Muditā for the Neutral Person and the Difficult Person

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 31:19

Please sit comfortably.

First, bring your attention into the heart center, the center of the chest. Let this be the avenue through which you can connect to yourself.

Feel your own being through sitting here or through an image. Connect with your own goodness, remembering qualities in your character, good things you've done. Think of all the moments on this retreat when you've committed to being present, to making right effort, to showing up, to allowing what's difficult, to developing love and compassion—strong, wholesome intentions.

Then reflect on your life, your general situation, both here and at home, and reflect on what's going well for you. What are the things in your life you feel good about? As you connect with those, say your muditā phrase to yourself. I'll mention a few possibilities: "May my happiness and good fortune continue," or "I appreciate the blessings in my life," or "I'm grateful for my happiness and good fortune."

Continue staying in touch with those blessings and repeating your muditā phrase for yourself, remembering that we all share in the rare good fortune of this precious human birth.

When you're ready, bring in either your happy person or benefactor or dear friend—wherever you feel the most uplifting connection. As you connect with this person, make them alive in the room with you right now. Feel their presence, feel their character. Remember their good qualities. What do you like about them? What's noble in them?

Then connect with the things that you know are going well in this person's life—whether it's their mental state, work, family, friendships, hobbies, practice. Take in all the blessings in their life. As you connect with them, some of the difficulties may come through too. Pass over those and return to connecting with the things that are going well.

Send your muditā phrase to this person: "May your happiness and good fortune continue." If you like, you can add this subclause: "May they increase, may they never end." Or "I appreciate the blessings in your life," or most simply, "I'm happy that you're happy."

As with the mettā practice, from time to time just stop and feel in your body whatever you feel there, perhaps in the heart center. Notice whether there is a feeling of resonant joy for their happiness, or any

other emotions that can come, and make space for any feeling that's there. Return to the intention to appreciate their happiness.

Now bring to mind your neutral person—perhaps the same person you've been using through mettā and compassion as well, so that you're familiar with them. Connect with them as best you can, remembering what they look like, remembering places and times you've seen them, and getting as much of a feeling for their character as you can.

You don't know them well, but you can intuit some things. Feel into what you've intuited about their personality or character. If you've ever seen them looking happy, remember them with a smile on their face and fill in a bit about what they might have been happy about. It's okay to imagine a little bit with the neutral person. Whatever sense you can get about what might be going well in this person's life—any things you know they might enjoy, anything you've seen them appreciate, expressions of friendliness, cheerfulness.

Remember that every human life has some happiness in it. Send your muditā phrase to your neutral person: "May your happiness and good fortune continue. May they increase. May they never end."

Remember that you can try the four-step process with muditā as well as with mettā: recalling the image, checking the feeling, sending the phrase, resting in the heart center.

If the connection with the neutral person just feels too thin or too dry, go back to one of your other people—the happy person, benefactor, or friend. Connect again with the warm feelings for them. Come back to your neutral person when you like.

When you're ready now, you can bring in your difficult person. Bring this person to mind. Say their name or see them.

Feel their personality. If it's more comfortable for you to have them at a little bit of distance, that's fine—across the room, that's fine.

As you connect, simply notice any feelings that arise at their coming into your space. If there's unease, anxiety, resentment, just notice those feelings are there, allowing them to be there in the space.

Connect with your difficult person and see if you can call to mind any of their good qualities. Sometimes this is not easy, but you may know, or you might imagine how their mother would see them. Someone could probably find good qualities.

As you connect with their good qualities, bring to mind also all the things that may be going well in this person's life—whatever sources there are for happiness, enjoyment, contentment that are still wholesome. If this is someone who enjoys being unkind, that's not a true source of happiness, so don't bring those to mind. Any wholesome sources of enjoyment—friendships that they enjoy, family, work.

Notice as you're focusing on the things going well for them, any mood that comes with that. Is there a sense of sharing in the happiness? Is there some contraction around their happiness, some wishing that they would limit their happiness, wishing that circumstances weren't quite so good? Notice the presence of those feelings without judgment, without trying to push them away, just making space for them to be there.

Then begin to say your phrase for sympathetic joy to the difficult person: "May your happiness and good fortune continue. I appreciate the blessings in your life." Continue to say it as you've said it for the other people and yourself, and then see what comes. Check on the feeling, connect with the heart center, and see what you feel for their happiness. See if there's any judgment that they're not deserving it, and let that pass through.

In the last minutes of the sitting, extend this sense of resonant joy to all beings everywhere. The sense that it can go out from your heart center to all four quarters of the world, touching the beings in the hall, the beings on this land, beings on the earth and beyond. All beings near and far, seen and unseen. All beings having a mix of pleasure and pain in life. All beings wanting only to be happy and not to suffer.

For all beings: "May your happiness and good fortune continue. May you appreciate the blessings in your life. May you grow in happiness, peace, and freedom."

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