

Readings on Metta

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Ajahn Pasanno said,

When one cultivates the meditations on loving kindness, ideally what one's doing is taking the emotional tone of the heart as the object of meditation, as opposed to the discursive element... One maybe starts in that way, but the object of attention, the focus of attention is the actual feeling within the heart.

Teachings on Metta, by Thich Nhat Hanh

Metta Meditation

Metta meditation is a practice of cultivating understanding, love, and compassion. This is done first for ourselves and then for others, by looking deeply. Once we love and take care of ourselves, we can be much more helpful to others. Metta meditation can be practiced in part or in full.

Just saying one line of the metta meditation will already bring more compassion and healing into the world.

To love is, first of all, to accept ourselves as we actually are. That is why in this love meditation, “Know thyself” is the first practice of love. When we practice this, we see the conditions that have caused us to be the way we are. This makes it easy for us to accept ourselves, including our suffering and our happiness at the same time.

Metta means “lovingkindness” in Pali. We begin this with an aspiration:

{such as, May I be safe, healthy, happy and at peace...}

Then we transcend the level of aspiration and look deeply at all the positive and negative characteristics of the object of our meditation, in this case ourselves.

The willingness to love is not yet love. We look deeply, with all our being, in order to understand. We don’t just repeat the words, or imitate others, or

strive after some ideal. The practice of love meditation is not autosuggestion. We don't just say, "I love myself. I love all beings." We look deeply at our body, our feelings, our perceptions, our mental formations, and our consciousness, and in just a few weeks, our aspiration to love will become a deep intention. Love will enter our thoughts, our words, and our actions, and we will notice that we have become "peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit; safe and free from injury; and free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety."

When we practice, we observe how much peace, happiness, and lightness we already have. We notice whether we are anxious about accidents or misfortunes, and how much anger, irritation, fear, anxiety, or worry are already in us. As we become aware of the feelings in us, our self-understanding will deepen. We will see how our fears and lack of peace contribute to our unhappiness, and we will see the value of loving ourselves and cultivating a heart of compassion.

In this love meditation, "anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety" refer to all the unwholesome, negative states of mind that dwell in us and rob us of our peace and happiness. Anger, fear, anxiety, craving, greed, and ignorance are the great afflictions of our time. By practicing mindful living, we are able to deal with them, and our love is translated into effective action.

* * *

This is a metta - loving kindness meditation adapted from the Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification) by Buddhaghosa, a 5th-century systematization of the Buddha's teachings.

To practice this love meditation, sit still, calm your body and your breathing, and recite it to yourself. The sitting position is wonderful for practicing this. Sitting still, you are not too preoccupied with other matters, so you can look deeply at yourself as you are, cultivate your love for yourself, and determine the best ways to express this love in the world.

May I be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit...

May I be safe and free from injury...

May I be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety...

(or)

May I be safe... healthy... happy... peaceful...

...

Begin practicing this love meditation on yourself ("I"). Until you are able to love and take care of yourself, you cannot be of much help to others. After that, practice on others ("he/she," or "they") - first on someone you like, then on someone neutral to you, then on someone you love, and finally on someone the mere thought of whom makes you suffer.

Practice in this way:

May they be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit.

May they be safe and free from injury.

May they be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety.

(or)

May they be happy... safe... healthy... peaceful...

According to the Buddha, a human being is made of five collections, called skandhas in Sanskrit. They are: form (our body), feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. In a way, you are the surveyor, and these elements are your territory. To know the real situation within yourself, you have to know your own territory, including the elements within you that are at war with each other. In order to bring about harmony, reconciliation, and healing within, you have to understand yourself. Looking and listening deeply, surveying your territory, is the beginning of metta loving kindness meditation.

From Teachings on Love, by Thich Nhat Hanh

Chapter Two - Love Meditation

The Buddha offered many meditations on love. When a group of monks told him that the spirits living near their forest monastery were causing others to suffer, the Buddha taught them the Metta Sutta, also known as the Discourse on Love:

"He or she who wants to attain Peace should practice being upright , humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with their senses calmed, with out being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. And this is what he or she contemplates:

"May all beings be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy.

"May all living beings live in security and in peace, beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

"Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

"Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and

enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying down, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

"Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death."

After several months of reciting and practicing the Metta Sutta, the monks came to understand the sufferings of the troubled spirits. As a result, the spirits began to practice, also. They became filled with the energy of love, and the whole forest was peaceful.

The Buddha also offered many specific exercises to help his disciples practice and realize the Four Immeasurable Minds:

When your mind is filled with love, send it in one direction, then a second, a third, and a fourth, then above, and then below. Identify with everything, without hatred, resentment, anger, or enmity. This mind of love is very wide. It grows immeasurably and eventually is able to embrace the whole world. Practice the same way with your mind filled with compassion, then joy, then equanimity.

With his mind filled with love, the monk permeates one direction, and then a second, a third, a fourth, above, below, and all around, everywhere identifying himself with all. He permeates the whole world with his mind filled with love, wide, far, developed, unbound, free from hatred and ill will. He does the same with his mind filled with compassion, joy, and equanimity.

When the energy of love is strong in us, we can send it to beings in all directions. We may imagine our love as being like waves of sound or light, or like a pure white cloud that forms slowly and gradually spreads out to envelop the whole world. But the love meditation is not only an act of imagination. A true cloud produces rain. Sound and light penetrate everywhere, and our love must do the same. We have to observe whether our mind of love is present in our actual contact with others. Practicing love meditation in the sitting position is only the beginning.

Metta meditation is an important beginning. We sit quietly and look deeply into ourselves. With practice, our love will increase naturally, becoming all-inclusive and all-embracing.

As we learn to see with the eyes of love, we empty our mind of anger and hatred. As long as these negative mental formations are present in us, our love is incomplete. We may think we understand and accept others, but we are not yet able to love them fully...

Mindfulness is the energy that allows us to look deeply at our body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness and see clearly what our real needs are, so we will not drown in the sea of suffering. Eventually love fills our mind and our will, and all our actions from that time on manifest love. Speech and actions are the fruits of will, so when our will is permeated by love, our speech and actions are also suffused with love. We speak only loving and constructive words and act only in ways that bring happiness and relieve suffering.

...

We practice not only to give rise to the Four Immeasurables in our mind, but also to bring them into the world through our words and actions. When we practice love meditation, we don't merely visualize our love spreading into space. *We touch the deep sources of love that are already in us, and then, in the midst of our daily lives, in our actual contact with others, we express and share our love.* We practice until we see the concrete effects of our love on others, until we are able to offer peace and happiness to everyone, even those who have acted toward us in ways that are most unlovable.

...

In the Itivuttaka, the Buddha says if we gather together all the virtuous actions we have realized in this world, they are not equal to practicing metta meditation. Building practice centers, making Buddha figures, casting bells, or doing social work cannot bring about one-sixteenth of the merit of this practice. If we collect together all the light from the stars, it will not be as bright as the light of the moon. In the same way, practicing metta is greater than all other virtuous actions combined.

Practicing loving kindness meditation is like digging deep into the ground until we reach the purest water. We look deeply into ourselves until insight arises and our love flows to the surface. Joy and happiness radiate from our eyes, and everyone around us benefits from our smile and our presence.

If you take good care of yourself, you help everyone. You stop being a source of suffering to the world, and you become a reservoir of joy and freshness. Here and there are people who know how to take good care of themselves, and who live joyfully and happily. They are our strongest

support. Everything they do, they do for everyone. That is the meaning of Mahayana Buddhism. That is loving kindness meditation.

The Buddha said that if a monk practices metta meditation, even if only for the length of time it takes to snap one's fingers, that monk is worthy of being a monk:

"He will not fail in meditative concentration. He will realize the teachings given by teachers on the path. The food offered to him as alms will not be wasted. There is no greater virtue than practicing metta loving kindness meditation every day."

*May all beings be happy and at peace,
and may their hearts be filled with joy*

The Metta Sutta

This is what should be done
by those who are skilled in goodness,
and who know the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,
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 their 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 their 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 living beings;

radiating kindness over the entire world,
spreading upwards to the skies,
and downwards to the depths,
outward 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 to fixed views,
the pure-hearted one,
having clarity of vision,

being freed from all sense desires,
is not born again into this world.

A Loving Kindness Meditation, by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, from *The Heroic Heart - Awakening Unbound Compassion*

To begin, we sit and quiet down the surface of the mind and send loving thoughts to ourselves. Traditionally we think to ourselves,

May I be well and happy...

May I be free of suffering...

May I be peaceful and at ease...

Recite any verse that speaks to you, and visualize sending loving thoughts to yourself, maybe in the form of light...

When you think, "May I be happy" you are sending loving-kindness, and when you think, "May I be free from suffering," you are sending compassion. Even though at first this may seem artificial and contrived, gradually we begin to feel a kind of peacefulness and warmth inside ourselves...

We can start by befriending ourselves and being a little more tolerant of ourselves, and that will help us be friendlier and more tolerant of others...

When we give loving-kindness and compassion to ourselves, then naturally this is also going to spread out toward others...

After that, we send thoughts of loving kindness to somebody whom we feel particularly loving toward, wishing that they might be well and happy, and

imagining them well and happy, and free from suffering. This is the easiest part - to wish happiness to people (or to animals) we really care for...

Then we spread this goodwill to somebody we feel neutral about, whom we don't care about one way or the other- the mailman, for example, whom we see every day but usually don't give a thought about. Now, just imagine really wishing them to be happy and free from suffering...

Everybody in their heart of hearts wants to feel well and not suffer- as the Buddha said, "To each one, his own self is most dear", and we wish that for them. Imagine them being happy, imagine all their problems solved, and see them free from suffering, their children attending good colleges and marrying nice people, and their partner staying healthy. Everything is really nice; all their worries and problems are resolved, and they are just filled with happiness; Imagine it...

Then we visualize someone whom we don't like or with whom we have problems. Just think of that person and recognize that if people create difficulties for others it is because inside they are not really at peace with themselves.

Wish them to be well and happy, imagine everything they want being fulfilled for them, and all their worries and anxieties, all their problems fading away. They're just happy. Feel pleased for them...

Then just gradually expand that sense of goodwill around the world, thinking of all the many beings out there- not just human beings, but

animals, insects, birds, fish, all the beings who inhabit this planet, and then all those who inhabit the other realms that we can't even see...

Imagine that all these beings finally experience having all their worries and anxieties melt away, to be replaced by great happiness and joy and satisfaction...

May it be so!

Loving-Kindness Meditation, by Ajahn Brahm

The Buddha's word for loving-kindness is mettā. It refers to an emotion, to that feeling of goodwill that can sustain thoughts wishing happiness for another, and that is willing to forgive any fault.

My favorite expression of mettā is encompassed by the words “the door of my heart is fully open to you, forever, whoever you are and whatever you have done...”

Mettā is love without a self, arising from inspiration, expecting nothing back in return, and without any conditions.

The Buddha compared mettā to a mother's love for her child (Sn 149). A mother might not always like her child or agree with everything it does, but she will always care for her child and wish it only happiness. Such an openhearted, non-discriminating, and liberating kindness is mettā.

In mettā meditation you focus your attention on the feeling of loving-kindness, developing that delightful emotion until it fills the whole mind. The way this is achieved can be compared to the way you light a campfire. You start with paper or anything else that is easy to light. Then you add kindling, small twigs, or strips of wood. When the kindling is on fire you add thicker pieces of wood, and after a time the thick logs. Once the fire is roaring and very hot, you can even put on wet and sappy logs and they are soon alight.

