

An Afternoon with the *Mettā Sutta*

Kim Allen

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So welcome to our program today, an afternoon with the *Mettā Sutta*. And this is a Sati Center event being held at IMC. Sometimes people aren't aware that those are different entities, even though many of the teachers overlap. So this is a Sati Center event. It's a kind of a study and practice way of really connecting ourselves to the suttas and also using the Buddha's teachings directly in our lives. The Sati Center has this kind of daily life component also.

So we're going to be doing several different things during our two and a half hours together this afternoon. And there will be a break near the middle, a short break just because it's hard to sit for that long. And there will also be some natural movement as we shift from thing to thing. But please do take care of yourself as needed. I think we'll just jump right in. Let's just jump right in.

So how many people here, and you can raise your hand online also, have done some kind of formal *mettā* practice? Yeah, okay, so quite, I'd say the majority, but not everybody. And how many of you are familiar with the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* in the Pāli Canon? And again, we have a majority, but maybe a little bit fewer, but generally some. So the Buddha taught *mettā* in various ways in the Pāli Canon. He didn't teach it only one way.

And it also is woven through his teachings in many different aspects of it. So this formal text that we'll be looking at today, called the *Mettā Sutta* or the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, is quite rich, and it includes many dimensions that are beyond, for example, wishing well-being for others in a specific way, like you may have done in formal *mettā* practice. There are also many, many different translations of this sutta because it's a well-loved sutta. It's very popular. People find it meaningful.

Leigh Brasington has, I believe, 19 or more on his website, translations just of this one sutta. And so in order not to get overwhelmed or spend too much time comparing word to word of different suttas, we're going to be working with the Amaravati or Abhayagiri translation, which I believe was sent to you ahead of time by Rob, if you're online. Is that correct, Rob? Oh, okay. You could send it now if you, okay, check your email. Okay, I'll put it in the chat.

We have the good fortune that Rob is actually in the room with us right now. I don't think he'll be here the whole time, but that's kind of exciting for us. And those of you who are here in person, I have photocopies and you've all received it. So they're all good translations, really. But the one we're working with today is quite good. And the reason I chose it is not because of some vast superiority, but because it's one that people know if you've ever learned the chant of the *mettā sutta*, which we're going to do today, it's usually this translation.

So that will be easy if any of us want to chant together. Okay. So we'll just stick with this one for today. So as we get started then, since we are focusing on the Sutta, but we're going to do a lot of different things, but speaking of the Sutta, how many of you know, does anybody know which collection of texts this text appears in? You can write it in the chat if you're online, I think. Anybody in the room want to? Ram?

The connected discourses, okay, that's the *Samyutta Nikāya*. It's a similar sounding name, but it isn't actually in the *Samyutta Nikāya*. The *Sutta Nipāta*, that's right. Of course, those of you who are in the room, if you know what the wisdom texts look like, yeah. There's the, in the chat, you now have the copy that we'll be looking at. So this is, it looks huge, but this is not a huge book.

Actually, the *Sutta Nipāta*, as Ram said, where this text is found, it's actually a very slim text. It's like, you know, maybe out of this book, it's maybe like this portion. But the rest of this book is the commentary, the other people talking about the text in here. So the *Mettā Sutta* is slipped into this relatively unassuming, if you don't have the commentary book, in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, in the *Sutta Nipāta*. Thank you. And let's see.

So the commentary is interesting. We'll talk about that in a moment. Actually, let's talk about it now. So it's important to understand maybe the background of suttas. And that's one of the things that the commentaries do. That's why there's so much here.

Each sutta in this text of this thin little text has a story that goes with it about how it is that the Buddha came to teach that teaching to the monks or to the lay people. And in the case of the *Mettā Sutta* the story is interesting. Some of you may have heard it but it's always good to hear again. It's such a wonderful story. So what happened according to this is that the monks that were practicing with the Buddha, they went off to do the rains retreat, which is a three-month period of more intensive practice, sometimes four months.

And they found an amazing place to practice. Beautiful forest, beautiful, clear, clean water nearby, townspeople that were supportive and didn't usually get teachers. So when the monks arrived, they said, oh, please stay. We would love to have you be here and practice in our forest and they could come and get alms every day. And so the monks were like oh this is like this is the best you know it's like the ideal retreat center and so they set up camp and they um they were practicing and they were so blissed out and they were really practicing well and the tree deities there happened to be tree deities living in this forest and it says that you know because the monks were all set up there around the trees they came down out of the trees with their children.

It even says they specified that they had to bring their children down with them. And so at first they were happy to let the monks be there and to kind of move out of the way. And then they got the idea, oh, wait a minute, they're here for the rains retreat. They're going to be here a long time. We're not going to be able to come back and reasonably move around our forest for several months. That's not okay.

And so then the tree deities said, well, let's make a lot of loud sounds and scary apparitions and bad smells. And so they did all this stuff to the monks. And of course, the monks lost their concentration because they weren't that experienced. And all these things were happening, and they got scared, and then they couldn't concentrate and they lost mindfulness. And they started to think, maybe this isn't so ideal. I don't really want to be in a place like this.

And so that's it. They packed up and they went back to the Buddha. And they said, we couldn't practice there. It was too hard. There were these bad smells and bad sounds and we were scared. And it said that the Buddha surveyed the whole world with his Dharma eye.

And he determined that there was actually no other place that those monks could practice. There was just no other suitable place for them. So he gave them the tough love and he said, you got to go back. You got to go back. There's nowhere else you can practice and you have to practice for the range retreat. You're not allowed to wander around. That's one of the rules.

So you go back, but I'm going to give you a protective teaching that you can carry with you. And that is the *Mettā Sutta*. He taught them to carry loving kindness in their heart and to wish for well-being. And we'll see in the Sutta, it's not just about sitting and wishing for well-being like we do in formal *mettā* practice. Actually, it includes uprightness of heart. It includes right view. It includes all kinds of other attitudes and practices along with it.

And so the monks said you have to practice this a couple times a day along with your other practices. And so the monks did this they followed his orders and they came back and they chanted the *Mettā Sutta* twice a day and then they did their other practices and this created enough harmony in the forest that the tree deities welcomed them back and found a way to live with them in harmony. Now it's somewhat idealized story but worth reflecting on that if we carry *mettā* in our heart you know even without you know just and if we follow the other instructions in the sutta about living in an upright way being calm being undemanding being easily satisfied having right view not being attached to sensual pleasures if we were to live in that way would it be more harmonious maybe with some of the people who we have difficulty with yes, that's the short answer maybe not in the way you want I wish that person would just stop doing what annoys me maybe there will have to be some different solution but there certainly will be more harmony if we carry out what it says in the sutta that we'll be looking at today.

