

# Morning Meditation: Mettā: Developing Goodwill – the Theory

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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Let us first understand the importance of metta practice. One of the problems that can occur with vipassana only practice is that the inner onlooker, the observer becomes too detached. That detachment is necessary for clear comprehension and close investigation of the Three Characteristics, but the equanimity there soon degrades into indifference once we take this position into the world of action. A woman told me that after practising vipassana her husband found her cold and unresponsive. I suggested she practice metta. The last report was positive. That's what metta is all about. Re-engagement. It's there in the Eightfold Path. After Right Understanding comes Right Attitude. Whatever wisdom we gain from our practice remains sterile unless translated into an attitude and then with both this understanding and attitude we can progress through to Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. However, this re-engaging must also not be confused with other forms of love. Metta is not attachment. It's not that in our present deluded state we can love, especially those close to us without attachment, but it's important to know that metta isn't that. It's not erotic love either. And it's not an emotion! Metta is an attitude. The heart may indeed respond with warm and delicious feelings, but that's not metta. That's why I prefer the translation of goodwill as opposed to loving-kindness, though it is also that. Metta is all the virtues you would ask of a good friend. And sometimes a good friend may tell you something you don't want to hear. Metta allows people to be truthful with us. Likewise we should treat those who dislike us or whom we dislike with the same impartial goodwill. This is the meaning of 'love your enemy'. You don't have to 'love' someone to treat them with metta. In this way metta is the basic relationship we should have towards everyone. Indeed all beings. It can even affect the way we treat objects. How often have you closed the fridge door gently and kindly? Metta is the default position in our relationship to the world. From this the other two qualities of compassion and joy arise naturally. Would it not be perfectly normal to want to help friend in distress? And goodwill makes it easy for us to rejoice in a friend's success. These attitudes – metta, compassion, joy – are called Illimitables. Their development is indefinite. For there are innumerable number of beings and the depth of development is unfathomable. Like a number, no matter how big it is, you can always add one. These are underpinned by equanimity, the other Illimitable, which here means non-attachment or non-prejudice. And all together these four are known as the Brahmavihara – Dwelling Place of the Gods. In other words, they create the bountiful heart and beautiful mind. How often should we practice? All sittings, no matter how long, should end with some metta. At least five minutes. You will find a five minute metta at the end of both the Detailed Guided Meditation and Metta on the website. <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audio.htm> But the Buddha's advice is to practice it all the time! Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down. Whenever there is 'nothing to do' – sitting on a bus,

waiting at the traffic lights, climbing stairs – that's the time to practice. If we were to use up all the minutes when we are 'doing nothing' with metta practice, just that would change our lives radically. For metta is the only true revolutionary force.

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