

The Power of Love

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Association for Insight Meditation

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The Power of Love

Few emotions have more effect on people's lives than love. Feeling unloved is the most common reason for depression, and being "in love" radically alters one's view of the world — "Everyone loves a lover" as they say. Films, plays, and books of love stories are often more successful than those on other topics. The practice of love is essential to the spiritual life in all religions.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (Corinthians I, 13)

Here, love or charity (Latin: *caritas*) does not mean generosity, but goodwill or love of humanity. Religious people should strive to develop a mature love that is unselfish. The passage from Corinthians continues:

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways."

Buddhist monks are often accused of being indifferent to the suffering of others, practising meditation for their own happiness alone without compassion for those in trouble. The Buddhist ideal of a monk meditating alone in a forest or a cemetery may seem remote from ordinary people's lives, and unsociable — even anti-social. I will relate a story from the Buddhist texts to show that the Buddha was certainly not lacking in love and compassion.

Roja the Malla

At one time, the Buddha made his way to a place called Āpaṇa in the Malla kingdom, with two thousand five hundred monks. On hearing of the Buddha's impending visit, the Malla princes made a proclamation that anyone who failed to turn up to greet the Buddha would be fined. Roja was an intimate friend of Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant. Seeing Roja in the crowd, Ānanda greeted him warmly, saying how pleased he was that Roja had come to welcome the Buddha. Roja replied that he had only come because of the threat of being fined.

Venerable Ānanda was a very kind and sensitive monk, and was hurt by Roja's indifference to the Buddha. He thought, "My friend is ignorant of the benefits to be gained by paying respects to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and will lose a great opportunity." The Venerable Ānanda told the Buddha his private thoughts about his friend, expressing his anxiety about the benefits that Roja would lose.

The Buddha exhorted Ānanda to develop loving-kindness for Roja. The Buddha himself also directed his loving-kindness towards Roja. As part of his daily routine, the Buddha radiated loving-kindness to all living beings equally. However, because of the intervention of Venerable Ānanda, he directed his loving-kindness specifically to Roja. Immediately, Roja felt immense reverence for the Buddha. It is said that his state of mind was like that of a new-born calf, which has a deep attachment to its mother. Roja could not help himself, he began searching all over the monastery for the Buddha. Directed by the monks, he soon found his way to the Buddha's residence. He sat in the Buddha's presence, worshipping him with great devotion.

The Buddha talked to him about the benefits of charity, morality, concentration, and insight, after which Roja realised nibbāna and became a Stream-winner. Roja then asked the Buddha to recognise him as a life-time provider of the four requisites: almsfood, robes, medicine, and shelter.

Love is a positive force that can change a person's attitude radically, but one needs to develop the mind's natural power through meditation to have any effect in this cynical age. Love must be sincere and impartial.

Unconditional Love

There are so many different ways that love can manifest. Real, unconditional love is not in the least sentimental. It is hard to practise, since it is totally selfless. It is impossible to please everyone all of the time. Even the Buddha made numerous enemies in spite of his unlimited love and compassion.

For example, when he renounced the palace, leaving his young wife, Yasodharā, and his new-born son, Rāhula, he was not being self-centred, nor was he neglecting his responsibilities, for he knew that they would be taken care of by his relatives. He surely loved his wife and son as much as any father, but having realised that they were trapped by old-age, sickness, and death, he went in search of an escape.

When a soldier goes to war he risks his life to fight the enemy, and has to leave his wife and children behind, though he doesn't want to go at all. Those who stay behind usually regard a soldier as a hero who deserves the greatest respect, even though he may be making serious unwholesome kamma by killing human beings. The Bodhisatta was not making any such unwholesome kamma, yet he was going out to fight the enemy. The enemy he was fighting is not the enemy of a particular nationality or political party, but the enemy of all human beings, everywhere. This enemy is, of course, the enemy within — greed, lust, selfishness, hatred, anger, stubbornness, arrogance, delusion, ignorance, conceit, pride, *etc.*