So that's the story and that's also why the *Mettā Sutta* is one of a series of chants, when it's done in a chant form, that are called *paritta* chants, p-a-r-i-t-t-a. *Paritta* chants are the protective chants of Buddhism, as it came to be more of a formally practiced system, came to be more of a religion. There came to be a set of texts, the *Mettā Sutta*, the *Maṅgala Sutta*, some of the praises of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, that are now kind of done as a set. And if you go to Asia, you can hear *paritta* chanting often done at ceremonies or on full moon days.

If people come to the monastery, they'll do the protective chants. If there's a new monastery being

founded, monks will come and do *paritta* chants. If someone is dying, they may come and do *paritta* chants at the bedside. So the *Mettā Sutta* is included among these so-called protective chants that are intended to create, like the monks created when they went back to the forest, creating a field or kind of a bubble, if you will, in more modern language, of goodness, of well-being, of well-wishing that has an effect on beings. Even if they're not quite conscious of it, it has an effect on them. So we'll see how that goes with us today.

There is a devotional side to this sutta. And I'm not asking you to believe any of that, but I'm giving you the whole picture of what's going on with this sutta. So another question. How many of you have done *mettā* practice in the form of imagining people in various categories? Yeah, so I see a fair number of hands. I see online also, yeah.

So you imagine maybe you start with yourself or maybe you start with a benefactor. So somebody who's easy, right, to wish well for, and then maybe a friend, and then a neutral person, and then someone who's not so easy, and then maybe all beings. So there are these kind of different categories that we imagine sending, quote-unquote sending or wishing *mettā* for. So you may be interested to know then that the Buddha actually does not teach that in the Pāli Canon. So the earliest texts that we have do not teach that practice. That is from a later commentarial text.

It is a Theravādan practice, so it wasn't invented a long time later. But it's from a non-canonical text to use categories of beings. And even there, the phrases are not the well-known phrases like, may you be safe, may you be healthy. Those ones were made up, modern. And that's okay. There's a lot of creativity, I think, that's fine to have in this practice.

But like the four standard ones you might hear from Spirit Rock or something. I don't even know if I can remember them exactly. May you be safe, may you be healthy, may you be happy, may you live with ease, something like that. Those were invented at Spirit Rock, as far as I know. But they imitate the original phrases that were used in this later commentarial text, which are, may you be free from enmity, may you be free from mental suffering, may you be free from physical suffering. And may you take care of yourself with ease.

So if you've heard the phrases in chanting, it would be, That's what those phrases are. You can find these online. You can find them on YouTube. That lovely chants of these four phrases. They're not from the *Mettā Sutta*, they're not from the earliest teachings, but they are in the Theravādan tradition just a little bit later.

So what did the Buddha teach in terms of *mettā* practice? What are the earliest teachings that we have from the Pāli Canon? That is a practice called radiation, radiation of *mettā*. How many have done radiation practice? Yeah, I see some hands, fewer, it's not as common to teach this. The main teacher who's been promoting this in the last eight, nine years is Bhikkhu Anālayo, some of you may have learned it from him, that's where I learned it from a while ago, although I was kind of intuitively doing it before that so I was very gratified to learn all this from him about this is the earliest way it

was taught, it felt very natural for me and then to have the formal teaching given by him just felt like coming home.

So some of you may have also kind of discovered this for yourself intuitively. And we'll be doing that practice when we get to the sit. So radiation of *mettā* is a different form where we evoke *mettā* in the heart through something. I'll invite an image or you can use a phrase. That's okay. That's what you like.

Or maybe just a felt sense of some situation that brings up *mettā* for you. And then feeling that, like letting that ignite in the heart, like lighting a lamp as if you put the match down into the oil lamp and the wick catches and then you have it burning, if you will, in your heart like a lamp. And then allowing that illumination to radiate, to shine forth. And the way it's done is not through categories of beings, but through directions. Literal, you know, the cardinal directions generally, but I'll be doing it just in front to the right, to the back, to the left, above and below.

But you would know which direction you were sitting in, and you would do it, you know, north, west, southeast, etc. So it's different. Effectively it's the same. If you were really radiating in all directions, the idea is that any being that is encountered through that radiation would have *mettā*, would be touched by the *mettā*. So it is similarly boundless. But just done through this imagination of radiation.

And you may find, if you've never done this, that it has a different feeling to it than imagining beings and categories of beings. So I encourage you to try the radiation if you've never done it.

Guided Meditation

Okay. So let's go ahead then and we'll do a sit. My style in guiding this kind of meditation is similar to Anālayo's. As I said, I learned it from him, but it will be slightly different. Finding a meditation posture. And it's important to be comfortable in doing this practice, so you're welcome to sit or stand or lie down if that's more comfortable for you.

Somewhere where your body will generally feel at ease. And first, as kind of a preliminary, bringing attention to the posture that you're in. Having a sense of balance in your posture so if you're sitting make sure that you're well balanced on your sit bones or if you have your feet against the floor having a stable tripod if you're sitting in a chair feeling your feet on the floor your seat against the chair if you're lying down generally being in a simple straight-ish posture somewhere where your back is well supported legs and arms symmetric in some way and on your next out breath softening the body into the posture that you're in.

You'll find it most comfortable for the long run not to just collapse, but to have a balance between being soft and being alert, having attention and having tranquility. Bringing the attention inward now

to feeling your body from the inside so if you have a habit of imagining the body the way you see it in the mirror, letting that go and feeling the body from the inside, the contact points that you're sitting on, the breath perhaps coming in and out gently, softening, softening the eyes and the eye sockets, softening the jaw and the face, softening the shoulders, letting them sink downward.

Softening down through the heart area, front, back, sides of the ribcage. Releasing the belly and softening the arms and legs, brightening the attention so although the body is soft and perhaps relaxed the mind now has more capacity to be present and bright. From our sense of alert and bright presence evoking a feeling of goodwill, friendliness, *mettā*. You may bring up an image of a being whom you easily can care about, a pet is often suggested, an animal of some kind or a baby or for some it's yourself, it doesn't matter so much but an easy simple being that we feel warm upon seeing.

You can say a phrase if that's more common for you. Seeing this being we might think maybe well. Or we could simplify and just have a sense of being in the presence of a being that we care about. What's it like to sit with your best friend even if you're not saying anything? And feel that feeling in you, feel in your heart or your belly or your whole body a simple sense of wishing well, goodwill. This is the most basic understanding of *mettā*.

Perhaps being curious what if you didn't know what *mettā* was, some of you didn't coming to the session today. If you didn't know and you were now exposed to it through the feeling in this body, what's it like? As you breathe in, allowing that feeling to kindle and brighten the way when you very gently blow on a candle, it gets brighter. Breathing in, the *mettā* brightens. And breathing out, imagine that that feeling shines.

