

# METTA

(Loving - Kindness)

How to live, let live and die in PEACE

## Benefits of Metta

Chapter 1 taken from "Metta"

(*Loving-Kindness or True Divine-Love*)

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UNESCO is perhaps the largest and most popular international organization founded for the specific purpose of promoting WORLD PEACE by bringing about the necessary changes in the minds of men. The preamble to its constitution, therefore, says thus: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." Here men, of course, means men and women. You are also one of them. If you wish to have peace of mind, you must also construct defenses of peace in your own mind. Even if you cannot make the whole world happy, surely, you make yourself happy, if you have peace of mind. All those with whom you associate too, will be happy, when you are happy. Thereby you yourself become a mobile institution for promoting peace wherever you go.

Even if you are not interested in promoting world peace, surely you must be interested in yourself, and perhaps in your close associates such as your wife, (or husband), or brothers and sisters, or children and grandchildren, or your friends. Therefore you may wish to know how you can promote peace in your own mind and thereby make all your associates happy. Buddha, as you perhaps know, was himself a man, born in India. He lived among men, spent his whole lifetime trying to make men and women wiser, nobler and happier than they were. He has left us a method of promoting peace and happiness in our own minds. It is a meditation called METTA or LOVING KINDNESS. He has successfully practiced metta and all those who practice metta even today know by personal experience that it is very effective and produces immediate results.

Metta, in short, is somewhat like the loving kindness or the affectionate attitude of mind that a good mother has towards her only children while protecting them, even at the risk of her own life. If you can cultivate such an attitude of mind towards all, breaking down all barriers of caste, color, creed, sex, etc., then you have cultivated metta in full. It is not, of course, easy for anyone to attain this high standard at once, unless one had such past experience in this 'round of birth' called *samsara*. However, anyone can acquire this standard by following a graduated course of meditation and conscious application of the principle in everyday life. This definition of metta referred to here is found in the well-known *Metta Sutta* or Sermon on Loving Kindness. This metta is not necessarily the same as the love or lust (*pena*) which a man and a woman may have towards each other, but is somewhat similar to the love that a good mother has towards her only child.

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According to the teachings of the Buddha, metta is the first of a group of four related concepts that indicate four attitudes of mind necessary for social well-being and individual peace. All these four taken together are called the *Brahma Vihara* or Sublime States. *Karuna* is compassion towards the suffering of others. *Mudita* is altruistic joy which makes a person happy when others are happy. *Upekkha* is equanimity which gives a balance of mind to face one's life experience quite dispassionately. These are the other three concepts to this group which includes *metta* as the first and *upekkha* as the last.

The most outstanding characteristic of metta is the absence of its opposites *viz.*, hatred, anger, ill-will. To the extent that one reduces these undesirable tendencies of hatred, anger and ill-will, one can develop metta or loving kindness. On the other hand, to the extent that one cultivates metta, one can reduce these undesirable tendencies. They are two opposites that are inter-related in this manner, one reducing the other, or one's presence causing the other's absence. Therefore the first step in the meditation of developing metta is to reduce the opposite tendencies of hatred, anger and ill-will. (The Greek word nearest to metta in meaning is *Agape*.)

You need not necessarily be a professed Buddhist to develop metta in your mind. A non-Buddhist too may do so provided he follows the necessary instructions and adopts the prescribed techniques; preferably with the guidance of someone who is competent to help him. Even if you are a Buddhist, you may not be competent to guide a beginner, unless you have studied it and perhaps applied it to your own life. Therefore if you wish to try it out, you should first know what metta is and how metta can be developed in your mind.

According to the Buddha too, war and peace begin in the minds of men. Therefore most of his teachings, if not all, are directed towards understanding, developing and controlling the mind, eventually leading to perfect purity of conduct, perfect peace of mind, and perfect wisdom. Metta is only one such method prescribed by the Buddha for the purpose of this mind culture. If you develop metta, your attitude of mind will change for the better and that will in turn change your whole personality. Therefore even before you learn the methods of developing metta, you may like to know all the benefits of metta as found in the sacred literature that contains the teachings of the Buddha and his followers who applied these teachings to their lives.

