

## ***Mettā* Meditation**

### **by Sayalay Susila**

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### **The Meaning of Loving Kindness**

Before we can practice loving kindness, we must understand what it is. In Pāli loving kindness is called *mettā*, which means gentleness, like a full moon. *Mettā* also conveys friendliness, but mostly we think of *mettā* as unconditional and universal love--pure love, without expectation from the other party, love that makes no distinction between living beings. *Mettā* is good will, a way of wishing others to be well and unconditionally happy. With the practice of *mettā* meditation, we develop a genuine wish for our own happiness as well as the happiness of others. When we develop *mettā* for all beings by wishing them good health and happiness, we are the first to reap the benefits, as we become happy and peaceful ourselves.

*Mettā* may be appreciated by any person under any circumstance of life, although for many of us it may be particularly useful when we must spend time with an angry person. If we live or work with an ill-tempered person, someone who is consumed with angry thoughts and violent acts, our heart burns with fear. We are always worried, gripped by anxiety. At such times, if we react by radiating *mettā* to the angry person we can come to know and clearly understand the serene and peaceful quality that settles upon not only our own life, but on the life of the angry person as well. As we radiate thoughts of *mettā* we find that peace develops within our heart and then we begin to fully understand *mettā*'s true value. The beings to whom *mettā* is being radiated also experience the benefit of *mettā*, although they may not understand why! Their anger and ill-temper will be eased and they will be more pleasant to be around. When we live or work in the shade of a person who has the quality of *mettā*, we feel serene and peaceful.

## The Spirit of Loving Kindness

The spirit of *mettā* is an expression of pure love. We sincerely wish others to be “well and happy; free from all danger, diseases, and calamities; and free from all mental and physical sufferings.” We give warm wishes unconditionally and genuinely. There is never a wish for anything that is not beneficial. Most of us find it easy to wish that our good friends will be well and happy, but it is often very difficult to wish that same happiness and well-being to those we don’t like, or to our enemies. This approach to loving kindness is called “tainted” love, since it is based on a self-cherishing, or ego-centered, attitude and is tainted with like and dislike based on one’s preferences. If our “good friends” turn out to be harmful to us, our so-called *mettā* toward them immediately shrinks like a feather thrown into the fire. True *mettā* makes no distinction between any living beings. It is like the love of a mother toward her only child, radiated into the world and offered to all living beings.

*Mettā* is like a soothing balm; it is always cool, joyful, and filled with delight. When we meditate on loving kindness, the heart feels cool and happy and never burns with fear or anxiety. *Mettā* is always forgiving. No matter how much wrong a person has done to you, you will always forgive them because your love is unconditional. This kind of love will never turn to disappointment or hatred. It is concerned only with helping and is completely free from any destructive impulse. You work for the benefit of others and when others are benefited, you yourself become happy.

*Mettā* is also not controlling, domineering, or oppressive. You do not try to exercise your control, which again is based on self-cherishing or tainted love. You simply let others be themselves and do not have the slightest desire to control or change them. The spirit of *mettā* is free from entanglement and is accompanied by the spirit of independence.

As we develop and strengthen the quality of *mettā* in our hearts and minds by wishing all beings good health and happiness, there is no more desire to hurt other living beings. This is called *mano-kamma mettā* or *mettā* in mental actions. Since speech and action follow the command of the mind, when our mind is filled with *mettā* we will not utter any harsh or hurtful words to cause harm or suffering to other living beings. Instead we speak lovingly and beneficially toward all living beings. This is called *vaci-kamma mettā* or *mettā* in verbal actions. In the same way, our bodily actions also will become benevolent by rendering help rather than causing bodily harm to other living beings. This is known as *kaya-kamma mettā* or *mettā* in bodily actions. Thus, having *mettā* for others mentally, or in other words not having even a single thought to hurt other people, we fulfill the practice of morality. When we practice in this way, other living beings do not suffer because of us. If other living beings are not suffering, then they will be truly happy. So *mettā* is the proximate cause for morality and it is an active aspect, whereas perfection of morality is the effect, which is passive. A heart bereft of *mettā* is often led astray to thoughts of harming others, either through killing, stealing, sexual abuse, or deceiving.

