



Loving-Kindness Series 2018

Below is a series of nine dharma (teaching) talks given from April 2018 to June 2018. This loving kindness series is based on *Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta* by Bhante Gunaratana. (Wisdom Publications, 2017).

Table of Contents

1. What is Loving-Kindness?
2. How to Practice Loving-Kindness
3. Making Loving Kindness a Part of your Life
4. Overcoming Ill-will as an Obstacle to Loving-Kindness
5. Benefits of Loving-Kindness
6. Loving-Kindness and Forgiveness
7. How to Nurture with Loving-Kindness
8. Exploring the Metta Sutta
9. Living a Life of Loving-Kindness: Summary

What is Loving-Kindness?

Laura Good

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapters 1-2

*"I have heard what the talkers were talking,
the talk of the beginning and the end,
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.*

*There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.*

*All seems beautiful to me.
Whoever denies me, it shall not trouble me;
Whoever accepts me, he or she shall be blessed, and shall bless me.*

I am larger, better than I thought; I did not know I held so much goodness
Excerpts from [Song of Myself - Leaves of Grass \(1892-92\)](#) Walt Whitman

What is Metta

Metta is a Pali word that has been translated as many things. We most often hear it as “loving-kindness.” Bhante G likes the term “loving friendliness” but it has also been described as goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, inoffensiveness and non-violence.

Gil Fronsdal, a noted teacher in Northern California, has been known to use the term “gentle friendliness.” The Pali word metta shares roots with the words “gentleness” and “friendliness”, and the belief is that metta is actually a combination of these two Pali terms.

Bhante G tells us the word metta is derived from the word mitta which means “friend” but it also means “sun.” It’s helpful to refer to that analogy, that even when the sun is behind the clouds it still shines. Even when we are lost in reactivity we can remember that metta, a state of goodwill, is still in us shining and we need just remove the clouds.

While it’s easy to feel feelings of goodwill to those you love, metta is not a romantic or sentimental kind of loving-kindness. It is non-discriminating with no exceptions. The Buddha considered it a transformative practice not only for yourself, but a kindness that could be used as a “weapon; its strength and power not to be underestimated.”

In this and future talks, metta and loving-kindness will be used interchangeably.

History of the Metta Sutta

Every year during his 45 years of teaching, the Buddha led a three-month retreat in Jeta Grove for monks during the rainy season.

The story goes that the Buddha sent the monks into a particular forest to meditate and be awakened. There were forest spirits that lived in the trees and they weren’t happy with having their lives interrupted by these men. The spirits conjured up ghostlike figures, corpses and terrible smells to frighten the monks away. The monks ran back to the Buddha and told him of the experience. This is where the Buddha offered his monks the practice of metta, encouraging them to offer loving-kindness to these “evil” spirits. After hearing their story, the Buddha encouraged them to go back to the forest saying,

“You went without a weapon.” And then he gave them a “weapon” the Karaniya Metta Sutta (Discourse on Loving-kindness).

When the monks returned to the forest, they memorized the sutta, saying it many times per day as they sat in metta meditation. They found that the spirits stopped haunting them, and actually grew to protect the monks. Metta practice transformed both the monks and the spirits, as well as the promoting an appreciative village.

The Metta Sutta

“This is what is to be done
By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:
Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech.
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied.
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm and wise and skillful,
Not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be at ease!
Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as A mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all beings:
Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies;
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection,
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding on to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.”

The Buddha is talking about metta being a path to enlightenment. More on this in a later talk.

Why did the Buddha call metta a “weapon”?

The Buddha used the power of metta to “conquer” many of his enemies. But not just the outside enemies. In one story, the Buddha was returning from his alms round with his retinue of monks when his evil and ambitious cousin, Devadatta, let loose a fierce elephant. As the massive mammal rushed toward the Buddha, trumpeting aggressively, the Buddha projected thoughts of metta toward it. Ananda, the Buddha’s attendant, ran in front of the Buddha to shield him, but the Buddha asked him to step aside, knowing the projection of love would be sufficient. The impact of the Buddha’s metta radiation was immediate and over-whelming. By the time the elephant neared the Buddha, it had been completely tamed and knelt before him respectfully.

Whether or not this actually happened doesn’t matter. We all have big problems coming at us for many reasons. It is beneficial to reflect on who is your elephant?

Loving-Kindness is a natural faculty concealed beneath our greed, hatred, and delusion. It is cultivated through wisdom and mindfulness. No one can grant it to us. We have to find it in our-selves and cultivate it mindfully. When the ego gets out of the way, loving-friendliness arises naturally.

Metta Brings Transformation

- Transforms difficult situations
- Is a natural state that already exists but can be further cultivated
- Exposes our existing subconscious biases without judgment
- Helps us rewire our brain to let go of biases

Transforms our relationship to difficult situations

The Metta sutta is a beautiful example of how we can bring loving-kindness to difficult beings and situations that cause fear to arise in us in order to change our relationships to them. This doesn’t mean condoning actions that cause suffering, this is an opportunity to pause and be open to what is present so we can first recognize where there is suffering to all parties concerned.

Is a Natural State

Bhante G. says that metta is a natural state to be cultivated. What does that mean? Because we wish for peace, happiness, and joy for ourselves, we know that all beings also wish for these qualities. We know inside we could not continually live in hatred every second and also want those things.

The Buddha stated, “Hate does not dispel hate, by non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is the law eternal.”

We have to find metta in ourselves and cultivate it mindfully. When the ego gets out of the way, loving-friendliness arises naturally. Joseph Goldstein adds, “Metta does not make distinctions among beings. It embraces all; there is no one who falls outside of its domain.” Loving-friendliness is a warm wash of

fellow-feeling, a sense of interconnectedness with all beings. Like when you see a baby it's so easy just feel an open and warm feeling.

Metta exposes our fear, and biases

But that seed of loving-kindness gets stifled as our upbringing, culture, traditions etc., influence how we think. Instead of allowing this naturally occurring seed within us to grow, other seeds get watered, like prejudice or ignorance. A lot of this shows up as a subconscious negativity or fear that we don't even realize is there until it arises, or is triggered in some way and we don't we even know how we got to thinking about something in a certain way. It is time to rewire.

Helps us to rewire our brain to let go of biases

How do we rewire our brain?

First, relax! Be willing to check out what's going on inside. Where does the body feel tight or primed for a fight? Recognize our biases and not let them dominate our mind. Simply noting that there is a bias without self-admonishment is a place to start as we offer loving-kindness first to ourselves. So much of it is not our fault. It is just one link a chain that has a million causes and conditions.

Then as you know, we start with ourselves, wishing us well with phrases such as "May I happy, May I be at ease". Then we move to a loved one, then to someone we are neutral about, then to someone we have ill will towards and finally to all beings. We will be practicing more specific kinds of metta as will be explained in future talks.

Practicing metta can give emotional clarity which leads to an answer that is best for all concerned.

Bhante G says when we allow metta to arise, all concepts disappear. Just as the universe is endless, the practice is boundless and all-encompassing. You cannot say "I have a small degree of metta for small beings and a big dose of metta for elephants and whales. Or I have low-grade metta for my adversaries and high-quality metta for my friends and family."

So knowing when you need metta or when others do is usually the easy part. Practicing it until you feel its effect can meet much resistance. When those situations arise, pause, put your hand on your heart and wish yourself well. Often that is enough. Eventually you can try to see how metta can fill your heart and every corner of the cosmos without exception.

How to Practice Loving-Kindness

Laura Good

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapters 1-2

The Seed of Metta

We all have the seed of loving kindness within us but it won't grow without our care and nourishment. We must practice it over time to reap its benefits. While we can't control the results, we know the benefits are real to us and others. We may plant a seed thinking it will become a delicious watermelon. But what if that seed is really a gourd seed? Even though we give our care and love and nurturing we can't make it become something it isn't. Yet our care and love doesn't get erased just because we mistook the name on the seed packet. The plant grew healthy and well and became a beautiful gourd and you helped it do that by giving it metta.

As you practice metta (loving-kindness), note any initial reactions that come up. For example, when you started with yourself, maybe you felt happy or sad, or when you thought of a difficult person, "undeserving, I don't want to give metta to them". Everything is ok so feel free to be honest.

"Don't Tell Anyone"

"Don't tell anyone, but I love Jesus. I love his big dark eyes, so full of suffering and soul, like an unemployed poet's,

and the way he always argues with everyone and would go to hell for love.

He's just like that Buddhist god Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, except Jesus' name is easier to pronounce.

When you're in trouble it's hard to remember to yell for Avalokiteshvara,

but "Oh, Jesus!" arises naturally every time a crazy driver hot-dogs past me on the freeway.

I don't want to die saying "Oh, shit!"