Another woman might have criticised her husband for deserting her, but Yasodharā did not complain at all. She must have noticed how deeply Siddhattha was affected by the suffering he had seen when he ventured outside the palace. They must have discussed the meaning of life. However, Yasodharā's

father was deeply offended by what he saw as Siddhattha's desertion of his daughter. The Buddha's father-in-law, King Suppabuddha, later insulted the Buddha and fell into hell as a result. Of course, that would not have been the Buddha's wish. He must have had good-will towards his own father-in-law, but the king's attitude was wrong. He was totally mistaken about Siddhattha's intentions, and was destroyed by his own self-righteous anger and indignation. What a great loss he suffered! His own daughter and grandson became eminent members of the Saṅgha and could surely have taught him the Dhamma very well, but he could not overcome his foolish pride and anger.

Māgaṇḍiyā was another unfortunate person who hated the Buddha. When she was a beautiful young woman, her parents tried to arrange for her to marry the Buddha, who they regarded as the only man good enough for their daughter. However, the Buddha rejected her parents' proposal saying, "I would not like to touch this body full of urine and excrement even with my foot!" (Suttanipāta, verse 841) Admittedly, that is not the sort or response that most young men would give to a marriage proposal; most might be tempted, or at least flattered, by such an offer.

It is not at all obvious why the Buddha had to speak so harshly. However, Māgaṇḍiyā's parents both attained deep insight from the Buddha's teaching, so he must have realised that such shock tactics were essential. Unfortunately, Māgaṇḍiyā could not bear to be reminded of the unpleasant facts of life, since she was puffed up with vanity. She held a grudge, and later killed many pious disciples of the Buddha.

True, unconditional love is not easy, is it? To be kind and gentle to lovable beings is easy enough, to be averse to wicked or ugly individuals is only natural, but to be detached and truly compassionate takes something special. All good people want to be loving and kind, yet they are not always able to manage it. What should we do if we meet evil or wrong-doing? Should you allow your children to do whatever they want to do for fear of making them dislike you for a while?

Reasons for Disputes

In the Sakkapañha Sutta, Sakka, the King of the Gods, asked the Buddha about this dilemma, saying: “Lord, all living beings wish to be free from anger and ill-will. They do not wish to quarrel or to be ill-treated, and pray for happiness, security, peace, and freedom. Yet they are not free from danger and suffering. What is the reason for this?”

The Buddha replied that the cause for this unfortunate situation was the existence of envy and meanness.

Sakka then asked, “What is the cause of envy and meanness?” and the discussion continued as follows:

“Envy and meanness are caused by objects of love and hatred.”

“What is the cause of love and hatred?”

“Love and hatred arise from craving.”

“What is the cause of craving?”

“Craving arises from discursive thinking.”

“What is the cause of discursive thinking?”

“Discursive thinking is due to perception that tends to expand or diffuse.”

“What is the way leading to the cessation of the tendency to expand and diffuse?”

“Sakka, there are two kinds of happiness: one should be pursued, the other should not. Likewise, there are two kinds of unhappiness, and two kinds of neutral feeling. Whatever happiness leads to the increase of wholesome qualities or the decrease of unwholesome qualities, that should be pursued. Whatever happiness leads to the increase of unwholesome qualities or the decrease of wholesome qualities, that should not be pursued. Happiness may be accompanied by applied and discursive thought, or without such thought. Of these two, the latter is far superior. Similarly with unhappiness and neutral feelings. This is the way leading to the cessation of the tendency to expand and diffuse.”

Living in Harmony

If we want to live happily, without quarrels and resentment, we should practise meditation to overcome the tendency to thinking that leads to unwholesome states of mind. Simply put, we should learn to still the mind, to abandon thinking and theory, views and opinions, and to cultivate bare awareness and objectivity.

If awareness is sharp and penetrating we will no longer be at the mercy of our emotions, which are powered by habitual thinking, prejudice, opinions, and wrong views (especially personality-view). Bare awareness is synonymous with mindfulness meditation, or insight meditation. We must learn to be mindful of each and every mental and physical phenomena arising throughout the whole day without missing anything. Only this will purify the mind, and only mental purity will enable us to live happily without quarrelling and ill-will. When the mind is purified to a great extent by insight meditation, unconditional love will be spontaneous and natural.