As you breathe in, the candle gets a little brighter. As you breathe out, you notice the shining of the candle. Gently strengthening the *mettā*, gently radiating it. And we make a subtle shift now from a deliberate action of doing the evoking of the *mettā* and the radiation of it to simply being that, however that works for you. Can you simply be this feeling in the body, this brightness in the heart? And as we do so, we can release the being we used to evoke initially and just transfer to the feeling, the felt sense of *mettā*, care and goodwill that has been established in the body and the heart.

You can literally imagine a lamp if you like, or a candle in the chest area. I like to imagine a star. Breathing in, gathering together, our sense of care, friendliness, well-being, love. Breathing out, letting it shine out as far as it will go. Lamps do not push out their light, they just shine. Maybe it goes only to your skin, maybe it goes farther, it doesn't matter.

Sensing the light and warmth, breathing in, breathing out. Now it's possible that there are still a little bit of a barrier in the way of our shining this *mettā*. And we can gently remove any remaining barriers through a little imagination. Imagine that you have a curtain around you, around the heart perhaps. And now imagine that as you're shining this goodwill, you draw the curtain aside from the front. And now the *mettā* spills forth unhindered in the forward direction. It shines out, however far.

Gently now drawing the curtain aside to the right so now the *mettā* now shines unhindered to the

front and to the right. Gently drawing aside the curtain to the back so the meadows of goodwill is open to the front, the right, the back. We don't always think about our back, but there's no hindrance in radiating to the back. See if you can imagine that. And drawing the curtain aside now to the left, letting the *mettā* spill forth from our lamp or our star. Front, the right, the back, the left. Unhindered, unbounded.

When we're not placing any boundaries on our love, it is boundless, unbounded regardless of how far it goes and including now the upward direction above and down below. Solid objects like floors and the earth are not solid to *mettā*. It spreads down easily below us. Now we're continuing to breathe. And sensing what it's like to just be radiating a sense of friendliness and care. Naturally. Naturally.

If the mind wanders away, it's no problem. You may just start again from the feeling it, feeling the radiation of the lamp. You may need to go through the four directions above and below again. Or if you completely lose it, you can start again with the being, dog or cat, friend. And just start again. See if you can find a way of resting with the *mettā* pervading the body and outward. Very little effort. Just resting and shining. Thank you.

Allowing the gentle weight to soften the body, softening tense muscles, softening areas of resistance, what if you let the gentle light simply melt its way through your body. Thank you. And as we continue to rest this way for a little bit longer, I invite you to notice that you are the first recipient of radiating *mettā*. It must pass through every cell of your body to shine out. Feel that. You're welcome to continue radiating if that feels easeful. Or if you're ready, and whenever you're ready, you can let go of the intention to radiate and just rest in simple presence and mindfulness. Either way, we'll continue on a bit longer. Resting.

End of Meditation

I'm suspecting the bell doesn't work as well on Zoom, so ding. And I've lost the record button. Okay, sorry we have a problem on the record there we go okay so um just a few words and then I'll take some questions. So first of all notice in that way of practicing the emphasis on the felt sense of the *mettā* of the goodwill. This is really important because if we're using phrases there is the danger of that kind of *mettā* meditation is that it can stay in the head it can be a thought or an idea and then you can get very concentrated on that concept that idea but it's not the same as it's not as integrative as feeling it through the body, through the heart, through the direct sensations.

And my experience with, that's not to say it's always the case. So, you know, some people can say the phrases and very deeply feel them at the same time. So I'm not at all saying that's always what happens. But I have seen it happen that people remain somewhat unintegrated with *mettā* if they've only done phrase practice over time and it occupies the part of the mind that's linguistic but may not move more fully into the being. There are dangers of course of doing radiation practice also, danger

is maybe too strong of a word but there can be disadvantages of that also, the primary one being that you can leave beings out, you can get into just a nice feeling of *mettā* and believe that you have *mettā* for all beings but in fact you've left some out and so the categories where you actually have to wish *mettā* for example a difficult being that can make you be a little bit more inclusive in the *mettā* and not just be lost in oh yeah I'm radiating this to all beings but I've left out that relative that's especially difficult or that politician who's especially difficult.

So be aware of what strengths and weaknesses there are in different kinds of *mettā* practice. And all of this is just the formal practice, of course. We also have to be able to take it into our lives. The only other general comment I want to make about this practice is by switching at the end, and some of you may not have, but I invited switching back to just mindfulness and just allowing the radiation to settle out and feel. For me, one effect of doing that at the end of practice was to really understand how close *mettā* and mindfulness are. They're not that different in terms of the relationship that you have to experience.

So being mindful in a way that is right mindfulness, *sammā sati*, is not so different from the stance that one has in *mettā* of having a general, caring, open, available attitude to experience or to another person. And it can help purify both the mindfulness and the *mettā*. We'll talk later about ways that *mettā* can be a little bit off. And by switching to mindfulness and feeling what difference there is, there is a difference, they're not identical, but there's something very similar about the orientation of the mind in *mettā* and in mindfulness when they're correct. So that's another thing you can notice as you do this practice.

Q&A

So I'll pause there and ask if there are any questions, either in the room or from folks online. Nancy is watching you, and I can also see if I look toward the screen. You can also talk to them live. Their voices can be heard. Yeah? Oh, great. And if you guys unmute, we're going to be able to hear you in the room. Okay, the first hand I see is from Matthew. Hi. Go ahead and unmute.

Questioner

Yes. Oh, wonderful. Thank you so much for the practice. Yeah, my question is this. So I'm thinking about what the early Buddhist teachings have to say about what the power of *mettā* is. So just for some context, like I was raised in the Christian tradition as a child. And, you know, the idea was with prayer, for example, you're, you know, you're praying, actively praying for someone. And the idea is there's really strong belief there that your prayers can help that other person in a very, you know, literal way. And so my question is, you know, what does, you know, early Buddhism have to say about, you know, *mettā*? Because I've heard from some people, well, *mettā* is something you do for yourself. And then, of course, there's the idea that any practice that we do for ourselves, of course, is going to radiate outward in the sense of karma, of course. But I'm just curious, is there an idea of the practice

being something that's done for me that then pays dividends towards others throughout karma and throughout time? Or is there a more specific, like, idea of this energy that I'm sending out, you know, really helping someone in that? Yeah.

Kim Allen

Yeah, I think there are different answers to your question. One of them is that, and you talked through your kind of understanding of several of them. Sorry if I look to the side, it's so I can actually see you, but I'll also look so that you can see my face. So the primary function that *mettā* has is the more karmic one that you talk about in the sense of we purify, we're purifying our own being of any traces of ill will, of hatred, of disdain for others. And when we look at the sutta, we'll see that there's actually many things being purified through this practice. And then in ways, and that pervades so many levels of our being that we actually probably don't know all the impacts it can have.

