

# Filling the Heart with Loving-Kindness

Guidance for  
Loving-Kindness Meditation



Sayalay Susilā

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## About the Author



**V**enerable Sayalay Susilā is the founder and current Abbess of the Appāmada Vihari Meditation Center (AVMC), in Penang, Malaysia, since 2014.

Sayalay was born in 1963 in Pahang, Malaysia. Sayalay began developing her keen interest in insight meditation while at the University of Science Malaysia, where she obtained a degree in mass communications in 1987. After graduation, Sayalay worked as a high school teacher for a year and a half. Being increasingly disenchanted with worldly matters and desiring to be dedicated to the practice

more than ever, she resigned her post to take up meditation full time for three years.

In 1991, Sayalay ordained as a Theravada Buddhist nun in the Burmese tradition at the age of 28, in Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Penang, Malaysia. Six months after her ordination in 1991, she went to Panditarama Monastery in Myanmar, where she practiced intensively for nearly three years under the guidance of the famous meditation master Venerable U Pandita Sayadaw.

In 1994, wishing to cultivate concentration meditation, Sayalay moved to Pa Auk Forest Monastery in Myanmar. She placed herself under the guidance of the renowned monk Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, and remained in the forest for 14 years. In addition to an assiduous program of meditation, she also learned the *Abhidhamma*, ancient discourses, and the Pāli language from Pa-Auk Sayadaw. Meanwhile, she became his English-to-Chinese interpreter in Myanmar and abroad.

From 2000, Sayalay started teaching the *Abhidhamma* extensively in various renowned centers internationally, including those in Malaysia, Australia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

In order to deepen her own understanding of the *Dhamma*, Sayalay also practiced different meditation methods during her stay in Myanmar, including those taught by Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and Goenka. As a result of both her breadth of exposure and depth of practice of various meditation methods, Sayalay has become an unusually accomplished teacher—one who

is able to present the subtleties of the Buddha's teachings in a simple and direct way. In particular, she presents the most profound division of the teaching, the *Abhidhamma*, in a lucid manner grounded not in pedantic philosophy, but in actual meditation experience.

After leaving Myanmar, Sayalay studied and practiced according to the suttas, putting an emphasis on teaching and practicing the *Satipatthāna*, the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Sayalay has traveled extensively as a meditation and *Abhidhamma* teacher, presenting the *Abhidhamma* and sutta expositions in formal lectures and talks, and has conducted meditation retreats throughout the United States, Canada, Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, India, China, Indonesia, Singapore, and in her home country of Malaysia. In 2015, Sayalay led the first International Novitiate Program with Venerable Sanghasena held in Ladakh, the region of the Himalayas of northern India.

Sayalay Susilā has a unique gift to teach and present the Buddha's teachings with profound depth, vividness, directness, precision, and clarity. Her teaching is very much appreciated by her students globally. As an effectively bilingual speaker in both English and Chinese, Sayalay is uniquely able to expound the Dhamma and teach to a wide global audience. In addition, Sayalay is also fluent in Burmese, Hokkien, and Malay.

Sayalay is the author of many books published in both English and Chinese. Her most well-known English book is *Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body through*

*Abhidhamma* 《揭开身心之奥秘》 (second edition, both Chinese and English).

Other books she has published in English include:

1. The Path to Happiness
2. Contemplation of Feeling
3. Dhamma Essence Series
4. Inner Exploration
5. The Nine Attributes of the Buddha
6. Mindfulness of Breathing
7. Moment-to-Moment Practice

Her Chinese publications include:

1. *From this Shore to Far Shore*  
《从此岸到彼岸》
2. *The Practical Manual of Abhidhamma*  
《阿毗达摩实用手册》
3. *Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma*  
《正法初现》
4. *The Development of the Faculties*  
《根修习经》
5. *The Nine Attributes of the Buddha*  
《佛陀的九种德行》
6. *Contemplation of the Mind*  
《洞见心之真相: 念处经之心念处》
7. *The Path to Happiness* 《朝向快乐之道》
8. *Dhamma Essence Series* 《佛法精粹》
9. *Mettā Bhavana* 《慈爱禅》
10. *Paṭṭhāna* 《二十四缘发趣论》
11. *Mangala Sutta* 《吉祥人生》

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## Introduction

Everyone wants to be happy. However, people nowadays have become more and more unhappy. Many people want to pursue spiritual happiness, but life is hard. The stress of life can lead to a feeling of helplessness or an urge to pay large amounts of money for counseling courses, seeking help. What we don't realize is that happiness is, in fact, readily available. Even when depressed, most people have the ability to awaken positive emotions that can warm their hearts. All we need is an effective method — cultivating loving-kindness or practicing loving-kindness meditation. Loving-kindness meditation is the most direct method taught by the Buddha to achieve spiritual happiness by simply cultivating love for ourselves and others. The sincere wish of “May you be happy” not only makes others happy but also gladdens our own hearts.

The Buddha said:

*If [one] develops a mind of loving-kindness, even for just the time of a finger snap...they're called [one] who follows the Teacher's instructions...*

— *Aṅguttara Nikāya 1.54*

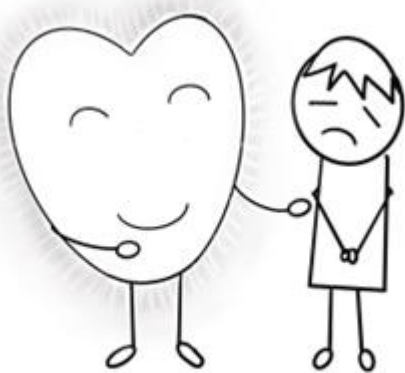
Loving-kindness meditation is an indispensable practice for every Buddhist disciple because it not only can bring joy for

ourselves but can also make other people happy, shaping a happy and harmonious world.

This book is based on the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* (Discourse on Loving-Kindness; Khuddakapāṭha 9, Suttanipāta 1.8), supplemented with the *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification), and provides guidance on how to practice loving-kindness meditation to soothe your mind and to attain jhāna.

# 1. The Meaning and Spirit of Mettā

Before practicing loving-kindness meditation, first we need to understand the meaning of “loving-kindness.” In Pāli, the word for loving-kindness is “mettā,” meaning “friendliness and goodwill,” like a good friend who is kind, supportive, and smiling at us. A loving smile is like a cool breeze on a hot summer day, gladdening our hearts.



**Mettā is like a good friend**

Mettā also means gentleness, like a full moon. On a full moon night, people like to gaze at the full moon because it gives us a sense of peace and serenity.

Generally, mettā refers to unconditional, pure, and universal love — love without differentiation between all sentient beings. When we hold such loving-kindness toward others, we generate kind wishes and sincerely and wholeheartedly wish for ourselves and each other:

“May you be free from danger, illness, or disaster;

May you be well and happy, free from mental and physical suffering;

May you take care of yourselves joyfully.”

Such love is pure and unconditional; it will not turn into disappointment or resentment because it does not expect anything in return, just as the Buddha’s compassion for Devadatta did not turn into resentment, even though Devadatta had repeatedly tried to harm him.

Like a soothing ointment, loving-kindness is refreshing, pleasant, and full of joy. When practicing loving-kindness meditation, we expand our kind wishes to other people, even to all sentient beings. Loving wishes are warm, unconditional, and sincere, and each wish brings benefit for both giver and receiver. When we do this, our hearts will feel refreshed and joyous. This is a pleasant experience because in wishing health and happiness for others, we ourselves feel happy and peaceful at that very moment.

Treating others with loving-kindness can bring great benefit at any time, even if a person is short-tempered and not easy to get along with. By radiating loving-kindness to someone like that, we will be surprised to find out that they

are not as difficult as we first thought and that they also have good qualities. The power of loving-kindness can not only calm our minds but also tranquilize the anxious minds of others, making them gentler and easier to get along with. Therefore, living and working under the shield of protection of loving-kindness can help our minds stay calm and peaceful.

Most people find it easy to wish that their friends be well and happy. But once a “good friend” turns their back on us and harms us, that so-called “love” is like a feather touched by fire, turning into ashes in the blink of an eye. Our hearts are filled with resentment rather than mettā. Why? Because such love stems from favoritism and is self-centered — it is tainted by our own likes and dislikes.

In contrast, the spirit of loving-kindness is not based on whether we find someone agreeable or not. True loving-kindness treats every living being equally, whether it is someone we like or dislike, someone who has harmed us or helped us, just as the Buddha treated his son Rāhula and Devadatta — who had repeatedly tried to harm him — equally.

Loving-kindness is unlike selfish love, which seeks to control and possess others. As soon as there is a desire to control others, we fall into self-centeredness, and loving-kindness is replaced by contaminated love. Loving-kindness is simply wanting others to be happy, free from hostility, free from illness, and to live with a sense of freedom; it does not contain even the slightest desire to

control others. Loving-kindness is free from entanglement and possession — it is a mental state of independence that does not expect anything in return.

When we sincerely wish that all sentient beings be well and happy, such benevolent thoughts will prevent us from having any intention to harm others. In Pāli, this kind of benevolent thought is called “**mano-kamma mettā**,” meaning “mental kamma of loving-kindness.” Both speech and actions are manifestations of the mind, and when the mind is full of loving-kindness, we will not utter harsh words or provoke dissension to the detriment others. Instead, our words will be gentle, kind, and pleasant to the ear, without any insincerity or deception. In Pāli, this kind of speech is called “**vacī-kamma mettā**,” meaning “verbal kamma of loving-kindness.” With loving-kindness, our behavior will also be kind and non-violent, not inflicting any harm to others. In Pāli, this kind of behavior is called “**kāya-kamma mettā**,” meaning “bodily kamma of loving-kindness.”

With loving-kindness in our hearts, we will not harm other people, thus fulfilling the moral code of the five precepts Buddhist disciples observe every day — abstaining from killing, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual misconduct, abstaining from speaking falsehood, and abstaining from alcohol and other intoxicants. The spirit of observing precepts is based on the principle of not harming others. Loving-kindness is the immediate cause for the purity of our morality. The more we live a moral life, the



more we create a peaceful society where we care about and respect each other.

On the contrary, if someone lacks loving-kindness for other people and thinks only of themselves, it is inevitable that they will easily generate intentions to harm others for the sake of their own interests. Such bad intentions will further give rise to unwholesome deeds such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech, bringing harm to both themselves and others.

## 2. The Opponents of Mettā

Loving-kindness has two strong opponents.

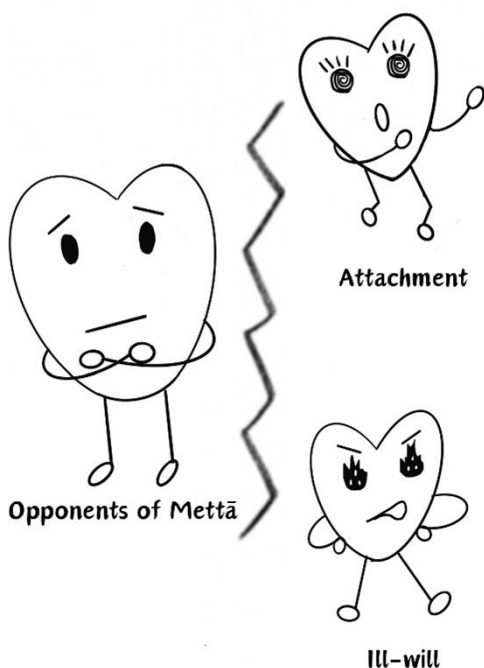
The close opponent of loving-kindness is attachment. Attachment can get mixed up with loving-kindness when we are not paying attention and can make us think it is loving-kindness — this is why it is called the close opponent of loving-kindness.

A young bhikkhu once said that before going out for alms round, he would spread loving-kindness to residents in his neighborhood. The first time he did so, he was flattered by the amount of food he received, and he was convinced that it was due to the power of loving-kindness. In order to get more food in the following alms round, he tried to radiate even more loving-kindness to the villagers. However, he was puzzled when he received less food instead. Through continuous exploration, he realized that his loving-kindness had become tainted with greed through his desire for more food. Thus the power of “mettā” was impaired.

When greed is hidden in loving-kindness, our hearts will be blinded by possessive-ness without us being aware. Greed is a good actor and very skillful at disguising it-self as loving-kindness. For example: a mother, being possessive of her son and afraid of losing him, might unconsciously drive a wedge between her son and

daughter-in-law; or some parents, using the excuse of loving their children, would control their freedom, even their aspiration, forcing their children to become the successes they themselves want to be. When greed and longing invade our hearts, we will become strongly possessive and inclined to control others, and our hearts will gradually drift away from the spirit of loving-kindness.