Fortunately for us, most of these techniques as understood, interpreted, and applied by his followers in Lanka have been recorded first in Sinhala in the first century BC, and later in Pali during the fifth century. Out of the extant Pali texts that give us this information about the Buddha's system of mind culture the famous Buddhist psychology book called *Visuddhi Magga* (Path of Purity) is by far the best and the most authoritative. This was compiled by Buddhaghosha, an Indian scholar

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monk, who came to Lanka to study teachings of the Buddha as found in the unbroken Sinhala tradition. Buddhism was brought to Lanka in the third century BC by Mahinda, the son of Asoka. This Pali text called *Visuddhi Magga*, is also the best single book which can provide us with all the relevant information about this subject of metta.

*Vimutti Magga*, or Path of Liberation was the work of a Sinhala monk called Upatissa, during the first century. According to this *Vimutti Magga*, and its successor *Visuddhi Magga*, there are eleven benefits of metta. They record the teachings of the Buddha here too, as in many other places. All these benefits can be obtained in full by anyone who has perfected the practice of metta in full as prescribed by the Buddha. However, some of them can be gained by anyone here and now, proportionate to the extent of one's development in metta. Most of the benefits are verifiable by direct personal experience of the follower. Out of these, the first one itself belongs to this verifiable group. One who practices metta will enjoy a sound undisturbed sleep. This is mentioned as the first benefit of metta.

The second benefit of metta, as taught by the Buddha and as found in the *Visuddhi magga*, is a happy and comfortable waking after sleep. This too may be verified by anyone who wishes to do so. The third benefit also refers to sleep. One who has developed metta will not have the unpleasant experience of seeing undesirable dreams. So the first three benefits of metta will help the followers enjoy a good sleep, which is a fundamental requirement for anyone's health and well-being. Metta, therefore, helps us to commence, continue, and conclude our sleep in a healthy and desirable manner.

Everyone perhaps knows how important a sound sleep is for one's happiness and well-being. This is a fundamental need to be met daily if one is to live in peace and promote peace. Those of you who have had the unpleasant experience of working with people who do not enjoy a sound sleep will know how irritable and sensitive such persons are in their interpersonal relationships. You may also know what an amount of tension results from the extraordinary behavior of a person who does not have the privilege of enjoying a sound sleep regularly. Some people often even use drugs to induce sleep, but most of these artificial methods have their own unpleasant after-effects, unlike a sound sleep resulting from the development of this psychological skill called metta.

A person who practices this meditation will be dear to all those with whom he associates. Those who meet him and have dealings with him will consider it a pleasant experience. Such a person is seldom disliked. This benefit may be explained perhaps by casually relating it to the other benefits referred to earlier, because a person with sound sleep often tends to behave in a pleasant way leading to less tension and lesser unpleasant feelings. To those who believe in unobservable and unverifiable

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experiences that do not come within our perceptual field of the senses, other explanations too may be given for this benefit. However, a person who practices metta appears to develop a force that attracts all.

The fifth, sixth and seventh benefits of metta are rather unusual and may not be believed by those skeptics and rationalists who discard all super or supra normal extra-sensory experiences. A person who has developed metta will be liked by (or dear to) non-human beings. Buddha's dispensation and his cosmic system contained therein, include thirty-one planes of existence and hundreds of thousands of world systems. Human beings and animals that we see with our unpurified, untamed, naked eyes are only two of these thirty-one. Non-human beings here mean those other spirits we humans do not easily see, unless we develop our spiritual faculties that are latent in all of us in varying degrees. This benefit of metta is also one that may be verified by those who have unpleasant experience with spirits. That is why most Buddhists in Lanka and in other countries use metta as a part of the culture to ward off the evil influence of spirits whether imaginary or real or both.

Sixth benefit of metta also deals with what may be called spiritual, supernormal, or extra-sensory experiences. According to this, one who practices metta will be looked after or guarded by devas or deities. Everyone knows that a reasonable proportion of the human race, whether they are Buddhist or not, believe in the existence of other beings, who are said to be more powerful than humans, at least in certain, if not in all, respects. As such, some believe in one God while others in several. Most of them expect these supernatural powers to help them when they are in distress. Whether this is right or wrong is to be decided by each individual according to one's own experiences and spiritual maturity. However if you expect such powers to help you or answer your "prayer", you can qualify for it by practicing metta as part of your regular prayer and conduct.