I'd like to leave my body consciously, like a Tibetan lama, sitting in full lotus with my head turned toward where I'll reincarnate next.

But let's be realistic: I probably couldn't meditate enough to become enlightened in the however-many years I have left.

Jesus seems easier.

All you have to do is love everyone. " - by Alison Luterma (edited)

How do we love everyone?

Metta is the first of the four heart practices, also known as the Brahma Viharas. In the Buddha's time, a *brahma* was a deity who lived in a heavenly realm. The word *vihara* means abode or dwelling. So brahma-vihara can be directly translated as "abode of the divine" or more commonly, "heavenly abode." Cultivating these heart qualities leads to a calm, joyous mind. The Buddha suggested on many occasions that developing the Brahma-Viharas fully leads to awakening.

Metta, or loving-kindness is the first one of these divine abodes and is a foundation to the other Brahma Viharas, its qualities being found in the other three: compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. The

monk Analayo says, “In relation to the tree of compassion, metta is the water that nourishes the root of this tree.”

(Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation)2015 by Bhikkhu Analayo

He goes on to say, metta is the one Brahma Vihara that is cultivated with bodily, verbal, and mental deeds. Metta is the basic mood with which we interact with others. Compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity are more specific. They build on the basic foundation of having a kind disposition in all our actions and all our words and all our thoughts as we interrelate with others.

Metta is also called a *paritta* — (Pali) a spiritual formula capable of safeguarding one's well-being, protecting one against all dangers, and rescuing one from mishaps and misfortunes, like in the original sutta noted in the previous talk where the Buddha gave the practice of metta to the monks to use as a weapon against fear. Metta can be used to develop and defend your true nature against more than fear and ultimately help us toward developing equanimity. Often danger is not from the outside but comes from the inside.

How to Practice Metta

Bhante G stresses in his book that first thing to do, is relax. Metta is a peaceful practice, so whatever can help you pause and breathe, will work. This is not about solving problems but cultivating a state of mind that is sort of “heart first”, no matter what is happening.

So we relax, breathe and recite phrases wishing ourselves and others well, that’s it! It is a simple practice, and it’s good to keep it that way.

Four or five phrases will do. Though Bhante G gets somewhat detailed, these are wishes from your heart. Some examples are:

“May I be happy.”

“May I be peaceful.”

“May I live life with ease.”

“May I be safe and protected.”

“May I be of benefit to all beings.”

So we relax and breathe, then moving inwards to outwards, we recite phrases to

- Yourself
- Loved One, Benefactor
- Neutral Person
- Person you feel ill will toward
- All Beings

You can say these phrases aloud or to yourself, but out loud certainly helps at first!

To Yourself

Metta phrases can be simple or detailed, short or long, but we always start with ourselves. “May I be peaceful,” “May I be happy” etc.

What were some of your reactions when you gave loving kindness to yourself? Was it hard to offer yourself kindness before others?

Why do we start with ourselves? The Buddha said in the Kosala Sutta

“One who truly loves himself will not harm others.”

“Having traveled all quarters with the mind, one finds none anywhere dearer than oneself.”

This is can be so hard to do. For some reason, some feel wishing one’s self well is self indulgent or emphasizes the “Self”. But we are all human. We must hold ourselves dear, if not you than who? That’s all we have- our actions of our hearts. Now some are surprised to hear what the Buddha said next

“One should not give up one’s own welfare,

Even for the sake of much welfare to others.” (Sallekha Sutta)

Is our aversion to others really aversion to ourselves? How does it feel to offer loving kindness to yourself? Do you feel like you have to “deserve” it? Can you take gentle note of what these feelings are and how and where they feel in your body and heart? Is there tightness somewhere? If recall of a certain situation arouses a negative emotion see if you can stay just with the feelings that arise for a few moments, without trying to solve them or stop them. Offer yourself compassion and kind phrases,” May I be peaceful, May I be happy. May I free from inner and outer harm, etc.”

We also start with ourselves because just as we want to be happy, it reminds us we are all connected and we all want to be happy. Whether or not you feel like you deserve loving kindness, can you allow that metta just might already be there, somewhere in you as a natural state? That we all have Buddha nature.

Sharon Salzberg reminds us Loving kindness takes time.

“Our job, so to speak, is just to say those phrases, to say them knowing what they mean but without trying to fabricate a feeling, without putting that overlay on top of it, of stress. Let your mind rest in the phrases, and let the phrases be meaningful to you.” (<https://www.sharonsalzberg.com/>) And if the mind gets too distracting, focus on your heart.

When you first practice metta and offer loving kindness to yourself sometimes there is a feeling of sadness. This sadness is your heart opening to your suffering. The suffering may have been caused by many things: self aversion, disappointment, trauma, etc. Realizing this can be very important. Our Buddha nature is always with us even if we haven’t been able to see it.

Achaan Chah put it, “If you haven’t cried a number of times, your meditation hasn’t really begun.” (Jack Kornfield, A Path with Heart)

So while it can be sad to realize you haven't been giving yourself love and kindness, it's also a relief to know from now on you have a tool, the tool of metta to ease your suffering and that of others.

To a Benefactor or teacher /To a Loved One

When we have awakened metta in ourselves, we're ready to send metta to those we love. Think of someone who has given you a meaningful teaching, or a mentor you whole-heartedly respect. Or imagine someone you truly love: a child, a friend, family member or if that's too loaded, imagine yourself as a child. So even if it's hard to give loving-kindness to yourself, think of yourself as a new born baby. How utterly they deserve care and kindness, that their life depends upon it! The intent is what matters. We're not trying to "earn" a reciprocal benefit in our relationship or keep tabs on how much metta you are doing for them. We practice metta anonymously without expectation of reward.

To a Neutral Person

The largest category of beings is those we don't have strong feelings for one way or another. It can be anyone you encounter or see, in line at the store, on the highway etc.

Experiment with this, see what happens how it changes your relationship with the world, a world we are all experiencing together. Note what and who you are paying attention to.

What happens when you contemplate there are others right now that are giving metta to the world, to you! There are monks and meditators all over the world right now who are doing this!

To a Difficult Person

Why? As Bhante G says, *"The reason is simple. If your enemies are well, happy and peaceful, they won't be your enemies anymore!"*

But if you start feeling contracted, *"Be gentle with yourself—it should not be a struggle. Know your limitations. Extend your compassion only as far as you feel your heart opening naturally. Plant your seed of trust. It will grow in its season."* -Jack Kornfield (<http://jackkornfield.com>)

So it's ok if you don't feel like you can do this at some times.

To All Beings

"Close your eyes and envision the whole universe-the earth, the stars, everything you've ever experienced or thought, every being you've ever met and all those you will never meet. Breathe calmly and allow loving-friendliness to arise within you. When you feel it, send this loving energy in all directions." This is called the six directions- north, south, east, west, above, below. This is heart purifying. When we imagine those we love and the thought of losing them, we can be fearful and contracted. The six directions keep us open.

Summary

Metta recitations are not magic formulas, they don't work by themselves. By truly participating in each statement with our own energy, our hearts and minds become inclined toward kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. The Brahma Viharas)

We can use metta as a way to open our heart, to heal our heart and also to clarify and energize us to use it as a weapon of goodness. Eventually when we in a metta state, all concepts disappear, the heart is open. Try it, see if you feel subtle changes after one week.

Making Loving Kindness (Metta) a Part of your Life

Robert Hodge

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapters 1-2

The Metta Phrases

As discussed in the last talk, giving metta involves reciting phrases to yourself, loved ones and benefactors, neutral persons, persons you feel ill-will toward and all beings. Bhante G. includes several examples (the blanks below are to fill in for each group of beings starting with yourself):

May all _____ be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

May all _____'s minds be filled with the thought of loving-friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. May they be generous. May they be gentle. May they be grateful. May they be relaxed. May they be happy and peaceful. May they be healthy. May their hearts become soft. May their words be pleasing to others.

May everything that all _____ see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think help them to cultivate loving-friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity, generosity, and gentleness. May their behavior be friendly and their loving-friendliness be a source of peace and happiness. May this behavior help their personalities. May all of them be free from fear, tension, anxiety, worry, and restlessness.

Wherever they go in the world, may they meet people with happiness, peace, and friendliness. May they be protected in all directions from greed, anger, aversion, hatred, jealousy, and fear. (p. 14-15)

The above phrases work well for reading and reciting. Simpler phrases used during meditation with eyes closed. Develop your own version of loving kindness phrases and use it to send out loving kindness as much as possible. Your version doesn't have to be long. Create ones that you feel comfortable with and that bring you joy when you repeat them silently to each group.