## **The Enemy of Loving Kindness**

Loving kindness has two types of enemies:

Near Enemy

Far Enemy

The near enemy of loving kindness is attachment. This attachment, which can be disguised as love, is the near enemy because attachment can easily creep into the heart of loving kindness without our knowledge. The heart may suddenly fill with desire and burn with lust. Lust is a very good actor, so we might think it is *mettā*. If attachment and lust enter the picture, the mind then becomes possessive and domineering, and develops a destructive tendency that no longer resembles the spirit of *mettā*.

While we radiate loving kindness, from time to time we must check our mind and ask: is our *mettā* associated with attachment or not? Is our *mettā* unconditional or not? Since attachment easily creeps in, when taking up this meditation subject we do not first send loving kindness to our dearest one, as in one's spouse or beloved son or daughter. Radiating *mettā* to the dearest person directly may cause attachment to creep into one's heart without one being aware of it. In a commentary, there is the story of a man who, while taking up this meditation for the first time from a senior monk, radiated *mettā* to his wife first; by the time he finished his meditation, lust had arisen in him and he ended up knocking on the door of his wife's room!

The far enemy of *mettā* is *dosa* or ill-will. When the mind is obsessed by hatred, one will find it difficult to radiate loving kindness to anyone, even oneself. *Mettā* is serene, peaceful, gentle, and forgiving. On the other hand, *dosa* or anger and ill-will, is burning, harsh, confrontational, and unforgiving. There is a desire to destroy. Whenever there is hatred in the mind, happiness ceases to exist. Hatred is a very strong opposition to loving kindness meditation. Those who are entangled and obsessed with hatred will find it very difficult to radiate loving kindness to anyone. A person with a very rigid or feeble heart will also find it very difficult to radiate loving kindness. The Buddha recommends loving kindness meditation to those who are enslaved and confronted with anger, but to carry out this recommendation, such individuals require skillful training.

## **The Power of Loving Kindness**

Loving kindness can bring about a positive result in oneself as well as in the person to whom one radiates loving kindness. Many scientific experiments in Western countries have proven the efficacy of loving kindness and positive thoughts.

One such brain science study showed quite clearly that a good mental state brings about positive change in the brain. Whenever one has a wholesome thought such as compassion, patience, or wisdom, that thought can change the neural system in the brain and give positive energy to your brain. This ensures your mental health. A few recent psychological studies suggest that loving kindness meditation may also impact health and well-being. One study done at Stanford University suggested that a short, 7-minute practice of loving kindness meditation can increase social connectedness. Loving-kindness meditation has also been shown to reduce pain and anger in people with chronic lower back pain. Researcher Barbara Fredrickson at the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) found that loving kindness meditation can help boost positive emotions and well-being in life, fostering the personal resources that come from experiencing positive emotion.

[Richard J. Davidson](#) performed an EEG study of people who practice *mettā* meditation, with a minimum of 10,000 hours of practice. His study showed substantial differences in the magnitude of gamma waves as well as gamma synchronization, particularly during meditative sessions, and immediately afterward. During baseline states, where the subject was not doing *mettā*, there was a signature brain wave pattern that distinguishes the *mettā* practitioners, lay people as well as monks, from people who, at baseline, had not extensively practiced loving kindness meditation. This study also showed, during meditation, an increase in the activity of brain areas, such as the [temporoparietal junction](#), [insula](#), and [amygdala](#), and an increase in the subject's ability to see things from another's perspective. The study actually showed change in the area of the brain that is involved with the autonomic system so that the meditator's heartbeat increases. These studies show that the [amygdala is modulated](#) during loving kindness meditation. Loving kindness meditation has been shown to lower the participant's reaction to inflammation and distress, both of which are associated with "major depression, heart disease, and diabetes," in response to stressors. This change was dependent on the amount of time spent practicing, with practitioners who spent more time meditating having correspondingly more significant changes in their brains.

