

Loving-Kindness Meditation: Guidelines

Metta Bhavana: The Cultivation of Universal Loving-Kindness

May all beings be happy and peaceful
(free from suffering and distress).

May all beings be safe and secure
(free from fear and harm).

May all beings be healthy and prosperous
(free from pain, illness, and lack).

May all beings live joyfully and with ease
(free from struggle and conflict).

This excellent meditation derives from the Discourse on Loving-Kindness (Metta Sutta) given by the Buddha 2600 years ago. The loving-kindness he spoke of then is still the deepest need of the world today. The Pali word *Metta* (Maitri in Sanskrit) means universal loving-kindness, friendliness, and goodwill free from expectation and possessiveness.

However, this is not the ordinary, sensual, emotional, or sentimental kind of love that most people commonly express. Metta has a far greater significance than this. Metta is an all-embracing love—a sincere desire for the happiness and well-being of others.

Metta is without any selectivity or exclusion. If we select a few people we love and exclude someone we do not like, this is a lack of understanding of Metta. With the sublime heart of love, we express care and concern for all beings through benevolent thoughts, feelings, and words, as well as through selfless acts of kindness and generosity.

The benefits of practicing this form of meditation are immense. We develop the valuable skill of concentration. We dissolve the barriers in our hearts that create separation between ourselves and others. We transform fear and negativity into courage and kindness, and we learn to care for and love all beings without exception.

The simple yet powerful radiance of our loving-kindness brings protection from harmful influences and offers blessings and beneficence to all it touches. Even if we do not recognize the immediate effects of our practice, nevertheless, we should always persevere and never doubt or underestimate the power of loving-kindness!

The Buddha does not offer us his teachings merely to be studied and recited. He asks us to follow and practice the instructions so they become a reality in our awareness, in our actions, and in our ways of life. It is action, not speculation; it is practice, not theory that really matters.

Therefore, we should not be satisfied with the mere recitation of the Metta Sutta. We must strive to know and feel its meaning. We must allow the teaching to suffuse our entire being, and have the heartfelt intention to bring it into full practice in our daily lives. Cultivating the noble principles offered here in the Metta Sutta is the very essence of Buddhist Dharma.

The Practice of Loving-Kindness

Spiritual development and ultimate awakening are based upon the firm foundation of loving-kindness for all beings. To help establish this essential foundation, practice this meditation daily for at least 15 to 20 minutes, or longer. For ease of recollection, only the first line of each phrase of this meditation is used. It is not necessary to repeat the words in parentheses. If you wish, you may also create your own words for this practice.

(1) Begin by directing *loving-kindness to yourself*. Love for self comes first. This is not a selfish love, but a pure love for oneself that has the power to dissolve anger, hatred, and selfish tendencies. By overcoming any sense of unworthiness and cultivating genuine love for yourself, you are able to share this love with others. Allow the heartfelt radiance of loving-kindness to fill your being as you recite each phrase of this meditation slowly and with deep feeling: "May I be happy and peaceful..." and so forth.

(2) Visualize a *person for whom you feel love, respect, and gratitude*. Radiate heartfelt loving-kindness to this person, reciting each phrase of the meditation slowly and with deep feeling: "May you be happy and peaceful..." and so forth.

(3) Visualize a *person toward whom you feel neutral or indifferent*. This may be a stranger or an acquaintance, somebody you have no particular feelings for or against. Extending loving-kindness to those toward whom we feel indifferent develops the ability of the heart to love all beings without exception. Radiate heartfelt loving-kindness to this person, reciting each phrase of the meditation slowly: "May you be happy and peaceful..." and so forth.

(4) This may be the most difficult part of the practice. Visualize a *person with whom you experience tension, fear, hurt, conflict, resentment, anger, or aversion*. Radiate heartfelt loving-kindness to this person as well: "May you be happy and peaceful..." and so forth.

(5) Finally, radiate heartfelt *loving-kindness to all living beings throughout all realms of existence*: "May all beings be happy and peaceful..." and so forth. The Buddha suggests we remain in this mindful state of loving-kindness at all times and "cherish all living beings with a boundless heart, radiating kindness over the entire world".

Source: SourcePoint Global Outreach, *The Heart of Dharma Collection* (Mount Shasta, CA: Naljor Prison Dharma Service, n.d.), 23-24.
<http://sourcepointglobaloutreach.org/what-we-offer/>