And maybe the story I told at the beginning, if you were there for that, about the monks who went back into the forest, right, radiating this *mettā*, the deities that were upset with them became less upset. You know, we don't want to take that too literally, like, oh, if I just practice *mettā*, then all the people who don't like me will suddenly like me. Not like that, but there are effects on more levels than are quite cognitive or conscious for us. When we purify our own heart, somehow our way of showing up in the world, our presence, can actually influence relationships. But as far as are we literally changing the karma of somebody else through this in a kind of a mystical or magical way, I think that would be questionable in early Buddhist understanding because we make and carry our own karma in that sense.

But I wouldn't discount the ways that we can't see everything that's going on with *mettā* practice. That I'm going to leave as the open question. And we certainly change the direction of our own life in ways that can be even quite profound through doing this practice. So don't discount that there could be direct effects on other beings simply because we are directly affected by others that we're with, right? When you are in the room with someone, you feel it, what somebody says, the words that they use. If your words, because of doing *mettā* practice, become more gentle, more kind, more connecting, you're going to change the whole course of the flow of what's going on in your life. Does that make sense?

Questioner

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much.

Kim Allen

Okay. Anything else or particularly related to the meditation, if anyone wants to share anything about that? Rinal, is that your hand online?

Questioner

Yes, it is. Thank you. I'm not Buddhist and I'm relatively new to this practice so apologies for the naivety in my question when you mentioned that you can extend *mettā* to for example certain politi-

cians making sure it's inclusive I felt a fair amount of resistance in doing that because it felt like I would be in a way saying it's okay certain things are okay and um and perhaps you answered my question with the previous caller where you talked about it you show up differently if you flow *mettā* to people and i can change the course of things but maybe you could talk about say something about that that resistance that I really don't feel like um that's something I want to do um on on some level.

Kim Allen

I love this question this is one of the most common questions um that people have about *mettā* especially when they first start practicing and even or maybe when they first start realizing you know regardless of when you started practicing when you start realizing, oh, this is supposed to be for everyone, boundless, then there start to be these kinds of questions. I would like to address it in a more full way a little bit later. I am planning to, but maybe what I'll say for now is that it relates also to what Matthew said, where the first word he said was, I want to ask about the power of *mettā*. And *mettā* is really deep and powerful, actually. And it's not what we think it is at first.

It's a very deep, mature, different than the warm, fuzzy kind of quality. And it does have real power. And I kind of promised that in my description of this half day is that I said that *mettā* has a quiet strength to it as it grows and the transformation that happens in our heart through long-term and open deep *mettā* practice will make it such that it's not incompatible with our favorite politician our least favorite politician and I want to develop that though over the course of our practice this afternoon so can I take a rain check and get to this later in the program and thank you for bringing it in yes thank you very much okay great excellent okay I see more questions okay Samantha we'll take these three that are there and then we're going to take a break

Questioner

hi thank you again for your teachings this question might be a little too big for this context i'm fine if you want to shelf it kind of has to do with i was studying tibetan buddhism before i went to theravāda and so i remember the *Vajrasattva* kind of purification practices to clear karma that came from that branch and i was just wondering if you could talk about the difference and I'm curious to know maybe which came first and where the branch came and again if this is too big for this context it's okay if you can't answer that today.

Kim Allen

Well, it'll be easy in that I don't know the *Vajrasattva* purification practices from Tibetan Buddhism but I can say that for sure the Theravādan and early Buddhist versions of these came before that one thing I do know I mean there's so many purification practices in Tibetan Buddhism I'm not completely unfamiliar with it one thing I do know about how the *Brahmavihāras* are done in the Vajrayāna is that the foundational practice for them is equanimity, it's actually the first of the *Brahmavihāras* or the first of the immeasurables as they're called in that tradition is equanimity That's said to be the most fundamental form of love. And until you have that mastered, the other forms of love don't make

sense to do, which I love. I love hearing that idea. So when you have enough equanimity, then you can practice *mettā* and *karuṇā* and *muditā*, the other immeasurables.

We take *mettā* as the foundational one, loving kindness or goodwill or friendliness. And we say that from there, we will be able to extend into compassion, you know, dealing with suffering, to *muditā* or appreciative joy, dealing with happiness. And then finally, we come to equanimity as kind of the purification of all of those into a very balanced state of mind. So it's a whole different approach, right, to the relationship between these heart qualities. So maybe that's enough of a framework for you to sense the similarities and the differences. But what we just did in that meditation would be kind of a very foundational practice from Theravāda, early Buddhist perspective.

Questioner

Thank you, that helps a lot.

Kim Allen

Okay, great. All right, who's next on the hands? Anne. Oh, hi, Anne.

Questioner

Hi, Kim. Good to see you. This may be something that's a little esoteric, but you may be going to address it later. You know, through the Anacampa program, I've come to this understanding of wanting to reconcile my relationship with my mother, who's been long dead. And when we did the phrases, which I never enjoyed as much as I've enjoyed what we've done today. So I thought to spend some time on *mettā* and radiating goodwill to my mother, who I say is long gone. And then the other thing I thought about was possibly merit. And I don't know if you've... Merit is sort of gratitude and a broad view on that. Do you have any simple comments on that? Well, just stick with *mettā*. What do you think about matter for the dead? Because that's not normally suggested. Right. Yeah, this is a good question.

Kim Allen

I think the most foundational, fundamental thing I get from what you're saying is, and I want to say yes, do something to reconcile these unfinished feelings with your mother, even though she's dead already, because the feelings that are left are related still to kind of views or ideas that you have in your mind, right? They're not actually about your mother. They're ideas of your mother, right? So, but you can then have, you have total access to them since they're in your mind. So those can be purified and it will work fine. I don't know that I would call it literal *mettā*, but radiating good feelings or gratitude or you called it merit, if that seems to be reconciling, integrating, harmonizing, choose your word, those leftover feelings for you, great. How does that sound? It sounds great. Thank you very much. Okay. Yeah. It's true that we aren't generally, in classical understanding, we don't do *mettā* for people who are dead because there isn't a literal mind stream connection. But we can always connect with the idea of the person in our mind and then we can do gratitude or other things. Yeah.

Questioner

Thank you. Okay.

Kim Allen

And then there was one more hand. Thank you. It's Eileen.

Questioner

It's Eileen, and I wanted to maybe relate to what a previous person said, but she was talking about resistance to *mettā* for a particular person. I wonder if later on, maybe today, we might talk about, or now, whenever, resistance to *mettā* practice in general, which I think I shouldn't admit to, but the fact is, I have, you know, I keep telling myself, you should do this, a good Buddhist would do this practice, it's a good Buddhist practice, and good Buddhists do it, and that should just kind of, I just fight with myself about it sometimes.

Kim Allen

No, this is a great question.

