Loving Aversion

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 42:51

We continue with the guided loving-kindness practice. Our intention is to take you through the classical categories as metta is traditionally taught, allowing you to choose for yourself how to practice in whatever way is easiest for you. By "easiest," I mean using whichever person—whether it's yourself, a dear friend, a mentor, or any of the categories—most readily evokes feelings of well-wishing, friendliness, and connection in your daily practice.

There's no need to be in a hurry to move from that person to the most difficult person, as if somehow to prove to yourself that you've gotten it down. It doesn't work that way. If you were to simply stay for six weeks with yourself and the person that's easiest, that would be a very helpful way to cultivate loving-kindness practice. But we want to present to you the whole breadth of the classical teaching, and that's what we'll be doing over these evening guided metta sessions.

You'll also notice that each one of us does it in a slightly different way. Our phrases will probably each be a little different. Rather than taking that as a sign of confusion, you could take it as a sign of permission to be creative in your own method of practice. Find the phrases that work for you, that have the most ability to connect in your heart with what you're wishing.

One thing to keep in mind: if you do make up your own phrases, they should be fairly generic. As a friend of mine says, "May I have more hair" doesn't really translate to all beings. You get the picture. "May you be free from danger"—that can translate to all beings.

I know Joseph began with having you pick any being that really opens your heart and is easy for you. Tonight I'm going to start with the classical way, which is with yourself. After about fifteen minutes of sending loving-kindness to yourself, we'll move to the category classically called benefactor or mentor. This is someone who has done a lot for you, who really inspires you, or for whom you feel much gratitude. The traditional examples include a teacher, a mentor, someone who has helped you.

If a person like that comes to mind, you might have to try a few. Sometimes the most obvious person doesn't really work if there's a little other stuff on the side—you think it doesn't matter, but it might get in the way. You never know; it's a surprise. So I like to say you may have to audition a few benefactors. See which one is easiest—not who you should be able to feel it for, not who deserves it, but who is doing you another favor by being the person that lets you offer this gift of well-wishing, this generosity of heart.

If you have someone in that category, it should be someone for whom there isn't going to be any sexual interest likely to arise, because obviously that complicates the issue. This is actually a very important

piece, because we're trying to practice in the way that's easiest. The near enemy of metta—the state of heart and mind that we can actually confuse for loving-kindness—is love with attachment, or lust, or wanting. If there's someone for whom the real, true well-wishing can easily slide into wanting something back, it makes it harder to really come to rest and find your home in this mental state, this heart space of metta. So pick someone more or less uncomplicated.

Sometimes people can't find someone who would classically fit into the benefactor category. In that case, use the person Joseph brought up last time—someone really easy, like your grandchild. Some people even use their pets. It's whatever really lets you offer this gift of caring. That's the purpose.

And of course, with ourselves—well, that's complicated, but we start with ourselves. If it's dead, if it's flat, that's okay. If it's worse than dead and flat, that's also okay. Just gently keep coming back to yourself, and then when we're ready, we'll move to the benefactor or the easy person for you. In your daily practice of metta, if yourself really brings up a lot of self-hatred, judgment, or anger—nothing even close to metta—then start with the easiest person and try at the end to boomerang it back on yourself a little bit. You're learning to play with this.

So sit in a way that's as comfortable as possible, so you're not putting any extra strain on your body. Take a couple of deep breaths. Just let out any tension, any holding, any expectations. See if you can come to a sense of relaxed presence in your sitting, with your body, with yourself right now.

Take a moment to consciously reflect on some of your good qualities. This is a very skillful act—whether it's some kind or generous action or speech that you've done, or just one of your wholesome qualities. This isn't to bolster ego. This is really to open our hearts to the fact that we're worthy of loving-kindness, just being who we are right now in this moment.

As you bring something wholesome about yourself to mind, let it in.

Open yourself to appreciate that the way you would appreciate it in someone else who's dear to you.

And then take this sense of appreciation, however mild it may be, even if it's only a thought, and open it into yourself. Connect that appreciation with a sense of yourself—whether it's a felt sense of your body as you sit here, connecting with yourself physically here and now. If you're more visual, then bring into your heart and mind a mental image, a memory, a memory of a photo of yourself. Connect that appreciation with a felt sense or image.

And when you're ready, begin offering to yourself the phrases that you have been using. I will one time give an example of the ones I use, but then let you find your own words and your own rhythm:

May I be free from inner and outer danger.
May I have mental happiness.
May I have physical happiness.

May I live with ease of well-being—or *may I care for myself happily.*

Just offering the phrase one at a time to yourself as you would offer a precious gift. Not trying to feel any particular emotion, but simply the offering of a generous heart.

Don't worry about how much your mind wanders off. When you notice you've wandered, you don't need to investigate where it's gone. Simply take a moment to reconnect with the sense of yourself or the image. And when you feel here with yourself again, then offer the next phrase, gently, steadily.

Now bring into your mind, your heart, a sense or image of the person you want to use as the benefactor. Again, see if you can have a memory or an image, a felt sense of this person. Take a moment to consciously focus on their wholesome, their lovable or inspiring qualities—the qualities that allow your heart to open easily when you think of this person, someone you don't know well or someone you do know well.

And as you get a sense of them—appreciation or gratitude or love or happiness or friendliness—when you're ready, then offering each phrase one at a time. Not to change this person, not to make what you're wishing be so. The phrases are an expression of our open-hearted affection. They're not an attempt to change things. We're not looking for results. We're simply offering.

May you be safe from inner and outer harm.
May you be happy and peaceful.
May you have physical happiness.
May you live with ease of well-being.

And again, when you realize you've been lost, take a moment to bring up again the sense or image, the beautiful qualities, and then connect with each phrase. There's no hurry. Give it some time. If you don't feel the connection is happening, give it a little time before you decide it's not the right person. If other more difficult aspects of this person start to surface, see if you can just leave that in the background, consciously refocus on the qualities that open your heart, and again offer the loving-kindness.

For the last few minutes of this sitting, you can either stay with your benefactor or come back to yourself—whatever intuitively you feel you'd like to do. And just for a moment, send this loving-kindness to someone sitting next to you, or behind, or in front of you.

May the beneficial energies of our practice be shared with all beings for their well-being and awakening.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.