

A FLOWER CALLED

metta



AJAHN CHATCHAI

A Flower Called Mettā

by

AJAHN CHATCHAI

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Contents

Benefits of Mettā	1
Let's plant now!	5
Mettā clarifies	27

Preface

The Buddha once said that the mind of *mettā* was like the sound of a trumpet—a clear call over the land that could not be stopped or kept out by anything. It's such a beautiful image; I love the thought of that sound reaching over the trees and forests, the cities and towns. Today, we might say it's like a satellite, a message beaming across the whole earth. For all those who are lost, who have no-one, who suffer and don't know why: there is someone who loves you.

This is the gift of *mettā*, a gift that will change everything.

But the Buddha also pointed out something else about trumpets. A crowd of people, attracted by the call, found the trumpet. But they'd never seen one before. They picked it up, wondering, "Where does the sound come from?" And they poked it and pulled it apart, looking for the sound—but no sound did they find.

I used to be a musician, so I sympathize with their problem. I mean, have you ever tried to play a trumpet? It's really hard! If you just try to pick one up and blow it, you'll get nothing but a few sad squeaks, if you're lucky. To learn it, you need someone to train you, who knows how to break down a hard task into many smaller ones, who knows when to encourage you, and when to tell you that enough is enough. And someone who can inspire you as a master of their craft.

While still a young monk I was blessed to find such a teacher—Ajahn Mahā Chatchai. While many spoke of *mettā* meditation, he was the first one I knew who could break it down, clearly, step by step, and show you how it worked and how it all fit together. He taught me to find joy in meditation, to learn the art of stillness. Through all my many—often naive and ignorant—questions, he showed nothing but patience

and kindness. He so clearly manifests the power of *mettā*, with such humility, grace, and intelligence, that he has inspired me to not just be a better meditator and a better monk, but a better human being. It has been an honor to be his student, and I will always be grateful for what he has done for me.

May you be happy, and may you find joy in *mettā* meditation. And may you be the trumpet call that sounds over the land, bringing love to the hearts of all.

SUJATO BHIKKHU

July 9, 2017

Benefits of Mettā

Huge benefits

When our mind is peaceful, we are happy and know how to let go of the unwholesome.

Peace comes from a still mind that shies away from the unwholesome. This is a skilful or wholesome mind.

*The nature of the wholesome is calm and cool
to the body and the heart.*

Cultivation of mindfulness in our meditation practice is beneficial to our life, both while we are awake and while we are asleep. We are protected by the practice. This is called:

“Protection of the dhamma”

The purpose of meditation is to cultivate peace and calm of the mind. This, in turn, will foster understanding of the dhamma, especially of the truth of the elements (*dhātu*), and of aggregates or groups of existence (*khandha*). This also develops understanding of our practice so that we could overcome all worries, which are causes of our sufferings. Understanding will arise only when our mind is still and peaceful, and when we have time to contemplate reality as it is.

Practicing dhamma renders peace and happiness.

Cultivating *mettā* gives the practitioner unsurpassable benefits. Even when we cultivate *mettā* in the first zone or the first stage of *mettā* meditation, we will experience exquisite emotions of peace, well-being, fulfilment, a powerful mind, happiness and joy.

*Like a lotus at dawn
which slowly unfurls its petals to
the warmth of the sun,
our mind, while spreading mettā, is
soft, gentle and joyful.*

Hence, the preliminary goal of planting a tree called “*mettā*” is to cultivate peace from the chaos, caused by what we see, hear and touch. The mind that runs amok and gets involved with outside disturbances is scattered and, thus, lacks power. A powerful mind is one that is composed and still.

A peaceful mind brings us serenity and happiness.

When our mind is peaceful and contented, the mindfulness, strong with a solid foundation, can help us skilfully and calmly address all the negativities that surround us – be they forms, tastes, smells, sounds, or physical contacts. Our mind is not irritated much when people angrily shout at us or give us a hostile eye.

A contented mind is the condition in which the mind is in *samādhi*, calm and free from turmoil. It is the mind that is free from all the unwholesome activities and thoughts, including craving for mundane pleasures. Even pleasure from eating is mundane. Thinking about and wishing to eat a favourite

food or listening to sounds adorned with passion is flurry and worry. Once the mind is free from this defilement, our mind will become peaceful.

The peace from *samādhi* based on *mettā* is happiness beyond imagination. It is beyond ordinary people's understanding. Sitting on a beautiful beach getting refreshed by a nice breeze, eating good food, reading a good book, sipping cool drinks, you may think that this is utmost happiness, but that kind of happiness is less than one-trillionth of the happiness from *samādhi*.

Unconditional love

Love that follows softness and gentleness of a wholesome mind is called *mettā*.

Mettā is unconditional love.

Mettā is love that never demands that things have to be certain ways before they are embraced.

What we are practicing now is to cultivate a mind that is soft, gentle, and relaxed. This kind of mind is compared to the leaves, branches, or stem of the tree called *mettā*.

*The root of mettā is love:
love and goodwill
for all objects and sentient beings.*

Each individual's *mettā* state is different. For some who come to my monastery, I will give them a sapling of *mettā* to plant in their garden, but for some, I give them a seed. Those who have received a seed are those who have no prior hint of what

mettā in their heart will look like as it has neither roots nor trunk nor leaves.

Whenever and wherever the loving feeling that is soft and gentle and unconditional arises in our heart, though the feeling is still like a young seedling, we will experience magic, as *mettā* will bestow upon our heart immense power.

When the *mettā* sapling that we have been nurturing has developed into a strong solid tree which sprouts stunning flowers, our soft and gentle mind will be empowered by incomparable bliss.

Let's plant now!

Preparing the field

Cultivating *mettā* requires skills, so we need to prepare ourselves for the training. Planting a *mettā* tree in our heart is not a hasty job, we need to be patient.