Anyone who is practising insight meditation seriously is spending 100% of his or her time to eradicate self-view, which is for the benefit and harmony of the whole society. He or she is doing the most unselfish thing that a human being can do. Instead of disparaging those who practise meditation as selfish, one should revere them, support them, and try to practise meditation oneself.

Three White Lies

The words "I Love You" mean so much, but how many people have been led astray by hearing those three words? Who hasn't? All three words are likely to lead to delusion.

Personality-view is the supporting condition for all the other mental defilements. It is not wrong to use the words 'I', 'me', or 'mine' if we use them in the conventional sense, and understand that they are just conventions. However, it never stops there. If we have not eradicated personality-view, we take

what is impermanent to be permanent, we regard what is unsatisfactory and painful as satisfying and pleasant, and we believe what is insubstantial and uncontrollable to be substantial and subject to our control. In the ultimate sense 'I' is a lie, 'me' is a lie, and 'mine' is a lie, *i.e.*, they are false and misleading. In the conventional sense they are not false, but they support the false idea of a permanent self. A wise person is not led astray by them, but the foolish majority usually take things personally.

When we use the word 'you' in talking to someone else, it is also true only in the conventional sense. The listener will most probably become puffed up with pride if the words are pleasing, or upset if they are unpleasant. He or she is unlikely to realise that the speaker's praise or criticism is just a personal opinion, and so is likely to take any comments personally. Human beings are social beings and it is only natural to want to be liked by others.

Some American psychologists conducted tests on unsuspecting students. A hidden camera was set up in an elevator. Everyone except the students who were the 'victims' of the experiment, was told to face towards the back of the elevator on entering it. The hidden camera showed that all of the 'victims' soon became very uncomfortable when facing to the front of the elevator, as people usually do. Because everyone else was facing the wrong way — towards the back of the elevator — they soon responded by turning round to face the wrong way! This proves that though we should listen objectively to criticism or praise, we must face the right way (or do the right thing), whether others agree with us or not.

The word 'love' covers many meanings. When a man loves a woman, or a woman loves a man, it is usually rooted in sensual desire or lust — which is not love. When someone loves their parents or children it is rooted in affection and attachment — which is not love either. If someone loves a religion or an ideology it is rooted in attachment to view, and that is also not love. Unconditional love (*metta*) is the wish for the well-being

of others, without any discrimination or partiality. It includes the wish for one's own well-being too, no less and no more than the wish for the well-being of others. It is more mature than just wanting to make others happy in the short term.

King Pasenadi married Mālikā, a poor flower-girl who showed him great kindness when he was in danger and exhausted from battle. To reassure her and to express his love for her, he told her that he loved her more than anyone else. The king then asked Mālikā who she loved most of all, expecting the answer that she loved him the most. However, Mālikā truthfully replied that she loved herself most of all. The king was taken aback by this, and told the Buddha about it, but the Buddha praised Queen Mālikā's words of wisdom.

Pleasing Others is Not Love

Talaputa, an actor or comedian, once asked the Buddha where actors were reborn after death. The Buddha refused to reply at first, but on being pressed he replied that actors were mostly reborn in hell. The actor believed that making people laugh would lead to rebirth in heaven, but he was severely mistaken.

Please reflect on this carefully. Doing things to please others is not always wholesome kamma. Many kinds of behaviour may give pleasure to others, but if it increases their mental defilements it is unwholesome kamma. A comedian makes a living by preying on human weaknesses. Most people would rather accept their defects than try to remove them. Only the wise wish to be reminded of the need to strive earnestly to develop wisdom. True Dhamma is displeasing to many people.

With reference to Venerable Sāriputta the Buddha said, "Let the wise man admonish, and let him instruct. He will be loved by the good and hated by the bad." (Dhp v 77)

An elderly man with few friends was ordained by Venerable Sāriputta. He was eternally grateful to him and listened avidly to his teacher's exhortations. For an older man to take instruction and correction from a younger man is not easy, but this

elderly monk was very humble and easy to instruct. Of course, he quickly gained insight and realised nibbāna.

Good people like a strict teacher who admonishes and instructs them constantly. However, a teacher should be scrupulous, energetic, and mindful, otherwise his instructions will be ineffective.

