

About the Author

Venerable Dr. Acharya Buddharakkhita is the founder president of Maha Bodhi Society, Bangalore. He was a member of the Editorial Board of the Sixth Buddhist Synod (Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana) in Yangon, which brought out a complete edition of the sacred Buddhist Scriptures - Tipitaka. Since then he has established many Buddhist centers in India and abroad and rendered yeomen spiritual and humanitarian services. He established Mahabodhi Monastic Institute in Bangalore, India, Buddhist Meditation Center in USA and conducted many Dhamma and Pāli courses, meditation courses and written numerous books and translations of the Pāli Buddhist Texts. They have been published all over the world, including some German, Portuguese, Korean and Chinese translations. He was editing and publishing English monthly DHAMMA Magazine for four decades.

Mahabodhi Academy for Pāli and Buddhist Studies and Bhagavan Buddha University of Theravada Buddhism are the result of his effort and research to provide a systematic Theravāda Buddhist education as widely as possible, first of its kind in India. The Venerable Dr. Acharya Buddharakkhita passed away on 23rd September 2013 in Maha Bodhi Society, Bangalore at the age of 92.



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METTĀ

The Philosophy & Practice of Universal Love

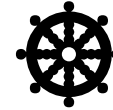


Venerable Dr. Acharya Buddharakkhita

Abhidhaja Aggamaha Saddhammajotika, Ph.d, D.Lit

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Buddha Vachana Trust
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Introduction

The *Pāli* word *Mettā* is a multi-significant term meaning universal love, loving-kindness, friendliness, goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, inoffensiveness and non-violence. The *Pāli* commentators define *Mettā* as the strong wish for the welfare and happiness of others (*parahita-parasukha-kāmanā*). Essentially *Mettā* is an altruistic attitude of love and friendliness as distinguished from mere amiability based on self-interest. When *Mettā* infuses the mind, one refuses to be offensive and renounces bitterness, resentment and animosity of any kind. Instead one develops a mind of friendliness, accommodation and benevolence seeking the well-being and happiness of others. True *Mettā* is devoid of self-interest. It evokes within a warm-hearted feeling of fellowship, sympathy and love, which grows boundless with practice and overcomes all social, religious, racial, political and economic barriers. *Mettā* is indeed a universal, unselfish and all-embracing love.

Mettā makes one a pure font of well-being and safety for others. “Just as a mother gives her own life to protect her only child”, so *Mettā* only gives and never wants anything in return. To promote one’s own interest is a primordial motivation of human nature. When this urge is transformed into a wish to promote the interest and happiness of others, then self-seeking is overcome. And the mind becomes universal by identifying its own interest with the interest of all. By making this change one also promotes one’s own well-being in the best possible manner.

Mettā is the protective and immensely patient attitude of a mother who forbears all difficulties for the sake of her child and ever protects it despite its misbehavior. *Mettā* is also the attitude of a friend who wants to give the best to further one’s well-being. If these qualities of *Mettā* are sufficiently cultivated through *Mettā-bhāvanā*, meditation on universal love, the result is acquisition of tremendous inner power which preserves, protects and heals both oneself and others.

Apart from its higher implications, today *Mettā* is a pragmatic necessity. In a world menaced by all kinds of destructiveness, *Mettā* in deed, word and

thought is the only constructive means to bring harmony, peace and mutual understanding. Indeed, *Mettā* is the only means for bringing about interfaith amity among the followers of all the religions. It is also the basis for all benevolent activities intended to promote human well-being.

This book aims at exploring various facets of *Mettā* both in theory and in practice. The examination of the spiritual and ethical aspects of *Mettā*, will be based on an analysis of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, the “Hymn of Universal Love”. In connection with this theme we will also look at several other short texts dealing with *Mettā*. The explanation of *Mettā-bhāvanā*, meditation on universal love, will give the practical instructions as set forth in the main meditation texts of the *Theravāda* Buddhist tradition, namely, the *Visuddhimagga*, the *Vimuttimagga* and *Paṭisambhidamagga*.

Venerable Dr. Acharya Buddharakkhita
Mahabodhi Society, Bangalore



"Sabba dānaṃ Dhamma dānam jināti"
Of all gifts the gift of Dhamma excels !
- The Buddha

Dr. B. Rajanandamurthy,
family members and
Ramesha Chetana, Tusito Piyadassi
departed relatives

Have donated for the publication of this book
in memory of their departed relatives.
May they progress on the onward path to Nibbana!
May all their family members and relatives share the
merits of this Dhamadāra!

May all be happy !

Venerable Bhikkhu Sangha
Maha Bodhi Society
Bangalore - 560 009

The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta Discourse on Universal Love

Nidānaṃ:

*Yassānubhāvato yakkhā
Neva dassenti viṃsanam,
Yamhi cevānuyuñjanto,
Rattindivamatandito,
Sukham supati sutto ca,
Pāpam kiñci na passati,
Evamādi gunūpetam,
Parittam tam bhaṇāmahe.*

Occasion:

The inherent spiritual power of the Protective Hymn, which prevents evil spirits from making fearful appearances and which when assiduously applied whether in day or in night, brings excellent benefits, such as, enjoying sound sleep, undisturbed by bad dreams etc., that Protective Hymn do I now chant:

*1. Karaṇīya matthakusalena,
Yam tam santam padam abhisamecca,
Sakko ujū ca sūjū ca,
Suvaco cassa mudu anati māni.*

Whoso his welfare seeks to promote,
With a grasp of the state of Perfect Peace,
He should be competent, honest and upright,
Gentle in speech, meek and not proud.

2. *Santussako ca subharo ca,
Appakicco ca sallahukavutti,
Santindriyo ca nipako ca,
Appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho.*

He should be contented and easy to support,
Be not over-busy, but live a simple life,
With restrained senses, be ever prudent,
Not be brazen, nor fawn on families.

3. *Naca khuddam samācare kiñci,
Yena viññū pare upavadeyyum,
Sukhino vā khemino hontu,
Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.*

He should refrain from any action
That gives the wiser reason to reprove.
May all beings be happy and secure,
May all be well-disposed at heart!

4. *Ye keci pāṇabhūtatti,
Tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā,
Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā
Majjhimā rassakānukathulā.*

Whatever living beings there be,
Without exception, weak or strong.
Long or huge, middle-sized,
Short, minute or bulky,

5. *Diṭṭhā vā yeva adiṭṭhā,
Ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre,
Bhūtā vā sambhavesi vā,
Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.*

Whether visible or invisible,
And those living afar or near,
The born and those seeking birth,
May all beings be happy!

6. *Na paro param nikubbetha,
ñātimaññetha katthacinam kañci.
Byārosanā paṭighasaññā,
Nāññamaññassa dukkhamiccheyya.*

Let none deceive or decry
His fellow anywhere.
Let none with resentment or hate
Ever wish to harm others.

7. *Mātā yathā niyam puttam
Āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe,
Evaṃpi sabbabhūtesu,
Mānasam bhāvaye aparimānam.*

Just as a mother would shield
With her own life an only child,
Even so let him develop a mind
Of boundless love for all beings.

8. *Mettañca sabbalokasmiñ,*
Mānasam bhāvaye aparimānam,
Uddham adho ca tiriyañca,
Asambādham averam asapattam.

