



THE APPLICATION OF BUDDHIST LOVING-KINDNESS(METTĀ) IN DEVELOPING HAPPINESS IN DAILY LIFE

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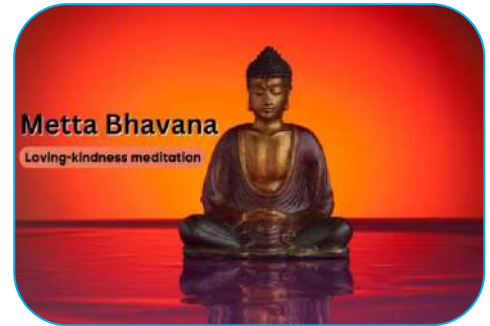
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ABSTRACT :

The application of Buddhist loving-kindness(Mettā), in fostering happiness in daily life is a profound practice that offers invaluable insights into the human experience. Rooted in the teachings of Buddhism, Mettā emphasizes the cultivation of unconditional love, goodwill, and compassion towards oneself and others. This abstract explores how integrating Mettā into daily routines and interactions can profoundly impact one's overall well-being and happiness. By extending kindness and compassion to oneself, individuals can cultivate self-acceptance, resilience, and inner peace. Furthermore, practicing loving-kindness towards others fosters stronger interpersonal connections, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness with the world. Through mindful application of Mettā, individuals can navigate life's challenges with grace, cultivate a deep sense of contentment, and contribute to a more harmonious and compassionate society. This abstract highlights the transformative power of Buddhist loving-kindness as a practical tool for developing happiness in daily life.



KEY WORDS: Loving-Kindness(Mettā), Happiness, Youth Development, Positive Psychology, Mindfulness.

I. INTRODUCTION

Derived from Sanskrit and Pali, Metta or Maitrī embodies qualities like friendliness, goodwill, and loving-kindness, making it a valuable addition to Buddhist contemplative practices. Unlike other awareness techniques, Metta involves the repetition of specific phrases accompanied by a profound feeling of warmth and benevolence, transcending societal boundaries. Beginning with oneself, practitioners gradually extend this heartfelt wish for happiness to all beings. This form of meditation aligns with Buddhism's emphasis on cultivating love, one of the four divine qualities alongside Appreciation, Compassion, and Equanimity. By fostering an attitude of boundless friendliness and compassion, Metta meditation serves as a powerful tool for nurturing genuine connections and universal well-being within oneself and towards others, regardless of differences in background or affiliation.

There are varied descriptions on the procedure to practice loving kindness meditation based on different texts – Visuddhimagga, Mettā Sutta, Paṭisambhidāmagga, Vibhaṅga¹. The best definition of loving kindness that highlights its universal love is taken from the Mettā Sutta, in the following excerpts *“In safety and in bliss, may creatures all be of a blissful heart. Whatever breathing beings there may be, no matter whether they are frail or firm, with non-excepted, be they long or big or middle-sized, or be they short or small or thick, as well as those seen or unseen, or whether they are dwelling far or near, existing or yet seeking to exist. May creatures all be of a blissful heart. And just as might a mother with her life protect the son that was her only child, so let him then for every living thing maintain unbounded consciousness in being; and let him too with love for all the world maintain unbounded consciousness in being, above, below, and all-round in between, untroubled, with no enemy or foe. And while he stands or walks or while he sits or while he lies down, free from drowsiness, let him resolve upon this mindfulness: This is Divine Abiding here”*²

In the hustle and bustle of modern life, amid the myriad challenges and stresses, the pursuit of happiness often seems elusive. Yet, nestled within the teachings of Buddhism lies a profound and transformative practice: Mettā, or loving-kindness. Originating from the Pali word “Metta,” meaning benevolence, goodwill, and loving-kindness, this ancient Buddhist concept offers a profound pathway to cultivating joy, contentment, and peace in our daily lives.

