

Loving-Kindness Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation (also called *metta* meditation) is a practice that aims to cultivate unconditional love toward all beings. In the practice, one starts with oneself and then gradually expands love and kindness out toward all sentient beings. Specific words and phrases may be recited to help generate a more boundless love. It is a love (including a feeling of warmth and kindness) that is not restricted to certain individuals, religions, classes, or space.

On Extending Goodwill

Loving-kindness meditation (*metta* meditation) – or extending goodwill to others – develops our ability to radiate an unconditional love to all living beings. It should not be determined by our likes and dislikes – or our judgements about people, or our perceived rights and wrongs of a relationship.

Rather, we understand that all living beings seek the same thing – freedom from suffering. In the way we desire happiness for ourselves, we then extend that same wish to all other sentient beings.

One way to practice loving-kindness meditation is to first show goodwill to ourselves, and then to those we respect and like. From there, we move on to people we feel neutral about or even dislike. Finally, we then encompass all other humans and eventually all other living beings.

Gradually, over time, the heart will begin to open more and we will feel love flowing out more freely. In this practice, liking all people is not the issue – we are not expected to like all others. We will, however, slowly be able to extend goodwill toward others.

When people first begin this practice, they may use statements such as "May you be well; may you be happy". These are not intended as mantras or be a part of mantra meditation, but a way to start involving the feeling or emotion of loving-kindness or goodwill. Later, such specific statements may no longer be needed.

The goal is to allow our goodwill or loving-kindness to flow and emanate generously and impartially toward all others – without a desire to change any person. We share our kindness and warmth without any expectation of reward. We also remember that all sentient beings need love.

Finally, we learn to be gentle with ourselves – and perhaps see those with whom we have had difficulty, as their actions being a response to their own suffering.

Some specific instructions include: To begin, allow 20 to 30 minutes for each session. If possible, practise at a regular time each day in a quiet place. Keep your purpose for the meditation in mind, and let go any analysing or planning. Let your breathing be normal, without trying to change its rhythm or depth.

Benefits of Loving-Kindness Meditation

Eleven benefits of loving-kindness meditation are given in the *Metta (Mettanisamsa) Sutta*: Discourse on Advantages of Loving-kindness:¹

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was living near Savatthi at Jetavana at Anathapindika's monastery. Then he addressed the monks saying, "Monks." — "Venerable Sir," said the monks, by way of reply. The Blessed One then spoke as follows:

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

1. "He sleeps in comfort. 2. He awakes in comfort. 3. He sees no evil dreams. 4. He is dear to human beings. 5. He is dear to non-human beings. 6. Devas (gods) protect him. 7. Fire, poison, and sword cannot touch him. 8. His mind can concentrate quickly. 9. His countenance is serene. 10. He dies without being confused in mind. 11. If he fails to attain arahantship (the highest sanctity) here and now, he will be reborn in the brahma-world.

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

So said the Blessed One. Those monks rejoiced at the words of the Blessed One.

Why Extend Goodwill Toward Everyone?

In reflecting on the Loving-Kindness meditation, I have asked myself: Why extend goodwill toward everyone? Or, conversely: Why should I wish anyone ill will? Why should I not wish anyone goodwill? My answers are:

1. In not wishing goodwill toward others, I am content – just as happy – to allow them to continue suffering. Is this what I intentionally want? No.
2. We are all inter-connected in our universe. If I extend ill will toward others, sooner or later, I will be harming and suffering myself – it will come back to me. Is this what I want? No.
3. If I continue to extend ill will toward others, I am programming or conditioning my mind in a harmful manner. These negative seeds will sprout and multiply (the laws of harvest state that "we reap what we sow" and "we reap far more than we sow"). Is this what I want to inflict on myself? No.
4. Thoughts involve energy – my ill-will is going to hurt the other person, even at a subtle, sub-conscious level. Every thought or feeling – whether positive or negative – is a tiny pulse of energy which flows out into our universe, and that pulse of energy will reach the person I am thinking about. Positive energy can help the person; negative energy can harm the person. Would I wish to be hurt in that way? No. Then, why should I inflict hurt in this manner on anyone else?

The conclusion is that to extend ill will toward anyone else is harmful not only to the other person, but also very harmful toward my own self. It is never a good investment of mental energy! Do I want to continue harbouring ill will? No.

Background to Metta Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation was taught by the Buddha in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*.² The following is a translation from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2004). He uses the term *goodwill* in place of loving-kindness.

This is to be done by one skilled in aims
who wants to break through to the state of peace:
Be capable, upright, and straightforward,
easy to instruct, gentle, and not conceited,
content and easy to support,
with few duties, living lightly,
with peaceful faculties, masterful,
modest, and no greed for supporters.

Do not do the slightest thing
that the wise would later censure.