Let him cultivate a mind of boundless love,
Towards all, throughout the universe,
In all its height, depth and breadth,
Love that is unobstructed
And free from hatred or enmity.

9. *Tiṭṭham caram nisinno vā,*
Sayāno vā yāvatassa vigatamiddho
Etam satim adhiṭṭheyya,
Brahmametañ vihārañ idhamāhu.

Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down,
As long as he is awake,
Let him preserve this mindfulness of love,
Deemed here a Divine State.

10. *Diṭṭhiñca anupagamma sīlavā*
Dassanena sampañño,
Kāmesu vineyya gedham
Na hi jātu gabbhaseyyam punareṭṭi.

Holding no wrong views, being virtuous
Endowed with the Vision of Nibbāna, Ultimate reality,
Having overcome all sensual desires,
Never in a womb is he born again.

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The Background Story of the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta

The historical background of the Buddha expounding the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* is explained in Bhadanta Acharya Buddhaghosa's commentary. The great Acharya had received it from an unbroken line of Elders going back to the days of the Buddha himself.

We are told that five hundred monks paid a visit to the Buddha and went to the foothills of the Himalayas to spend the four months of the Rain's retreat by living a life of seclusion for intensive meditation. In those days, a month or two before the Rain's retreat started, monks from all parts of the country would assemble wherever the Buddha stayed in order to receive direct instruction from the Supreme Master. Then they would go back to their monasteries, forest dwellings or hermitages to make a vigorous attempt at spiritual liberation. This was how these five hundred monks went to the Buddha who was then staying at Jeta's Grove in the monastery built by *Anāthapiṇḍika* near *Sāvatti*.

Having paid homage to the Master, they left in search of a suitable place. In the course of their wandering, they found a beautiful hillock at the foothills of the Himalayas. According to the commentary, the place

“Appeared like a glittering blue quartz crystal; it was embellished with a cool, dense and green forest grove, and a stretch of ground strewn with sand, resembling a pearl net or a silver sheet, and was furnished with a clear spring of cool water.” The *Bhikkhus* were captivated by the sight. There were a few villages nearby, and also a small market-town ideal for alms-round. The monks spent a night in that idyllic grove and the next morning went to the market-town for alms-round.

The residents were overjoyed to see the monks, since rarely did a community of monks come to spend the retreat in that part of the Himalayas. These pious devotees fed the monks and begged them to stay on as their guests, promising to build each a hut near the grove on the sandy stretch so that they could spend their days and nights plunged in meditation under the ancient boughs of the majestic trees. The *bhikkhus* agreed and the devotees of the area soon built little huts with a wooden cot, a stool and pots of water for drinking and washing.

After the monks had contentedly settled down in these huts, each one selected a tree to meditate under, by day and by night. Now these great trees were inhabited by tree-deities who had a celestial mansion built, appropriately using the trees as the base. These deities, out of reverence for the meditating monks, stood aside. Virtue is revered by all, particularly so by deities,

and when the monks sat under the trees, the deities, who had families, did not like to remain above them. They had thought that the monks would remain only for a night or two, and gladly bore the inconvenience. But when day after day passed and the monks still kept occupying the bases of the trees, the deities wondered when they would go away. They were like dispossessed villagers whose houses had been commandeered by officials of the visiting royalty and they kept anxiously watching from a distance wondering when they would get their houses back.

These dispossessed deities discussed the situation among themselves and decided to frighten the monks away by showing them terrifying sights, by making dreadful noises and by creating a sickening stench. Accordingly, they materialized all these terrifying conditions and afflicted the monks. The monks soon grew pale and could no longer concentrate on their subjects of meditation. As the deities continued to harass them they lost even their basic mindfulness, and their brains seemed to become smothered by the oppressing visions, noises and stench. When the monks assembled to wait upon the senior-most Elder of the group, each one recounted his experiences. The Elder suggested: “Let us go, brethren, to the Blessed One and place our problem before him. As you know there are two kinds of Rain’s retreat – the early and the late. Though we will be breaking the early one by leaving this place, we can always take upon ourselves

the later one after meeting the Lord.” The monks agreed and they set out at once, it is said, without even informing the devotees.

By stages they arrived at *Sāvatti*, went to the Blessed One, bowed down at his feet, and related their frightful experiences, pathetically requesting for another place. The Buddha, through his supernormal power, scanned the whole country, but finding no place except the same spot where they could achieve spiritual liberation, told them: “Monks, go back to the same spot! It is only by striving there that you will be able to destroy the mental cankers. Fear not! If you want to be free from the harassment caused by the deities, learn this *sutta*. It will be a theme for meditation as well as a formula for protection (*paritta*).” Then the Master recited the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, the Hymn of Universal Love, which the monks learnt by heart in the presence of the Lord. Then they went back to the same place. As the monks neared their forest dwellings reciting the *Mettā Sutta*, thinking and meditating on the underlying meaning, the hearts of the deities became so charged with warm feelings of goodwill that they materialized themselves in human form and received the monks with great piety. They took their bowls, conducted them to their huts, caused water and food to be supplied, and then, resuming their normal forms, invited them to occupy the bases of the trees and meditate without any hesitation or fear. Further, during the three months of the ‘Rain’s

retreat’, the deities not only looked after the monks in every way but made sure that the place was completely free from any noise. Enjoying perfect silence, by the end of the rainy season all the monks became *Arahats*, the pinnacle of spiritual development. Indeed, such is the power intrinsic in the *Mettā Sutta*. Whoever with firm faith will recite the *sutta*, invoking the protection of the deities and meditating on universal love, *Mettā*, will not only safeguard himself in every way but will also protect all those around him, and will make spiritual progress that can be actually verified. No harm can ever befall a person who follows the path of *Mettā*.

Three Aspects of *Mettā*

The *Mettā Sutta* consists of three parts, each of which focuses on a distinct aspect of *Mettā*. The first part (lines 3 to 10) covers that aspect which requires a thorough and systematic application of loving-kindness in one's day-to-day conduct. The second part (lines 11 to 20) expresses loving-kindness as a distinct technique of meditation or culture of mind leading to *samādhi* — higher consciousness induced by meditative absorption. And the third part (lines 21 to 40) underlines a total commitment to the philosophy of universal love and its personal, social and empirical extensions, i.e. loving-kindness through all bodily, verbal and mental activities.

Mettā has been identified as that specific factor which 'ripens' the accumulated merit (*puñña*) acquired by the ten courses of meritorious deeds (*dasapuñña-kiriyavatthu*), such as, the practice of generosity, virtue, etc. Again, it is *Mettā* which brings to maturity the ten exalted spiritual qualities known as 'perfections' (*pāramī*).

Thus practice of *Mettā* is like growing a great tree. From the time the seed is sown to the time the tree is laden with fruits, sending forth sweet odor far and wide and attracting myriads of creatures to enjoy the nutritious bounty. The sprouting of the seed and

the growth of the plant are, as it were, brought about by the first part of the *sutta*. In the second part, the tree, now well developed and robust, is fully covered with fragrant and beautiful flowers.

As a pattern of behavior, the first aspect of *Mettā* makes one's life grow like generous and noble tree. *Mettā*, as meditation, is that spiritual efflorescence whereby one's entire life becomes a source of joy for all. The third part envisages in this imagery the fruition of that process of spiritual development by which one brings about an all-embracing application of universal love. This stage of the practice of *Mettā* affects the whole society and leads one to the height of transcendental realization.

