

Metta Week 1, June 4th 2025

Holistic Kindness: *Mettā Pāramī* Who isn't touched by acts of kindness? Who isn't moved by the intention to 'pervade the all-encompassing world — to others as to myself — with a mind imbued with a kindness that is abundant, exalted, without boundaries, free from hatred and ill-will'? Or by the phrase, 'Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child — so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings'? The ideal of goodwill (*mettā*) expressed in these phrases from the Buddhist tradition is one that is shared by all spiritual paths. Kindness is immediately and obviously a big part of what spirituality, and true humanity, is all about. We can all experience goodwill towards some being at some time. However, we can all lose touch with that bright way of relating — especially to ourselves. So it's valuable to bring to mind that each of us has at some time been on the receiving end of freely given goodwill. It's one of the recollections, or 'five-minute meditations,' that is useful to undertake throughout the day. I have done this myself for years, recollecting specific acts of kindness that occurred in this very day, and dwelling on the emotional resonance of that. So far I have never found a day when someone didn't offer a kind word, ask if I needed something, or even talked about our conflict in a gentle and non-hurtful way. With all of this I acknowledge: 'They didn't have to do that.'

So when you're feeling bitter, anxious or lonely — remember this: at some time you have been seen with a loving and sympathetic. Also recall: no matter how mean you may think you are, you experience goodwill towards something. We all do — they say that even Hitler loved his dog. However, it's clearly the case that for most beings this channel of goodwill gets blocked from time to time by a flood of ill-will. Therefore we need a means to carry the heart across the floods that submerge our fellow-feeling. And when we make the resolution of kindness, not just towards kittens on a nice day but even towards cockroaches on a bad day, when we include dictators and brutal maniacs, as well as all aspects of ourselves — then we're making *mettā* into a perfection, a vast and transfiguring way of life. The result, the fulfilment of the *pāramī*, is a mind that is grounded in wisdom and compassion, and which easily opens to the peace of Nibbāna.

The Mind of Self and Other Let's get to the crunch point. A heart brimming with love is indeed an attractive ideal, but what's more important is breadth of application rather than intensity of affection. As an analogy, the Buddha remarked that if bandits caught you and sawed your limbs off, and if at any time during that process your mind moved into aversion — then you wouldn't have been practising *mettā* thoroughly. So if you include all beings all of the time, you'll recognize that to not allow the mind to move into hatred and ill-will is a pass-mark you could aim for. (And that, indeed, is a very high standard).

Mettā is an extension of the affective and responsive mind or heart. How crucial its alignment is! On the one hand, the mind can get trapped by fear, greed, hatred and delusion, and on the other hand it can extend in generosity and other perfections.

The main issue for the mind is how it relates to what happens. Relationship is fundamental, because we are actually never a stand-alone being, but always a 'being with' or a 'being in,' or even a 'being with the sense of being without.' Consciousness is just this awareness of 'being with' in the various fields of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and thinking. And in that process of being with, consciousness automatically establishes the sense of a subject and an object: a seer who sees a visible object, a hearer who hears an audible object, etc. Out of that duality, the sense of self and other arises. That's the program of consciousness. Notice that self and other are relative positions that depend on each other. You can't have an experience of self without an other (animate or inanimate) that is in contrast to it. However for each mind, the emphasis is on the self; the 'me, mine' bit is the crucial aspect in a world of changing others. Even in your own mind, there appears the self (the subject) as a watcher and the other (the object) as thoughts and emotions. Or the self is how you conceive yourself as being, and other is what you should be, might be, or were.

This is self-view, and it's the norm for unawakened beings. Self-view rests on the assumption that these dependently-arisen polarities are actually separate and autonomous. It infers a self, despite the inability of that self to own or control the body or mind that it adopts as its own; despite its genetic and psychological inheritance from others; and despite its inability to rest unsupported by sights, sounds, affection and purposeful activity — all of which are outside its dominion. Self-view is blind to interdependency. Consequently, its flooding ignorance sweeps us into a sense of separation and alienation, whilst all the time asserting that this is our empire.

The sense of dissatisfaction that occurs in the territory of alienation is not attributed to the disconnection between self and other. Instead, ignorance tells us that there's something wrong with either the other, or the self that eventually becomes an other — that is, my mind that I have to deal with. So we pick away at either or both of these apparent culprits. It's often the case then that the boundary mark between self and other becomes one of ill-will, although we may not even recognize it. We might say: 'I should be like this,' 'I'm the one who has to do this,' 'I need to help others to be more the way they should be.' In all of these, the relationship is one marked with a sense of the inadequacy of either self or other. The flood of becoming makes such assumptions reasonable: of course I have to become better! And, of course you and the world could improve! But does frustration and blind reaction make that happen? Following that instinct, do you ever notice that the good times still don't arrive? Now it's not that everything is exactly right, but when the assumption of needing to become something

else precedes, and is the basic configuration of, our attitudes — where's the appreciation, where's the joy? In a world of flawed humans, where's the foundation for goodwill? Where's the resource and the *pāramī* that can make the world a better place?

Accepting Otherness In the practice of kindness, we look into the mind as it is happening, a moment at a time, with the intention to gentle it out of the hold of aversion, depression and anxiety. To support this, the teaching is that, although the sense of self-other happens by default, we *can* have some say over its emotional and energetic flavouring. Our current intention doesn't need to be tense, inadequate and critical; it can be uplifted and uncramped. The sense of self-other can catalyse and give occasion for an intention to offer support. This intention is essential for a happy life, because if we don't use the relational experience in a kind and generous way, then defensiveness, anxiety, fault-finding and grudges are going to haunt our lives and impair the lives of others. *Mettā* is non-aversion, but it's also non-fascination and non-projection. It releases others from being the objects of our projections, lust and idealism. It allows others to not be the way I want them to be for me. True love for another means that you don't appropriate someone or project your unfulfilled wishes or needs onto them. Instead, *mettā* means recognizing otherness, and feeling that it's OK. We don't have to make people the same as ourselves or judge ourselves, based on what we think about other people. We don't have to feel we have to win them over, or feel that they should satisfy our emotional hunger. And when *mettā* is fully developed it can allow us to be with the irritating and the unfair and the messy, so that such perceptions no longer even take hold.

It's the same for ourselves: when we hold ourselves with the mind of goodwill, we don't have to feel intimidated and compelled to prove ourselves. We have all been small, weak and stupid. We have all been totally irresponsible infants, awkward adolescents, made a mess of things, lied, cheated and maybe even killed. Yet we changed. These were all visitors and forces that occupied the mind. Now there's no denying the responsibility for allowing one's mind to be so occupied, but our current responsibility is one of cultivating virtue, discernment and kindness, not of obsessing and sustaining the burden of guilt and denial. And one of the major healing tools for this process is *mettā*. With this we take on *samsāra* with non-aversion and non-projection. We can accept the presence of the petty-mindedness, the guilt and anxiety as visitors conditioned into the mind, and work with them. Then there is nothing to hide from or dread anymore. This is a more useful approach than going through another round of anguish, self-hatred and defensiveness. By stilling these reactions, *mettā* enables us to penetrate to, and remove, the root cause of ill-will — often towards ourselves — underneath the complexes.

Ajahn Sucitto:

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

The Metta Sutta

This is what should be done

By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech,
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied,

Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm and wise and skillful,
Not proud or demanding in nature.

Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.

Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born —

May all beings be at ease!
Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.

Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.