Many people have a misconception that the Buddha never spoke a harsh word to or about anyone, but they have not read the texts thoroughly. When necessary, the Buddha used disagreeable speech, seeing that it would be of benefit to others. Some things that he said might be so offensive to some people nowadays that we hesitate to repeat them, but those critical words were beneficial for his intended audience. Once, he said that women would always commit adultery given the right opportunity.

This is a general truth, and must not be taken out of context. Men would also do the same — it is obvious that if any woman is committing adultery, then a man is too. The Buddha was talking to newly ordained, eligible young bachelors from among the Sakyan nobles who were his relatives. He highlighted the weakness and wickedness of women to dissuade young monks from disrobing. If he had spoken about the generosity, kindness, and other virtues of women, it would have had the opposite effect. Intention is everything in Buddhism. Even the harshest of words spoken with the right intention are wholesome verbal kamma.

Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child?

The current thinking is that punishing children hampers their development and leads them to be violent later in life. Many studies have been done that confirm this. However, the opinion of those who have been punished in childhood is usually the opposite; they are likely to punish their own children in turn, believing that it is necessary for their welfare.

Ultimately, all problems arise from mental defilements. Even if parents never hit their children, they are sure to get angry

sometimes. Psychological punishments may do far more harm than physical ones. It is rare to find the ideal family where the parents never have to discipline their children, and where the children can talk to their parents as friends whenever they are facing conflicts at school or with their friends. If the parents abstain from all immorality, meditate regularly, teach Dhamma to their children, and honour and support virtuous monks, they may still find that their children are corrupted by influences beyond their control. We are living in very difficult times.

In treating antisocial behaviour in children one must treat the parents as well. Children learn how to behave from their parents, not by listening to what they say, but by watching what they do. If a parent is angry and often displays it, then a child will follow suit.

The Buddha was the ideal 'father' to the community of monks since he had eradicated all traces of anger. If he admonished monks it was always motivated by compassion. If parents are motivated by compassion, they need not worry too much about harming their children by smacking or scolding them occasionally, but if they are angry they should cool down before punishing their children. Everyone should practise meditation seriously to eradicate mental defilements such as attachment, anger, impatience, jealousy, and hypocrisy. Teachers, and others in charge of children have a special duty to be mindful and wise.

According to the Vinaya rules it is an offence to strike a novice when angry. However, in practice it is not uncommon for naughty novices to be beaten. If one is not angry, there is no offence. I was quite shocked when my Burmese teacher beat a novice who had been listening to music in the meditation centre. He also thrashed a young delinquent whose pious parents had brought him to the monastery, begging my teacher to correct his wild behaviour. It is hard to say that he did not get angry. That was many years ago, when my teacher was in the prime of life. He has mellowed a lot after having a heart-bypass.

He is a well-respected meditation master, but only Arahants and Non-returns are totally free from anger. Some people argue that beating children is fundamentally wrong, but those living in the world have to be pragmatic. Ordinary parents and teachers are not Arahants or Non-returns who have eradicated all anger. If they do not smack children, their anger will almost certainly manifest in other ways. Teachers may suffer from severe stress if they have no practical means to maintain discipline. The tried and tested method of sending unruly pupils to the headmaster for punishment is practical. The teacher does not punish the pupil himself while he is angry. The headmaster is detached from the classroom confrontation, and can assess the facts objectively. If he thinks that the teacher was being intolerant he can punish the pupil lightly to save face for both parties.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had no police, courts, or prisons? Shopkeepers and home owners could shoot robbers themselves and save everyone a lot of trouble! Would this really work? Society would soon descend to anarchy, wouldn't it.

So love has a broad scope. If you really care for the welfare of others, you must oppose them when they are wrong. You may sometimes need to use physical force to restrain evil-doers, but you must train yourself well to overcome greed, anger, and delusion.

“Whatever harm a foe may do to his enemy, or a suitor may do to his rival, one's own ill-directed mind can do one a still greater harm.” (*Dhp v 42*)

The Protection of Love

Loving-kindness is a powerful protection from danger — the external danger of violence and the internal danger of anger, jealousy, resentment, and meanness. Loving-kindness makes the mind soft and pliable, like a green branch full of sap. Without love, the mind is brittle, like a dried up branch.