If we compare *mettā* to saplings that we want to plant in our heart, what I have given you are young saplings that are not yet strong enough and thus need our loving care.

*Good tending is caring:
'tend' to 'mettā' with 'care'.*

Mettā needs to be planted. Having been planted, it can then grow. Sometimes we use the term 'cultivating *mettā*'. Successful cultivation of *mettā* is like growing a fruit tree; we have to imagine that we are a farmer skilled at growing plants.

The sapling that we are about to plant is young and thus vulnerable to the elements. So, before we plant it, we have to prepare the soil well.

*If our mission were to plant a tree,
the first task would be to prepare the soil.*

The *mettā* tree has huge benefits. Before you plant one in your heart, you should make sure that it is well prepared: cleansed

and supple, the same way you prepare soil, ensuring that it's fluffy and full of nutrients, suitable for the growth of our sapling. *Saddhā* or confidence and *virīya* or diligence, are essential nutrients for the soil of our heart.

*Without saddhā,
a dhamma tree can never grow.*

Saddhā is not merely faith but also understanding. It encompasses confidence, conviction and trust. This enriching fertilizer for the soil of our heart is part of the five faculties: conviction (*saddhā*), perseverance (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), stillness of the mind (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*). When you have wisdom and stillness, you will not allow the mind to be sucked into harmful emotions—not allowing weeds to thrive. Otherwise, our dhamma or *mettā* plant will struggle and finally wither and die.

*Before you plant a mettā tree, prepare your heart.
Cultivate softness and tenderness
while letting go of harshness and hesitation.*

The ground for planting a *mettā* tree is our own mind. The most suitable ground is a mind rich in dhamma—mindfulness, contentment, perseverance, caring, carefulness, and thoughtfulness. We should try to savour, associate and collect forms, feelings, and thoughts that are wholesome and conducive to dhamma practice.

We come here to meditate so as to train the mind to stay with our body; to learn to be aware of our posture. This is the preparation needed to plant the seed of *mettā* into our mind and nurture it to become a healthy tree which will produce beautiful flowers and delicious fruit.

Getting to be aware of our body is the preparation process in the same way that farmers prepare their land before planting. If our land is well prepared, the trees will flourish. If not, they will not grow well, or not at all! Likewise, if we want to plant a *mettā* tree, we need to clear our mind from weeds of unwholesome experiences.

When we focus our attention on the body to clear the mind of unwholesome entanglements, it is similar to pulling weeds from the soil, tilling the soil, and enriching it with compost. Our mind also needs to be fertilised. Perseverance and *saddhā* are excellent fertilisers, the topic of which will be further explained later.

As for the planting stage, I have prepared you all to ready the mind by focusing on the state of your body: face and body erect, shoulders relaxed, etc. This will help your mind to be peaceful or familiar with peace. The familiarity with awareness or mindfulness is like soil that has been properly tilled and thus is suitable for planting.

Just as the *mettā* sapling is young and weak, so is the feeling of *mettā* in our mind, as *mettā* hasn't yet been firmly planted in our heart.

The planting process includes preparing the mind, practicing awareness of the body and removing weeds harmful to the mind. After this caring preparation, our mind will become calmer and calmer.

Collecting the wholesome

Dedication to learning and practice is needed before our mind can be well developed with unshakeable confidence in the dhamma and perseverance to walk the path. Once this dedi-

cation is achieved, we can be skilfully selective in collecting wholesome feelings and let go of the unwholesome.

*Accumulating that which is
beneficial, nourishing, and wholesome
is accumulating pāramī or perfections.*

Increasing your dosage of wholesome feelings is a solid foundation to your practice. This is the same as preparing fertile soil for your plants. All that I've been teaching is to prepare your mind.

*Good preparation of the mind
is half the success of dhamma practice.*

The reason that most people feel that they have barely made progress is mainly that they haven't readied their mind before actual meditation.

Preparing the seeds

In general, each day the disagreeable, both observable and unobservable, visits us more than the agreeable. This affliction will oppress us both physically and emotionally. Meanwhile, we seek to find pleasure in such things as listening to music, eating out, or travelling. This is our natural reaction when things around us signpost that we are unhappy.

Our instinct tells us to pursue happiness by seeking pleasures such as satisfactory forms, sounds, and thoughts. However, these are never-ending pursuits—once found, they'll soon be discarded. Then, one after another form of happiness is to be chased. A beautiful picture—when seen for the second, third, fourth and fifth time—can lose its attraction and become boring. This is the nature of things.

The very first step is to prepare good seeds—peace and serenity. These two qualities are like knowledge and experience in the workplace, valuable to you everywhere you go. When dhamma or higher virtues, such as *samādhi*, are in our heart, it doesn't matter whether you are travelling out of the city or out of this world, *samādhi* will always be with you.

*A special quality of samādhi is
to give us serenity and happiness.*

All kinds of *samādhi* will bring about serenity and happiness; hence, wise people should seek to train the mind to be still and peaceful. This is like an umbrella to provide happy shade and protect our heart against the rain of misery. *Mettā* meditation is especially conducive to bring us calm and happiness in all aspects of our life, be it at work or at school. Cultivating *mettā* is always beneficial.

Meditation is a good use of time.

I advise that you all do your best to cultivate the true essence of *mettā*—a soft and gentle heart. This could be difficult for those who have never trained themselves before or those that have an unskilful mind.

Of course, it is hard for us defiled beings to be free from greed, hatred and delusion, but we could temporarily mitigate them by developing mindfulness, such as when we focus our awareness on our body: with face and body erect, and shoulders relaxed; as well as our physical sense of sitting on the floor. This kind of training bears fruit.

