



Open Minds. Open Hearts. Open Hands.

Shoonya Spaces

Space for Seekers of Truth.

Loving Kindness Meditation

or

Metta Bhavana

by

Jinarakshita

Introduction:

The Metta Bhavana meditation appears to have been practised from the very early days of Buddhism. The classical reference to it is in the Kariniya

Metta Sutta, which forms part of the Kudhaka Nikaya, which from textual analysis is regarded as being one of the earlier parts of the Pali cannon. The particular form that is described here more or less follows the description given in the 5th century text - the Vissudhimagga.

The word "Metta" is the Pali equivalent of the Sanskrit "maitri" (मैत्री) and can be understood as a *kindly friendliness, a well intentioned active interest in others*. It is often translated in English as "loving-kindness". The aim of the Metta Bhavana practise is to *develop an open, friendly attitude to all beings (including oneself)*.

Our minds have several aspects, including a rational aspect and an emotional aspect. Quite often the emotional part of our mind is the stronger of the two. For example, take the situation of having someone who you have to interact with but don't get along with. At some level, you may intellectually understand that there is no point in getting angry with this person, or spending your time rehashing arguments that you may have had in the past. But often, this becomes difficult to carry out in practise. The metta bhavana practise is aimed at building up positive emotions so that when confronted with such situations we are able to come up with creative, helpful solutions, rather than descending into an unthinking, reactive mode.

Overview:

We practise the metta-bhavana in five stages. In the first stage we develop metta towards oneself, in the second stage towards a good friend, in the third stage towards a "neutral" person (i.e. someone we are neither friendly nor unfriendly with), in the fourth stage towards a person with whom we have some difficulty, and in the final stage we try to extend an attitude of friendliness to all beings without exception.

As one can see, the different stages are ordered roughly in order of the

effort involved - developing metta towards a good friend would come naturally, whereas developing metta towards someone we have difficulties with takes effort. But once we have, to some extent done that, we could then bring this same open friendly attitude to all beings, and indeed *our entire experiential situation*.

In general it is recommended that the people who you chose to bring to mind during the meditation (i.e. the friend, neutral person, etc.) *should be alive, roughly the same age as you, and of the same gender*. For the friend, you should certainly *not pick* someone who you have a romantic interest in. For the neutral person, it is recommended that one picks someone *who one sees often*, but may not have properly "noticed" or had a proper conversation with. For example, some vendor on the road, the watchman in your society, etc. For the "difficult" person, to begin with, it may be better *not to pick* somebody with whom you have a really bad relationship, someone who you are very upset with. Instead pick someone with whom you have some *minor difficulty*.

There are many possible ways to try and develop metta, and to some extent you will have to experiment to see what works best for you. Different approaches may work better at different times. A few are listed below. Whatever approach one is taking, *it is important to not be too "goal oriented"*, in the sense of expecting some very particular kind of experience from the meditation and getting upset or disappointed if it does not arise. Instead *we are trying to work with openness, understanding and kindness with whatever experiences that do arise*.

General Instructions

Common instructions for all stages.

Try and visualize the person that you are trying to develop metta to. Imagine them in front of you with a faint smile on their face. Say the

following sentences to yourself. *Say the sentences slowly*, allowing yourself to **feel their meaning**.

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

May you progress.

You could imagine each sentence to be like throwing a stone into a pond, causing ever expanding ripples of positive emotion. Alternatively you could try bringing your awareness to the person who you are trying to develop metta to. *Keep a friendly, open, kindly appreciation* for whatever you feel when doing so. Try to *gently encourage any positive emotion that arises*, so that it grows into a warm, expansive glow. You could also try the sentences listed above to *encourage the flow of positive emotion*. You could visualize other kinds of positive interactions, example imagine pouring flowers on the person, or imagine a warm red light coming out of your heart and enveloping the other person etc. As mentioned above some amount of experimentation and trial and error is likely to be needed to figure out which method works best for you. Basically, the aim is to get positive emotion flowing, and one should feel free to experiment creatively with different methods to do so.

First Stage: Loving Kindness towards oneself

We start with ourselves, because it is difficult to be truly friendly towards others if you are not open and friendly to all aspects of yourself. Usually for all of us, there are things about oneself that one is not fully comfortable with. Very often there is nothing really "wrong" with these parts of ourselves, but for whatever reason we are not comfortable with them. This can make us hypersensitive about certain issues. Very often people you interact with can sense the exact issues that you are not comfortable with, and can easily "press your buttons". *If you are completely open to yourself,*

friendly to all aspects of yourself, there are no buttons for someone else to press. After gaining some understanding of oneself, one can then try and understand and be friendly to others. So metta towards oneself comes first.

Practice: Imagine “yourself” in front of you with a faint smile on the face. Say the following sentences (silently in your mind) to yourself. Say the sentences slowly, allowing yourself to **feel their meaning**.

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

May you progress.

You could try repeating the entire sequence periodically (but make sure that it does not become mechanical). Alternatively try one of the other methods described in the general instructions section. Try and keep this up for 5 to 10 minutes.

Second Stage: Loving Kindness towards good friend

We have seen above the importance of first developing metta for oneself. The second stage, viz. developing metta for a good friend, is sometimes easier than developing metta for oneself. In a way this second stage could also provide the foundation for the other stages that follow.