Mettā can accurately be compared with a warm and radiant fire burning in your heart. You cannot expect to light the fire of loving-kindness by starting with a difficult object, no more than you can expect to light a campfire by striking a match under a thick log. So do not begin mettā meditation by spreading mettā to yourself or to an enemy. Instead begin by spreading loving-kindness to something that is easy to ignite with loving-kindness.

I prepare myself for mettā meditation by grounding my mindfulness in the present moment, establishing stage one of the meditation method described in chapter 1. Then I initiate mettā meditation by imagining a little kitten. I like cats, especially kittens, so my imaginary kitten is to loving-kindness as gas is to a flame. I only need to think of my little kitten and my heart lights up with mettā.

I continue to visualize my imaginary friend, picturing it as abandoned, hungry, and very afraid. In its short span of life it has only known rejection, violence, and loneliness. I imagine its bones sticking out from its emaciated body, its fur soiled with grime and some blood, and its body rigid with terror. I consider that if I don't care for this vulnerable little being then no one will, and it will die such a horrible, lonely, terrified death. I feel that kitten's pain fully, in all its forms, and my heart opens up releasing a flood of compassion.

I will care for that little kitten. I will protect it and feed it...

I imagine myself looking deeply into its anxious eyes, trying to melt its apprehension with the mettā flowing through my own eyes. I reach out to it slowly, reassuringly, never losing eye contact.

Gently, I pick up that little kitten and bring it to my chest. I remove the kitten's cold with the warmth from my own body, I take away its fear with the softness of my embrace, and I feel the kitten's trust grow. I speak to the kitten on my chest:

Little being, never feel alone again. Never feel so afraid. I will always look after you. I will always be your protector and friend. I love you, little kitten. Wherever you go, whatever you do, my heart will always welcome you. I give you my limitless loving-kindness always...

I feel my kitten become warm, relax, and finally purr.

This is but an outline of how I begin my meditation on mettā. I usually take much more time. I use my imagination and thoughts to paint a picture in my mind, to create a scenario where the first flames of mettā can arise. At the end of the mental exercise, my eyes still closed, I focus the attention on the region around my heart and feel the first warm glow of the emotion of loving-kindness.

My kitten is like the paper that you use to start the campfire. You may not like kittens, so choose something else, a puppy or a baby perhaps.

Whatever you choose as your first object of mettā, make it an imaginary being and not a real one. In your mind you can make a kitten or a puppy or a baby into anything you like. You have more freedom to generate mettā when you make use of a fantasy creature rather than one from the real world. My imaginary kitten for example purrs at just the right time...

Having chosen your first object, use your powers of imagination to create a story around that being that arouses your loving-kindness. With practice this innovative method becomes one of the most successful and enjoyable ways to begin mettā meditation.

Some years ago a female student complained to me that this method did not work for her. She regarded small animals, especially mischievous kittens, as little pests, nor did she like crying and wailing nappy-soiling babies. She had a severe case of what I now call “metta-block.”

She went on to tell me that in her apartment in Sydney she had been growing some flowers in pots. So I suggested that she choose one of her plants as her first object of mettā. She imagined a seedling so delicate and tender. It was so fragile that it needed all her care, love, and protection to survive. She directed all her motherly instincts to that vulnerable little potted plant, nurturing and feeding her friend until it burst from its bud to repay her kindness with a beautiful, fragrant flower. She really took to that method.

That was the first time mettā meditation worked for her. During the retreat when this happened, she said it was the only session when she wasn't waiting for me to ring the bell.

After the first flames of mettā have been established in this way, let go of your imaginary creature and put in its place a real person, someone very close to you emotionally such as your partner, a well-loved relation, or even your very best friend. It must be someone for whom it is easy to generate

and sustain loving-kindness. In the metaphor of the campfire, they will be the thin pieces of wood called kindling.

Once again use your thoughts, words and images, to paint a picture around them in your mind. They too need your friendship and love. They are also emotionally vulnerable, subject to the disappointments and frustrations of life. Think along these lines and say to yourself:

Dearest friend, I sincerely wish you happiness. May your body be free from pain and your mind find contentment. I give you my love with no conditions. I'll always be there for you. You will always have a place in my heart. I truly care for you...

- or similar words of your own design. Use whatever phrases arouse the warm glow of mettā in your heart. Stay with this person. Imagine they are right before you until the mettā grows bright and constant around them...

Now briefly place your attention on your body near your heart and feel the physical sensation associated with mettā. You will find it feels delightful.

Let go of the image of that person and substitute that of another close acquaintance, creating the feeling of mettā around them by using your thought and feeling in the same way:

May you live in happiness...

Imagine them right before you until the mettā glows bright and constant around them.

Next substitute an entire group of people, perhaps all the people who live in your house. Develop the caring glow of mettā around them in the same way:

May you be well and happy...

In the simile of the campfire, you are now putting on the logs.

See if you can imagine mettā to be a golden radiance emanating from a beautiful white lotus flower in the middle of your heart. Allow that radiance of loving-kindness to expand in all directions, embracing more and more living beings until it becomes boundless, filling up all that you can imagine.

May all living beings, near or far, great or small, be happy and at peace...

Bathe the whole universe in the warmth of the golden light of loving-kindness... Stay there for a while...

In the simile of the campfire, the fire is now roaring and very hot and can now burn the wet and sappy logs. Think about your enemy. Visualize someone who has hurt you badly. You will be astonished that your mettā is now strong enough for you to forgive them. You are now able to share the healing golden glow of loving-kindness with them as well:

Friend, whatever you have done to me, revenge will not help either of us, so instead I wish you well. I sincerely wish you freedom from the pain of the past and joy in

all your future. May the beauty of this unconditional loving-kindness reach you as well, bringing you happiness, peace, and contentment...

When the fire of mettā burns strong, nothing can withstand it. Next, there is one final “wet and sappy stick” to be tossed into the fire of mettā. Most meditators find that the hardest person to give loving-kindness to...is themselves.

Imagine that you are looking at yourself in a mirror. Say with your inner speech and with total sincerity:

I wish myself well. I now give myself the gift of happiness. Too long the door of my heart has been closed to me; now I open it. No matter what I have done, or will ever do, the door to my own love and respect is always open to me. I forgive myself unreservedly. Come home. I now give myself the love that does not judge. I care for this vulnerable being called 'me.' I embrace all of me with the lovingkindness of mettā...

Invent your own words here to let the warmth of loving-kindness sink deep inside of you, to the part that is most frightened. Let it melt all resistance until you are at one with mettā, unlimited loving-kindness, like a mother's care for her child.

Before you end the mettā meditation, pause for a minute or two and reflect on how you feel inside. Notice the effect that this meditation has had on you. Mettā meditation can produce heavenly bliss.

To bring the meditation to an elegant conclusion, once more imagine mettā as a golden glow radiating from the beautiful white lotus located in your heart.

Visualize the golden radiance being drawn back into the lotus, leaving the warmth outside. When the golden glow becomes like a condensed ball of incandescent energy in the center of the white lotus, imagine the petals closing around the ball of mettā, guarding the seed of loving-kindness within your heart, ready to be released again in your next mettā meditation. Then, open your eyes, and get up slowly...

The Meaning of Metta Bhavana, by Sayadaw U Indaka

Bhavana means development or cultivation. Therefore, metta bhavana refers to the repeated cultivation of metta in our own hearts and minds to make it firm and strong. With the practice of metta meditation, we have to develop a genuine wish for our own happiness and the happiness of others. When we develop metta for all beings by wishing them good health and happiness, then our hearts and minds will feel happy and peaceful.

Because we are practising metta meditation, we experience this happiness and peace ourselves. As we develop and strengthen the quality of metta in our hearts and minds by wishing all living beings good health and happiness, there is no more desire to hurt or create suffering for other living beings. This is *mano-kamma* metta or metta in mental actions.

We also do not use any words that cause suffering or harm other living beings. This is *vaci-kamma* metta or metta in verbal actions.

And we do not do anything that hurts or causes suffering to other living beings. This is *kaya-kamma* metta, metta in bodily actions. In this way, other living beings do not suffer because of us, and if they do not suffer, they are happy.

When we practise metta meditation and live in the tranquil shade of metta, this subtle happiness and peace is at first not very distinct or obvious. The serene and peaceful quality of metta is not always evident, so we may not understand the true value of metta. Only when we have to spend time with an angry person, do we come to appreciate and savour the serene taste of

metta. Living in the shade of a person with metta, we feel serene and peaceful...

At such a time, we come to know and clearly understand the serene and peaceful quality of metta, which is radiated by the person who is developing metta. Then we fully understand the true value of metta. This is the benefit that can be experienced by a being to whom metta is radiated.

The Spirit of Metta, by Sayadaw U Indaka

The spirit of metta is the wish for the welfare and happiness of all living beings. There is never a wish for anything that is not beneficial.

In the spirit of metta, we always work for the benefit of other living beings. We never work to create unwholesome results or to inflict suffering.

The spirit of metta is always and forever peaceful and cool; it never burns.

The spirit of metta is always loving-kindness; it never turns to hatred.

The spirit of metta is always soft, gentle and subtle; it is never rough and harsh.

The spirit of metta is always clear and fresh; it never withers.

The spirit of metta only sees and looks at the good side; it never sees and looks for faults.

The spirit of metta is always forgiving; it is not oppressive or controlling.

The spirit of metta is only concerned with helping; it is completely free from any destructive impulses.

The spirit of metta works only for the benefit of others; it doesn't work for our own benefit {alone}.

The spirit of metta is free from entanglement; it is always accompanied by a spirit of independence.

Anointing with the Waters of Benevolence, from Duties of the Sangha, by
Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

When one has seen with the power of intuitive understanding that a person is ready to receive the Dhamma, one should spread thoughts of good will, dedicating the fruits of one's merit to that person. This way of spreading the Dhamma can be done both in public and in private, with those who are near and those who are far away. It can help certain human and divine beings, and inspire conviction in those whose dispositions lie within the net of the Dhamma, all without having to say a word.

This has been termed "anointing with the waters of benevolence." The good will that lies in the heart is like a cooling current. Wherever this current is directed through the power of a radiant heart, it can draw other beings, both human and divine, to become inspired to develop the qualities of their hearts in line with their varying dispositions. Even if we have yet to meet them, and have simply heard news, we can still cause their hearts to become cool and refreshed, contributing to their welfare and happiness.

Spreading the Dhamma in this way is beneficial both to us and to others. To be able to do this, though, we must first give rise to sufficient quality in our own hearts. If the quality isn't yet there, then build it and dedicate it first of all to those to whom you owe "kamma debts." Spread this goodness to fill the body. Spread this goodness to fill the mind. This sense of fullness is what is meant by rapture (piti) - i.e., full of what is skillful. Goodness fills the heart, refreshing it with what is skillful.

When goodness fills the body and mind, it is like water filling a tank or saturating the earth. Wherever the earth is saturated with water, there the trees and vegetation flourish. But if we don't have enough goodness within, we're like a tank without any water: No matter how far the faucet is opened, only wind will come out. The coolness of wind and the coolness of water are two very different things. The coolness of wind can cause trees to wither and can send dust clouds flying, but the coolness of water is useful in many ways: It can be used to wash clothes, to bathe the body, to drink, or to sprinkle on the ground, nourishing plants and softening the earth. Not only that, it can also give a deep sense of refreshment.