*Our ultimate goal is to cultivate mettā.
If our mind is not still nor grounded enough,
we can't develop mettā.*

Mettā is such a gossamer-delicate feeling that it is difficult to bring up in our mind. Therefore, our first basic training will focus on mindfulness or *sati*, and stillness or *samādhi*.

A strong and solid foundation of the mind comes from training of the mind, or meditation.

We develop *sati* to build a solid and strong foundation for our mind. A well-grounded mind is happy, whether standing, walking, seated or lying down.

A solid mind is soft and gentle.

Meditation or *kammatthāna* is the base or place of work of the mind. When we focus our awareness on our body, we aim to get *sati* to work, not allowing the mind to wander aimlessly. During meditation, our mind is with *sati*.

Most days we are without *sati* rather than with *sati*. Those who don't meditate tend to be without *sati*, and lack mindfulness. When we come into contact with outside elements through the five senses, we feel pleased or displeased towards these sense perceptions. We are even moved by thinking about the past or the future. Both pleasure and displeasure degrade a mind that lacks solid foundation. When this kind of mind experiences the highs and lows of happiness and sorrow, it feels them with great intensity.

*Developing sati and meditation
is to train our mind to become unwavering
and mindfulness to function.*

If our *sati* has no foundation, it doesn't function. Without foundation, there's no base for *sati* to stand on. *Sati* needs something to stand on such as the body. Mindfulness of the

body means our body is the foundation for *sati*. An example of this practice is to learn to be aware of our erect body, with the head up and shoulders relaxed. When we train ourselves this way, we will be more grounded and the mind will be calm and at peace with whatever comes into contact with it.

*Developing mindfulness is to strengthen our mind, and
be happy.*

The more we practice watching our mind, the more skilled our mindfulness is, and the more we are aware of our physical state. The clearer our awareness of the body is, the more skilful our mind.

Bright light

Our sati is like a compact fluorescent lamp.

When it is first switched on, the light is relatively dim, but after a while, the light gets brighter and brighter.

Mindfulness of our body is like the light from a fluorescent lamp on our body. At first, our *sati* is just a glimmer. So, if you can't focus well, don't worry. Allow things to be. Simply be aware of what's going on, allowing the light to shine on. After a while, the light will become stronger.

Likewise, mindfulness of our body starts small with a small part. After having worked for a longer period, our *sati* will become more and more active until it finally becomes fully functional. Then, our mind will be brightly lit with *sati*.

When mental irritants have been eliminated, we will feel happy—nothing is there to bother us. Irritants, whether pleasing or displeasing, harm our mind, but when *sati* is with us, we can experience them with unruffled calm.

*To have sati or mindfulness
is an objective of our training, of meditation*

Different schools seek different methods to develop *sati*. All approaches aim for the same purpose: to develop mindfulness.

During our practice, we should try to sustain our mindfulness, keeping it focused on our body and not wandering outside as well as not getting curious and going inside the mind to explore new mental experiences. We should sustain our mindfulness on our body parts such as keeping our head and body erect but with shoulders relaxed. Then, our mind will be peaceful and free from the unwholesome.

Not yet awakened with full *sati*, we, who are just trainees, should continuously develop experience. Do it when you feel diligent. Do it when you feel lazy. Do it when you are busy. And do it when you are free.

What we usually find is that there is little time to practice mindfulness because we always claim busyness or wishes to do something else. Even when we are happy, we say to ourselves: “Could I postpone the practice as I want to enjoy my happiness first?” But when we are miserable, we don’t have an iota of *sati* to start with!

An hour or two of each single day of your remaining time on Earth should be spent on cultivating mindfulness for your own benefits. Be mindful when you work, speak, think or even eat. Always practice mindfulness. Don’t waste your day.

The seeds of *mettā*

*Mettā is the softness and tenderness of the mind
that needs cultivation.*

Mettā is cultivated. Visualise the softness of the mind as it is the seed or the sapling of the *mettā* tree.

To obtain such a valuable seed, we have to search for it, just like we have to go to the market or the forest to procure seeds for our farm.

Mettā or tender feelings need to be regularly collected.

When we witness wholesome things or experience tender feelings, a seed of *mettā* is born, and wise farmers will save this seed in their hearts.

When we cultivate *mettā*, we should think of that feeling—just the feeling. This is similar to us collecting seeds or seedlings in a forest. We will collect only the newly born ones that we like; we don't collect their mothers. Likewise, we collect only the beautiful wholesome feelings as seeds of the *mettā* in our heart.

We need to collect mettā or wholesome feelings.

If you can do this, you're considered a person skilled at maintaining wholesome states. Please look after these positive feelings, or they will die. You have to keep an eye on them, visiting them at the greenhouse, watering and fertilising so that they will germinate and grow into beautiful trees.

Tend the mind well

Productive practice is homage to the Buddha.

Non-productive practice is also homage to the Buddha.

“Well” or “not well” depends on our intention. The result is the fruit of our knowledge or understanding from our own practice.

What is most important is our intention.

The meaning of “intend” is “tending” the “inside” of our heart, ensuring that it sits upright. When the heart is not holding upright or not upholding the right dhamma, the heart will lack energy and will not be happy.

When we get up and don’t stand upright, our body will lack strength. Likewise, our heart needs to be upright or it will lack energy to overcome obstacles or sufferings in life. So, right intention is needed.

However, we should be aware that despite our good intentions, the mind tends to flow in different directions pulled around by its many impulses. Continuous mindfulness to maintain good intention is thus important.

Mettā meditation is essential.

The goal of our meditation is to cultivate *mettā*. Having *mettā* means maintaining goodwill in our heart and being contented with ourselves, with whom and what we are, without any need for outside influences.

