



Awakening with **metta**

FOR THE WELLBEING AND HAPPINESS OF ALL



by VENERABLE MAHINDA

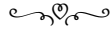
About The Author

Venerable Mahinda was born in 1949 into a traditional Chinese family in Malacca, Malaysia. He was ordained in 1976 as a Buddhist monk in the Sri Lankan Theravadin tradition under the tutelage of the late Venerable Dr K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera. He undertook basic Buddhist studies and training in Sri Lanka, and trained in meditation under several well-known masters in Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar and Thailand. He has also been inspired by Mahayana masters from China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan, as well as by Vajrayana masters from Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and India.

Over the past 30 years, Venerable Mahinda has travelled to more than 30 countries to spread the peace message of the Buddha, teaching Buddhism, Mindfulness and Metta Meditation, and their application in daily life.

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Dedicated To All



*my parents, teachers, friends and foes,
who have helped me to open my heart
and shown me a peaceful way.*

*May all peace-loving people be awakened
and work for the wellbeing and happiness of all.*

May all beings be well and happy.



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Introduction

This booklet, *Awakening with Metta*, is part of the *Metta Round the World* initiative that we embarked upon in 2012 to connect peace-loving people worldwide in meditation and prayer for world peace, harmony and stability.

What began as an initiative encouraging the practice of loving-kindness (*metta*) meditation for just 15 minutes on New Moon, Full Moon and other special days, has evolved with the formation of *Metta Round the World* chapters in a number of countries and the convening of an annual Metta Convention for the meeting of hearts. It has also spawned the development of “Metta Circles” as a platform for groups of people to come together in the regular practice of metta.

With *Metta Round the World* gaining traction and the growing popularity of Metta Circles, a booklet that serves as a guide to the practice of *metta* is essential. It is with this in mind that this booklet has been compiled.

It serves to provide information and instructions that will help to bring about the awakening of hearts. It includes a clear explanation of the theory and practice of *metta*, or loving-kindness, and how it should be applied in our daily lives, as well as when reaching out to serve others. It also explains how the practice of *metta* together with mindfulness leads to true freedom – freedom from all the manifestations of suffering that accompany the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death.

May all beings be well and happy!

Venerable Mahinda

April 2014



“May all grow in metta,
May suffering beings, be free from suffering.
May those in sorrow, be free from sorrow.
May those in fear and danger,
be free from fear and danger.
May all grow and evolve from light to light.”

For more information about Metta Round the World and associated activities,
please visit:

www.mettaroundtheworld.org/ / www.mettaconvention.org

A Guide to the Practice of Metta



Metta in the Pali language or *maitri* in Sanskrit means loving-kindness or compassionate love. It is the wish for all sentient beings to be well and happy. It is also referred to as boundless, or universal love – a love that transcends all barriers such as caste, colour or creed.

Metta is compared to the love of a mother towards her only child. The 7th verse of the *Metta Sutta* (the *Discourse on Loving-Kindness*) reads as follows:

*Mātā yathā niyam puttam
Āyusā eka putta manu rakkhe
Evampi sabba bhūtesu
Mānasam bhāvaye aparimānam*

Just as a mother would protect her only child
at the risk of her own life
Even so let one cultivate
a boundless heart towards all beings

The practice of *metta*, or loving-kindness, helps to reduce the tendencies of anger, hatred and grudges. *Metta* is a great healing force. It promotes the development of virtues such as compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity. It also promotes patience, tolerance, gratitude and above all, a forgiving heart. Forgiveness is an important factor which helps in releasing emotional blockages due to grudges or remorse.

When we make *metta* our object of meditation, we should first direct it towards ourselves, until we begin to experience a sense of wellbeing and calmness within us. As we arouse the thoughts, ‘Be well and happy, free from anger and enmity’, and so on, we

should try to feel it from our hearts, synchronising our thoughts with our feelings.

You may like to try it now: Just think, 'Be well and happy' and keep a smile in your heart. Pause for a few moments and try to feel a sense of wellbeing. Suffuse your whole being with this feeling of calm and peace.



When you are able to do this, then you should learn to radiate loving-kindness in all directions – above, below and all around – until your aura of calm fills the whole room. Then continue to radiate out to the whole building, to all the surrounding areas, all the neighbourhood, covering the whole suburb or village, and to the whole city or township. Then to the whole country, the neighbouring countries and islands, covering the whole world. And eventually to all the realms of existence, whether known or unknown to us.

Alternatively we can direct our minds and send *metta* to the ten directions: north, south, east and west, north-east, south-east, south-west, north-west, above and below.

After radiating *metta* in all directions, you may go on to direct *metta* to individuals, beginning with those who are near and dear to you. When you are directing *metta* to individuals, you should try to feel their presence, and as you wish them well and happy, you should also experience a sense of wellbeing. If you have a

religious or spiritual teacher, you should start with your teacher/s. Otherwise you may think of your mother, father, brothers and sisters, your spouse and other family members. Then your school teachers, relatives and friends. You can begin with just one person, someone whom you have the trust and confidence in, whom you respect and feel grateful towards, and later move on to include others.

If you think of a certain person, and the thought of that person should arouse the feeling of anger, aversion or other negative emotions, then you should avoid trying to radiate *metta* to that person for the time being. When your practice is more established, then you can think of them again.

You should also avoid persons with whom you are very emotionally attached. If you concentrate on those with whom you are emotionally attached, it is likely that you will not want to go on radiating to others. You will tend to arouse desire and passion, instead of *metta* or boundless love.

Once you are able to radiate loving-kindness to those who are near and dear to you, you should go on to those who are neutral – less well-known or even unknown to you. This could include your neighbours, or passers-by in the streets. You take up these people in your mind and then wish them to be well and happy, and so on.

After you are able to radiate to those who are less well-known to you, you are ready to extend *metta* to those who are hostile or unfriendly towards you. This may include people with whom you have had quarrels or misunderstandings, or who are simply unfriendly. They could be within your own family circle, your relatives, colleagues at work, or friends in schools or universities.

If you can truly wish for the wellbeing of those who are unfriendly or hostile towards you, then you have learned to break barriers and your *metta* will become more established. You will begin to develop a more forgiving heart, which will help you to clear

certain emotional blockages that have developed during your childhood or younger days in this life, or even in your previous lives.

When these emotional blockages have been cleared – through seeking forgiveness from others, forgiving others, as well as forgiving yourself – your heart will become lighter, and you will be happier and more cheerful. *Metta* helps to soften our hearts. We become more humble and able to seek forgiveness from others. However, in order to be able to forgive others and also forgive yourself, you need to have some wisdom and understanding.

Firstly, we need to understand that all those who have cheated, hurt or abused us, have done so not with wisdom and understanding, but through ignorance. Secondly, we need to understand that whatever happens to us has a reason; there are certain causes and conditions. We reap what we sow. If, upon reflection, we realise that we do not deserve the ill-treatment we receive from others as we have not done anything wrong towards them, then we have to consider that what we are experiencing in the present is the result of what we have done in the past. If not in this very lifetime, it could be in our past lives. It is very unlikely that we have not done anything wrong in all our past lives.

