

Four Week Introductory Course on Metta **2nd Week - Loving-kindness Towards Benefactors and Friends**

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Love in Buddhist Spirituality:

The Buddha pointed to a range of healthy emotions that can arise independent of any craving, aversion or egotism. He emphasized forms of joy and happiness, free of any attachment, which are useful for spiritual growth. In addition, the Buddha encouraged the cultivation of delight, enthusiasm, contentment, tranquility, peace, ardency, faith, empathy for others and most significantly, various forms of love. All these are understood as promoting both spiritual maturity and the capacity to live happily in the present. They are also the emotions that support a positive and engaged attitude toward one's life and community.

Among all the helpful emotions developed on the Buddhist path, love is extremely important. It ensures that a person's spiritual life is rooted in healthy relationships with other people and with other forms of life. It also helps create optimal inner conditions for the heart to relax and be at peace.

Contrary to the popular idea of "falling in love" as a mysterious process outside our control, the Buddha emphasized cultivating our capacity for love. Through the practice of loving-kindness, love can become a frequent part of our emotional life. By learning to recognize the wellsprings of love within us, we can call upon kindness and goodwill in the appropriate circumstances. With cultivation, love becomes a strength. It bolsters both self-confidence and self-reliance.

Buddhism teaches that a variety of attitudes may be confused as love. One is sensual desire. Another is affection which is entangled with craving and the need for reciprocity. The Buddha never encouraged the cultivation of such affection; in fact, he often considered it a hindrance to spiritual maturity. However, if we abandon such affections too quickly, we may overlook situations when affection consists of a combination of craving and a helpful form of love. One of the joys of spiritual practice is learning to distinguish unhelpful grasping and neediness from an underlying love that needs nothing beyond itself. What should be abandoned is craving, not love. When letting go of craving is too difficult, a person may practice developing love to the point that any need to be loved naturally loses its power in the glow of the love flowing from us.

The Buddha and the enlightened men and women who followed him are often depicted as motivated by love, but never as in need of being loved. Spiritual practice helps free this impulse to love so that it can become a motivating strength in our lives.

*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
- The Buddha*

The Sequence of Loving-kindness Meditation:

The traditional form of loving-kindness meditation involves systematically directing our goodwill toward individuals in the following categories: oneself, benefactors, friends, neutral people, and enemies or difficult people. The principle for deciding which of the categories to begin with is to choose for whomever is the easiest to have goodwill. One starts the practice by focusing one's loving-kindness on this person until they are established in good-will towards this person. Then the practitioner moves on to someone for whom it is a little less easy to have loving-kindness. When a good and stable loving-kindness is established toward this person, the practitioner then moves on to someone for whom the loving-kindness is even less easy. In time one moves from practicing loving-kindness to people one already has warm regard towards to people one has no particular feelings for, and then eventually to people one might feel antipathy toward. As one's loving-kindness matures it becomes possible to have strong and meaningful goodwill toward even people who are enemies or who one initially dislikes.

If having loving-kindness for oneself comes easily then this is the best place to begin. If it is difficult to have love toward oneself, then it is useful to choose someone from one of the other categories first and once a stable attitude of kindness is established towards others it may be easier to then look upon oneself with kind regard.

Practicing Loving-kindness toward Benefactors and Friends

First, choose someone who has been a benefactor and towards whom you can easily feel love, kindness and friendliness. A benefactor is someone, either personally known or not, who you feel has benefited or supported you. In doing loving-kindness meditation toward this person, bring to mind an image or a sense of this person. Then try to have a sincere wish that that person be well. Thinking about the person and your good wishes, repeat the following phrases silently to yourself:

May you be happy.

May you be well.

May you be safe.

May you be peaceful and at ease.

Be alert enough so that you can let go of any thoughts not directly connected and supportive of the loving-kindness meditation. Repeat generating intentions of goodwill and saying the phrases toward your benefactor until you feel the loving-kindness is well enough established to move on to another person. Then think of another benefactor and do the same thing toward him or her.

When you feel ready, think of a friend to whom it is easy to have intentions of loving-kindness. Choose someone for whom your friendship is as uncomplicated as possible so that you are not reminded of any negative feelings, no matter how small, you might have toward the friend. Thinking about the person and connecting to your good wishes for them, repeat the phrases. After some time choose another friend. With time start including friends with whom the friendship is less strong or with whom other, negative feelings are mixed up with the friendship. As you direct the phrases toward them try to generate feelings of goodwill and well-wishing towards these friends equal to the loving-kindness you have toward benefactors or good friends.

In directing the phrases of loving-kindness towards others it can be helpful to say their names as well.