The Metta Sutta

The famous *Metta Sutta* — often referred to as the *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta* — was taught to a group of forest monks. When meditating in the forest they were disturbed by tree spirits who made all manner of frightening appearances to scare them away. The Buddha urged them to practise loving-kindness towards all beings, both seen and unseen. Then those spirits tolerated their presence happily.

*Karaṇīyamatthakusalena,
yantaṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca;
Sakko ujū ca suhujū ca,
sūvaco cassa mudu anatimānī.*

*Santussako ca subharo ca,
appakicco ca sallahukavutti;
Santindriyo ca nipako ca,
appagabbho kulesvananugiddho.*

*Na ca khuddamācare kiñci,
yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ;
Sukhino va khemino hontu,
sabbasattā bhavantu sukhittā.*

*Ye keci pāṇabhūtatti,
tasā vā thāvarā vanavasesā;
Dīghā vā ye va mahantā,
majjhimā rassakā aṇukathulā.*

*Diṭṭhā vā ye va adiṭṭhā,
ye va dūre vasanti avidūre.
Bhūtā va sambhavesī va,
sabbasattā bhavantu sukhittā.*

*Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha,
nātimaññetha katthaci na kañci.
Byārosanā paṭighasaññā,
nāññamaññassa dukkhamiccheyya.*

*Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttam
āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe;
Evampi sabbabhūtesu,
mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇam.*

*Mettañca sabbalokasmi,
mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇam;
Uddham adho ca tiriyañca,
asambādham averamasapattam.*

*Tiṭṭham caraṃ nisinno va,
sayāno yāvatāssa vitamiddho.
Etaṃ satim adhiṭṭheyya,
brahmametaṃ vihāramidhamāhu.*

*Diṭṭhiñca anupaggamma,
sīlavā dassanena sampanno;
Kāmesu vinaya, gedham,
na hi jātuggabbhaseyyaṃ punareti”ti.*

The Discourse on Loving-kindness

1. He who is skilled in welfare, who wishes to attain that calm state (*nibbāna*), should act thus: he should be able, upright, perfectly upright, obedient, gentle, and humble.

2. Contented, easily supported, with few duties, of light livelihood, with senses calmed, discreet, not impudent, not greedily attached to families.

3. He should not pursue the slightest thing for which other wise men might censure him. May all being be happy and secure, may their hearts be wholesome!

4-5. Whatever living beings there be: feeble or strong, tall, stout, or medium, short, small or large, without exception; seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born or those who are to be born, may all beings be happy!

6. Let none deceive another, nor despise any person whatsoever in any place. Let him not wish any harm to another out of anger or ill-will.

7. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.

8. Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world: above, below, and across without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.

9. Whether he stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness. This they say is the noblest living here.

10. Not falling into wrong views, being virtuous and endowed with insight, by discarding attachment to sense desires, never again is he reborn. (Translation, Hammalawa Saddhātissa, Suttanipāta, Curzon Press).

The Metta Sutta is recited frequently by monks to protect people from danger. In my view, the mere recitation of *suttas* is not fully effective. Since we recite the *suttas* in Pāli, some people may not reflect well on the meaning. They will know that the *sutta* is about the practice of loving-kindness, but they may allow their minds to wander to other thoughts while listening to the recitation. Afterwards, they may neglect to practise loving-kindness as urged by the discourse. If so, how could they get any benefit? The discourse says at the start that one should be able and upright, not doing the slightest blame-worthy thing. So morality should be purified to practise loving-kindness effectively. Then one should be contented, with few duties, with senses calmed, and one should be unbiased and impartial. One should cultivate serenity, humility, and simplicity. If one does not love oneself, how could one love others? We need to be free from remorse, anger, and jealousy.

The benefit of medicine can be gained by taking it, not by reciting prescriptions, though we must admit that there might be a placebo effect. Therefore, it would be better to take up meditation on loving-kindness properly, learning to recite the Pāli formulae by oneself, while reflecting deeply on the meaning

in one's own language. With repetition, the words imbue the mind with powerful thoughts of sincere love. Memorise the words, then learn the meaning, then cultivate skilful thoughts.