Realising that the pain we are going through is the result of our own unskilful actions in the past, we will begin to develop a sense of compassion for those who harm us, for they do not realise that they will have to go through this pain one day. So let us forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Thirdly, in order to forgive ourselves, we must realise that all the wrong and foolish actions we have done have all been performed as a result of ignorance. Now that we have the opportunity to come to the Dhamma and to realise what is good and bad, we need to aspire to, and make an effort to set ourselves on the right course: To avoid all evil, to do good and to purify our minds. We need to acknowledge our mistakes and determine from now on to

walk the right path. This is how we can forgive ourselves and be released from the burden of remorse and a guilty conscience.

The release of emotional blockages through *metta* and the practice of forgiveness has great therapeutic value. Many health problems are related to anger and other negative emotions. *Metta* will also help to prevent one from falling into states of depression and keep the mind healthy and happy always.

In the *Mettanisamsa Sutta* the Buddha spoke of 11 benefits or advantages from the practice of *metta*, or loving-kindness. The first three are related to our sleeping habits. One who practises *metta* daily will be able to sleep well, wake up easily, and be free from nightmares or bad dreams.



Metta promotes the true spirit of friendship or friendliness. As such, human beings will be near and dear to you. You will be able to make friends easily. Even animals will love you, and wild animals will not harm you. This is how yogis who practise deep in the forest or jungle can live in harmony with wild animals.

At the spiritual level, you will be protected by the gods or devas in the celestial realm. As you vibrate with the frequency of loving-kindness, you will naturally be connected to those beings who are full of love and compassion. As such, you will receive the blessings, guidance and protection of great spiritual masters and teachers, including devas and bodhisattvas.

Metta will also help to improve one's complexion -- you will become more radiant. Your mind will be more focussed and you will be able to get into concentration quickly. And when your practice is well-established, you will not be easily harmed by fire, poison or weapons. Furthermore, at the time of death, your mind will be peaceful and unconfused. This will lead to good birth, that is, in the higher and happier realms of existence (if the mind is not yet liberated). Such are the benefits or advantages of the practice of *metta*.

There are different variations or techniques in the practice of *metta* but the underlying principle is the same. It is the sincere wish for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. The formula for the practice is based on three aspects of one's wellbeing. In order to enjoy a true sense of wellbeing, firstly we need to be free from all forms of hostility such as anger, enmity, hatred and grudges. This includes anger coming from others or from within ourselves.

We often get angry with ourselves because we are not able to achieve our goals or we are not able to progress as well as others. Sometimes there can be a more subtle anger towards ourselves as a result of remorse or due to the ripening of some past karma.

Secondly, our mind needs to be free from mental suffering such as fear, worries and anxieties. Thirdly, we need to be free from physical pain and suffering, from sicknesses and ill health. It is only when one is free from hostility, from mental and physical suffering that one is able to live happily, with ease and harmony. Traditionally the formula reads like this:

Aham avero homi

May I be free from hostility – from anger, aversion, hatred and grudges

Abyāpajjho homi

May I be free from mental suffering – from fears, worries and anxiety

Anīgo homi

May I be free from physical pain – from sickness and ill-health

Sukhī attānam parihārami

May I dwell with ease and happiness

Just as we have these good wishes for ourselves, so do we wish others:

Averā hontu

May others be free from hostility – from anger and enmity, hatred and grudges

Abyāpajjhā hontu

May they be free from mental suffering – from fears, worries and anxiety

Anigā hontu

May they be free from physical pain – from sickness and ill-health

Sukhī atthānam pariharantu

May they dwell with ease and happiness

We should cultivate *metta*, or loving-kindness, again and again, until it becomes a part of ourselves. The practice of *metta* should not be confined to sitting sessions alone, it should be applied in our daily encounters with people or situations, especially those which arouse anger or aversion in us. Whenever anger or aversion arises, just tell yourself: ‘Be well and happy, be free from anger and enmity. May others too be well and happy, free from anger and enmity’. In the beginning this may not seem natural, but as we develop this habit more and more, it will eventually become part of our response mechanism.

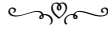
It is good to commence the day with at least 10-15 mins of *metta* in the morning and then again in the evening before going to sleep. *Metta* meditation can be practised in all the four postures: standing; sitting; walking or moving; and lying down or sleeping.

When loving-kindness becomes part and parcel of oneself, then one does not have to think about how to radiate *metta* anymore. Loving-kindness or compassionate love will always be present. One will always wish others well. Real *metta* will flow naturally when one's heart becomes truly empty – empty of greed, hatred and delusion. This will lead to the true awakening of our hearts.



Real *metta* will flow naturally when one's heart becomes truly empty – empty of greed, hatred and delusion.

Advice for Developing of Metta



First it is important to get a grounding in the basics by listening to the guided instructions¹, until we learn the ‘formula’ for *metta* practice. At the early stages, it may be difficult to experience a real feeling of *metta*, but over time, with regular practice, you will find your mind becoming quieter and more settled, and you will start to feel a sense of calm and peace.

This sense of calm and peace means you are beginning to connect with your heart. It is the heart that feels, and when you are able to connect with your heart, you will be able to practise *metta* with sincerity. Sincerity is very important in today’s society because we are so used to talking without feeling. Consider conventional social greetings like “Hi, how are you?” Many people use them, but do they really mean it?

Metta will develop the qualities of the heart and that’s when we will start to be able to feel more. As soon as we think ‘May I be well and happy’, we will be able to feel that our energy is uplifted. When we talk about happiness it is not about excitement or thrills – it is this sense of upliftment.

Once we can do it for ourselves, then when we turn our thoughts to someone else, they will also feel calm and uplifted. Of course, this will take some time to develop fully.

¹ Guided *Metta* meditation instructions by Venerable Mahinda can be downloaded from www.mettaroundtheworld.org .

The 15 minutes of guided instructions are a general introduction which will develop the thought of loving-kindness (i.e. the wish for all beings to be well and happy) at the mental level. But the cultivation of *metta* involves going beyond mere verbalisation in order to refine the gross emotion of love. To do this one needs to spend more time to practise more consistently.

For example, try for one week to spend extra time each day, in addition to the basic practice, to just focus on wishing yourself well. Then once you are able to really feel the calmness in yourself, for the following week spend more time on radiating this sense of wellbeing above, below, and all around you. With some practice you will be able to ‘sense’ the immediate space around you – your room, office, etc. When you can feel the space immediately around you, then you can gradually extend this out to the whole building, the surrounding area, the whole city, the whole country, and the whole world...

Metta practice should not be confined to just 15 mins of formal meditation. Throughout the day, in whatever you do, try to remind yourself as much as possible using a short phrase such as ‘be well and happy’..., or just ‘be well’..., or ‘smile in your heart’. If you have a tendency to get angry, keep reminding yourself ‘may I be free from anger’... and so on.

Use the above phrases as a constant reminder to have thoughts of *metta*. When you get into the car, wish the other drivers and passers-by to be well and happy. When you need to attend meetings, wish the participants to be well and happy. Apply this day to day until it becomes part and parcel of your life, until you reach a stage when you no longer need to verbalise it anymore and a sense of wellbeing will flow naturally from within you.



Throughout the day, in whatever you do, try to remind yourself as much as possible using a short phrase such as ‘be well and happy’...

Sleep Better with Metta



One of the benefits of practising *metta* is being able to sleep well. Many people today have difficulty sleeping. We need to understand that the causes for not sleeping well are due to some kind of stress – on a physical, emotional, mental and/or spiritual level.