In the same way, people who practice the Dhamma, even if they don't speak a word but simply spread thoughts of good will, can be of great benefit to people at large. This is termed "*metta-parami*" - the perfection of benevolence.

So when goodness arises within us, we can work for the welfare of others even when we sit with our eyes closed, perfectly still. But it's the nature of ignorant people to believe that such a person is simply saving his own skin. They haven't looked deep inside.

The teachers of the past thus made a comparison with thunder and rain. Some people can teach others, but they themselves have no inner goodness. Such people are called *thunder without rain*. They can cause others to feel awe and respect, but can give no sense of cooling refreshment.

Some people are like *rain without thunder*. They rarely speak, but spread thoughts of good will, dedicating their merit to others. They have received

their own full measure of inner goodness and so can give goodness and inspire conviction in the hearts of others even when simply sitting still. Those who find peace and calm in the shelter of such an influence will, in turn, feel the highest form of respect.

Then, some people are like *rain with thunder*, and others, *rain with thunder and wind to boot*: This, for those who are able, is the best of all. Such people, after having developed their own inner goodness, are able to teach others, spreading the Dhamma by thought, word, and deed, giving results in many ways: People who are stubborn and fixed in their opinions will be able to soften in an instant, just as giant trees bend before the wind. At the same time, teachers of this sort can be an example to others through their behavior and the kindness of their hearts, feeling no envy for the goodness of others, but only compassion, providing the shelter of mental peace to all sorts of people.

This is the way to spread the Dhamma fully and completely, causing the religion to prosper in the true and proper way.

The Method of Developing Metta, by Sayadaw U Pandita

The method for developing metta is much the same as the methods for the other brahmacariyas. We will explain metta bhavana, then, as a basic example; and we will also briefly describe the theme of protective meditations.

The basic method for metta bhavana is simple. One deliberately generates wishes for others' welfare and happiness. Identifying one's own wish to be happy, one recognizes that others feel just the same way. A desire to help them arises; and so one goes out and does whatever helpful things one can.

Helpful actions are a form of metta, known as *kaya-kamma metta*, friendly actions performed with the body. True lovingkindness includes kaya-kamma metta and two other forms of metta: *vaci-kamma metta*, verbal acts of metta; and *mano-kamma metta*, friendly mental actions.

Four Kinds of Loving Speech

To speak friendly words, recite suttas, give good advice, or simply to speak in a friendly, beneficial manner - all are forms of vaci-kamma metta.

The specific teachings on skillful speech, vaci-sucarita, indicate that for speech to be skillful it must be motivated by lovingkindness. Thus, to practice skillful speech is vaci-kamma metta.

The first type of skillful speech is truthful speech. One wishes to inform the other person honestly, so he or she may have correct understanding and

knowledge. This is a wholesome, kind intention. Honesty is a form of lovingkindness.

Second, one chooses words that are unifying rather than divisive. Not only is the intent based in metta but the result of such speech is sure to be a further expression of lovingkindness.

Third, we choose words that are sweet and pleasing, not rough, harsh language. We want to make people happy when they hear us talking. At the same time, we guard against deceit and flattery, which contain an element of dishonesty.

The fourth type of vaci-sucarita is speaking of meaningful, essential things. Not wanting to waste the other person's time, we offer worthwhile information and understanding...

People who love to gossip and pass around divisive tidbits often claim they just want to be kind and helpful, but this is untrue. Similarly, rough, coarse language and frivolous time wasting chatter reveal a dearth of metta. In general, ill intentioned speech, vaci-duccarita, turns people away. People are attracted to speech that is truthful, meaningful, unifying, and friendly.

Vaci-sucarita, skillful speech, and vaci-kamma metta verbal acts of lovingkindness, are beneficial for everyone. The more one practices them, the more power one will have to gather others together into a respectful and supportive group. The kind intentions must be genuine, though.

Mental Kindness

The third and final form of metta is mano-kamma metta- acts of lovingkindness performed by the mind. Essentially this means wishing others to be well and happy. Mano-kamma metta can be radiated at all times, in all postures.

It can occur as a spontaneous wish or a deliberately repeated phrase like

May she (or he, or they) be happy...

To recite verbal formulas silently in the mind is the method of formal metta meditation, which can develop one's lovingkindness to an extraordinary level. It will be described extensively below.

Loving Kindness as a Protective Practice

Metta bhavana has two possible goals. It can be used to gain the jhanas, or absorptions, states of very strong concentration; or it can be used as a Guardian Meditation, leading to freedom from danger and enmity.

The technique for developing jhanic concentration has many fine points that we will not go into here, since our emphasis is on developing the insight knowledges through satipatthana vipassana meditation. Sufficient moment to moment concentration arises in satipatthana vipassana practice to fulfill the Noble Eightfold Path and lead to freedom from the defilements.

The protective form of metta bhavana is extremely beneficial. It generates wholesome mental states, guards against inner and outer dangers and disturbances, and develops the perfections according to the example of the Buddha.

There are enemies, *vera*; and there is also fear, *bhaya*. The two are related, for if we are not free from enemies we endure danger and fear. We already distinguished outer and inner enemies - *puggala vera*, the enemy that comes in the form of a person, and *akusala vera* and *kilesa vera*, unwholesomeness and mental defilements. Outer enemies are encountered relatively rarely, while the inner enemies attack us night and day, unless we protect ourselves with meditation.

Dosa (aggression) is an internal enemy, as is *raga*, or lust, which so often poses as metta. When *dosa* and *raga* arise in the stream of consciousness they disturb it; they also have the potential to bring disaster to oneself and others. Hatred, when indulged, hardens into resentment. Lust too can grow into a destructive passion. Whenever a destructive mental state is present, the mind becomes rough, coarse, wild, heavy, doped, disgusting, and dreadful. In contrast, a mind filled with metta is peaceful, lovable, light, and open.

The First Wish of Metta Meditation

To be free from hatred and lust is *avera*, to lack an enemy. This wonderful state is the first wish we generate toward others in formal metta bhavana. "May he or she be free from enemies," we say to ourselves, thinking of both inner and outer enemies.

It is all right to vary the verbal formula slightly, as long as the essence of the wish remains. For instance, the phrase you use could be "May he or she be free from danger" or "May he or she be free from enmity, danger, and fear."

People often ask, When one meditates by radiating metta to other beings, will these others become peaceful? This is not certain. What is certain is that one's own internal enemies, dosa and raga, will be pacified and one will become peaceful oneself.

If we practice lovingkindness, it will certainly arise. If we keep at it, our metta will gradually increase, growing powerful enough to quell the internal enemies of hatred and greed. Once these enemies are subdued, one is no longer so quick to respond to others in an angry or self centered way - for example, by immediately forming negative judgments of those we meet, or by feeling jealous and suspicious of family members.

Generally if one does not radiate metta, or if one's practice is weak, one remains easy prey for hatred, greed, lust, and so forth. One can end up violating the precepts by killing, stealing, verbal unkindness, sexual misconduct, or intoxication.

Protection from Inner and Outer Danger

Wrongdoing results from a tormented mind; it also leads to further dangers. By protecting us against inner enemies, metta bhavana also averts the dangers that result from wrongdoing. These dangers are:

1. *Attanuvadabhaya*, the fear or danger of self-blame, feeling ashamed and guilty about what one has done.
2. *Paranuvoddabhaya*, the fear of censure by others, losing the respect and support of people who have good judgment. Kind, ethical people tend to avoid those who habitually indulge in wrongdoing.
3. *Dandabhaya*, fear of punishment by the authorities. If one kills, steals, lies, takes intoxicants, and is generally unruly, sooner or later this will lead to conflict with the secular authorities.
4. *Duggatibhaya*, fear of being reborn in an unfavorable existence. Just as eating unsuitable food leads to an upset stomach, anytime one acts on a defiled intention one will suffer the consequences.

Clearly, no happiness arises in the mind of a person who is facing guilt, punishment, torture, and unfavorable rebirths.

The Formula for Reciting Loving Kindness

The wish we are emanating, for others to be free from enemies or danger, is expressed in a short, simple phrase that encompasses all possible problems a being can face: outer and inner enemies, wrongdoing, and all of its future consequences. If this wish were to come true, the being toward whom we're directing it would be perfectly happy and calm. Since we're wishing them to be freed from inner enemies, we are also wishing they might reach ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom.

So, as we mentally recite the formula "May this person be free from enemies," we're emanating a pure volition for their happiness. Though it's uncertain what the result of this will be for the recipient, great joy will develop in one's own mind. One begins to understand what it is like to be freed from inner enemies, oneself.

Metta practice bestows the power to overcome *kodhum-mattaka*, mental madness based on hatred, colloquially called blind rage. Gripped by *kodhum-mattaka*, one goes berserk, out of control, and barely knows what one is doing. With metta bhavana, one's knee-jerk responses become gentler, toned down; one's thoughts are less distorted, more humane.

People with strong metta no longer wish disadvantages upon others. They genuinely hope for others' happiness. They can put up with being insulted; they can forgive and forget. They let go of grudges and can sacrifice their own benefit for the sake of other beings. These wise, kind, beautiful qualities all arise due to lack of hatred in the mind.

As metta grows stronger, the beauty of the mind increases. A generous, tolerant, unselfish person will also tend to be loved by others; he or she will be relatively free of *puggala vera*, enemies in human form. Thus, the protective quality of metta bhavana works inwardly and outwardly. It gradually tames the mind and behavior. As one's own little world is pacified, peace arises in the surrounding world.

Radiating Metta

To wish others to be free from enmity and danger is an efficient, focused way of radiating metta. The wish, in the form of a phrase, is radiated repeatedly. Metta can also be radiated spatially, first to those within one's home, then to those in the immediate neighborhood, and progressively to all beings in one's village, township, state, country, world, and universe.

If one's wishes are dedicated wholly to the welfare and happiness of others, metta reaches the level of *metta-parami*, the perfected lovingkindness of a buddha. Each and every time one radiates lovingkindness, either to individuals or groups, one is protecting oneself, developing metta-parami, gaining merit, and sowing a beneficial kammic seed that will bear fruit someday. By radiating metta hundreds or thousands of times, one protects oneself, develops metta-parami, and gains merit hundreds or thousands of times~quite a matter for rejoicing...

After radiating lovingkindness mentally, we must also express it in verbal and bodily actions. Anytime we relate to other beings, we should do so with threefold lovingkindness– mental, verbal, and bodily acts of metta. This point should be well noted.

Self Esteem and Human Status

Most people hold themselves in high esteem; this is why they so easily lose patience. Impatience is a form of anger based on pride and conceit, or *mana*. Conceited ill will causes one to lose one's tolerance and humanity.

One may continue to look like a human being from the outside, but one's mind and behavior resemble a hungry ghost's. If one remains just as irritable and impatient after radiating metta, the practice has been superficial. It is a sign that one needs to practice more. Maybe then one will start being a little bit more generous and succeed in rising up to human status and eventually become a distinguished, even an outstanding human being.

In human life it is quite possible to fulfill one's social duties, be generous, and improve one's mental states through meditation. If one can do all this, one will not be just a human being, and not just a distinguished human being, but a true human being. As such, when relating to others one will feel happy, cool, and peaceful.

Unselfishness, the Perfection of Loving Kindness

Since we are practicing metta along the direction of developing paramis, it is good to delve into the meaning of this term.