The human mind is like a mine. When rightly developed it can become an inexhaustible source of spiritual power and insight. This immense inner potential of merit can be fully exploited only by the practice of *Mettā*. It is clear from the description of *Mettā*, as that 'maturing force' which ripens the dormant merits. In the *Maṅgala Sutta* it is said that first establish an elevating interpersonal relationship (by resorting to good company, etc.), then choose the right environment so that the accumulated merits of the past may fructify. This ripening or fruition of merits is what *Mettā* does. Mere avoidance of wrong company and living in a cultured environment is not enough; the mind must be cultivated by *Mettā* for the fruition of past merits.

The Ethics of Mettā

In Buddhism, ethics or Sīla means right conduct, which on one hand brings happiness and peace of mind, and on the other, does not give rise to remorse, worry or restlessness of mind. This is the immediate psychological benefit. Right conduct also leads to a happy rebirth, which conduces to further progress on the onward path to spiritual liberation. Thus, it is the basis for progress in *Dhamma* here and now and hereafter. Right speech, right action and right livelihood of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path constitute right conduct in the best sense of the term.

Buddhist ethics is twofold: fulfillment of certain virtues (*cāritta*), and precepts of abstinence (*vāritta*). *Cāritta*, as found in the *Mettā Sutta*, is as follows:

He should be competent, honest and upright,
Gentle in speech, meek and not proud.
Contented, to be easy to support,
Be not over-busy, but live a simple life.
Restrained in his senses, and ever prudent,
And not brazen, nor fawn on families.

Vāritta is covered by the next *gāthā*:

Also, he must refrain from any action
That gives the wiser reason to reprove him.

Thus *Cāritta* and *vāritta* are practiced through *Mettā-motivated* bodily and verbal actions. The resultant inner happiness and altruistic urge is reflected by the aspirant's *Mettā-motivated* mental action, as found in the next two lines of the stanza:

May all beings be happy and secure,
May all be well-disposed at heart!

Thus ethics of *Mettā* provides not only subjective well-being, or the opportunity to progress on the path of *Dhamma* here and now and to win a happy rebirth in the future, but it means the giving of fearlessness (*abhayadāna*) and security (*khemadāna*) as well.

An analysis of the behavior-pattern and traits commended by the *Mettā Sutta* for meaningful interaction both with reference to persons individually and to society collectively, provides ample insight into the great possibilities for mental health.

Competence is not just mere efficiency or skill, but it means doing a thing rightly and appropriately out of consideration for others. That is, one should be able not to compete with others, but also not to cause inconvenience to anybody.

As an able man, one can become very conceited. So the practitioner is advised to be “honest and upright”, while being “gentle in speech, meek and not proud” – indeed a perfect synthesis and an equilibrium of traits.

He who is contented is “easy to support”. Frugality, in consideration of others, is a noble trait. To the extent that one’s own needs are minimized as an example to others and as a means not to inconvenience them, to that extent one shows refinement. The more gross and materialistic a person becomes, the more his needs increase. The yardstick for judging the mental health of a given society is the element of satisfaction through reduction of needs.

A materialistic and egocentric life is characterized not only by an increase in wants but also by restlessness, showing itself in being over-busy and overactive, and lacking in moderation and self-restraint. *Mettā*, promotes the well-being of all. Therefore, it needs to be built on such qualities of sober humanism as are reflected in having a few meaningful and select tasks which conduce to the maximum well-being of all.

Living a simple life as an expression of *Mettā* involves a reorientation of one’s outlook and conduct, especially in a competitive, pleasure-seeking and possessive society. A man of simple living is gentle, yet efficient and effective, is able to restraint his senses, is moderate, frugal and controlled. Mental culture through meditation, for such a person becomes natural and effortless. Hence the attribute “calm and restraint in his senses.”

Mettā in conduct includes the exercising of prudence, that is to say, practical wisdom. For, only when a

person is sagacious and wise, he can really practice *Mettā* in all its modes of human relationship. Self-righteousness, arising from a sense of being better or more devout than others, can be, and often is, a masquerade of religious intolerance. “Not be brazen, nor fawn on families” is a pointer for the person of *Mettā* not to indulge in self-righteousness in any form.

Further, the practitioner of *Mettā* is advised to refrain from any action, even social conventions, which a wise man may reprove for lacking in prudence or propriety. It is not good enough that one should be good, but one should also appear to be good, in consideration not only of one’s own well-being, but also of other’s well-being. An exemplary life is to be lived for the benefit of all, for the welfare of the society.

A person living thus now methodically cultivates the all-embracing mind of *Mettā* through definite techniques of meditation as envisaged in the remaining part of the *sutta*.

Mettā sutta is also called a *paritta*, a spiritual formula capable of safeguarding one’s well-being, protecting one against all dangers, and rescuing one from mishaps and misfortunes.

Reverting to the five hundred monks who could not stay and meditate in that beautiful forest provided with all facilities, because the deities were hostile

to them. They had to leave the place. However, when they were armed with the protection of the *Mettā Sutta*, which they recited and meditated upon throughout their journey, by the time they returned to the place, the deities were full of friendly feelings and already waiting for them. Hostility had been turned into hospitality.

The protection of *paritta* works both subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, as *Mettā* cleanses and strengthens the mind, it also awakens the dormant potentials, resulting in the spiritual transmutation of the personality. Transformed by *Mettā*, the mind is no longer haunted by greed, hatred, lust, jealousy and other mind-polluting factors, which are one's real enemy and source of misfortune.

Objectively, *Mettā* as a thought-force is capable of affecting any mind developed or undeveloped. The radiation of *Mettā* can not only calm a person or remove the darts of hate from within him, but in some cases can even cure his/her severe illnesses. It is a common experience in Buddhist countries to see how people are cured from all sorts of diseases and freed from misfortunes through the solemn chanting of protective *paritta suttas*. Thus as a *paritta*, *Mettā* is a real healing power and a formula for safeguarding life.

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The Psychology of *Mettā*

According to the *Pāli* commentaries, one radiates universal love towards all beings thus:

- (a) One overcomes the thought of oppressing others by (developing) the consciousness of non-oppression towards all beings.
- (b) One overcomes the thought of hurting others by (developing) the consciousness of inoffensiveness towards all beings.
- (c) One overcomes the thought of harassing others by (developing) the consciousness of non-harassment towards all beings.
- (d) One gives up the thought of destroying others by (developing) the consciousness of non-destruction (of all life).
- (e) One gives up the thought of vexing others by (developing) the consciousness of non-vexation of all beings.
- (f) By projecting the thought, “May all beings be friendly and not hostile”;
- (g) By projecting the thought, “May all beings be happy and not unhappy”;
- (h) By projecting the thought, “May all beings be well-disposed at heart and not ill-disposed”.

In these eight ways one radiates love towards all beings; therefore, it is called universal love. Because

one conceives this thought (of universal love), within one's mind, it is called a state of mind. And since this state of mind is free from all thoughts of ill-will, the combination of universal love, mind and freedom makes up the phrase 'freedom of mind through universal love.