Therefore, we each need to examine our own hearts: is our loving-kindness mixed with greed, or is it pure?



The most direct opponent of loving-kindness is ill-will. Ill-will is the exact opposite of loving-kindness, therefore it is called the most direct opponent of loving-kindness. When our hearts are filled with ill-will and resentment, it is very difficult for us to radiate loving-kindness to anyone, including ourselves. Loving-kindness is peaceful, serene, accommodating, and welcoming; on the contrary, resentment or ill-will is burning, criticizing, confrontational, ruthless, and destructive. Whenever ill-will is present, loving-kindness will retreat and disappear.

The Buddha often encouraged those enslaved to ill-will to practice loving-kindness meditation. Once, he said:

*Rāhula, practice loving-kindness meditation. Rāhula, when you practice loving-kindness meditation, ill-will will be given up.*

—*Majjhima Nikāya* 62

Although loving-kindness is an antidote to ill-will, people heavily imbued with ill-will might find it particularly difficult to practice loving-kindness meditation; therefore, they need special tactics and patience. Ill-will is a strong opponent of loving-kindness, and those wishing to cultivate loving-kindness must first contemplate the faults of ill-will.

## **2.1. Contemplating the faults of ill-will**

The faults of ill-will are as follows:

### **2.1.1. Unwholesome bodily, verbal, and mental kamma**

When our hearts are occupied by ill-will, we lose our inherent good nature and rationality. Because ill-will is destructive and needs to be channeled somewhere, we take the anger out on others by scolding or slandering — creating unwholesome verbal kamma. If by then the fire of ill-will is still burning, we might even beat or abuse others. In the worst case scenario, we might kill others, creating severely unwholesome bodily kamma. Once such unwholesome bodily, verbal, and mental kamma matures in the future, we will have to bear the painful consequences. A single glitch in our thoughts can bring endless remorse.

### **2.1.2. Poor interpersonal relationships**

An angry person makes enemies everywhere, and no one wants to be friends with them. Imagine approaching your friend's house and hearing their angry roar even before entering the house — you might choose to avoid your friend immediately and make a quick getaway. Those who are angry all the time can be very lonely and isolated.

### **2.1.3. Low sleep quality**

An angry person has nightmares from time to time because their feelings of hatred keep them constantly in a state of agitation, as if there were a thorn pricking their body, disturbing their sleep. One of my students once told me about her experience:

“Back then, I was going through an emotional turmoil. Even though the relationship had ended, I always held a grudge against my ex-boyfriend. The resentment was like a thorn in my body that could not be picked out, and when I thought of him, the thorn would stir in my body, making me physically and mentally disturbed and tormented, and the fire of anger burned so much that it was always difficult for me to fall asleep.”

### **2.1.4. Damage to our health**

When we are upset, our angry hearts produce undesirable turbid *qi*, or negative energy fields, causing obstructions in our bodies and seriously jeopardizing our health. Many research institutes specializing in this field have done detailed studies specifically on this matter. As stated in the *Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor*, “All illnesses arise from the heart.” The vast majority of illnesses are related to our own emotions. Throughout history, there are countless examples of emotions jeopardizing people’s health. Even

the extremely arrogant Zhou Gong-Jin was angered to death by Zhu-Ge Liang!<sup>1</sup>

Once when Sayalay Susilā was in Canada teaching about how anger and ill-will can produce turbid *qi* that jeopardizes our health, a student recounted her personal experience. She was previously diagnosed with cancer and gradually recovered after meticulous treatment. Unfortunately, her husband later had an affair. She was so overwhelmed with anger at his betrayal that she quarrelled with him endlessly. The flames of anger burned her heart constantly, damaging her health, and eventually her cancer recurred and she had to withstand the double blow of physical and mental suffering. Finally she realized, “What on earth is more important than my own life and health?” Therefore, she decided to reconcile with her husband, let go of her resentment and attachment, and treat him like a friend, no longer quarrelling with him. Slowly, she regained her health.

From this example, we can see that ill-will and illness are closely related. Less anger leads to less illness. When we are angry, there is a significant elevation of heart rate and blood pressure and stronger contractions of the heart, causing increased blood flow to the heart. The heart gets

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<sup>1</sup> In the popular Chinese 14th-century historical novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Zhou Gong-Jin is a prominent general who is extremely jealous of the highly noble and talented general Zhu-Ge Liang. Zhou Gong-Jin attempts to outwit Zhu-Ge Liang on multiple occasions but never succeeds. Zhou Gong-Jin eventually dies in frustration and anger after Zhu-Ge Liang repeatedly thwarts his plans.

overloaded, causing symptoms such as palpitations, tightness in the chest, panic, arrhythmia, myocardial ischemia, and even other severe heart diseases such as heart attack and angina! One of Sayalay's fellow nuns, of British origin, told her that in her past life, she was a male heavenly deity who fell in love with a heavenly goddess. Yet soon after, his beloved goddess pursued another, more powerful heavenly deity. He became furious, and immediately his life was cut off. He found himself reborn as a hungry ghost, living in complete darkness!

### **2.1.5. Exposure to danger**

When we are angry, the negative energy generated by our hateful minds will spread widely, attracting malignant *qi* or the violence that's connected with it, making us easily violated or attacked by other people or non-humans.

Sayalay tells a story about a gentle stray dog that would lie down every day at the back door of the monastery where she lived about twenty years ago. At one time, Sayalay had a quarrel with a fellow nun and became angry. Without being mindful of her angry mind, she walked toward the back door of the monastery, feeling discontented. For some reason, that stray dog lying at the back door of the monastery suddenly lunged at her. She was startled enough to fall down, and the stray dog ran away in panic as well.

Sayalay could not figure out why that stray dog attacked until she understood the mechanism of the mind: perhaps it was the negative energy of ill-will radiating from her mind

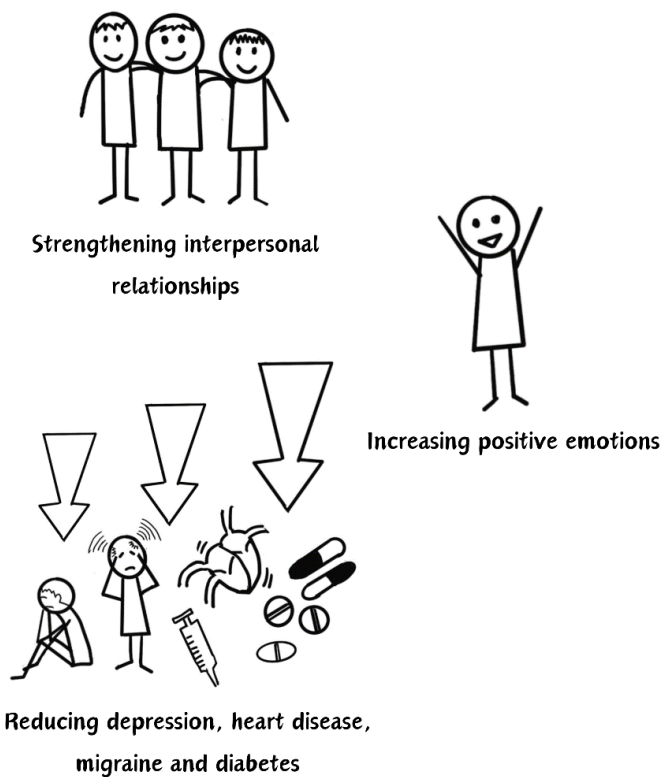


that triggered the violence in that stray dog. As stated in the well-known law of attraction: “Like attracts like,” or in this case “Ill-will attracts ill-will.” The stray dog thought Sayalay was going to attack it, so it struck first out of self-protection. If Sayalay had been radiating loving-kindness, the ending might have been different. It was her ill-will that provoked the dog and brought danger to herself.

These are the faults of ill-will. Contemplating these can strengthen our motivation to cultivate loving-kindness.

### 3. The Power of Mettā

Loving-kindness can benefit both the giver and the receiver. In the West, many scientific experiments have proven the win-win benefits of loving-kindness and benevolent thoughts.



### **3.1. Strengthening interpersonal relationships**

A study by Stanford University points out that just seven minutes' practice of loving-kindness meditation can strengthen the practitioner's interpersonal relationships. Barbara Fadlison, a researcher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, also noted that loving-kindness meditation could help in generating positive emotions and a sense of happiness in life, leading to good interpersonal relationships. One of Sayalay's students said that before practicing loving-kindness meditation, she frequently got into heated arguments with her boyfriend; now, by practicing loving-kindness meditation, she has improved her relationship with him.

### **3.2. Increasing positive emotions, reducing back pain and anger**

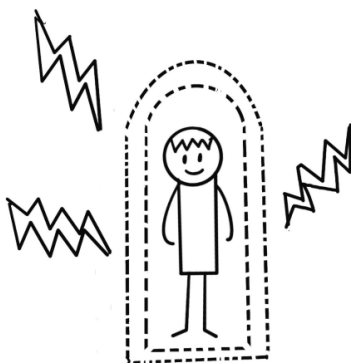
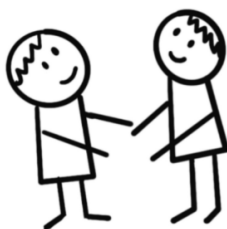
One brain study found that benevolent thoughts could positively influence our brains. When we have benevolent thoughts, such as loving-kindness, tolerance, forgiveness, or wisdom, such thoughts can alter cranial nerves and bring positive energy to our brains, ensuring a healthy mental state. In addition, other studies proved that for patients with chronic back pain, loving-kindness meditation can alleviate pain and reduce pain-triggered anger. Practicing loving-kindness meditation can reduce ill-will in our hearts, and with a lower occurrence of ill-will arising, our bodies will be healthier.

### **3.3. Reducing the incidence of depression, heart disease, migraine, and diabetes**

Neuroscientist Richard J. Davidson once measured brain waves in people who had practiced loving-kindness meditation for more than 10,000 hours. His study found that both during and after practicing loving-kindness meditation, the synchrony of the gamma waves in these practitioners' brains was particularly strong. Even when they were not practicing loving-kindness meditation, the brain waves of loving-kindness practitioners — both monastics and householders — were different from those who were not loving-kindness meditation practitioners.

This study showed that when practicing loving-kindness meditation, the temporo-parietal junction, insular cortex, and amygdala of their brains were more active compared to the general population, which enhanced their ability to observe things from another perspective. At the same time, the autonomic nervous system was altered by the meditation, and the heart rate of these meditators had slowed down.

These studies prove that the amygdala of our brains can be adjusted when we practice loving-kindness meditation. It has also been found that the practice of loving-kindness meditation can reduce a practitioner's grief reaction to sudden mishaps and can reduce the occurrence of depression, heart disease, and diabetes. The degree of change varies depending on the time spent practicing. The longer the practice, the more noticeable the changes in brain waves.

**Enhance inner cultivation****Defuse danger****Defuse hostility from others**

Another study has shown that a brief loving-kindness meditation can alleviate migraines and relieve emotional stress associated with chronic migraines. Because of these benefits, Westerners are increasingly valuing meditation. In conclusion, practicing loving-kindness meditation can lead to improved health.

### 3.4. Defusing danger

Nowadays, there are many cases proving the effectiveness of distance healing. Similarly, loving-kindness meditation can generate a benevolent energy that can also be transmitted over a long distance. Wherever the recipient might be, they can receive our wishes.

It is mentioned in the Abhidhamma that the human mind can produce a kind of matter called “mind-generated matter.” This mind-generated matter arises in groups containing eight elements: earth, water, fire, air, color, smell, taste, and nutrient essence; a group is called “rupa-kalāpa” in Pāli. The fire element in each kalāpa can then give rise to a new generation of kalāpa called “temperature-generated kalāpa.” The arising of kalāpa generated by loving-kindness only occurs within the body, but the fire element in that kalāpa can generate a new generation of temperature-generated kalāpa not only within the body but also outside the body. The fire element in the new generation of temperature-generated kalāpa can then generate a second generation of temperature-generated kalāpa, and the fire element in the second generation of temperature-generated kalāpa can then generate a third generation of temperature-generated kalāpa, and so on — the fire element continues to generate new generations of temperature-generated kalāpa. These temperature-generated kalāpa derived from loving-kindness will transform into positive energy that can radiate from the practitioner's own body to others far away, increasing their goodwill or dissolving their ill-will.

