Guided Mettā Meditation For All Beings

Winnie Nazarko · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2010) · 46:58

Tonight we're doing a guided metta meditation. I'm assuming at this point that the basic instructions are familiar to people, so I won't do much prompting in that area. But before we start, I wanted to offer a few reflections on this particular practice and its value.

People who have done studies of children raised in very difficult circumstances—children with absent or alcoholic or abusive parents, or where there's been a loss of parental connection for one reason or another—have noticed something important. The well-being of the child, their basic sense of things being workable in the world as they become adults, seems to have something to do with whether or not they found at least one adult they could make a connection with. Not necessarily even someone close to them, but one adult who could offer them a baseline sense of having a lifeline, of having support and help in the world.

This could even be someone who probably didn't think twice about their relationship with the child—like the lunch lady at school who knew this particular kid liked an extra scoop of potatoes, or a coach, or a teacher. Someone who offered metta, even though they might not have thought of it that way. That's just part of how they were being in the world, and it made a tremendous difference to the child.

We all know, or could probably think of, occasions in our own lives where we were scraping along the bottom or close to an edge or having a really difficult time, and someone offered us kindness when we really needed it.

So this is a very powerful force—not to be confused with wearing pink all the time or putting heart-shaped dots above your i's. This is a very powerful practice. When we reflect on its value in our own lives, in the lives of our families and our communities, and consider how different things would be, could be, if this particular quality of mind were more widespread and valued and consciously cultivated, we can see its importance.

I always think, when beginning a period of intensive metta practice, that at the time we're here doing this, there are many places in the world where people are consciously cultivating the opposite—although they might not think of it that way. The cultivation of the opposite, the things done with guns and bombs and rockets and suicide belts, by all kinds of groups—that always seems to be well organized, doesn't it? And funded. We're organized about that. The opposite, not so much. This kind of place is rare in the world. This kind of opportunity is very rare in the world, and very important.

Some people, when they are doing metta practice or working with a teacher who suggests it, get the idea

that this is some sort of practice for people who really can't do insight. That's a wrong understanding. This practice is foundational in many ways to being able to do insight, because the mind that can do insight is the mind that has basic self-care, self-love—a mind that can hold experience with kindness and without losing respect for the person who may be experiencing difficult emotions like hatred or anger or resentment or self-doubt.

To see what's in our mind streams, the full range of it—some of which isn't very pretty and is very painful—takes a lot of courage and a lot of kindness. It takes us being able to stay loyal to ourselves in some deep way, despite what we experience. To not turn on ourselves, to not give up respect for ourselves or care for ourselves or love for ourselves. So the mind of metta is very much present in insight practice. In fact, I would say that for insight practice to be successful, it has to be present.

This quality of metta is also the second step on the Eightfold Path—wise intention, along with renunciation and compassion. It's also one of the paramis. So it's an important quality that occurs again and again in the Buddha's teaching and is one of the qualities he developed to an extremely high level, one that he loved very much. He would talk about how one of the things that gave him the most pleasure in the world was to reflect upon the fact that he had only loving-kindness towards all beings, that he had no resentment, no ill will towards any being whatsoever, in any state. It would bring him tremendous joy.

This quality, of course, is part of our heritage as human beings. We all have this intrinsic in ourselves, developed at some level. This particular practice is designed to take what is naturally present, to strengthen it, to purify it, and through the use of intention, to develop the capacity to extend it further and further out from where we find it naturally occurring—naturally occurring being, for instance, toward those closest to us, our family, our friends, the people for whom loving-kindness tends to flow more easily.

That's the understanding of why it's a progressive instruction, why we start with ourselves generally, where presumably it's accessible. Yet we find often in our culture it's not such an easy place to start. So then we look around—what person, what being, what representation can we use to begin, so that we can prime the pump and get it going? We summon the quality in the body and mind and then keep spinning that wheel through the recitation of the phrases, with the intention to summon loving-kindness and to rest in that state.

That's the basic methodology and the importance of this practice in the Buddhist system of bhavana, meditative development.

With that, we're going to work tonight on extending metta to all beings. We'll start by doing a brief run-through, beginning with self and benefactor, then neutral person, difficult person, and finally all beings.