Parami translated as "perfection," but it means "noble becoming" or "the business of a noble person."

When performing wholesome deeds of generosity, *dana*, when observing morality (*sila*), and especially in metta bhavana it is extremely important that there be no selfish interest involved. This is the meaning of the term "noble." It has nothing to do with social class - or, rather, it expresses the Buddha's definition of what is valuable and respectable in human affairs.

When performing a generous deed, it should be done entirely for the benefit of others. Only then does it qualify as true generosity. This is fairly obvious, since selfishness and generosity are contradictory.

The commitment to maintain sila, too, can be altruistic, since a refined morality includes the recognition that others are just as worthy of good treatment as oneself. Likewise, when radiating lovingkindness we can do so entirely for the welfare and happiness of others.

Wholesome acts of morality, generosity, and kindness do not, however, lead to assurance in the Dhamma. Only the insight knowledges attained in satipatthana vipassana meditation can give that ultimate assurance--the assurance that one has understood the truth of existence and will no longer be subjected to suffering. We have been talking about the importance of selflessness in the metta practice. However, metta practice does not by itself lead to the ultimate understanding of the Noble Eightfold Path, to liberation of the mind from suffering, or to what is called "assurance in the Dhamma."

When it comes time to practice the Dhamma to attain stream entry, we may feel motivated by a profound wish for release from the suffering we experience in ourselves. To have a certain degree of self-interest here is fine. The texts say that this desire is perfectly legitimate. So, when practicing the Dhamma to attain stream entry, one will be working hard in hopes of being freed from wrong views, doubt, and the danger of rebirth in states of loss. There's nothing wrong with harboring some hope of success, and no harm is done to others either. We've already discussed how one's own insight meditation practice benefits other beings.

In all other areas besides this, one should guard strenuously against selfish interest and instead focus on benefiting others. This is a noble aim; a person who undertakes such noble activity is also called parami. Persons worthy of the title parami will act from genuine loving-kindness and compassion. They are not hoping to gain name and fame or a long life nor even to be freed from the cycle of birth and death, samsara. Their motivation is altruistic.

Detailed Explanation of Metta Bhavana

The Instruction for Practice

Traditional metta bhāvanā consists of silently repeating the following four phrases again and again:

Sabbe sattā averā hontu

Avyāpajjhā hontu

Anighā hontu

Sukhi attānam pariharantu

May all beings be free from inner and outer danger

May they be free from mental suffering

May they be free from physical suffering

May they care for themselves happily

When we wish to carry out a session of metta meditation practice, the texts suggest a structure of four phrases. We begin with the phrase discussed earlier, "May all beings be free from enmity and danger." This is a clear and simple wish for others' welfare, happiness, peace, and safety.

The second line, "May all beings be free from mental suffering." offers a new twist. Again we are wishing that others may be freed from suffering, but this time we're focusing on the internal level. We wish all beings to have happiness and peace by no longer undergoing the pangs of difficult thoughts and emotions, or mental suffering in any form.

Vyāpajjha means the pain of anger in the mind, the anger that often arises when circumstances are difficult or unpleasant. This includes all worries, all sadness, fears, grief, and separation from near and dear ones, which can bring sorrow or lamentation. Included here, too, are all the sorrows arising from worldly troubles, like businesses that fail.

In order to be truly freed from all mental suffering, beings must be freed from the internal enemy, kilesa vera. The second metta phrase addresses this issue. We're hoping not only that beings never have to suffer pain within their minds, but also that they shall experience liberation from all the causes of mental suffering, namely, the internal afflictions.

The kilesas are also the causes of destructive behavior, so by extension we're wishing that all beings could maintain ethical, cultured, compassionate behavior. Sweeping implications are condensed into a brief phrase. We're also really intending all this for the benefit of others, not hoping that the rest of the world will start behaving more civilly toward us and give us what we want.

The third line expresses a desire for all beings to be free from physical suffering. This covers all the gradations of bodily pain, anything sharp or unpleasant. We wish others to be free from diseases, wounds, pains, aches, accidents, and so on. Again there is no selfish aspect to this, no secondary hope for one's own health somehow to improve as a result of this meditation.

The final line is a wish for others to be able to look after themselves happily, to be able to bear the burdens of life with ease, to meet the requirements of

their bodies and minds without hardship. It can also be translated as wishing for others to meet with supportive circumstances. Taking care of one's own body and mind is a demanding task, and we hope that all beings will receive whatever they need to sustain their lives and even leave them with enough time and mental ease so they can devote themselves to meditation practice. To speak colloquially, we want everyone to have it really good.

The Metta Sutta, version three, as found in *Metta - The Practice of Loving-Kindness As the Foundation for Insight Meditation Practice*, by Sayadaw U Indaka, revised

{1./2. By the power of this sutta, the yakkhas do not show fearful visions, and a person who makes effort regarding this sutta day and night sleeps comfortably. When he sleeps, he does not have bad dreams. Good people, let us recite this protective sutta, which is endowed with these qualities and others as well.}

3. He or she who wants to dwell penetrating the state of calm (nibbana) and who is skilled in virtue should practise the three kinds of training {of ethics, meditation, and wisdom}. He should be capable, frank, extremely honest, obedient, gentle, and not conceited.

4. He should be contented, easy to take care of, have few activities, have few possessions, and be controlled in his senses. He should be wise, and respectful, and not be greedily attached to anything at all.

5. He should not commit the slightest wrong, by doing which he might be censured by the wise. (Then he should think) May all beings be happy and safe. May their hearts be happy.

6./7. Whatever living beings exist; be they feeble or strong, long or big, or medium or short, small or bulky, seen or unseen, dwelling near or far, born or yet to be born, may all beings without exception be happy.

8. Let none deceive another, or despise any person in any place. Let him not wish any harm to another person, with insult or ill will.

9. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so let him cultivate a boundless loving heart towards all beings.

10. Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world, above, below, and all around; making them unrestricted, free of hate and free of enmity.

11. Whether he is standing, walking, sitting or lying down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness. This is the Noble Living here (in the dispensation of the Buddha), they say.

12. Not holding onto wrong views, being virtuous and endowed with vision (the first path knowledge), and removing greed for sensual pleasures, such a one will surely transcend birth and death.

From Abundant, Exalted, Immeasurable, by Ajahn Pasanno

If you really set your mind on loving-kindness, it has a transformative effect. Of course, the major effect was on myself, not holding to fixed views. That helps a lot. It seems pretty mundane, not as spectacular as stories of the Buddha. If you have experimented with loving-kindness, you will find that you have a story or know somebody who has a story about how it has really worked. If we take the time to cultivate and use it, there will be some kind of effect. This is quite natural. The sense of loving-kindness is a universal quality that we as human beings all respond to.

Today I'd like to introduce another formulation of lovingkindness meditation, based on the one we chanted this morning:

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind of loving kindness . . .

The chanting book says *heart*, but it is usually translated as *mind*. For me, it seems to chant a bit more nicely with *mind*.

This is the most common formulation of loving-kindness and the brahmavihāras {the four immeasurables} in the discourses. It comes up in many places. This is directional in the sense that it is conceived of in terms of the directions, the four quarters -

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below and around and everywhere; and to all as to myself...

The sense is of spreading loving-kindness in the different directions - north, south, east, west, above and below, all around - so that we are allowing the feeling of loving-kindness to expand.

To all as to myself establishes that feeling of loving-kindness within the heart, then allows it to pervade and extend.

That's the next part of the chant,

I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness - throughout the extension of the world and ultimately all worlds, not just how we conceive of our little planet, floating in space. Allow that sense of extension, that abundant, exalted, and immeasurable quality.

Without hostility and without ill will - this is the encouragement. Without any hostility, without allowing ill will, is the key to sending or shining forth loving-kindness, as in the introduction to the chant,

Now let us make the four boundless qualities shine forth...

We allow the heart and mind to be established in those sublime qualities. Allow it to shine forth, not obstructing it with aversion, ill will, worry, or fear, all the tendencies that we can add to it.

As we do this, we allow the heart to feel abundant, exalted, and immeasurable. We see that these qualities are truly beautiful. When we think of physical beauty in the world, it doesn't compare to the

beauty of a sublime quality like loving-kindness.

There is an image in the Suttas that the Buddha uses. He says, in comparison with the stars, there isn't anything that shines as brightly as the sun. In the same way, there isn't any quality that shines as brightly as loving-kindness.

Or at night, there isn't anything that shines as brightly as the full moon. In the same way, there isn't any quality that shines as brightly as loving-kindness.

The Buddha gives various, apt images for nourishing ourselves with those qualities of loving-kindness, pervading above, below, around, and everywhere, to all as to myself. There is the sense of establishing within ourselves this abundant, exalted, and immeasurable feeling.

It wasn't very long after we did the translation of these chants and started chanting them that someone said, "When we do these chants, we are supposed to feel abundant, exalted, and immeasurable, and all I feel is abandoned, exhausted, and miserable." (ha) But what is needed is to draw attention to this quality and to slowly build momentum, allowing it to take hold within the heart.

I think we also need to have a tremendous amount of kindness and well-wishing for the habits of our minds. *They are so deeply ingrained.* Do not be daunted by that. It's all doable; it's all workable.

It's drop by drop and little by little. We can establish these qualities and bring them to mind, sowing the seeds. Over time, it definitely grows.

The image that the Thai monks use is that when we are cultivating good qualities and that which is skillful, we have to be willing to be like a farmer sowing rice. He is just throwing seeds away, out into the fields. We are not quite sure whether it is going to grow. What's going to happen?, but it's the nature of things that when conditions are ripe and the sun, water, and soil are good, the seeds we , quote, "threw away" grow up into plants. They go through that cycle.

Similarly, with our practice of sowing the seeds of lovingkindness in the heart, plugging them into consciousness, we find they come back again. What arises is the sense of spaciousness, warmth, and kindness...

We can use this particular chant as a theme as we sit and bring those thoughts of loving-kindness into being.

To all as to myself...

bring one's attention to oneself...

Visualize oneself sitting here... Visualize oneself as happy, as if one were looking into a mirror at a time when one was very happy, feeling well, comfortable, and at ease...

Bring that into mind, into consciousness...

Here I am sitting here, happy, at ease, free from fear, ill will, and anxiety.

Just allow that to establish itself...

Then use phrases (such as):

May I be well and happy...

May I retain this feeling of happiness and well-being...

Allow it to settle and pervade the body...

Breathe it in so that it pervades from the top of the head down...

In just the same sense that the breath energizes the body, the feeling of loving-kindness energizes, brightens, relaxes, and softens the head... the top of the head... the neck... and the shoulders...

Breathe out, relaxing any tension, any feeling of conflict or difficulty...

Allow it to release...

Then, breathe in, allowing the warmth of loving-kindness to pervade the shoulders... the arms... relaxing and softening the whole chest... the back... and the abdomen...

Softening, but energizing and brightening, that is the nature of loving-kindness energy...

The lower back...the legs... the knees... and down to the soles of the feet...

use the energy of loving-kindness to establish it in oneself...

Again, we use those thoughts or reminders, whether it is planting the seed with just one word of *mettā*, or some other formulation that may strike a chord,

*Wishing, in gladness and safety,
May all beings be at their ease...*

May I be well and happy....

Whatever works. We are not trying to be technically correct. Rather, what is actually going to work and be helpful?

Feel your way through it. Allow your sense of loving-kindness to establish itself within the heart and within this {way of } being...