Firstly we need to recognise what factors are affecting our sleep:

Are we experiencing a lot of stress, tension, worries and have a lot of thoughts in our mind?

Are we experiencing physical imbalances that disturb our sleep? (Such as illness, aches & pains, indigestion, etc).

If we can't easily identify any factors affecting us physically, emotionally or mentally, it could be the influences of karma, or planetary alignments.

The practice of *metta* can address all these causes.

Firstly, we need to learn how to wake up happily as this will set the tone for the day ahead. When you wake up, calm and quieten your mind with a session of *metta* practice and reflection. Then apply mindfulness to recall what things you need to do today. It's a good idea to keep a notebook handy to note down all the things you need to do because a lot of stress is caused by forgetting things. Don't rely totally on your smartphone or tablet. Always have a hard copy of important information like phone numbers, appointments (in case your electronic device crashes!). Developing the habit to be more organised will help to reduce stress.

Continue to apply *metta*, together with mindfulness, throughout the day. Anytime you start to feel any sort of conflict or tension, internally or externally, we must apply *metta* and remind ourselves, ‘Be well, be free from anger...’. Whenever you have to deal with other people, such as family, colleagues or friends, be sure to wish them to be well and happy. If you interact with others with a sense of mindfulness and *metta*, a lot of stress and conflict will be reduced.

Make time to pause frequently during whatever activities you do in your busy day. Just take a few minutes to bring your mind within, feel the calm and peace and radiate *metta*. Then you can return to what you are doing with a clearer mind and you will be able to see the situation from a broader perspective and have a better idea of how to proceed.

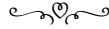
If you apply *metta* along with mindfulness in this way throughout your day, it will reduce your overall stress and build-up of tension in your mind and body, and over time you will sleep more peacefully. It is also important to practise *metta* meditation for at least a few minutes before you sleep. That way you will sleep in a good state of mind, and will not be disturbed by thoughts or dreams.

On a spiritual level, the positive thoughts of loving-kindness will influence your own energy and the energy around you. Such positive vibrations will attract good beings and energies, and will transmute any negatives energies, thoughts or entities into light, love and harmony.

Therefore, with the practice of *metta* and mindfulness, we will be physically less stressed, emotionally less disturbed, mentally in a good state, and spiritually protected and guided. Not only will we be able to sleep well, but we will be able to spend our waking life well too.



Metta and Mindfulness



Mindfulness is an important technique in the cultivation of *metta* and can be applied in all day-to-day situations. We can describe ‘mindfulness’ as being present, with clear awareness of our body, feelings and state of mind. This technique is a powerful tool in coping with negative situations such as stress, conflict, or pain, as well as bringing clarity, calmness and appreciation to positive situations.

Mindfulness goes hand in hand with *metta*, because as we practise *metta* more and more, we will become naturally more aware of our own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of others. Likewise, as we practise mindfulness more, we will be more sensitive to our own and other’s happiness.

We can start to practise mindfulness with our own body. By observing our breathing, in and out, we will begin to notice when we are tired, or when we are angry, etc., because the pattern of our breathing changes². Then we know that we need to pause and bring our attention within and generate *metta*. By observing our posture, we will start to notice how incorrect posture also affects our wellbeing, and we will start to learn to treat our own body with *metta* – to sit, stand and move in a way that is conducive to our physical wellbeing.

In fact, when we begin to mindfully observe the body in this manner, we start to see how we often don’t even look after our

² This can be practised formally using ‘*anapanasati*’ meditation – mindfulness on breathing in and out.

own body with *metta*, and thus we will be better able to act with loving-kindness towards ourselves, and amend our lifestyle patterns such as how and what we eat, what activities we do, etc.

Next, we need to be mindful of our feelings. In our practice of *metta* we first have to be able to observe the feeling of calmness and quietness within. Then we have to feel it radiate out. We need to observe the quality of the feeling. Is it soft and gentle? Does it flow steadily and smoothly? Are there times when it feels as if there is something blocking? When practising mindfulness, we just observe and know what the feeling is like, without having aversion to any unpleasant feeling or clinging on to any pleasant feeling.

It is also important to be mindful of our state of mind. Sometimes we try to apply *metta* when we get affected by negative emotions, such as anger, jealousy, confusion or depression, but we find it difficult because we are so caught up in that emotion. That is why the effective cultivation of *metta* requires mindfulness. Mindfulness helps you to focus on the present. Once you are mindful, clearly aware of the emotion itself, you have already stepped out of that state. This is how mindfulness provides the space to overcome negative emotions and instead cultivate positive ones.

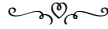
To provide a concrete example: Suppose you get angry with someone. You are so angry you just cannot have thoughts of *metta* towards them – your thoughts of anger are the opposite of *metta*. What is going through your mind? You will be constantly thinking of that person and what they did to upset you. What they did is in the past, but you keep remembering it in your mind. However, if you change your focus to the present moment, aware of just the emotion which you are experiencing, you have the chance to step out of that anger and apply *metta*. That is how mindfulness is such a powerful tool.

On a daily basis we are afflicted by three main negative states of mind: (1) craving or desire, (2) anger or aversion, and (3) delusion. Mindfulness in particular will help to reduce craving and desire. *Metta* will reduce our anger and aversion. And by practising both *metta* and mindfulness, we will develop the clarity and wisdom to overcome delusion.



Mindfulness provides the space to overcome negative emotions and instead cultivate positive ones.

Metta in Difficult Situations



Every time we encounter unfriendly people, we are presented with an opportunity to develop our *metta* practice further. It is relatively easy to cultivate thoughts of loving-kindness in an environment where everyone around us is friendly and responds positively towards us. But unless we are challenged by people who are unfriendly or disturb us, how will we know if our practice is progressing?

When practising *metta* towards people whom we find difficult, we need to use our wisdom. With wisdom, we can change our perception. Firstly, we need to understand the factors conditioning people's behaviour towards us. It may be due to some kind of stress which that person is experiencing, and they have not learned how to respond to the situation in a better way. If we understand what they are going through, we can arouse compassion for them. We cannot change that person's habitual tendencies of speech and behaviour, but we can change our perception of the situation and respond with as much loving-kindness and compassion as possible on our part.

However, when dealing with difficult people, we also have to assess our own limitations, how far we have cultivated loving-kindness. If our foundation in *metta* is not strong, and we lack understanding and wisdom, whenever we think of or associate with such people, it tends to aggravate our negative emotions. In which case, it would be best to avoid such situations for the time being.

That is why we start with a graduated practice of *metta*: beginning with ourselves, then extending to our loved ones and so on. It is only when we can truly have good thoughts towards

those unknown to us, that we are ready to extend loving-kindness to those who are unfriendly towards us. If we don't have the foundation in *metta* towards those friendly or indifferent to us, we won't be able to sincerely extend *metta* to unfriendly people.

At times we may need to consider avoiding the company of people with whom we have a difficult relationship, even moving to a completely different environment, to allow ourselves the space to build up our loving-kindness so that we have greater resilience to meet these challenges. However, we should bear in mind that if our difficulties are due to our karmic relationship from the past, we will need to confront them at some time in the future if we do not confront and overcome them now. That's when you need to accelerate your practice – for example, by going for a *metta* meditation retreat.

