Morning Instructions: Pervading Mettā for All Beings

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 45:46

Let's begin this morning again chanting the refuges and precepts to start our sit. And let's do this in unison this time. See how we go.

In the meditation this morning we'll again focus the instructions on loving-kindness for all beings. Just to orient you to directions, because we'll be pervading the four directions with loving-kindness, you are roughly facing north. This building is not quite aligned north-south, but more or less you're facing north. So East is to your right, West is to your left and South is behind you.

One of the instructions that I'll give is as you're directing loving kindness to beings in the North, you can think of all the beings to the North who will be receiving your loving kindness. You can think of our lovely neighbors from Canada whom we wish were closer to our country. You can think of all the native people, indigenous people up in the north of Canada and of course throughout. You can think of all the creatures to the north, creatures in the Great Lakes and the Bay and the Arctic, whales and fishes, seals and polar bears.

When we aim to the east, to the west, to the south, you can be really creative in your imagination about what beings are receiving your loving kindness in those directions. If there are people who you've wanted to bring in, who you haven't brought into the metta because we've been restricted, this is a great time to bring them in. Whenever we hit their direction, you can remember your loved ones who are in that direction and say the phrases specifically for them.

As we're extending to the various directions and you think of people in the hall who are in that direction from you, you can bring up their faces and say the loving kindness specifically for those people, or the birds you hear outside, or whatever sparks your imagination. Loving kindness for all beings is really a wonderful time to be creative. Bring in any beings that come to your imagination, think of the wide range of beings that your metta is directed to, and let that tickle your fancy. Metta for all beings can never become boring for me because there's always so much imagination we can bring to it, so many other people we can bring in.

Please begin by sitting comfortably. We'll begin again with loving kindness on a few individuals that you've worked with in order to warm up the field.

In sitting comfortably, coming into your body. Let the body be relaxed, the forehead and the eyes, the jaw

and shoulders, the belly and hands. Not trying to get anywhere else, just resting, settling into the moment.

As you feel your body in sitting, coming into the heart center, bringing your attention to the center of the chest. Aware especially of any sensations, any mood that might be felt there.

Connecting with yourself, either through this felt sense, the body here and now, or an image of yourself somewhere you're contented and happy, maybe smiling. Remember your goodness. You've devoted so much of your life to the cultivation of wisdom and love. It's a really unusual thing in the human realm. A really beautiful expression of what you care about. I wish we could populate the world with you all.

With that sense of your own good nature, then directing the thoughts of loving kindness to yourself.

Then bringing in either your benefactor or good friend, wherever you feel the warmer connection. Bringing them alive with you in this moment so you feel their presence. Remember what you appreciate in them. Remember all their good qualities. There's some mysterious way that happiness follows goodness. In touch with your benefactor or friend's goodness and directing your thoughts of loving kindness to them.

Now letting go of your friend or benefactor. Just coming into the moment. Again, feeling your body, feeling the heart center, noticing any mood that's present.

As you rest in the moment, feel the wide field of your own awareness. How it stretches out to hold everyone in the room, the space in the room, the objects in the room. And beyond to the outdoors, to nature, to the trees and creatures and grass. And on in a fairly limitless way, to include all the beings everywhere.

We reconnect with that initial wish that's the impulse of loving kindness, that all beings everywhere be well, in a vast range of life. So we say that with our simple wish, may all beings be well, happy, and peaceful. May all beings be well, happy and peaceful.

Now we can take up the practice of the Four Quarters. We'll do this in two different ways. The first way that we'll do it, as you're sitting we'll begin with the quarter that's in front of you. So that is to the north. Just have the sense of taking in the vastness of what's in front of you. As you're sitting in the hall facing the front, you're roughly facing north. Remember, as you take in this quarter, that your gaze includes up into the sky as well as down into the earth.

And now, as you repeat the phrases for all beings to the north, let yourself feel the flame in the heart center. Imagine raising the metal pane on the side of the lantern that faces north, allowing the light of loving-kindness to shine out in that direction. You can visualize this warm, golden light streaming from your heart toward all the beings in the north.

May all beings to the north be safe, happy, healthy, and at ease.