Then allow that feeling to expand, to pervade, and suffuse...

It's helpful not to be too ambitious in the beginning. If you are using the different quarters, (for example) pervade one quarter with the mind imbued with lovingkindness. You can just take it to five, ten, or twenty feet around you.

Pervade one quarter: for example, the north if you are facing in that direction. What's in front of you?... What's on your the right-hand side?... What's behind you?... On your left-hand side?...

Above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to myself...

Allow that to stabilize and feel comfortable...

Breathe into that space...

Allow the breath energy and the energy of loving-kindness to pervade that space, however you conceive of it in your mind - starting small, near and around you.

Allow that feeling not to be obstructed by discursive thought or the sense of "Am I doing this wrong? Am I doing it right?" Don't analyze or think about it. *This is a feeling exercise...*

Allow that sense of pervading space with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, whatever it is and however you have conceived of it, five or ten feet around you...

Abundant, exalted, immeasurable, and to all as to myself, without hostility and without ill will...

These are reminders to keep it bright and clear...

Allow it to stabilize...

Then use the phrase again,

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with lovingkindness...

Extend the feeling to whatever feels comfortable...

We are in a valley {or in an apartment}, so pervade the valley {or the street where you live} with loving-kindness, sitting here.

What's in front? All the people, all the beings, whether they are human beings, people in our group, people that are residents here; the animals that are here; the beings that are non-material, any earth devas, any other beings that are here. Extend loving-kindness, including all beings...

The, second quarter, or off to one's right: all those beings in that quarter... then those who are behind one... then those who are on one's left-hand side... Allow that feeling to extend, becoming more expansive and brightening...

There is the sense that all beings are worthy of our lovingkindness. All beings appreciate it. When we meet somebody who gives us a gesture of kindness, it's always appreciated. It's natural.

So we sit and generate, spread, suffuse, and pervade the space around the four quarters, above and below, around and everywhere...

Allow that to become brighter and brighter...

Do not allow yourself to be held back by feelings of limitation. We limit ourselves with our perception of being unable, unworthy, or not good enough. We realize that is not necessary. With lovingkindness, it really doesn't apply. It's such a universal quality; allow that to pervade...

I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving kindness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill will...

Recognize that even if it is just a niggling bit of ill will, a flash of negativity, it's a limitation of the heart that can be set aside and dropped. We can allow that feeling of loving-kindness to expand. We can continue working with it; we can experiment.

Allow the feeling of loving-kindness to extend further out, to more and more beings, not making any distinction, not dividing the world up into us and them, or me and others. Recognize that the heart of lovingkindness doesn't make those distinctions. That is its fundamental quality. That is what gives it its strength, when we're able not to get bogged down in those distinctions. As we make those distinctions - me and others, us and them - that limitation and feeling of constriction is immediately felt.

If you feel the suffusion of loving-kindness collapsing, just start back again.

Direct loving-kindness to yourself...

{Then,}

And to all as to myself...

Attend to those thoughts of loving-kindness directed to yourself. That is the seed, the core, the base that we work from.

There is a teacher in Thailand whose primary teaching tool and methodology is the cultivation of loving-kindness. Sometimes he will have people work towards the establishing of loving-kindness to themselves and won't encourage them to go beyond that, for a year, or two years, or three years.

Just keep working on that. That's the core. Don't get ambitious until you can lay that base and establish it solidly within yourself.

As an exercise, it is interesting to see what happens to the mind as we allow loving-kindness to expand and pervade. Again, if you feel there is some obstruction coming up, reestablish that there is no rush to go anywhere.

*The main object of the contemplation or meditation is to establish mettā, the object of loving-kindness within the heart, and that's what we allow to grow, nourishing and supporting that.

If we are able to extend that feeling outward and find that it is useful for our cultivation, all well and good, but again, pay attention to the experience, investigating, "Is it useful? Is it working? Is it helpful?"

I will abide, pervading this all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

Prayers for Children, for their Whole Lives, from a full heart

May all the children of this world grow up healthy and strong
May they have many good friends, and wonderful experiences

May they have kind teachers who treat them gently,
with respect and appreciation,
who encourage and delight in them,
and teach them well

May they always know they are loved by their parents,
siblings, and friends,
and have wonderful, loving relationships with them all,
for their whole lives

May their parents spend abundant time with them,
and always find ways to communicate their love,
and may these beautiful relationships flourish for their whole lives

May all the children of this world grow up in a safe environment,
free from harm, poverty, disease, and war,
and with a healthy mother earth, our home,
to support them, and for them to delight in:

with clean air, and water,
fertile fields, and abundant orchards,
with green valleys, and glorious mountains

May this earth always be a safe,
thriving and beautiful place for them,
and for future generations

May all our children be free from all outer and inner harm -
may they be free from all negative emotions,
such as fear, greed,
insecurity, anger, and sadness

May they learn early in their lives
how to take care of themselves well,
and may they grow up happily, with joyful minds,
supported, encouraged, and cherished

May they treat all others with kindness their whole lives,
and deeply appreciating all that they have,
may they be able to express their gratitude and love
for parents, teachers, friends and family,
other species, and this whole great world of ours

May they grow up, year by year,
with beautiful values,
as moral young people,
being respectful, gentle, and considerate to all,
with kindness and compassion,

May they live generously,
with joyful hearts always

May they not be too quick to grow up,
but, day by day, thoroughly enjoy their childhood,
their natural vitality, creativity,
wonder, and discovery

May they, in time, find subjects that engage them deeply,
and that they find deeper rewards in studying

May they then grow to be fine men and women of character,
considerate, loving, with good friends, and stable relationships

May they have ethical, fulfilling and balanced livelihoods,
and may they care for those in their immediate and extended families,
with joy and affection

May they be healthy and happy their whole lives
May they always be safe,
and may they always know they are loved

May they give ample time to their inner life
May they connect with one or more spiritual teachers
early on in their lives
May they develop their wisdom,
and know how to live well,
in peace and harmony with others

May they find freedom, the highest happiness within themselves,
and may they then joyfully share the great benefits

of their insight and ease
with their family, friends, and Tradition,
with all others in our human family,
and other species, and this earth,
for all generations

Loving Kindness Practice

Introduction

There is a light in the mind when we love selflessly, no doubt about it. Love is what lets us see beauty. Delighting in others is a kind of enlightenment, we could say, and that light is sustenance; it brings happiness and well being to the heart and mind.

If you are interested in this as a formal Buddhist practice, see *Living in Beauty - Buddhist Loving Kindness Practice*. I'm also very glad to be able to recommend the website called dharmaseed, which is a great treasure trove of audio talks on many aspects of Dharma practice.

What a time to be alive!

On the next pages you will find two versions of the Metta Sutta, the teaching on Loving Kindness taught by the Buddha, followed by two traditional methods for cultivating Metta, the second with some personal variations added, of course. They are essentially the same meditation.

The first method offered here I received in 1998, at a monastery in Thailand called Wat Asokaram, from a Western monk there named Phra Ingo. It uses a simple visualization.

The second method uses phrases to generate loving kindness, to guide the mind and keep it on track. These can be combined, of course, whatever works best.

Sometimes I feel like, 'enough with words!' At these times, just bringing an image to mind is enough to enjoy this meditation.

When we practice metta, we're doing something very simple. We're getting in touch with and awakening the heart's innate capacity for love. So there's no need to make it complicated, or to have any doubt that this is something we can all do.

Then, when it comes to using metta phrases for the cultivation of loving kindness, some teachers say that the fewer phrases the better, but this is something we can experiment with for ourselves, and see what works best for us.

Whatever method we use, I think Ajaan Pasanno explained the aim of metta practice very well when he said:

'In reality, the cultivation of loving kindness is not the actual repeating of the words – I mean, you use those words and phrases, but it's about the feeling, that feeling of loving kindness, the feeling of warmth, the feeling of acceptance, the feeling of openness, the feeling of the heart, including and concerned for the happiness of oneself or others, and that's about generating the feeling.'

'In terms of meditation, it's that – directing attention to the feeling, or emotion, that sense of kindness, well-wishing, and then finding ways to support that, and to shore that up, and allow that to become stable, and then to start to suffuse one's

own being, and then allowing that to spread out... and that requires mindfulness, and attention..."¹

However we approach it, this is such a worthwhile practice. Don't you agree?

The Buddha taught that, 'Having seen that all beings, like ourselves, have a desire for happiness, one methodically develops loving kindness for all beings.'

This Buddhist loving kindness practice naturally leads us to what are called The Four Brahma Viharas, or Divine Abidings, of Universal Love, Compassion, Delight in the good, and Peace and balance of mind born of the strength of dedication, also called Equanimity, so I've also included a few verses that express this.

Enjoy! May all beings benefit!

¹ From the recording of the 2008 Metta Retreat, available from Abhayagiri Monastery

The Metta Sutta

This is what should be done
By those who are skilled in goodness,
And who know 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 living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world,
Spreading upward to the skies,

And downward to the depths;
Outward 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 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 Discourse On Love {Thich Nhat Hanh translation}

He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones.

(And this is what he or she contemplates:)

May all beings be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy. May all living beings live in security and in Peace - beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility. Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate Boundless Love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below and across. Our love will know no obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying down, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

Free from wrong views, greed and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice Boundless Love will certainly transcend Birth and Death.

Metta Bhavana - Loving Kindness Meditation

To begin with, I sit upright, and relax. I close my eyes and allow myself to settle, becoming more calm, relaxed and harmonious.

I let go of thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

I observe how the breath is flowing in smoothly, and flowing out easily; free and harmonious.

Now I see a wonderful sun over my head, shining with warm, golden light.

This bright light of loving-kindness is streaming throughout my entire being. I can feel it; I feel well, and I am happy.

I. First person: Now I imagine one person who I love the most.

I see the warm, golden light of loving-kindness streaming to that person.

This wonderful bright light is flowing through this person. This beloved person is surrounded by this light of higher love and kindness.

I can see the smile on their face. This beloved person feels well, and is very happy.

II. Second person: Next, I imagine one person who I like and respect.

... (as above)

III. Third person: Next I can see one person toward whom I have a neutral relationship. ... (as above)

IV. Fourth person: The last person I think of is one whom I have had difficulties, or someone who I dislike. ... (as above)

Now I see all four persons together, with the sun above them, and I see them all receiving the same amount of this warm golden light of loving-kindness.

They all feel well; they are all smiling, and they are all shining, and happy.

Then I let them go in peace and happiness.

Now, once more I see the warm sun above my head, and once again I am filled with feelings of happiness and well-being.

(optional:)

If necessary, at this point, I practice equanimity meditation:

Now, I allow myself to feel calm, and peaceful.

To conclude, I take a deep breath, and exhale slowly. I come back to the here and the now, and slowly open my eyes.

May all beings be happy.

Metta - loving kindness practice

Traditionally, metta practice is first done toward oneself. Then one cultivates metta for one's parents, family, friends and benefactors, including teachers, to neutral ones, or those we don't know, seen and unseen by us, to those we've had some difficulty with, and then to all beings. The general principle is that we start with what is easy, and go from there, and that we go patiently, and gradually. We start wherever we are, and continue from there.

In general, fewer words are better, but we should have a clear idea of what the words we use mean to us. For different people or groups, different lines may seem more appropriate to reflect on. You're welcome to select from these, to use lines from other sources, or to write your own metta phrases. Sometimes one or two lines are enough. Here is a model. Use your intelligence and skill to adapt meditation, as you see fit. The feeling is the important thing, and the clear intention.