The Buddha's taming of the drunken elephant Nālāgiri with loving-kindness is the best example. Devadatta was very jealous of the Buddha's achievements and wanted to supersede him, so he tried every way he could to harm the Buddha. One morning, in the city of Vesālī, the Buddha and his disciples, wearing robes and carrying their bowls, were walking toward the city for alms round. Devadatta bribed a man to get the fierce elephant Nālāgiri drunk, then asked him to unchain the elephant and drive it to attack the Buddha. The drunken elephant would trample on anyone it encountered, and the people were so afraid that they all hid in their houses, leaving only the Buddha and his disciples on the street. When the drunken elephant saw the Buddha and his disciples from a distance, it behaved very violently — gnashing its tusks, lifting its snout, raising its tail, and spreading its ears. It then charged wildly towards the Buddha, trying to attack him. Faced with this raging beast, the Buddha did not panic, and instead he calmly radiated loving-kindness towards the drunken elephant. The power of the Buddha's loving-kindness had an incredible soothing effect on the drunken elephant. As the elephant rushed toward the Buddha, it suddenly stopped and knelt down with its front legs, as if paying homage to the Buddha! The power of the Buddha's loving heart had obviously diminished the rage of this drunken elephant. We may find this hard to believe, but that is because we have not yet experienced the power of loving-kindness!

Here, Sayalay Susīlā would like to share her experience. Once, in the middle of the night, Sayalay was startled awake by extreme sharp pain, which was caused by tiny

ants biting and crawling all over her body. Most people might have immediately crushed those ants and said, “You deserve it, as you bit me first!” But the teachings of harmlessness taught by the Buddha had taken root in his disciple. Sayalay was ready to endure such pain without giving in to violence. So she tried to gently remove them one by one, fearing that she might accidentally kill them. Contrary to her expectation, the more she tried to remove them, the tighter they clung on. Her skin was starting to turn red and swollen, and she was at her wits’ end, not knowing what to do. Then, in a flash of insight, she decided to employ the weapon monastics would use to protect themselves — loving-kindness. So she sat up, tried to forget about the pain they were causing, and very joyfully radiated loving-kindness to them. She continuously wished for them: “May you be well and happy, free from hostility ... May you be well and happy, free from hostility...”

Amazingly, within just a few minutes, most of the ants stopped biting her. Her loving thoughts had obviously lowered their aggression — they probably could not resist the power of loving-kindness. Although there were one or two somewhat slow receivers of Sayalay’s loving-kindness who continued to bite her, strangely, she could only feel the bite, but no pain at all. After this incident, these ants no longer attacked her. They always crawled freely on the table, walls, and baseboards, but never on her body. Since then, Sayalay and these ants have lived in peace with each other and have shared the space together. She is grateful to them for teaching her this valuable lesson.



When our minds stop focusing on our own suffering and spread loving-kindness to others who have hurt us, we do not feel physical pain any more. How is that? Before Sayalay decided to spread loving-kindness to those little ants, she was slightly irritated because of the pain caused by their bites. But in the midst of spreading loving-kindness, the physical pain could not manifest itself. This shows that loving-kindness has a therapeutic effect on pain. Moreover, when we forget that we are being hurt and hold only compassionate love for others, our hearts will be peaceful and calm. The state of mind that forgets about oneself, in which self no longer exists, can make our hearts fearless and courageous. Therefore, enduring harm done to us by others without giving in to ill-will is possible because the power of an egoless mind is limitless. People are all equipped with this power, as long as they know how to let go of clinging to the self.

Another example of loving-kindness defusing hostility occurred when Sayalay was hiking with her family members. When they were passing a remote trail, a few dogs blocked their way and barked furiously at them. Sayalay's family members were intimidated and hesitant to move forward. At that moment, she asked them to radiate loving-kindness to those dogs: "May they be safe and happy, free from hostility ... May they be safe and happy, free from hostility..." Sayalay herself was smiling at those dogs too, as countless experiences had taught her that a loving smile is the best weapon to defuse hostility. As expected, something incredible happened — the positive energy of their loving-kindness had an effect on those dogs,

and they immediately stepped aside and gave way to the group. This was the first time Sayalay's family members learned to spread loving-kindness, and its effect astounded them. A genuine compassionate wish of "May you be safe and happy" is like a magic spell, capable of turning danger into safety.

### **3.5. Defusing hostility from others**

Loving-kindness is like a cooling ointment that can soothe the fiery hostility of others. One day, during the time of the Buddha, he was visiting a small country with a group of bhikkhus. The king ordered all princes, nobles, and civilians to come out of the city to greet the Buddha, otherwise they would be fined. Venerable Ānanda saw that his friend Roja the Malla was among them.

He happily said to the prince, "It is truly rare that you have developed faith in the Buddha."

The prince replied uncomfortably, "I was forced to be here to greet the Buddha."

After hearing the words of Roja the Malla, Venerable Ānanda thought to himself that Roja the Malla was so ignorant and arrogant that he did not realize that meeting the Buddha in person was unsurpassable meritorious kamma for him! In order to make the delusional Roja the Malla gain faith in the Buddha, Venerable Ānanda reported to the Buddha what had just happened and asked the Buddha to spread loving-kindness to Roja the Malla, hoping that this would change his ungrateful attitude

towards the Buddha. The Buddha agreed. Generally, the Buddha would radiate loving-kindness to all sentient beings, but this time the Buddha directed his loving-kindness specifically to Roja the Malla.

At that time, Roja the Malla was in the palace, and he suddenly had a strong urge to be close to the Buddha. So he left the palace and searched everywhere for the Buddha, like a stray baby chicken looking for its mother. When Roja the Malla finally found where the Buddha was residing, his inner turmoil was finally eased. He humbly bowed to the Buddha three times, and the Buddha preached the Dhamma to him. Roja the Malla gained faith in the Buddha and became a devout follower from that day on.

### **3.5. Enhancing inner cultivation**

Under the protection of loving-kindness, we are not prone to get angry with others. Sayalay remembers an incident that occurred when she was with a group of students. In front of everyone, a hot-tempered young student yelled at her so loudly that others were petrified, but she was unaffected, as if nothing had happened. When someone vents their anger on Sayalay without reason, she only feels sympathy for them. People with loving-kindness are less likely to complain or blame others when they encounter adversity in life, because the essence of loving-kindness is hoping others will be happy. If we are in the habit of blaming others for our own suffering, the fire of ill-will and delusion will keep burning ourselves and others, creating a predicament for both. This in turn will continuously

strengthen our habitual responses — of only complaining and neither reflecting on our own faults nor contemplating kamma and its consequences. When this habit becomes deeply rooted, it becomes even more difficult to change. Wise ones clearly understand that our suffering and happiness stem from inner cultivation, and external challenges reveal the depth of our cultivation.

## **4. The Importance of Unshakable Faith for Cultivating Loving-Kindness**

Most Asian Buddhist disciples know the power of loving-kindness, so when their family members are sick, undergoing a surgery, or in danger — or even when they want their children to pass a college entrance examination — they will come to the monastery and ask monastics to spread loving-kindness for them, which keeps the monastics quite busy! They have forgotten that they themselves have the ability to radiate loving-kindness, too. We should all learn loving-kindness meditation so that we can not only enjoy the happiness brought by loving-kindness but also help our family members, friends, and ourselves in times of difficulty, or even turn a crisis into safety. Remember, it is better to rely on ourselves rather than on others.

In previous sections, we discussed how practicing loving-kindness meditation can reduce a practitioner's grief in reaction to sudden mishaps, thus lowering the occurrence of depression. So when we feel depressed, we should not forget to spread loving-kindness to ourselves:

“May I be happy, peaceful, and free from depression;

May I be happy, peaceful, and free from depression.”

Such wishes can bring positive energy to our hearts and help maintain a healthy mental state. Afterwards, if we feel comfortable, we can radiate loving-kindness to others: “May all sentient beings be similarly happy, peaceful, and free from depression.” At the moment of radiating these wishes, not only will we be able to forget our own depression, but the loving-kindness and benevolent thoughts arising in our hearts will also have a therapeutic effect on our bodies, alleviating our depression.

Unfortunately, many people do not have the good kamma necessary to meet an experienced teacher, or they do not put loving-kindness into practice in their daily life after learning it, or they do not have confidence in the power of loving-kindness or in themselves. Therefore, they would rather leave their health in the hands of psychotherapists. Wanting to cultivate loving-kindness and yet lacking faith in loving-kindness makes loving-kindness powerless. Therefore, in the practice of loving-kindness meditation, the unshakable faith in both loving-kindness and one’s own ability is essential.

## 5. Prerequisites for Cultivating Loving-Kindness

Can anyone practice loving-kindness meditation? Sure. But many find it difficult to have joy and happiness when practicing loving-kindness meditation. Why is that? First of all, it is due to lack of practice. Additionally, we might lack the conditions necessary to nurture loving-kindness. The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* outlines the virtuous qualities a skilled practitioner should possess. Although this sutta is addressed to monastics, some of these qualities are indeed helpful for householders in cultivating loving-kindness. Here are a few:

### 5.1. Competent

Being competent means knowing the correct methods for practice and being able to continuously practice and progress without needing constant prompting and guidance from the teacher.

### 5.2. Upright and honest

To cultivate loving-kindness, we must be extremely upright and honest, without hypocrisy or pretence. We should be honest with ourselves and others, not hiding our shortcomings. When we make a mistake, we should not

shift the blame but sincerely apologize and seek forgiveness. When others make mistakes, we can easily forgive as well because we naturally possess loving-kindness for others. If we are insincere or deceitful, how could our loving-kindness be genuine?

### **5.3. Humble and easy to instruct**

Humble people are easy to instruct. Being easy to instruct means that we are willing to accept others' advice and criticism without getting angry. We can follow our teacher's guidance without stubbornly clinging to our own views. Venerable Rāhula was just like this. Before he renounced, Venerable Rāhula was a prince and the only child of the Buddha. After renouncing, he did not exhibit any arrogance typical of a prince, nor did he use his status as the Buddha's son to be overbearing or resist instructions. He was well-mannered, humble, and compliant, and he readily followed teachings from elders.

If we are headstrong and opinionated, we become unteachable — when a teacher kindly points out our shortcomings, we immediately defend ourselves. To the unteachable, the teacher's words are like water poured into a broken jar, draining away immediately. People like this find it challenging to cultivate loving-kindness.

### **5.4. Gentle**

We must also be gentle — maintaining a kind and gentle demeanor in action, speech, and thought. Gentleness can



facilitate a successful practice of loving-kindness meditation.

## 5.5. Content

Contentment means being satisfied with everything we possess, a manifestation of non-greed. The Buddha said, **“Contentment is the greatest wealth.”** (*Dhammapada* 204). A content child is satisfied with their old, worn-out shoes because they know there are many poor children who have no shoes at all. When we are content, we lack nothing and are therefore happy. Being happy makes it easier for us to practice loving-kindness meditation. It has been said that contentment is like wrapping our feet in leather: when we walk on the ground, although leather cannot cover the entire earth, it can cover our feet, allowing us to walk happily across the entire land (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Chapter 5, Verse 13). Such a person will undoubtedly excel in cultivating loving-kindness.

In contrast, if we are discontent, we try every possible way to obtain what we want, and once we have it, we want even more. Whether we obtain our desires or not, we are filled with delusions and anxieties. If we are only concerned with our own self-interest, how can we selflessly wish for peace and happiness for all sentient beings?

## 5.6. Few worldly duties

Being overly busy with worldly duties prevents mental concentration and leaves no free time for practicing loving-

kindness meditation. If we are busy with numerous tasks, we will tend to have scattered and restless minds and find it difficult to relax, making it harder for us to cultivate loving-kindness.

## 6.7. Observing precepts

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* states:

*One should not commit even the slightest fault that would be criticized by the wise.*

If we observe the precepts, we are less likely to make mistakes. Generally speaking, what a wise one criticizes is usually unwholesome deeds that harm oneself and others. So avoid evil. If we do evil, we feel guilty and remorseful. Such negative mindsets are obstacles to the progress of loving-kindness meditation.

Upon reading this, some might lose confidence and immediately say, “I am no candidate for practicing loving-kindness meditation because I lack the above qualities.” Don't worry! Although possessing these qualities can facilitate a smooth and pleasant practice of loving-kindness meditation, it does not mean that we must possess these conditions prior to starting the practice, nor does it mean that practitioners who have not fully met these conditions cannot practice loving-kindness meditation. Once loving-kindness is cultivated, these good qualities will also be strengthened along with it.



