

Mettā Sutta (3 of 5) With No Anger

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

loving-kindness, goodwill, *The Path Of Purification*, Buddhaghosa, *brahmavihāra*, resentment, liberation, aversion, despise, hostility, gift, unwholesomeness, wholesomeness, respect

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We continue with a series of talks on the “*Mettā Sutta*,” the discourse on loving-kindness. My translation of the sutta is on the IMC website at <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/metta-sutta/>. I have divided the text into four parts. Today I will discuss the third and shortest part.

The Path of Purification, a fifth-century meditation manual by the teacher Buddhaghosa, provides the classic instructions for loving-kindness practice. The modern practice of loving-kindness – the most common way to practice it – comes from this book.

The ninth chapter of *The Path of Purification* is about *brahmavihāra* meditations – the meditations of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. The chapter’s discussion of loving-kindness is mostly about overcoming resentment and anger. One of the biggest obstacles to loving-kindness or goodwill is having resentment or anger towards someone. So this section of the book is a treatise on overcoming anger more than teachings on loving-kindness.

The third part of the “*Mettā Sutta*” says:

*Let no one deceive another
Or despise anyone anywhere;
Let no one through anger or aversion
Wish for others to suffer.*

Here we have a call to put aside anything that gets in the way of goodwill. The sutta is not only about loving-kindness. It is about the path to liberation through loving-kindness. The path of liberation cannot be found in being angry or despising, having aversion towards anyone – especially if there is a wish for others to suffer – a kind of hostility.

Being caught in anger and resentment goes against the grain of liberation because it involves becoming unliberated. That attitude involves getting entangled, being in bondage, and not being free. It does not necessarily mean all anger, but rather any anger that involves hostility or ill will towards someone – a wish for others to suffer.

As I said, *The Path of Purification* has a section on overcoming anger and resentment. It is fun to read because Buddhaghosa gives instructions on what to do, and he says, “If that does not work, try this.” He continues: “If this does not work, try that. And if that does not work, try this.” Buddhaghosa offers a series of options. Lastly, he says: “If nothing else works, get involved in the practice of gift-giving. Either offer a gift to the person you are angry or hostile with – or allow them to give you a gift.”

I do not know why Buddhaghosa provides gift-giving as the last resort for overcoming anger and resentment. Why not the first? His other instructions include drumming up loving-kindness for the person you are angry with and thinking about their good qualities. He also says to consider how one’s own anger and resentment harms oneself. The text literally says it causes damage to oneself that the enemy cannot create. Others can cause us harm in a variety of ways, but only you can get into the deepest parts of your heart and mind by having anger or resentment.

Perhaps you have your own effective, skillful, and respectful ways of working with anger, resentment, aversion, and hostility. These states of mind are well worth respecting. To not automatically have hostility towards your hostility or aversion towards your aversion. But rather, to understand and have respect for them.

Sometimes we have respect for dangerous things. These states of mind can be dangerous. We respect them partly because of their danger. We are very careful with these states of mind so that they do not cause harm or we do not succumb to the danger that they bring.

Anger and resentment are also like messengers – and we do not want to kill the messenger. The message may be that we are hurting or some part of ourselves feels scared. The message may be that something unwholesome is going on inside of us – and that unwholesomeness needs attention if we want to find our way to wholesomeness. What is unwholesome inside of us might be the thing that most needs our goodwill, compassion, and generous spirit. If we keep pushing away what is unwholesome inside of us, it can fester and get worse. We can live a life divided by what we are willing to face and what we are ignoring.

What is the message of anger? What is underneath or behind the anger? Sometimes anger is something in ourselves that needs goodwill or reassurance. Maybe anger needs to be let go of – not with hostility, but put down with respect and care.

Living a wholesome life means bringing wholesomeness to the unwholesome parts of ourselves. In a sense, to be a friend to yourself.

The third part of the “*Mettā Sutta*” says,
*Let no one deceive another
Or despise anyone anywhere;
Let no one through anger or aversion
Wish for others to suffer.”*

I see this, first and foremost, as directed towards ourselves. We do not want to deceive or despise anyone. We do not want to be angry or aversive towards anyone. Cultivate putting those down. Cultivate the absence of deception – presenting ourselves as different from who we are or getting people to do what we want through manipulation. Do not despise yourself or anyone. Respect everyone.

Enter the world of your unwholesomeness and begin looking at how to put it down, relax it, and heal it. Bring forth what is wholesome and put down any hostility.

*Let no one through anger or aversion
Wish for others to suffer.*

It may not seem like we want others to suffer. But being mean or saying something slightly sarcastic or critical is like poking people or getting back at them. When someone says something unkind, we may respond similarly because we want to get back at them. There are all kinds of small ways in which we try to irritate people, get back at them, or take revenge. Complaining sometimes is more than just complaining – it is a critique or criticism that is poking at people.

If you want to cultivate loving-kindness and the path of liberation, a profound, healthy, and inspiring thing to do is to overcome any tendency towards hostility. Learn to recognize hostility when it comes up and not give in to it. Learn to recognize hostility when it arises and meet it with wholesomeness.

Our intention – the way we are motivated to live our lives – is to have no wish for others to suffer. Even though there might be some difficult, angry feelings, what is important is the intention that drives how we speak and act in the world – the intention that we have no wish for others to suffer.

This wish or intention that we come from occurs in the second part of the sutta:

*May all be happy and secure;
May all beings be happy at heart.
All living beings, whether weak or strong,
Tall, large, medium, or short,
Tiny or big,
Seen or unseen,
Born or to be born,
May they all be happy.*

The art of loving-kindness is to discover how to have goodwill be the motivating force inside of us. To put aside or not act on any ill will that is there – and to deeply heal the ill will. That is a very worthwhile way of living and practicing.

A classic practice in Buddhism is to memorize a text like the “*Metta Sutta*” and say it repeatedly to yourself. Imagine if you memorized the “*Mettā Sutta*” and recited it every day. See the effect that has on you.

Thank you, and we will continue tomorrow.