The Japanese researcher, Dr. Masaru Emoto, also proved the effect of loving kindness through his water experiment. By taking a sample of water that had been exposed to the thought of a loving kindness meditator and examining it under a microscope, he found the water molecule had transformed into beautiful crystal-like structure. He then compared this with water from the same source that had been exposed to negative thoughts. He discovered the same water became an ugly, distorted structure. This shows that water, which is void of life, can respond to human thought. How then could a human being not respond? So, when we send loving kindness to another person, that person can receive our healthy vibration. When we send loving kindness to ourselves first, the liquid in our body can react positively, because 70% of our body is water, just like the water that changed to beautiful crystals. When we utter kind and positive words, the liquid in our body will respond automatically. A person suffering from depression, anxiety, and heartbreak should first radiate loving kindness more to himself or herself, then move on to other people.

Loving kindness is like a healing balm. It can heal your body and soul and also impact the happiness of others. When we radiate loving kindness to a particular person, that person will respond well toward our loving thoughts. In this way we indirectly help to support and uplift that person's mental health as well as physical health.

Loving thought produces good mental vibration, and vibrations can travel far. Nowadays, we have good evidence of distance healing through Qi. For example, a *qi gong* master in America can heal a patient far away and reach beyond the boundaries of countries. This distance healing results from healing energy that travels far. The mental energy that arises through loving kindness meditation can also travel far and reach the objects no matter where the person is.

In *Abhidhamma* teaching, it is stated that any mind state can produce four elements in the body. Among the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, the fire element can generate and reproduce another generation of the four elements. The four elements, together with color, smell, taste, and nutritive essence, arise in a group called *kalapa*, or particles. So, the fire element that is the product of a loving mind has the potential to produce another generation of *kalapa* inside or outside of the body. These are manifested as good vibrations or energy emanating from us that have a positive effect on ourselves and others. How far the fire element can generate or reproduce another generation outside the body depends on the power of the person's thought. If his or her loving kindness is very powerful, the force is also very strong and can bring positive results in another person. Devadatta attempted to kill the Buddha by getting a wild elephant, Nalagiri, drunk and sending him toward the Buddha when the Buddha and a group of his disciples were on alms-round. Ananda stepped in front of the Buddha to protect him, but the Buddha told him not to worry because it wasn't possible for him to be harmed. Instead the Buddha radiated loving kindness toward the elephant, and as Nalagiri neared the Buddha, rather than harming him, he knelt down and bowed.

Here, I would like to relate my own personal experience. On one occasion, I awoke in the middle of the night, having been bitten by many small black ants. When I got up, the ants were crawling all over my body. Although they were small in size, the bite of these ants is extremely painful. While it is their nature to bite, it is not my nature to take revenge, even if they attack me, so I tried to pick the ants off my body gently without causing any injury to them. The more I tried, however, the more they seemed to hold on. My skin was starting to become inflamed, and, not knowing what else to do, I decided that the best way to deal with them was to radiate loving kindness toward them. I sat down, forgetting the pain the black ants were inflicting on me, and instead I generated love for them. Joyfully, I repeatedly wished them to be well and happy.

To my astonishment, after a short time most of the ants had stopped biting me. Evidently, my thoughts had a soothing effect on their normally aggressive behavior. One or two ants, who must have been slow receivers, continued to bite me. However, as my mind was absorbed with love for them, I just felt the bite but not the pain. After this incident, the ants became my friends.

They continued to move around the room but never again on my body. We shared the space in harmony. I thanked them for teaching me a valuable lesson.

This wonderful experience left a strong impression on my heart: when we do not dwell on our own suffering, and instead are suffused with love for another, particularly the one who has harmed us, bodily pain becomes imperceptible. This also shows that the thought of *mettā* has healing power. Armed with *mettā* for others and forgetting oneself, the mind becomes serene, unperturbed, and courageous. It is not a mystery, then, how the Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be) could endure the pain of being cut limb by limb in his long *samsaric* journey to Buddhahood, and still remain suffused with love for his torturer. The power of the selfless mind is inexhaustible.

