

# METTA PRACTICE

## Head and Heart Together

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**Metta** – goodwill. A wish that you and all living beings will find true happiness.

**Bhavana** - mental development (literally, calling into existence, producing).

The underlying motivation that led the Buddha to search for awakening and teach the path to awakening to others.

One of the Brahma Viharas, the Divine Abodes or Sublime Attitudes. The others are compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.

These states can be developed from the emotions that we all feel at some time. They become true ‘sublime attitudes’ when we make them unlimited i.e. we feel them for all living beings without exception. To achieve them requires time and effort; there is usually no ‘quick fix’ for our negative habits.

Metta should be practised in every area of your life, not just in meditation. Meditation and daily life feed into each other. The Buddha referred to his teaching as the Dhamma Vinaya, the Doctrine and the Discipline. You will need to have self-discipline, and probably re-order your priorities if you want to make progress to achieving true happiness.

Holistic practice: include mind *and* body, every area of your life, every part of the Dhamma as appropriate.

### **In Daily Life**

First, have goodwill for yourself. Give yourself the conditions that promote feelings of well-being and goodwill. Remember the ‘Four Requisites’ - food, clothing, shelter, medicine; but check need against greed. Make sure that you get enough sleep. Reduce the unnecessary stress in your life (if you find that you are always too busy, ask yourself who took on all these activities).

The more that you can develop joy and goodwill in daily life, the lighter your mind becomes and the easier it is to see the drawbacks of negative states of mind. You start to see your patterns and you can begin to work with them.

Have the intention of goodwill rather than the idea. Every morning set the intention to be kind and have goodwill, then monitor your actions throughout the day. Keep reminding yourself that you get good at what you practice.

Investigate the causes of any resistance to goodwill.

Investigate the triggers for ill will.

Regard ill will as an affliction – both in yourself and others.

Put things in perspective.

Communicate; be clear about your boundaries.

Remember karma – yours and theirs.

Be careful about attributing intention / motives.

Relax the sense of self.

Expand the category of ‘us’.

Hold positive experiences in mind for at least 30 seconds i.e. savour them.

When you recognize that happiness is a process, not a thing, you realize: you can choose to do it or not do it; you can get better at it; you can ultimately master it.

### **In Meditation**

Adopt a posture that you can hold comfortably for the entire meditation session. It is difficult to develop goodwill if you are in pain.

Start from where you are. Get in touch with your current mental state before you begin.

Set an intention to increase the goodwill that you currently feel for yourself and others. Remember that you are wishing *true* happiness i.e. a happiness that does not involve hurting others.

Remind yourself that; 1. When you feel goodwill you are the first to benefit. 2. Happiness is a choice. 3. You are trying to change yourself, not others.

Spend some time fully relaxing your body and mind. This is an important preliminary.

Begin with developing goodwill for yourself and in yourself. It is essential that you generate the feeling / emotion of goodwill and that the practice is not just done as a mantra – “May you be well, may you be happy.”

Investigate different methods for promoting the feeling of goodwill to find which works best for you. You must be interested in the practice because we don’t pay attention to boring things. When you learn how to create good positive feelings that you like, you’ll want to return to them often and learn how to create them at will.

Remember that there are other ways of developing metta than the 5 stages, and that the guidelines normally given are just that – guidelines.

Realize that you may have to change the meditation subject if negative feelings threaten to overwhelm you. This can mean either changing the person(s) you are currently trying to feel goodwill for or changing to a different meditation e.g. mindfulness of breathing.

At the end of the session, be aware of any goodwill that you have developed and try to carry it into your daily life.