

METTA (LOVINGKINDNESS) MEDITATION: BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

Metta is a Pali word that means good will, lovingkindness, and friendliness. Metta meditation is very helpful in checking the unwholesome tendency to anger in us and promoting and strengthening the wholesome tendency of non-anger, tolerance, good will, loving kindness, patience, and friendliness. In addition to vipassana (insight) meditation the Buddha often exhorted us to practise metta as one of the four divine ways of abiding. The other three divine abidings are karuna (compassion), mudita (appreciative joy) and upekkha (equanimity).

Below are simple instructions by Visu on how to practise metta meditation. Please try to do it on a daily basis in the sitting posture as a formal meditation and also casually every now and then in your everyday life. If you do so you will find a great improvement in your life by way of your increasingly warm, kind, friendly, patient, helpful, and happy disposition.

RADIATING OF METTA (GOODWILL, LOVING KINDNESS, GOOD WISHES, FRIENDLINESS) *by Visu*

Sit comfortably. If you are used to meditating sitting cross-legged on the floor, do so. If not, sit comfortably on a chair in a position which is suitable for sitting long without you having to make any movements or adjustment. You could sit on a straight back chair, an arm chair or a sofa.

Begin radiating *metta* by mentally reciting the following lines, which express good-will and warm wishes for the person you radiate to.

When radiating to ourselves, we recite:

May I be happy.
May I be safe.
May I be peaceful.
May I be healthy.
May I take care of myself happily.

When reciting to another person, say, John:

May John be happy.
May he be safe.
May he be peaceful.
May he be healthy.
May he take care of himself happily.

You can also address the person directly saying, 'John, may you be happy. May you be safe....'

Wish for this person for as long as you like and then change to another person, wishing, say: 'May Mary be happy. May she be safe,' and so on.

When you like to switch to somebody else, you may go on to yet another person, say: 'May Richard be happy. May he be safe,' and so on.

You can radiate to one single person (and also to yourself, of course) for a long time – even for a whole session you may do so. Or you can keep changing persons, now this person, now that person.

You can also think of a few persons, grouping them together, and wish, 'May they be happy,' etc. Or you can radiate to all beings in general, saying 'May all beings be happy. May they be safe...'

If we radiate for one person or all beings for a long time or a whole session, our concentration (samadhi) can also become very deep because we don't need to think of which person to wish for next.

Sometimes instead of reciting the five lines, you can just think, 'May this person be happy. May that person be happy.'

So there is no fixed one way. If you feel like reciting all the lines recite them; if not, just say, 'May he/she be happy.'

You can also make specific wishes for the person, what you think or observe he/she may need. In the case of a person suffering from a serious illness you can wish, 'May he be healed. May he be able to bear up with the suffering. May he recover fully and quickly. If he cannot recover, may he also be able to bear up with the suffering, may he have mental strength, patience and endurance,' etc.

You can think of their loved ones and say, 'May they also be able to bear up with the suffering. May they be happy. May they be peaceful,' etc.

When we say 'may he be healed', we understand healing not just as a physical cure, but also as mental healing, that the mind may be healed in the sense of being able to accept and reconcile with the illness if it cannot be cured. And, of course, the mind can be healed of a lot of other mental wounds.

Naturally you can radiate to your spouse, saying, 'May she/he be happy,' etc., and also say 'May I love her/him well and true, May I take good care of her/him,' because we want to love our spouse/partner/lover well, ever improve on our love, grow and learn how to be a better partner. Of course 'well and true' can be defined further in many ways: being faithful to one's spouse, showing gratitude and appreciation, understanding, forgiveness, being nurturing and caring towards each other, helping and supporting each other along the spiritual path.

Equally we include our children, parents, brothers, sisters, and all other family members and close friends.

Say, if you want to have a good working relationship with somebody, you can think of that person and address him or her directly, 'May you be happy. May we relate well with each other. May we have good collaboration. May we have lots of goodwill and harmony. May we work together for the greater good of all beings.'

When you wish for yourself, 'May I be happy,' you can also wish for specific things, making positive resolutions, such as, 'May I have faith and trust in the process,' 'May I be patient,' 'May I have strength and courage to face all the challenges ahead,' 'May I be focused and concentrated in all that I do,' 'May I be hardworking, diligent, disciplined,' etc., whatever is relevant or meaningful at the time.