May ___ be happy and peaceful

May ___ be safe and protected

May ___ be filled with contentment

May ___ be free from suffering

Making Loving Kindness (Metta) a Part of your Life

In the Mettanisama sutta (Discourse on Advantages of Loving-kindness), the Buddha noted eight ways to deepen your practice of metta:

"Monks, eleven advantages are to be expected from the release (deliverance) of heart by familiarizing oneself with thoughts of loving-kindness (metta), by the cultivation of loving-kindness, by constantly increasing these thoughts, by regarding loving-kindness as a vehicle (of expression), and also as something to be treasured, by living in conformity with these thoughts, by putting these ideas into practice, and by establishing them."

The advantages of metta will be discussed in a later talk. The Buddha is saying that in order to reap the eleven benefits of loving kindness, make the practice of loving kindness a part of your daily life. The eight ways that the Buddha noted are:

- Familiarizing oneself with thoughts of loving-kindness (metta)
- Remove the obstacles to loving-kindness
- Constantly increasing these thoughts of loving kindness
- Regarding loving-kindness as a vehicle (of expression)
- Regarding them as something to be treasured
- Living in conformity with these thoughts
- Putting these ideas into practice
- Establishing them.

From this advice, there are three main points:

1. Increase your thoughts of loving-kindness
2. Remove the obstacles to loving-kindness
3. Live in conformity with the five precepts.

Increase your thoughts of loving-kindness (metta)

There is the story of a man encountering a student with a violin case on the streets of New York. The student asks, "Can you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?" The man answered, "Practice, practice, practice." The same goes for making loving-kindness a part of your life. Daily repetitive practice works best. Gradually expand your phrases to include everyone regardless of their behavior. Also it is very motivating to include frequent reading, reciting and reflecting on the Karaniya Metta Sutta (the Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness). Keep a copy handy and read it periodically.

"How do we practice well? Start the day with loving thoughts. As soon as you wake up in the morning, remember that you want to live a healthy and peaceful life. What you do early in the morning has an impact on your mind the rest of the day. Be friendly with yourself, be warm. Be loving and kind. Don't cause yourself harm in thought, word, or deed. Forgive those who have offended you. Don't put yourself in a higher position than others. Understand that we all have weaknesses. All of this opens the door to truly understanding the roots of suffering. And when we truly understand suffering, we can truly practice well throughout each day and throughout our life." (p. 23)

"As your loving-friendliness grows it becomes more stable; you may find that even when somebody is very upset with you, you can still maintain your composure. You can remain calm and cool if you are practicing metta. When your mind is fully charged with loving-friendliness you can help an angry person calmly and peacefully. You can see how the other person suffers from his or her anger. When your response is calm and relaxed the other person also can become calm soon. This comes to you naturally." (p.21)

Remove the obstacles to loving-kindness

The three major obstacles to giving loving kindness are the trances of greed, anger and delusion. With greed, we are only thinking of ourselves getting what we crave; with anger or ill-will, we are only thinking of getting even or revenge; and with delusion, we are confused. In fact, the antidote to anger or ill-will is loving kindness. The way to remove these obstacles is through following the Eightfold Path.

As Bhante G. notes: “There are, however, several useful ways to think about the path as a whole. For one thing, it’s clear that greed, hatred, and delusion are the three most powerful unwholesome factors and the source of all kinds of suffering. Opposing these are the three most powerful aspects of the path: Skillful Understanding of the Buddha’s teaching; Skillful Effort to overcome greed, hatred, and delusion; and the practice of Skillful Mindfulness as the means of overcoming those states. These three factors— understanding, effort, and mindfulness— support each other and work together to move you along the path.” Gunaratana, Henepola. *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha's Path* (p. 247).

Live in conformity with the five precepts

The five precepts for skillful living are:

- Abstaining from killing
- Abstaining from stealing
- Abstaining from speaking falsely
- Abstaining from sexual misconduct
- Abstaining from misusing intoxicants such as alcohol.

Loving-kindness and the five precepts complement each other. If you truly engage in loving-kindness, you cannot possibly fail to adhere to the five precepts because in doing so, you would be acting unskillfully towards another. Likewise, by following the five precepts, you will be able to practice loving-kindness more easily.

Overcoming Ill-Will as an obstacle to Loving-Kindness

Robert Hodge

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapter 8

What is Ill-Will?

Bhante G. notes that the chief obstacle to practicing Loving-Kindness is ill-will towards another person. Ill-will can include animosity, hostility, enmity, acrimony, animus, hatred, hate, loathing, antipathy; ill feeling, bad feeling, bad blood, antagonism, unfriendliness, dislike; spite, spitefulness, resentment, hard feelings, bitterness, malice, rancor; informal grudge, friction. Because of our perception that the other person is offensive in their bodily or verbal behavior, this makes it very challenging to wish them to peace and happiness. In fact, we often wish them harm.

It is important to recognize ill-will through mindfulness. We can't deal with ill-will unless we are willing to realize its arising in a non-judgmental manner.

How does ill-will arise?

Ill-will is a mental formation, one of the five aggregates of clinging, the gateway to all experiences. When we encounter another being usually through the senses of sight, hearing or thought, ill-will arises from our conditioning of an unpleasant feeling, and a biased perception from our memory. It is important to recognize that our ill-will is coming from within, not an external source.

http://www.whitehallmeditation.org/satipatthana_sutta/ffm21/

Why is ill-will harmful?

Ill-will is more harmful to us than to those whom we direct it to. We are the ones who suffer. The fire of anger happens in the body yet we often perceive the problem and the solution as being external. As Malachy McCourt once said, "Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die."

Five ways to subdue hatred (ill-will) towards another person.

In the Aghatavinaya Sutta, the Discourse on Repression of Ill Will (1) (AN5.161), the Buddha notes:

"There are these five ways of subduing hatred by which, when hatred arises in a monk, he should wipe it out completely. Which five?

- "When one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should develop good will for that individual. Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.
- "When one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should develop compassion for that individual. Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.
- "When one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should develop equanimity toward that individual. Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.
- "When one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should pay him no mind & pay him no attention. Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.
- "When one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should direct one's thoughts to the fact of his being the product of his actions: 'This venerable one is the doer of his actions, heir to his actions, born of his actions, related by his actions, and has his actions as his arbitrator. Whatever

action he does, for good or for evil, to that will he fall heir.' Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.

"These are five ways of subduing hatred by which, when hatred arises in a monk, he should wipe it out completely." translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

<https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.161.than.html>

In summary, the five approaches are:

- Develop good will
- Develop compassion
- Develop equanimity
- Pay no mind and no attention
- Direct thoughts to his/her being the product of his actions.

Develop good will

This is the practice of loving kindness. As noted above, the obstacles may be the offensive bodily or verbal behavior of the person or both. And at times, a person may act skillfully without being offensive in either bodily or verbal behavior. The Buddha taught that one should look for and pay attention to the purity of the persons behavior, if it exists.

A story by Bhante G.:

"When we bought the first thirteen acres of land in West Virginia to establish the Bhavana Society, some friends asked, "Bhante, why on earth did you choose West Virginia to buy land for a retreat center? It's not an atmosphere supportive of Buddhadharma."

It may not have been an easy choice, but we did our best. We went door-to-door introducing ourselves to our neighbors. The family on the property closest to us could not accept us being there. I was naive and said, "When we start the center, please come meditate with us whenever you like."

My neighbor was seriously offended and said, "You do any damn thing you want. I am a Christian!" That was exactly what my friends had warned me about. And for years afterward, that neighbor gave us lots of problems.

We began inviting our friends for retreats, and sometimes twenty to thirty people would come. Even before we had any buildings, we meditated sitting on the ground under the trees. I instructed everyone to practice metta meditation, to send thoughts of loving-friendliness wholeheartedly and not let resentment enter their minds. This neighbor's house was about fifty yards from the grove where we were sitting, and he and his wife started singing Christian hymns loudly to disturb us. But we enjoyed their singing. The woman's voice was sweet and she sang beautifully.

The next time we meditated, they played drums using loudspeakers. They thought that the drumbeats would come only in our direction, but the sound dispersed all around and the other neighbors were disturbed. They telephoned the sheriff, who came and stopped it. So the next time we meditated, they shouted in the middle of the night. Again, we did not respond. So they fired a high-powered rifle in the middle of the night to scare the retreatants, but we never complained.

We had a mailbox at the entrance to our land. It was shot at. We used duct tape to cover bullet holes and continued to use the mailbox. Then it was clubbed. We still used it. Then it was uprooted and thrown away. We did not do anything in response. Then dog excrement was put in it. When the mail

carrier came and put the mail inside he saw the excrement. So we bought another mailbox, which was then damaged in the same way.

Then our neighbors spread the rumor we were eating their dogs. They said they had lost eight dogs. Another neighbor told them, "They're vegetarians. They don't even eat meat, how could they kill your dogs?"