Armed with *mettā*, we can easily transform our mind when encountering adversity in life. If we habitually react to our suffering by blaming others, the fire of delusion and hatred continues to spread and burn on both sides—oneself and the other. It also reinforces our habitual pattern of behavior to a point where it becomes extremely difficult to correct. The wise person sees that suffering and happiness do not come from without, but from within the mind—a mind of love—and claims nothing as his own.

Scientific experiments also have proven the effect of positive thought. According to a study carried out at two hospitals in San Francisco in 1998, a sick person who was prayed for recovered more quickly than those who were not prayed for. This shows that loving thoughts have healing power that affects the sick person. This may be why my teacher, who could not be healed by modern medical treatment, was cured by the prayer of a senior monk when he was severely ill many years ago.

Asian Buddhists know the power of *mettā*, so they tend to ask for blessings from monks because the warm wishes and blessings from a virtuous and cultivated monk are indeed powerful. From this, one can easily see the power of positive thoughts in oneself as well as in other persons. It is easy to cure those who have depression just by generating good thoughts for yourself, followed by generating good thoughts for other people. However, many people lack inner confidence, thus lessening or depreciating the power to heal. Generating loving kindness without being confident in the power of loving kindness itself makes the loving kindness “toothless” or without power. In *mettā* meditation, a high level of confidence is very important.

### **Prerequisites of Mettā**

As mentioned in the *Mettā Sutta*, to cultivate *mettā*, one must be endowed with the good qualities of being very upright, compliant, pliant, and contented, and one must not be conceited or impolite. For those who are endowed with all these good qualities, the practice of *mettā* becomes easy.

## **The Methods of Practicing Loving Kindness**

There are two ways to practice loving kindness:

- i. Developing *mettā* without *jhāna*
- ii. Developing *mettā* for the attainment of *jhāna*

### **I. Developing *mettā* without *jhānā***

If a person intends to develop loving kindness without *jhāna*, he or she may think of every being together as “all beings” and wish “May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful” repeatedly. This can be done at any moment, whether one is walking or doing chores. It is good to keep the sentences short. Try to let the love flow from the heart abundantly. Beginners may find this difficult at first, because their concentration is not very strong and they are lacking proficiency. Therefore, it is important to keep the words short. With more experience, one may add the following sentences:

1. *Sabbe satta avera hontu*—“May all beings be free from all enmity and danger.”

2. *Abyapajjha hontu*—“May all beings be free from all mental suffering.”

3. *Anigha hontu*—“May all beings be free from physical suffering.”

4. *Sukhi-attanam pariharantu*—“May all beings take care of themselves happily.”

When we mentally or verbally say “all beings,” we should incline our mind toward all beings. It is not essential that a picture of all beings arises in the mind; it only matters that we incline our mind toward all beings. If we try to get a mental picture, then it may be very difficult to develop the quality of *mettā*. At the beginning, when concentration is still very weak, we may find that *mettā* completely disappears if we think too strongly of a mental picture, so just pay attention to the inclination of the mind. When we are reciting “May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful,” we need to make sure that our wish for their good health, happiness, and peace is genuine and strong. A person who is practicing *mettā* should regard all beings in the same way as that of a mother who cares for her only child.

“May all beings be happy and peaceful” means that we wish all living beings to be free from mental suffering such as worry, grief, anger, depression, anxiety, longing, conceit, jealousy, etc. We have to repeat the phrases over and over again. Take care to not let the reciting become monotonous or automatic. Feel the love emanating from your heart while reciting the phrases. If the mind gets tired through repeating the phrase, drop the words and let the mind feel the love. When we feel very sleepy or have a mental state filled with anger, worry, anxiety, or many thoughts, we should increase our effort by repeating the phrases aloud; then *mettā* will be able to overpower unwholesome mental states, and our practice will proceed much better.

## ii. Developing *mettā* for the attainment of *jhāna*

In order to achieve *jhāna* (deep concentration) through loving kindness meditation, one has to practice systematically. How does one do this?