Phrases for metta loving kindness practice

Here are two versions of the traditional phrases that are used:

May they be happy

May they be healthy

May they be peaceful

May they live with ease

...

May they be safe
May they be healthy
May they be happy
May they know they are loved

Ani Tenzin Palmo offers this way of expressing metta that has a very nice rhythm to it:

*May they be well and happy,
peaceful, and at their ease...*

The following was offered by Ajaan Pasanno. Beginning with oneself, it can be adapted to the different categories of people.

May they be well, happy, peaceful, and prosperous.

May no harm come to them.

May no difficulties come to them.

May no problems come to them.

May they always meet with spiritual success.

May they also have the patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

May they have the qualities that will allow them to see those through.

And here are my own phrases (slowly)

May they be entirely well and at their ease.

May they have every happiness.

May they always be safe and protected

May they always know themselves to be greatly loved and cared for

May their heart be open to all the beauty and wonder of life.

May they have all they need and wish for

May they have every blessing

May they have all of the good things that this life has to offer,
every success and all joys.

May they have happiness

May they be healthy

May they have peace,

happiness and harmony in all their relationships

May they know freedom,

the highest happiness, and fulfillment.

As I mentioned earlier, you can also write your own metta phrases – and I encourage you to do so. Make the practice your own. These are just offered as an example. You are welcomed to use whatever works best for you.

Two more traditional methods

There are many ways to develop loving kindness. Two more ways that have come down to us are the spatial extension of metta, and developing metta for different categories of people. In each case, we are aiming to gradually become more inclusive in our love.

In the spatial extension of metta, we begin with where we are physically, and extend goodwill in front of us, to the left and right, in all directions, step by step, further and further, as much as we like and feel comfortable doing. We can begin where we are sitting and extend the light of metta to those in our own room, household, building, block, neighborhood, city, state, country, continent, hemisphere, world, universe, and beyond....

Another, simple application of the spatial extension of metta can be when we look from our window, we can extend well-wishing to the people we see pass by in the street. When we go out, we can offer metta to those on public transportation, or in line at the grocery store, or to a room of people, such as at work, at the bank, at the doctor's, or at a bar, genuinely wishing them all well.

In developing metta for different categories of people, we have a model in the suttas, and we are encouraged to be creative with it as well. We can develop kindness and well wishing for the young and old, for the rich and poor, for those near and far away; for the happy and the troubled in spirit; for those living in ease, comfort and safety, and those in difficult circumstances, and so on. We can develop this quality of care and support for people of different political views, and for those of different races, for

different species and stages of development, and those who live in other worlds. Truly, there is no limit to its application.

The Four Brahma Viharas

Metta practice is done step by step, through the different categories, understanding their purpose, and then all together, as taught, until one reaches the Four 'Brahma Viharas' – the 'Divine Abodes', also called the Four Limitless States. These are Universal Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity, which in this context is the strength and balance of mind that comes from love.

The Four Brahma Viharas can be expressed, and reflected on in a number of ways, including this four line prayer, adapted from the Tibetan Tradition:

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness...

May all beings be free of suffering and the causes of suffering...

*I rejoice in all that is beautiful and right in the world,
in all virtue and positive action,
and in all happiness and good fortune...*

and abide in impartial love...

You may like to pause a while between practices, to allow metta the time and space to unfold.

A metta meditation, written out, and my own versions of the traditional teachings, 'The Cultivation of Loving Kindness', and 'The Suffusion with the Divine Abidings' follow.

A Metta Meditation

I.

May **my loved ones** be completely safe

May they be healthy

May they live long

May they be happy, and at peace.

May they feel very well loved and cared for,

truly appreciated, valued and respected

May they have everything they need and wish for,

both materially and spiritually,

and May they realize perfect freedom,

the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

II.

May **all the precious children of this world** be completely safe

May they be healthy,

May they be happy, and at peace.

May they all be very well loved and cared for, each and every one of them

May they all have everything they need and wish for,

both materially and spiritually

May they enjoy an abundance of good things in this life,

and May they all realize perfect freedom,

the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

III.

May **all our revered, venerable elders** be completely safe

May they be healthy

May they live long

May they be happy, and at peace.

May each one of them feel loved and deeply cherished

May they each have everything they need and wish for,

and May each and every one of them realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

IV.

{For teachers}

May **all my supremely kind teachers** enjoy the best of health,

May they live long

May they have an abundance of resources,

and May all their noble wishes be fulfilled.

{Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Ringu Tulku, Lama Lodro Rinpoche, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche, Matthieu Ricard, Sakya Trizin, Jetsunma Chimay Luding, Lama Kunga, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Garchen Rinpoche, Bhante Gunaratana, Bhikkhu Bodhi, Payutto Bhikkhu, Piya Tan, Khenpo Sodargye, Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Amaro, Rav Dovber Pinson...}

V.

May I be completely safe,
 May I be healthy
 May I live long
 May I be happy, and at peace.

May I feel very well loved and cared for,
 May I have everything I need and wish for to accomplish my aims,
 and May I realize perfect freedom,
 the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment
 May my life be most fruitful for living beings!

VI.

May **all my dear friends** be completely safe
 May they be healthy
 May they live long
 May they be happy, and at peace.

May they all feel very well loved and cared for each and every day
 May they have everything they need and wish for,
 and May each one of them realize perfect freedom,
 the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

VII.

May **all the precious animals** in this world be very well cared for

May they all be safe from all harm, each and every one of them
 May all their living environments be protected,
 and may they all know they are loved

VIII.

May all **neutral ones**,
 those who are known, and those who are unknown by me,
 always be completely safe
 May they be healthy
 May they live long
 May they be happy, and at peace.

May they all feel very well loved and cared for,
 truly appreciated, valued and respected
 May they have everything they need and wish for,
 and May they all realize perfect freedom,
 the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

IX.

May all **honored guests** -

politicians, the oppressed and the oppressors, those who suffer, and
 those who cause suffering; those who are doing well;

those I have had difficulty with; those I have harmed, and those
 who have harmed me, or those close to me; those I have

disrespected, rejected, or neglected, and those I have felt
disrespected, rejected, or neglected me; those I have disappointed,
and those who have disappointed me;

those towards whom I feel attachment, aversion, indifference, or
resentment; strangers, my relatives, and friends; friends in the past,
employers and co-workers, past and present; my neighbors, my
teachers, my mother and sister, and myself; the one who is before
me now, and the one I will meet tomorrow

May all my honored guests be completely safe

May they be healthy

May they live long

May they be happy, and at peace.

May they all know they are very well loved and cared for,
truly appreciated, valued, and respected

May they all have everything they need and wish for

May they enjoy an abundance of good things,
and May each and every one of them realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

X.

and **all beings...**

young and old,

rich and poor,

male and female,
realized and ordinary people,
near and far away,
already born and to be born...
animals,
humans,
spirits,
ordained and laypeople...

family and friends,
myself, my teachers,
neutral ones, known and unknown by me,
and honored guests -

May *all beings* be completely safe,
May all beings be healthy
May they live long
May all beings be happy, and at peace.

May all beings feel very well loved and cared for
May they all have everything they need and wish for,
and May all beings realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

The Cultivation of Loving Kindness

Having seen that, like oneself,
all beings seek for happiness,
one patiently then cultivates love for all beings

May all the precious children of this world
be entirely well and at their ease...
May they be safe...
May they be healthy, happy, and at peace...

May I be safe...
May I be healthy, happy, and at peace...
May I be free from suffering...

May my family, friends,
neutral ones, and all honored guests always be safe
May they have every happiness
May they be free from all suffering
May they be completely free from all danger, and all difficulty

Within the boundaries of this town,
may all beings have happiness
Likewise those in other places,
in other cities, and countries, in all places,
May they all be safe...
May they all have happiness, health and peace

All creatures and all breathing things,
all persons and all entities...
men, women and children,
the Noble Ones, the unawake,
Devas, and unhappy ones
who in the ten directions dwell -

*May all beings be happy and at peace,
and may their hearts be filled with joy!*

Suffusion with the Divine Abidings

{I. Loving Kindness}

I will abide
pervading the world
with loving-kindness,
all around and everywhere,
and to all as to myself

I will abide
pervading this all encompassing world
with loving-kindness,
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

with unconditional love,
warmth, and gentleness,
gratitude,
appreciation and respect,
supreme well-wishing,
and encouragement for all!

May all beings be happy,
May they all be healthy,
May they all dwell in safety, comfort and peace,
May they all know that they are loved

I will abide
pervading the world
with loving-kindness -

May all beings be entirely well
and at their ease! -

From the insects on the ground, and under the ground,
to the birds in the trees, and in the sky,
the fish in the waters,
animals,
and people everywhere,

young and old,
rich and poor,
male and female,
realized and ordinary people,
near and far away,
already born and yet to be born –

May they all be entirely well and at their ease!

May they all be safe,
healthy,
happy, and fulfilled
May they all always know they are loved and cared for

May they have all that they need and wish for in their lives

May they all surely enjoy an abundance of good things!

All around and everywhere,
and to all as to myself –

May all have supreme happiness,
health, and peace!

I will abide
pervading this all encompassing world
with loving-kindness,
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

with unconditional good-will,
warmth, and gentleness,
gratitude,
appreciation and respect,
supreme well-wishing,
and encouragement for all!

{II. Compassion}

I will abide
pervading the world
with compassion,
all around and everywhere,
and to all as to myself

I will abide
pervading this all encompassing world
with compassion,
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

with a heart of complete solidarity with all those who suffer in any way,
with engagement with them
and with support and tender care

May I always be there for them

young and old,
rich and poor,
male and female,
realized and ordinary people,
near and far away,
already born and yet to be born –
May they all be free from all their suffering,
and the causes of suffering
May they all be healed
May they all be completely safe and protected

I will abide with compassion,
courage, joy,
and real strength...

{III. Joy}

I will abide
pervading the world
with a heart that rejoices in the good,
everywhere it is found,

in the arts,
in children,
in the natural world,
in myself and in others,
in teachers, and in healers,
in kind and caring people,
in cherished elders, ancestors,
family and friends

I celebrate all that is beautiful and right in this world,
I rejoice in all kindness, virtue, and positive action,
and in all success, happiness, and good fortune...

I will abide
pervading this all encompassing world
with joy and celebration
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable

{IV. The Immutable Strength of Impartial Love, also known as its
Equanimity}

And I will abide
pervading the world
with the immutable strength of impartial love
stable, and dedicated
all around and everywhere,
and to all as to myself

With all people
and in every circumstance,
steadfast, loyal,
courageous, and reliable,
with the power of love's own committed equanimity,
its unchanging nature,
patience, peace and strength

I will abide
pervading the all encompassing world
with this stable, impartial love,
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

at all times with a heart that is steady, joyful,
even, and serene

Suffusion with the Divine Abidings

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with compassion; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with gladness. likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with gladness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

Sublime Abiding Places for the Heart

Adapted from a workshop given by Ajahn Pasanno at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery with the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies, May 1999

The *Brahmaviharas* are the qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. What is often not sufficiently emphasized is that the *brahmaviharas* are fundamental to the Buddha's teaching and practice. I shall begin with the chant called *The Suffusion of the Divine Abidings*. I find this chant very beautiful. It is the most frequent form in which the *brahmaviharas* are mentioned in the discourses of the Buddha.