If you believe in such a God or gods who can answer your prayer or with whom you wish to have communion, you may supplement your regular methods with the practice of metta and see the results yourself. According to the *Visuddhi Magga*, the sixth benefit of metta specifically states that one who practices metta will be guarded by the deities or devas. Surely, unless you are dear to them, they will not award you or listen to your prayer. Therefore, the practice of metta is undoubtedly an effective method of qualifying yourself to have direct access to those celestial planes too, because metta attracts even divine beings.

Fire, poison and weapons do not harm a person who has developed metta. This is the seventh benefit and is also one that may be tentatively ignored by those who are inclined to disbelieve anything that is not verifiable here and now, by empirical methods. One is not entitled to deny entirely the validity of these until one has developed metta and failed to obtain the benefits specified herein. Although there are

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instances of such strange situations in the life of certain saints, whose life-stories are recorded in the sacred books of all religions, one may not be inclined to believe them until one gets a direct personal experience. Until then it is reasonable and even advisable, perhaps, to leave it as an open question. It also conforms to the so-called scientific traditions of the age, too. But others, who are inclined towards believing such powers, may develop metta even as a protection against fire, poison and weapons. Try it and see the result for yourself.

The next benefit of metta says that one can concentrate on anything very easily and promptly if one cultivates metta. This does not belong to the supernatural sphere and may be tested by personal experience here and now. You may test it for your own benefit by your experience. It is common knowledge that most of us find it extremely difficult to concentrate on something without much effort on our part. Nothing worthwhile, of course, can be achieved without effort, but metta helps a person get the best out of his mental abilities with the minimum effort and strain. It is the skill of concentration that may be considered as the gateway to intellectual success. Therefore one may benefit from metta in one's intellectual pursuits that need much concentration.

The ninth benefit of metta tends to make the facial appearance of the followers quite serene. As you know it is not everyone whose face is serene, calm and attractive to look at. Neither is it easy to acquire such true serenity and calmness, which are invariably and surely the external manifestations of the presence of peace in one's mind. One who has such a face will also have such words, too. Both these will promote peace among all those who come under the influence of such a person, whether he is a parent, a group or religious leader, or a national or international leader. Therefore, if one wishes to radiate peace both within and around oneself, one must develop a serene face by practicing metta.

Now we have already discussed nine benefits of the meditation called metta or loving kindness, as found in the Buddhist texts. Out of these, at least three may not be acceptable to those who do not believe in supernatural or extra-sensory experiences. According to these three benefits one who practices metta (a) will be dear to the non-human beings, (b) will be guarded by the divine beings, and (c) fire, poison, and weapons will not harm him.

Out of the other benefits of the meditation three are related to sleep. According to them one who practices metta begins, continues and ends his sleep in comfort. In other words, such person can enjoy a sound sleep with no unpleasant dreams. He will sleep in comfort, will not be disturbed by unpleasant dreams and will wake in comfort.

Out of the nine benefits of metta that we have already studied, three are related to extra-sensory or supernormal powers, three are related to sleep, and the following

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three refer to the personality changes that will result from the practice of this meditation. One tends to make oneself dear to other human beings, another makes one's face serene, and another facilitates the skill of concentration of the mind on any subject.

The tenth benefit of metta shows also how its followers not only live in peace but also die in peace. According to it one who practices metta, or loving kindness, will die unconfused. No one among the surviving, of course, has had the experience of dying in the present life. Therefore one may not be able to realize the value of this blessing. However, everyone can imagine how unfortunate it is to die with a confused mind. For those who believe in rebirth, or life after death, it is very desirable that death occurs in such a state of unconfused consciousness. Buddhists, of course, value this blessing, because such death will help them obtain a satisfactory rebirth.

