

# Mettā, Forgiveness and Determination Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 51:22

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So good afternoon everybody. I hope you're ready to do a little bit of that *mettā* practice. If you get yourself into a good meditational posture, I'll go through an explanation and then we'll do the exercise. The exercise includes after *mettā* the forgiveness exercise and then how to develop our sense of determination.

By the way, this morning, those of you who opened your eyes and looked at the screen may have noticed that I was leaning to the left. I didn't used to. I think this is to do with some injury I have in the spine. I've got a prolapsed disc on one side, and I think that's what makes me do it. I'm not aware of it at all. See, just like the leaning tower of Pisa. I'm not aware I'm leaning.

So let's get ourselves into a comfortable posture. The usual thing – make sure the energy is running up the spine, lifting up from the lower back and the abdomen. Just a moment to relax the brow, the jaw, the shoulders.

So let me explain a few things about *mettā* before we actually do the practice. Remember that when we are practicing *vipassanā*, the quality that we want to develop is equanimity. So there's no specific effort to develop goodwill or compassion or joy. In a sense, that's all presumed. We wouldn't be doing it were it not that we care for ourselves. But when we finish the *vipassanā* and come out into the world, that equanimity can stay with us and can begin to corrupt into what's known as its more subtle enemy of indifference. We might feel we're not engaging. People might feel that we are indifferent. And so the way we overcome that is by practicing *mettā*. That re-engages us.

Now *mettā* is the basic relationship that the Buddha put to us that we should have towards all beings. So sometimes it's translated as an affective feeling of loving kindness, but I much prefer an attitudinal way of looking at it. In other words, goodwill. It's just goodwill.

Now when you've established a good relationship of goodwill with everybody – I mean it's easy to do with friends, obviously – you can see that if a friend or a family member or whatever falls into misfortune, there's just a natural desire to help. And if they have good fortune, then of course you're happy for them. So compassion and empathetic joy arise quite naturally from that base of goodwill.

Now when we talk about it being non-attached – in the old books you might read detached, which sounded a very cold sort of love or goodwill. Now they use this non-dual term, neither attached nor detached, but non-attached. But I think we can say, simply, universal. It rises above whether we like somebody or not, or whether they like us or not. So it's rising above personality to the humanity within us.

And of course, this can be extended to any living being, all animals.

Now, it's not an emotion per se, but an attitude, as I say. So don't worry if you don't feel loving – it's still working because these intentions are creating a habit. From an intention you get an action, an action of thought in this case, which comes out of goodwill, and from that you get a habit. So don't worry about whether you feel like practicing *mettā* or not. The heart may respond. You might have lovely warm feelings and there's no problem with that at all. And in fact, you might encourage the heart by sending warm feelings from the heart to the various subjects that we bring to mind. So just practice anyway.

So the practice – we go through the various categories, as you'll see. First particular and then more universal. And when we get to all beings, we'll do it in the six directions. All beings before us, behind us, left, right, above and below.

Now, the traditional blessings, if you wish to use them – and of course, you can always make up your own – but the traditional blessings are: may you be safe, well and happy. Everybody wants to be safe. Everybody wants good health. And of course, everybody wants to be free of mental distress. So may you be safe, well and happy. And to have a certain ease about living. So to live contented and in harmony with the world, even when the world is not such a pleasant place for us. So may you be safe, well and happy, live contented in harmony with the world.

So let's begin by bringing to mind someone who's been a benefactor for us, someone who's helped us in our lives. And as you picture that person in your mind's eye, just direct your goodwill towards them. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented in harmony with the world.

We can bring to mind someone who is near and dear to us, or more than one person – it doesn't matter. And again, as you picture them in your mind's eye, just direct your goodwill towards them.

You can bring to mind a friend. Even an acquaintance.

Now there's a category of a neutral person. So if you think about it, many days in our lives, we see many tens of people whom we don't know. These are all neutral people. Can you think of somebody whom you see quite often when you travel, maybe at work, down the street, a neighbour, but you don't know them? Offer them the same quality of goodwill.

Turning now that stream of goodwill towards ourselves. Now, if you find that's difficult, if you're suffering a little bit from self-aversion, just put that to the side. So we're not suppressing it. We know it's there. When we suppress something, we do it with anger or with aversion or fear. But here we just acknowledge it, just putting it to the side, parking it. Sometimes it helps to put your hand over your heart and then just speak gently into your own heart. May I be safe, well and happy. May I live contented in harmony with the world.