The light doesn't need to be forced or pushed. It simply radiates naturally from your heart center, carrying your intentions of goodwill to all beings in that quarter.

And now turning your attention to the east, to your right. Imagine raising the metal pane on the eastern side of the lantern. Feel the warm light of metta flowing from your heart toward all beings to the east.

May all beings to the east be safe, happy, healthy, and at ease.

Now toward the south, behind you. Raising the southern pane of the lantern, allowing the light to flow from your heart center toward all beings in that direction.

May all beings to the south be safe, happy, healthy, and at ease.

And finally, to the west, to your left. Lifting the western pane and letting the light of loving-kindness stream from your heart toward all beings in that quarter.

May all beings to the west be safe, happy, healthy, and at ease.

And now imagine raising all four metal panes simultaneously, so that light is radiating from your heart center in all four directions at once. The lantern in your heart is shining its warm, golden light equally to the north, east, south, and west.

Feel this light representing your loving-kindness flowing out to encompass all beings everywhere. Not just those in the four horizontal directions, but also those above you—in the sky, in space—and those below you, within the earth itself.

May all beings in all directions, above and below, be safe, happy, healthy, and at ease.

Rest in this sense of universal loving-kindness, your heart radiating goodwill in all directions like a beacon of light. There's no effort required, no straining to make the light go further. Simply allow it to shine naturally from your heart center, touching all beings with its warmth.

Take a few more moments to rest in this all-encompassing metta, feeling connected to all life everywhere through the light of loving-kindness flowing from your heart.

So this will be a practice in pervading the four quarters one at a time without using words.

First, you lift the cover over the glass that's to the north, that's in front of you. The light of your loving kindness can shine in that direction in front of you. You let your metta pervade the quarter that's in front of you without any words. You simply have the sense that that quarter of your heart is open and the metta can stream out and radiate however it likes.

You don't have to try to make it fill that quarter. You don't have to try to make it go any further than it's inclined to. You open that door on the lantern and you let the light of metta shine in front of you, touching

all beings in that direction who can feel it. I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness.

Now you let the door go down over that pane that's to the north, and you open the door that's over the pane of glass to the east. You let your loving-kindness pervade the quarter to your right, letting the light simply go free and extend as far as it likes to go. Loving kindness extended to all the beings in the quarter to your right.

If different beings come to your mind as you're pervading, that's fine. You can let them stay there and be touched by the light.

Then closing the door on the pane facing right, and opening the door on the pane that faces to your rear, behind you, roughly south. Simply let the light of your loving kindness shine in that direction, pervading the quarter to your back.

Then close the door facing south and open the door that faces west. Your metta extends to the west as far as it naturally does.

Now open all the doors over all four panes of the lantern and have a sense that the light of your loving kindness can shine in all directions equally. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a heart imbued with loving kindness.

May all beings everywhere be safe and protected from harm.
May all beings be happy and peaceful.
May all beings be healthy and strong.
May all beings live with the ease of well being.

You can bring in this meditation on all beings as you like, as it seems appropriate to you. As you may have found yesterday, it's a really lovely meditation to do when walking, when walking outdoors. You can really feel that space and the pervading nature. And any being that comes in your orbit, make it specific to them—people, birds, chipmunks, squirrels. It's directed to individuals.

In practicing with this last form where it's wordless and you're just pervading a quarter or the whole world with this light, because there's not a clear form to focus on, sometimes it may be easier for the mind to drift. If you're practicing that way and you find a lot more thoughts coming in, come back to the phrases for a while. It can be phrases for individuals, phrases for the four quarters, all beings, however you like. But see that the concentration doesn't get too frayed around the edges as you practice with this formless, pervading kind of metta.

Work in your own self, benefactor and friend when they feel helpful. One of the risks in "all beings" practice is if it's not connecting with specific beings, it can get too abstract—"Oh yeah, may all beings be happy, right"—but we're not really feeling the happiness and welfare of individuals. It can just become

conceptual.

If that happens, bring in specific beings to the north, south, east, west, whatever, or go back to your three easy folks—self, benefactor and friend—to make the metta warm again and real, so that it lands somewhere.

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