The application of Mettā in daily life transcends religious boundaries, offering a universal approach to fostering happiness and well-being. Grounded in the belief that all beings deserve love and compassion, irrespective of differences, Mettā extends beyond personal desires, encompassing a genuine concern for the welfare of others. Through intentional practice, individuals can harness the power of loving-kindness to navigate life's challenges with resilience, grace, and an open heart. This exploration delves into the practical applications of Buddhist loving-kindness in our modern, fast-paced world. It examines how the cultivation of Mettā fosters not only personal happiness but also enriches interpersonal relationships, fosters a sense of interconnectedness, and contributes to a more compassionate society. From mindfulness techniques to daily affirmations, from acts of kindness to forgiveness practices, the principles of Mettā offer a roadmap for infusing every moment with meaning, purpose, and profound joy.

II. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF METTĀ IN DAILY LIFE

In loving-kindness meditation, it's crucial to begin by cultivating positive feelings and self-love before extending them to others. This initial focus on oneself is essential because it can be difficult to genuinely radiate love and positivity outward if one lacks these qualities internally. Various techniques can facilitate this process, including visualization, reflection, and verbalization. Visualization involves conjuring mental images of oneself or recalling positive experiences until feelings of warmth and compassion emerge. Through reflection, individuals can contemplate their own worthiness of love and kindness, recognizing their inherent value as human beings. Verbalization entails using affirmations or kind words directed towards oneself, reinforcing self-love and acceptance. By prioritizing self-compassion and positive self-regard, individuals can establish a solid foundation from which to extend loving-kindness to others, fostering genuine connections and deepening their capacity for empathy and compassion. Verbalization entails the repetition of three or four concise phrases created by the meditator, such as

¹ See Gyana Ratna Sraman, “Loving Kindness Meditation in the Visuddhimagga,” in Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies Vol. 53, No. 1 (2004), (16); see (18), it is not clear why the author comments that “loving-kindness of the Visuddhimagga has limitation to develop towards the sentient beings.”

² Sutta-nipāta, vv. 143-52, quoted from Ñāṇamoli Thera, comp. and trans., The Practice of Loving Kindness (Mettā) as Taught by the Buddha in the Pali Canon, 50-51.

"May you be happy,
May you be peaceful,
May you be free from suffering,"

Practicing loving-kindness meditation, which embodies compassionate intentions towards oneself and others, can complement various forms of meditation like concentration or mindfulness. Integrating loving-kindness meditation into the beginning or end of a meditation session can enhance its benefits. While it's feasible to practice loving-kindness meditation in any posture as long as the body remains relaxed, it's commonly done in a seated position, particularly by those familiar with concentration and mindfulness techniques. Whether sitting on the floor or in a chair with eyes closed, individuals typically start by taking a few deep breaths to induce relaxation. This setup encourages a focused and receptive state, facilitating the cultivation of loving-kindness towards oneself and extending it outward to others.

If one desires to express benevolent sentiments verbally, the ensuing phrases may be iterated concerning oneself:

"May I experience happiness.
May I feel peace.
May I be liberated from suffering."

These same phrases can be adapted to convey loving kindness to others as follows:

"May you experience happiness.
May you feel peace.
May you be liberated from suffering."

The practice of loving kindness can be incorporated into our daily routines. To cultivate this virtue, one may consider the following examples: Firstly, it is important to seek out the positive attributes in others as a means of nourishing loving kindness. Additionally, reflecting upon a person or thing that brings joy to one's heart can also be beneficial. When traversing the streets, one may extend the wish of happiness and well-being to all those encountered. As the esteemed Dali Lama has suggested, it is advantageous to spend any available moments throughout the day reciting one or more of these phrases: "I've never met anyone I consider a stranger."

a. Mindfulness Techniques For Cultivating Loving-Kindness

Several straightforward methods exist for engaging in loving-kindness meditation, allowing practitioners to choose the approach that resonates most with them. One widely practiced method involves sequentially directing loving-kindness towards oneself, specific individuals, and ultimately all living beings:

In the first technique, having initially directed loving kindness towards oneself, loving kindness is extended to all living beings in the ten geographical directions of North, South, East, West, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, above, and below. In the second technique, having initially directed loving kindness towards oneself, loving kindness is extended to all living beings in an expanding order of geographical locations. This can commence with all beings in one's abode and gradually extend to the neighbourhood, village or town, county, state or province, country, continent, the whole world, and the universe³.