**Competent**



**Upright and honest**



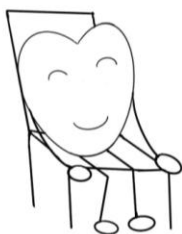
**Humble and easy to instruct**



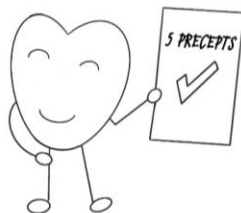
**Gentle**



**Content**



**Few worldly duties**



**Observing precepts**

**Conditions for cultivating loving-kindness**

## 6. Methods of Practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation

Loving-kindness needs to be cultivated by oneself; no one can bestow it upon us. This chapter explains two methods of practicing loving-kindness meditation based on the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* and the *Visuddhimagga*.

Householders are often entangled in family responsibilities and live hectic lives, rarely having time to participate in long-term intensive meditation retreats to attain jhāna. Therefore, we should first practice loving-kindness meditation in our daily lives. When we have experienced the joy and transformation brought by loving-kindness and have built confidence, we can then move forward and systematically practice loving-kindness meditation aiming at attaining jhāna.

### 6.1. Practice in Daily Life

#### 6.1.1. Relax

When our minds and bodies are stiff, tense, anxious, or fearful, our inner loving-kindness cannot flourish. To cultivate the seeds of loving-kindness, we must learn to relax.

Start by closing the eyes and sitting comfortably and relaxed. Think about something that makes you happy, and then smile. Smiling can lighten your mood and allow your mind to let go of all burdens, such as regrets about the past and worries about the future. Start with scanning your body to relax.

Focus on our head and tell yourself: “Relax”;

Then move your attention to your face and say: “Relax”;

Next, focus on your neck and say: “Relax”.

Continue downwards: relax your shoulders, arms, back, chest, belly, hips, legs, knees, calves, and feet.

Scan from head to toe, again and again, telling yourself to relax. Examine each part of the body, ensuring that both mind and body are in a soft and peaceful state. Reflect on your aspirations for your life — health, happiness, and ease.

### **6.1.2. Take yourself as the meditation object**

Next, spread loving-kindness to yourself. If we do not know how to love ourselves, it will be difficult to have loving-kindness for others. How can we spread loving-kindness to ourselves? We can use some wishing phrases. We divide our wishes into short phrases, such as:

“May I be free from animosity.

May I be well and free from illness.

May I be happy and free from mental suffering.

May I take care of myself joyfully.”

Continuously spread these kind wishes to yourself. You can repeat the first phrase until you feel relaxed and happy and then move on to the second and third phrases. Alternatively, you can choose the phrase that resonates most with you for long-term practice, such as “May I take care of myself joyfully.”



**May I be free from animosity**

**May I be well and free from illness**

**May I be happy and free from mental suffering**

**May I take care of myself joyfully**

Some people might gradually feel bored because a single wishing phrase can be monotonous. At this point, you can alternate between different wishing phrases for practice. Choose the one that best suits your current needs or resonates most with you, as this will allow your loving-kindness to quickly arise. Whether using a single phrase or multiple phrases, practice for a few days or weeks. For beginners, practicing for about ten to twenty minutes each day is sufficient. Remember to practice with a smile and a sense of ease.

### **6.1.3. Take a respected one as the meditation object**

Next, think of someone you respect or who has helped you, but do not choose a close family member. Why not? Because attachment can disguise itself as mettā, tainting the mettā with affection. Thus, in the beginning, avoid spreading loving-kindness to those who are too close to you, such as partners, parents, or children. Radiating loving-kindness to those you are very close to can unconsciously lead to attachment without awareness.

The respected person you choose should not be someone you might be attracted to, because that can easily lead to lust. They should also still be alive, because deceased people now have a different appearance and no longer look as we remember them; besides, thinking of the deceased might stir up difficult emotions.

First, remember this person's smiling face, and then reflect on one of their virtues, such as generosity, caring, honesty, and so on. Let your mind fill with joy and then direct loving kindness towards them by repeatedly wishing:

“May he or she be free from animosity.

May he or she be well and free from illness.

May he or she be happy and free from mental suffering.

May he or she take care of himself or herself joyfully.”

(You can also use that person's name.)

While repeatedly sending these wishes one by one to the respected person, occasionally visualize their smile — this will surely make you feel relaxed and happy.

Once you get familiar with the practice, you can choose one or more wishing phrases that resonate the most to repeat. You can also choose the phrases that best suit your current needs. Practice for about twenty minutes.

Generally, in the beginning, loving-kindness arises easily, and the heart feels joyful. However, after a while, loving-kindness might gradually recede as distracting thoughts enter the mind. At this point, reflect more on the person's different virtues to recharge and enhance the loving-kindness. Do this whenever loving-kindness starts to fade, in order to sustain its growth.



### **6.1.4. Take family members as the meditation object**

Next, spread loving-kindness to your family members for ten minutes. This is something that most people are eager to do. It is recommended to include the entire family as a whole, rather than focusing on individual family members, such as just the mother, wife, or husband. This helps avoid turning loving-kindness into attachment.

The commentary for the *Visudhimagga* mentions a householder who was learning loving-kindness meditation from a bhikkhu. The bhikkhu forgot to instruct him not to direct loving-kindness to his beloved first. Unaware of this, the householder directed loving-kindness towards his wife from the very beginning. His attachment continuously grew and eventually turned into a strong desire to have sex with his wife!

### **6.1.5. Take people nearby as the meditation object**

It is sufficient to spread loving-kindness to our family members for about ten minutes. Next spread loving-kindness to your neighbors, either an individual or a group of people:

“May they be free from hostility.

May they be well and free from illness.

May they be happy and free from mental suffering.

May they take care of themselves joyfully.”

Then, expand your loving-kindness from near to far. For example, start with your immediate neighbors and gradually extend it to more distant regions, eventually encompassing the entire world.

In the next section, we will use *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* to define the scope of all sentient beings and the method to cultivate boundless loving-kindness in different directions.

## 6.2. Cultivate Loving-Kindness towards All Sentient Beings According to the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*

In the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, the Buddha emphasized his teaching to radiate loving-kindness towards all sentient beings. Who are all sentient beings? The sutta says:

*All sentient beings in existence, frail or firm, no one is left out,*

*long or large, medium or small, fine or coarse,*

*seen or unseen, living far or near,*

*having been born or seeking to be born: may all beings be happy within.*

### 6.2.1. Classification of “all sentient beings”

In the sutta, beings are classified into various categories, such as: frail, firm, long, large, medium, small, fine, coarse,

seen or unseen, living far or near, born or seeking to be born.

The term “frail ones” includes those beings who are still fearful, while “firm” ones refer to those beings who are free from fear, such as arahants.

“Long ones” includes snakes, crocodiles, and so forth;

“Large ones” refers to species that are bigger in size than humans and are not domesticated, such as large land animals like elephants, lions, rhinoceroses, and deer, as well as giant aquatic species like whales and sharks.

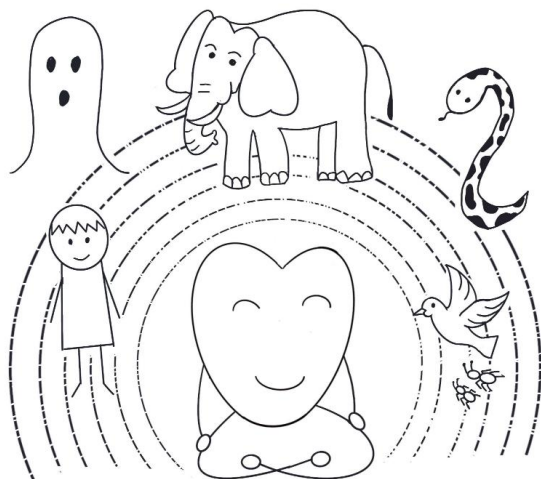
“Medium ones” includes humans, sheep, dogs, and other creatures that are roughly human-sized.

“Small, fine, or coarse ones” includes land animals like mice and ants, small birds flying in the sky, and small fish in the water. “Coarse” ones also includes creatures like hedgehogs.

“Seen” refers to those that are visible with the naked eye, including humans, birds, and animals; “unseen” refers to those that are invisible with the naked eye or have not been seen, such as deities, hungry ghosts, hell beings, and humans.

Beings who are “living near or far” are measured relative to our own body: beings who are “living near” are those that are close to our own body; beings who are “living far” are those that are distant from our own body.

“Seeking to be born” refers to all sentient beings except arahants, including sotāpanna (stream-enterer), sakadāgāmin (once-returner), and anāgāmin (non-returner).



**Cultivate loving-kindness to all sentient beings**

Radiate loving-kindness to all sentient beings based on the above categories. To make it easier for loving-kindness to arise, first reflect that all sentient beings have once been our family members and loved ones. The Buddha said:

*In this endless transmigration with no discernible beginning, it is not easy to find a single being who has not once been our mother... our father... our brother... our sister... our son... our daughter.*

— *Saṃyutta Nikāya 15.14-19*

From an inconceivable beginning, beings have been transmigrating through the endless cycle of births and rebirths (saṃsāra) and have met each other again and again. By viewing all sentient beings as our past family members,

we will feel a sense of closeness, making it easier for loving-kindness to arise.

When radiating loving-kindness to all sentient beings, do not focus on any specific individual. If an image appears, envelop that image with loving-kindness. If no image appears, it does not matter; continue to spread loving-kindness and repeatedly wish for all sentient beings to be safe, happy, and peaceful.

Ensure that your wishes are sincere. Earnestly and repeatedly spread loving-kindness from your heart, feeling it as waves moving forward, layer upon layer, with peace in your heart. Be patient. At first, it may feel like a dry and boring recitation of words, but over time loving-kindness will gradually emerge.

### **6.2.2. Avoid factors causing unhappiness**

Next, wish that all sentient beings avoid the factors causing them unhappiness. According to the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*:

*No one should deceive another, nor despise another in any place;*

*Out of thoughts of anger and aversion, no one should wish suffering for another.*

When spreading loving-kindness, we not only wish for sentient beings to be happy but also hope that they avoid unwholesome bodily, verbal, and mental kamma, such as deceit or contempt for others, that could lead to unhappiness. Deceit and contempt can bring suffering to

others, cause the victims to hold grudges, and make it so both parties are unable to be happy.

Happiness stems from doing good, so when trying to find genuine happiness, we must understand the cause of happiness and act accordingly. True happiness is based on not harming others; when we are hurt, we should not wish others to be harmed out of anger. Instead, we should maintain compassion and loving-kindness, with no resentment in our hearts. In the face of being hurt by others, however, it is indeed very difficult to avoid anger by arousing and maintaining loving-kindness.

The Buddha personally demonstrated this teaching. Devadatta once attempted to murder the Buddha by rolling a large rock down a slope. The Buddha's feet were injured by fragments of the rock, and he had to endure severe pain. When he was resting due to his injuries, Māra came to taunt him. The Buddha responded:

*"I lie down with compassion for all sentient beings."*

— *Samiyutta Nikāya* 4.13

This is the boundless loving-kindness of the Buddha for all sentient beings, including his enemy. When we can maintain such love and equanimity in the face of suffering, the harm inflicted by others will be as insignificant as a drop of water. With loving-kindness in our hearts, we provide protection for both ourselves and others.

### 6.2.3. Cultivate boundless loving-kindness in different directions

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* also says that we should cultivate boundless loving-kindness towards all sentient beings:

*...just as a mother would do for her child, protecting her only child with her own life.*

We should regard all sentient beings as our own children and then cultivate boundless loving-kindness, radiating it throughout the entire world:

*...above, below, and all around — without obstruction, animosity, and hostility.*

This phrase means to cultivate boundless loving-kindness towards all sentient beings in different directions.