Practice: Imagine your “good friend” in front of you with a faint smile on the face. Say the following sentences (silently in your mind) to your good friend. Say the sentences slowly, allowing yourself to **feel their meaning**.

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

May you progress.

You could try repeating the entire sequence periodically (but make sure that it does not become mechanical). Alternatively try one of the other methods described in the general instructions section. Try and keep this up for 5 to 10 minutes.

Third Stage: Loving Kindness towards neutral person.

The third stage, viz. the neutral person, is also interesting one. The majority of the people who we encounter are "neutral" people. So, in a way, our relations with them are very critical, because they form the majority of our relations. If we come up to people with an open, friendly attitude, they will most likely respond with the same. *Our interaction will bring out the best in us, and the best in them.* However, precisely because they are "neutral" people we tend not to be interested in them. This stage of the metta bhavana could hence be more difficult than the earlier one. We can get easily distracted and get lost in hindrances. That is something to be aware of and watch out for during the practise.

Practice: Imagine "neutral person" in front of you with a faint smile on the face. Say the following sentences (silently in your mind) to the neutral person. Say the sentences slowly, allowing yourself to **feel their meaning.**

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

May you progress.

You could try repeating the entire sequence periodically (but make sure that it does not become mechanical). Alternatively try one of the other methods described in the general instructions section. Try and keep this up for 5 to 10 minutes.

Fourth Stage: Loving Kindness towards difficult person.

The fourth stage, developing metta for the "difficult" person is in general the hardest. The moment we bring the person to mind, we are reminded of whatever the problem between us is, and we get disturbed and unhappy. To start with, at least sitting on our meditation cushion we try to think of them without getting agitated. Or perhaps we can first just bring the person to mind and *keep an open friendly attitude towards whatever we experience*, whatever our sensations are when we bring them to mind. To help us along we could reflect that much like ourselves, this person too is seeking his or her own happiness. In that sense the problem person has with us is not "personal", but just a particular consequence of the universal desire for all beings for their own happiness. If we can go further than that, if we can actually try to actively wish them well, then when we meet them in person, the chances of us behaving in a way that will help resolve the problem are greatly increased.

Practice: Imagine "difficult person" in front of you with a faint smile on their face. Say the following sentences (silently in your mind) to the person with whom you have some difficulty. Say the sentences slowly, allowing yourself to **feel their meaning**.

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

May you progress.

You could try repeating the entire sequence periodically (but make sure

that it does not become mechanical). Alternatively try one of the other methods described in the general instructions section. Try and keep this up for 5 to 10 minutes.

Fifth Stage: Loving Kindness towards all sentient beings.

Finally in the fifth stage we first bring all four people to mind and try to *feel equal metta towards all of them*. We then try to expand this feeling of friendliness to include all beings without exception. We could do systematically, by for e.g.. increasing geographical area (all beings in the town you are in, all beings in the state, in the country...) or by any other category. The important thing is to finally try and *include all beings without any exception*. You could image friendliness radiating outwards from yourself and expanding to fill up space in all directions.

Practice: First become aware of all beings (including all humans, animals, insects etc.) in your immediate surroundings. You could also try particularly to bring to mind beings who you normally are not even aware of. Try and to keep an open friendly awareness towards all of them. Gradually radiate out this friendliness further and further, including more and more beings. For example, you could imagine moving out geographically, from all beings in your town, all beings in your state, all beings in the country you are in, all beings in the entire world, all beings everywhere, throughout space, without exception. You could try and wish all beings happiness in their heart of hearts. If it helps you can try chanting the traditional mantra “Sabe satta sukhi hontu” a few times.

Conclusion

Gradually bring the meditation to a close and open your eyes. It is also worth reminding oneself that, as in all meditations, the point of this exercise is *self-transformation*. We should try to make sure that we do

sitting on the cushion has some effect on our actions later. *We should actively try to be more open and friendly to everyone.*

Three concrete things that one could try are:

(a) *to try and develop gratitude for all the good things that come our way, instead of taking them for granted*

(b) *to be generous to others* (this need not be by giving money, but could be, for e.g. by being patient instead of irritable),

(c) *by being courteous to others*. To be courteous is to acknowledge the shared humanity we have with the other person, to treat them as someone much like ourselves. This is a particularly useful practise with "neutral people".

The more we meditate the more easily and naturally we will be able to do these things. Conversely, what we do when we are not meditating will have an effect on us when we try to meditate. If we are open and friendly, then our meditation will flow more easily and will be deeper and more rewarding.

About Jinarakshita



Dharmachari Jinarakshita is a member of the Triratna Sangha, a Buddhist Sangha which aims at trying to engage with the Buddha's teachings in the conditions of the modern world. Members of the Triratna Sangha teach meditation, study the Buddha's teaching together, engage with the Arts, support each other through life, as well as engage with their local communities. The Triratna Sangha also promotes projects in which Buddhists can live and work together, and explore how to turn their work into a spiritual practice.

About Open WellBeing

Open WellBeing is a community driven movement to improve everyone's wellbeing. Our key objective is to enable each individual to explore their own holistic wellbeing by their own efforts. We are adopting **holistic and individualised** approach to wellbeing. Our primary goal is to explore and identify wisdom required for individual's wellbeing and making it available to everyone at an affordable cost. We are a not for profit company.

To join this movement please log on to - www.openwellbeing.org

For more details please Whatsapp/Text/Call **Atul - 9766118844**.

Email: openwellbeing@gmail.com.