How to Practise Loving-kindness

Ahaṃ avero homi: may I be free from ill-will.

Abyāpajjo homi: may I be free from enmity.

Anīgho homi: may I be free from affliction.

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi: may I be happy.

Dukkhā muccāmi: may I be free from suffering.

Yathā-laddha-sampattito mā vigacchāmi: may I not be parted from the good fortune I have attained.

Kammassako: I am the owner of my kamma and must inherit its results.

Then one should extend loving-kindness to the guardian deities of one's house or monastery:

Imasmiṃ gehe ārakkhadevatā averā hontu: may the guardian deities in this house be free from anger.

Abyāpajjā hontu: may they be free from enmity.

Anīghā hontu: may they be free from affliction.

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu: may they be happy.

Dukkhā muccantu: may they be free from suffering.

Yathā-laddha-sampattito mā vigacchantu: may they not be parted from the good fortune they have attained.

Kammassakā: They are owners of their kamma and will inherit its results.

Next one should extend loving-kindness to one's parents, teachers, relatives, and associates:

Amhākaṃ mātapitu ācariya-ñāti-mitta-sammuhā averā hontu: may my mother and father, teacher, relatives, and associates be free from anger.

Abyāpajjā hontu: may they be free from enmity.

Anīghā hontu: may they be free from affliction.

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu: may they be happy.

Dukkhā muccantu: may they be free from suffering.

Yathā-laddha-sampattito mā vigacchantu: may they not be parted from the good fortune they have attained.

Kammassakā: they are owners of their kamma and will inherit its results.

Then one should extend loving-kindness to all kinds of living beings:

Sabbe sattā, sabbe pāṇā, sabbe bhūtā, sabbe puggalā, sabbe atta-bhāva-pariyāpannā, sabbā itthiyo, sabbe purisā, sabbe ariyā, sabbe anariyā, sabbe devā, sabbe manussā, sabbe vinipātikā averā hontu: may all sentient things, all breathing things, all beings, all persons, all individuals, all women, all men, all noble ones, all ordinary persons, all deities, all human beings, all those destined for the states of loss, be free from anger.

Abyāpajjā hontu: may they be free from enmity.

Anīghā hontu: may they be free from affliction.

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu: may they be happy.

Dukkhā muccantu: may they be free from suffering.

Yathā-laddha-sampattito mā vigacchantu: may they not be parted from the good fortune they have attained.

Kammassakā: all beings are the owners of their kamma and must inherit its results.

Finally, extend loving-kindness in all directions:

Puratthimāya disāya, dakkhiṇāya disāya, pacchimāya disāya, uttarāya disāya, puratthimāya anudisāya, dakkhiṇāya anudisāya, pacchimāya anudisāya, uttarāya anudisāya, hetṭhimāya disāya, uparimāya disāya: in the east, the south, the west, the north, the south-east, the south-west, the north-west, the north-east, below, and above.

Sabbe sattā, sabbe pāṇā, sabbe bhūtā, sabbe puggalā, sabbe atta-bhāva-pariyāpannā, sabbā itthiyo, sabbe purisā, sabbe ariyā, sabbe anariyā, sabbe devā, sabbe manussā, sabbe vinipātikā, averā hontu: may all sentient things, all breathing things, all beings, all persons, all individuals, all women, all men, all noble ones, all ordinary persons, all deities, all human beings, all those destined for the states of loss, be free from anger.

Abyāpajjā hontu: May they be free from enmity.

Anīghā hontu: May they be free from affliction.

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu: May they be happy.

Dukkhā muccantu: May they be free from suffering.

Yathā-laddha-sampattito mā vigacchantu: May they not be parted from their good fortune.

Kammassakā: All beings every where are the owners of their kamma and will inherit its results.

Eleven Benefits of Loving-kindness

Practised in this way with right understanding of the law of kamma and its results, loving-kindness will be sincere, impartial, equanimous, and very effective. Having calmed and purified the mind with *metta*, one can more easily develop insight, which leads to nibbāna.