Here is the *Divine Abidings* chant:

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

The chant continues similarly with the other three qualities:

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with compassion; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with gladness. likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with gladness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

Last February I was asked to be the spiritual advisor to a Thai man who was to be executed at San Quentin, and I spent the last few days until his death with him. He touched many people and had many visitors, but in the capacity of spiritual advisor, I was the only person allowed to be with him in the last six hours of his life.

So some of his friends asked me what they should be doing in those final hours to help Jay as well as themselves. I asked them to chant this *Divine Abidings* chant. That's what they did during the final hours of Jay's life, sending forth these thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, gladness, and equanimity. They are powerful emotions to evoke at a time when one could be stuck in anger, regret, and self-pity. It is very empowering to be able to bring forth these qualities of the heart, to turn the mind away from negativity towards that which is wholesome and positive.

The Buddha's Discourses on the *Brahmaviharas*

The word *brahmavihara* is translated in many different ways—divine abidings, divine abodes, sublime attitudes. “*Brahma*” means great, holy, supreme, sublime, exalted, and divine. “*Vihara*” is a place, an abode, and also an attitude of mind. When put together, “*brahmavihara*” means the psychological abiding place of the spiritually developed, of those who are exemplary.

In the Commentaries, the religious life, the holy life, is called *brahmacariya*. One of the explanations for this term is that the holy life is a life dedicated to developing the *brahmaviharas*.

These qualities of the mind and heart are qualities that the Buddha himself cultivated and abided in. In a discourse (A 1.182), the Buddha addresses a brahmin thus:

Herein brahmin, I am dependent on a certain village. Setting mindfulness in front of me, I abide suffusing one quarter of the world with a heart possessed of loving-kindness, likewise the second....

He goes through the phrases we just chanted,

...the whole world I suffuse with a heart grown great with loving-kindness, free of enmity, and untroubled. Likewise with a heart possessed with compassion, possessed with sympathy and gladness, possessed with equanimity. If I walk up and down, my walking is sublime; my standing, my sitting is sublime. This is what I mean when I say it is a sublime abiding place.

So even the Buddha, a completely enlightened being, still directed his attention to these four *brahmaviharas*.

There is a discourse (M 55) given to Jivaka, the Buddha's physician, where the Buddha addresses the duty of a monk living in dependence on a lay community:

Herein Jivaka, a religious seeker depending on alms lives in a certain village or town. He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second," and so forth. Namely, it is a duty of such a bhikkhu to live cultivating the brahmaviharas towards the lay community.

He continues,

That bhikkhu goes into that village for alms, and what do you think? Would such a monk cultivate these for the sake of his own affliction, for the sake of another's affliction, or for both?

Jivaka answers,

No, venerable sir.

Someone cultivating these qualities of the brahmaviharas becomes sensitive to the suffering they create for themselves and for others. They are qualities that develop the heart. By cultivating and abiding in them, one leans towards that which would bring happiness to others and to oneself. This is a fundamental truth. As your heart becomes sensitive and open, you realize that suffering is painful and do not want to abide in it.

In another discourse (A 5.294), the Buddha again points to the development of the heart and to the fact that these wholesome qualities create a fullness of the heart. He says,

Monks, those noble disciples, thus freed from covetousness, freed from malevolence, not bewildered, but self-possessed and concentrated, with hearts possessed of amity [also translated as loving-kindness, friendliness, and so on] abide radiating one quarter and then the second, the third and the fourth with loving-kindness, pervading the whole world with a heart immeasurable, grown great, and boundless, free from enmity and untroubled.

After going through the rest of the *brahmaviharas*, the Buddha says that they come to know that

Formerly this heart of mine was confined, it was not made to grow, but now my heart is boundless, well made to grow. Moreover my heart was limited to a certain range, but now it is not confined, it stays not in that range.

“Well made to grow” is translated from the Pali word with the same root as *bhavana*, meaning meditation or mental development. It means therefore that these qualities enable the development of the mind.

Also as a result of this practice, feelings and thoughts that formerly were limited and constricted become boundless. The results permeate all aspects of one’s life. Similarly, when one does something in a small-minded way, the results are limited. That’s the way it works.

The Buddha ends the discourse thus:

The heart's release by loving-kindness is conducive to non-returning for the monk with insight but who has not yet penetrated to the truth.

The stages of enlightenment are stream-entry, once-returner, non-returner, and *arahant*². Here the Buddha says that even for those who are still practicing and training, the cultivation of the *brahmaviharas* is conducive to attaining higher levels of the Path.

The *Brahmaviharas*: Their Nature and Characteristics

As one continues to practice and study Buddhism, it is very useful to familiarize oneself with some of the Pali terms. For example, when working with computers, you have to learn some technical terms to deal with certain concepts or operations, or when studying music, you learn the related technical terms. With Buddhism, there is a range of technical terms in Pali for the qualities of the heart that are helpful to know.

Metta, for instance, is often translated in English as “loving-kindness”. Although two words are used, they still don’t quite get it right, so other words are used, such as amity or friendliness, in an effort to convey its meaning. *Metta* is characterized as being connected to happiness or welfare. Its function is to generate welfare or well being. It is manifested as the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing the lovableness of beings, or the good qualities and that which is pleasing in others.

Metta succeeds when it causes ill will to subside and fails when it brings about affection. Using the word *metta* is more useful as it does not have the connotations of affection and attachment that the word loving-kindness has. *Metta* is a selfless wishing of happiness and well being for others.

The *brahmaviharas* have so-called near and far enemies—obstructions to their correct development. The near enemy of *metta* is greed or attachment, since happiness and well being could become coveted. That leads to pain and sorrow and could even turn into a defilement if not correctly understood.

When we experience something pleasing, we tend to want it, but to really practice *metta* is to wish for the well being of others and not to try to possess them. The same goes for cultivating *metta* towards oneself, to try not to cling to feelings of joy and well being generated by the practice of meditation. So the near enemy to *metta* is when the heart moves too close to something and then it shifts from being loving-kindness to greed and grasping.

The far enemy of *metta* is anger. Bearing anger, ill will, or aversion is, of course, inimical to loving-kindness, but it is far enough away to recognize such feelings. Being more insidious, the near enemies are more dangerous. When you are angry, you try to deal with it or try to remove it, but when you are delighting in something, your mind tends not to be clear enough to see that you have come too close to the object. In terms of cultivating loving-kindness, you have to know and be aware of these aspects that are related to and define the quality of *metta*, and to use them as boundaries to work within.

Karuna is the quality of compassion. It is characterized by the wish to help alleviate suffering in others. Its function resides in the inability to tolerate suffering, so it motivates the desire to help when others suffer. Compassion does not allow complacency in the face of suffering. One is moved into action. Compassion manifests as non-cruelty, and its proximate cause is seeing the pain and helplessness in those disadvantaged or overtaken by some misfortune. Then the heart responds with the wish to help.

The far enemy is cruelty, and compassion succeeds when it makes such feelings subside. The word cruelty sounds very strong, but the wish to harm, to hurt, to be cruel can come out in many ways. One could be quite cruel in one's speech without in fact beating up someone. Making a cutting comment or put-down is being cruel. When there is compassion, the tendency to lash out subsides.

Compassion fails when it causes sorrow. When faced with suffering, if one is overwhelmed by grief or heaviness of heart, then that is not being compassionate. The quality of compassion is then tainted and not functioning properly. When the heart is drawn towards boundlessness, it is not dragged down by suffering. Instead, it is uplifted. It is important to recognize that. The heart could be weighed down by sorrow and grief in response to a tragic event or situation, and one could think that that is being compassionate, but that is not compassion, even though the etymology of the word (in English) is "to suffer with". That is not the way the Buddha defined compassion.

If one's mind is affected by grief, then one is not able to respond in a clear and open-hearted manner. It is important to recognize that. This is why

sorrow and grief are characterized as the near enemy of compassion. Both responses can spring from seeing suffering in others, but grief has a depressive effect, while compassion has a positive and uplifting quality.

Mudita is translated as gladness in the *Divine Abidings* chant, but the term commonly used is sympathetic joy. *Mudita* is characterized as a gladdening at others' success, a delighting in the success, the goodness, and the well being of others. Its function is being unenvious, not being jealous of the good fortune of others.

Most of us, I think, find loving-kindness and compassion beneficial and good to practice. When it comes to sympathetic joy, we do not think too much about it and tend to dismiss it as either abstruse or unreal. When you start watching your mind however, you see the pettiness over and over again. The unwillingness to rejoice when someone does something good is seen in the snappy remark or the clever little synopsis of a person or situation, which are a part of daily life in our interrelations with people but which tend to be based in negativity or cynicism. Such responses do not come from a place of gladness but very much from a sense of self. One attempts to lift oneself up by putting down someone else.

By cultivating *mudita*, the sense of self is undermined. There is a letting go of the attachment or fixation to self. This enables us to delight in the wellbeing and good fortune of those around us. A great deal of joy is generated when one is able to tap into this quality. *Mudita* is manifested as non-aversion, and its proximate cause is seeing the success of others. It succeeds when it causes a sense of coolness of the heart, an acceptance. It

fails when it causes merriment, a frivolous delighting in things that agitate the mind, which is not a pure-hearted delight.

Equanimity in Pali is called *upekkha*. It is characterized as that quality which brings about a sense of neutrality or an evenness of heart towards all beings. Its function is in maintaining a steadiness of mind and not allowing differences - whether physical, intellectual, spiritual, or whatever – to detract or influence our perception of those with whom we come in contact. Its proximate cause is understanding the nature of karma—recognition that our actions bear results which affect us and, in effect, that we create our own future world or experiences.

Another factor to recognize regarding karma is that we are not able to take on the results of other's actions and deeds. Equanimity is therefore understanding how the basic laws of nature work, the recognition that our lives are governed by the way we conduct our lives. Where the suffering of others is concerned, we recognize that by making ourselves suffer, we do not decrease or take away the suffering of others.

We can work to alleviate another's suffering or delight in another's good fortune, but there is a point where one has to exercise equanimity, being aware of one's own wellbeing. To try to take on someone else's life and carry it around is not equanimity. Equanimity is not taking on more than what is actually necessary or beneficial.

Equanimity succeeds when it is aware of the movement of the mind- the wanting and not wanting, approval and disapproval- and one is able to establish an evenness of mind, a clarity that sees things for what they are.

Equanimity fails when it causes indifference, not caring. Indifference could arise due to a lack of attention or clarity, or to being unwilling to deal with a situation because too much effort is required. Indifference is the near enemy of equanimity.

True equanimity does not hinder compassion or action, but rather enhances it by developing the discernment that knows how and when to engage. The far enemy is aversion and greed: the liking and disliking, approving and disapproving that occurs within our minds.

Equanimity is the quality not shaken by the movement of the worldly dhammas or the ways of the world.

A Foundation for One's Practice

Cultivating the *brahmaviharas* means bringing these qualities, of *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upekkha* into consciousness. It is like exercising muscles that have not been used. As you develop these qualities, you have to consider whether your mind is getting clearer or more confused. The correct practice of the *brahmaviharas* always leads to increased clarity and joy. That is the nature of these qualities of mind.

The whole point of the Buddha's teachings is to cultivate mental qualities in order to gain happiness of mind. And the *brahmaviharas*- a prime source for creating happiness- can thus lay the foundation for the entire practice.

Most of the terms the Buddha uses regarding the developing of practice are those that describe states of well being. We see this in a sequence he sets out to illustrate the development of the mind.