Firstly, radiate loving kindness to yourself for 20 to 30 minutes. Radiating loving kindness to oneself does not result in achievement of *jhāna*, so why should we radiate loving kindness to ourselves? This is because we must be happy first, only then we can have genuine love for others. Imagine a gloomy person; can he or she have love in the heart? He or she cannot even love himself or herself! *A happy person thinks positively and only sees the lovable side of others.* Therefore, it is essential to radiate *mettā* to ourselves first until the mind becomes very happy and calm; only then we will understand how valuable the happiness is for oneself. However, if we are the only person in the world who is happy, but the rest are all unhappy, we cannot be truly happy. For us to be happy, everyone must be happy. Therefore we must extend our love to others, wishing them to be happy like us. To make *mettā* arise more easily in the heart, one must first think of a living, respected person and extend one's love to that person. It can be our teacher or a lovable friend. Calling all his or her virtues to mind, from the very bottom of the heart, one wishes: "May he or she be well, happy, and peaceful." If one can also generate gratitude in the heart toward all the good deeds she or he has done for us, one can easily feel the love for him or her.

Traditionally we use four phases when practicing *mettā*, as follows:

1. *Avera hontu*—"May you be free from all enmity and danger."
2. *Abyapajjha hontu*—"May you be free from all mental suffering."
3. *Anigha hontu*—"May you be free from physical suffering."
4. *Sukhi-attanam pariharantu*—"May they take care of themselves happily."

For beginners, choosing one phrase of the four is enough. Or, if you prefer, you can choose any other phrase that you feel most suits the respected person. For example, "May you be happy and peaceful." So, think of one respected person, and radiate loving kindness to him or her constantly by repeating the phrase up to a hundred or a thousand times. However, saying the words without genuine love is futile. While wishing "May you be well and happy," at first, his or her face may not be clear in the mind, but as you continue to let the love flow out from the heart and as concentration progresses, the face of the respected one becomes clear and it becomes apparent that he or she is smiling. The smile intensifies your happiness. As a result of this happiness, your concentration deepens. The loving mind becomes steady with the object. When the mind becomes happy and concentration deepens, the light will appear; both the object and mind will become bright because of concentration. The *mettā* developed toward this person continuously for one to two hours can help achieve *jhāna* concentration.

Thus, loving kindness meditation also produces light. One becomes more and more peaceful, and the mind becomes absorbed with love for the object. This is the way to achieve *jhāna* through loving kindness meditation. *Mettā* meditation may lead to attainment up to the third *jhāna*. However, it is not possible to attain the fourth *jhāna* through loving kindness meditation. Why is it so? This is because the fourth *jhāna* has only two *jhāna* factors: equanimity (*upekkhā*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) of mind. It is void of *sukha*, or happiness, and loving kindness meditation is strongly associated with happiness. Happiness is its end. Therefore, one cannot reach the fourth *jhāna* through loving kindness meditation, since it has only equanimity and one-pointedness (two *jhāna* factors) but does not have *sukha*.

After successfully attaining *jhāna* by radiating love to the respected person, one changes to another respected person to make the *mettā* more powerful. Then one moves to the second category of person, namely a neutral person, a person you neither like nor dislike. Keeping her or his image in mind, we send our loving thoughts to this person, “May he or she be well and happy,” or calling her or his name, “May Jane/Jack be well and happy,” until our mind becomes calm, peaceful, and happy. The image persists, and the love flows and embraces the neutral person. One continues this for one or two hours until one reaches the first *jhāna*.

The last category of person in the loving kindness meditation is an enemy. The enemy may not be only a person whom we dislike; he or she could be one who dislikes us. Sending loving kindness to this person is a challenge. Sending loving kindness to oneself, to a respected person or dear person, or even to a neutral person, is considered easy, but sending loving kindness to an enemy is a great challenge. That’s why we do it last, after we have developed some skill in this practice. One of my students reported that when sending loving kindness to an enemy, he had the following experience: “I end up with anger, and I want to hit him.” Another reported: “I am so worried that my enemy will become well and happy.” This isn’t an easy task, is it?

