

Notes and Quotes for December 12, 2021 *Dharma Reflections*:

“The Four Immeasurables”: Boundless Loving-Kindness

This is what should be done
By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:
Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech,
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied,
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm and wise and skillful,
Not proud or demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born —
May all beings be at ease!

Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.

"Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness" (Sn 1.8), translated from the Pali by The Amara-vati Sangha. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 2 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.amar.html> .

Metta (Pali, or Maitri in Skt.) as an Immeasurable:

“Bodhisattvas are ceaselessly inspired by the rare conviction that the infinitely diverse structures of relativity, far from being some dangerous disease, are actually a healing medicine. Why? Because in their intrinsically selfless nature, interdependent structures perfectly express the mystery and transmit the spiritual energy of universal friendliness. Not just illumined sages but all structures of relativity are dwellers in the boundlessness which brings about all-embracing love, in the boundlessness which constitutes selfless compassion, in the boundlessness which constitutes which blossoms as sympathetic rejoicing, in the boundlessness which opens the treasure of blissful equanimity.”

- From a teaching by Shakyamuni Buddha interpreted in *Mother of the Buddhas – Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra*, Lex Hixon, Quest Books, 1993, p. 206.

“The first of the four *brahmavihārās* is *mettā*, often translated as “loving-kindness,” although I would prefer the translation “benevolence”. The term has its etymological root in *mitra*, “friend”, and conveys a basic sense of friendliness and an attitude of friendship, as well as nuances of mutual benefit and assistance.

...Notably, *mettā* is the only *brahmavihārā* whose broad range of application by way of bodily, verbal, and mental activities is explicitly highlighted in the early discourses. By covering the entire range of possible interactions with others, *mettā* expressed bodily, verbally, and mentally thus provides the testing ground for one’s meditation practice. One who has truly cultivated *mettā* will be able to remain established in this mental attitude even when having to face difficult people and situations.

Being undertaken in these three modes, *mettā* comes to permeate all aspects of one’s behaviour and activities, thereby providing fertile soil in which compassion and the remaining *brahmavihārās* can grow and flourish. The cultivation of compassion will be greatly facilitated by such building of a foundation through kindness in one’s activities, the way one communicates, and most importantly one’s mental attitude.”

- Anālayo, *Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation*, Windhorse Publications, 2015, pp. 28-31.

“Humanity brims with positive feelings such as affection, sympathy, kindness, love, and mercy. Why is this so? Because we are all essentially one. Just as sunshine breaks through the clouds, the light of our essential nature shines through the cracks in our delusion. Buddhism teaches that absolute and universal love emerges when we eliminate the delusion of dualistic opposition.”

- Koun Yamada, *Zen — The Authentic Gate*, Wisdom Publications, 2015, p. 159.

“Just as with speaking, the brain seems primed to learn to love.

...The cultivation of a loving concern for other people’s well-being has a surprising and unique benefit: the brain’s circuitry for happiness energizes... Loving-kindness also boosts the connections between the brain’s circuits for joy and happiness and the prefrontal cortex, a zone for guiding behavior. The greater the increase in the connection between these regions, the more altruistic a person becomes following... training.

...if you want to increase your feelings of kindness most effectively, practice exactly that—not something else.”

Daniel Goleman and Richard J. Davidson, *Altered Traits—Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*, Avery, 2017, pp.111-112, 115.

<https://www.sanmonjizen.org/audio/Guided%20Metta%20Practice%201.mp3>

The above link is to a short talk, and an even shorter guided Metta meditation from Mitra Bishop, Roshi.

<https://www.mindful.org/a-guided-loving-kindness-meditation-with-sharon-salzberg/>

above is a link to A Guided Loving-Kindness Meditation with Sharon Salzberg

“The practice of metta is not an effort to convince ourselves of anything; it is not an effort to pretend, to plead, or demand. It is tapping into what we really are, which is pure love itself.

Metta is not a feeling. Feelings fluctuate and are not dependable. To try to take refuge in a feeling is to try to find refuge in that which is impermanent. Rather, metta is an intention that guides our lives and warms whatever it shines upon. Metta is utterly dependable, once we have dedicated ourselves to practicing it, and access to metta becomes immediate.... Goodheartedness becomes our default position, rather than just an accidental product of circumstance, an unpredictable feeling.

...The practice of metta is, quite literally, a training. It develops our natural capacity to love, come what may; it enlarges our capacity to hold all things in our hearts, not abandoning ourselves and not abandoning one another. As we practice, our perception of the world shifts and we begin to see with the eyes of metta. The pronouns of *you*, *me*, *us*, and *them* lose their prominent place.”