I'll say the phrases. If you have ones that you are using, you can continue to do that. If for one reason or another it feels indicated to stay with one of the earlier categories, you can do that. And I may vary the

phrases as we go along. I find for myself, once it really starts moving, that kind of free-forming it can work well. So that's something you can do for yourself, too—you could stick with your basic phrases, or you could start to free-form as it arises in your mindstream.

So settling back now, we connect with the intention to open to the quality of mettā and to offer it, knowing its importance and value to ourselves, our families, our communities, and all beings.

May I be happy. May I be safe. May I be healthy. May I live with ease of well-being.

May I be happy and at peace. May I be healthy. May I know ease of well-being.

May I be happy and at peace. May I be healthy and strong in body and mind. May I be safe. May I know ease of well-being.

May I be happy and safe. May I be healthy in body and mind. May I know ease of well-being.

And now, leaving if you wish, summon the felt sense or image of a dear friend or benefactor.

Just as I wish to be happy, so may you be happy. Just as I wish to be safe, so may you be safe. As I wish to be healthy, may you too be healthy. As I wish for ease of well-being, so too may you know ease of well-being.

May you be happy and safe. May you be healthy in body and mind. May you know ease of well-being.

May you be happy and safe. May you be healthy and strong. May you know ease of well-being and freedom from worry.

May you be at ease. May you be free from danger and harm.

And now if you wish, leave that being with a blessing and bring to mind a neutral person or a difficult person.

Just as I wish to be happy, so may you be happy. As I wish to be safe, may you be safe. As I wish to be healthy, may you too be healthy and strong. As I wish for ease of well-being, may you know ease of well-being and joy.

May you be happy and safe. May you be healthy. May you live with ease of well-being.

May you be happy in every way. May you be healthy and strong. May you be safe from inner and outer harm and danger, and live at ease.

May you awaken to your true nature.

May you be happy and safe. May you be healthy and live with ease of well-being.

And now bringing this to a close, leave this being with a blessing. Bring your awareness to your heart center and soften there. Become aware of the people sitting next to you, around you.

May all beings here in this space, seen and unseen—may we all be happy and safe. May we all be healthy and strong. May we all know ease of well-being and peace.

May we awaken. May we all be happy.

May we all be safe. May we all be healthy and live with ease of well-being.

And now allow the field of intention to open beyond this room and include in the field the other beings in this building and around it—the beings in the woods, in the fields, in the sky, in the water, underground, seen and unseen. May these too be happy and safe. May they be healthy and live with ease of well-being. The birds and deer, the insects and snakes, the chipmunks, the squirrels and fox, the frogs—all beings, happy and safe. May they be healthy and live with ease and safety.

Now expand your field of intention to include the town nearby, the area around this retreat center, going out however the images come to you. May all beings in this town and state be happy and safe. May they be healthy and live with ease of well-being. All the many lives, all different, all wishing to be happy and safe and healthy and to live with ease, just as we do. May you be free from harm. May you be protected from danger.

And now opening wider. May all beings to the north—New England and Canada, the Arctic, the moose and polar bears, seals, all living things—may you too be happy and safe, healthy. May you live with ease.

And all beings to the east, all the beings in the sea—the fish and the whales and the dolphins, and the invertebrates, seagulls, all the humans—to Europe, the Middle East, Russia and China, Japan. May all beings of every kind be happy and safe. May all beings to the east be healthy and live with ease of well-being.

All beings to the south—the lower states, Mexico, Central America, the Gulf, Cuba and Haiti, South America, the Antarctic. All the many lives of sentient beings, all wish to be happy and safe, all wish to be healthy and to live with ease. May they all be protected from harm and danger. And to Africa and all the beings—humans, the great apes, giraffes, lions, gazelles, tortoises, birds, snakes, insects—all of life so fragile. May you be happy and safe. May you be healthy and live with ease. May no harm come to you. May you know joy and peace of mind.

To the west—the western states and Japan, Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia, the great Pacific, Asia, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka. May all the beings to the west and southwest also be happy and safe. May we all be healthy and live with ease.

Now allow your mettā to extend in all directions without border, and allow your intention to fall on all beings in all dimensions without exception. Blessing all the beings on this planet, and the planet itself. The Mother.

May we all be happy and safe. May we be healthy. May we live with ease of well-being. May all beings in

this and all dimensions, seen and unseen, beings in the higher realms and beings in the lower realms, humans and non-humans—may all sentient beings without exception be blessed.

May we all awaken. May we know our true name. May we awaken together.

May mettā radiate throughout the web of life.

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