### A MEDITATION ON LOVING-KINDNESS

The quality of *loving-kindness* is the fertile soil out of which an integrated spiritual life can grow. With a loving heart as the background, all that we attempt, all that we encounter, will open and flow more easily. While loving-kindness can arise naturally in us in many circumstances, it can also be cultivated.

The following meditation is a 2,500-year-old practice that uses repeated phrases, images, and feelings to evoke loving-kindness and friendliness toward oneself and others. You can experiment with this practice to see if it is useful for you. It is best to begin by repeating it over and over for fifteen or twenty minutes once or twice daily in a quiet place for several months. At first this meditation may feel mechanical or awkward or even bring up its opposite, feelings of irritation and anger. If this happens, it is especially important to be patient and kind toward yourself, allowing whatever arises to be received in a spirit of friendliness and kind affection.

In its own time, even in the face of inner difficulties, loving-kindness will develop.

Sit in a comfortable fashion. Let your body relax and be at rest. As best you can, let your mind be quiet, letting go of plans and preoccupations. Then begin to recite inwardly the following phrases directed to yourself. You begin with yourself because without loving yourself it is almost impossible to love others.

*May I be filled with loving-kindness.*

*May I be well.*

*May I be peaceful and at ease.*

*May I be happy.*

As you say the phrases, you may also wish to use the image from the Buddha's instructions: picture yourself as a young and beloved child, or sense yourself as you are now, held in a heart of loving-kindness. Let the feelings arise with the words. Adjust the words and images so that you find the exact phrases that best open your heart of kindness. Repeat the phrases again and again, letting the feelings permeate your body and mind.

Practice this meditation repeatedly for a number of weeks until the sense of loving-kindness for yourself grows.

When you feel ready, in the same meditation period you can gradually expand the focus of your loving-kindness to include others. After yourself, choose a benefactor, someone in your life who has truly cared for you. Picture them and carefully recite the same phrases, *May he/she be filled with loving-kindness*, and so forth. When loving-kindness for your benefactor has developed, begin to include other people you love in the meditation, picturing them and reciting the same phrases, evoking a sense of loving-kindness for them.

After this you can gradually begin to include others: friends, community members, neighbors, people everywhere, animals, the whole earth, and all beings. Then you can even experiment with including the most difficult people in your life, wishing that they, too, be filled with loving-kindness and peace. With some practice a steady sense of loving-kindness can develop and in the course of fifteen or twenty minutes you will be able to include many beings in your meditation, moving from yourself, to a benefactor and loved ones, to all beings everywhere.

Then you can learn to practice it anywhere. You can use this

meditation in traffic jams, in buses and airplanes, in doctors' waiting rooms, and in a thousand other circumstances. As you silently practice this loving-kindness meditation among people, you will immediately feel a wonderful connection with them—the power of loving-kindness. It will calm your life and keep you connected to your heart.