- Narayan Helen Liebenson, *The Magnanimous Heart — Compassion and Love, Loss and Grief, Joy and Liberation*, 2018, p. 75.

“It’s so easy to think that we’re the only ones who suffer while other people were born with the Happiness Handbook... which, through some accident of birth, we never received. I’ve been as guilty of this belief as anyone else. When I was young, the anxiety I almost constantly experienced left me feeling alone, weak, and stupid. When I began practicing loving-kindness/compassion, however, I found that my sense of isolation began to diminish. At the same time I gradually began to feel confident and even *useful*. I began to recognize that I wasn’t the only person to feel scared and vulnerable. Over time I began to see that considering the welfare of other beings was essential in discovering my own peace of mind.”

- Yongey Mingur Rinpoche, *Joyful Wisdom—Embracing Change and Finding Freedom*, Three Rivers Press, 2009, p. 185.

“We can train our eyes to look at people with metta. Seeing others with metta can prevent our own mind from forming a biased opinion. Looking at them with metta thoughts can prevent our own heart from forming false opinions of that person.”

- Bhante Gunaratana, *Loving-Kindness in Plain English—The Practice of Metta*, Wisdom Publications, 2017, p. 112

“Love and concern for all are not things some of us are born with and others are not. Rather, they are results of what we do with our minds: We can choose to transform our minds so that they embody love, or we can allow them to develop habits and false concepts of separation.”

- Sharon Salzberg, *Loving-Kindness—The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*, Shambala Classics, 1995, p. 89.

“Where does the capacity to cultivate the four immeasurables come from? In the meditation on loving-kindness, you use your own experience of kindness, the experience of warmth and love freely given by another person. If you have never experienced kindness, you might have difficulty with this practice, but such people are rare. Work with what you have, even if the only experience you can recall is a shopkeeper giving you a piece of candy or a teacher not embarrassing you in front of class.

...Begin by noting how you react to even a small act of kindness, such as a friend’s opening a door for you. You naturally feel respected and appreciated, and even if you dislike the person, you feel a little more open toward him or her. But also note how you move away from opening to the other by ignoring the kindness, dismissing it, or not acknowledging it. Strange, isn’t it?”

- Ken McLeod, *Wake up to your Life - Discovering the Buddhist Path of Attention*, Harper San Francisco, 2001, pp. 247, 268.

“Cultivating loving-kindness has everything to do with the pursuit of enlightenment. And in Buddhist practice one begins with loving-kindness for oneself. This is a very deep practice, one that requires a kind of vision quest: what is your vision of happiness? What is genuine happiness, which yields ‘the good life’ and also the possibility of dying well—‘the good death’? And if there is continuity of individual consciousness beyond our present life, what does that entail? What is your vision of happiness in the long-term? It is the Dalai Lama’s view that loving-kindness and compassion are inborn, not something we acquire just from the environment, from good training or education. They are intrinsic to our very identity, to the nature of awareness itself. Nevertheless, these innate qualities can be and often are muted and obscured. Accepting that premise, you can resort to them in times of difficulty, as you would take refuge in trustworthy friends.”

– B. Alan Wallace, *Genuine Happiness – Meditation as the Path to Fulfillment*, Wiley, 2005, pp. 116-117.

Possible Discussion Starting Points

1. Were any parts of the *Metta Sutta* particularly moving for you?
2. Why do you think loving-kindness is often taken up as the first Immeasurable to be worked on?
3. Reflecting on the various quotes above, is metta innate, or must it be cultivated?
4. Any comments on Mitra Roshi’s or Sharon Salzberg’s talks/guided meditations?
5. Review Bhante Gunaratana’s quote above... are loving-kindness and equanimity somehow different aspects of one quality?
6. While it may be a “rare conviction” that “ceaselessly inspires” bodhisattvas that “the infinitely diverse structures of relativity, far from being some dangerous disease, are actually a healing medicine,” (quote at top of page 2), can you get a sense of what the Buddha was pointing to in speaking thus?
7. “The cultivation of compassion will be greatly facilitated by such building of a foundation through kindness in one’s activities, the way one communicates, and most importantly one’s mental attitude.” (Anālayo) ““Cultivating loving-kindness has everything to do with the pursuit of enlightenment.” (B. Alan Wallace): How might metta awareness/practice/cultivation actually support or deepen you zazen practice?