This state of mind will happen only after our heart has a certain degree of tenderness. Therefore, we should ceaselessly practice doing everything with gentleness in our heart. It doesn’t matter whether sensations come to us or whether we go out and grasp them, try to maintain a kind and gentle reaction. We all can learn and train our mind.

Blissful sense

*Cultivating a gentle heart
helps us to have happy relationships with others.*

Whatever we say or do to or about others, we should do it with kindness. Even when we think of others, we should think with kindness. This state of mind is essential to a happy co-existence.

We should train our mind to be gentle towards every contact, every sensation as well as every single thought. Whatever or whomever we think about, we should think of them with a tender heart. And finally, when we think of our own body during meditation, we think of it with tenderness and kindness.

*Tenderness comes from friendliness,
willingness to live together,
and goodwill towards our own thoughts.*

No matter what you are thinking about or how you are feeling, or in what posture you are, you should always try to maintain tenderness in your heart. A gentle and kind heart is a quality heart.

Always maintain a soft and gentle mind

Coarse movements include common bodily movements, while refined movements are those during meditation such as walking meditation, during which we have to try to be aware of every single movement while maintaining a gentle mind.

When you watch your breath with tenderness, it means you have *mettā* towards your breath. The coarseness of the breath will be softened to become lighter and more refined, a most useful tool for meditation.

This could be difficult for those who don't practice on a regular basis, but for those who have trained themselves for a considerable period of time to breathe with kindness, their breath will be so light and refined that it seems to disappear.

Their coarse body has been suppressed temporarily and they will feel comfortable with softness spreading throughout their body.

When you feel this way, please focus your attention on the tenderness, which, in fact, is *mettā*. If you can focus your attention well, *mettā* or the tenderness will never disappear, but will only become stronger and stronger.

Heartwood starts with sapwood

The essence of *mettā* starts from a small component—the softness of the mind which has been growing little by little so that eventually softness will become the whole of our being. This is the essence or the foundation of *mettā*. One day we will feel that only *mettā* exists and remains. People with little *samādhi* or stillness will stay in *mettā* for a short time only. On the contrary, those with good *samādhi* can remain with *mettā* for a long time...

So, what you need to do is to simply maintain your mind not to fall into the trap of callousness or indifference. Try to keep your mind soft and refreshed by the tenderness of your heart. This is how we connect our mind to *mettā* so that eventually *mettā* will become us, and we become *mettā*. *Mettā* is in us, and we are in *mettā*.

Always remember me(ttā)

Please try to regularly recollect *mettā*. However, you should learn to be flexible and lenient with yourself. Sometimes some people have such a strong determination to strengthen *mettā*, but when they do, their mind is stressed and thus not gentle nor soft. So, please think of *mettā* with a relaxed attitude...

How much effort is needed varies from one to another. You just need to observe your own practice and be cautious of your own negligence; otherwise, *mettā* will just fade away. On the other hand, being too uptight will stress you out.

Stress is a powerful force that lacks mettā.

To find out the right amount of effort, our intention to cultivate mindfulness of our body must be sufficiently solid, following the middle path where we neither put so much stress that our mind feels distressed nor are so lax that *sati* disappears.

When we are mindful of the body without any stress or pressure, it's called 'having *sati*'. Balancing in the middle path, peace and calm will arise in our mind, laying a solid foundation for *mettā* cultivation.

Mettā is the power of a peaceful mind.

Mettā is the result of training of the mind so that we are aware of our body from head to toe, feeling softness throughout our whole body. Even when we move our attention to the breath, the breath feels soft and gentle. After that, we let go of all thoughts, including awareness of the body, and focus on *mettā* and the feeling of tenderness, of unrestricted and indefinite softness.

This practice is to elevate our spirituality to feel united with *mettā* so that "We are *mettā* and *mettā* is us". This is our personal dhamma which only our mind can feel, which is called '*paccattam*'—to be realized within oneself.

When you are in *mettā* or your mind is connected with *mettā*, the experience will be totally different from what you have experienced before. An immediate tangible consequence is the beauty of your mind and feelings.

In fact, *mettā* is an element that tries to connect us with all natural elements of the world, including the *Samatha Dhātu* or peace, but we instead run away from nature and push away our own spirituality.

Mettā cultivation, therefore, is an endeavour to connect ourselves with nature, especially with the *mettā* element of the nature. The training road must be paved with contentment as well as efforts and sacrifices. What kind of sacrifices? Sacrifices of time and indulgences in superficial or superfluous pleasures.

Planting process in brief

There are three steps to planting or cultivating the *mettā* tree.

Step 1 concerns contact. No matter whether it is a physical or mental object, we should contact it with softness. Whatever we think of or feel, we should perceive it with tenderness. To do this, we must have clear and resolute intent to the practice. Without wholesome intention, it cannot be a dhamma practice.

Practice contacting everything with softness. Whether lifting a glass of water to drink or putting on clothes, do everything gently. Whatever touches our body, we should also soften our bodily reception. And although some sounds that reach our sense of hearing might be harsh, we should try to make our aural reception gentle with kindness.

Perceive everything with tenderness.

Step 2 is about feelings or sensations, called *vedanā*.

During body contemplation, when we have clear awareness of the body, direct your mind to cultivate tenderness at

the erect face and body, and relaxed shoulders. This perception of softness is called *vedanā* or sensations.

Step 3 deals with how to nurture *mettā* so that it will grow healthily, and sprout flowers and fruit. Whether a tree will bear beautiful flowers and fruit depends on how much we care for it. Likewise, the *mettā* tree that we've planted needs our love and care.

*We are to plant and nurture the tree.
The tree is to sprout flowers and fruits.
We are to plant and nurture mettā.
The outcome is served by dhamma.*

Weeds, weeds, weeds

Our mind is like farmland. We have the land and prepare the soil for cultivation. All the weeds are completely exterminated. But after just a few days, they sprout back up again.