Loving-kindness towards oneself: Initiating the practice by generating feelings of warmth and compassion towards oneself lays the foundation for extending kindness outward.

Loving-kindness towards a benefactor or teacher: Directing gratitude and well-wishes towards someone who has offered guidance or support facilitates the expansion of loving-kindness.

³ Acharya Buddharakkhita 1989, Metta: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love, Wheel Publication No: 365/366, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Loving-kindness towards a familiar and cherished individual: Focusing on someone close to the heart, such as a friend or family member, deepens the cultivation of benevolent feelings.

Loving-kindness towards a neutral person: Extending kindness to someone with whom there's neither a strong connection nor conflict helps broaden the scope of compassion.

Loving-kindness towards a hostile person: Challenging but transformative, sending goodwill towards someone with whom there's conflict fosters reconciliation and understanding.

Loving-kindness towards all living beings in the universe: Finally, expanding the circle of kindness to encompass all beings reflects the boundless nature of loving-kindness.

However, certain considerations should be kept in mind during practice. It's recommended not to choose a deceased individual, as loving-kindness can only be directed towards the living. Similarly, selecting someone of the opposite sex as a benefactor or cherished individual may risk conflating loving-kindness with desire. When choosing a hostile person, it's advisable to start with someone towards whom one doesn't harbor intense resentment initially. Additionally, practitioners must be vigilant against two adversaries: desire, considered the "near enemy" of loving-kindness, and ill-will, the "far enemy." If feelings of ill-will arise, redirecting kindness towards a non-hostile person can help regain equanimity before returning to the challenging individual. Finally, directional extension techniques can be employed to cultivate loving-kindness towards all beings, utilizing phrases that affirm universal well-being and happiness.

Loving-kindness represents a compassionate affection that transcends boundaries, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all beings as fellow companions on the journey of life, subject to the universal law of suffering. This sentiment is deeply ingrained in Buddhist philosophy and finds practical application in the meditation practice known as mettā bhāvanā.

In the Theravadin tradition of Buddhism, mettā bhāvanā serves as a widely embraced method for cultivating loving-kindness. It commences with the practitioner directing benevolent sentiments towards oneself before extending them progressively to encompass loved ones, acquaintances, adversaries, and ultimately, all sentient creatures.

Central to this practice is the cultivation of awareness that every living being harbors the innate desire for wholeness, security, and happiness. Through this realization, practitioners come to understand that the experiences of others mirror their own, fostering empathy and dispelling fear towards any individual or circumstance. Fear, it is understood, arises from a failure to recognize the shared humanity of oneself and others, both striving for happiness and liberation from suffering.

Traditional Buddhist texts often advocate beginning this practice by focusing on the mother figure, symbolizing ultimate kindness and sacrifice. However, recognizing the diversity of familial relationships, contemporary interpretations permit practitioners to select any object of meditation that evokes a sense of tenderness and warmth, be it a relative, friend, teacher, child, or even a beloved pet. Formal practice of loving-kindness typically involves assuming a conducive posture and allowing the body to relax, irrespective of the setting. Once settled, the practitioner releases mental distractions, allowing the mind to bathe in a profound sense of relief, akin to a deep sigh. This process signifies the embracing of loving-kindness as a transformative force for inner peace and universal harmony.

b. Forgiveness practices to release resentment and foster healing

In the intricate tapestry of human relationships, forgiveness stands as a potent thread, weaving together the fragments of broken trust, hurt, and resentment. As we navigate the complexities of life, encountering inevitable conflicts and grievances, the art of forgiveness emerges as a transformative force, capable of untangling the knots of emotional turmoil and paving the path towards healing and reconciliation. In this exploration, we delve into the profound significance of forgiveness practices as a means to release resentment and nurture the seeds of healing within the human heart.