So sometimes you can just keep on repeating the five lines, or one or two of those lines, and sometimes you can add in more specific wishes or affirmations, and then go back to the standard lines.

As regards the standard lines, the meanings are as follows:

To be happy means not being sad, miserable, unhappy, or depressed; it means being happy, joyful, cheerful, lighthearted, content. (We can feel happy by counting our many blessings and considering how fortunate we are to have the Dhamma, a spiritual path to walk, that we have loved ones who love us, etc.) We can put a half smile on our face as we wish for ourselves, 'May I be happy.'

To be safe means to be free from harm and danger, both internally and externally. Internal danger is our own mind when it is out of control and causing us suffering. External dangers are accidents, calamities, disasters, mishaps, misfortunes, people that may be hostile or have ill intentions towards us.

To be peaceful means to be free from mental suffering such as worry, anxiety, anger, irritation, annoyance, sorrow, depression, unhappiness, agitation, confusion, and despair.

To be healthy means to be free from physical suffering such as bodily pain, sickness and discomfort. (We know we can't be free from all this suffering all the time, but you can think of it like a wish that one may be free of it for as much of the time as possible.)

To take care of oneself happily means to be able to take care of one's mind and body; take care of one's work, responsibilities, tasks and duties; take care of one's relationships; take care of all aspects of one's life.

Metta meditation is a way to cultivate loving-kindness towards all beings in our own mind and heart. The person who radiates will feel better simply by freeing himself from feelings of hatred, anger, ill-will, animosity, and resentment.

Of course we know we cannot escape suffering in life and that these wishes are mere wishes and cannot be fully realized. But still it is good just to wish; it is like saying a prayer for the well-being of oneself and others. It means we are wishing as much as we can to be happy. There is mental force/power/effect in wishing, and it can bring about positive results, subject of course to other factors such as the law of kamma. When we wish well for others, we are sending good mental vibes that can have a positive effect on their wellbeing. Studies have shown that people who were prayed for, recovered more quickly and with fewer complications than those who were not prayed for. People have reported that relationships improve after they radiated metta to the difficult persons.

As you radiate, various thoughts might come in, the mind might wander a bit here and there, but that's okay, just notice that the mind has wandered off and bring it back to the metta radiating. Be careful when you radiate to a person not to be lost in thoughts about the person. Just stick to the theme which is the radiating of metta, the recitation of the lines. However, you can occasionally recollect the kindness this person has done for you, so you can feel gratitude for the person, and even say to the person, 'Thank you very much for your kindness, for all that you have done for me,' and then wish that he may be happy, etc.

You can sometimes be mindful of the body as you radiate. You can feel your body being here, the sensations at the touch areas between the buttocks and the seat, etc. From time to time you can also know how your mind is; you can notice when the metta lines are flowing smoothly and how the mind is becoming more calm, absorbed and peaceful.

As regards pain and ache in the body you don't have to note it as you are not doing vipassana. You can continue radiating, just tolerating or ignoring the pain and after some time, it might not be felt. But if you find the pain/body discomfort distracting or intolerable, you can always mindfully change your posture, move your legs, etc, to relieve yourself, and continue to radiate. If you find sitting on a chair more conducive for the metta radiating, you can sit on a chair.

When you radiate, if you like, you can occasionally picture the person in your mind and feel your metta going out to him/her. Visualization is optional and can be done if you find it helpful. What counts primarily is just the good wish that you are making for the person.

As regards the speed in reciting the lines, you can recite slow or fast as you like. Initially you might recite slowly, saying 'May John be happy', etc., feeling the meaning of those words, but after some time, if you like, you can pick up the speed. Go according to the pace you like, fast slow, or moderate. Even though you might not contemplate on the meaning of the words as you recite, the meaning is already understood and the good wish/will is there being expressed through those lines. So you can adjust the speed accordingly, like driving a car, now going fast, now slowing down. Do it in the way you like, in a way that you find pleasant and which will lead therefore to a pleasant and peaceful state of mind. There is no hard and fast rule. The mind changes – sometimes it feels like doing it this way, and sometimes that way. So you can be creative. You can experiment and see how it goes. There is no one fixed way but many ways of doing metta.