Likewise, while we meditate and have the power of perception in our mind, we can control the defilements at a certain level and find ease. But after a couple days of neglect, not paying attention to practicing mindfulness or awareness of what comes in contact with our mind, the farmland of our heart will be overgrown with spiritual weeds.

Sometimes we feel irritable for no apparent reason. It seems the irritation is smouldering inside of us. This is a spiritual weed or impurity of the mind that can reside deep inside of us.

*Just like the weeds' roots underground,
latent tendencies burrow themselves
deep in our heart.*

A clever farmer will constantly pull the weeds out without feeling irritated by the task because he knows that it's par for the course. If the soil we've prepared is not fertile, weeds are unlikely to grow. On the contrary, if the soil is rich, weeds naturally spread. When weeds sprout, we simply need to remove them, preventing them from smothering our plants.

To nurture *mettā*, we need to watch out for emotional weeds, an enemy to *mettā* cultivation.

Planting a mettā tree needs constant weeding.

Weeds are vegetation harmful to cultivated plants. Negative emotions such as irritation, moodiness, frustration, discomfort, and boredom are harmful to human beings.

Spiritual weeds are like weeds that are harmful to saplings and seeds. Skilful farmers will plough away weeds. Sometimes some weeds still remain, or those ploughed down can sprout up to compete with our seedlings. As the seedlings and saplings are not yet strong, we must keep removing these enemies.

The same is also true about our mind. Our *mettā* saplings are vulnerable to various things that come into contact with our mind, including but not limited to anger, dissatisfaction, malevolence and obsession. We need *sati* to eradicate these spiritual weeds or unskilful volitional activities (*sankara*) as they are the source of harshness, which is adverse to *mettā*.

Thoughts or volitional activities (*sankhārā*) are also weeds in our heart.

Vicious weeds of the mind include greed, hatred and delusion. Once arisen, they advance so quickly. The unwholesomeness that arises in our heart is fast-growing, strong and enduring. It lasts for an extremely long period of time. Aeons have passed, and it is still there!

Please try to pull weeds out from the first day that they sprout. Diligently cultivate *mettā* and virtues deep in our heart, regularly fertilising and watering them. If the seedling that I distribute every week withers, come and get a new one. Do not be dispirited.

Watch out for accumulated rust

*Watch out for the rust of irritation
piling up in your heart.*

I would like to cite an example of irritation: without mindfulness, when we are fastening a button and get the wrong button hole, we get annoyed.

Some people, when taking a shower, may get angry simply because the soap slips out of the hands. Some people slip in the bathroom and injure themselves due to lack of *sati* when stooping down to angrily pick up the soap. When they don't get a firm grip of the soap and it slips out of their hands again, they step aside to avoid the slippery soap, fall down, and hit their head on the floor. All of these chain reactions are consequences of lack of *sati*.

If we do not practice mindfulness every day, our *sati* can easily run wild after inside or outside distractors.

If we are vigilant about protecting our mind from anger just for an hour a day, our mind will be cooler and softer. Each day irritants created by both others and ourselves abound. Nonetheless, whatever comes into contact with our mind, try not to get irritated, as anger can make an imprint on our mind. When we have practiced being unaffected by irritants, we will be more calm and composed.

*Practice must be done with what actually happens
with resolute intention not to be irritated.*

Forms are coarse and when touching our mind, they do not last long—the irritation will fade soon. However, the negative impression could be accumulated and become displeasure. So, try to lessen the anger when you see irritating forms. Be determined not to be angry and focus on making your mind soft and gentle so that the irritating forms will not make a deep imprint in your mind and evolve to be a latent tendency.

On the other hand, sound is more refined. If we dislike a sound, the displeasure will run deep. For some, words of criticism or sarcastic comments may adhere to their mind for decades. When such anger occurs, the mind that is soft and kind will disappear because anger is completely opposite to *mettā*. We thus need to practice a lot about how to deal with sounds. You do not need to like them; just try not to be angry with aural irritants.

Sometimes someone is talking about their tasks, which is no concern of ours, but when we overhear it, our mind goes out and takes hold of it and makes it the focus of our irritation. Then, the irritation gets stuck in our mind for days or even for years. Consequently, *mettā* disappears.

Both forms and sounds that we take hold of and get irritated with can drive away *mettā*. These two are like big volcanos with lava smouldering inside.

Smell and tastes usually do not have adverse long-term effects. However, when we practice, we should practice to deal with all forms of irritants. For example, when we perceive unpleasant smells, we should set ourselves to feel free from anger. Similarly, when we are not satisfied with a taste, keep calm and try not to be angry. A tactile sensation, be it gentleness, roughness, heat, cold, etc., can be an irritant if it is not

to our liking. All of these are just ashes of hot lava, thus not so detrimental. However, some people firmly grip these little negative sentiments; thus, they become blazing flames like lava gushing out of a volcano.

Our thoughts or imagination can also irritate us. A way to cultivate a *mettā* mind is to be determined not to get upset, not to allow lava to erupt from the volcano of our mind.

If we can maintain our commitment to practice, we will not be upset by all irritants and our mind will be calm and will not harbour thoughts of revenge when aroused.

Therefore, when we open our eyes every morning, we should set ourselves up for a task of training our mind to be at peace with all things without falling victim to irritation. Practicing mindfulness of the body is one way of cultivating *sati*.

Sati, a weed exterminator

If *mettā* were a living being, it would sit depressed in a far corner of our heart because when we get angry, *mettā* will simply get dispersed. But if we regularly practice *sati* and *mettā* cultivation, *mettā* can grow without much difficulty.

Sati is used in all situations. *Sati* helps us be aware that our mind has started to get irritated before the ‘anger’ goes full steam and drives *mettā* away.