Questioner

It's about resistance to *mettā* practice, I appreciate it.

Kim Allen

Yeah, yeah, this is a great question. Broadly speaking, there are so many ways to do *mettā* or to kind of have the effect of purifying ill will and other negative mind states that if sitting on the cushion and doing phrases or doing radiation practice doesn't feel like it works for you, don't worry, you have a lot of other options. What we want is to free the heart from feelings that are in the category of aversion, negativity, ill will, those kinds of things. Somehow we have to free the heart of those because they bind us, right? And so if classical practice isn't working for you, try something else.

But what you need to feel, perhaps, if you're feeling resistance to the whole idea, oh, I don't want to do any of this, is to discover that there is actually a limitation for you in feeling any kind of aversion or ill will toward, you probably have this in your life toward other things, right? Resistances, negativities, these kinds of things. So when you start feeling, oh, that doesn't feel good for me, it's actually described as poison in the suttas, you know, that feeling. And when you start feeling it, oh, this is something I don't want to be carrying in my mind stream, in my being. I'm harmed by it. Before it even, if I even say anything or do anything to act on it, I'm harmed by it. And when you realize that, then you'll be motivated to find a way. And if it's sitting on the cushion and in this formal way doesn't work, that's all right. But you're not totally resistant because you came to this program. So maybe reading the Sutta will be interesting for you. What do you think? I'm looking over so I can see your picture.

Questioner

I haven't read this particular version, but I have read the Sutta. And it's inspiring to think about above and below and all around. I think it's easier that way maybe as a certain place.

Kim Allen

Yeah, and maybe you'll find the radiation done in a gentle way to be useful. You can have some creativity around how you do it. Let's hold your question also, because I'm sure you're not the only one with resistance to *mettā*. Let's hold your question also as we go through the sutta a little more, which is the next thing we're going to get to after a little break, and see what lands for you. We're going to have a chance also to talk with other people about which aspects of the sutta feel the most meaningful to us. So with that slight preview, let's take about a five-minute break. It's, according to my clock, it's 16 after the hour, so let's come back at 21.

Break

So let's take a look now at the sutta itself, the *Karaṇīyametta Sutta*, which is *Sutta Nipāta* 1.8, as it says at the top. There are a lot of different translations, as I mentioned before. If you want 19 of them, or 20, or maybe it's more than that now, you can look at Leigh Brasington's website. But we'll try this one. And it does have a gender update, which is really just that "mother" has been changed to "parent," so we don't leave the men out. And so we'll try that one.

I'm going to read it through the first time. And if you've never heard it, it's your chance to kind of hear it all at once. And then what I would like is for those who know the chant of it, we'll do the chant together. And if you don't know it, you'll only have to listen to that. You'll only have to follow along with that once.

So, *karaṇīya*, by the way, means "should be done." So this is the *mettā* that should be done. So 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 and 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 parent protects with their life their child, their 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. So I'm actually going to talk about it a little bit first, and then we'll chant it. So there's a lot going on here.

Probably we should put down the idea that we're going to completely cover all of it today. But I hope

when I read it, you maybe recognized the practice that we did. It's in here, right? So wishing in gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease. And then we have a little farther down, 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.

There it is. So radiating. And we have some structure to this sutta, actually, which is talked about in the commentaries, but I think it's, and I think it's quite relevant, is that it points out the way this sutta goes through all of the major trainings that are expected on the Buddhist path. So there are three main areas of training on the *Eightfold Path*, right? *Sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.

So that's ethical conduct, development of the mind or meditation, and wisdom, *sīla samādhi paññā*. And this sutta includes all of them. So there is a way of organizing or seeing different aspects of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* in this sutta. It's not like there's a specific section exactly divided for each one, but the ethical conduct part is divided out pretty well, and that's the beginning. This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness and who knows the path of peace.

So now we have the ethical section. 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. So this is about being in the world in a way that is upright, in a way that has integrity, a way of living that is somewhat simple, not complicated, not busy, not demanding. We may know people who live somewhat like these.

Has anyone come to mind if you know people who fit this? Maybe we aspire to do a few more of these things ourselves. So this is generally in the realm of how we are in the world. So this is said to be the *sīla* section or related to it. And then, may I ask, by the way, that you not do that in this meditation hall? Yeah, thanks.

And then there's a section that's really more about the cultivation of the mind. So we have wishing well for beings. Note the inclusivity of the second section. So we're including really all beings. May all beings be at ease. Any living beings that there may be.

Weak, strong, omitting none. Great, mighty, medium, short, small. Seen and unseen, near and far away. Born and to be born. The idea here is, I understand that those are not, that overlaps, all of those categories overlap, but it's just making absolutely sure that absolutely everybody is included in our care, our loving kindness, our friendliness, our goodwill, our tenderness. May all beings be at ease.

And then we have sections that are also about mental development, but start to bring in views or understandings. So that's wisdom is included in the last section, kind of mixes mental development and wisdom. But we have various ways of, again, this radiation. And then we have one should sustain this recollection near the end. This is said to be the sublime abiding.

That word is *Brahmavihāra*, the general word for the heart qualities. Not holding to fixed views. There's a wisdom quality. Pure-hearted one, clarity of vision. Clarity is, you know, again, wisdom. Being freed from sense desires. That takes some mental development and also some other kinds of practice.

And then we have this interesting ending. It's not born again into this world. So this is a statement about the liberating quality that can come from *mettā*. So it can liberate the heart, at least to the degree that we, in the cosmological understanding, would not be reborn in the human realm. So one becomes either a non-returner or an arahant.

Or if one takes a more psychological approach, one's mind becomes transformed in a way that we will not experience the world in the same way. We won't, again, live in a world that's a lot about continually creating self and then having that self suffer and then getting into entanglements with other people. All that kind of gets set aside and we have this easier way of being in our life. So *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* are all contained within these trainings that are done in what? The *Mettā Sutta*. *Mettā* covers the entire path in a way.

So that's maybe a kind of a cognitive understanding of the structure or the map of the chant, of the sutta. Now let's do it as a chant. So forget about all that and let's feel it again. We're kind of breathing in this with the sutta today of going back and forth. Let's look at the words. Let's feel the feeling. Now let's open our mind to the chant.

If you know the chant, you're welcome to chant along. If you're online, please do stay muted because Zoom doesn't do simultaneous voice very well, but you're welcome to chant where you are. If you're in the room, you can chant along with me if you know this chant, and if not, I'll be chanting anyway. So those who know, feel free to join. But if you don't, just settle back and listen.

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 and 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 parent protects with their life their child, their 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.

It's beautiful, yeah, so and feel the power and the strength of that and what it asks of us to not have fixed views has something to do with our ability to care for others, to live an upright life has something to do with being kind in the world. Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down, this is a 24-7 kind of practice. It's not just sitting on the cushion. Wow, wow, there's so much here, right?