They circulated a petition against us, but the other neighbors refused to sign, telling them that Buddhists are peaceful people they wanted to welcome to the neighborhood and not drive away. Our hostile neighbors had four small children. The parents encouraged them to throw stones at us, spit at us, and use foul language to insult us. The children did that

One winter, there was a lot of snow and it was very cold. These neighbors didn't have enough firewood to heat their home. We invited them to come and take firewood from us. In spite of all the things they'd done to us, they took the firewood, and continued with their ways for another seven years. After that, the husband went away; we don't know where. We never saw him again. Then the children grew up and went away.

A few years later, the eldest son returned to the Bhavana Monastery as an adult and apologized. He said, "When we were little, we didn't know anything. We did what our father asked us to do. I joined the navy and discovered that Buddhism is a peaceful religion. So I've come to say I'm very sorry for everything we did to you."

We accepted his apology and made him feel comfortable. We were pleased with this young man and wished him success in his search for truth.

I tell this story because metta practice is not easy. Sometimes it takes a great deal of patience to practice loving-friendliness.

Now we have no shooting or drumming or shouting. All those years we sent metta five times a day — during early morning meditation, breakfast time, lunchtime, evening puja time, and evening meditation time.

Perhaps sending all that metta eventually helped things on our neighbor's side. But I know it helped us! (p. 83-85)

As the saying goes, "Never let a problem to be solved be more important than a person to wished loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy."

Develop compassion

Compassion is the intention to relieve the suffering of others. It arises with the recognition of the universality of suffering and the realization that all living beings desire happiness. If you can find no purity of behavior, the Buddha recommends in the Aghatavinaya Sutta, the Discourse on Repression of Ill Will (2): "when a person is impure in his bodily behavior & verbal behavior, and who does not periodically experience mental clarity & calm, one should do what one can out of compassion, pity, & sympathy for him, thinking, 'O that this man should abandon wrong bodily conduct and develop right bodily conduct, abandon wrong verbal conduct and develop right verbal conduct, abandon wrong mental conduct and develop right mental conduct.'"

Develop equanimity

Another approach is to develop equanimity toward that person, realizing that suffering exists and that you have done all that you can, and that this person's behavior will not affect you.

Pay no mind and no attention

Continued association with the person as long as they are exhibiting this offensive behavior may cause harm to you. It is important to set boundaries. By paying no mind and attention, you are not exposing yourself to potential harm

Direct thoughts to his/her being the product of his actions.

"When one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should direct one's thoughts to the fact of his being the product of his actions: 'This venerable one is the doer of his actions, heir to his actions, born of his actions, related by his actions, and has his actions as his arbitrator. Whatever action he does, for good or for evil, to that will he fall heir.' Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued." (ibid)

This refers to the law of karma, that every action has a cause and effect. As Bhante G. notes: "Acting in skillful ways leads to happy results and acting in unskillful ways leads to unhappy results" (Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness, p. 54)

What to do for yourself

Since you are the one suffering from ii-will, Thich Naht Hahn notes a sequence of methods for cooling the flames

- Mindful breathing
- Mindful walking
- Embracing our anger
- Looking deeply into the nature of our perceptions
- Looking deeply into the other person to realize that she also suffers a lot and needs help

Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames Riverhead Books 2001

Benefits of Loving-kindness

Laura Good

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapter 8

*A pearl goes up for auction
No one has enough,
so the pearl buys itself-- Rumi*

As we continue to practice metta for ourselves and others, you may notice there are times when it's easier to include wider circles of people and times when it's not. This is normal and gives us a chance to reflect on what we think is true.

Sharon Salzberg notes: *"The truth may be difficult to open to, but it will never hurt us."* (*Loving -Kindness p. 106*) This is a relief, to have the truth of suffering out in the open. It exists. We suffer. But we don't ONLY suffer. We experience a myriad of perceptions, emotions, causes and conditions that bring us to moments of "wow I'm suffering here." Yet, having the courage to acknowledge that moment and then open to it, that's where metta comes in, metta is how we get through the suffering and disappointments, so we can see the whole truth, or at least as much of the truth we are capable of seeing.

The Buddha said, *"Because we hold ourselves dear, we maintain careful self-regard both day and night."* How do we do that? How do we love ourselves and value ourselves, just as we are not how we think we supposed to be? We don't need to wait until everything is perfect to practice metta- it is the start of the path to freedom not the end result. Bhante G reminds us we aren't practicing to save the world, we practice for ourselves, and any effects beyond that are a bonus.

The Buddha told us how to practice Metta in the Sutta and at the very end he assured us what the benefits are of doing so

*"Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection,
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding on to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world."*

Abiding is enduring, continuing without change, steadfast; we abide in the divine abode of loving-kindness. We seek a state of contentment not conditional on circumstances.

Being freed from all sense desires means that we are free of the five hindrances, the unwholesome roots greed, hatred and delusion and unskillful actions

Is not born again into this world means that we are a non-returner.

The Buddha gave two discourses on Loving Kindness, the Kayaniya Metta Sutta which has been discussed and the *Discourse on the Benefits of Loving-Friendliness (Metta Nisamsa Sutta)*, in which the Buddha lists 11 benefits derived from practicing metta.

The Benefits of Loving-kindness

1. You sleep well.

Saying a few metta phrases as you go to sleep is similar to counting sheep, and inclines the mind to relax. I do this every morning and evening.

2. You wake up feeling well.

A relaxed mind and body is able to connect with those in your life and strangers in a genuine and centered way. Metta is a skillful means to navigating those connections.

3. You are not likely to have nightmares.

When you practice metta you become solid enough to face whatever arises and the Buddha said it's unlikely you'll have nightmares when you practice metta.

4. Your body relaxes, and your face is joyful.

Your body reflects your mind. Seeing your honest, relaxed face, others will gravitate toward you and enjoy being around you.

5. Even animals and celestial beings feel drawn to you.

This may be easier if you are a monk! Bhante G says our mind generates a peaceful field around you, but I would say it's more your heart intention that draws people to you. We can't deny that certain people just give off a certain energy. We still have innate sense about danger or trust, its biological survival mechanism. How you interpret this is all about you. Children are especially tuned in to this energy. When my daughter was young, around 4 or 5 she would sometimes meet someone and just not like them at all. I had to straddle the lesson of learning how to be polite to everyone versus trusting your instincts about people that may not be so kind.

6. Spirits protect you

Whether or not you take this literally there *are* times you can sense the energy or tone around you of a situation. And when we sense a loving energy gives us a sense of guidance and protection like the forest spirits in the Metta sutta. That ended up protecting the monks.

7. Fire, poisons, and weapons will not harm you.

The Buddha tells stories of how metta protected people from fire, poisons and weapons. But he explains that greed, hatred and delusion are the fires, poisons and weapons, so this is not to be taken literally. The Buddha taught that all of our six senses are on fire and any one of them is sufficient to consume us. The antidote is to know reality, and that the practice of metta cools the fires down.

8. Your mind immediately becomes calm.

The moment you start practicing metta you are in a non-harming state which is really important!

9. Your complexion brightens. Your face can't hide what's going on in your mind. It can slow aging.

We know that stress decreases telomere length (telomeres are tiny bits of your genetic materials – chromosomes – that are a biological marker of aging). However, Hoge et al

(2013) found that women with experience in Loving Kindness Meditation had relatively longer telomere length compared to age-matched controls! So, while anti aging beauty benefits may not be the only reason to practice metta it sure is a nice side effect.

10. You'll die with a clear mind.

The thought of dying peacefully can be very comforting. If you have unresolved conflicts, death can be difficult. This isn't about putting on a happy face which is near impossible to do when you near death.

11. You'll die in peace

The Indian mystic Poonja (papajii) says:

"The real reason why everybody wants to avoid death is because Eternity is our real nature.

*Death is not to be feared
because it is an enjoyable and happy occasion
and it only hurts one who has
anger, greed, attraction and aversion."*

Even if you have not "*comprehended the highest truth you will still go to a realm of great peace.*"

Have you ever been with someone as they breathe their last breaths? Some struggle, it is painful; others are peaceful.

Choosing a Peaceful Death

On the eve of his death, David Goodall, 104, Australian scientist, father, grandfather and right-to-die advocate, was asked if he had any moments of hesitation, "even fleeting ones."

"No, none whatever," Mr. Goodall said in a strong voice. "I no longer want to continue life, and I'm happy to have a chance tomorrow to end it."

How would he like to be remembered? "As an instrument of freeing the elderly from the need to pursue their life irrespective," he said at the news conference on Wednesday.

At one point, he was asked what tune he would choose for his last song, and he said the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Then he began to sing, with verve and vigor.

Mr. Goodall did end up choosing Beethoven, and he died the moment "Ode to Joy" concluded.

