

## 1. Introducing the Mettā Bhāvana

### - *developing loving kindness*

'Bhāvanā' translates as 'cultivation', 'coming into being', and there are a few bhāvanā practices where we are encouraging positive emotion. Mettā translates as 'loving kindness'. A pointer that we find in the Buddhist texts to what mettā is, is the love a mother feels for her child, extended to all. We can therefore see mettā as a genuine care and concern for the welfare and wellbeing of others, or even responsibility toward the welfare of others. Like all positive emotions it opens us out, increases our sense of connection, and increases our happiness. By putting conscious practice into developing positive emotion, conversely we begin to move away from negative mental states that keep us isolated and miserable. And what we practice we get better at!

There's something within us that instinctively knows this to be true; an intuition that knows that a life based upon loving kindness and connection is better than a life lived based upon greed, anger or any of the negative mental states that keep us separate. Buddhism is certainly quite clear that this is the direction we want to be going in if we want to develop and grow as human beings, and that, moreover, we can actually develop these qualities to a degree that is totally transformative. They transform us, and so transform our world.

The Mettā Bhāvanā is a staged meditation, coming in 5 stages, and it's worth saying a little at this point about the first stage.

In the first stage, we sit with a sense of ourselves, we bring ourselves to mind and we try to bring a sense of friendliness and warmth towards ourselves. We ease up on ourselves, because our judgment against ourselves is often quite harsh. Our relationship with ourselves influences our relationship with others and the world. We need to be in as good and healthy a relationship with ourselves as possible, at all times, in order to have a chance of good healthy relationships with others.

What's more, when we do have a sense of mettā towards ourselves, it's easier to have it for others too. It starts to extend out and incorporate more and more. A part of self metta is beginning to have a sense of self empathy; a loving acceptance of ourselves and our situation. This takes in the human situation that we find ourselves in, the fact that we have hopes and dreams that often elude us, and fears that become all too real, all in the light of the challenging facts that we will get old, get ill and eventually die. The Mettā Bhāvanā works by revealing this truth to ourselves, while also showing that the same is true for everyone else too. ALL beings desire happiness, and all beings wish to avoid suffering, all beings are subject to old age sickness and death.

The Mettā Bhāvanā is therefore an 'equanimity' practice. We begin to see more clearly, and feel more strongly, the common experience that we all share, and on that basis we form real connection. This real connection differs from the way we usually form our connections, which is on the basis of our own preferences and wants. Our relationships with others are often very contractual, and conditional upon what we receive from them. On the other hand, mettā is *unconditional*. The strong sense of ME and YOU starts to break down, and that changes things; changes us, changes how we are in the world. Of course, our mental states and emotions feed directly into our actions of body and speech, so mettā doesn't just stay 'on the cushion', it begins to inform what we do and say and how we live.

But, first of all, we start right with the practicalities of the meditation.  
(thanks to Amaradaya)

## 2. The stages of the Metta Bhavana

### Preliminary stage:

Close your eyes and take time to notice any sounds in the room.  
Feel your weight on the cushion or the chair.  
Let go of any tension in your shoulders, jaw and face.  
Check in with how you are feeling emotionally and energy-wise.

### Stage 1:

Developing loving-kindness towards yourself.

### Stage 2:

Developing loving-kindness towards a good friend.  
Choose someone around the same age as you, who is alive and you know (not a TV celebrity, for example) and whom you are unlikely to feel sexual attraction for.

### Stage 3:

Developing loving-kindness for a neutral person.  
Choose someone who you see around but do not know well and who you do not have strong feelings of like or dislike for. Examples are a receptionist at work or someone who gets the same bus as you.

### Stage 4:

Developing loving-kindness for a person we find difficult.  
Don't choose someone who you are having really difficult problems with at the moment. Choose someone who you find a little difficult.

### Stage 5:

Radiating loving-kindness to all beings.  
Start by bringing 4 people (including yourself) from the previous stages to mind. Offer mettā equally for all 4 people.  
Radiate out mettā to all people in your building, your street, your area, your town or city, your country and then the world.  
You can include animals and other beings if you wish.

### 3.Home Practice

As for the mindfulness of breathing, we suggest that you gradually build up the mettā bhāvanā meditation in the days between classes, like this:

**Week 3:**

Stages 1 and 5.

**Week 4:**

Stages 1, 2, 3 and 5.

**Weeks 5 and 6:**

Stages 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.