So what I would like is for us now to—I'm going to give you just a few minutes to look over the text because everybody has it on your own, without me talking to you. Read it through. Let your eyes linger over it or just zero in on something that catches your eye, however it is that you can interact with it. And just see if there's a word or a phrase that stands out for you today, at this moment, has meaning. You love it or you hate it. You're afraid of it or you aspire to it. It makes you cry. I'll give you a few minutes. Okay.

Okay. So we're going to now do some small groups, which I hope you'll want to participate in. I know that's not everybody's thing, but even if you think it isn't your thing, today's a day to try something new and we're all practicing *mettā* so it should hopefully be in a field or a spirit of goodwill and care. So we're going to have two different sets. We'll have the folks in the room making their groups and the folks online. Nancy is putting you into groups. We'll do groups of four, Nancy.

And let me tell you a little bit about what you'll do. And what I would like is for you to share your word or phrase and something about why it stood out for you. If it was something deeply personal that you don't want to share, just say something a little bit more top level. That's okay. But generally what we're doing is we are appreciating that there's a lot in this sutta and that probably somebody else picked a different word or phrase than you did and appreciate that, appreciate what they found beautiful in the sutta and then share yours.

And it's not that we have to decide which is the absolutely the best of the four that were shared or we don't need to correct other people about their understanding. If they say I love this because of X, you say oh no that's not what it really meant. We're just creating a soup or a mandala or a painting together of what was meaningful for us and appreciating that there's a lot here. So please, no advice or explaining or interpreting those kinds of things. Hold it in the spirit of *mettā* and I would like for everyone to just maybe take a minute or two in the group to share and make sure everybody, please, sure everybody has a chance.

You'll have 10 minutes, let's say 12 minutes in the group. Can you make that? Okay. For the online folks. And I'll divide you up in a moment in the room. So let's come back. You can go ahead and when

we come back we'll talk about that. So please enjoy that in your breakout groups. You can start the rooms. Okay.

Break

Discussion

So I said at the very beginning that we might have a few technical glitches. So I think the folks online were in very large rooms, but you were in rooms. So I hope that was interesting for you. And the people in here were in quite small groups. So that's interesting.

So it was an error on our end that the breakout groups were pretty large online, but that's okay, that meant you got to hear even more key phrases from different people. So I'm curious, now we have a moment for any chance to share anything that came out of your time in the groups, if you wanted to share your phrase. I'd encourage you not to share somebody else's phrase or what they said. That's up to them. But if you want to share yours or maybe an insight that you had listening to what other people offered, if something came to you through that, either in the room or online, we would be happy to hear in the larger group.

Yeah, I think we have one here in the room. So are the folks online going to be able to hear if he uses the—oh, okay, no, we don't have one in the room. Alright, somebody else, Beverly?

Questioner

Yes, so I expressed curiosity at the phrase that caught my mind in my eye, that "let them be able and upright." Does it seem to quite fit? And I don't know exactly what's meant by that, so I was wondering if you have any insights on that. I can guess...

Kim Allen

Well then, what is your guess?

Questioner

The way I read it is, the rest of it's kind of nice, syrupy—I mean, I don't mean to knock it, it's good—but it almost says, but you're not a pushover either. Yeah, I think that's my interpretation. I'm not sure that's what's meant, what's written. Well—

Kim Allen

I think it's not so much that there's only one way to read it. I think there are different inspirations we can have from it. So "able and upright," we don't need to take it totally literally, but there is a certain—this is in the *sīla* section, right? The ethical conduct section. So uprightness is often used in the suttas as a word for having integrity in what we do.

So being honest, being ethical in our way of being. It doesn't have to be like a literally straight spine, although we can feel that, maybe when we embody uprightness, right? There's a certain amount.

And there's also, I think, the dimension that you touched on of not being—I think you said not being a pushover. Is that right? I think that's what I said. I think that's relevant also. And that relates to what I'm going to talk about next.

We've had this kind of undercurrent of the power, the strength of *mettā* that is really conveyed through this sutta. So I think *mettā* creates an inner fortitude, an inner quality of being that can't be pushed over easily in the world. Yeah. All of that is there. Thanks for bringing it up. Yeah. There was another hand online. Oh, and there's one here too. Okay, Sri and then in the room. Go ahead, Sri.

Questioner

Yeah, thank you for doing this session, Teacher Kim. I really liked it, and thanks for sharing it on Friday. So it was short notice, but I like it. So it—you know, this is my first time doing the radiating, you know, kindness, and I feel it is a very appropriate way of spreading kindness. So thank you.

Kim Allen

Thank you, nice comment. And then in the room, we have one here. You can use that microphone.

Questioner

Thank you for leading this today. Yeah, there was a lot in here that touched me, and we were discussing a little interpretation here. I'll try to not hold to fixed views, but the last two lines didn't really resonate with me: "being freed from all sense desires"—it's not something I really aspire to. I like my sense desires. And "not being born again into this world"—also, I feel like being born again is a good thing, it means growth, right? It's evolution. So yeah, we were wondering, they were sharing interpretations about what that could mean, so I'm just wondering—

Kim Allen

Oh, I'm curious what you came up with.

Questioner

Alex, do you want to share that? Okay, what was I saying? Okay, so an interpretation, "is not born again in this world," could be—I think it might have been what you were saying, Kim, before—but is that if I'm not born again in this world, could it mean I'm not repeating my unwholesome habits, unwholesome habits or patterns.

Kim Allen

Yeah, you wouldn't be born into the world that's created from a particular unwholesome tendency, for example.

Questioner

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kim Allen

I think it's a fair approach if it works for you. We can also have lines in the sutta that we say, wow, I like everything else about this sutta, but I'm just not wrapping my head around that one. And that's fine

too. Sometimes, like in the oyster, the little grain of sand is where the pearl forms. Right. Yeah, I think it's very reasonable to encounter some lines in this sutta that challenge us a little bit. Yeah. Yeah. So wonderful.

I encourage you—I'll say more at the end—but to kind of keep working with the text of this sutta. It's a lot different sometimes than the way *mettā* is taught at kind of an introductory level or in a group where you're just doing the phrase practice and that's what you're learning. So that's why I really like to get the sutta in front of people and see, oh, there's a lot here, there's a lot going on. So I want to now say a little bit more. There was that question earlier about feeling like it's difficult to have *mettā*, goodwill, loving-kindness, whatever word you use.

I deliberately didn't try to translate just one word because there isn't an English word. The word is *mettā*. There isn't one English word for that. So it can be difficult to feel that for all beings. It's like, wait a minute, really? Boundless? So let me step back and talk then about, okay, what's the deeper thing going on here?