See for yourself

[Sanskrit: *Ehipaśyika* "which you can come and see" — from the phrase *ehi, paśya* "come, see!"]

All beings are welcome to put these assertions to the test and see for themselves if any or all of these benefits are true.

Recent Scientific Studies

Increases Positive Emotions & Decreases Negative Emotions In a landmark study, Barbara Frederickson and her colleagues ([Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008](#)) found that practicing 7 weeks of loving-kindness meditation increased love, joy, contentment, gratitude, pride, hope, interest, amusement, and awe. These positive emotions then produced increases in a wide range of personal resources (e.g., increased mindfulness, purpose in life, social support, decreased illness symptoms), which, in turn, predicted increased life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms. (<https://emmaseppala.com/18-science-based-reasons-try-loving-kindness-meditation-today/>)

Increases vagal tone which increases positive emotions & feelings of social connection.

Vagal tone or Sinus arrhythmia refers to activity of the **vagus** nerve, an important component of the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. Because the **vagus** nerve is importantly involved in heart rate , **vagal tone** is easily assessed by heart rate.

A study by [Kok et al \(2013\)](#) found that individuals in a Loving Kindness Meditation intervention, compared to a control group, had increases in positive emotions, an effect moderated by baseline vagal tone – a physiological marker of well-being.

Health:

Decreases Migraines:(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24602422>)

Decreases Chronic Pain<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16049118>

Decreases PTSD

A study by [Kearney et al \(2013\)](#) found that a 12 week Loving Kindness Meditation course significantly reduced depression and PTSD symptoms among veterans diagnosed with PTSD.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23893519>

Emotional Intelligence in the Brain

We know that the brain is shaped by our activities. Regularly practicing loving-kindness meditation activates and strengthens areas of the brain responsible for empathy & emotional intelligence.

Will you lose your “edge”?

This depends on who you are and what you are doing. Only you can determine if a heightened awareness of loving friendliness helps your situation. Which the Buddha would say is always. But again this is not a weak position, or martyrdom. This is an active practice to help you in any situation.

The Buddha reminds us not to give up your own welfare even for the sake of others, yet there is always a “best for all concerned place. “Don’t win the battle to lose the war. What is real strength? What is real victory? Notice which sense fires you are feeding, or which seeds you are watering.

“Sometimes the love has to be fierce, he explains, to stand up for justice, but always, always, always act with love.” -Ram Dass

Loving-Kindness and Forgiveness

Robert Hodge

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapter 11

Bring to mind someone whom you haven't been able to forgive. Why not? What does it mean to you to forgive someone? What does it not mean?

What does forgiveness mean?

The term forgiveness can be confusing because it can be interpreted in many ways. The dictionary definition is the act of ceasing to feel resentment against an offender. To forgive is to cease your ill-will towards another being.

However, to some, forgiveness means more than that. To them, forgiveness might mean forgetting about the harm done or being absolved of all responsibility. It is important to understand what forgiveness is not.

Forgiveness is simply ceasing your ill-will towards another. **It is not:**

- Glossing over or deny the seriousness of an offense against you.
- Forgetting about it.
- Condoning, excusing or releasing from legal accountability
- Obligating to reconcile.

To avoid misunderstandings, I recommend avoiding the use of the term, forgiveness. I feel that it is more beneficial to both parties to replace it with a simple statement such as, "I am no longer angry with you." To be entirely clear, you could add, "I will not forget, and I do not condone your actions. You are accountable for what you did. I do wish you well." This takes courage.

Why is forgiveness important?

If we do not forgive (cease our ill-will), we suffer, not the other person. We are frustrated. We want the other person to have behaved differently toward us. In other words, we want life to be other than it is. We have a fixed belief that the other person was wrong. This is suffering as the Buddha defined it in the Second Noble Truth. ([link](#))

We keep our feelings of resentment and ill-will. Resentment means to feel again and if we keep our ill-will, resentment arises over and over in the mind and the body. We have painful sensations in the body and recurrent unpleasant thoughts in the mind. Only you suffer. As Malachy McCourt once said, "Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die." Tara Brach notes, "not forgiving hardens and imprisons our heart. If we feel hatred toward anyone, we remain chained to the sufferings of the past and cannot find genuine peace." Brach, Tara. *Radical Acceptance* (p. 262). She also notes that we "ignore the truth that we are connected to all of life, and that grasping and hatred create more separation and suffering. To be ignorant is to ignore the purity of awareness and capacity for love that expresses our basic goodness." Brach, Tara. *Radical Acceptance* (p. 248).

What are the benefits of forgiveness?

Forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees him or her from corrosive anger.

As Joseph Goldstein notes, “All this doesn’t mean that we’ll never get angry or annoyed. Rather, as the Dalai Lama said, “Sometimes I do get angry, but deep in my heart I don’t hold a grudge against anyone.”

By focusing on the good in ourselves and others and feeling gratitude for the good others have done for us, we can more easily open to a place of forgiveness, not holding on to old grudges and hurts.

Sometimes we let go of these in a moment; sometimes letting go of them is part of a longer process. At the beginning of a meditation period, it can be helpful to ask for and extend forgiveness. And even with people we find difficult, we can reflect on our basic intention of goodwill.” Goldstein, Joseph.

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 324-325)

As Jack Kornfield notes, “Forgiveness is, in particular, the capacity to let go, to release the suffering, the sorrows, the burdens of the pains and betrayals of the past, and instead to choose the mystery of love.

Forgiveness shifts us from the small separate sense of ourselves to a capacity to renew, to let go, to live in love. As the Bhagavad Gita (a verse Hindu scripture in Sanskrit) says, “If you want to see the brave, look to those who can return love for hatred. If you want to see the heroic, look to those who can forgive.” https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_ancient_heart_of_forgiveness

How do we forgive?

Jack Kornfield: “What’s unique about Buddhism—because Buddhism is more a science of mind than a religion, although it functions as a religion for some people—is that it offers practices in trainings. It doesn’t say just “turn the other cheek” or “remember the mercy of Allah,” but it offers a thousand different trainings: trainings in mindfulness, in compassion, in forgiveness, in lovingkindness, in compassion for those who are different than you, and so on.

In this way, Buddhist psychology shows an ancient understanding of “neuroplasticity,” the idea that our neurosystem is always changing, even to the very end of life. So many of the modern neuroscience studies that researchers like Richard Davidson are doing, using fMRI machines and the like, validate this idea of neuroplasticity. Indeed, in Buddhism, the teaching in three words is: “Not Always So.” Things are always changing.

And forgiveness is not sentimental, or quick. You can’t paper things over and smile and say, “I forgive.” It is a deep process of the heart. And in the process, you need to honor the betrayal of yourself or others—the grief, the anger, the hurt, the fear. It can take a long time. Sometimes when you do a forgiveness practice, you realize that you’re never going to forgive that person. And never takes a while. Forgiveness is also not for anybody else. There’s a story of two ex-prisoners of war. One says to the other, “Have you forgiven your captors yet?” And the second says “No, never.” And the first one then says “Well, they still have you in prison, don’t they?”

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_ancient_heart_of_forgiveness

Forgiveness is about overcoming ill-will against another person. The Buddha said "There are these five ways of subduing hatred by which, when hatred arises in a monk, he should wipe it out completely.

Which five? (Aghatavinaya Sutta, the Discourse on Repression of Ill Will (1) (AN5.161)

In summary, the five approaches are:

- Develop good will

- Develop compassion
- Develop equanimity
- Pay no mind and no attention
- Direct thoughts to his/her being the product of his actions.

By following these steps, forgiveness can be granted. It may take awhile as Jack Kornfield noted.

*What we know of other people
Is only our memory of the moments
During which we knew them. And they have
Changed since then
We must
Also remember
That at every meeting we are meeting a
Stranger. (T.S. Eliot)*

The important word here is memory.

Forgiveness meditation- Sharon Salzberg

“Meditating on forgiveness is not terribly different from lovingkindness or sympathetic joy practices, as all of them invite us to be with our emotional states without judging them and to use the meditation as the anchor of our attention. These practices require courage, as we are not denying our suffering or the harmful actions we’ve taken.

Forgiveness is not passive, but an active gesture of releasing feelings like anger, guilt, and resentment, all of which deplete us if we become lost in them. Forgiveness demands presence, reminding us that we are not the same as the feelings we possess in a given situation, nor is the person who we’ve harmed or who has harmed us.

Traditionally, the meditation is done in three parts: first, you ask forgiveness from those you have harmed; next, you extend forgiveness to those who have harmed you; and the final practice is that of self-forgiveness, for all of those times we harm ourselves with judgmental habits of mind.