We often meet with such challenges due to our karma, the actions we have created in the past. This is especially true when we have recurring problems in certain situations, or with particular people, when other people have no difficulties. However, when we practise *metta* and build up a strong aura of compassionate love around us, conditions can change. It is due to the anger inside us, which we may be unaware of, that we attract anger. When our own minds are angry, we often perceive others as being angry. So we need to re-examine our actions and acknowledge our own shortcomings and imperfections before we blame others.

In difficult situations, we need to arouse our determination to overcome our own negative emotions, and cultivate loving-kindness and compassion for all, not excluding those who cause us trouble. We need to pray for blessings and protection, and if we are truly practising *metta*, there will always be guidance and help in one way or another.



When we practise *metta* and build up a strong aura of passionate love around us, conditions can change.



“Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world,
through love alone they cease...”

~ The Buddha

Developing a Forgiving Heart



As we develop our practice of loving-kindness, we may start to feel that although we are trying to practise love and compassion, we somehow seem to be more angry. In fact, this may be a sign not that our anger is increasing, but that we are becoming more aware of our strong habitual tendency to get angry. We will also start to become more aware how our unskilful thoughts, speech and body actions cause harm and suffering to others, as well as to ourselves.

The fact that we have so much anger inside shows that we need to learn patience: the patience to endure discomfort or hardship without reacting with anger, blame or any other negative emotion. Developing a forgiving heart will help us to have the patience and endurance to go through negative or challenging situations with a calm and clear mind.

We can include forgiveness as part of our *metta* practice, especially when we confront certain emotional blockages when we try to radiate loving-kindness. Sometimes the thought of certain people or situations brings up strong emotions, or sometimes we feel our heart is tight and painful. Firstly, we need to recognise that we have caused harm to others, in the present and in the past. Sometimes we may clearly know of certain wrong actions we have done; other times we may not be aware of any wrong we have done in the immediate past. Then we need to reflect, in the long rounds of samsaric existence, it is difficult to believe that we have not done anything wrong. Thus we sincerely seek forgiveness, from our hearts, for whatever suffering we have caused to others.

Next, we need to also extend forgiveness to those who have caused us to suffer. With the understanding of cause and effect, or the law of karma, we recognise that the suffering we are experiencing now, although it appears to be coming from others, is in fact the result of our own negative actions in the past. Likewise, the suffering that others cause to us now will one day result in suffering for themselves. Thus we cultivate compassion for their ignorance and delusion, and forgive them for what they have done to us.

Finally, we need to forgive ourselves. When we recognise the suffering we have caused ourselves and others through anger, hatred and other negative emotions, a deep sense of remorse is bound to arise. While we may have enough wisdom not to blame others, sometimes we blame ourselves for the suffering we have created.

At this point, it is very important to remember that when we begin the practise of loving-kindness, we start with our own selves. Now that we have become aware of the more unpleasant aspects of ourselves, we need to learn to forgive ourselves for our unskilful and negative actions. Reflecting that such actions are not the result of wisdom, but of greed, hatred and ignorance, we need to make a firm determination not to repeat such actions again, to lead a righteous way of life, and to cultivate loving-kindness, wisdom and other positive qualities that are beneficial to ourselves and others.

Forgiveness is a very powerful act in releasing the burden of guilt and remorse from our minds. When we have done something unskilful, if we don't admit our shortcomings and seek forgiveness from ourselves and others, we will tend to ignore the restlessness we feel, which is conditioned by guilt, by distracting ourselves in various ways. This is how delusion builds up without our being aware of it. Then we begin to lose respect and trust for ourselves and for others.

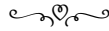
That is why the basis of proper mental culture lies in the practice of *sila*, or moral restraint (i.e. avoiding unwholesome thoughts, speech and body actions). Moral restraint frees us from remorse, and the mind that is free from remorse will be naturally calm and composed. Remorse is a great hindrance to our spiritual development and if it is not dissipated, it will create a sense of restlessness and obstruct the development of calmness and clarity in our minds. It can also create emotional blockages that manifest as physical illness or ailments.

Learning to seek forgiveness from others, and to forgive others as well as ourselves is essential for our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. The more we develop the ability to forgive and to seek forgiveness, our hearts will become lighter and happier, and our *metta* will be able to flow more naturally.



The mind that is free from remorse
will be naturally calm and composed.

Metta-Inspired Motivation



When we get up in the morning, what is it that motivates us to go to work, or to school? Is it money, status, enjoyment...? Why is it that sometimes we don't feel we have the energy to go about our daily activities, or that the challenges of moving forward in our lives seem overwhelming?

It all comes down to our motivation. Motivation is very important, whether we wish to succeed materially or spiritually. Right motivation drives us to do the right thing, that which is wholesome and skilful, and beneficial to both ourselves and others.

We need right motivation to face the challenges of life, to confront and overcome problems and obstacles. Thus it is important for us to consider what can really motivate us to strive hard to succeed in our career, studies or other activities?

When we cultivate *metta* and sincerely wish for the wellbeing of all sentient beings, we will naturally develop the right motivation. When we are motivated by the thought of benefiting others, and not by a selfish desire to benefit ourselves alone, we will have the energy to continue, no matter what hindrances we may encounter.

For example, when students have respect, love and gratitude for their parents and teachers, they will be motivated to study hard and will have the determination to meet whatever challenges that may arise. Similarly, it is out of love that parents work hard and strive to overcome hardships and difficulties in order to support and care for their children.

This is how loving-kindness provides the right motivation, giving us the energy not only to carry on with our lives, but also to be successful, so as to fulfill our duties and responsibilities to one another. Our purpose in life is linked to our love and care for others. Sometimes people even contemplate suicide when they lose their loved ones, because they no longer see any meaning in their lives.

To prevent such tendencies we need to become aware of the bigger picture. In the infinite cycle of birth and death, we have established a vast network of relationships. Our past parents, children and loved ones are all around us, not only among humans, but also amongst animals and some higher and lower beings as well. Thus we should extend our love and care beyond our immediate family and friends, to wish all beings to be well and happy.

If we contemplate the kindness of our parents and loved ones in this present life, and recognise that others around us have been our kind parents and loved ones in the past, or will be in the future, we will start to broaden our outlook to encompass all living beings. Out of gratitude for their kindness, we will be motivated to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to alleviate the sufferings of others, thus giving deeper meaning and purpose to our lives.

This deeper meaning will not only motivate us to succeed in our worldly lives, but also to develop ourselves spiritually, so that we can benefit others at a different level. At the worldly level our motivation to succeed usually comes with ulterior motives – the expectation of receiving something in return – and this ultimately leads to disappointment and frustration. As we tread the spiritual path, we need to learn to act out of the purity of our hearts, without any expectation of reward or return, by cultivating unconditional, compassionate love.

It is out of great loving-kindness and compassion for all sentient beings, that great spiritual teachers like the Buddha make such great effort to search for the truth and to develop the knowledge and skills to enlighten others. Starting with the thought of loving-kindness, we too can develop the motivation to bring benefit and happiness to others, beginning with those around us and extending out to embrace the whole world.



When we are motivated by the thought of benefiting others,
and not by a selfish desire to benefit ourselves alone,
we will have the energy to continue,
no matter what hindrances we may encounter.