So *mettā* is an attitude or almost an intention, and it can mature into a whole way of life. It's actually not just a *Brahmavihāra*, a heart quality or a meditation practice, as we kind of talked about so far. *Mettā* also appears in a list, a little bit later list, called the *pāramī*, which means a foundational character trait that leads to liberation. So the *pāramī* are very deep. They're sometimes translated as perfections, but that's not literally what *pāramī* means. But like ways in which we are in the world, things that become integrated into our way of being that are qualities of the liberated heart. And *mettā* is one of them.

And we do see this even in the *mettā* sutta, even though it's not specifically about the *pāramī* of *mettā*. The Buddha doesn't actually ever give kind of a textbook definition of *mettā*, at least not in his sutta, right? He doesn't ever say what it is. I love that he starts out saying it's the *Karuṇīyamettā Sutta*. Skilled in goodness be done. *Mettā* is an action. It's something that should be done. And then he goes through all these qualities that I talked about earlier are connected to all the steps of the *Eightfold Path*. The *Eightfold Path* is what leads not to *mettā*, but to liberation.

So we have, you know, all kinds of things. Able and upright, we talked about that one. Gentle in speech. Frugal. Not conceited. Not demanding. Not holding to views. Not holding to fixed views. Free from sensual desire. You can draw the line anywhere along here and say, wait a minute, I'm not sure about that one. But these—some of these, especially being freed from all sense desires—are genuine attainments, you know, that are not trivial, and they don't happen just from wishing or something like that. So this is the power of *mettā*.

So I want to say clearly, and not just from the sutta, but also from my own experience, I can say that *mettā* is not simply the warm, fuzzy feeling that you get when you see a good friend or a kitten or a baby, like we evoked at the beginning of the *mettā* practice, right? I said, think of something that will make it easy for you to feel a kind of a tender feeling. That's the entry point. That's the entry point.

But that's—it's a little unfortunate that sometimes *mettā* is taught as if that is the only thing that *mettā* is, and that's what it is, and we want to just kind of feel more and more of that, essentially.

I would say that that's part of *mettā*, that that warm, simple, friendly feeling is part of *mettā*, but it's not all of it, and it's—yeah, there's a lot more there. So now we can maybe bring in this common question that people have, which is to say, the question is usually phrased as, I have a very hard time feeling *mettā* for—and then you fill in the blank. So you fill in the blank with a certain relative who's difficult, a politician who's difficult, a world leader, for example, or a category of people that's difficult, such as people who harm children. I have a hard time feeling *mettā* for—and you can fill in the blank with whatever it is for you—and then they say, how do I do that?

Okay, so what I hear in this question, what it seems to mean is, how can I have a warm, fuzzy feeling for someone I don't like or someone whose actions I don't approve of? That's kind of what the question comes down to. And that's a very reasonable question if you think that *mettā* is the warm friendliness we feel toward people we like. But I don't think we would feel that exact feeling toward all beings, would we? Necessarily. That exact warm, fuzzy feeling that characterizes your friend doesn't characterize someone who isn't your friend in the same way.

So the near enemy, as it's called, of *mettā* is affection. And that is sometimes getting entangled here. So if we have a certain warm, fuzzy feeling for a friend or a pet, an easy being, as they say, most likely when we first evoke that, we're evoking *mettā* with some affection in there. Because it's easier. It's easier to slide into *mettā* from a feeling, a natural feeling of affection that we would have. Some of these are even biological. Like baby mammals are cute to humans. This has been studied. Baby mammals, kittens, puppies, those kinds of things are inherently cute—babies, obviously. Human babies are inherently cute to us.

So we readily feel something like affection, but affection maybe has *mettā* in it, but affection is *mettā* that's tainted with grasping in some way or entanglement. So I would suggest that at least some of the time that question about how do I—I can't feel *mettā* for X—might come from a misunderstanding of the fullness of *mettā*, of what's really being asked of a quality, a deep heart quality like *mettā*, to develop it. So *mettā* is a mature state of the heart that is rooted in wisdom. This sutta makes that very clear. What form of wisdom? The wisdom that knows that harboring judgment or hatred or any contraction of the heart is a limitation on one's own freedom.

I am not free if I'm feeling ill will towards some people or some group of people. I'm not free if I have that contraction in my heart. And there comes a point in practice where we find it unacceptable to limit our own freedom. It doesn't mean we can always pull it off. Yeah, the heart contracts. It does because, you know, we're not fully free yet, but we at least wish that it wouldn't contract because that's a limitation. That's an ouch for me, even before it has any impact out there.

So that, when we get to that point, that's when it starts to make sense that we would want to have *mettā*, that we would want to have a heart quality for—fill in the blank, whatever you filled in the blank

with earlier. And so that's when we can start to discover, purify the *mettā* a little bit more and discover what it really feels like beyond a warm, fuzzy feeling towards someone that we like and approve of. We can start there. That's easy. And then we can move on to feeling, okay, what would it be like? What is *mettā* for somebody I really disapprove of? What does that even mean? Then it's a meaningful question.

It's—maybe it is still hard to feel it, and it is a legitimate question: how do I do that? Ah, how do we do that? Practice the *Eightfold Path*, practice formal *mettā* of radiation or of categories, and I think in the end only you can discover for yourself what it is, what it is to feel that freedom of heart even around somebody that we don't approve of or whose actions we don't like, and to see how we can then respond, because responding to the world is part of being free, and we can respond a lot better if the heart is not contracted.

So I'm entangling things as we're getting closer to the end. I'm making it complicated, that's right. You don't have to—you're not going to approve of everyone in the world. Don't approve of unwholesomeness, and yet there is *mettā*, there can be *mettā*. So this is a—*mettā* must be something bigger and deeper, and we've started to touch on it in the sutta. But what I want us to do—and I do see, I did see that there were some hands coming up and down—we're going to meditate again, a very short one, to maybe touch into some of the implications. But I want to read first a quote from Ajahn Sucitto about the *pāramī* of *mettā*, maybe helps us expand the notion of it, and then we'll meditate.

So Ajahn Sucitto:

> When we make the resolution of kindness not just toward kittens on a nice day but even toward cockroaches on a bad day, when we include dictators and brutal maniacs as well as all aspects of ourselves,

> Then we're making *mettā* into a *pāramī*, a vast and transfiguring way of life.

So there's a lot more here than the simple warm, fuzzy feeling that we start with. I don't mean to diminish it in that way, that's not meant to. But there's something quite powerful here. So let's sit.

Guided Meditation

So finding a posture—it'll be a brief meditation, but in the same spirit as what we did before—so allowing yourself first to feel yourself sitting, closing the eyes, maybe taking a deep breath and then letting the energy go out, settling in, letting any words drift away and coming into the feeling of the body, and with full awareness that we're just touching into the tip of *mettā*, evoking a sense of kindness and care for an easy being—dog, cat, baby—feeling our natural care, goodwill for such a being. There is *mettā* there, even if there's also affection.