Now it's at this point that we can bring somebody into the heart who we're having a hard time with. So

obviously you don't have to go for the big one. Just make it somebody who you don't feel too bad about. And just as they slip into your mind, just hold them there for a second and at least offer them your goodwill.

Now we can open up more outwardly. If there are other people living with you in the house, then we bring them in now. For those who are living with close neighbours in flats or something, you can bring those people in. Whoever is around you, just bring them into your *mettā*, into your goodwill, and offer them your blessings.

And from there, just begin to widen out to include your neighbourhood, your village, your small town, just the wider area in which you live. And from there, radiating out to all the people in our country. And from there to all the peoples of Europe – if you happen to be in another continent, of course, to all the peoples of your continent. And from there to all people on earth.

So now we come to all beings in all directions. So here you can just think of it as infinite space and just send out your goodwill in all directions. I mean if you have a vivid imagination you might populate them, but I think it's enough just to send your goodwill into a sort of infinite space.

All beings before us. All beings behind us. All beings to our left. All beings to our right. All beings below us. All beings above us. And finally, to all beings in all directions.

Having developed our goodwill, we can move into the area of forgivingness, overcoming our grudges and our resentments. So there are three areas. There is asking for forgiveness, forgiving others and forgiving ourselves.

So beginning with asking for forgiveness. Can we bring to mind someone whom we've hurt? And again, we don't have to go for the big one. This is an exercise which we can extend in the fullness of time. If you can bring to mind somebody whom you've hurt in some way, a sharp word or whatever. Now, as they come to mind, you'll find you have a memory of an event or the person themselves, and the attitude will come of hurting them and you may find there's still justifying yourself, or you might find some guilt or some shame or a desire to be reconciled, remorse. So it's a case of using this image, this event, to contact those feelings and to really allow them to express themselves.

Now you have to be very careful not to let this image or this memory suddenly draw you into a fantasy, in which case, of course, it will be developing one of these attitudes. So be careful of that. You have to hold the event, hold the person in your mind, and as it were, look into your heart and just see if you can feel what your reaction is. Is there still some justification there? Is there still guilt or shame, sense of remorse? And just stay with it. Just let the heart express itself.

Someone whom we hurt. Can we see how we've hurt ourselves? How these mental states are unwholesome, unskillful, knowing that they will just create more suffering? We undermine them by seeking reconciliation. So again, we bring that person to mind and talk to them and bring yourself round

to apologising, to make amends. Perhaps you can see in them a desire to be reconciled, holding out a hand of friendship. Can you take it? Allowing the love back in. And let's offer them our good wishes. Allowing them to fade away.

Well, you can see here the two purposes for such an exercise. First of all, it's a process of healing the heart. It's also just like we go for an interview for a job. You're preparing yourself for that interview. And even though the interview is nothing like the way you would imagine it, what you have done is prepared yourself and entered the room with a certain confidence. So it is with these exercises. It makes it more easy for us to ask for forgiveness.

Turning now to somebody who's hurt us. So again don't feel you have to go for the big one. And as that person comes to mind there'll be an event or there might be a history, and of course we'll have hurt, and we tend not to want to feel the hurt. It's humiliating, after all. We prefer to be angry and to seek revenge. So these are the two qualities, these are the two reactions which we are getting in touch with when we bring somebody to mind who's hurt us. So again, be careful not to let the mind wander off into a fantasy. Just hold the image fairly still and just feel. Allow the heart to express its turbulences. Open up to the hurt with affectionate awareness.

Someone who's hurt us. Can we accept that these feelings, these mental states have been produced by us, not the other person? We're the ones who reacted with hurt. We're the ones who are seeking revenge. And we accept that these are unwholesome states, unskillful, just making us suffer. So the antidote, of course, is to forgive. So we bring this person to mind and have a conversation with them. Just tell them how much you were hurt, etc. How you do not intend to seek revenge and all that. And finally tell them that you forgive them.

Perhaps you can see in them a desire to be reconciled. And they also want to make friends, make amends. Can you hold out a hand of friendship to them? Can you wish them well? And again, allowing that image to fade away.

Turning to ourselves and the harm that we might have done ourselves physically, mentally. So there are two contemplations which help us here. The first is dependent origination, the psychology the Buddha teaches, and a teaching on *kamma*.