From the above it will be seen that *Mettā* enables one to outgrow negative traits by positive virtues. It is only when one builds up the consciousness of non-oppression of all beings that one can outgrow the thought of oppressing others. The same applies to the rest, namely, by cultivating the values of inoffensiveness, non-harassment, non-destruction and non-vexation in deed, word and thought. That is, one can outgrow the negative traits of hurting, harassing, destroying, or vexing others by cultivating their positive alternatives. Over and above such positive conduct and principled way of life, one cultivates the mind through that specific technique of meditation called *Mettā-bhāvanā*. Meditation on *Mettā* generates powerful thoughts of spiritualized love that grow boundless, making consciousness itself infinite and universal.

Thoughts that wish all beings to be friendly and never hostile, happy and never unhappy, to be well-disposed at heart and never be ill-disposed, imply not only sublimity and boundlessness, but also utter freedom of mind. Hence the expression 'freedom of mind' through universal love.

As to the meanings of the five traits opposed by *Mettā*, namely, the thought of oppressing others, means the desire to coerce, treat harshly, or cruelly fellow beings. The thought of hurting others, means being offensive. Harassing means subjecting others to pain or misery, it is the sadistic tendency to trouble or annoy. Thought of destroying others means to put an end or to torment, subjecting others to pain or misery; to be destructive means is to put an end to or finish, the trait of the extremist and the iconoclast; thought of vexing others, means to cause trouble or worry, and strain others. Each of these tendencies is rooted in antipathy and malevolence, and provides a contrast to *Mettā*, both as a mode of conduct and as a psychological state or attitude of mind.

The substitution of a negative trait by the opposite positive course implies a very developed and mature approach to life. The ability to remain non-oppressive, inoffensive, non-harassing, non-destructive and non-vexing, calls for a very refined, beautiful and loving mode of behavior in a world where interaction between human beings creates so much tension and misery.

According to the *Visuddhimagga*, *Mettā* is a "solvent" that "melts" not only one's own mental pollutants of anger, resentment and offensiveness, but also those of others. Since it takes the approach of friendship, even the hostile one turns into a friend.

Mettā is characterized as that which “promotes welfare”. Its function is to “prefer well-being” rather than ill. It manifests as a force that “removes annoyance” and its proximate cause is the tendency to see the good side of things and beings and never the faults. *Mettā* succeeds when it loves, and it fails when it degenerates into worldly affection.

It will be clear from this analysis that only when one tends to see the good in people, prefers the welfare of others, is inoffensive to remove any annoyance or hurt, and actively promotes well-being, does *Mettā* function as a solvent. The ultimate purpose of *Mettā* is to attain transcendental insight. If that is not possible, *Mettā* at the least bring about rebirth in the sublime sphere of the Brahma gods. Besides, it generates inner peace and a healthy state of mind here and now.

Hence the Buddha’s assurance in the *Mettā Sutta*:
"Holding no more to wrong beliefs,
With virtue and vision of the ultimate,
And having overcome all sensual desire,
Never in a womb is he born again."

Loving kindness wards-off ill-will which is the most damaging of emotions. Hence it is said: “For this is the escape from ill-will, friends, that is to say, the freedom of mind wrought by universal love” (Dīgha Nikāya, III. 234).

In the practice of *Mettā* it is important to understand the emotions which nullify *Mettā* either by being similar or being dissimilar. The *Visuddhimagga* calls them “the two enemies — the near and the remote.” Greed, lust, worldly affection, sensuality — all these are said to be the “near enemies” because they are similar in tendencies. The lustful also sees the “good side” or “beauty”, and therefore gets involved. Universal love should be protected from these enemies lest the masquerades of these emotions deceive the meditator.

Ill-will, anger and hatred are dissimilar emotions, therefore they are the “remote enemies.” The remote enemy can easily be distinguished, so one need not be afraid of it; but one should overcome it by projecting a higher force, that of universal love. But one has to be wary of the near enemy because it creates self-deception, which is the worst thing that can happen to spiritual seekers,

It is said that *Mettā* begins only when there is zeal in the form of a desire to act. Having commenced through earnest effort, it can be continued only when the five mental hindrances, namely, sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt — are put down and then, *Mettā* reaches consummation with the attainment of ecstatic absorption (*jhana*).

Meditation on Mettā

There are various ways of practising *Mettā-bhāvanā*, the meditation on universal love. Three of the principal methods will be explained here. These instructions, based on canonical and commentarial sources, are intended to explain the practice of *Mettā*-meditation in a clear, simple and direct way so that anyone who is earnest about taking up the practice will have no doubts about how to proceed. For full instructions on the theory and practice of *Mettā-bhāvanā* the reader is referred to the *Visuddhimagga*, Chapter IX.

Method 1

Sit down in a comfortable posture in a quiet place, a shrine room, an empty room, a park, or any other place providing privacy and silence. Keeping the eyes closed, repeat the word “*Mettā*” a few times and mentally conjure up its significance of unselfish, spiritual love as the opposite of hatred, resentment, malevolence, impatience, pride and arrogance, and as a profound feeling of goodwill, sympathy and kindness promoting the happiness and well-being of others.

Now visualize your own face in a happy and radiant mood. Every time you see your face in the mirror, see yourself in a happy mood and put yourself in this mood during meditation. A person in a happy mood cannot become angry or harbour negative thoughts and feelings. Having visualized yourself in a happy frame of mind, now charge yourself with the thought: “May I be free from hatred or hostility (*avero*), free from ill-will (*abyāpajjho*), free from distress or affliction (*anīgho*); may I live happily”. As you suffuse yourself in this way with the positive thought-force of universal love, you become like a filled vessel, its contents ready to overflow in all directions.

Next, visualize your meditation teacher, if living; if not, choose some other living teacher or revered person. See him in a happy frame of mind and project the thought: “May my teacher be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress, may he live happily.”

Then think of other people who are to be revered, and who are also living, monks, teachers, parents and elders, and intensely spread towards each one of them the thought of *Mettā* in the manner mentioned already: “May they be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress, may they live happily.”

The visualization must be clear and the thought-

radiation must be “willed” well. If the visualization is hurried by done or the wishing is performed in a perfunctory or mechanical way, the practice will be of little avail; for. it will then be merely an intellectual pastime of thinking about *Mettā*. One must clearly understand that to think about *Mettā* is one thing, and to do *Mettā*, i.e. actively project the will-force of universal love, is quite another.

Note that only a living person is to be visualized, not a dead one. The reason for this is that the dead person, having changed form, will be out of the focus of *Mettā*-projection. The object of *Mettā* always is a living being, and the thought-force will become ineffective if the object is not alive.

Having radiated thoughts of *Mettā* in the order already mentioned — oneself, the meditation teacher and other revered persons, one should now visualize, one by one, one’s dear ones beginning with the members of one’s family, suffusing each one with abundant rays of loving-kindness. Charity begins at home. If one cannot love one’s own people one will not be able to love others.

While spreading *Mettā* towards one’s own family members, care should be taken to think of a very beloved one, like one’s husband or wife, at the end of this circle. The reason for this is that the intimacy between husband and wife introduces the element

of worldly love which defiles *Mettā*. Spiritual love must be the same towards all. Similarly, if one has had a temporary misunderstanding or quarrel with any family member or relative, he or she should be visualized at a later stage to avoid recalling the unpleasant incident.