1. Sit comfortably and allow the breath to be natural. Begin by silently (or audibly) reciting phrases of forgiveness for those you have harmed. You may try, “If I have hurt or harmed anyone knowingly or unknowingly, I ask their forgiveness.”
2. Notice what comes up. You may find that offering forgiveness to one person may catalyze memories of another tough situation or person. Don’t push these feelings or thoughts away—but maintain your focus on the practice, and don’t get lost in guilt or self-blame about your distraction. As other thoughts arise, send your forgiveness in these new directions.
3. Next (after however long you want to spend on the first part of the reflection), you can begin to offer forgiveness to those who have harmed you: “If anyone has hurt or harmed me, knowingly or unknowingly, I forgive them.”
4. Once again, thinking about past painful experiences may trigger emotion. As these feelings, images, and memories bubble to the surface, you may simply recite, “I forgive you.”
5. Finally, we turn our attention to forgiveness of ourselves (ill-will toward self). Most of us have experienced self-blame—at work, in relationships, or simply because we have habitually kept ourselves

in cycles of perfectionism. “For all of the ways I have hurt or harmed myself, knowingly or unknowingly, I offer forgiveness.”

Salzberg, Sharon. *Real Love: The Art of Mindful Connection* (pp. 205-206). Flatiron Books. Kindle Edition.

How to Self-Nurture with Loving Kindness

Laura Good

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapter 7

As we delve further into the metta sutta one part of it holds a key skill: Developing and defending our metta practice like a mother would protect her child:

*“Even as mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all beings:
Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies;
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and un bounded,
Freed from hatred and ill will.”*

Like the word “forgiveness,” “mother” is a loaded concept. Rarely can anyone say they had a perfect mother or father, but while it may not have felt like it, they were doing the best they could at the time. It is our ego that thinks they should have done better. Still, our need for nurturing never goes away.

When we say “mother” we mean the traditional role of nurturer. There’s a nurturing aspect about offering loving-kindness to yourself or others and examining this relationship can deeply affect our practice. Because often there is resistance to what should on the surface seem like a no brainer, loving-kindness, this resistance can be rooted in how we were nurtured (or not) in the past.

What does it mean to nurture ourselves and how can metta practice help identify and dissolve blocks in one’s ability to care for ourselves and others?

First, we’ll look at what self-nurturing, self-care is and its role in loving-kindness practice.

Next, we’ll learn how to recognize when one needs some self-nurturing.

Then we’ll see how unmet needs morph into suffering and how to use metta practice to bring more contentment and peace into your life.

Finally we’ll learn why the Buddha thought loving kindness was so important to develop and defend.

There’s no escaping the fact we all had a biological mother. Whether or not you have a good relationship with her, you were born of her, made of elements from the earth that organized in a certain way in her body along with all the causes and conditions that were present, to bring you into existence. On the most basic level, you have been “mothered” into being and as long as you are living, some sort of nurturing is taking place to keep you alive. We continually feed our life’s perpetuation and whether or not we tend to good or bad forces at work, it IS happening. We continue to be “mothers” to ourselves until we die. Mothering is not only from woman to child. Anything can mother. We can be mothered by

people, by conversations, by good stories or tasty foods – and yes, we can learn to mother ourselves, also known as the term self-care.

What is Self-Care

One definition of self-care is “any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health.” Self-care is not selfish, or indulgent. It’s not about giving yourself an extra piece of chocolate cake or procrastinating a necessary task. It’s about finding a balance between needs and wants, so there is an easy relationship between taking care of ourselves and others. Balance is the key word. Self-care is being kind to yourself and then you can be kind to others as a spiritually mature person.

So, ask yourself, “How kind am I to myself?”

You could make the point that it’s to our evolutionary benefit to love ourselves because then we do the hard work of caring for others so our DNA survives.

Sharon Salzberg notes: *“Of course, in different life situations many different courses of action might be appropriate. But the point here is that metta does not mean that we denigrate ourselves in any situation in order to uphold other people's happiness. Authentic intimacy is not brought about by denying our own desire to be happy in unhappy deference to others, nor by denying others in narcissistic deference to ourselves. Metta means equality, oneness, wholeness. To truly walk the Middle Way of the Buddha, to avoid the extremes of addiction and self-hatred, we must walk in friendship with ourselves as well as with all beings.”*

How to recognize when you need to “Self-Nurture/re-mother”

We might have sub-conscious messages that get stuck on repeat trying to convince us of our unworthiness and then our un-met needs materialize in how we experience the world. Do you experience any of the following:

- Inner critic on overtime
- Overly Critical of others
- Complaining
- Shame spiral
- Depression
- Health suffers from lack of rest, care
- Blaming the world in general for your unhappiness
- Defensive
- Inability to empathize
- Self-medicating, drugs, addiction, food, social media etc
- Lack of ability to find joy or laugh

These are just a few of the signs you might need some deliberate self-care.

How to Self-Nurture

The Buddha said, *“Because we hold ourselves dear, we maintain careful self-regard both day and night.”*

- Get over any feelings that we don't deserve "it"
- We practice Metta: May I be happy, may I be loved, May I be free from Inner and outer harm
- Listen inward [to our feelings](#) and value our own opinions
- Be willing to say what we need and resist conformity
- Be willing to walk away when we don't feel valued
- We protect our emotional space
- Take care of our bodies in ways that align with our beliefs and needs
- Protect our non-negotiables (a daily walk, rest, limit negative people even if they are family)
- Tell your inner critic to be quiet!
- Find lightness and humor when possible

We all know what we should do, but what do we really do? Are we lost in a game of self-sabotage. Why? Where did this message come from? This is not about blame but about gently naming the root of why it may be hard to care for yourself, genuinely. Ask yourself is this (blame, criticism, etc.) really getting me where I want to go?

The most important thing is to listen, to pause and ask what am I really reacting to? Who am I really mad at?

Karen Maezen Miller is a Zen Buddhist priest and the author of *Momma Zen: Walking the Crooked Path of Motherhood*. She writes: *"So my question is not how you parent the people you undoubtedly love the most, but rather, how do you (parent) yourself? Because there are not two ways.*

Are you kind and forgiving?

Do you give yourself quiet attention?

Permission to play?

Discipline to work?

The confidence to do things by yourself?

Are you honest with yourself?

Do you encourage yourself to go outside?

To take a breath?

To try again?

To take risks?

To be silly?

....Do you nourish yourself?

Laugh at yourself?

Do you abandon yourself to preoccupations with the past?

Do you make new friends and forgive the old?

Do you sleep when tired and eat when hungry?

Take a bath and splash?

Do you let yourself rant and cry for no good reason and then coax yourself back into the familiar cushion of your very own lap?

Do you tell yourself you are a wonderful mother/father and a beautiful daughter/son? Then let me be the first, and not the last."

Note which phrases really hit home. Whatever we feel we didn't get from our main nurturer, we can give ourselves now. Not things but meaning and value that you matter. All the things on this list that you would easily give a cherished child, give to yourself. Especially rest, mindfulness and time to breathe.

It's also helpful to not hold the world to a certain standard that revolves around you. Not, "If they loved/respected/ me then they wouldn't..." Just, "I love and respect myself." No set up. No trap of perfection or demands on a fantasy virtuous world.

Thich Naht Hạnh notes:

"Waking up this morning I smile

Twenty-four brand new hours are before me

I vow to live fully in each moment

And to look at all beings with the eyes of love"

What to do when negative emotions arise

Sometimes when we focus on loving feelings for ourselves we are acutely aware of how we did not get the love we needed in our primary relationships. This awareness may be painful at first but can help dissolve the suffering.

Ajahn Sumedho, former Abbot of Amaravati Monastery UK notes: *"So as we meditate, we can even be glad when unpleasant states keep coming up! By having metta for these wretched creatures we lock away inside us, we're opening the door of the prison. We're letting them go, but it's out of compassion rather than the desire to be rid of them."*

You might say, no it's too hard. I don't want to "go there", to think about how I wasn't loved enough or the way I wanted to, or needed, but we don't really have to "go there" we can have metta for that feeling and stay with it and offer all of OUR love, with active self-care.

He continues: *"... By reminding ourselves to have metta for the feelings we experience – not thinking about them or analyzing them but going to the place in the body itself, to the mental quality, really embracing that - really being willing to feel those particular emotions, they become bearable on their own. "*

Sometimes self-care means, withdrawal. Don't put yourself in harm's way if you are in a deep suffering. (Don't try to get blood from a stone).

We forgive when we can. What makes genuine forgiveness possible is that you begin to realize on a very deep, level that others hurtful behavior had nothing whatsoever to do with you. This is not just on the conceptual level, but deep inside it becomes very obvious that it was just a reflection of their own fears and wounds, which were never your responsibility to fix. A massive weight is lifted with this realization. You might still feel the hurt, but you don't feel the weight.

Protecting and maintaining your state of loving kindness.