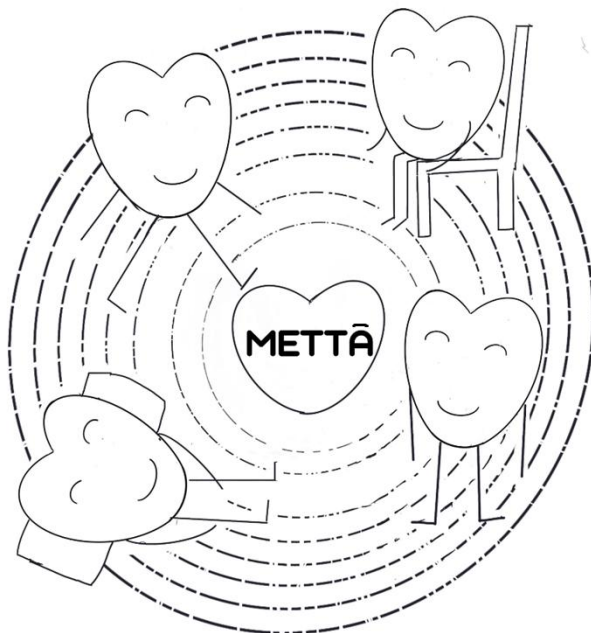
“Above” includes heavenly beings from the formless realm, the form realm, and the sensual realm, as well as birds.

“Below” includes beings from the sensual realm, such as humans, hungry ghosts, hell beings, animals, reptiles, and marine life.

“All around” includes the four directions of east, south, west, and north.

The radiating of loving-kindness has no boundaries, harbors no resentment, and is without hostility for others.

### 6.2.4. Practice at all times



**Practice at all times**

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* continues:

*Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, as long as one is not drowsy, one should resolve on such mindfulness (loving-kindness).*

This statement requires practitioners who are in an intensive period of loving-kindness practice to have the diligence — whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down — to continuously cultivate loving-kindness. It also highlights how loving-kindness meditation can be



practiced at any time, not just during formal sitting meditation. Once we have learned loving-kindness meditation, we can spread loving-kindness while standing, walking, or lying down, following the same method as when sitting, only with a different posture.

Ordinary householders, with limited time for sitting meditation, should learn to practice loving-kindness anytime, anywhere. For example, while walking on the street, in elevators, waiting for buses, or riding trains, we can spread loving-kindness to the people around us; or when meeting friends, we can smile and say “May you be happy” instead of our usual greetings.

In a business setting, employers can spread loving-kindness to their employees. Once the employees are happy, their productivity is increased. When attending a meeting where tension might arise, attendees can spread loving-kindness to their colleagues before and during the meeting to dissolve any potential or existing tension. One student shared his experience that when he had conversations with his colleagues in the office, he often spread loving-kindness to them. Additionally, he encouraged himself to spread loving-kindness to a different colleague every day as a way of practicing loving-kindness meditation in his daily life.

While driving, instead of getting angry at a driver who recklessly pulls into the lane we are in, take this opportunity to practice loving-kindness meditation — “May they be safe and free from danger.”

When our mother or partner nags or complains, avoid instinctively arguing back, which will elevate their anger or increase the tension. Instead, learn to immediately spread loving-kindness to them. The power of loving-kindness can leave them speechless and unable to utter any angry words, giving us peace of mind and making everyone happy!

If we enjoy strolling in the park, don't forget to spread loving-kindness to other walkers and be rewarded with plenty of smiles in return!

While doing housework, we can wish for ourselves, our family members, and neighbors to be safe, happy, and peaceful. Let loving-kindness flow naturally, filling your heart. Consistently practicing in this way over the long term can promote harmony within our families and foster peaceful relationships with people around us.

Parents can try to practice five minutes of loving-kindness meditation with their children before going to bed. By practicing every day, we can gradually cultivate loving-kindness in our children, and the entire family can sleep peacefully.

When we are in remote mountainous areas or walking alone on dark streets, our instinct for self-protection might lead us into wild imaginings — like mistaking a coil of rope for a snake — causing fear in our hearts. At such times, in order to prevent our minds from dwelling in fear, we should radiate loving-kindness to all sentient beings — both seen or unseen. When our hearts focus on a wholesome object, the power of the heart will collect on the wholesome object and not spin off into wild imaginings.

Once, a Thai bhikkhu was walking in the forest at night, holding a lantern in his hand. Suddenly, he heard the roar of a tiger in front of him. Scared to death, he wanted to turn around and run away, but the roar of another tiger came from behind him. Though this was a cold and windy night, he could feel sweat trickling down his body. He thought, “This time I am doomed to die!” Escape was out of the question. He decided to apply his spiritual strength to overcome his fear of death. So he closed his eyes and spread loving-kindness to the tigers. Gradually, he entered and abided in loving-kindness *jhāna*, forgetting about himself, forgetting about time, forgetting about the tigers. When he came out of the *jhāna*, the lantern was still on but the tigers were gone. This experience helped him to overcome his fear, and he was no longer afraid of walking alone in a forest inhabited by wild beasts. The power of loving-kindness is truly extraordinary!

### **6.2.5. Avoid mechanical repetition and worry**

Mechanical repetition is a common issue for beginners and is one of the reasons for joy not arising when practicing loving-kindness meditation. To avoid mechanical repetition, use your imagination — envision the person becoming increasingly happy as you envelop them in loving-kindness. When their joyful image appears, you too will feel joy right in that moment and might even smile. Alternatively, as previously mentioned, you can change the virtue that you’re reflecting on to a different one, or alternate the wishing phrases so that you experience the joy and power brought by loving thoughts.

If you still cannot avoid mechanical repetition that causes the heart to feel weary and bored, stop reciting the phrases. Instead, just gently and slowly feel the loving-kindness in your heart — even if it's just a tiny amount.

When your heart is filled with worries, anxiety, and distracting thoughts, it is indeed very uncomfortable. If you feel restless during the practice or feel inexplicably worried and anxious, or if you are having all kinds of distracting thoughts, then repeatedly spread loving-kindness to yourself: “May I be free from anxiety and mental suffering.” Then visualize yourself being free from anxiety and mental suffering.

At this time, you can also think about those who are similarly overwhelmed by this kind of suffering and reflect on how they are surely suffering as much as you are. Then, generate loving-kindness towards them, wishing them to be free from mental suffering as well. Regardless of the type of meditation, it is vital to first overcome the worries and restlessness in your mind, letting the heart settle so that loving-kindness can arise.

## 6.3. Attaining Jhāna through Loving-Kindness Meditation According to the *Visuddhimagga*

### 6.3.1. Method recorded in the *Visuddhimagga*

If we want to enter into deep concentration and attain jhāna through the practice of loving-kindness meditation, the commentary text *Visuddhimagga* provides guidance. We should choose four groups of people for practice — ourselves, someone respected, someone indifferent, and enemies.

#### i. Take oneself as the meditation object

First, spread loving-kindness to yourself for about ten minutes. Spreading loving-kindness to yourself does not lead to attaining jhāna, so why is it necessary to send loving-kindness to yourself first? Because only a happy person can treat others with sincere loving-kindness. Imagine a doleful person full of sorrow — how could their heart hold loving-kindness for others? If we cannot love ourselves properly, how can we love others? Therefore, spread loving-kindness to yourself at the beginning until you feel inwardly happy and serene. Only then can you realize how precious happiness is to everyone. After that, you can move on to spreading loving-kindness to the second group of people: someone you respect, or someone who has done you a favor.

## **ii. Take someone respected as the meditation object**

According to the commentaries, in order to attain *jhāna*, a beginner practicing loving-kindness meditation should not choose the following objects for practice: (1) someone not loved; (2) someone extremely loved; (3) enemies; (4) someone indifferent (neither disliked nor liked); (5) someone of the opposite gender; and (6) the dead.

Practicing loving-kindness towards someone not loved can lead to weariness and the inability to generate loving-kindness; practicing loving-kindness towards someone extremely loved can easily lead to attachment; practicing loving-kindness towards enemies will lead to anger; practicing loving-kindness towards indifferent or unaffiliated people can also lead to weariness and difficulty generating loving-kindness; practicing loving-kindness towards someone you may be attracted to can lead to cravings for sexual pleasure; and practicing loving-kindness towards the dead cannot lead to attaining *jhāna*.

Instead, choose someone you respect or who has offered help to you, such as a teacher or a friend. Contemplate their virtues and sincerely wish from your heart, “May they be safe, happy, and peaceful.” If you can recall the help they offered in the past and genuinely cultivate a sense of gratitude from your heart, it will be easier to generate loving-kindness towards them.

Traditionally, we use these four wishing phrases to cultivate loving-kindness:

“May you be free from hostility and danger.

May you be happy and free from mental suffering.

May you be well and free from physical suffering.

May you take care of yourself joyfully.”

For beginners, it is sufficient to choose any of the above wishing phrases. Visualize the smiling face of this respected person in your mind, or call their name, and recite the chosen phrase repeatedly for hundreds or thousands of times, supplemented with a bit of imagination, and sincerely wish them well. It is of no use to just recite the phrase repetitively without sincere loving-kindness. If at first the image of the person is not so clear in your mind, that is all right. No need to forcefully try to lock onto an image, as this can cause dizziness and exhaustion. In such situations, what we need the most is loving-kindness for ourselves.

Some teachers put a strong emphasis on vividly seeing the image in our minds of those who are receiving our wishes. However, the key point should be: choose a recipient of loving-kindness, direct the mind towards them, and repeatedly focus on your mind's intention to generate loving-kindness, wishing “May they be well and happy.” If we continuously spread loving-kindness from our hearts, regardless of whether the image is clear or blurred, our concentration will gradually strengthen. As our concentration strengthens, the image of the person we respect will become clearer and clearer in our minds, until we can see their smiling face. This method is more relaxed and natural, not exhausting. Their smile will enhance our joy, which will continue to deepen our concentration, and

the loving-kindness in our hearts will become steadier. When our hearts become joyful and the concentration deepens, our minds and the image of the person we respect will become brighter due to concentration, showing that loving-kindness meditation can also generate light. If we can continuously and steadily spread loving-kindness to the person we respect for one to two hours without any distracting thoughts, we will become happier and happier inwardly. From happiness comes concentration — this will help us to attain the first jhāna.

Loving-kindness meditation can guide us into the first, second, and third jhānas. When attaining the first jhāna, there are five jhāna factors — applied thought, sustained thought, rapture, pleasure, and one-pointedness of the mind. The first jhāna is described as follows:

*Secluded from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters and abides in the first jhāna, which consists of rapture and pleasure born of seclusion ... The rapture and pleasure born of seclusion moisten, soak, fill, and pervade his body, so that there is no part of his body that is not pervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.*

— *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 5.28

The practice of loving-kindness meditation can be used to attain the first three jhānas. For smoother progress, after attaining the first jhāna, you should find an experienced teacher who can guide you in moving from the first jhāna into the second and third jhānas.



By practicing loving-kindness meditation, we can only attain up to the third jhāna but not the fourth jhāna. This is because practicing loving-kindness meditation ultimately results in a feeling of pleasure and happiness that is closely related to the jhāna factors of pleasure and happiness. The fourth jhāna has only two jhāna factors: purified equanimity and mindfulness, and one-pointedness of the mind. It is “without pain and without pleasure” (*adukkhamasukham*), meaning that the jhāna factor of pleasure has fallen away. Loving-kindness meditation cannot generate this state of neither-pleasure-nor-pain required for the fourth jhāna.

### **iii. Take a neutral person as the meditation object**

After attaining the third jhāna with someone respected, we can now take a neutral person as the object of practice. A neutral person is someone we neither love nor hate. If we succeed in attaining the third jhāna with a neutral person as our meditation object, we are ready to take an enemy as a recipient of loving-kindness.

### **iv. Take an enemy as the meditation object and counteract ill-will**

Enemies are not limited to people who have harmed us through bodily, verbal, and mental actions but also include people who dislike us. It is easy to spread loving-kindness to ourselves, to someone respected, and to neutral person, but radiating loving-kindness to enemy is a big challenge. When thinking of enemies, the past is played like a movie, one scene after another in front of our eyes: this person sweet-talked me out of my money and slandered me

behind my back; that person enticed my boyfriend, causing heartbreak and humiliation for me — how could I possibly wish them happiness? At this point, we might already be filled with righteous anger, feeling an urge to slap their face, and the loving-kindness we had cultivated earlier may vanish as a result.

A practitioner once said: “When I spread loving-kindness to my enemy and wish them peace and happiness, I always worry that they might actually become peaceful and happy!” This shows that spreading loving-kindness to enemies is truly not an easy task! For this reason, it is more appropriate to leave enemies for last after we have gained some skill and concentration in the practice of spreading loving-kindness. So, how do we counteract ill-will?