Next, one should visualize neutral people, i.e. those whom one neither likes nor dislikes, such as, one’s neighbours, colleagues in one’s place of work, bare acquaintances, and so on. Having radiated loving thoughts on everyone in the neutral circle, one should now visualize persons for whom one has dislike, hostility or prejudice, even those with whom one may have had a temporary misunderstanding. As one visualizes disliked persons, one must mentally repeat to each one: “I have no hostility towards him/her, may he/she also not have any hostility towards me. May he/she be happy!”

Thus, as one visualizes the persons of the different circles, one “breaks the barrier” caused by likes and dislikes, attachment and hatred. When one is able to regard an enemy without ill-will and with the same amount of goodwill that one has for a very dear friend, *Mettā* then acquires a sublime impartiality, elevating the mind upward and outward as if in a spiral movement of ever-widening circles until it becomes all-embracing.

By visualization is meant “calling to mind” or

visualizing certain objects, such as a person, a certain area or a direction or a category of beings. In other words, it means imagining the people towards whom thoughts of universal love are to be projected or spread. For instance, you imagine your father and visualize his face in a very happy and radiant mood, and project the thought towards the visualized image, mentally saying: “May he be happy! May he be free from disease or trouble! May he enjoy good health.” You may use any thought which promotes his well-being.

By radiation is meant, as explained above, the projection of certain thoughts promoting the well-being of those persons towards whom one’s mind is directed. A *Mettā*-thought is a powerful thought-force. It can actually effect what had been willed. For wishing well-being is an act of willing, thus is a creative action. In fact, all that man has created in different fields is the result of what he has willed, whether it is a city or a hydro-electric project, a rocket going to the moon, a weapon of destruction, or an artistic or literary masterpiece. Radiation of thoughts of *Mettā*, too, is the development of a willpower that can effect whatever is willed. It is not a rare experience to see diseases cured or misfortunes warded off, even from a great distance, by the application of the thought-force of *Mettā*. But this thought-force has to be generated in a very specific and skillful way, following a certain sequence.

The formula for radiating *Mettā* that is used here has come down from the ancient *Patisambhidamagga*: “May they be free from hatred or hostility, free from ill-will, free from affliction or distress; may they live happily” (*averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu*). The commentarial explanation of these terms is highly significant. “Free from hatred or hostility” (*avera*) means absence of hostility whether aroused on account of oneself or others, or on account of oneself because of others or of others because of oneself. However the absence may be due to the presence of self-pity, remorse or a sense of guilt, in which case it would be fruitless. Hostility combines elements of hate or enmity. “Free from ill-will” (*abyāpajjha*) means absence of unkind or hard feelings. “Free from affliction or distress” (*anīgha*) means the absence of mental suffering, anguish or anxiety, which often follows upon hostility or hard feelings. It is only when one is free from hostility, ill-will and distress that one “lives happily”, that is, conducts oneself with ease and happiness. Thus all these terms are interconnected.

In a given order means visualizing objects, one after other, by taking the path of least resistance, in a graduated sequence, which progressively widens the circle and therewith the mind itself. The *Visuddhimagga* is emphatic about this order. According to Acariya Buddhaghosa, one must start the meditation on *Mettā* by visualizing oneself, and thereafter a person for whom one has reverence, then one’s dear ones, then

neutral people, then hostile persons. As one radiates thoughts of universal love in this order, the mind breaks all barriers between oneself, a revered one, a dear one, a neutral one and a hostile one. Everyone comes to be looked upon equally with the eye of loving-kindness.

In the *Visuddhimagga* Acariya Buddhaghosa gives a very apt analogy for the breaking of the barriers: “Suppose bandits were to come to the meditator who is sitting in a place with a respected, a dear, a neutral, and a hostile or wicked person and demand, ‘Friend, we want one of you for the purpose of offering human sacrifice.’ If the meditator were to think, “Let him take this one or that one,’ he has not broken down the barriers. And even if he were to think, ‘Let none of these be taken, but let them take me.’ Even then he has not broken down the barriers since he seeks his own harm, and *Mettā* meditation signifies the well-being of all. But when he does not see the need for anyone to be given to the bandits and impartially projects the thought of love towards all, including the bandits, it is then that he would break down the barriers.”

Method 2

The first method of practising meditation on *Mettā* employs the projection of loving thoughts to specific individuals in the order of increasing remoteness from

oneself. The second method presents an impersonal mode of radiating *Mettā*, which makes the mind truly all-embracing, as suggested by the *Pāli* term *Mettā-cetovimutti*, the liberation of mind through universal love. The unliberated mind is imprisoned within the walls of egocentricity, greed, hatred, delusion, jealousy and meanness. As long as the mind is in the grip of these defiling and limiting mental factors, so long it remains insular and fettered. By breaking these bonds, *Mettā* liberates the mind, and the liberated mind naturally grows boundless and immeasurable. Just as the earth cannot be rendered “earthless”, even so the mind of *Mettā* cannot be limited.

With the radiation of *Mettā* towards selected persons, the mind breaks the barriers existing between oneself and revered ones, beloved ones, friends, neutral ones and hostile ones. The meditator then embarks on the great voyage of impersonal radiation, even as an ocean-worthy ship voyages through the vast, measureless ocean, while retaining a route and a goal as well. The technique is as follows:

Imagine the people residing in your house as forming a family or group, then embrace all of them within your heart, radiating the *Mettā* thoughts: “May all those dwelling in this house be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily”. Having visualized one’s own house in this manner, one must now visualize the next house, and

all its residents, and then the next house, and the next, and so on, until all the houses in that street are similarly covered by all-embracing universal love. Now the meditator should take up the next street, and the next, until the entire neighborhood or village is covered. Thereafter extension by extension, direction-wise, should be clearly visualized and spread with *Mettā*-rays in abundant measure. In this way the entire town or the city is to be covered; then the district and the entire state should be covered and radiated with thoughts of *Mettā*.

Next, one should visualize state after state, starting with one's own state, then the rest of the states in the different directions, the east, south, west and north. Thus one should cover the whole of one's country, geographically visualizing the people of this land regardless of class, race, sect or religion. Think: "May everyone in this great land abide in peace and well-being! May there be no war, no strife, no misfortune, no maladies! Radiant with friendliness and good fortune, with compassion and wisdom, may all those in this great country enjoy peace and plenty."

One should now cover the entire continent, country by country, in the eastern, southern, western and northern directions. Geographically imagining each country and the people therein according to their looks, one should radiate in abundant measure thoughts of *Mettā*: "May they be happy! May there be no strife and discord! May goodwill and understanding prevail!

May peace be unto all!"

Thereafter one should take up all the continents – Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, North and South America – visualizing country by country and people by people, covering the entire globe. Imagine yourself at a particular point of the globe and then project powerful rays of *Mettā*, enveloping one direction of the globe, then another, then another and so on until the whole globe is flooded and thoroughly enveloped with glowing thoughts of universal love.

One should now project into the vastness of space powerful beams of *Mettā* towards all beings living in other realms, first in the four cardinal directions – east, south, west and north – then in the intermediary directions – northeast, southeast, southwest, northwest and then above and below, covering all the ten directions with abundant and measureless thoughts of universal love.

