

## Loving kindness practice

**Loving kindness** (*mettā* in Pali), is a fundamental aspect of Buddhist practice. It is focused on acting with compassion towards all sentient beings, and respect for the natural world.

Its natural outcome is friendliness, with the disappearance of ill-will, hate, anger and selfishness. Practice, and you will see your relationships change.

*Mettā* in the Buddha's teaching is the first of four kinds of contemplation called Divine Abidings (*brahma-vihara*). They are designed to develop a sound relationship to other living beings. The four are:

- *mettā*, or loving-kindness,
- *karuna*, or compassion
- *mudita* or gladness at others' success, and
- *upekkha*, or equanimity

*Mettā* is one of ten "perfections" (*paramis*), leading to awakening. They include:

1. **generosity**, giving of oneself
2. virtue, morality, **ethical conduct**
3. renunciation, **letting go of craving**
4. **wisdom**, informed by insight into the real nature of existence
5. **energy**, diligence, effort
6. **patience**, tolerance, acceptance
7. truthfulness, **honesty**
8. **determination**, resolution
9. goodwill, friendliness, **loving-kindness** (*mettā*)
10. **equanimity**, serenity with whatever arises

*Mettā* is the essential foundation for spiritual growth and purification of the individual, making for a peaceful and healthy community.

Also relevant is the fourth Noble Truth, which states that *there is a path* to awaken; this is called the Middle Way because it avoids extremes of sensual indulgence and of denial. This also relates to the Eight-Fold-Path - right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Before starting any loving kindness meditation, it is helpful to consider the dangers of hate and craving, and the benefits offered by their avoidance. To address anger/hate, loving-kindness, compassion and equanimity is directed towards the person/thing/event.

Two meditations in common practice are:

**Loving kindness to all beings:**

- begin with an intention to generate loving kindness to all beings equally
- consider the pitfalls of hate and anger
- come into the body and use breathing or sounds to stay present
- allow thoughts to dissipate
- relax, while staying attentive to whatever arises
- rest until tranquillity is felt
- bring to mind a loved, respected person, and imagine them in front of you
- they are smiling with love at you, and you at them
- open the heart unconditionally
- now do the same with: someone neutral, someone you dislike, and finally yourself
- as you come out of the practice, reflect on what you experienced
- finish by offering up the benefit of this meditation for all beings

**Loving kindness in all directions:**

- begin with an intention to generate loving kindness to all beings equally
- come into the body and use breathing or sounds to stay present
- allow thoughts to dissipate
- relax, while staying attentive to whatever arises
- rest until tranquillity is felt
- imagine above and in front of you, a glow of light, and if you wish this contains an embodied awakened being such as Jesus or the Buddha
- imagine that this light enters your body from the top of your head, filling all parts of the body, washing out ill-will like a waterfall
- imagine the light or warmth concentrated at your heart
- now radiate that light in front of you, going as far as your mind lets you, touching and blessing all beings
- do the same additionally: behind, to the left, right, below and above, equally
- open your heart to blessings from others in this field of love
- stay open-hearted, giving and receiving
- as you come out of the practice, reflect on what you experienced
- finish by offering up the benefit of this meditation for all beings
- be aware that you may be vulnerable for some time afterwards, so be gentle