

Great Heart As a Dhamma practice, we sustain and deepen the intent of kindness, irrespective of the various identities and shadow forms that arise in awareness. That's enough. We establish clear awareness and sustain kindness in the moment where impressions occur and where responses arise. It's not about conjuring up any great feelings of emotional warmth, but a process of staying in touch, of not blaming oneself or others, and of not going into the past to rehash old issues. The 'staying at' that point of the hurt, ill- will and pain then begins to carry the awareness across to compassion (*karunā*) and transpersonal wisdom.

Karunā is the kindly eye on the helplessness of our suffering. When we experience this without blame or defence or struggle, compassion arises. And it arises irrespective of the identity or value of the wounded being. Compassion sweeps over judgements of others or ourselves. It knows how terrible it is for anything — even a mass murderer, tyrant, or poisonous snake — to be trapped in pain. When entering into this sphere of compassion, it is not a matter of doing anything, blaming or feeling sad about it, or wishing it were different. Instead, it is about entering that place where one touches the pain directly. Then, through staying in the hurt where the mind can't do anything, has no remedies, ideas or philosophies, it comes out of the position of 'me.' The small, localized state of mind opens out of the default self-and-other sense into the Great Heart.

The non-doing of such a heart has powerful effects. Instead of trying to conjure it up (and feeling frustrated if 'it doesn't work,' or 'I'm not good enough'), we let the healing happen by itself. Then there is a sense of grace, of receiving compassion that is greater and more boundless than any of one's personal attributes or efforts. Truly this is called a divine (or sublime) abiding (*brahmavihāra*). And through contemplating the selfless nature of this abiding, the mind lets go — not only of ill-will, but also of the push of becoming and self-view. This is the shore of the Beyond.

Quotes and Suggestions on Kindness *This is how you should train yourselves: 'The liberation of mind through kindness will be cultivated, developed, followed, used for guidance, taken as a basis, grounded, steadied, consolidated, and thoroughly practised ...' (S. 20.5) Just as a strong conch blower can easily notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the liberation of mind through kindness is thus developed, thus followed, the results of limited [unskillful] actions don't remain and linger on there. (S. 42.8)*

In the last of these teachings, the Buddha makes it clear that one should sustain such a mind state even in the presence of what one finds repulsive. So much so that one should test the mind by seeing the unattractive aspects of what one customarily perceives as attractive (giving consideration to the viscera and waste products of the human body for example) — and yet not be moved by aversion. The other permutations indicate the thoroughness of the training. Therefore, more than being a social grace, such goodwill requires the strength and clarity of the Enlightenment factors to keep the mind from swerving down the habitual track of what it likes

and dislikes. And the maturation of such a practice is that the mind abides in the inner radiance called 'the sphere of the beautiful.'

Kindness as a Dhamma practice is the skill of extending goodwill, so that one's heart isn't taken over by ill-will. Sounds easy? Well, these quotes point to the thoroughness and the excellence of such a cultivation. Thoroughly undertaken, it liberates the mind from the cramp and gloom of ill-will, despond and cynicism. In the second quote, the Buddha recommends using *mettā* to free the mind from the regret and remorse that is the result of unskillful actions. Herein one is encouraged to spread *mettā* to oneself (or who one was at that time) and to all those who were affected and involved in the unskillful action.

Action

Minimize critical speech about others to a few words that are offered sparingly, merely as an opinion if it seems necessary to warn another of that person's tendencies. Refer to others' apparent weaknesses as degrees of illness or affliction that they have to bear, as in, 'He sometimes gets caught by the tendency to dominate others.'

Notice any boundaries that your mind erects to place yourself or others in categories such as 'friend,' 'enemy,' 'no-account,' 'important person,' 'idiot,' 'genius,' etc. Without discounting the perceptions, move the labels around from person to person and maintain a willingness to accept each one as they are.

Meditation Begin with several minutes of the above reflection, extending the awareness into how your body feels with the experience of goodwill. Settle into that. Pick up the sense of wishing your body well. Move that warm sense around the body, including places that feel unwell or neutral as well as vigorous. As much of our self-consciousness hovers around the face, it's especially useful to imagine this part of your body being seen by the eyes of goodwill.

Draw your attention out to the surface of your body, to how you sense the skin. Be aware of it like a sheet or a blanket enclosing your person, until you sense a good connection and a vitality gathering there. This is your field of goodwill. Let it fill with the benevolent sense that was described above. This may take a while. When you're ready, imagine that someone you are fond of or respect is going to move into that extended space. Notice if the energy changes, and stay connected to your bodily presence. Maintain the sense of an unobstructed field that contains your body, and gradually allow the other person into that without reaching out or feeling self-conscious. When you reach a limit, rest there. Then imagine them moving away while maintaining the same state of mind and energy.

Subsequently, practise this with people you feel neutral about, and those with whom you have difficulties. However, don't let them get any closer or for any longer than your field of goodwill can support!

Reflection Give consideration to any acts of goodwill that have been shown to you this day. Do likewise to any such actions that have occurred in the past. Then reflect in a similar way to any such actions — encompassing generosity, loyalty, advice, care, service or forgiveness, that you know have occurred between other people. Dwell on such reflections long enough to establish the emotion and attitude of kindness.

Ajahn Sucitto: <https://forestsangha.org/teachings/books/parami-ways-to-cross-life-s-floods?language=English>

Metta (Mettanisamsa) Sutta: Discourse on Advantages of Loving-kindness

translated from the Pali by Piyadassi Thera

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was living near Savatthi at Jetavana at

Anathapindika's monastery. Then he addressed the monks saying, "Monks."

"Venerable Sir," said the monks, by way of reply. The Blessed One then spoke as follows:

"Monks, eleven advantages are to be expected from the release (deliverance) of heart by familiarizing oneself with thoughts of loving-kindness (metta), by the cultivation of loving-kindness, by constantly increasing these thoughts, by regarding loving-kindness as a vehicle (of expression), and also as something to be treasured, by living in conformity with these thoughts, by putting these ideas into practice, and by establishing them. What are the eleven?

- 1. *"One sleeps in comfort.*

- 2. *One awakes in comfort.*
- 3. *One sees no evil dreams.*
- 4. *One is dear to human beings.*
- 5. *One is dear to non-human beings.*
- 6. *Devas (gods) protect one.*
- 7. *Fire, poison, and sword cannot touch one.*
- 8. *One's mind can concentrate quickly.*
- 9. *One's countenance is serene.*
- 10. *One dies without being confused in mind.*
- 11. *If one fails to attain arahantship (the highest sanctity) here and now, one will be reborn in the brahma-world.*

"These eleven advantages, monks, are to be expected from the release of heart by familiarizing oneself with thoughts of loving-kindness, by cultivation of loving-kindness, by constantly increasing these thoughts, by regarding loving-kindness as a vehicle (of expression), and also as something to be treasured, by living in conformity with these thoughts, by putting these ideas into practice and by establishing them."

So said the Blessed One. Those monks rejoiced at the words of the Blessed One.