Method 3

According to the cosmology of Buddhism there are numberless world-systems inhabited by infinitely varied categories of beings in different stages of evolution. Our earth is only a speck in our world-system, which again is a minute dot in the universe with its innumerable world-systems. One should radiate thoughts of boundless love towards all beings everywhere. This is developed in the next method

of practice, the universalization of *Mettā*.

The universalization of *Mettā* is accomplished in these three specific modes:

1. Generalized radiation (*anodhiso-pharaṇā*),
2. Specified radiation (*odhiso-pharaṇā*),
3. Directional radiation (*disā-pharaṇā*).

According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the generalized radiation of *Mettā* is practiced in five ways, the specified radiation in seven ways, and the directional radiation in ten ways. These ten directional ways may be combined with the five categories of general radiation and with the seven categories of specified radiation. In each of these modes of practice, any of the four phrases of the standard *Mettā* formula – “May they be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily” – may be used as the thought of radiation. Thus four types of thought applied to five, seven, and 120 objects of *Mettā* amount to 528 modes of radiation. Any of these can be used as a vehicle for attaining absorption (*jhāna*) through the technique of *Mettā*-bhāvanā. (See *Vism.* IX, 58.)

Generalized Radiation

The five ways of generalized radiation are as follows:

1. “May all beings (*sabbe sattā*) be free from hostility,

free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

2. “May all those that breathe (*sabbe pānā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
3. “May all creatures (*sabbe bhūtā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
4. “May all individuals (*sabbe puggalā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
5. “May all those who are embodied (*sabbe attabhāvapariyapannā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

Specified Radiation

The seven ways of specified radiation are as follows:

1. “May all females (*sabbā itthiyo*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
2. “May all males (*sabbe purisā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
3. “May all the Noble Ones (*sabbe ariyā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
4. “May all worldlings (*sabbe anariyā*) be free from

hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

5. “May all gods (*sabbe devā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
6. “May all human beings (*sabbe manussā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
7. “May all those in fallen states of woe (*sabbe vinipātikā*) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

Directional Radiation

The ten ways of directional radiation involve sending thoughts of *Mettā* to all beings in the ten directions. This method is applied to all forms of beings (*sattā*), as mentioned in the five generalized objects of *Mettā*; then further developed by extending *Mettā* through each of the seven ways of specified radiation, as follows:

- I. 1. “May all beings in the eastern direction be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
2. “May all beings in the southern direction be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
3. “May all beings in the western direction be free

from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

4. “May all beings in the northern direction be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
5. “May all beings in the northeastern direction be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
6. “May all beings in the southeastern direction be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
7. “May all beings in the southwestern direction be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
8. “May all beings in the northwestern direction be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
9. “May all beings below (in the downward direction) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
10. “May all beings above (in the upward direction) be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

- II. 1-10. “May all breathing creatures in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

- III.** 1-10. “May all living creatures in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- IV.** 1-10. “May all individuals in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- V.** 1-10. “May all sentient beings in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- VI.** 1-10. “May all females in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- VII.** 1-10. “May all males in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- VIII.** 1-10. “May all Noble Ones in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- IX.** 1-10. “May all worldlings in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

- X.** 1-10. “May all gods in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- XI.** 1-10. “May all human beings in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”
- XII.** 1-10. “May all fallen beings in the nether worlds in the eastern direction... above be free from hostility, free from ill-will, free from distress; may they live happily.”

Explanation

In this technique of universalizing *Mettā*, each of the five categories of generalized radiation refers to the total dimension of animate or sentient existence, belonging to the three mundane spheres, namely, *kāmaloka*, sphere of sense-desire where desire is the primal motivation; *rūpaloka*, realm of the radiant Brahma gods with subtle form; and *arūpaloka*, realm of the formless Brahma gods with pure mental life. Whether it is a “being”, or a breathing creature or a living creature, or an individual or a sentient being – all refer to the totality of animate existence, the distinction being that each term expresses comprehensively a life-form in its entirety.

While visualizing each category one should keep in mind the specific life-form expressed by its

designation. If one trains the mind in the manner of a “mental drill” after having exercised it with the first two methods, the meaning of the unspecified or generalized terms will become clear. By the time one has completed the two methods, the consciousness will be sufficiently developed and all-embracing. And with such a consciousness, when each of these universal concepts is grasped, the universalization becomes effortless. It may be pointed out that visualization of each of these is no longer of individual objects, but of a concept representing organic existence. The radiation in this case becomes a flowing of universal love in abundant measure towards the conceptualized mental object — all beings, all creatures, etc.

Each of the seven categories of specified radiation comprehends a part of the total range of life, and in combination with the others expresses the whole. *Itthī* refers to the female kind in general among the devas, human beings, animals, demons, spirits and denizens of hell. *Purisa* means the male kind in all the spheres of existence. And both *itthī* and *purisā* together comprehend the entire life-form. Again, from another angle, the *ariyas* or the spiritually transformed and sanctified Buddhist saints, and the *anariyas* or worldlings bound to the wheel of becoming, comprehend the totality. *Ariyas* are those who have entered the transcendental path; they are to be found in the human and divine worlds, therefore they constitute the tip of the pyramid of sentient spiritual existence. Worldlings, in all the spheres of existence,

constitute the body of the pyramid from the base to the tip. Likewise, the three categories of *deva*, *manussa* and *vinipātika* — gods, human beings, fallen beings in the nether worlds comprehend the totality in terms of spiritual evolution. Devas, the radiant divine beings, comprise the upper layer, human beings the middle layer, and fallen *vinipātikas* the lower layer of the cosmological mound.

The “mental drill” in terms of directional radiation, the radiation of *Mettā* to the above twelve categories of beings in the ten directions, makes the universalization of *Mettā* a most exhilarating experience. As one mentally places oneself in a particular direction and then lets love flow out and envelop the entire region, one literally transports the mind to the sublimest heights leading to *samādhi*, ecstatic absorption.

When one projects this total wish or will for others to dwell happily, free from hostility, ill-will and distress, one elevates oneself to a level where true happiness prevails. One also sets in motion powerful vibrations conducing to happiness, cooling off enmity, relieving affliction and distress. It will be seen, therefore, that universal love simultaneously infuses well-being and happiness; and removes the mental and physical suffering caused by the mental pollution of hostility, enmity and anger.