To avoid having your meditation end up in anger, skillful means are needed. First, one should not choose the enemy one hates the most. One should choose the enemy one hates the least, because one’s love is still conditional (not unconditional). It is not necessary to challenge yourself by sending loving kindness to your greatest enemy; just choose an enemy that you hate the least to test it out first. This will let you know how much mental strength has been developed.

If we succeed in sending loving kindness to the person we hate the least, then we can move on to another enemy that we hate more. If this meditation is not successful, go back to the respected person until the mind becomes happy and concentrated. Based on the power of concentration thus developed, it becomes easy to send loving kindness to the hated one. If that is successful, move on again until we come to our greatest enemy—if we have one. In fact, the greatest enemy is our own hatred. If one does not harbor any hatred for anyone, who else can be our enemy?

But for this practice, you choose a person who is a real enemy that you hate. For those who have no enemy at all, this is a blessing. Alas, even though we only have love for others, some may not like us owing to their own reasons, just as Lord Buddha hated no one and yet Devadatta did not like him. So Devadatta is considered as his enemy, although Buddha loved him like his own son. You can take the person who does not like you as the object of the *mettā* meditation.

Loving kindness meditation is capable of improving the relationship between yourself and the hated person or the person who does not like you. However, one must have confidence in the power of the meditation in order to find success. By constantly radiating loving kindness to those who do not like us, we are sure to soften their hearts. Having confidence in the power of love is the key for loving kindness to be efficiently materialized.

If you are successful in sending loving kindness to an enemy—whether a person for whom you have the slightest dislike or a person who is your greatest enemy—then it is necessary to practice again among the four groups of people until our *mettā* to them is equal. This is known as “breaking the barrier” or *mettā* without discrimination.

To summarize, we have four groups of people:

1. Oneself
2. Respected or dear person
3. Neutral person
4. Enemy

Now, your task is to “break the barrier.” What does that mean? It means your love for these four groups of people must be the same and without any discrimination. If your love for yourself is more than your love for another, or if your love for any one of the four is more than for the others, the barrier is still there. If you find it easy to send loving kindness to yourself or to your respected person but not to the neutral one, the barrier is still there. If you can easily radiate love to yourself, the respected person, and a neutral person, but not to the enemy, the barrier is still there. So in order to break this barrier, you have to send loving kindness to yourself, the respected person, the neutral person, and the enemy over and over again until you feel that your love for the four types of persons is equal; then you have broken the barrier.

A commentary gave an example. Suppose there are four groups of people (oneself, a loved one, a neutral person, and an enemy) gathered in a ship, and a robber wants to kill one of the four persons. Whom should you give away to be killed among these four persons: yourself, the loved one, the neutral person, or your enemy? If you think you should sacrifice yourself in order to save others, this is compassion and not loving kindness because you do not have love for yourself. If you give away your enemy, thinking he deserves to be killed, your *mettā* is still

tainted by discrimination. So, no one should be given away to be killed. If you choose any one of the four to be given away to the robber, this is a sign of partiality. Your loving kindness is not equal among the four. Recognizing this partiality and overcoming it are how one breaks the barrier. Only then does your loving kindness become unconditional and without bias or preference.

One may also develop the practice of *mettā* without discrimination in this way:

“May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my beloved person also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my respected person also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my neutral person also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my enemy also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my beloved person, my respected person, my neutral person, and my enemy all be well, happy, and peaceful.”

All the above-mentioned constitute the traditional way of practicing *mettā*. Here, I would also like to recommend another way of practice. Through my teaching experiences, I have found that many people have difficulties radiating *mettā* to oneself. To overcome such difficulties, one can divide “I” into mind and body consisting of the elements. Paying attention to one's body, mentally recite “May the four elements of the body be well and balanced” repeatedly. Or, while mentally reciting “May the four elements of the body be well and balanced” at the same time one scans the body from the top of the head down to the sole, repeatedly. After twenty to thirty minutes, one radiates *mettā* to one's mind thus: “May this mind element be happy, peaceful, and contented (or whatever words suit you most)”; one says this repeatedly until one feels happy and peaceful. Many of my students find this way of practicing *mettā is soothing and achieves the end*.