Fertiliser

*Seeing a plant with beautiful flowers,
wise men will collect them and nurture them
with water and fertiliser...*

Likewise, when we grow a tree of *mettā*, when we see beautiful things such as an act of kindness, our heart will grow soft and tender as it becomes infused with *mettā*. We should be wise enough to collect that feeling in our heart and mind and visit it frequently.

Our world has millions of plant species. Likewise, sensations that can soften our mind abound. We just pick one or two beautiful emotions that make our mind distinctively soft and gentle, and save them and care for them with our whole heart.

As I've said earlier, cultivating *mettā* is like planting a tree. Both need nutrients and water and fertilizer before a seedling can grow strong roots and develop a strong trunk.

Confidence in the dhamma, *sati*, perseverance, understanding of the nature of the mind, and patience are all great fertilisers to ready the mind for dhamma plantation.

Mindfulness of the body is like aerating of the soil for our *mettā* tree.

*A sure way to effective mettā cultivation is
to encourage the mind
to focus on wholesome things.*

One effective approach is to pay extra attention to the present moment, being aware that we are sitting and then trying to relax and to develop a gentle mind. Investigate whether we are harbouring upsetting feelings.

Irritants abound and a great number of them challenge us every day. Even a stranger can annoy us! If we do not want this kind of headache, we should try to maintain a tranquil mind which is not susceptible to anger.

Furthermore, sometimes bad things happen to others and we feel a sense of *schadenfreude* (or pleasure derived

from the misfortune of another). This unskillful emotion is something we have to be careful about since it is a form of hatred, a nemesis of *mettā*.

Weeds again!!!

When we come across irritants, which result from frustration when our different sorts of desires can't be gratified, our *mettā* meditation will degrade. Therefore, we should determine to remain calm when these irritants come into contact with our senses. This is one way to sustain a gentle heart.

Cultivating a soft and gentle heart is a very wholesome thing bearing a lot of merit, but each day we have many unwholesome feelings that constantly come to our mind. The unwholesome is coarse, whilst the wholesome that we are cultivating is soft and refined. Thus, it can be difficult for the wholesome to displace the unwholesome. So, we should try to be mindful at all times since when we are absent-minded just for a second, as an unwholesome feeling can arise or propagate very quickly.

The unwholesome is like a fast-propagating germ, whilst the wholesome is gradually slow-growing. Hence, we have to put efforts into sustaining the feeling of softness and gentleness in our heart with the great help of *sati*.

When our mind is filled with the wholesome, it is soft and gentle, a *mettā* mind. Please continue practicing until you are gentle and soft with *mettā*, become a *mettā* meditator, and finally dwell in *mettā*.

Mettā Tree, a perfect dwelling

*When mettā is our abiding,
our heart will be gentle and tender towards everything,
especially towards ourselves.*

When we feel one with *mettā*—*I am mettā, mettā is me*—it means that our *mettā* practice has borne the first fruit. If our practice is a like a journey, this is the perfect first step.

*On the mettā meditation journey,
The first step is the hardest.*

When our *mettā* practice has reached the stage where both our body and mind are *mettā*, the harmony between *mettā* and ourselves is an exceptional experience. Then, our mind will be free from accumulated spiritual pollutants.

We are all experts at accumulating spiritual pollutants, which degrade the quality of our mind and makes us stressed and unhappy. But when our practice has reached the level of ‘*I am mettā and mettā is me,*’ all spiritual pollutants will disappear and we will experience bliss and joy.

Mettā clarifies

Is a mantra necessary?

To cultivate *mettā*, we can use a mantra to facilitate the process such as “*Aham sukhito homi*” or “May I be happy”. I don’t place emphasis on using mantras because if we are used to arousing *mettā* through just our feelings, we can expand the softness to cover the whole feeling and thinking spheres.

Where has my *sati* gone?

*Sati needs to function.
If *sati* doesn’t function, it simply means
lack of *sati*.*

Having *sati* means ‘being aware’ that if our head is upright or drooping, the shoulders are lifted or relaxed, etc.

When you have difficulty in maintaining awareness or when *sati* (mindfulness) takes a day off, you just need to add a bit of softness into whatever you are doing. While you are focusing your attention on the head, add softness to your attention. When you focus on keeping your head up while meditating, imagine softness. Use a soft and gentle feeling to explore your shoulders, making sure the shoulders are not

tense. When your heart is cherishing tenderness, *sati* can function in a relaxing manner.

After that, scan your awareness down to your body from under your armpits to your waist – your body. Your body should be erect, but not stretched. Having an erect body facilitates good mindfulness. If *sati* fails to work, we will hunch down or lean to the side. Then, be aware of the body parts which touch the seat, from your waist to your legs and your feet. Be aware of the feelings of your feet touching the floor.

We do all these things to encourage *sati* to work or to have awareness: awareness of the body, of the arms, of the legs, of the stress, of the tension, or of the relaxation.

Be determined to cultivate peace, adding soft and gentle mindfulness onto the sensation of our feet touching the floor. Then, move the tenderness up to the legs, the body, the arms, the shoulders, and the head. After that, spread gentleness from head to toe.

Sati and softness?

*The nature of a sound and secure mind is
soft and gentle.*

The softness of the heart can sometimes be stunningly powerful as if it would overtake our whole body. Since *sati* and our mind do not belong to the physical world, there's no obstacle preventing any sensations from happening. So, stop questioning whether what you are feeling is real.

*This softness is a condition of a mind
filled with full awareness.*

The stronger the awareness, the more powerful the softness of the mind. This tenderness of the feelings is a divine quality, difficult to arouse and more difficult to keep. If it has arisen in your heart, try to maintain it, as the tenderness of the heart is a foundation of *sati* (mindfulness), *paññā* (wisdom), and *mettā* (loving-kindness).