Mettānīsaṃsā Sutta

The Benefits of Mettā

A. 11.16

Nidānaṃ:

*Aggikkhandhopamaṃ sutvā,
Jātasamvega bhikkhunam,
Assādatthāya desesi.
Yaṃ parittaṃ Mahāmuni,
Sabbaloka-hitatthāya
Parittaṃ taṃ bhaṇāmahe.*

*Evaṃ me sutam. Ekaṃ samayaṃ Bhagavā
Sāvattiyam viharati Jetavane Anāthapiṇḍikassa
ārāme. Tatra kho Bhagavā bhikkhu āmantesi,
'Bhikkhavo'ti! "Bhadante"ti te bhikkhū
Bhagavato paccassosum. Bhagavā etadavoca.*

*Mettāya, bhikkhave, ceto-vimuttiyā āsevitāya,
bhāvitāya, bahulikatāya, yānikatāya,
vatthukatāya, anuṭṭhitāya, paricitāya
susamāraddhāya ekādasānisamsā pāṭikaṅkhā.
Katame ekādasā? Sukham supati, sukham
paṭibhujjhati, na pāpakaṃ supinaṃ passati,
manussānaṃ piyo hoti, amanussānaṃ piyo hoti,
devatā rakkhanti, nā'ssa aggi vā visam vā*

*sattham vā kamati, tuvaṭam cittaṃ samādhiyati,
mukhavaṇṇo vippasīdati, asammūlho kālaṃ
karoti, uttarim appaṭivijjhanto brahmalokūpago
hoti.*

*Mettāya, bhikkhave, ceto-vimuttiyā āsevitāya,
bhāvitāya, bahulikatāya, yānikatāya,
vatthukatāya, anuṭṭhitāya, paricitāya
susamāraddhāya, ime ekādasānisamsā
pāṭikaṅkhā'ti.*

*Idamavoca Bhagavā, attamanā te bhikkhū
Bhagavato bhāsitaṃ abhinandun'ti.*

Occasion:

After listening to the Lord's discourse 'All is Aflame', the bhikkhus were seized with a (spiritual) sense of urgency. The protective chanting which the Exalted Sage enunciated (to make the bhikkhus happy) do we now chant for the well-being of the world.

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying at Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery in Jeta's Grove near Sāvattī. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus, saying: "Bhikkhus". "Most Venerable Sir", the bhikkhus replied to the Blessed One. Then the Blessed One said this:

Bhikkhus, universal love, which brings about the freedom of mind, when ardently practised, developed,

made a habit of, mastered, made the basic philosophy of one's life, firmly established within, fully familiarized and unrelentingly applied, then these eleven benefits should be expected. What eleven? One sleeps happily, wakes up happily, does not suffer bad dreams, is dear to human beings, is dear to non-human beings; the gods protect him, no fire or poison or weapon injures him, his mind gets quickly concentrated, his features are bright, he dies unperturbed, and, if he fails to attain to supermundane insight-stages, he is certain to reach the state of the high divinity of the Brahma realm (loka).

“Bhikkhus, universal love, which brings about the freedom of mind, when ardently practised, developed, made a habit of, mastered, made the basic philosophy of one's life, firmly established within, fully familiarized and unrelentingly applied, then these eleven blessings should be expected.”

Thus the Blessed One spoke. Inspired, those bhikkhus greatly rejoiced at the Lord's exposition.”

Anguttara Nikaya, 11:16

Mettā cetovimutti – Liberation of mind through universal love – signifies the attainment of *samādhi*, absorption based on *Mettā* meditation . Since *Mettā* liberates the mind from the bondage of hatred and anger, selfishness, greed and delusion, it is a state of liberation. Every time one practices *Mettā*, for however short a period, one enjoys a measure of freedom of mind. Measureless freedom of mind,

however, is to be expected only when *Mettā* is fully developed into *samādhi*.

The various applications of *Mettā*, as indicated by the terms “practiced, developed”, etc., signify a well-structured skill cultivated not only by specific hours of meditation, but also by converting all one's deeds, words and thoughts into acts of *Mettā*.

By “practiced” (*āsevita*) is meant the ardent practice of *Mettā*, not as a mere intellectual exercise, but by committing oneself wholeheartedly to it and making it life's guiding philosophy, something which conditions one's attitudes, outlook and conduct.

By “developed” (*bhāvita*) is implied the various processes of inner culture and mental integration brought about by the practice of meditation on universal love. Since meditation brings about unification of mind by integrating the various faculties, it is called development of mind. The Buddha taught that the entire mental world is developed by the practice of meditation on universal love, leading to mind's transformation and liberation.

“Unrelentingly resorted to” (*bahulīkatā*) emphasizes repeated practice of *Mettā* through all one's waking hours, in deed, word and thought, thus maintaining the tempo of *Mettā*-awareness throughout. Repeated action means generation of power. All the five spiritual powers, namely, faith, vigour, mindfulness,

concentration and wisdom, are exercised and cultivated by the repeated practice of *Mettā*.

“Used as one’s vehicle” (*yānikatā*) signifies a “total commitment” to the ideal of *Mettā* as the only valid method for the solution of interpersonal problems and as an instrument for spiritual growth. When *Mettā* is the only “mode of communication”, the only vehicle, life automatically is a “divine abiding” as mentioned in the *Mettā Sutta*.

“Made the foundation of one’s life” (*vatthukatā*) is making *Mettā* the basis of existence in all respects. It becomes the chief resort, the haven, the refuge of one’s life. This way “taking refuge in the Dhamma” becomes a reality.

“Fully established” (*anuṭṭhitā*) refers to a life that is firmly rooted in *Mettā*, under all circumstances anchored in *Mettā*. When *Mettā* is effortlessly practised, not even by error does one violate the law of universal love.

“Well consolidated” (*paricitā*) means one is so habituated to *Mettā* that one remains effortlessly immersed in it, both in meditation as well as in one’s day-to-day activities.

“Perfected” (*susamāradhā*) indicates completeness through total adherence and development. *Mettā* when perfected leads one to that fully integrated state in

which one enjoys perfect well-being and spiritual felicity, as indicated by the passage on the eleven benefits of *Mettā*.

The benefits of *Mettā* are indeed great and comprehensive. For a follower of the Buddha this is the one supreme instrument that can be wielded with advantage everywhere.

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The Power of Mettā

The subjective benefit of universal love is evident enough. The enjoyment of well-being, good health, peace of mind, radiant features, and the affection and goodwill of all, are indeed great benefits accruing from the practice of *Mettā*-meditation. But what is even more wonderful is the impact which *Mettā* has on the environment and on other beings, including animals and devas, as the *Pāli* scriptures and commentaries illustrate with a number of memorable stories.

Once the Buddha was returning from his almsround together with his retinue of monks. As they were nearing the prison, the executioner let loose the fierce elephant *Nālagiri*, which was used for the execution of criminals, in consideration of a handsome bribe from Devadatta, the Buddha's evil and ambitious cousin. As the intoxicated elephant rushed towards the Buddha menacingly trumpeting, the Buddha projected powerful thoughts of *Mettā* towards it. Venerable Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, was so deeply concerned about the Buddha's safety that he ran in front of the Buddha to shield him, but the Buddha asked him to stand aside since the projection of love itself was quite sufficient. The impact of the Buddha's *Mettā*-radiation was immediate and overwhelming. So much so that

by the time the animal neared the lord, it was completely tamed as though a drunken wretch had suddenly become sober by the magical power of a spell. The tusker bowed down in reverence in the way trained elephants do in a circus.

The *Visuddhimagga* records the case of one landlord of Pataliputra (modern Patna), Visākha by name. It seems he had heard that the island of Sri Lanka was a veritable garden of *Dhamma* with its innumerable shrines and *stupas* adorning the isle. And blessed with a favourable climate, the people were highly righteous, following the Teaching of the Buddha with great fervour and sincerity.

Visākha decided to visit Sri Lanka and spend the rest of his life there as a monk. Accordingly, he made over his great fortune to his wife and children and left home with a single gold coin. He stopped for some time at the port town of Tamralipi (modern Tamruk) waiting for a ship. During this time he engaged himself in business and made a thousand gold coins.