In the *Anguttara Nikāya* 5.161, the Buddha taught us five methods to counteract ill-will:

*Bhikkhus, one should use these five methods to completely get rid of resentment when it has arisen toward anyone. What five? You should develop loving-kindness ... compassion ... equanimity ... should disregard the person ... should focus on the ownership of kamma for the person one resents.*

#### a) Choosing “enemies” accordingly

When spreading loving-kindness to enemies, here are some tips to avoid getting angry. First, avoid choosing the one you hate the most — there is no need to challenge your limits at the very beginning. Start by choosing someone you slightly dislike, setting aside your discontent with them and

contemplating their good qualities. Everyone has good qualities — even the most evil person in the world might also be the best father ever. Choosing someone for whom you have a lower level of aversion allows you to understand to what extent your mind needs to be strengthened.

If you can successfully spread loving-kindness to someone you slightly dislike, then you can send loving-kindness to those who are more bothersome. If resentment arises and prevents you from continuing to spread loving-kindness, set that person aside and return to radiating loving-kindness to someone you respect until your heart is happy and focused, then redirect loving-kindness again towards those you dislike.

#### b) Counteract ill-will with compassion

If you are still unable to spread loving-kindness to our enemies, cultivate compassion towards them. Compassion involves a sense of sympathy for our enemies who have committed unwholesome bodily and verbal kamma. Recognizing that they will suffer from the consequences of their unwholesome kamma will help us develop a sense of empathy for them and forget the pain they have inflicted on us.

### c) Counteract ill-will with equanimity

*“They abused me! They hit me! They defeated me! They robbed me!” For those who bear such a grudge, their hatred is never calmed.*

—Dhammapada 3

If you cannot maintain equanimity in the face of injustice directed towards yourself and constantly harbor thoughts like “they” bully, “they” insult, “they” attack, and “I” suffer, “I” am insulted, “I” am bullied, then resentment will never cease. This is because such thoughts keep revolving around the concepts of “they,” “I,” and “people,” causing resentment to grow continuously. Isn’t it more painful to be entangled in resentment that cannot be shaken off from our minds? Is it really necessary to live our lives in resentment and pain? Remember! Changing our mindsets can transform our pain and suffering. If we can understand things according to the principle of “all phenomena are not-self, all phenomena are not-others” and realize that an eternal and substantial “I” or “they” does not exist, then there will be no “they” deceiving and no “I” getting angry. We can then maintain equanimity, and many problems will naturally resolve themselves.

### d) Counteract ill-will by shifting attention

If you find it challenging to directly counteract ill-will with loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity, try shifting your attention. Temporarily avoid thinking about things that make you angry, so you will not lose your rationality and make irreparable mistakes. Pick up an inspirational

book or suttas to read, or listen to some music you enjoy. Relax your mind; there is no need to make yourself distressed due to ill-will.

e) Counteract ill-will with contemplation of kamma and its consequences

Contemplation of kamma and its consequences means to reflect on the fact that all sentient beings are the inheritors and owners of their own kamma. Anyone who commits unwholesome kamma will face the consequences themselves. If our enemy has done unwholesome kamma against us, they will inevitably suffer from such actions. If we only remember their faults and become angry with them, we are creating unwholesome mental kamma, and we are the owners and inheritors of that unwholesome kamma. Upon contemplating in this way, we can easily let go and no longer harbor resentment.

Contemplating kamma and its consequences can prevent us from creating unwholesome kamma caused by holding on to resentment for our enemies. However, a truly wise person with right knowledge and right view does not bring in the notions of “self” or “other.” A wise person does not think that there is an “other” doing unwholesome kamma or that there is a “self” suffering the consequences. In ultimate truth, only the law of kamma is working, and there is no one creating kamma and no one suffering from the consequences. Once the “self” is successfully detached from our minds, resentment will no longer find a foothold and will instead vanish like smoke, disappearing completely.

#### f) Observe ill-will with mindfulness

If you have learned from the teachings of the Buddha to examine your thoughts, you can also take this opportunity to observe your mind. When ill-will arises in your mind, arouse mindfulness and recognize that “ill-will has arisen,” or observe that “the mind affected by ill-will is just the mind affected by ill-will,” and contemplate that ill-will is only a state of the mind, not “you” harboring ill-will. Then continue to observe that ill-will is a dependently-originated phenomenon — a state of mind that arose in line with the law of dependent origination. Explore the reasons why you hate someone — they betrayed or deceived you, verbally abused you, repaid your kindness with hostility, and so on, resulting in you holding resentment towards them. In exploring the law of dependent origination, you will realize that your ill-will towards them is based on the notion of cherishing your “self” or believing “they exist.”

In fact, our greatest enemy is the ill-will within ourselves. If there is no ill-will in our hearts, we will not be resentful even if we are harmed. Isn't that right? Much of the suffering experienced by sentient beings is caused by unwise attention.

#### g) Take someone who dislikes us as the meditation object

If there is no one you hate in your heart, then you are very fortunate and there is no need to wrack your brain searching for enemies towards whom to practice loving-kindness meditation. However, even if we love all the people in the world, some people may still dislike us for their own self-interests. The Buddha harbored loving-

kindness for all sentient beings, yet Devadatta loathed the Buddha out of his self-interest, trying everything possible to harm and supersede the Buddha. From our perspective, Devadatta can be counted as an enemy of the Buddha, even though the Buddha never treated him as such. Therefore, we can also choose someone who dislikes us as the object of our practice.

Practicing loving-kindness meditation will improve our relationships with others. As for whether loving-kindness meditation can be effective, confidence is the key factor. As long as we keep radiating loving-kindness to those who dislike us, we can certainly soften their hearts, eventually leading to mutual happiness.

#### **v. Break the boundaries**

Once we can smoothly radiate loving-kindness to our enemies (whether they are those we slightly dislike or those we deeply hate), the next step is to practice with these four groups of people — ourselves, someone respected, someone indifferent, and enemies — non-stop until we break the boundaries and achieve undifferentiated loving-kindness. In other words, our loving-kindness towards these four groups of people becomes equal, without differentiation.

If more loving-kindness is spread to ourselves than to others, or more loving-kindness is spread to one group over another, then the boundary still exists. If it feels easier to spread loving-kindness to ourselves and someone respected than to someone indifferent, then the boundary still exists. If it is easy to spread loving-kindness to

ourselves, to someone respected, and to someone indifferent but not as easy to spread loving-kindness to our enemies, then the boundary still exists. In order to break the boundaries, we need to radiate loving-kindness to ourselves, someone respected, someone indifferent, and our enemies non-stop, again and again, until the loving-kindness we radiate to each group of people is equal, and then the boundaries will be naturally dissolved.

The description above is the method of practicing loving-kindness meditation as recorded in the *Visuddhimagga*. It begins with taking oneself as the meditation object, and after attaining jhāna, one can gradually expand the meditation object to encompass all sentient beings.

### **6.3.2. Another method of practicing**

Sayalay would also like to offer another method of practice to cultivate loving-kindness for ourselves and others. Alternate spreading loving-kindness between yourself and the three groups: respected ones, indifferent ones, and enemies. So, start with spreading loving-kindness to yourself, then spread it to respected ones. Return to yourself, then indifferent ones. Return to yourself, then enemies. Finally, return to yourself, then all three groups at once. This can be done repeatedly until loving-kindness is smooth and even.



May I be safe, happy, and peaceful.  
May those respected be safe, happy, and peaceful.

May I be safe, happy, and peaceful.  
May those indifferent be safe, happy, and peaceful.

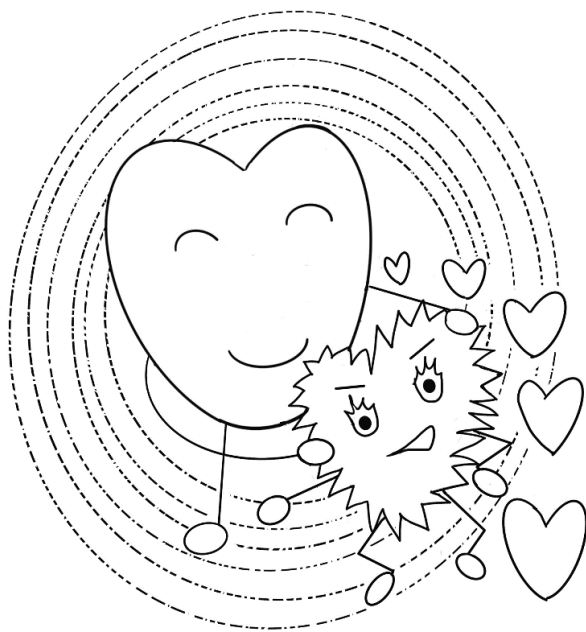
May I be safe, happy, and peaceful.  
May my enemies be safe, happy, and peaceful.

May I be safe, happy, and peaceful  
May those respected, those indifferent, and my enemies be  
safe, happy, and peaceful.

May I be safe, happy, and peaceful.  
May all sentient beings be safe, happy, and peaceful.

## 7. Overcome Intense Self-Hatred

Many people — especially Westerners — have a strong sense of self-hatred, which might be a result of Western religions emphasizing that every human being has original sin. If we believe ourselves to be evil and sinful, we will surely hate ourselves and find it difficult to harbor loving-kindness towards ourselves.



Overcome intense self-hatred

Based on her many previous experiences teaching meditation in the US, Sayalay Susīlā once said that about ninety percent of Americans had a hard time spreading loving-kindness to themselves. An American student strongly agreed and asked, “How many Europeans have intense self-hatred?” Sayalay was curious about the answer, too.

The next time she was leading a meditation retreat in Eastern Europe, she asked them, “About ninety percent of Americans have a hard time spreading loving-kindness to themselves, how about Europeans?” One European student who was a psychotherapist answered, “It would be ninety-five percent for us.” Sayalay was so shocked to hear that, and compassion immediately arose from her heart. Why do people hate and inflict pain upon themselves? The student went on to explain that “All the people who come to me for psychotherapy have strong self-hatred.”

Filled with sympathy and compassion for those people suffering from self-hatred, Sayalay wanted to help them overcome this obstacle. After considering various strategies and suitable methods to teach them, she finally came up with a method to help overcome self-hatred.

She told them to start by spreading loving-kindness to their pets — this turned out to be fairly easy for Sayalay’s Western students!

Next, Sayalay thought, “Since they have hatred towards themselves, we could first eliminate the concept of ‘self’.” Try to break down the “self” into body and mind (or name and form). People with fundamental knowledge of

Theravāda Buddhism understand that the body, or form, is composed of the four elements earth, water, fire, and air, whereas the mind, or name, is a combination of consciousness and a group of mental factors (such as contact, feeling, attention, perception, and mindfulness).

Starting with your own body, wish “May the four elements of this body be healthy, balanced, and free from pain.” At the same time, scan your body consciously from head to toe several times. This is a method of not identifying the “body as the self,” or a method of detaching from the “self.”

Scanning the body together with benevolent wishes is one of the factors leading to good health. Benevolent wishes can produce heart-generated-matter infused with positive energy, which means that the earth, water, fire, and air elements within that heart-generated-matter are all in good condition. As stated in Qigong theory, “Consciousness leads and Qi follows”; consciousness can drive the Qi, and benevolent thoughts can drive Righteous Qi. Righteous Qi flows along with benevolent thoughts throughout your body, unclogging places where Qi is blocked, and your whole body gradually becomes comfortable, warm, and energetic. At that moment you are healthy, and your wishes have come true. After twenty to thirty minutes of repeatedly scanning your body and wishing for health, proceed to blessing your heart.

Gently turn your attention to where your heart is located and begin joyfully spreading loving-kindness to your heart, smiling and repeatedly wishing “May the heart be happy, peaceful, and free from animosity.” This is a method of not

identifying the “heart as the self,” or the method of detaching from the “self.”

The wishing phrases can be adjusted according to our current situation and needs. If we have unspeakable grief in our hearts, we can wish: “May the heart be happy, peaceful, and free from grief.” If our hearts are filled with resentment, we can wish: “May this heart be free from animosity and resentment.” Keep practicing until your heart becomes increasingly peaceful, more and more serene and joyful. Many students find that this method can eliminate self-hatred and transcend conventional truth, achieving the ultimate truth of not-self.

However, some students (especially beginners) think that this method does not let loving-kindness arise easily, because it removes the object we habitually attach to — the “self” — leaving only the elements of the body and mind, making those with a strong sense of self-attachment disoriented. The best method is whichever one works for you and helps you cultivate loving-kindness.