Meditation stresses me out!

When we are training our mind to live in peace, we start off with awareness: focusing our attention on the head and making sure that it is upright, not bending left or right or up or down. Careful attention to ensure a properly upright head is called 'being composed'. Monitor your shoulders, making sure that they are not lifted as this is a sign of stress or tension.

*The main principle of mental development
or meditation is to do it with a relaxed attitude.*

Though we are earnest in our meditation practice, we need to do it in a relaxed way. We can easily check our stress level by monitoring the posture of our shoulders. If they are lifted, it means we are trying too hard to attain *samādhi*, but practicing meditation is not to gain *samādhi*. Cultivating *samādhi* does not aim to gain *samādhi*. This is a crucial fact. If we are too focused on attaining *samādhi*, we will be tense because of the attempt to focus.

*Cultivating samādhi is to relax the mind,
while maintaining awareness and mindfulness.*

We sit to be aware. Whether we will gain *samādhi* or not is not the issue. We don't have expectations. What we should do is to be aware of our body that is sitting meditation. This is a state of mind with *sati*.

Mindfulness misplaced!

If we don't cultivate mindfulness, we will lose *sati* or mindfulness, as it will run away with both outside or inside distractions, taking us away from being aware of our own body.

So, practice mindfulness often. Do it a lot. Do it when you are lazy. Do it when you are diligent. Do it every day. Many times a day. Even when you are riding on a bus!

Utterly difficult!

Practice feeling the flow of gentleness throughout the body. Holding our head and body upright may be hard but not too hard. The reasons it is hard are 1) we lack mindfulness; our mind wanders off somewhere, and 2) our mind does not feel enough gentleness.

When we contemplate on our posture: head and body upright and shoulders relaxed, our mind will be in a neutral and comfortable state. It will be light and still. Stillness is also a state of *sati*, but we should add some gentleness to it.

My mind likes to wander off

We may find some difficulties in remaining mindful as our mind likes to wander off, not staying where we want it to be, and not communicating with the body. Our mind likes to seek diversions elsewhere, emotions from the past, emotions in the future, some nice, some not nice, some coarse, some delicate, some good and some bad. When our mind is filled with those emotions, it will run amok. We should simply be aware of what is happening and monitor it, and continue focusing on our body.

Untamed horse, untamed mind

Our mind is wild like an untamed horse. One of the techniques in horse training is that the trainer will stand in the middle of a stable with a lead rope attached to the horse's halter in his hand, allowing the horse to run around in a circle. If he is not careful, the horse may jump or suddenly stop, or perhaps the horse will rear up on its hind legs, but he can use the rope to control it.

The rope to restrain the horse is like sati.

We can pull back our thoughts, not letting them wander somewhere else. Being mindful and uplifting our mind are examples of how to focus our mind on the body. Whenever our mind wanders off, we should try to pull it back to the body, which is the object of our meditation or our dhamma base.

*Mind training is like horse training.
Let it run till it exhausts its wildness.*

Our mind is like a horse. It likes to leap to different emotions. If we keep gently pulling it back, soon, it will come back.

Likewise, we should observe our mind and see if it travels around like a wild horse. If the horse is rather well-behaved, the trainer will let the rope loose, but he will keep the rope short and tight if the horse is unruly.

Similarly, when our mind is contented and orderly, we use just sufficient sati, without being too stern, allowing the mind to travel only within our body like a trainer loosening his grip on the rope.

On the contrary, if our untamed mind runs around in all directions, we must pull the rope tight and be vigilant in maintaining mindfulness and with preventing other thoughts from coming in.

Baby monkey's mind

*Our mind is like a baby monkey
who likes swinging from
one branch of emotion to another.*

Our mind is like a baby orangutan, and our *sati* is like a mother orangutan. If you have watched a documentary about nature, you may see the calm nature of a mother orangutan. It is impressive that the mother orangutan is not too worried about her baby when it climbs up dangerously tall trees. The mother will slowly climb up to its baby and gently take it down. Also, while climbing down, she may even feed the baby fruit she finds along the way, paying no attention to her baby's attempt to flee from her chest.

*Our emotion is like a baby orangutan.
Our sati is like a mother orangutan.*

Like a baby orangutan, our mind struggles to run away from our body and leap onto different branches of emotions. The important thing to do is not to be too tense. If we strain to become mindful, we then are not as skilful as a mother orangutan.

*To practice our mind,
we must be calm, kind and collected
like a mother orangutan.*

It is the nature of our mind to wander off here and there. We just need to be aware and gently bring it back to our body. The calming quality of our emotions is the stability of the mind.

Our mind needs stability.

‘Stable’ means steady or solid. Do not be upset or frustrated. Be kind and composed. This is the secret of meditation. Be calm and collected like a mother orangutan. Be diligent in laying a good foundation of the mind until our mind is used to being still and does not have the desire to wander. When the mind is relatively calm, we have overcome a critical condition.

Then, we will find that meditation is amazing, and that it is achievable. Cultivating *mettā* becomes easier when our mind has a good solid foundation.

Body contemplation with *mettā*?

We can combine *mettā* with our body contemplation by:

Step 1. Be aware of the whole body with sufficient but relaxing effort. Sometimes, with too much effort, the muscles are too strained and the brain stressed. So, just by relaxing your mind, you can be calm.

Step 2. Focus your attention deep in your head, feel the hair, scalp, brain, and bones. Do not forget to relax every movement of your feelings. Also, notice if you are calmer, more relaxed. Maintain a calm and relaxed mind.

*As we are not skilled,
we need to pay special attention*

Monitor your mind: is it anxious? Does it have any expectations? All the cravings are just a waste of your time and disrupt your chance to become peaceful.