In the same way, we can divide the respected person, neutral person, and enemy into the four elements and the mind element, and wish them to be well and happy. By separating a being into elements, attachment, which is the near enemy of *mettā*, cannot creep into our heart while we are radiating *mettā* to the loved one; and the anger, which is the far enemy of *mettā*, will not burn the undeveloped mind while radiating *mettā* to an enemy. It is also a reminder to us that in the

ultimate sense, only the four elements and the mind exist; there are no persons, beings, respected ones, or enemies.

## **The Blessing of Loving Kindness**

There are 11 blessings for those who practice loving kindness constantly:

1. One sleeps happily.
2. One wakes up happily.

Nowadays, to sleep and wake up happily has become a luxury. Many people have to depend on sleeping pills in order to have sound sleep. Practicing loving kindness ensures that you sleep happily and wake up happily.

3. One does not suffer bad dreams.
4. One is dear to human beings.

When you radiate loving kindness to all sentient beings, a very wholesome and pure vibration comes from your heart and reaches others, and, as a result, others love you.

5. One is dear to nonhuman beings. (see “How the *Mettā Sutta* Came Into Existence,” page 11)
6. One is protected by heavenly beings.

Devas and all the heavenly beings protect one who has loving kindness. That’s why loving kindness is one of the four protective meditations.

7. One is protected from fire, weapons, and poisons. While radiating loving kindness, one cannot be easily harmed by any weapons because the power of love forms a protective field or net that cannot be pierced by weapons. Many stories from the Buddha’s time show how one is protected from weapons when radiating *mettā*. King Udena had two wives, Samavati, who was a devoted disciple of the Buddha, and Magandiya, who bore a grudge against the Buddha and towards Samavati as well. Magandiya plotted to make King Udena believe that Samavati was trying to kill him. Believing her lie, King Udena went to shoot Samavati with his bow and arrow. But, upon seeing King Udena and understanding his intention, Samavati entered into *mettā jhāna*. When the arrow reached her it dropped to the ground without touching her at all.

8. One is able to concentrate easily.

When practicing loving kindness, one feels abundant happiness. The Buddha said that happiness is the proximate cause for concentration. Thus one’s mind easily becomes concentrated, up to attainment of the third *jhāna*.

9. One has a clear and serene facial expression.

When one has *mettā* in the heart, one’s expression becomes clear and serene. This is because the loving mind produces many clear mind-born particles. Among the eight elements in those particles, the color becomes very bright. As a result, the facial expression also becomes clear.

This is natural beauty, unlike the artificial appearance that comes from putting different colors of make-up on the face.

10. One dies unburdened or one dies peacefully.

It is a great blessing to be unburdened as death approaches. Many people die in a state of confusion, fear, and bewilderment. Departing from one's own body, from a lovely son, daughter, and spouse, and from property earned with so much hard work may be deemed by some people to be the hardest thing to do. Most people, while alive, enjoy the comfort of their houses, property, and association with loved ones. What we habitually hold onto becomes extremely difficult to let go of, even while we are alive, let alone when death approaches. Not wanting to depart from those things, one clings to them, and most people die in fear and confusion. Being reborn in one of the four woeful states is expected for a person who dies in fear. A person who dies with a mind unburdened because of loving kindness is sure to be reborn either in a human realm or higher realm. This is indeed a great blessing. As Buddhists, we are not working for this life only; we are also working for a happy existence in the next life.

11. One may be reborn in the Brahma world when one dies.

When a yogi meditates on loving kindness, which is a concentration object, he can move on to *Vipassanā* and progress through different stages of insight. If he fails to become a noble one — a *sotapanna*, *sakadagami*, *anagami*, or *arahant* — he will at least be reborn in the Brahma world if he can maintain his *jhāna* up to his dying moment.