Similarly, we can view our loved ones and enemies as body and mind, then wish them peace, happiness, and freedom from suffering. By breaking people down into elements while we radiate loving-kindness, we can avoid defiling our hearts with the proximate opponent of loving-kindness — attachment. At the same time, we can also overcome the obstacle of ill-will that we may encounter when spreading loving-kindness to our enemies. This direct opponent of loving-kindness can erode and destroy our

untrained, weak hearts when we are trying to spread loving-kindness to our enemies.

This method also reminds us that there are only the four elements and the mind, not the notions of “people,” “sentient beings,” “I,” or “others.” Since this method transcends the conventional truth of the existence of “you,” “I,” and “them” — notions of people and sentient beings — and instead takes the stance of the ultimate truth of “not-self,” jhāna cannot be attained with this method because jhāna takes conventional truth such as “I,” “them,” or “people” as its object. This method, therefore, does not attain merely loving-kindness but achieves a combination of wisdom and loving-kindness. Sayalay Susīlā, being inclined to the cultivation of wisdom and not enjoying attachment of any kind, highly appreciates this method because it makes us happy and calm and at the same time reminds us that there is no “one” for us to cling to.

## 8. The Benefits of Practicing Loving-kindness

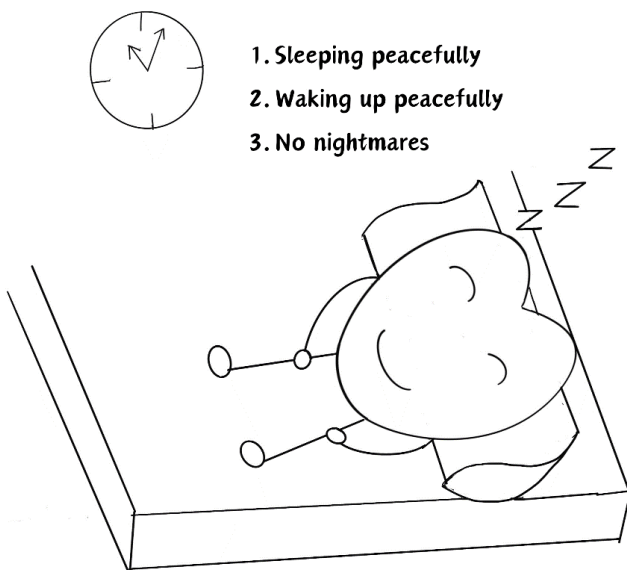
According to *Anguttara Nikāya* 11.15, repeatedly practicing loving-kindness meditation will bring eleven benefits:

*Bhikkhus, when the liberation of the heart by loving-kindness has been repeatedly practiced, developed, cultivated, taken as a vehicle, taken as a foundation, applied, consolidated, and diligently pursued, eleven benefits can be expected. What eleven? 1) One sleeps peacefully, 2) one wakes up peacefully, 3) one doesn't have nightmares, 4) one is loved by humans, 5) one is loved by non-humans, 6) one is protected by deities, 7) one cannot be harmed by fire, poison, or weapons, 8) one's mind quickly becomes concentrated, 9) one's complexion is bright, 10) one is not perplexed at the end of life, and 11) if one hasn't attained a higher level of awakening, one is born into the brahmā realm after death. Bhikkhus, when the liberation of the heart by loving-kindness has been repeatedly practiced, developed, cultivated, taken as a vehicle, taken as a foundation, applied, consolidated, and diligently pursued, these eleven benefits can be expected.*

Continuous practice of loving-kindness meditation will bring eleven benefits.

## **1 – 3. Sleeping peacefully, waking up peacefully, and no nightmares**

Sleeping and waking up peacefully seems to have become a luxury for modern people. Many people even need to rely on sleeping pills to get a good night's sleep. The practice of loving-kindness meditation makes our hearts happy and calm, so it can help us sleep and wake up peacefully, without nightmares, allowing us to feel refreshed every day. Abundant energy indicates physical and mental health, which is important for quality of life.



One of Sayalay's students had difficulty falling asleep at night due to work-related stress, resulting in a lack of



energy and vitality. Besides teaching him to practice loving-kindness meditation, Sayalay also spread loving-kindness to him. His condition improved immediately the next day, and in the following days he slept soundly.

#### **4. Loved by others**



**Loved by others**

When we radiate loving-kindness to all sentient beings, a friendly and pure energy will arise in our hearts, which can be transmitted to faraway places and sensed by others, so

they will naturally like us. A long-time practitioner of loving-kindness meditation told his peers that strangers were generally friendlier and more patient with him. For example, when he was strolling in parks, waiting in line to buy something, or searching for a table at a restaurant, strangers often smiled at him, greeted him, and invited him to sit with them. A loving person with a beaming smile and gentle manners — who would not love such a person? If we were an employer with such qualities, we would definitely be loved by our employees!

## **5. Loved by non-humans**

In the time the Buddha, a venerable named Visākha frequently practiced loving-kindness meditation, and he used to spend four months in one place during the rainy season before moving to another. Once he came to a quiet forest and decided to solely practice loving-kindness meditation for the next four months. He regularly radiated loving-kindness to all sentient beings while dwelling in the forest. Because of the power of loving-kindness from the venerable, every sentient being there felt peaceful and happy and lived in harmony.

After four months, the venerable decided to leave for another forest the next day. Right at that time, the venerable heard someone weeping and asked in surprise, “Who is crying?” A tree spirit told him that ever since the venerable had come to the forest, because of his loving-kindness, every tree spirit had lived peacefully, without the quarrels and fighting they used to have. Now that he knew

the venerable was leaving, he was afraid that all the tree spirits would go back to their old habits of fighting with each other, so he wept sadly.

For the sake of the happiness of the tree spirits, the venerable ended up staying. Each time he was about to leave, the tree spirits wept sadly, and the venerable had to prolong his stay there again and again, until he attained parinibbhaṇa there.

## **6. Protected by deities**

Deities will protect people possessing loving-kindness. For this reason, loving-kindness meditation is also known as a guardian meditation, which means we protect ourselves by practicing loving-kindness meditation.

Venerable Subhūti was an arahant and the foremost in mastering loving-kindness. Once, while traveling around, he entered and abided in loving-kindness jhāna. Trying to protect him, the deities prevented rain from falling for many days, leaving the nearby farmers worried. After the farmers set up a hut as a shelter for Venerable Subhūti, it finally started to rain.

## **7. Unharmd by fire, poison, or weapons**

When practicing loving-kindness to the point of attaining jhāna, a practitioner is not easily harmed by fire, poison, or weapons, because the mind of loving-kindness forms a protective net, shielding them from harm. During the

Buddha's time, there are many stories about how people were protected from harm inflicted by weapons through practicing loving-kindness.



### **Unharmd by fire, poison or weapon**

One such story is about the two wives of King Udena of Kosambī. One of the wives, Sāmāvatī, was a devoted disciple of the Buddha, while the other wife, Māgandiyā, harbored ill-will towards the Buddha and Sāmāvatī.

Once, in order to frame Sāmāvatī, Māgandiyā lied to King Udena, saying that Sāmāvatī was planning to murder him. King Udena believed the slander and took up his bow and

arrows, intending to shoot Sāmāvatī to death. Seeing that King Udena was about to shoot her, Sāmāvatī did not feel any resentment towards him. Instead, she spread loving-kindness towards him and instantly entered and abided in loving-kindness jhāna. When the arrows reached Sāmāvatī, they all fell down and could not harm her. Seeing this incredible scene, King Udena realized that he had wronged her.

## **8. Attaining concentration with ease**

When practicing loving-kindness meditation, we will feel incomparable happiness. The Buddha said that from pleasure, concentration arises. Pleasure is the proximate cause of concentration; therefore, the practitioner's mind can easily settle into calmness due to joy and pleasure (instead of being agitated or restless), all the way up to attaining the third jhāna.

## **9. Bright complexion**

When our hearts are filled with loving-kindness, our complexions will be bright and peaceful. This is because loving-kindness can generate heart-generated-matter kalāpa. One of the elements in these kalāpas — color — will be bright because of the power generated by loving-kindness meditation, so the complexion of the practitioner will look radiant and glowing. This is a natural beauty that does not require artificial makeup to enhance our appearance. After practicing loving-kindness meditation,

we can look in the mirror, and we will find ourselves glowing, more radiant than before.

One of Sayalay's students said, "When I stopped practicing loving-kindness meditation for a while, my complexion looked not as radiant as it did when I was practicing; this reminded me to resume practicing loving-kindness meditation as soon as possible."

## **10. Not perplexed at the end of life**

It would be an unsurpassable blessing if our minds were not perplexed at the end of life. Most people feel lost, fearful, and perplexed when facing death. They are about to leave behind their cherished bodies, beloved children and spouses, and the wealth accumulated through a lifetime of hard work, without knowing where they will go after death. At that time, most people feel reluctant to depart and are fearful of death. Letting go of all these things during their lifetime is already so difficult; it is even harder at the end of life. In addition, at the time of death, the heart is particularly weak, resulting in a lack of mental focus and a state of confusion and distraction. For those who are well-practiced in loving-kindness meditation, at the time of death, their hearts will not be confused but instead will incline towards loving-kindness, and they will surely be born into a good realm.

As Buddhists, we do not practice only for the sake of this life; how many people can achieve arahantship in this lifetime? If we cannot achieve arahantship in this lifetime,

we hope that in the next life we will be born into a good realm to continue our practice with peace and ease.

## **11. If not attaining a higher level of awakening, being born into the Brahmā realm after death**

If a practitioner uses loving-kindness meditation as a foundation to progress into vipassanā (insight meditation) but does not attain arahantship, at the time of death, through jhāna — whether it be the first jhāna, second jhāna, or third jhāna — they can still be born into the Brahmā realm.

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* describes the eleven benefits above. Sayalay Susīlā describes an additional benefit of helping us overcome distracting thoughts. Since loving-kindness meditation involves a wider range of meditation objects, it keeps our minds more engaged and leaves little room for distracting thoughts to enter the mind. In contrast, ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) involves only one meditation object — the breath. The breath is a subtle meditation object, and the mind of an average person is coarse and scattered, making it difficult to concentrate on such a subtle meditation object; therefore, it is challenging for them to attain jhāna. First, practice loving-kindness meditation to eliminate distracting thoughts and make your heart relaxed and happy. After concentration arises from the pleasure, shift to mindfulness of breathing, at which point the mind can easily concentrate on the subtle breath.

## 9. From Samatha to Vipassanā

Loving-kindness meditation is part of samatha (concentration meditation). The concentration cultivated through loving-kindness meditation can serve as the foundation for vipassanā (insight meditation).

The final instruction of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* is:

*Avoiding wrong views, virtuous, endowed with insight,  
having removed greed for sensual pleasures, one never  
again returns to a womb.*

The above sentence does not imply that those who have attained jhāna are necessarily “**endowed with insight**.” In fact, those who have attained jhāna through loving-kindness meditation still hold onto the view of “self,” believing in the existence of “all sentient beings,” “people,” and “self.” This is because the meditation object of loving-kindness meditation is the conventional truth and encompasses conceptual notions, including all sentient beings, such as someone respected, someone indifferent, deities, animals, and so on. When we direct loving-kindness toward ourselves, we also treat ourselves as a “person” or a substantial “self.” “Person” and “self” are just conceptual notions, not the ultimate truth.

Vipassanā emphasizes “**insight**” — knowing and seeing the ultimate truth as it is — so the practice of vipassanā involves breaking down the concepts of “people” or “self”



into the ultimately-existing elements, e.g., the five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness. The true nature of the five aggregates is impermanence, suffering, and the absence of a substantial self. Vipassanā practice is to constantly see this true nature of the five aggregates. Once one has penetrated the truth of impermanence, suffering, and not-self of the five aggregates, the view of a substantial self is eradicated. At that time, one becomes a sotāpanna (stream-enterer) — **“avoiding wrong views, virtuous, and endowed with insight.”** As one continues to observe the impermanence, suffering, and not-self of the five aggregates, **removing the greed for sensual pleasures** with wisdom, one becomes an anāgāmi (non-returner), meaning one will not be born in the sensual realm again.