Another *Mettā Sutta* found in the *Āṅguttaranikāya*¹ says that eleven benefits are obtained by one who practises loving-kindness:

1. He sleeps in peace,
2. he wakes in peace,
3. he dreams no evil dreams,
4. he is dear to human beings,
5. he is dear to non-human beings,
6. deities protect him,
7. fire, weapons, and poisons cannot harm him,
8. his mind is quickly concentrated,
9. his countenance is serene,
10. he dies unconfused,
11. if he attains no higher, he attains the Brahmā realm after death.

¹ A.v.241. The *Mettā Sutta* in the *Book of the Eights* at A.iv.150 mentions eight of these benefits, excluding 8-10. Yet another at S.v.130 says that one who cultivates loving-kindness well develops the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*), which lead to dispassion and Enlightenment.

Do Not Be Afraid of Merit

In yet another Metta Sutta¹ the Buddha relates how, after cultivating loving-kindness for seven years he enjoyed seven aeons in the Brahmā realms, and also enjoyed many kinds of worldly glory and happiness when reborn in the human realm.

The Buddha urges us not to be afraid of cultivating merit (*puññā*) as merit is a synonym for happiness. One who is intent on realising nibbāna in this very life might be inclined to disregard the practice of loving-kindness, but as the Mettā Sutta in the Aṅguttaranikāya says, the cultivation of loving-kindness leads to the development of the seven factors of enlightenment, which are the basis for attaining the path and realising nibbāna.

If we try to practice mindfulness only, with the idea of attaining insight by the shortest possible route, like Bāhiya Dāruciriya, we might succeed, but we might not. If we don't succeed before we die, the lack of loving-kindness meditation practice might lead to a overly critical and rigid mind, and that may result in great disappointment if the goal is not achieved even after many years of practice. Then we might fall away from morality, and fall into lower realms in spite of all of our good efforts. So it is recommended to practice both loving-kindness and recollection of the Buddha's qualities to keep the mind soft, pliable, and optimistic while practising mindfulness meditation to develop insight.

It is not uncommon for meditators to look down on ordinary Buddhists who are only intent on "making merit," and are negligent to practice meditation to develop the path. This spiritual pride should be guarded against. Unless one has the power to read minds, one really has very little idea how mature the understanding of others' is. Many who practised meditation in their youth, later work hard to support monks, nuns, or meditation centres while living the household life. Without their kind support, meditators would find it very hard to develop concentration.

¹ A.iv.89. also in Iti.14.

The teaching of all the Buddhas is threefold (Dhp.v.183):

1. Not to do any evil thing (*sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ*),
2. To cultivate wholesomeness (*kusalassa upasampadā*),
3. To purify the mind (*sacittapariyodapaṇaṃ*).

This is the teaching of the Buddhas (*etaṃ Buddhāna sāsanaṃ*).

The cultivation of wholesomeness is an important support to the development of mental purity. If you look again at the Karaṇīya Metta Sutta you will see that the first three verses have nothing obvious to do with meditation practice, and the sixth verse is about not deceiving others. These verses are primarily about morality, renunciation, and contentment.

“One should be able, upright, perfectly upright, obedient, gentle, and humble. Contented, easily supported, with few duties, of light livelihood, with senses calmed, discreet, not impudent, not greedily attached to families. He should not pursue the slightest thing for which other wise men might censure him.”

Reading Dhamma books like this and reflecting on what has been said also comes under the heading of “Cultivating wholesomeness.” It is the wholesome deed of “Listening to Dhamma,” or “Straightening one’s wrong views.” Bowing to an image of the Buddha, lighting candles and incense, or offering flowers, may be regarded as unnecessary rituals, but they are also the wholesome deeds of reverence (*apacāyana*).

Contemplating with gratitude the help and support given by others who provide a place to meditate, or who take over practical responsibilities so that others can meditate without being disturbed, is the wholesome deed of sharing merit (*pattidāna*).

All of these wholesome deeds are a great kindness to oneself and to others. The meditator who has a great storehouse full of meritorious deeds is a kind person who will easily gain concentration and insight, leading to the attainment of nibbāna.