### **How the *Mettā Sutta* Came into Existence**

The *Mettā Sutta* is a very popular *sutta* in the Theravada tradition. The Buddha first taught the *Mettā Sutta* to a group of 500 monks, each of whom went into the forest with one alms bowl and a set of three robes. After they had walked for about 100 *yojanas*, they came to a large village. The people of this village asked them to stay in the adjacent forest for *vassa*, the three-month retreat that takes place during the rainy season. This large forest was very calm and quiet, entirely free from the noise that can normally be heard in many villages and small towns. There were many tall trees and clusters of bamboo, and the forest was extremely dense, so that the thick foliage prevented much sunlight from hitting the ground. There was also a little creek, which made it very pleasant and peaceful, and not very far from this bamboo grove was a village where they could walk on their alms round. The monks decided to stay in this forest, as it seemed to be a very congenial place for them to practice meditation. After the decision had been made, the villagers built 500 huts and offered them to the monks, so they could spend the *vassa* there. After all the huts were finished, each of the monks moved into a hut and started to practice *vipassanā* meditation.

With the arrival of the monks, who were endowed with *sila*, *samadhi* and *pañña* (morality, concentration, and wisdom), the forest devas who lived in the trees were afraid to stay there any longer. Holding onto their children, they wandered aimlessly about the forest paths. The *devas* initially thought that the monks were only temporary visitors who would not stay very long,

perhaps only one or two days, and then leave. However, the monks did not leave after a few days but stayed at first for ten days and then another five days. Soon, the *devas* began to suffer from the way they had to live, and they hoped that the monks would soon leave, so that they could live there happily. To make the monks leave, they created frightening noises and emitted bad odors. All the monks became terrified, and, as a result, their fear broke their concentration. Some of the monks suffered from fever and pain, while others felt dizzy. They felt that it was impossible for them to continue their meditation practice. Finally, they went back to Jetavana monastery where the Buddha was residing during *vassa*. When the Buddha saw them, he asked them why they had come back, and they told him exactly what had happened.

After the monks had related their tale, they asked the Buddha to suggest a suitable place for them to meditate. The Buddha answered, “My beloved monks, go back to exactly the same forest and practice your meditation there.” Hearing this, the monks replied, “Please do not send us back to that forest; it is impossible to practice meditation there.” Understanding their anxiety, the Buddha said, “Dear monks, you went there to practice meditation without a weapon, therefore you have encountered many distractions and difficulties. This time, however, I will give you a weapon.” Then the Buddha gave them a powerful weapon, the *Mettā Sutta*. The monks did not dare to contradict the wishes of the Buddha and went back armed with the *Mettā Sutta*. However, the monks still did not feel very brave. They lived with feelings of fear and anxiety because they never knew when or where they might come across a frightening vision or a maddening sound.

Nevertheless, because of the virtuous quality of their *mettā* practice, the monks did not see or hear any more frightening objects. Whereas the *devas* had previously been hostile, now their anger and resentment disappeared when they felt the monks’ *mettā*. Feeling this *mettā*, the *devas*’ minds were filled with respect and reverence, and they welcomed the monks and paid their respects. They went up to the monks, took their alms bowls and spare robes, and carried these things to their respective huts. They welcomed them as they might have welcomed their own parents, brothers, or sisters after a journey to a distant country. They no longer attacked or taunted them. The *devas* even provided safety from other dangers and supported the monks, so that they could practice meditation peacefully. *Mettā* is without doubt a very powerful and wholesome force that can always be depended upon for protection.

In fact, all 500 monks practiced *vipassanā* meditation with *mettā* meditation as their foundation. Since, they were able to practice meditation peacefully, they were all able to abandon all defilements and become *arahants* during that *vassa*. The Buddha had foreseen this, and for this reason, he had sent them back to the forest. When the monks reflected on this incident, they realized that they had encountered many difficulties and hindrances because they had tried to practice *vipassanā* meditation without the beneficial protection of *mettā* meditation. After consulting the Buddha, they heeded his advice and first practiced *mettā* meditation and then *vipassanā* meditation. Only then were they free from all dangers, undisturbed mentally or physically. Eventually, all of them became *arahants*.

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