Breathing in, allowing the *mettā* to strengthen. Breathing out, having a sense of it radiating through our body and outward. Gently stoking the lamp as we breathe. As you feel the *mettā* brightening in the

heart, you might imagine a candle or a lamp or a star. And when it feels natural, you can turn toward that and allow the particular initial being to gently fade. Sensing in your own being the warmth and strength of this light, letting it flow through every cell.

Can we experience this quality as a field in which we are bathed as with light? Perhaps it extends out beyond us too. I'll read a quote from a different sutta in which the Buddha was also teaching the heart qualities from the Pāli Canon. It has instructions for radiation practice in it also.

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *mettā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth.

Those four quarters are the four directions. So above and below, around and everywhere, and to all as to myself, I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will.

Abiding, pervading all directions with this *mettā*, resilient and uncompromising commitment to the freedom of our own heart.

This field is protective. Don't be touched by unwholesome qualities like ill will.

Hatred, judgment. Simple, pure care and kindness radiating from the heart.

This practice is called the suffusion with *mettā*. And the power of this suffusion, when it becomes strong enough, is that it's compatible with any being walking into it.

No one's presence can dim or weaken our field of *mettā*. No one has that power.

We carry it with us even if someone we do not approve of walks into our field, they can't diminish it.

This is the practice of boundless *mettā*.

End of Meditation

Thank you. And for those online, the bell rang. So the world needs people with mature hearts. We're not going to get refuge externally. So now is the time to carry it within, to create the inner strength that supports us for certain, and also others in ways that we can't even know, as we alluded to earlier with the question.

So I have some suggestions for how to practice, if this is intriguing to you, some of what we touched into today. So one is to read the sutta. This makes a difference in ways that we don't know. So you don't need to chant it necessarily, although there are chants like the one that I did. Those are available online. For example, at the Abhayagiri website, the monks chant it very nicely. So you can listen along and learn it. But you can also just read it, a little bit like we did with the reflective, contemplative reading.

You can read sutta through, really see, what does this *Karuṇīyamettā Sutta* have in it? And you'll notice that different phrases and words stand out to you at different times. And those can be inspirations for

things that might be relevant for us in our practice. I tend to trust that when I'm reading suttas, if something stands out to me, it's important in some way. And sometimes I've read some of the suttas many, many times. And sometimes I read it, I come back to a sutta that I've read many times, and I see something in it that I think, was that there before? It was there the whole time, but it didn't stand out until I read it that next time.

So it's helpful to familiarize yourself with this text. It's very deep. There's a lot in here. You may wish to try the radiation practice on the cushion if that had some meaning for you today. You can maybe listen to recordings of guided meditations the first time if you want to learn how to do it and then do it on your own. There are also other ways to do *mettā* practice. Of course, there are the phrases, if you want to practice with those. There are also recordings of that. There are people who teach *mettā* more through imagery also.

Ayya Khema used to teach primarily through painting, kind of painting a picture of a certain image that's related to *mettā*, like maybe a fountain or sometimes it was radiation like a sun, and then she would go through kind of different ways of relating to that image that would fill out the *mettā* for us. So there are many ways, it's a very creative practice. But I do encourage you to do kind of a classical type practice that draws from the suttas, draws from classical ways of approaching it so that we don't—so that it purifies, so that we don't fall into affection, for example, one of the near enemies.

And then we can also practice more in daily life with the qualities that were evoked in the sutta. So there were some nice ones named through the beginning of it, like I've practiced, for example, with contented and easily satisfied. That's a good one to practice with. Or we can practice also with that inner strength that was just evoked in that last meditation that we did. I kind of pointed toward, could we carry with us in our life a sense of inner dignity, able and upright, inner dignity, inner care, inner unwillingness to sacrifice our freedom in situations, even if they get challenging.

It's not easy. I'm not saying any of these things are easy. That's why it's a practice. But see if you can recall this quality of openness, of straightforwardness, of uprightness in situations. Maybe the next situation you have that's a little bit challenging, maybe you'll remember it afterwards. That's good enough. Maybe you'll remember it during the time after. But just try to stay with it. And of course have *mettā* and be gentle when we aren't able to do that. We have limits to our capacity. And if you lose it, then you say, oh boy, I really lost it. Really lost it. I'll try to do better next time.

But this is a whole transformative quality if we stay with it. And it unfolds in different ways. This is much of what I wanted to share. Perhaps I'll make a space at the end for any—if there's anything that really feels seriously incomplete, you're welcome to ask a question. I want to make sure we wind up well. Yes, there's one in the room here. Could you hand her the microphone? Yeah, and then we'll finish up.

Questioner

It's not a matter of incomplete, but the imagery I try to use when practicing this, I get particularly hung

up, because if I imagine ease and peacefulness for the beings I have in mind, and there's a key word here that says, "wishing in gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease." Is there—I'm hoping it's just a translation thing—is there a better word than wishing?

Kim Allen

What would feel better for you?

Questioner

Wishing makes it—things—I think it just has a funny connotation for me, that almost like I was raised as a Catholic in the power of prayer sort of a thing.

Kim Allen

Okay. Then I think in that phrase, "wishing in gladness and in safety," why don't you focus on the gladness and the safety? So it's actually—those parts are actually meant to be significant, is that we first establish ourselves in a feeling of safety. We are upright. We are centered. We are strong. And we have some degree of happiness, some degree of gladness within us that we want to carry with us in the world.

From there, we are able to wish for others, "may you be at ease." So if you strengthen those qualities in yourself, then maybe something more like intending or caring for others. Okay, caring, that seems to work. You can offer care from that place of gladness and safety. Much better, thank you. Okay, great. Okay, I think we're going to wind up. So let's go ahead.

And so as you see, there's so much in this sutta that two and a half hours is not even close to enough time, but that's why we have, you know, hopefully much more time ahead of us in our practice to keep practicing with it, unpacking, talking about it with other people. I would—yeah, I encourage you to stay with it. So let's dedicate our merit. We can remember that what we've done is shared the Dhamma together and come together to try to understand these deep heart qualities that are liberating and mean so much, not only for us, but for the world. And what a blessing that we had the chance to do that. And may it carry forward.

In fact, I almost don't even have to wish it because we've done that. We've already done that with the *mettā*. So I wish only that whatever you got out of our practice today, may it root ever more deeply in your heart, and from that it can't help but help all beings. So may all beings be happy, may all beings be peaceful, may all beings find freedom. Thank you all. Thanks to everyone online. I should wave to the camera. It's so nice to see you all there and your pretty faces. I have so many. We have a big screen, I can actually see almost all of you. So goodbye. Be well, everyone.