Eventually he reached Sri Lanka and went to the capital city of Anuradhapura. There he went to the famous Mahāvihāra and asked the abbot's permission to enter the *Saṅgha*. As he was led to the chapter house for the ordination ceremony, the purse containing the thousand gold coins dropped out from under his belt. When asked, "What is it?" he said, "I have a thousand

gold coins, sir.” When he was told that a monk cannot possess any money, he said, “I don’t want to possess it but I wanted to distribute it among all who come for this ceremony.” Accordingly he opened his purse and strewed the entire yard of the chapter house, saying, “Let no one who has come to witness Visākha’s ordination depart empty-handed.”

After spending five years with his teacher, he now decided to go to the famous Cittalapabbata forest, where a good number of monks with supernormal powers, lived. He went to the jungle-monastery of Cittalapabbata. On his way he came to a fork in the road and stood wondering which way to turn. Since he had been practising *Mettā*-meditation assiduously, he found a certain deva living in the rock there, holding out a hand pointing the road to him. After reaching the Cittalapabbata jungle-monastery, he occupied one of the huts.

Having stayed there for four months, as he was thinking of leaving the next morning, he heard somebody weeping, and when he asked, “Who is that?” the deva living in the manila tree at the end of the walkway said, “Venerable sir, I am Maniliya (i.e., belonging to the manila tree).”

“Why are you weeping?”

“Because you are thinking of going away from here.”

“What good does my living here do to you?”

“Venerable sir, so long as you live here, the devas and other non-human beings treat each other with kindness. When you are gone, they will again start their wrangling and quarrels.”

“Well, if my living here makes all of you live at peace, it is good.”

And so he stayed on for another four months. It is said that when he again thought of going, again the deity wept. So this Elder stayed on permanently and attained *Nibbāna* there. Such is the impact of *Mettā-bhāvanā* on others, even among invisible beings.

There is also the famous story of the cow. It seems a cow was giving milk to her calf in a forest. A hunter wanting to kill her flung a spear which, when it struck her body, bounced off like a palm leaf. So mightily powerful is *Mettā* — loving-kindness. This is not the case of one who has developed *Mettā-samādhi*. It is a simple case of the consciousness of love for the offspring.

Indeed, the power of *Mettā* can never be told enough. The commentaries to the *Tipiṭaka*, the *Pāli* canon, are replete with stories, not only of monks, but also of ordinary people who overcame various dangers, including weapons and poison, through the sheer might of *Mettā*, selfless love.

But let not *Mettā* be mistaken as a mere sentiment. It is the power of the strong. If the leaders from different walks of life were to give *Mettā* a fair trial, no principle or guideline to action would be found to possess greater efficiency or fruitfulness in all spheres of human activity.

Man is the ultimate unit in every enterprise. If man decides to substitute *Mettā* as a policy of action to counter aggression and ill-will, the world will turn into a veritable abode of peace. For it is only when man shall have peace within himself, and boundless goodwill for others, that peace in the world will become real and enduring.

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Mettā Bhavana Gāthā

Hymn of Universal Love

1. Ahaṃ avero homi, abyāpajjho homi, anigho homi, sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi;

Ahaṃ viya mayhaṃ ācāriyupajjhāyā, mātāpitāro hitasattā, majjhāttikasattā, verīsattā, averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharāntu, dukkhāmuccchantu, yathāladdha sampattito, mā vigacchantu, kammaṣakā.

May I be free from hatred, free from ill-will, (thus) be free from afflictions (sufferings), and conduct myself happily (live happily)!

Like me, may my teachers and preceptors, mother and father, kith and kin, well-wishers, all beings who are well disposed towards me, beings who are neutral, beings who are hostile, may they all be free from hatred, freed from ill-will and thus be free from afflictions (sufferings) and conduct themselves happily (live happily), and be free from suffering, and not be deprived from all the good things accrued to them rightly; for all beings are subject to the result of their actions.

2. *Imasmim vihāre, imasmim āvāse, imasmim ārāme, imasmim gocaragāme, imasmim nagare, imasmim janapade, sabbe sattā, sabbe pānā, sabbe bhūtā, sabbe puggalā, sabbe attabhāva pariyāpannā, sabbā itthoyo, sabbe purisā, sabbe ariyā, sabbe anariyā, sabbe devā, sabbe manussā, sabbe amanussā, sabbe vinipātikā, averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharāntu, dukkhā mucchantu, yathāladdha sampattito, mā vigacchantu, kammassakā.*

2. May all beings, who are breathing, all living creatures, all individuals, all sentient beings, all females, all males, all noble ones, all worldlings, all divine beings, all human beings, all non-human beings, all those who are in the fallen states, all who are living in this monastery, in this monastic dwelling, in this locality, in this city, in this country, be free from hatred, free from ill-will, and (thus) be free from afflictions (sufferings) and conduct themselves happily; may they all be free from suffering and not be deprived from all possessions accrued to them rightly, for, all beings are subject to the law of kamma and its results.

3. *Purathimāya disāya, dakkhiṇāya disāya, pacchimāya disāya, uttarāya disāya, purathimāya anudisāya, dakkhiṇāya anudisāya, pacchimāya anudisāya, uttarāya anudisāya, heṭṭhimāya disāya, uparimāya disāya, sabbe sattā, sabbe pānā, sabbe bhūtā, sabbe puggalā,*

sabbe attabhāva pariyāpannā, sabbā itthoyo, sabbe purisā, sabbe ariyā, sabbe anariyā, sabbe devā, sabbe manussā, sabbe amanussā, sabbe vinipātikā, averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharāntu, dukkhā mucchantu, yathāladdha sampattito, mā vigacchantu, kammassakā.

3. May all beings, who are breathing, all living creatures, all individuals, all sentient beings, all females, all males, all noble ones, all worldlings, all divine beings, all human beings, all non-human beings, all those who are in the fallen states, may all who are living in the eastern direction, in the southern direction, in the western direction, in the northern direction, in the north-eastern direction, in the south-eastern direction, in the south-western direction, in the north-western direction, all beings below (in the downward direction), all beings above (in the upward direction), be free from hatred, free from ill-will, and (thus) free from afflictions (sufferings) and conduct themselves happily; may they all be free from suffering and not be deprived of whatever possessions accrued to them, for, all beings are subject to the law of kamma, and its results.

4. *Uddham yāva bhavaggo ca, Adho yāva avicīto, samantā cakkavālesu, ye sattā pathavicārā,*

*abyāpajjhā niverā ca,
nidukkhā ca nirupaddavā.*

*Uddham yāva bhavaggo ca,
Adho yāva avīcīto,
samantā cakkavālesu,
ye sattā udakecārā,
abyapajjhā niverā ca,
nidukkhā ca nirupaddavā.*

*Uddham yāva bhavaggo ca,
Adho yāva avīcīto,
samantā cakkavālesu,
ye sattā ākāsecārā,
abyapajjhā niverā ca,
nidukkhā ca nirupaddava.*

4. In the upward direction till the end of the worldly-spheres, and downward till the very bottom of hell-worlds, and all the spheres of existence around, those beings who are earthbound, may they all be free from hatred, free from ill-will, (thus) be shorn off sufferings and mishaps. All water-bound beings, may they all be free from hatred, free from ill-will, (thus) be shorn off sufferings and mishaps. All space-bound beings, may they all be free from hatred, free from ill-will, (thus) be shorn off sufferings and mishaps.

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