The eleventh and last benefit of this meditation also refers to life after death. Those who do not believe in any life after death may tentatively ignore this, but those who believe in some form of rebirth will undoubtedly appreciate this blessing too. According to the *Visuddhi Magga*, one who cultivates metta will be reborn after death at least in the Brahma Loka, the highest of heavens. However, whether we are born again or not, it is always good to be harmless to others and helpful to all. That is the attitude of mind which will be cultivated if one practices metta or loving kindness. Such attitude will, perhaps, make this world itself a heaven for you, even if you do not believe in life after death. Therefore, one who practices metta will try to be harmful to none and helpful to all.

Now even if one does not practice this meditation of metta or loving kindness to such a great extent as to obtain all these eleven benefits, one can surely benefit according to one's own ability and skills of practicing metta. You can try it yourself and see whether you will not be happier than you were. You will also observe a marked change in your attitude of mind and a change in your whole personality thereafter. If you have adequate patience to continue this meditation regularly, at least for a few minutes each day, and maintain the consequent attitude of mind throughout your waking life, you will realize how happy and pleasant you are. This is the cumulative and collective benefit of practicing metta even for a short time.

If you develop metta, you will start liking all those whom you associate with and will also be liked by them in return. This will lead to a whole fund of goodwill flowing to you and from you in all your interpersonal relationships, maybe with the members of your family, or maybe in the society you live, or maybe with those of your working group. Therefore metta can radiate, release, or generate a peace-promoting, social-psychological force from the one who practices metta regularly to those who associate with him. This peace-promoting, social-psychological force will soon be a network of forces emanating from one another. This metta-motivated peace force

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tends to breed peace every where it goes. It is more or less like an infection with metta as the germ that spreads the necessary condition for peace.

These benefits as found in the teachings of the Buddha were no doubt preached to his direct followers who were devoting their whole life time for the attainment of perfect morality, perfect wisdom and perfect peace. Therefore theirs was not a matter of stopping half-way only, as a preliminary step towards attaining world peace by reducing world tension. As such, these benefits may be attained in full only by persons prepared to devote at least a reasonable portion of their time to this socially beneficial, culturally enriching, and intellectually satisfying, spiritual experience called metta, or loving kindness, to which the Buddha gives highest priority in the list of spiritual activities.

However, anyone who practices metta even a few minutes a day, or a short time, will be rewarded in proportion to the sustained effort and the sincerity of purpose. One need not wait long to see the result of such elementary practice. The meditator himself will feel the difference resulting from the presence of metta as a dominant part of the content of his psychological field. This cannot be evaluated or tested merely by rational or conceptual argument for and against metta. It has to be lived as a true experience even for a short time as a start. The best and perhaps the only test for metta is the direct experience of the follower.

All those who do not believe in scientifically unverifiable, spiritual experiences and are concerned only with the socio-economic, cultural experiences that lend themselves to empirical tests and observable benefits may also give due consideration to metta as a method of promoting human motivation towards social progress. If a parent, as the leader of a family group practices, metta, the other members of the family will feel the difference in the leader's attitude to otherwise conflicting situations. If a temperamentally irritable and extremely sensitive leader of a working group practices metta, the result of that new condition will be reflected in the decreasing amount of heat and the increasing amount of light falling on the co-operative experiences that follow.

In working social groups of all types, political, religious, cultural, national or international, these benefits of metta may be tested perhaps by all participants, practicing metta as prescribed by those who have already succeeded in obtaining these benefits. Subject to the common subjective factor creeping into any so-called "scientific" experiment dealing with and handled by human beings, this experimental situation may not be out of the reach of human ingenuity in the contemporary society. Such experiments may be tried by those who are not prepared to depend even on their own personal experiences in dealing with matters of social significance as the reducing of inter-personal, inter-group, international, or inter-racial tension. In matters

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of this nature utilizing the benefits of metta appears to be a psychological possibility even if it does not appeal to the scientific requirements of the modern, “rational” age.