So we “re-mother” ourselves, we protect ourselves, we become the parent we need now, and know when and what to do (or not do) to get to the root of our suffering, which is so often because we want the world to work differently than it does or we want to have had a better version of how we were nurtured. But we can’t change the past.

We are not promised much when we are born, and certainly not that life works according to our unique needs. By using metta to self-nurture we develop skillful means to deliberately experience our life in a kinder, more loving way.

So we take time you notice if we’re lost in reactivity, do you need some need self-care. Can you stop and see why you might be suffering, what is really going on here? We use metta and mindfulness and sometimes, yes a cup of tea or hot bath or sometimes a mindful hard conversation, but we aim for balance in our energy and love.

*“And still, after all this time,
The sun never says to the earth,
‘You owe Me.’
Look what happens with
A love like that,
It lights the Whole Sky.”
-Hafiz*

Exploring the Metta Sutta

Robert Hodge 6/6/18

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Chapter 13

What are suttas?

The Buddha, after he became awakened, gave many talks over his lifetime. These are called suttas. It was over 500 years after his death that his talks were written down and preserved in the Pali language. "The Tipitaka (Pali ti, "three," + pitaka, "baskets"), or Pali canon, is the collection of primary Pali language texts which form the doctrinal foundation of Theravada Buddhism. The Tipitaka and the paracanonical Pali texts (commentaries, chronicles, etc.) together constitute the complete body of classical Theravada texts. The Pali canon is a vast body of literature: in English translation the texts add up to thousands of printed pages. Most (but not all) of the Canon has already been published in English over the years. Although only a small fraction of these texts are available on this website, this collection can be a good place to start." (accesstoinight.org)

It is very beneficial to read and reflect on the suttas. However, it is important to keep in mind that the English translations vary depending on the translator. Some noted modern translators include Bhikkhu Bodhi, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Nyanaponika Thera, and Gil Fronsdal. There are also many commentaries on the suttas by well known teachers.

Bhante G. provides a brief commentary on the Metta Sutta in Chapter 13 of *Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta*. One of the better known commentaries on the metta sutta is *Metta, The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love* by Acharya Buddharakkhita. The historical background which led the Buddha to expound the Karaniya Metta Sutta is explained in his commentary as he received it from an unbroken line of Elders going back to the days of the Buddha himself.

<https://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/buddharakkhita/wheel365.html#about>

Studying Suttas

Judy Lief in her article on "How to Practice Reading Dharma" recommends "close reading" or "active reading" of the suttas:

- Before reading the text, settle your mind by breathing and relaxing. Note any feelings that come up and try to take a fresh approach, free of assumptions.
- Read the entire text to get perspective and imagine what you would say if someone asked you for a brief summary.
- Read the sutta again one paragraph or verse at time. Ask yourself what the sentences are really getting at. Does it make sense. Is it compatible with your own experience?
- Embody the sutta. Explore how can this teaching can become a part of you.
- After a break, read the sutta through one more time. "Just let it flow through your mind like a river."

Lion's Roar July 2018 Volume 3 Number 3 pages 27-29

Exploring the Metta Sutta

The version below of the Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness (Sn 1.8 PTS: Sn 143-152) was translated from the Pali by The Amaravati Sangha © 2004 (<https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.amar.html>)

This sutta has been divided into four sections. Read and study the lines in each section before reading the brief commentaries.

Section 1

This is what is to be done

By one who is skilled in goodness,

And who knows the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,

Straightforward and gentle in speech.

Humble and not conceited,

Contented and easily satisfied.

Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.

Peaceful and calm and wise and skillful,

Not proud and demanding in nature.

Let them not do the slightest thing

That the wise would later reprove.

Commentary:

This sets the standard of moral conduct required by those who wish practice metta to obtain purity and peace. Bhante G. notes: "The first verses of the Metta Sutta give us a glimpse of the character of someone who has loving-friendliness in his or her heart and thus has a purified mind. We'll find that practicing metta changes our behavior at every level. Of course we can only do our own personal practice of metta, just as other people must do their own practice. And when we do so our mental patterns change over time. These thoughts are transformed into our speech and actions, which in turn affect other people." (p. 75)

Section 2

Wishing: In gladness and in safety,

May all beings be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be;

Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,

The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,

The seen and the unseen,

Those living near and far away,

Those born and to-be-born,

May all beings be at ease!

Commentary:

This is the intention of metta: "May all beings be at ease!" All beings are to be included in our metta practice. Bhante G. noted: "It is easy to practice metta to those beings that are near us, like our parents,

relatives, and friends. They are near to us in space and they are near to our heart. We love our dogs, cats, and other pets. We can easily send our metta to them. When distance separates us we think of them very dearly and send our metta to them. How easy it is to forget others who are not close to us in space and not close to our heart — yet we can send our metta to them too. As we don't know their situation, we should include them in our metta practice and wish for their well-being and happiness. Our metta practice should include all that are born or coming to birth. There are beings that are still seeking birth, in the process of coming out of their mothers' wombs or eggs. This is another marvelous aspect of metta practice — it encompasses everyone.” (p. 79)

Section 3

Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state.

Let none through anger or ill-will

Wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother protects with her life

Her child, her only child,

So with a boundless heart

Should one cherish all beings:

Radiating kindness over the entire world

Spreading upwards to the skies;

And downwards to the depths;

Outwards and unbounded,

Freed from hatred and ill will.

Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,

Free from drowsiness,

Commentary:

This section describes the practice of metta: “cherish all beings and radiating kindness over the entire world.” Bhante G. notes: “The Metta Sutta goes on to say, “Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill will wish harm upon another.” Here the Buddha advises us not only to abstain from deceiving others, but also to wish that others not deceive one anyone else. While we practice honesty we may wish that others also practice honesty. This is a very wholesome wish that we can all make — for everybody to be free from suffering. The metta practitioner should not wish anyone to suffer for any reason. Greed, hatred, and delusion lead people to commit so much harm. They cause people to look down on others' weaknesses or look at some people with contempt, even to cheat or kill. A mind full of metta does not cultivate such a harmful attitude, because it sees all beings as equal. Wishing others success causes us no harm. Just as the sun dispels darkness, loving-friendliness destroys the darkness of hatred. If a disdainful thought should arise, the metta practitioner becomes mindful of it quickly and adjusts his or her attitude accordingly.” (pp 79-80”

Section 4

One should sustain this recollection,

This is said to be the sublime abiding.

By not holding on to fixed views,

*The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.*

Commentary:

This is the promise of metta practice. Bhante G. notes: “The Buddha later says in the Metta Sutta, “Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down, free from drowsiness, one should sustain this recollection.” Sometimes meditation may be misinterpreted to be a kind of practice that makes the meditator a heartless or indifferent being, a robot without any love and compassion for other living beings. We must remember, however, that the Buddha has strongly advised us to cultivate four sublime states of mind: loving-friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. We can also maintain recollection of metta through all our activities, as this verse suggests. When we do so, being mindful is far from being indifferent or heartless. In all of our activities we may discover we become more kind, gentle, and considerate. Mindful observation of our own individual mental states can make us aware of how some thought waves are harmful, destructive, and painful. Others are peaceful and joyful. Then our mind rejects that which is harmful and cultivates that which is peaceful and joyful. We can’t truly learn this from books, teachers, friends, or even enemies — we can only learn this from our own practice and experience. When harmful thoughts arise we learn not to entertain them, and when peaceful thoughts arise we let them grow and stay in the mind much longer. This way we learn from our own experience how to think more healthily. This practice conditions our minds to grow loving-friendliness. This means that peaceful thought waves appearing in our mind by themselves can be generated at will later on.” (pp. 80-81)

The Buddha also notes that by being freed from all sense desires, one is not born again in this world. One interpretation of this is that samsara is the endless cycle of suffering and to not be born again is to break this cycle by being free of all attachments.

Living a Life of Loving Kindness: Summary

Laura Good

Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta. Tips for Living a life of Loving-Friendliness.

Chapter 16

In the Metta sutta, the Buddha lays out a path to freedom: by offering loving kindness to ourselves and all living beings, we are shown a way to experience peace in every moment of our daily life. How does this happen? By developing our loving kindness as our default setting and by feeling the calm and strength that happen when we (Bhante G) *“hold our heart and mind open with regard to the world.”*

But how do we do this when every moment can be filled with the myriad of challenges of all of our intersecting karma? It can feel risky to always be “open”. A deep loving-kindness practice not only soothes the soul but gives us confidence that whatever action we take if based in loving-kindness, is the right one.

All Roads start from Metta

Metta is the road map and we are the blue dot on Google maps, with many roads to and from wherever we are. When we move, our metta moves with us. Even when our reactivity dominates we can always start again, offering loving-kindness to ourselves and others.