From Selfish to Selfless Love



Often we find that the people who make us most angry are the people we love most – our spouse, our parents or children. Although we know that we love them, they also make us very upset. Why? Because consciously or unconsciously, we expect something from them in return for our love. When we do not get it, our love can turn to hate. This can be seen in the case of many broken marriages.

This kind of love is not refined, it is based on attachment and desire. While we may genuinely care for the other person, there is always a sense of gain for ourselves, of fulfilling our own desires, needs and wants. Our love comes with strings attached – expectations and hopes we place on the other person. For example, when you whisper ‘I love you’ to another, very often somewhere in the back of your mind you may be thinking ‘Now I will not be so lonely,’ or ‘Now I will have someone to look after me when I grow old...’. Isn’t this true?

We need to become aware of how much emphasis we are placing on our own ‘self’ in our relationships, and to understand that identifying so strongly with this ‘I’ and ‘my’ in our relationships is the cause of a lot of suffering.

We all conform to a belief that this is ‘my’ wife, ‘my’ husband, ‘my’ child and so on. Our world is centred around this ‘I’ and ‘my’ – the ego – and what this ego wants. But we need to consider what is this ‘I’ and ‘my’. Many parents get upset with their children because their children do not want to become what they want them to be. Simply because they are ‘your’ children, can you really make them what you want them to be? If not, are they really yours? Do you really own them? In the same manner, simply

because you have married and signed a contract, can you really make your husband/wife be what you want him/her to be?

That is why true *metta* must be accompanied with the wisdom and purity of mind to see beyond our limited idea of self, to recognise that each and every being wishes to be happy, no matter whether they are friendly, indifferent, or hostile towards us. *Metta* transforms ordinary love into an unconditional, unlimited kind of love, which involves care, respect, and trust – without any ‘strings’ attached.

When we sincerely wish all beings well and happy, we go beyond our own selfishness. It is an act of generosity – generosity of the heart. When we get upset with people, we need to be aware that there is some selfish motivation behind it. We are no longer caring for the other person’s wellbeing and happiness, only for our own ideas of what we want.

When we meditate on *metta*, we experience calm and peace because our mind is not on ourselves, it is focussed on radiating loving-kindness all around us, to others. If we become distracted and start to focus on ourselves, we feel the aches and pains and tension in our own body. The experience of real *metta* occurs when we can transcend our ‘self’ and our mind is truly empty; then compassionate love towards all beings will naturally develop.

All the great spiritual traditions teach us to reduce selfishness and ego, eventually paving the way for the development of unconditional and unlimited love that embraces all beings without exception. If we can genuinely develop such unconditional love, it will bring about true peace and happiness, both for ourselves and all sentient beings.



True *metta* must be accompanied with the wisdom
and purity of mind to
see beyond our limited idea of self.

The Social Application of Metta



Through the practice of *metta* (**loving-kindness**) meditation, we actively cultivate this wish for all sentient beings to be well and happy. But when we come out of our meditation and encounter the world, we see the manifestations of suffering all around us. If our *metta* is well developed, **compassion** – the wish that all suffering beings be free from suffering – will naturally arise when we encounter suffering.

As we develop the thought of compassion more and more, it will condition our speech and body actions. We will be moved to put love into action, to lend a helping hand in times of need, and to counsel and console those in trouble.

When we see people respond to our help, overcome their suffering, and become well and happy, we will also feel happy. That is how compassion manifesting in speech and body action will lead to **sympathetic joy**.

However, despite all our good actions, there are those who are not able to respond to, or even refuse, our compassionate help. Sometimes we are even blamed or accused despite our kind intentions. It is then that we need to develop **equanimity**.

Equanimity comes when we begin to understand the nature of life, particularly the understanding of impermanence and the law of karma, or cause and effect. We see that some people can respond to our help but others cannot. Due to certain causes they have created in the past, they do not have the right conditions for our help to be effective in the present. In other words, we are not able to prevent them from experiencing the effect of their own actions – they have to go through their karma.

Furthermore, our good intentions may be negatively received due to our own karma, or it could be our lack of skill in carrying out that action. The more we can see and understand the law of cause and effect, as well as the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of our existence, the more we will be able to let go and not be disturbed by whatever happens. Thus we will be able to maintain an equanimous mind, and continue to work on perfecting our skills and abilities in order to help others more effectively.

Loving-kindness (*Metta*), **Compassion** (*Karuna*), **Sympathetic or Altruistic Joy** (*Mudita*) and **Equanimity** (*Upekkha*) are known as the Four Divine Abodes (Four Brahma Viharas), or Four Immeasurable or Boundless Thoughts. The practice of *metta* underpins the other three ‘divine abodes’, and as your *metta* develops, so will your compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, which will in turn increase your loving-kindness. Eventually, when your practice reaches a very high level, each of these qualities will become boundless and unlimited, and you will really be living in a ‘divine abode’.

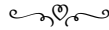
Developing these four qualities is essential, especially in the caring professions and the field of community service. Many people in these professions are affected in one way or another by the different sufferings of their clients, especially when they are not always able to remove or adequately relieve their clients’ suffering. This is because they do not fully understand the nature of life at a deeper level, and they are unable to remain equanimous in the face of such suffering.

For anyone who wishes to help and bring benefit to others, whether it be your own family, your community, nation or the whole world, it is very important to develop these immeasurable qualities, beginning with a strong foundation in the practice of *metta*. The more we develop loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, the more this world will be a caring and peaceful place.



As your metta develops, so will your compassion,
sympathetic joy and equanimity,
which will in turn increase your loving-kindness.

Understanding Our ‘Dis-ease’



In order to understand how *metta* can be such a powerful tool in the healing process, we first need to consider what it is that needs to be healed...

Disease, or sickness, arises as the result of dis-‘ease’. When our bodies or minds are subject to some kind of stress and are not at ease, illness starts to develop. This stress and imbalance can affect us on all levels – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

At the physical level, our bodies are affected by the presence of viruses, bacteria or abnormal cells; pollutants or toxic substances; physical injuries; as well as unhealthy diet and lifestyle habits. When this kind of physical stress is experienced, our body responds with its own natural defence mechanism. For example, when we catch a cold, our immune system responds to fight off the infection. We may experience discomfort for a short time, but if there are no other contributing factors, our body is eventually able to heal itself.

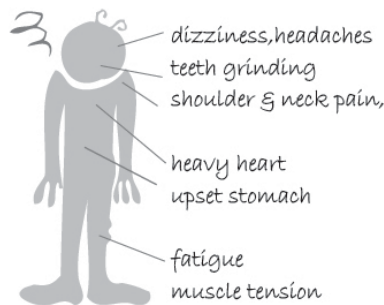
However, our physical body does not exist in isolation but is interlinked with our emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. There is increasing medical evidence showing how our mind and emotions affect our physical body³ (and vice versa). Thus when we consider ‘dis-ease’ and healing we need to take a holistic approach and take into account all these different aspects of our being.

³ See, for example, *The Living Matrix – The Science of Healing* documentary available at www.thelivingmatrixmovie.com (24/6/2013).

Stress on an emotional level is caused by negative emotions such as anger, hatred and grudges; fear, worry and phobias; jealousy; desire and many more. On a mental level, our beliefs, views and thinking processes (both rational and irrational) can also cause stress and imbalance. There is also the influence of karma (our past actions as well as present habitual tendencies) of which we may or may not be aware.