If we can continue and regularly practice this meditation, we may be able to radiate a spiritual peace force in the whole universe. Such a force will know no physical bounds in space, or temporal limits in time, as we know them. It will also spread, breaking through and crossing all other barriers, whether man-made or natural. Thus a force of that nature, emanating from several persons living in all parts of the world, will combine to be a massive force in the minds of most, if not all, men. Every temple, every church, every mosque, every praying hall or every meditation center, every synagogue, every institution or spiritual endeavor, every educational congregation, every center of cultural enterprises, and every assembly hall where human beings gather in different numbers for the purpose of considering the ways and means of serving and saving mankind, can surely be converted to an institution for generating and radiating this universal force of promoting peace through the practice of metta.

To those who believe in extra-sensory perception or supernatural experiences, a peace force of this nature radiating from all those who follow a religion, and those others who lead a good life even without professing any religion, will have the possibility of reaching the celestial planes of heavenly beings, granted such planes and beings do exist. Such a collective and cooperative effort by man to promote world peace undoubtedly bear better results than most of the international conferences and campaigns of the contemporary society, trying apparently to save God or gods from mankind, instead of trying to save mankind from the animal in man. Metta may provide this universal peace force which will eventually enlist the full support of the divine beings, if such beings do exist. God or gods may then say, “Man, mind your own business, and let me mind mine. I may also help you then.”

If this assumption is granted, it may not be the number of persons participating in such a cooperative spiritual endeavor that matters. It is the sincerity of purpose, continuity of the effort, and the clarity of the vision involved in the endeavor, that will ensure worthwhile results. Therefore even a few may make a good start augmenting all those existing campaigns directed towards the promoting of world peace. Even if you fail to achieve this laudable universal objective, by this spiritual experience, you are sure to be come healthier, nobler and wiser than you were, in your personal life. That will also improve the quality of your social relationships with those you associate with while the standard of your spiritual maturity will not remain static. All these will help metta reduce inter-group tension and promote racial, religious, or ideological harmony, in any society. If you wish to have peace of mind, if you wish to have peace around you, if you wish to increase your number of friends, and if you wish to win divine favors, try to develop metta and see the results for yourself.

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## Appendix 1

### **Metta for a Universal Society**

(Translation from *Metta Sutta*)

“May I always be happy, be free from ill,  
So be my friends, indifferent ones and enemies.  
May the beings of this village always be happy,  
So be those of foreign lands and of other worlds,  
Countless beings and living things, over all the worlds,  
All persons, all that have come to exist,  
And all those male and female kind,  
All worthy and unworthy ones,  
All in the ten directions, including gods, men and unhappy ones,  
May they all be happy. Be free from ill.”

### **Buddha’s Teachings**

(From *Sutta-Nipata*. Edited by Lord Chalmers, Humphrey Milford,  
Oxford University Press, 1932.)

When Peace is won, th’ adept  
in welfare needs to prove  
an able upright man  
of gracious speech, kind mood,  
devoid of arrogance

an easy, grateful, guest,  
- no busybody: wants  
but few; sense-disciplined,  
quick witted, bluster-free:  
never importunate:

and let him never stoop  
to conduct mean or low,  
evoking grave rebuke.

May creatures all abound

in weal and peace; may all  
be blessed with peace always:  
all creatures weak or strong,  
all creatures great and small:

creatures unseen or seen,  
dwelling afar or near,  
born or awaiting birth,  
- may all be blessed with peace!

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Let none cajole or flout  
his fellow anywhere:  
let none with others harm  
in dungeon or in hate.

Just as with her own life  
a mother shields from hurt  
her own, her only, child, -  
let all-embracing thoughts  
for all that lives be thine,  
- an all-embracing love  
for all the universe  
in all its heights and depths  
and breath, unstinted love,  
unmarred by hate within,  
not rousing enmity.

So as you stand or walk,  
or sit, or lie, reflect  
with all your might on this  
- 'tis deemed "a state divine."

Ignoring sophists' views,  
the good - with insight filled,  
and purged of appetite  
for sensuous delights -  
shall never see rebirth.

(From a souvenir distributed by the  
Gandhi Centenary Celebration Committee of Ceylon  
2/10/68)

May there be rain in due season,  
May there be a rich harvest.  
May the whole world be happy,  
May the rulers be righteous.

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