Forgiveness, often portrayed as an act of profound grace and compassion, transcends mere absolution of transgressions; it embodies a profound shift in perspective, a conscious choice to relinquish the burden of resentment and animosity. Rooted in diverse cultural and spiritual traditions,

forgiveness practices offer profound insights into the human psyche, illuminating the pathways towards inner peace and emotional liberation.

This journey of forgiveness traverses the terrain of personal growth and spiritual evolution, inviting individuals to confront the depths of their own pain and vulnerability. Through the gentle alchemy of forgiveness practices, wounds once festering with bitterness and anger are transmuted into fertile ground for empathy, understanding, and reconciliation. Moreover, forgiveness extends beyond the realm of interpersonal dynamics, fostering collective healing and societal harmony by dismantling the walls of division and fostering empathy and reconciliation.

In this paper, I embark on a multifaceted exploration of forgiveness practices, drawing wisdom from psychological insights, spiritual traditions, and personal narratives. Through an examination of diverse methodologies, ranging from cognitive reframing and empathic understanding to ritualistic ceremonies and meditative reflection, we seek to unravel the intricate layers of forgiveness and illuminate the transformative power it holds for individuals, communities, and societies at large.

c. Loving-kindness towards oneself.

Initiating the practice of loving-kindness necessitates directing it inward, towards ourselves initially. Some may question the need for self-love first, fearing it might breed self-centeredness or selfish conduct. However, upon deeper reflection, one realizes that there is none in the vast cosmos whom they cherish more than themselves. This sentiment finds resonance in the Buddha's assertion, "Investigating the whole world with my mind, never did I find anyone dearer than oneself. Since oneself is dearer than others, one who loves oneself should never harm others." Genuine love for others springs from a foundation of self-love. Conversely, lacking self-love inhibits one's capacity to truly love another. Yet, for those who nurture self-love, the reverberations of loving-kindness resonate profoundly, illuminating the path to spreading this benevolent sentiment to every corner of the world.

The practice of LKM, with its origins traced back to the metta sutta of early Buddhist scriptures (Karaniya Metta Sutta, Sn 1.8), involves a deliberate cultivation of compassion towards oneself, towards others, and towards all sentient beings. Buddhist monk and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (2014) expounds, "Metta meditation is a practice of cultivating understanding, love, and compassion by looking deeply, first for ourselves and then for others."

According to Buddhist meditation manuals, the initiation of cultivating loving-kindness should be directed inwardly, towards oneself. This approach stems from the understanding that to authentically extend loving-kindness towards others, characterized by a genuine concern for their well-being and happiness, one must first experience genuine self-love.

To embark on the practice of loving-kindness meditation, it is essential to assume a comfortable meditation posture. This may involve sitting cross-legged on a cushion or, if challenging, sitting in a chair with a straight back. The body should maintain an upright posture, neither rigid nor tense, with hands resting on the lap, right hand atop the left, and thumbs lightly touching. Subsequently, gently close the eyes and visualize a smiling, joyful image of one's own face in the mind's eye.

Following this visualization, internally repeat the following wish: "May I be healthy. May I be peaceful. May all my good intentions come to fruition." It's crucial not to mechanically recite these words but to try to evoke corresponding emotions with each phrase. Repeat this mantra several times until a soft, warm sensation arises in the heart, indicating a genuine desire for personal well-being and happiness.

After spending a few minutes applying the formula to oneself, transition to the next individual in the sequence: a beloved and respected figure such as a teacher, mentor, elder friend, or benefactor. Visualize their smiling, joyful image and internally recite: "May this good person be healthy. May he/she be peaceful. May all his/her good purposes be fulfilled." Repeat this process several times, striving to generate the same warm feeling of loving-kindness towards this individual. Continue this practice by moving on to a dear friend or close relative, repeating the formula multiple times with the intention of evoking that soft, warm sensation of loving-kindness in the heart.

