

## Metta Bhavana – The Cultivation of Loving Kindness

Metta is almost impossible to translate adequately, but refers to strong, even passionate, feelings of love, friendliness, and compassion towards all life – feelings felt equally towards all, and completely free from emotional self-interest or grasping. It is sometimes referred to as ‘universal loving-kindness’. It is a fundamental attitude of positivity and love that will express itself spontaneously and appropriately in action: as compassion towards the suffering, joy at others’ good fortune, help where help is needed, generosity towards the needy, and so on.

Summary of the five stages of the practice:

· Begin as for the Mindfulness of Breathing, checking your overall energy, emotions, and mental activity, acknowledging these as your starting point.

1 As you become more fully aware of yourself, develop a response of friendliness, interest, and kindness towards yourself, wishing yourself “happiness and the causes of happiness, freedom from suffering and the causes of suffering, growth and development”. One approach is to repeat a suitable sentence to yourself over and over, listening for the resonances in your heart. Another way is to remember a time when you felt this way, and feed that memory with awareness, thereby bringing it into life in the present. Another is to imaginatively give yourself a gift – a flower, jewel, or flame, symbolising self-metta.

2 Move the focus of your awareness onto a good friend and work creatively to contact, develop, and deepen metta towards them, using similar methods to stage 1. Avoid choosing someone for whom you feel sexual or parental feelings.

3 Bring to mind a ‘neutral’ person, someone for whom you have no clear like or dislike. Look for ways to contact metta for them and then develop and deepen it. This may mean ‘bringing them to life’ in your mind, reflecting on what you have most deeply in common, or simply taking an imaginative interest in them.

4 Turn your attention to a ‘difficult’ person. Experience how you actually feel towards them, and try to cultivate a fresh and more mettaful response, perhaps looking for a deeper understanding of them.

5 Lastly, bring to mind all four people and develop metta equally towards all of them. Broaden out to include those around you, in the local area, the country, the world – other forms of life – all life. Develop strong, impartial, universal metta towards all life.

· To end, as in the Mindfulness of Breathing, relax your effort, and gradually expand your awareness outwards slowly and sensitively.