What is metta

Metta is a Pali word that has been translated as many things. We most often hear it as “loving-kindness”. Bhante G likes the term “loving friendliness” but it has also been described as goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, and non-violence.

The word metta is derived from the word mitta which means “friend” but it also means “sun.” It’s helpful to refer to that analogy, that even when the sun is behind the clouds, it still shines. Even when we are lost in reactivity we can remember that metta, a state of goodwill, is still in us shining and we need just remove the clouds.

While it’s easy to feel feelings of goodwill to those you love, metta is not a romantic or sentimental kind of loving kindness. It is non-discriminating with no exceptions. This is why the Buddha considered it a transformative practice not only for yourself, but a kindness that could be used as a “weapon, its strength and power not to be underestimated.”

History of the Metta Sutta

Every year during his 45 years of teaching, the Buddha led a three-month retreat in Jeta Grove for monks during the rainy season.

The story goes that the Buddha sent the monks into a particular forest to meditate and be awakened. There were forest spirits that lived in the trees and they weren’t happy with having their lives interrupted by these men. The spirits conjured up ghostlike figures, corpses and terrible smells to frighten the monks away. The monks ran back to the Buddha and told him of the experience. This is where the Buddha offered his monks the practice of metta, encouraging them to offer loving kindness to

these “evil” spirits. After hearing their story, the Buddha encouraged them to go back to the forest saying, “You went without a weapon.” And then he gave them a “weapon” the Karaniya Metta Sutta (Discourse on Loving Kindness).

Metta, the way to enlightenment

Metta is the first of the four heart practices, also known as the Brahma Viharas (the divine abodes of metta, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity). Cultivating these heart qualities leads to a calm, joyous mind. The Buddha suggested on many occasions that developing the Brahma-Viharas, especially metta, can fully lead to awakening.

How to Practice Metta

Bhante G stresses in his book that first thing to do, is relax. Metta is a peaceful practice, so whatever can help you pause and breathe, will work. This is not about solving problems but cultivating a state of mind that is sort of “heart first” no matter what is happening.

So we relax, breathe and recite phrases wishing ourselves and others well, that’s it! It is a simple practice, and it’s good to keep it that way.

Four or five phrases will do, these are wishes from your heart. Some examples are:

“May I be happy.”

“May I be peaceful.”

“May I live life with ease.”

“May I be safe and protected.”

“May I be of benefit to all beings.”

Next we offer metta to loved ones, then to neutral people, to those we feel ill will towards and finally to all beings.

Making Loving Kindness (Metta) a Part of your Life

The Buddha talked about ways to make metta a part of your life with three main points:

1. Increase your thoughts of loving-kindness
2. Remove the obstacles to loving-kindness
3. Live in conformity with the five precepts.

The Buddha said, *“Because we hold ourselves dear, we maintain careful self-regard both day and night.”* How do we love and value ourselves, just as we are not how we think we supposed to be? We don’t need to wait until everything is perfect to practice metta- it is the start of the path to freedom not the end result. Bhante G reminds us we aren’t practicing to save the world, we practice for ourselves, and any effects beyond that are a bonus.

Obstacles

Often trying to offer loving-kindness can make opposite states come up: ill-will, forgiveness, self aversion.

Overcoming ill-Will as an obstacle to Loving-Kindness whether to ourselves or others.

The five approaches:

- Develop good will
- Develop compassion
- Develop equanimity
- Pay no mind and no attention
- Direct thoughts to his/her being the product of their actions.

This leads us to consider what role forgiveness plays in overcoming ill will.

Loving-Kindness and Forgiveness

The term forgiveness can be confusing because it can be interpreted in many ways. The dictionary definition is the act of ceasing to feel resentment against an offender.

Forgiveness is simply ceasing your Ill-will towards another. **It is not:**

- Glossing over or deny the seriousness of an offense against you.
- Forgetting about it.
- Condoning, excusing or releasing from legal accountability
- Obligating to reconcile.

To avoid misunderstandings, Bob recommends avoiding the use of the term, forgiveness. Replacing it with a simple statement such as, "I am no longer angry with you." You could add, "I will not forget, and I do not condone your actions. You are accountable for what you did. I do wish you well." This takes courage.

Sharon Salzberg *"Forgiveness requires courage, as we are not denying our suffering or the harmful actions we've taken. Forgiveness is not passive, but an active gesture of releasing feelings like anger, guilt, and resentment, all of which deplete us if we become lost in them. Forgiveness demands presence, reminding us that we are not the same as the feelings we possess in a given situation, nor is the person who we've harmed or who has harmed us."*

Ajahn Sumedho, notes: *"So as we meditate, we can even be glad when unpleasant states keep coming up! By having metta for these wretched creatures we lock away inside us, we're opening the door of the prison. We're letting them go, but it's out of compassion rather than the desire to be rid of them."*

This leads us into the topic of Self-Nurturing or **Self-Care**

Offering loving-kindness to ourselves or others is a nurturing act. The Buddha tells us in the metta sutta to guard our metta as a mother would her only child. One definition of self-care is "any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health." Self-care is not selfish, or indulgent. It's about finding a balance between needs and wants, so there is an easy relationship between taking care of ourselves and others. Balance is the key word. Self-care is being kind to yourself and then you can be kind to others as a spiritually mature person.

So, ask yourself, “How kind am I to myself?”

Do we have sub-conscious messages that get stuck on repeat trying to convince us of our unworthiness and then our un-met needs materialize in how we experience the world. Are you:

Overly Critical of self or others

Complaining

Shame spiral

Depression

Health suffers from lack of rest, care

Blaming the world in general for your unhappiness

Defensive

Inability to empathize

Self-medicating, drugs, addiction, food, social media etc

Lack of ability to find joy or laugh?

How to Self-Nurture

- We practice Metta: May I be happy, may I be loved, May I be free from Inner and outer harm
- Listen inward [to our feelings](#) and value our own opinions
- Be willing to say what we need and resist conformity
- Be willing to walk away when we don't feel valued
- We protect our emotional space
- Take care of our bodies in ways that align with our beliefs and needs
- Protect our non-negotiables (a daily walk, rest, limit negative people even if they are family)
- Find lightness and humor when possible

Benefits of Loving-kindness

Sharon Salzberg notes: *“The truth may be difficult to open to, but it will never hurt us.”* (*Loving -Kindness p. 106*) This is a relief, to have the truth of suffering out in the open. It exists. We suffer. But we don't ONLY suffer. We experience a myriad of perceptions, emotions, causes and conditions that bring us to moments of “Wow I'm suffering here.” Yet, having the courage to acknowledge that moment and then open to it, that's where metta comes in, metta is how we get through the suffering and disappointments, so we can see the whole truth, or at least as much of the truth we are capable of seeing.

There is a separate sutta that lists the Eleven Benefits of Metta Practice, though you may have a different list. Some of these include: you sleep well and wake up rested without nightmares, your face is joyful, and your complexion brightens and you'll die with a clear mind. Scientific Research has confirmed many other benefits such as decreases in migraines, chronic pain and PTSD.

The Metta Sutta is like an all in one medicine which helps in all circumstances.

Tips: (from Bhante G)

1. **Be careful of Anger**, if you expect yourself to be perfect since you are not you will get angry.
Buddha: *Suppose there is no life after death: due to your practice of loving –friendliness you will*

enjoy this life. Suppose there is life after death then, because of metta practice you will be reborn in a peaceful place. Likewise, you will suffer from your anger here and now and or in the next life. Its ok to get angry when appropriate, Thich Naht Hanh take care of your anger, and set it free.

2. **Don't blame anybody:** Don't blame others for what arises in your mind. Instead of blaming look at your anger impartially, arising dependent on C/C Without trying to justify your anger simply pay attention. Mindfulness is essential, blame is unnecessary.
3. **Cultivate gratefulness** for everyone and everything that has ever helped you
4. **Choose your friends wisely.** Buddha said to Ananda: *Spiritual friendship is not half the spiritual life, it's the entire spiritual life!*" We must honestly assess our ability to help with LK. We do what we can but there are limits. This is where self-care comes in.
5. **Look Honestly at yourself;** when you experience anger or greed we subconsciously are believing things should go the way we want them to instead, look for where you are falling into extremes and use metta to return to the middle way.
6. **Do some physical exercise.**
7. **Do some mental exercise;** right effort, minimize anger, maximize loving-kindness.

We can always relentlessly start again, using the balm of Loving-kindness until it becomes second nature, our Buddha nature. Why not see if it's already there, waiting to be used, developed and radiated out into the world.

All seems beautiful to me.

Whoever denies me, it shall not trouble me;

Whoever accepts me, he or she shall be blessed, and shall bless me.

I am larger, better than I thought; I did not know I held so much goodness.

Excerpts from [Song of Myself - Leaves of Grass \(1892-92\)](#) Walt Whitman

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