The pervasive and unchanging quality of benevolence should be extended to all groups of individuals - oneself, esteemed individuals, cherished ones, apathetic people, and disagreeable foes - while gradually progressing from simpler to more difficult in application. The objective of directing benevolence initially towards oneself is to become "the embodiment of benevolence"⁴ - a self-directed benediction for being peaceful, content, exempt from affliction, concern, and resentment. With oneself radiating with joy, one subsequently radiates benevolence to others⁵. The apex of this benevolence is the recognition of oneself with all living beings (sabbattatā), with no distinction made between oneself and others. It ought to ultimately "dissolve the boundaries" (sīma-sambheda) and embrace all equally⁶. The so-called "I" is not separate from the whole. Division evaporates. Unity is realized. Similarly, we should practice benevolence in all circumstances, particularly when facing abusive individuals in their improper conduct in body, speech, and mind. The Buddha urges us to train in benevolence.⁷

In all types of situations, particularly when faced with abusive individuals who engage in misconduct of body, speech, and mind, it is imperative that we practice loving-kindness. The Buddha

"Our minds will remain unaffected, we shall utter no bad words, and we shall abide friendly and compassionate, with thoughts of loving-kindness and no inner hate. We shall abide with loving-kindness in our hearts extending to that person, and we shall dwell extending it to the entire world as our object, with our hearts abundant, exalted, measureless in loving-kindness, without hostility or ill-will. That is how you should train yourselves"⁸.

At this particular point in time, with regards to the concept of universal love and its extensive scope, it is of great interest to draw attention to the fact that an individual who has attained and sustained a state of "heart-deliverance of lovingkindness" can anticipate one of the eleven blessings to be a cherished companionship with non-human entities, that is, all living creatures. It has been reported that upon being informed of a certain monk who was bitten by a snake and died, the Buddha remarked that if that monk had suffused the snake with friendly thoughts, he would not have been bitten and died. This is in harmony with the understanding that "loving-kindness has the mode of friendliness for its characteristics."⁹ The Buddha subsequently exhorted the other monks to practice lovingkindness as summarised in this manner: there is friendship 'twixt me and living beings without feet, with two, four, and many feet. Let no living being injured me. "Let all creatures that live, - let all creatures that breathe, - let all creatures that exist, - one and all, - let all meet with prosperity! Let none come unto any adversity"¹⁰!

III. LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION INCREASES POSITIVE EMOTIONS AND HAPPINESS

Loving-kindness and compassion stand as essential instruments in the pursuit of human happiness. Even within the realms of social harmony and spiritual enlightenment, loving-kindness emerges as a foundational necessity. Cultivating a mindset focused on the happiness of others, irrespective of their identity, becomes imperative. Merely contemplating bringing joy to others can instill a sense of fulfillment within oneself. Deliberate intentions to spread happiness lead to noticeable shifts in demeanor and conduct. To nurture this ethos of loving-kindness, it becomes crucial to consistently prioritize the well-being of others in our thoughts. Initiating with the goal of bringing happiness to two individuals each day, then progressively expanding this circle to three, four, and

⁴ Narada, The Buddha and His Teachings , 627.

⁵ Narada, 618

⁶ Nyanaponika, The Four Sublime States, 8; Nāṇamoli, The Practice of Loving Kindness (Mettā) as taught by the Buddha in the Pali Canon, 35-37. Though the meditation on loving-kindness is concerned with the welfare of the living, I would imagine that it could have had the healing efficacy in forgiveness and reconciliation if one with readiness extends it to disliked or even antagonistic people who have died.

⁷ Narada, 618.

⁸ Digha Nikaya i. 129, with translation from Nāṇamoli, 47

⁹ Nāṇamoli, 34. See 53: "Just as one would feel friendliness on seeing a dearly beloved person, so one extends loving kindness to all creatures.

¹⁰ Eugene Watson Burlingame, Buddhist Parables (Repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 64-65.

eventually encompassing everyone encountered, embodies the essence of the Bodhichitta mind. This practice underscores the profound interplay between thoughts, emotions, and actions, capable of effecting meaningful change in the world.

a. Identification of Primary and Secondary Causes of Happiness

Understanding the primary and secondary sources of happiness holds significant importance. While it's widely acknowledged that the pursuit of material well-being often leads to suffering, the perception of well-being varies among individuals. Some equate it with personal happiness, while others extend it to encompass family, community, society, or even the entirety of existence. Thus, discerning these causes is essential.

