

Metta

as edited by

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In the Buddhist Publication Society's Wheel Series 07, Bhikkhu Nanamoli explains what the Buddha said about *Metta: The Practice of Loving-Kindness* (1987).

If we wish to explain how happiness is based on 'love,' first we must define love: --

“Where Greek distinguishes between sensual eros and spiritual agape, English makes do with only the one word "love." But the Pali language, like the Sanskrit, has many words covering many shades of meaning. The word chosen by the Buddha for this teaching is *metta* from *mitta*, a friend (or better "the true friend in need").

Metta (loving-kindness) is defined as follows: "Loving-kindness has the mode of friendliness for its characteristic. Its natural function is to promote friendliness. It is manifested as the disappearance of ill-will. Its footing is seeing with kindness. When it succeeds, it eliminates ill-will. When it fails, it degenerates into selfish affectionate desire".

The *Visuddhimagga* recommends going to some quiet place, where one can sit down in a comfortable position. Then, before starting the actual meditation, it is helpful to consider the dangers in hate and the benefits offered by forbearance: for it is a purpose of this meditation to displace hate by forbearance, and besides, one cannot avoid dangers one has not come to see or cultivate benefits one does not yet know.

Then there are certain types of persons towards whom loving-kindness should not be developed in the first stages. The attempt, at the outset to regard a disliked person as dear to one is fatiguing, and likewise trying to regard a dearly loved friend with neutrality, and when an enemy is recalled anger springs up. Again it should not be directed towards members of the opposite sex, to begin with, for this may arouse lust.

Right at the start, the meditation of loving-kindness should be developed towards oneself repeatedly in this way: "May I be happy and free from suffering" or "May I keep myself free from hostility and trouble and live happily" (though this will never produce the full absorption of contemplation).

It is by cultivating the thought "May I be happy" with oneself as example, that one begins to be interested in the welfare and happiness of other living beings, and to feel in some sense their happiness as if it were one's own: "Just as I want happiness and freedom from fear and pain, just as I want to live and not to die, so do other beings."

So one should first become familiar with pervading oneself as example with loving-kindness. Only then should one choose someone who is liked and admired and much respected. The meditation can then be developed towards him, remembering endearing words or virtues of his, and thinking such thoughts about him as "may he be happy." (In this way the full absorption of contemplation, in which the word-meditation is left behind, can be attained.)

When this has become familiar, one can begin to practice loving-kindness towards a dearly beloved companion, and then towards a neutral person as very dear, or towards an enemy as neutral.

It is when dealing with an enemy that anger can arise, and all means must be tried in order to get rid of it. As soon as this has succeeded,

one will be able to regard an enemy without resentment and with loving-kindness in the same way as one does the admired person, the dearly loved friend, and the neutral person.

Then with repeated practice, jhana absorption should be attained in all cases. Loving-kindness can now be effectively maintained in being towards all beings; or to certain groups of beings at a time, or in one direction at a time to all; or to certain groups in succession.

Loving-kindness ought to be brought to the point where there are no longer any barriers set between persons, and for this the following example is given:

Suppose a man is with a dear, a neutral and a hostile person, himself being the fourth; then bandits come to him and say "we need one of you for human sacrifice." Now if that man thinks "Let then take this one, or that one," he has not yet broken down the barriers, and also if he thinks "Let them take me but not these three," he has not broken down the barriers either. Why not? Because he seeks the harm of him whom he wishes to be taken and the welfare of only the other three. It is only when he does not see a single one among the four to be chosen in preference to the other three, and directs his mind quite impartially towards himself and the other three, that he has broken down the barriers.

Loving-kindness has its "enemy within" in lust, which easily gains entry in its wake, and it must be well guarded against this. The remedy for lust is the contemplation of ugliness (in the body) as in the Satipattana Sutta (Digha Nikaya Sutta 22 and Majjhima Nikaya Sutta 10). Its "enemy without" is its opposite, ill-will, which finds its opportunities in the intervals when loving-kindness is not being actively practiced. (Full details will be found in Chapter IX of the *Visuddhimagga*).

In many discourses the Buddha lays emphasis on the need to balance contemplative concentration with understanding. The one supplies

the deficiencies of the other. Concentration alone lacks direction; understanding alone is dry and tiring.

In the discourses that follow the simile of a mother's love for her child is given. Now the incomparable value of a mother's love, which sets it above all other kinds, lies in the fact that she understands her child's welfare -- her love is not blind. Not love alone, nor faith alone, can ever bring a man all the way to the cessation of suffering, and that is why the Buddha, as the Supreme Physician, prescribes the development of five faculties in balanced harmony: the faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and understanding.

So concentration of love in its highest form -- the form that only the Buddha, and no one else, has given -- seen as a means to the end, becomes absolutely purified in one who has gained personal experience of the "supreme safety from bondage" (*anuttaram yogakkhemam*), which is Nibbana, as the ultimate welfare of beings.

For he knows from his own experience that their welfare is only assured permanently when suffering has been diagnosed, its origin abandoned, its cessation realized, and the way maintained in being. Then he has verified the Four Noble Truths for himself and can properly evaluate beings' welfare.

"Bhikkhus, it is through not discovering, not penetrating to four truths that both you and I have been trudging and traveling through the roundabout of rebirths for so long" (Digha Nikaya, Vol. II, p. 90). For the benefit of all those who have not yet done this, the way has been discovered and pointed out by the Buddha and its practicability attested by the Arahants.

The last discourse given in this collection, in fact, shows how this personal discovery and penetration to the Four Noble Truths can be achieved by using loving-kindness as the vehicle.

Reference

Nanamoli, Bikkhu. 1987. *Metta: The Practice of Loving Kindness*. Kandy: Buddhist publication Society.