On a spiritual level, certain vows or aspirations we have made in the past may cause stress and sickness when our way of life does not flow with what we have determined. In certain cases, stress and sickness can also be conditioned by the influence of lower beings (or spirits).

In everyday life, we may not realise the effect that these mental, emotional and spiritual factors have on our physical health. But as we practise meditation and begin to understand the complex nature of our being, we start to become aware of how they are interrelated. For example, when we experience anxiety or fear, we may feel our stomach tighten. If we repeat this physical reaction many times, a lot of tension will build up in the region of our stomach and it would not be surprising if we experienced digestive problems as a result. Similarly, anger, grief and suppressed emotions can contribute to all manner of diseases and physical problems.



We are all beings of energy - the physical and mental elements of our body are all made up of energy. Stress caused by external and internal factors means that our energy fields are disturbed. This causes our bodies' natural defence mechanisms against disease to become imbalanced, and thus the body loses its own healing powers.

The positive energies of loving-kindness help to relieve the stress and tension of our mind and body, re-establishing balance and harmony in our energy field, and allowing our body's defence mechanisms to function optimally for the healing process to take place. Being an antidote to anger, hatred and grudges, *metta* helps to transmute negative thoughts and emotions, allowing the spirit of forgiveness to manifest, thereby cleansing various blockages and restoring balance within oneself. Coming from the sincere wish to be well, the practice of *metta* has the potential to heal all aspects of our being: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.



When our bodies or minds are subject to some kind of stress and are not at ease, illness starts to develop. This stress and imbalance can affect us on all levels – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

Healing 'Dis-ease'



Metta is the wish to be well and happy, and this wish encompasses all aspects of our being: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Therefore, *metta* is naturally related to healing, both for ourselves and for others.

When we have love and compassion for ourselves, it is natural that we will look after our body through balanced diet and exercise. When we fall sick, we will take care of ourselves to the best of our ability.

Next time you are sick, or have any aches or pains, try radiating *metta* to yourself and allowing the feeling of wellbeing to spread throughout your body, especially to all the affected parts. As you start to relax, you may notice that a significant part of the pain is actually caused by our own resistance to it, not wanting to experience that unpleasant sensation. Approaching our pain and discomfort with loving-kindness reduces this extra stress that we cause ourselves by reacting to the original painful feeling. In this way, the pain will start to reduce and our circulation and energy will begin to flow better, giving our body the best chance to heal itself and even release the root cause of the problem.

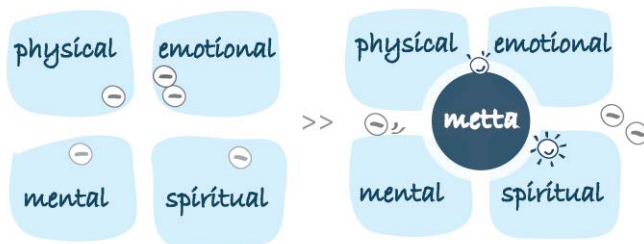
To do this effectively it is important that we build up our *metta* practice now, when we are not sick (or are less sick). At the beginning of your daily practice, when you radiate *metta* towards yourself, feel that loving-kindness is radiating to all the cells, tissues and organs of your body, that they may be well, happy and healthy. In this way you will build up the positive energies to promote physical health. If we are one day confronted with great pain and suffering, it may be difficult to arouse positive thoughts of loving-kindness unless we have already cultivated *metta* to a

certain level. That is why sustained *metta* practice is essential, especially for healing more complex problems involving our emotional, mental and spiritual blockages.

The practice of *metta* helps to stabilise our emotions, promote positive emotions, and to clear emotional blockages through forgiveness. Much of our 'dis-ease' is due to anger, hatred, grudges and the inability to forgive ourselves and others. When we practise *metta*, we learn to forgive others, to forgive ourselves and to seek forgiveness for whatever harm we may have caused.

Metta also encourages healthy mental attitudes. Our negative emotions are conditioned by the tendencies of grasping, aversion and delusion, created as a result of our inability to understand the true nature of life. When our hearts open and our understanding grows, we will be able to see the world around us more clearly, reducing these negative habitual tendencies. That is why thoughts of loving-kindness are considered an ingredient of wisdom.

On a spiritual level, *metta* will enable us to connect more: to our own hearts, so we will be able to know our true aspirations and purpose in life; and also to connect with higher spiritual beings (such as healing devas/angels, etc), and receive their guidance, blessings and protection. The practice of loving-kindness thus has a vital role to play, both in healing, and preventing, disease and imbalance.



Metta promotes healing and harmony

Generating *metta* also promotes healing and harmony amongst those around us. As we are all beings of energy, when we radiate *metta* towards others, our coherent energy fields resonate. That is why our thoughts of love and compassion can impact others, especially those with whom we have close connection, such as our loved ones. When practised together with others (via Metta Circles⁴, for example) this collective energy has even greater potential to transmute negative energies, negative thoughts and negative entities on a wider scale, into light, love and harmony. That is the advantage of group meditation, chanting and prayer.

We see ‘dis-ease’ manifesting everywhere, on various levels within ourselves and in the world around us. To heal ourselves and heal the world, it is essential to develop more and more loving-kindness, and to come together to harness the power of our collective *metta* for the welfare and happiness of the many.



When we radiate metta towards others,
our coherent energy fields resonate.
That is why our thoughts of love and compassion
can impact others.

⁴ See page 54

The 'Power' of Metta



It is often thought that if we try to practise loving-kindness and compassion all the time, we will become weak and passive. But this is not true. As we deepen our *metta* practice further and grow in wisdom, we will have greater ability to handle challenging situations in a constructive way. Sometimes we need to apply loving-kindness and compassion with a certain degree of firmness. Our hearts may be soft and gentle but our actions are strong and firm. Externally we may appear wrathful, but internally we are loving and kind.

We can observe this with a mother and child. When the child wants to play with fire, the mother will stop the child's action, perhaps in a forceful manner. The child may cry and be very unhappy, but the mother needs to act in such a way in order to protect the child from the danger of being burnt. Sometimes we need to take strong action to prevent harm to ourselves and others.

Similarly, saying 'no' to a friend at school or a colleague at work does not necessarily mean that we are angry or unkind. Although when we are angry we may say 'no' to everything, when we practise *metta* with mindfulness and wisdom, we say 'no' out of loving-kindness and compassion for both ourselves and others.

The strong motivating force of genuine loving-kindness and compassion will prompt us to take action in order to protect the life and welfare of all beings, not just ourselves and our loved ones. The examples of people such as Gandhi have shown that peaceful and non-violent means of effecting change are very powerful.

We need to have confidence in the law of cause and effect, knowing that when we act purely out of loving-kindness, we have not created any intentional harm to anyone, and this will be the source of future good, although we may not completely avert what seems to be a negative situation in the present. Even if we make some people angry or upset along the way, ultimately our sincere intention to act for the benefit of beings will overcome any animosity.

It takes great courage to sincerely exercise loving-kindness in the midst of threatening situations or confrontations. We need to understand that even though we may not be able to get the best solution in the short term, we will avoid creating further problems by our actions. If we give in to anger and craving, protecting our own interests at the expense of others', eventually the negative effects of our actions will backfire, creating further problems for ourselves and others in the long term.