Secondary sources of happiness, such as sensual pleasures, can ultimately result in discomfort or increased craving. Therefore, deriving enjoyment solely from external or material stimuli proves to be limited, transient, and ultimately deceptive. Despite initial appearances, such sources lack the capacity to sustain long-term happiness.

b. Transforming Anger with Loving Kindness

Besides practicing loving kindness as a blessing upon all living beings, it is one of the most effective ways to overcome anger or hatred, or ill will. Ignorance, craving, and hatred – all three unwholesome roots of evil are equally difficult to overcome, but, in one instant of anger, lives can be ruined and our spiritual development destroyed.¹¹ As Narada puts it, “one powerful destructive vice in a person is angry. The sweet virtue that subdues this evil force and sublimates the person is loving-kindness.”¹² The Buddha clearly teaches that “for enmity, by enmity is never in this world allayed; it is allayed by amity – that is an ancient principle”(Dhammapada 5).¹³ In all encounters and interactions, we are exhorted to “abide friendly and compassionate, with thoughts of loving kindness and no inner hate.”¹⁴

Narada further asserts that the opposite of mettā, or loving-kindness, is characterized by anger, ill-will, hatred, or aversion.¹⁵ Mettā can't coexist with anger or vengeful behavior. When the heart-deliverance of loving-kindness is upheld and prioritized, used as one's foundation, and properly managed, ill-will cannot invade the heart and persist. In essence, the heart-deliverance of loving-kindness provides an escape from ill-will.¹⁶ Furthermore, loving-kindness is not only capable of conquering anger, but it also enables one to be liberated from hateful thoughts of harming or condemning others.¹⁷ The ability to overcome anger or hatred or ill will is vital to the building of a harmonious society. The lofty ethical standard of loving-kindness to its utmost limit can be seen in this ideal follower of the Buddha who, equipped with “infinite liberation of the mind,” never thinks a thought of anger even when being subjected to extreme torture. The Buddha puts it in this hyperbolic way: “Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching.” Instead, one should “abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness,” and subsequently “pervade the all-compassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will.”¹⁸ The mind thus imbued with loving kindness is

¹¹ See the Kodhana Sutta of the Anguttaranikāya (AN iv. 94) on the wretchedness of the seven kinds of anger. Also see Visuddhimagga, ix, 14-39: The Visuddhimagga describes many ways of getting rid of anger or resentment

¹² Narada, 613.

¹³ Ñāṇamoli, 44

¹⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵ Narada, 613

¹⁶ Ñāṇamoli, 50.

¹⁷ Narada, 619.

¹⁸ Majjhima Nikaya i.129.

said to be a beautiful mind, since “the mind-deliverance of loving-kindness has beauty as the highest” efficacy.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

The application of Buddhist loving-kindness(Mettā) offers profound insights into cultivating happiness in daily life. Through Mettā practice, individuals can foster a mindset centered on compassion, kindness, and altruism, both towards themselves and others. By prioritizing the well-being and happiness of all beings, one transcends narrow self-interest and contributes to the greater good of humanity. The practice of Mettā enables individuals to recognize the interconnectedness of all living beings and to approach interactions with empathy and understanding. By embracing loving-kindness as a guiding principle, individuals can navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and equanimity. Moreover, the cultivation of loving-kindness promotes a sense of inner peace and fulfillment, irrespective of external circumstances.

In applying Buddhist loving-kindness in daily life, one not only experiences personal transformation but also contributes to the creation of a more harmonious and compassionate world. Through small acts of kindness and genuine care for others, individuals can ripple positivity and happiness throughout their communities and beyond. Ultimately, the practice of Mettā serves as a powerful tool for enhancing well-being, fostering meaningful connections, and spreading joy in the journey of life.

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¹⁹ Visuddhimagga, ix. 119