Anavajjasukha is the state of mind resulting from abiding by the moral precepts- the happiness of blamelessness or harmlessness, the happiness of non-remorse.

Abhyasekhasukha is the happiness that ensues from training in sense restraint- the composure one finds when one is not bent on gratification or excitement of the senses.

Pamojja means the delight that results from being free of the five hindrances that hinder meditation, sensual desire, ill will, sleepiness or drowsiness, restlessness, and skeptical doubt. *Pamojja* also refers to the happiness that meditative states of tranquility can bring—an unalloyed kind of happiness. It also includes the delight that arises from skilful reflection on the true nature of things. *Pamojja* leads to *piti*, joy. *Piti* leads to *passadhi*, the state of tranquility.

When there is tranquility, *sukha*, happiness arises, and because of *sukha*, *samadhi* arises. *Samadhi* is the firm meditative state of mind. The Buddha says in many discourses that the happy mind is easily concentrated.

We see that happiness brings about *samadhi*, whereas usually we approach it the other way round. We often think, “If only I could get my meditation together, then I would be happy,” whereas it should be: “How do I gain

true happiness so that my heart could be at ease?" It is a very important truth that the Buddha points to in this sequence of shades of happiness culminating in *samadhi*.

The result of *samadhi* is summed up in the recurring phrase "seeing things as they truly are." This is a description of a mental state where the mind steps back from the sense of self. This state prepares the mind to be truly still and unshakeable. When that happens, the mind moves into *nibbida*. Sometimes this word is translated as boredom or disgust or revulsion, but that does not really get it. It means a cooling of the heart and turning away from things, leading to *vimutti*, freedom.

Happiness plays a great role in the development of the whole sequence, and the *brahmaviharas*, which generate happiness, can serve as a powerful foundation for one's practice.

Similarly, the Four Noble Truths, while often characterized as a means to investigate suffering, also result in the cultivation of happiness. The qualities of happiness and joy are necessary for mental development. This is seen in many aspects of the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha very explicitly uses the Four Noble Truths as a tool. Over and over again he says,

I teach only two things, suffering and the cessation of suffering.

Some could say this is a miserable teaching, dwelling on suffering, but when you investigate the teaching, you see why the Buddha sets it out like that. Suffering is a very tangible quality. We can investigate it. It is

something that we know and do not want. The whole range of sentient existence is subject to suffering, and the wish to escape from it is universal.

Many positive qualities are brought into being and are involved when one is engaged in cultivating the boundless qualities of the *brahmaviharas*. They lead to a sense of ease, security, and fearlessness. The Pali word for fearlessness is *abhaya*. In Thai, it also has the connotation of forgiveness.

Developing the *brahmaviharas* engenders forgiveness, particularly in the practice of loving-kindness and compassion. To open one's heart to these qualities, one needs to be forgiving. The holding of past grievances- the constant refrain of "he did this; she did that; I did this; I can't forgive myself"- is swept away. There is no room in the divine abodes for holding grudges and enmity towards oneself or others.

Generosity, or *dana*, is another natural result of the desire to promote happiness and alleviate suffering. Three kinds of *dana* are mentioned: the giving of material things such as food or money, the giving of Dhamma, and the giving of forgiveness or fearlessness. Often we do not pay much attention to the little things, such as our perceptions of ourselves and others. We have to learn to really forgive so as to open our hearts to these boundless qualities.

For instance, during that experience I had with Jay Siripongs, I asked him if there was still anybody he had not forgiven. This was during the last six hours leading up to the execution. We had spent the previous four and one-half hours or so talking, chanting, meditating, laughing, and generally having a buoyant time. Jay paused for a while and quietly said, "I don't

think I've quite forgiven myself." That's not just him. All of us are in that position. So it is very important to bring up into consciousness areas where we have not forgiven ourselves and where we have thus created limitations and constraints for ourselves.

Practicing the *Brahmaviharas*

As we have seen, the *brahmaviharas* are a means of uplifting the mind, for brightening and bringing it joy. However, if the practice causes confusion, then something is wrong in the practice. You have to review it and look for the reason. This is where investigation comes in.

The "near enemies" and "far enemies" are terms to aid you when reviewing your practice. They are guidelines to reflect back on the mind. The Buddha instructs us to examine our minds to see the real nature of the qualities and feelings. For instance, is it loving-kindness or affection? This questioning is fundamental in the Buddha's teaching. It can be so skillful and useful to keep using the reflective capacity of the mind to penetrate and understand how the mind works. He gives us the basis for investigation- the Four Noble Truths are one skillful investigative tool.

Whichever practice one is cultivating, developing mindfulness, the *brahmaviharas*, or any other meditation, ask, "Is there suffering or freedom from suffering that results from my practice? How does it work for me?" That is always the bottom line in the Buddha's teaching. "Am I happier, or am I experiencing suffering? Is my mind clearer or more confused? Is it peaceful or agitated?" These are the guidelines.

All of these qualities, the *brahmaviharas*, *dana*, and so forth, are thus important tools of investigation in reflecting and understanding what remains to be done in the task of purifying the mind. This teaching of the *brahmaviharas* was something the Buddha taught everyone, regardless of societal divisions. In the Buddha's time, caste was an important factor in Indian society.

Pointing out the universality of these qualities to a brahmin who had come to argue with him, the Buddha asks,

What do you think, brahmin? Is only a brahmin capable of developing loving-kindness without hostility and ill will? Can a merchant or worker not be able to do so?

No, Master Gotama, a merchant, nobleman, brahmin, or worker is capable of developing loving-kindness, without hostility and without ill will.

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This practice is accessible to anyone, regardless of gender, age, position in society, or status as ordained or not.

The success of this practice depends on how you direct your mind, how you experience and engage with the world, on your ability to assess the benefit or the lack of benefit of this practice and then make use of it for yourself. Don't wait for these qualities to develop on their own. You have to investigate your practice, recognize the results that you experience, and then take whatever remedial measures are necessary. This practice

empowers us to change and develop ourselves. I would encourage you all to take these *brahmaviharas* and experiment with, learn from, and delight in them.

The Loving Heart Seeks to Sustain All

In its most universal dimension, love entails that we cherish others for their own sakes, without qualifications or preconditions. This kind of love involves an unwavering commitment to protect others from everything that endangers their well-being. It wants all people everywhere - regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion - to live lives that are safe, fulfilling, and profoundly meaningful. The heart filled with love seeks to uplift all, to sustain all, and to free every person from suffering.

- A Message from Buddhist Global Relief

The Precepts of Love

There is so much contained in love at it's best that I thought it would be worthwhile to write a few words about it this morning. I highlight love 'at its best' to distinguish it from the fleeting, partial, or limited kinds of affection or attachment we all know so well. The love I would like to talk about is the kind we look to when we want to remember who we truly are and who we can become.

We're living in a time when there is so much disconnect, hostility, fear and aggression. With our defenses raised, we are often but one step removed from striking out, in word or action.

I was talking with a friend and coworker the other day about how far this is from our natural state. We don't talk about love often enough, and so I told him what I feel needs to be said, that rather than training in and fostering anger, we should have zero aggression in us. Zero, and less than zero. I told him, this is more in line with our true nature which is naturally gentle. Our real nature is love, but how could we ever know this if we are just endlessly reactive, hitting back or preparing to do so?

We have to start somewhere, and I suggested to him that it is right here, simply, that: *Love begins with non-harming*. This is how we can start to know our real selves.

We have it in us also to create peace through our bodily actions, words, and thoughts, and the root of these is love. If we begin with non-harming, which is essentially knowing how we would want to be treated, and then

acting with a even a modicum of wisdom, we naturally become gentle, respectful, and conscientious.

Once we face in that direction, then no matter how wrong or careless or hurtful we might have once been, right away we experience a change of heart and mind. From our heart, our love goes out, and it extends peace everywhere.

To adopt an attitude of non-harming naturally creates the feeling of safety and comfort. It removes fear, and it is soothing.

Love begins there, and yet it goes beyond such mere restraint. *In the very character of love that we all carry with us at all times there is the willingness to remove suffering, now and in the future.*

My friend asked me, oh, can we really do that? and I immediately said, Yes! We do it all the time - like when someone puts their hand on a friend's shoulder when they need it, or when someone just shows up, or says a kind word just at the right time.

It's easier to see how we remove one another's suffering if we think of it happening by degrees instead of all at once. We do quite often care for and comfort each other, and this is one of the beautiful, precious qualities found in our inherent capacity for love.

If we go further with this, we see there is the movement to relieve suffering in the moment, and there is also what we do for one another to help prevent future suffering.

In Buddhism we have this prayer,

*May all beings be free of suffering,
and the causes of suffering*

and in this we see the wish to remove the hurt and needs of the moment, and then also to prevent future discomfort or unhappiness. Love contains all of this motivation and the spontaneous movement to see its aims fulfilled.

Starting with non harming and going on to removing suffering, we can tell that there is even more to love than this. *Love naturally brings joy to others, now and in the future.*

The prayer of loving kindness says

*May all beings have happiness
and the causes of happiness*

The first part of this expresses the natural quality inherent in love of bringing light, joy, inspiration, freshness and peace, everywhere it goes, and the second line refers to looking ahead with the union of love and far-seeing wisdom.

We plant trees that will flower and bear fruit in future times, long after we are gone, and we do this out of love and wisdom, looking ahead.

We seek a remedy, and give food today, and we also build a home for our family, for their future safety, comfort and happiness.

We need to look into causes, both of misery and health and happiness. Then we can sow the causes for the life we most naturally want for ourselves and our loved ones. We can see far into the future and then act out of love.

Love naturally expands. It wakes us up, and it reaches out in this way, more and more. Such is its nature.

This one quality we call love at its best has such richness to it. Don't you agree? We can certainly speak of it as inherently not wishing ourselves or others any harm at all, and we can then mention its function of removing suffering and bringing happiness to ourselves and others more and more, now, and with wisdom, into the future, but there is one more more facet that deserves to be mentioned when speaking of the naturally occurring qualities of love. It should be said here that *when someone is causing suffering, love would have us respond to them with even greater love and compassion and wisdom.*

This is the basis of the Lojong, or the Thought Training teachings in Tibetan Buddhism.

Thich Nhat Hanh said, When someone is suffering enough, his or her suffering will spill over, and they will cause others also to suffer.

Responding to them with *even more kindness and compassion and skill* is the only thing that will eventually remedy the situation, but how far that is

from how most people, groups and governments respond to violence, aggression, and acts of provocation. The usual response is one of retaliation, but its clear that this only furthers the cycle of violence. We lock people up, declare war, reject ourselves and others and start battles that go on for generations without end.

We use a cliché like 'their act was a cry for help' to describe some errant, hurtful action, but it is more than this - more precisely, it is a call for deeper attention, for more energy, wisdom and love. If we don't heed these messages, then we turn away from giving help where it is most needed.

A doctor runs *towards* the sounds of suffering, not away; he or she does not neglect the least sign that something is wrong. If we are to heal self, our relationships, family, community, and especially those who are lost and causing harm to themselves and others, we do so need this precept. It is the highest expression of love, at its most caring and far seeing.

These are the precepts of love, ever available for those who would pick up on them and bring greater light, peace, health, harmony and joy to our lives together, and to this whole ten direction world.

For further reading and reflection

[Readings on Metta](#)

[Readings on the Mahayana](#)

[Metta and Readings on the Mahayana - Complete](#)