We have to learn to see the bigger picture. If we look closely at the many conflicts in the world today – over territory, resources or the actions of another group of humans – we can see that greed, hatred and ignorance have produced generations of suffering, vicious cycles of retaliation and endemic social problems. Until the tendencies of greed, hatred and ignorance are replaced by an attitude of forgiveness, tolerance, sharing and understanding, any positive developments usually end up being short-lived.

The preamble to the UNESCO constitution declares that:

"since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

Therein lies the greatest 'power' in the world – the power of the human mind to develop loving-kindness and compassion, to develop wisdom. It is because we have not developed these potentials of our minds that greed, hatred and ignorance hold sway. That is why it is crucial for each and every one of us to take every opportunity to act with kindness, compassion and wisdom as much as we are able to, and to strive to develop these qualities further. Then we will have the strength and the confidence to confront and address even the most difficult issues, in such a way as to ensure the welfare and happiness of all beings.



"Since wars begin in the minds of men,
it is in the minds of men that
the defences of peace must be constructed".

Awakening with Metta



As we develop our practice of metta, we will start to become more sensitive to how our own thoughts, speech and body actions cause suffering to both ourselves and others. If we have developed a deep sense of concern and compassion for both ourselves and others to have ultimate wellbeing – that is, to eventually be free from all suffering – we will be motivated to proceed to the next stage in our practice. This will naturally take us to the cultivation of mindfulness.

The Buddha explained the practice of mindfulness in terms of the **Four Foundations of Mindfulness**. The purpose of practising these Four Foundations of Mindfulness is:

- to purify the mind
- to overcome sorrow and lamentation
- to put an end to mental and physical stress
- to attain higher knowledge and insight
- and to realise *Nibbana*, or enlightenment

If we sincerely wish for the wellbeing of ourselves and others, we will naturally recognise the need to purify our minds from greed, hatred and delusion, and to overcome sorrow, grief and all forms of mental and physical stress. We will also begin to understand the necessity of attaining higher knowledge and insight – so as to have greater understanding about the realities of life and thus not be disturbed by life’s ups and downs – as well as the skills and knowledge to bring benefit to others. Finally, we will be motivated to put an end to all suffering and attain the true freedom of enlightenment.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness involves the cultivation of mindfulness with regards to:

- the Body
- Feelings
- Mind (or mental states)
- Dhamma

As we become more mindful of our body, we naturally become more aware of our feelings. As we become more aware of our feelings, we naturally become more aware of our states of mind. And as our mindfulness on the mind develops, we will begin to understand and to realise certain aspects of the Dhamma at the experiential level. This is how the Four Foundations of Mindfulness lead us to liberation.

Mindfulness on the Body

The practice of *ānāpānasati* – mindfulness on breathing in and out – forms the first technique in the cultivation of mindfulness of the body. When done with proper guidance this method is very effective in raising our consciousness to a high level – such as in the development of *jhānas*, or mental absorptions. There are other aspects of mindfulness on the body which support the practice of *ānāpānasati* by generating a continuity of mindfulness. These include mindfulness on: body postures; clear comprehension of bodily activities; the four basic elements of the body; contemplation on the 32 parts of the body; and nine cemetery contemplations.

Mindfulness on Feelings

Mindfulness on the body naturally leads to the development of mindfulness on feelings. Here, we need to develop the ability to distinguish the different kinds of feelings – pleasant, unpleasant, and neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant. And we should neither cling on to pleasant feelings nor have aversion towards unpleasant or painful sensations.

Mindfulness on the Mind

Through the cultivation of mindfulness on feelings, we will develop greater sensitivity to our mind, or mental states. When the mind is restless or confused, we are aware. When there is lustful desire, or anger and aversion, we are also aware. This practice enables us to step out of any unwholesome states of mind, providing ‘space’ for positive action to take place, so as to overcome any unwholesome or negative states of mind.

When the mind is well-focused and concentrated, we know it is focused and concentrated. Eventually we will also learn to differentiate and become mindful of the different levels of concentration.

When mindfulness on the mind is well-established, it naturally leads on to the cultivation of mindfulness on the Dhamma.

Mindfulness on the Dhamma

The term “Dhamma” can mean many things. In the context of mindfulness, five aspects of Dhamma are involved. They are:

- The Five Mental Hindrances
- The Five Aggregates

- The Six Sense Bases
- The Seven Factors of Enlightenment
- The Four Noble Truths

The Five Mental Hindrances:

These are (1) sensual desire, (2) anger or aversion, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) restlessness, and (5) doubt.

Anyone who practises meditation will experience one or more of these hindrances. We need to become aware of them, as and when they arise, and the causes or conditions under which they arise. We also need to become aware, as and when they cease, and under what causes or conditions they cease. With the cessation of the Five Mental Hindrances, or when they are at least temporarily under control, the mind will develop into different levels of calmness and tranquility. With a calm, clear and steady mind, we are able to proceed to the next aspect of Dhamma, the Five Aggregates.

The Five Aggregates:

These refer to the aggregates of form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*sankhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*).

These Five Aggregates are the mental and physical processes that constitute what we call the ‘self’. The cultivation of mindfulness on the Five Aggregates leads to the realisation of the true nature of our ‘self’ – thus breaking the idea of ‘I’ and ‘my’. This is where the ‘self’ idea begins to disintegrate. When mindfulness on the Five Aggregates is well-established, we



then turn to mindfulness on the Six Sense Bases.

The Six Sense Bases:

These refer to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and the mind. When we see something, say, a visual object such as colour, we are aware of the eye consciousness and the contact that arises with the visual object, which conditions a thought to arise (to say it is 'white' or 'blue', etc). With the arising of a thought, there also arise the Five Aggregates – form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness.

In the same manner, we develop mindfulness on the other sense bases – hearing, smelling, touching (or feeling) and thinking. When mindfulness on the Six Sense Bases is established we are ready to embark on the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

The Seven Factors Of Enlightenment:

When the tendency of grasping is well under control and the idea of 'I, my, me, and mine' diminishes, one is ready to embark on the path to Enlightenment through the practice of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*satta bhōjjanga*) are:

1. *Sati* – mindfulness
2. *Dhamma-vicaya* – investigation of Dhamma
3. *Viriya* – energy (mental)
4. *Piti* – rapture
5. *Passaddhi* – tranquility
6. *Samādhī* – concentrated insight (*vipassanā-samadhi*)
7. *Upekkhā* – equanimity

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment begins with mindfulness, which refers to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, as discussed here. As we develop these Four Foundations of Mindfulness, we become able to clearly observe the rising-falling (*udaya-vaya*) of mental and physical phenomena. This constitutes *Dhamma-vicaya*, investigation of Dhamma, and as the Dhamma unfolds, *saddhā* (faith or confidence) arises, which will condition *virīya* (energy) to arise. Likewise, the other factors will begin to arise one after the other, finally leading to *upekkhā* (equanimity).

This state of equanimity eventually leads to the experience of *Nibbāna dhatu* – a state of void or ‘emptiness’ – which signifies the fruition of one’s practice. The depth of this experience may vary, coming as a flash or lingering on, depending on the clarity of one’s mind and the degree of realisation.