Think: Happy, at rest,
may all beings be happy at heart.
Whatever beings there may be,
 weak or strong, without exception,
 long, large,
 middling, short,
 subtle, blatant,
 seen and unseen,
 near and far,
 born and seeking birth:
May all beings be happy at heart.

Let no one deceive another
or despise anyone anywhere,
or through anger or irritation
wish for another to suffer.

As a mother would risk her life
to protect her child, her only child,
even so should one cultivate a limitless heart
with regard to all beings.
With good will for the entire cosmos,
cultivate a limitless heart:
Above, below, and all around,
unobstructed, without enmity or hate.
Whether standing, walking,
sitting, or lying down,
 as long as one is alert,
one should be resolved on this mindfulness.
This is called a sublime abiding
here and now.

Not taken with views,
but virtuous and consummate in vision,
having subdued desire for sensual pleasures,
 one never again
 will lie in the womb.

The value of goodwill is also mentioned in the *Itivuttaka*³ (a collection of 112 short discourses; it takes its name from the statement at the beginning of each of its discourses: this [*iti*] was said [*vuttam*] by the Blessed One).

This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard:

"All the grounds for making merit leading to spontaneously arising (in heaven) do not equal one-sixteenth of the awareness-release through goodwill. Goodwill — surpassing them — shines, blazes, and dazzles.

"Just as the radiance of all the stars does not equal one-sixteenth of the radiance of the moon, as the moon — surpassing them — shines, blazes, and dazzles, even so, all the grounds for making merit leading to spontaneously arising in heaven do not equal one-sixteenth of the awareness-release through goodwill. Goodwill — surpassing them — shines, blazes, and dazzles.

"Just as in the last month of the rains, in autumn, when the sky is clear and cloudless, the sun, on ascending the sky, overpowers the space immersed in darkness, shines, blazes, and dazzles, even so, all the grounds for making merit leading to spontaneously arising in heaven do not equal one-sixteenth of the awareness-release through goodwill. Goodwill — surpassing them — shines, blazes, and dazzles.

"Just as in the pre-dawn darkness the morning star shines, blazes, and dazzles, even so, all the grounds for making merit leading to spontaneously arising in heaven do not equal one-sixteenth of the awareness-release through good will. Goodwill — surpassing them — shines, blazes, and dazzles."

When one develops — mindful —
goodwill without limit,
fetters are worn through,
on seeing the ending
of acquisitions.

If with uncorrupted mind
you feel goodwill
for even one being,
you become skilled from that.
But a Noble One produces
a mind of sympathy

for all beings,
an abundance of merit.

Kingly seers, who conquered the earth
swarming with beings,
went about making sacrifices:
the horse sacrifice, human sacrifice,
water rites, soma rites,
and the "Unobstructed,"
but these don't equal
one sixteenth
of a well-developed mind of goodwill —
as all the constellations don't,
one sixteenth
of the radiance of the moon.

One who neither kills
nor gets others to kill,
neither conquers,
nor gets others to conquer,
with goodwill for all beings,
has no hostility with anyone
at all.

Sources:

1. "Metta (Mettanisamsa) Sutta: Discourse on Advantages of Loving-kindness" (AN 11.16), translated from the Pali by Piyadassi Thera. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 13 June 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an11/an11.016.piya.html> .

Note: ©1999 Buddhist Publication Society. You may copy, reformat, reprint, republish, and redistribute this work in any medium whatsoever, provided that: (1) you only make such copies, etc. available *free of charge* and, in the case of reprinting, only in quantities of no more than 50 copies; (2) you clearly indicate that any derivatives of this work (including translations) are derived from this source document; and (3) you include the full text of this license in any copies or derivatives of this work. Otherwise, all rights reserved.

Documents linked from this page may be subject to other restrictions. From [The Book of Protection](#), translated by Piyadassi Thera (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999). Copyright © 1999 Buddhist Publication Society. Used with permission. Last revised for Access to Insight on 13 June 2010.

2. "Karaniya Metta Sutta: Good Will" (Sn 1.8), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.than.html> .

Note: ©2004 Thanissaro Bhikkhu. The text of this page ("Karaniya Metta Sutta: Good Will", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). To view a copy of the license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

Documents linked from this page may be subject to other restrictions.

Transcribed from a file provided by the translator. Last revised for Access to Insight on 30 November 2013.

3. "Itivuttaka: The Group of Ones" (Iti 1-27), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/iti/iti.1.001-027.than.html> .

Note: ©2001 Thanissaro Bhikkhu. The text of this page ("Itivuttaka: The Group of Ones", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). To view a copy of the license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

Documents linked from this page may be subject to other restrictions. Transcribed from a file provided by the translator. Last revised for Access to Insight on 30 November 2013.

© 2014 Compiled by Alexander Peck