The concentration obtained through loving-kindness meditation does not have the ability to permanently eradicate defilements but can only suppress them temporarily. So what should be done to completely sever wrong views, be virtuous, be endowed with insight, and eliminate the greed for sensual pleasures? This classic passage from *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 9.36 provides guidance:

*Bhikkhus, I say that the first jhāna is a basis for ending the defilements... For what reason is this said? Here, a bhikkhu, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, enters and abides in the first jhāna, with applied thought, sustained thought, and rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. He contemplates the phenomena there—included in form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness—*

*as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumor, as an arrow, as misery, as an affliction, as alien, as falling apart, as empty, as not-self. He withdraws his mind from those phenomena and directs it to the deathless element: 'This is peaceful, this is sublime, namely: the stilling of all activities, the letting go of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.' If he is firm in this, he attains the destruction of the defilements. If he does not attain the destruction of the defilements because of the passion for the Dhamma, that delight in the Dhamma, then with the destruction of the five lower fetters, he becomes one of spontaneous birth, due to attain final nibbāna there without returning from that world."*

As one attains jhāna through loving-kindness meditation, one has suppressed the five hindrances — sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. “Jhāna” has a meaning of burning up the five hindrances. The five hindrances are obstacles preventing the cultivation of jhāna and wisdom. When the five hindrances are eradicated, the heart becomes malleable, wieldy, at ease, and accommodating, like pure gold. At this time, it is very suitable to practice vipassanā.

Emerging from concentration, one observes all forms, all feelings, all perceptions, all volitional formations, and all consciousnesses — whether they are the five aggregates of the present, the future, or the past — as being “impermanent, suffering, a disease, a tumor, an arrow, as misery, as an affliction, as alien, as falling apart, as empty, and as not-self.” Slowly, a sense of disenchantment towards

the five aggregates grows in the mind, and the mind detaches from clinging to them.

When the mind is free from clinging to the five aggregates, one inclines the mind to the deathless element (nibbāna). If their five spiritual faculties — faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom — are balanced and mature, they will eradicate all defilements and attain the path and fruition of arahantship. If they still have attachment to “the Dhamma,”<sup>2</sup> they cannot eradicate all defilements but only the five lower fetters — personal-existence view, doubt, wrong grasp of rules and observances, sensual desire, and ill-will — and will become an anāgāmi. After death, they will not be reborn in the sensual realm but will spontaneously arise in the form realm, where they will become an arahant and attain final nibbāna, completely extinguishing all defilements.

The above description of practicing samatha and then shifting to vipassanā to attain the state of anāgāmi or arahant is just one method of practicing, as stated in the following sutta:

*Friends, any bhikkhu or bhikkhunī who has declared in my presence the attainment of arahantship has done so through these four ways, or by one of these four. What four? Here, a bhikkhu practices samatha as a precursor (samathapubbaṅgamaṃ) and then practices vipassanā. When he is practicing vipassanā after having practiced*

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<sup>2</sup> According to commentaries, “the Dhamma” here refers to concentration and insight.

*samatha as a precursor, the path is generated. He practices, develops, and cultivates that path. When he practices, develops, and cultivates that path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are eliminated.*

—*Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.170*

According to this sutta, there are four methods of eliminating defilements and attaining the path and fruition of arahantship. If you would like to understand the other three methods, please refer to *Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.170*.

## 10. Origin of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* is well known and very popular in Theravādan Buddhist countries. It is recited by monastics in many ceremonies. Many Buddhists also gather together in times of crisis to chant this sutta for the world, the deities, or all sentient beings, seeking the protection of the Triple Gem. It is a very short sutta in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. Despite being concise, its content is rich and diverse.

The Buddha first expounded the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* to sixty bhikkhus who were having trouble practicing in the forest. This group of bhikkhus once chose a large forest in which to spend the rainy season, planning to spend the three months in intensive meditation. This forest was very quiet, with dense bamboo and thick trees providing shelter from the sun and rain, and also not too far from a nearby village, making it very convenient for the bhikkhus to go on alms round.

Since this group of bhikkhus were all well-versed in the three trainings (moral conduct, concentration, and wisdom), the tree spirits residing in the forest were worried about their arrival, as they would have to come down from the trees and live on the ground out of reverence for the meditating bhikkhus. They hoped the bhikkhus would leave as soon as possible, but instead they found out that the bhikkhus planned to spend the whole three-month

rainy season there. So the tree spirits began to harass the bhikkhus at night in all possible ways, trying to frighten them away.

The bhikkhus could not live in such conditions, so they went to visit the Buddha and told him about their difficulties. The Buddha observed the situation through his divine eye and realized that there was no other place more suitable for these bhikkhus to spend the vassa (rains retreat) than this particular forest. The Buddha told them, “Previously, you had no weapons with you; now you need to arm yourselves.” Then the Buddha offered them a weapon — the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* — and advised them to return to that forest using loving-kindness as their protection. The bhikkhus returned to the forest and practiced loving-kindness as taught by the Buddha, filling the entire forest with the light of their loving-kindness.

The previously hostile tree spirits, moved by the loving-kindness of the bhikkhus, no longer harassed or attacked them but instead developed a sense of reverence for them and even silently protected them so that they could meditate peacefully. Loving-kindness is undoubtedly a powerful force and a reliable shield of protection.

In fact, this group of bhikkhus used loving-kindness meditation as the foundation for their practice of vipassanā. Under the protection of loving-kindness, they were able to practice peacefully, so before the end of that rainy season, they all abandoned the defilements that had led them to repeated rebirth and attained the path and fruition of arahantship.

The Buddha had foreseen this, which is why he asked them to return to that forest after being harassed. When these bhikkhus reflected on this matter, they realized that when they practiced vipassanā before, they had not yet mastered the loving-kindness meditation that could protect them. Following the Buddha's guidance, they practiced loving-kindness meditation prior to vipassanā so that they would be free from danger, undisturbed both physically and mentally, and they eventually attained the path and fruition of arahantship.

# Appendix I:

## Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta Pāli-sikkhā

<i>Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta</i>  ( <i>Khuddakapāṭha 9; Suttanipāta 1.8</i> )	<b>Discourse on Loving-Kindness</b>  ( <i>Khuddakapāṭha 9; Suttanipāta 1.8</i> )
Karaṇīyam-attha-kusalena  yantaṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca:  Sakko ujū ca suhujū ca,  suvaco c’assa mudu anatimānī,	This should be done by one skilled in the good  to attain the path of peace:  One should be competent, upright, very upright,  easy to instruct, gentle, not conceited,
Santussako ca subharo ca,  appakicco ca sallahuka-vutti,  Santindriyo ca nipako ca,  appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho.	content, easily supported,  with few duties, living lightly,  with senses calmed, judicious,  courteous, with no greed for supporters.



<p>Na ca khuddaṃ samācare kiñci, yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ. Sukhino vā khemino hontu, sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.</p>	<p>One should not commit even the slightest fault that would be criticized by the wise. May all beings be happy and safe, may all beings be happy within.</p>
<p>Ye keci pāṇa-bhūtatti, tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā, Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā, majjhimā rassakā añuka-thūlā,</p>	<p>Whatever living beings there may be, without exception— frail or firm, long or large, medium or small, fine or coarse,</p>
<p>Diṭṭhā vā ye ca adiṭṭhā, ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre, Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.</p>	<p>seen or unseen, living far or near, having been born or seeking to be born, may all beings be happy within.</p>

<p>Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha,  nātimaññetha katthaci naṃ kiñci,  Byārosanā paṭigha-saññā,  nāññam-aññassa dukkhamiccheyya.</p>	<p>No one should deceive another,  nor despise another in any place;  out of thoughts of anger and aversion,  no one should wish suffering for another.</p>
<p>Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ,  āyusā eka-puttam-anurakkhe,  Evam-pi sabba-bhūtesu mānasambhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ.</p>	<p>Just as a mother would do for her child,  protecting her only child with her own life;  so too, for all sentient beings,  one should cultivate a boundless heart.</p>
<p>Mettañ-ca sabba-lokasmim  mānasambhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ.  Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyañ-ca asambādhaṃ averaṃ asapattaṃ.</p>	<p>With loving-kindness for the entire world,  one should cultivate a boundless heart.  Above, below, and all around,  without obstruction, without animosity, without hostility.</p>

<p>Tiṭṭhañ'caram nisinno vā</p> <p>sayāno vā yāvatassa vigata-middho,</p> <p>Etam satim adhiṭṭheyya</p> <p>brahmametaṃ vihāraṃ idham-āhu.</p>	<p>Whether standing, walking, sitting,</p> <p>or lying down, as long as one is not drowsy,</p> <p>one should resolve on such mindfulness,</p> <p>this is called a divine dwelling.</p>
<p>Diṭṭhiñ-ca anupagamma</p> <p>sīlavā dassanena sampanno,</p> <p>Kāmesu vineyya gedhaṃ,</p> <p>Na hi jātu gabbha-seyyaṃ punareti'ti.</p>	<p>Not holding onto wrong views,</p> <p>but virtuous and endowed with insight,</p> <p>having eliminated greed for sensual pleasures,</p> <p>one never again returns to a womb.</p>

## Appendix II:

# An English Translation of the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta

### Discourse on Loving-Kindness

*This should be done by one skilled in the good to attain the path of peace:*

*One should be competent, upright, very upright, easy to instruct, gentle, not conceited, content, easily supported, with few duties, living lightly, with senses calmed, judicious, courteous, with no greed for supporters.*

*One should not commit even the slightest fault that would be criticized by the wise.*

*May all beings be happy and safe.*

*May all beings be happy within.*

*Whatever living beings there may be, without exception — frail or firm, long or large, medium or small, fine or coarse, seen or unseen, living far or near, having been born or seeking to be born — may all beings be happy within.*

*No one should deceive another, nor despise another in any place; out of thoughts of anger and aversion, no one should wish suffering for another.*

*Even as a mother would do for her child, protecting her only child with her own life, so too, for all beings, one should cultivate a boundless heart.*

*With loving-kindness for the entire world, one should cultivate a boundless heart. Above, below, and all around, without obstruction, without animosity, without hostility.*

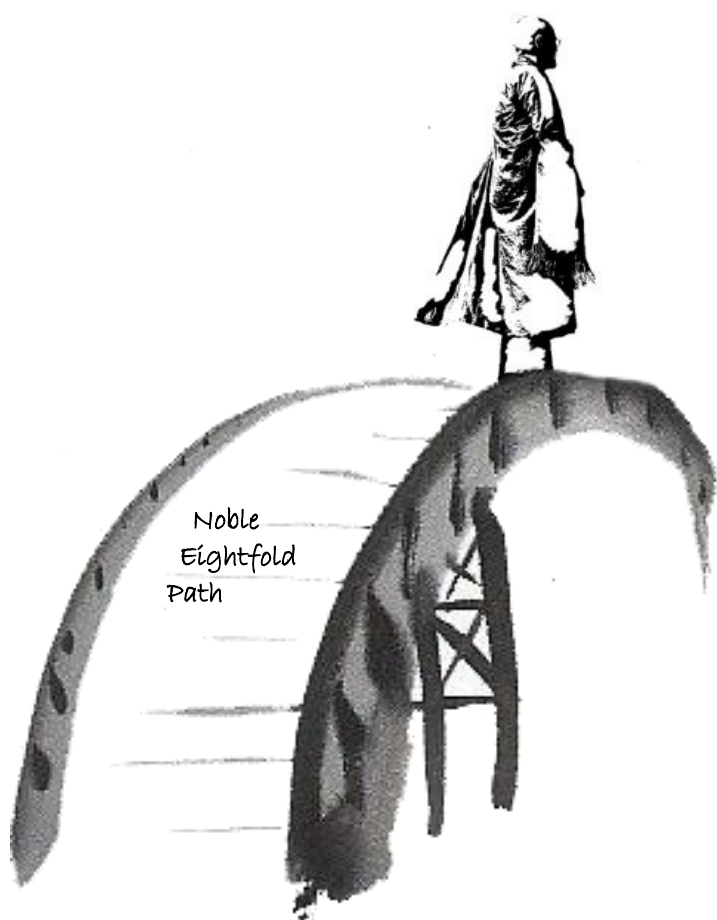
*Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, as long as one is not drowsy, one should resolve on such mindfulness; this is called a divine dwelling.*

*Not holding onto wrong views, but virtuous and endowed with insight, having eliminated greed for sensual pleasures, one never again returns to a womb.*



*Ciraṃ Tiṭṭhatu Saddhammo!  
Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*

May the True Dhamma Endure  
for A Long Time!



## Sharing of Merits

*Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti sabbarasaṃ dhammaraso  
jināti; Sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jināti, taṇhakkhayaṃ sabbadukkhaṃ  
jināti.*  
(Dhp. 354)

A gift of Dhamma conquers all gifts; the taste of Dhamma  
conquers all tastes;  
a delight in Dhamma conquers all delights;  
the ending of craving conquers all suffering & stress.  
(Dhp.354)



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