With the experience of *Nibbāna dhatu*, one experiences the cessation of *dukkha* (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) and this leads one to clearly see each of the Four Noble Truths and their interrelation, which is the final aspect of Mindfulness on Dhamma.

The Four Noble Truths:

1. *Dukkha* – suffering or unsatisfactoriness
2. *Samudaya* – cause (of *dukkha*)
3. *Nirodha* – cessation (of *dukkha*)
4. *Magga* – path (leading to the cessation of *dukkha*)

The First Noble Truth is the Truth of *Dukkha* which is generally translated as ‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, or ‘mental and physical stress’. *Dukkha* is defined in terms of: birth, old age, sickness and death – which all beings are subject to – as well as separation from loved ones or pleasant conditions; association with unpleasant persons or conditions; and not getting what one desires.

The Buddha finally summarises *dukkha* into what is known as the Five Grasping Aggregates. The Five Aggregates (explained above) are the mental and physical processes which make up our being. And they are constantly in a state of flux or change. Herein lies the deeper philosophical and profound meaning of *dukkha*, for it encompasses our whole state of being or existence.

It should be noted here that the Buddha did not say the Five Aggregates themselves are *dukkha*. He said the Five ‘Grasping’ Aggregates. Thus it is our clinging or attachment to these Five Aggregates, which are constantly changing and empty of self, that produces *dukkha*. This tendency of **grasping** is conditioned by ignorance (*avijjā*) – the ignorance or delusion about the true nature of our ‘self’.

This brings us to the Second Noble Truth which explains that *tanha* or craving, which leads to attachment and aversion, is the cause of suffering. Craving is a force which drives us to get what we want. When we get what we want, we are happy, and want more. When we are not able to get what we want, then anger or aversion arises.

The Third Noble Truth points to the cessation of suffering (i.e. through the cessation of craving). The tendency of craving, conditioned by ignorance or delusion, arises through our six sense bases (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind) and is constantly being sustained by the proliferation of thoughts. Hence the need to ‘silence’ our minds with proper mental discipline.

The path which leads to this cessation is called the **Noble Eightfold Path**, which is the Fourth Noble Truth. Avoiding extremes of self-indulgence on the one hand, and self-torture on the other, **the Noble Eightfold Path** consists of:

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Thought
3. Right Speech

4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

These eight factors may be summarised into three stages of training, involving **good conduct**, **mental culture** and **wisdom**.



These three stages of training are essential for the purification of our body, speech and mind. Through the restraint of speech and body actions (Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood), the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion can be prevented from manifesting at the physical and verbal level, but not at the mental level. As such, we need to discipline our minds (through Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration) in order to prevent the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion from manifesting at the mental level.

It is greed, hatred and delusion, manifesting as various unwholesome states of mind, that generate the cloud of obscurations which prevent the mind from seeing things as they truly are. When these tendencies are overcome, wisdom and insight into the true nature of life (i.e. Right Understanding and Right Thought) will be able to arise.

The intrinsic nature of our mind is bright and luminous, like a stainless mirror, or a clear blue sky. It is this intrinsic nature that provides the basis and potential of true awakening and enlightenment.

While our minds remain clouded by greed, hatred and delusion, it is not easy to appreciate or realise the deeper meaning of the Noble Truths, in particular, that the Five Grasping Aggregates are *dukkha*. It is this delusion of the ‘self’, which gives rise to grasping and aversion, and is the main fetter binding us to samsara – the cycle of birth and death.

That is why the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is so important, because it leads us to the realisation that these Five Aggregates are empty. ‘Empty’ in the sense that there is really no substance that we can cling on to as ‘I’ and ‘mine’, as these Five Aggregates have arisen dependent on various causes and conditions.

When we see the emptiness of the Five Aggregates, we will realise the futility of grasping onto something that has no intrinsic existence, and naturally we will cease our tendency of craving or grasping, which is the cause of suffering.

The realisation of the Four Noble Truths is the realisation of the knowledge of how to overcome suffering, which is the core teaching of the Buddha. When we are truly awakened to this knowledge, we will be liberated from all suffering and experience the peace and bliss of enlightenment. This is how we can achieve true wellbeing for ourselves and for others.



The intrinsic nature of our mind is bright and luminous.

The Significance of Mindfulness and the Practice of Metta



In order to fully develop the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, it will be beneficial if we have the opportunity to spend time in a retreat environment, under proper guidance. A retreat environment provides the optimal conditions for building up a ‘continuity of mindfulness’, which is essential for an effective process of transformation to take place. Transformation occurs when we break our unskilful habits and cultivate skilful habits at all levels – body, speech and mind.

Even if we do not have the opportunity to go for a retreat, we can still build up the practice of mindfulness throughout our daily activities. It is essential to try to practise mindfulness every moment, as much as we can, whether at home, at work, at school, or in retreat conditions.

Mindfulness and *metta* complement each other. As our *metta* grows stronger, we naturally will become more aware and sensitive to what is happening within and around us. As our mindfulness grows, our understanding of the realities of life increases, enhancing our ability to empathise with, and understand, the situations of others.

When we first begin to practise *metta*, the idea of ‘I’ and ‘my’, which creates a barrier between ourselves and others, is still there – i.e. ‘I radiate loving-kindness to ‘you’’. But as we cultivate mindfulness and begin to understand the empty nature of our being, our self-idea begins to diminish and our *metta* will become more natural.

As long as we are still practising *metta* with the self-idea, we are bound to be disappointed from time to time (e.g. I give *metta* to you and you let me down). That is why we need to take *metta* to another level by developing mindfulness meditation that will lead us to the insight to go beyond self.

As we cultivate the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, we will begin to see, in particular, the true nature of the Five Aggregates which make up our being – as impermanent, unsatisfactory and devoid of any intrinsic self-identity. In this manner, mindfulness eventually leads to the wisdom and realisation to break our concept of ‘I’, ‘my’, ‘me’ and ‘mine’. This is how the gross idea of self can be eradicated.

The more subtle notion of the self can only be overcome through greater maturity of wisdom and insight into the emptiness of ourselves, those around us, as well as whatever activities are being carried out. *Metta* minus the idea of ‘I’ and ‘my’ becomes truly pure and unconditional love because there is no more self. Then we will be free to help others in a much greater way.

In the concluding stanza of the *Metta Sutta* (the Discourse on Loving-Kindness), it is mentioned ‘*Ditthin ca anupa gama sīlavā ...*’ that is, in the culmination of *metta* practice one does not ‘fall into wrong views’, i.e. the delusion of the self. We need to break through the delusion of the self in order to free ourselves, and to help others to free themselves, from the cycle of *samsara*. It is only when we break through this concept of ‘I’ and ‘my’ that our love can become truly boundless and unconditional.



Metta minus the idea of ‘I’ and ‘my’
becomes truly pure and unconditional love

Metta Circles



Metta Circles provide a platform for connecting like-minded people to practise loving-kindness meditation together and provide spiritual support for one another, irrespective of caste, colour or creed.

As small groups practising together and supporting each other, Metta Circles harness the energies of compassionate love for world peace, harmony and stability.



For further information on Metta Circles, or how to form your own Metta Circle, please contact Sister Guat Cheng at guatcheng@alokafoundation.org.

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