Understanding dependent origination means that we understand that we have started from a position of not knowing and we make a mistake, and this mistake leads us to have wrong attitude, wrong understandings, and through the practice of meditation these are corrected and we end up with wisdom. From the heart's point of view, we're never meant to do any harm. We begin from a place of innocence, but because of these wrong understandings we do harm, and that's the suffering that we have within us and the pain that we cause others. And through the process of meditation we allow the heart to heal itself and so we end up with purity.

So there's your two trajectories: from ignorance, from not knowing – it's not a culpable ignorance, we just didn't know – from a mistake, a delusion, through these misunderstandings we create attitudes, and then through the meditation, through insight, we begin to undo these knots and we become wise. From the heart's point of view we begin with innocence, but because of these wrong understandings we create harm to ourselves, to others, and through the process of meditation we allow the heart to heal itself and we end with purity. So we're on the back end of this. We're moving now very rapidly towards wisdom and purity.

*Kamma* is very simple. It's at an obvious base. When you do harm, harm comes of it. And when you do something that's wholesome, good, good comes to it. You can say that as a general rule. From our point of view, with this forgiveness, we have to understand that punishment, self-hatred, self-aversion, picking on ourselves are completely unnecessary. Whenever we do harm, all we have to do is bear the consequence. That's enough. That's the karmic consequence of what we've done. So we don't have to get into all this other stuff about hating ourselves and punishing ourselves or even, and of course, punishing others. So it really is all about receiving the consequences of unwholesome action.

So can we choose something that we've done to ourselves which has harmed us? It might be physical harm – we might take drugs or whatever. It might be emotional harm – we might have put things in our minds which have become obsessive. Just choose one of them.

Now can you open up to that? Can you receive it? Can you hold it with a sense of care, of loving kindness? And just allow it to manifest. Now you can also talk to your body. You can talk to your heart. You can speak gently into your heart. Sometimes if you have the time, you wait for the heart to completely express its emotional turbulence. It might be feeling sorry about any harm you've done to your body. You might be angry about the way you've behaved in the past and things like that.

So for the purpose of this exercise, it's a case of making a resolution that you won't behave like that again. To seal the past with the resolution. Now if it's a habit that we don't want and we keep falling into it, we have to recognize that sometimes one resolution won't do and we have to go through this many times until we disempower a habit we don't want. And offer ourselves some blessings.

So this brings to an end our practice of loving kindness. And we can move to just an exercise which helps us to develop determination. So there are four steps to this. First of all, I can. So I can resist temptation and I can develop virtue. Then we have to take on personal responsibility for this. I ought to, for my own benefit and the benefit of others. Sometimes you have to cajole, you have to encourage the heart. I want to, I want to. And finally, when the occasion arises, I will, I will resist that temptation. I will develop that virtue.

Can we bring to mind a trait within our characters, personalities, which we would be very happy to be rid of? And then just gently speaking – again, always speaking into the heart, you see. I can resist. I ought to for my own benefit and the benefit of others. I want to. And I will. Can, ought, want and will. Three times.

We can bring a virtue to mind that we'd like to develop more. So I can, I ought to, want to, and I will when the occasion arises. Three times.

Well, this brings to an end our little practices of developing determination. So we can end this now with a slightly different way of developing *mettā*, just repeating these phrases.

May I be free of greed and selfishness. May I be free of anger and ill will. May I be free of fear and anxiety. May I be free of ignorance and delusion. May I be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May I be forgiving and compassionate. May I be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May I be peace loving and calm. May I be liberated of all my sufferings. May I experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Radiating this goodwill to all beings in all directions.

May all beings be free of greed and selfishness. May all beings be free of anger and ill will. May all beings be free of fear and anxiety. May all beings be free of ignorance and delusion. May all beings be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May all beings be forgiving and compassionate. May all beings be joyful, and rejoice in the success of others. May all beings be peace loving and calm. May all beings be liberated of all their sufferings. May all beings experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

We can end our meditation with a little chant, which means may all beings be happy. *Sabhe sattā sukhitā hantu*, three times. *Sādhu*, which means well done, three times.

*Sabhe sattā sukhitā hantu*

*Sabhe sattā sukhitā hantu*

*Sabhe sattā sukhitā hantu*

*Sādhu sādhu sādhu*

Very good.

So it's up to you now to continue your practice. You could continue practicing this method all afternoon if you wish. Those of you who are officially on the course, we have a Zoom meeting at 4 o'clock. And at 6 o'clock, Brian will begin his Reiki class. And then we shall be back this evening at 8 o'clock for a little short talk and some meditation.

Until then, please keep practicing. Thank you.

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