

Introduction to Lovingkindness (Mettā) Class 3 of 4

Lovingkindness towards neutral and “difficult” people

This week, we are widening the circle of those for whom we cultivate lovingkindness. Cultivating goodwill towards neutral people -- those on the edges of our lives – and those we find difficult can be a valuable way to discover what enlivens and limits our hearts. The core of Metta practice is intention. So, the most important principle of practicing lovingkindness is that we have the wish to do so. From a Buddhist perspective, it is not helpful to practice out of guilt, obligation, or a “should.”

There is no need to let the people you choose know that you are cultivating goodwill towards them, although a warmer rapport may naturally develop. In Buddhism, Metta practice is focused on *our* hearts. To practice Metta mindfully is to wisely cultivate an open heart without “giving to get”, in other words, without expecting another person to act or be a certain way.

During formal practice, please consider experimenting with:

- Notice the changes in your body when wishing well for different people, and afterwards.
- Re-connect with the dear one or benefactor when more energy or support is needed.
- Consider cultivating your best self, your internal muse.

Micro-practice options for during your day

During these practices, please do not focus on others in an obvious way. They may find it disconcerting!

1. Notice times when you experience goodwill, benevolence, and kindness. See if you can notice when these moments appear and disappear.
2. Also open to noticing minor moments of irritation, impatience, resentment, or ill will. Sense into the contrast between how these states effect your body and mind and feelings of kindness and goodwill. If you like, try out practicing a moment or two of informal mettā when irritation arises and notice the results.

For further exploration:

The Dhammapada. (I quoted Gil Fronsdal’s translation, as well as Maha Ghosananda’s spoken passage)

Step by Step. Maha Ghosananda. http://sithannablog.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/step_by_step.pdf

Difficult Conversations. Stone, Patton, & Heen

The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverence and Hope in Troubled Times (Naomi Shihab Nye’s Airport poem). Loeb

Meditation guidelines

Basic Forgiveness Practice (optional pre-practice before practicing with the difficult person)

- For whatever harm, knowingly or unknowingly, others have caused me, I forgive them.
- For whatever harm, knowingly or unknowingly, I have caused others, may they forgive me.
- For whatever harm, knowingly or unknowingly, I have caused others, may I forgive myself.
- For whatever harm, knowingly or unknowingly, I have caused myself, may I forgive myself.

Self-guided Loving-kindness Meditation (30 minutes or more recommended)

Class recordings and handouts posted on Audiodharma.org

In Lovingkindness meditation, it is helpful to take a comfortable posture, including an internal posture of regarding yourself in a kindly way, with the tenderness, respect or reverence you might offer a dear or vulnerable one. If it's helpful, take two or three slow, breaths, deep in your belly. Then, release all effort and allow the air to flow in naturally. Allow the breath to be natural, breathing in appreciation for your life's breath. Letting go of the outbreak, offering it as goodwill.

Allowing attention to collect around your heart center. Bring to mind a person or being who is dear to you, inspires you, or you feel gratitude towards. A benefactor, or a dear friend. Without a lot of internal discussion, recollect what you appreciate about them, some good qualities or actions you are grateful for. Reconnecting with the breath, focus your intentions with these phrases, or your own.

With each outbreak

- *May you be happy*
- *May you be well*
- *May you be safe (from inner and outer harm)*
- *May you be at ease*

With each in-breath

- *May I be happy*
- *May I be well*
- *May I be safe (from inner and outer harm)*
- *May I be at ease*

Pausing now and then, noticing how it feels in your body to be offering goodwill. Rest and be with whatever you feel in your heart center and body. Some people find it helpful to smile gently, place their hand on your heart center, or to hug themselves. Consider clarifying your intentions further by simplifying to single words, such as *happy, healthy, safe, peaceful, free...*

Focus on Neutral person: Bringing to mind now someone at the edges of your life, a stranger, someone you don't know well. Perhaps a distant co-worker, a cashier, or neighbor. Maybe imagine what they are doing when you see them. Reflect that they, too, have hopes and fears, others who depend on them. They want to be happy, free from suffering and fear, just like you. See how it feels to offer them kindness using breath and words or just energy.

OR Difficult person: Bringing to mind now someone in your life with whom you've experienced slight difficulty. Picture them in a moment when they are softer, quieter, than you usually experience them. Reflect that this person, too, has hopes and fears, others who depend on them. This person wants to be happy, free from suffering and fear, just like you. Their unskillful behavior may well be the unfortunate, even tragic consequence of unmet needs, sorrows, or past difficulties leading them to act out in ways that distance them from others. See how it feels to offer them goodwill. *Just like me, this person wishes to be happy and free of suffering. Just like me, they want to be healthy, safe, and peaceful.*

If it feels nourishing, return to offering either yourself or a dear one/benefactor mettā for a bit.

Then, letting go of any phrases or images, soften into this moment. Bask in being here, now. Allow, notice feelings, sensations, coming and going.

Closing Reflection: We resonate with one another's sorrows, difficulties, and joy because we are interconnected by the wish of mettā. Everyone wants to be free of suffering, happy, and at ease. All people, all beings. By opening our hearts to more receptivity, kindness, and appreciation we transform ourselves, and the lives we touch. Take a moment to appreciate the generosity you are offering by cultivating an open heart.