There are many kinds of people you can radiate to, such as loved ones, friends, benefactors, people who have been kind to you (even from long ago) and to whom you feel gratitude; casual acquaintances, people you don't know well or might only know just by sight; and difficult ones. Difficult ones may be those who don't like you, who are hostile to you, who might consider you like their enemy (though on your part you do not wish to consider anybody as an enemy but perhaps as just somebody you have had difficulty with). Difficult ones may be those you have had conflicts with now and in the past. Difficult ones may be those who have hurt us very much in some ways. Yet we would still like to wish them well, letting bygones be bygones, and wanting to radiate metta, to have goodwill for all beings, without exception.

If you still have to meet or relate with a difficult person, you can wish 'May he be happy. May the relationship improve, May we get along better,' etc. If you feel this person has the need to change in certain ways, you may wish, 'May he change for the better for his own good. May he become more like this or like that', though you know, of course, that ultimately we can't change anybody; the person has to change himself; we can only change our own attitudes and our way of relating to others with equanimity, compassion, understanding, love, detachment, etc. Difficult ones may sometimes be our own very close and loved ones, because when we are so close we can have conflicts and difficulties with each other as you know. So we need to cultivate a lot of love, kindness, compassion, tolerance, patience, understanding, wisdom, forgiveness, etc. If a person finds it too difficult to radiate to a difficult one, he can do it at another time when he feels more ready or prepared to do it.

Can you radiate to a deceased person? Yes, why not? In Buddhism we believe that the person must be reborn somewhere. So we can think, 'May this person wherever he is now, be happy, be safe....' We are directing the metta to the continuation of the person in his new existence. Even in this very life we are not the same but a changing person, changing from young to old, from moment to moment. Our metta need not stop when the person is dead. We can continue to radiate metta thinking 'I wish you well...may you be happy wherever you are now...'

There are many ways of radiating metta. You can always experiment and find out which way works for you. What's important is to keep on doing it, and eventually you'll get better and better at it. There's no substitute for practice. Practice is the key to development.

In everyday life, we can do metta anytime, anywhere, in any posture, whether sitting, walking, lying down, standing, doing some work, eating, etc. All we need to do is to just think the thought,

‘May all beings be happy’, or ‘May so and so be happy’.

Even in answering a phone call you can collect yourself for a moment before picking up the receiver, and wish, ‘May this person (whoever he or she is) be happy,’ and then, as you pick up the phone, you can continue to make the wish, ‘May this person be happy.’ And then of course you give your full attention to the caller and see how best you can respond to her/him, how you can help the person, or how you can skillfully communicate with her/him.

Similarly whenever you make a phone call you can radiate metta to the person as you are tapping in the number.

It is important to do metta often. The Buddha has spoken of the liberation of the mind through lovingkindness (*metta-cetovimutti*). Metta is like the moisture. Vipassana (insight meditation) can be rather dry – it’s about there being no self, it’s seeing ultimate realities; seeing *nama-rupa* (mentality and materiality/name and form); seeing impermanence, suffering, and not-self. Metta is different. It provides a complementing balance and supplement; it’s like moisture for the heart. It makes us feel good to wish well for others, especially our loved ones, friends, and benefactors. It is nice simply to remember them and to wish them well.

Metta removes a lot of ill-will, weakens the root of hatred, anger, and aversion. It helps to reduce our anger, annoyance, irritation, impatience, and intolerance, to a great extent. It makes us more warm, friendly, kind and loving. We tend to smile more often. It will become our way of life. We will get along better with others and they will like us too, though of course there will always be some people that may not like us, because in this world we can’t please everybody and cannot be loved and liked by everybody. We can however make more friends with our positive attitude of warmth, friendliness, goodwill and kindness towards others.

So metta is a good supplement to vipassana.

Vipassana is essential for seeing the four noble truths, uprooting the mental defilements, making an end of suffering and realizing Nibbana – the highest peace and happiness that comes with the removal of greed, hatred and delusion, while metta fills our hearts with loving-kindness and goodwill towards all beings.

Metta (loving kindness) is one of the four *brahma viharas* (divine ways of dwelling). So besides metta, we also cultivate compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity at the appropriate occasions.