Step 3. While doing mindfulness of the body, bring gentleness to your body and your mind, letting the softness radiate from your brain to your head, and spread to the scalp and the hair...

*The most obvious quality of mettā
is the softness that is led by gentleness.*

A *Mettā* tree is like a normal tree. Sometimes it will not grow in some soils. So, if *mettā* does not grow on our head, move it to the shoulders. For some people, tenderness arises when they think of their heart.

Once *mettā* grows in any part of the body, let it spread slowly and gently throughout the whole body. This is the technique of body contemplation which uses sensations without a mantra. For those who like to use a mantra, you may do so in order to enrich your path in cultivating *mettā* within you.

Actually, *mettā* can be used together with other meditation techniques, such as *ānāpānasati*, to increase effectiveness. While contemplating on the breath, you simply add *mettā* to it. Watch the breath with gentleness and tenderness, not harshness. *Ānāpānasati* will then bring a smile and joy to your heart.

*Mettā, like refreshing water,
can permeate everything.*

If we compare a meditation technique to gemstones in a container, *mettā* will be like water we will pour into the container. This pure water will simply run between the gemstones without diminishing their value. Quite the reverse, it helps make the practice more refreshing and invigorating.

I can't breathe!

Whether our breathing will be smooth or not depends on the factors within us, our mental volitions, our thoughts, etc.

If the cause of an uncomfortable breath is our interference with our body, observe the breath and try to relax. Try not to stretch the body too much, to slump, or to lean to one side. Send love and kindness to the breath while relaxing the body, then your breath will become more comfortable.

Our breath may reflect the tendency of our mind. If the state of mind is unwholesome, the breath will be rapid, tainted, distressed and uncomfortable. On the contrary, if the mind is wholesome, filled with generosity and compassion, and particularly with feelings of letting go, the breath will be soft and easy.

We want soft and easy breathing as it contributes to the development of *samādhi*.

Inhaling, you feel comfortable.

Exhaling, you feel released.

When you can watch the breath often, your *sati* will keep your memory strong. Try to observe your breathing and familiarize yourself with this activity until eventually you will feel happy with your breathing:

Breathing in, happy...

Breathing out, happy...

No progress after all this time...

What bothers our mind the most is our own unwholesome mental volitions. However, we cannot yet get rid of them from our mind. In fact, the more we try to push them away, the more suffering we feel—physically and emotionally.

One way to deal with the stubbornness of mental volitions is to use *sati*. When love and hatred arise in our thought, just

be aware with a gentle mind. Don't get upset about it, but look at the mind with forgiveness and tenderness.

When we do breath meditation, it takes time to get into the rhythm of watching. Sometimes we can observe the breath easily; sometimes after five minutes, mental volitions arise. Sometimes we push ourselves to observe, but we end up being frustrated and bored. The meditation path is not always smooth.

For those of us in training, the road is not smooth; it is full of ups and downs. We cannot afford to be careless and let days go by. A short time passes and we can find that our mind is spiralling downwards towards misery. Therefore, continuous diligence and perseverance in the practice is our only valuable investment. Information and other kinds of knowledge are just secondary resources, not the primary one.

When practicing meditation, consider yourselves as foolish and unwise, needing to learn a lot about meditation. So, be diligent, and don't be lazy. Do not allow defilements to bargain away your efforts. Laziness is a major defilement.

*Defilements are like a five-star general,
the commander of the army of cravings,
who wants to destroy us,
preventing us from developing our mind.*

Laziness is very powerful. Compared to a man, it could throw 10 or 100 men over the mountains. Laziness can throw us away from the wholesome, over the mountains of diligence. It likes to bargain with us, offering us so many excuses to detour us.

*Surrendering to laziness is
the scariest thing.*

If we are aware that we are possessed by laziness, we can overcome it. Unfortunately, most of the time, we simply forget to be mindful.

Every time we realise that we are being attacked by ‘Field Marshal Laziness’, we should watch the breath, and let go of all unwholesome feelings.

*Inhaling, you embrace virtues and the wholesome.
Exhaling, you embrace virtues and the wholesome.*

Keep on doing this until our mind goes softer and gentler and the wholesome thoughts and feelings increase.

By doing this, we will be peaceful and focused. We will feel the power of *mettā* building inside our mind. More importantly, we can use the softness of the mind to be an object of our meditation. That is, every time you breathe in or out, put softness into the breath and fill your heart with softness. Keep on doing this until your mind becomes still and peaceful.

*Expand the gentleness of your mind
to the end of infinity.*

If you can spread the gentleness outwards and unbounded, you have attained the first stage of *mettā* meditation.

Rust of the mind

Our practice is to reach purity. However, all conditions around us have tried to block our heart, covering it with rust.

*An untrained mind, far from the dhamma,
accumulates a lot of rust,
a source of misery.*

The rust in our mind leads us to trouble, filling us with cravings, anger, hatred, and delusion.

*We practice meditation to remove
rust from our mind.*

It takes time to remove rust at the surface, and it takes understanding and awareness that our mind is rusty so that we welcome a rust-removing process. Meditation is a process to scour rust from our mind.

My mind is dry like a desert

If you don't rejoice in meditation, your heart, while meditating, will feel dreary. This kind of mind is like a sandy ground, when splashed with the water of meditation, the refreshing water will simply seep away.

Really? Meditation makes me happy?

Pamodati
"Rejoice"

A joyful, delighted mind indicates that our meditation has found *samādhi* or stillness.

'Delighted' is not 'distracted'.

Spiritual delight that arises during meditation is different from sensual pleasures from sense objects.

Pamodati is different from common delights that we know of. It is refined joy that fills our heart so much so that it flows out exquisitely.

If we have *samādhi*, our mind will feel easy and happy, the feeling of which will flow outwards too. When we see or come into contact with anything, the contact will be with delight, connecting us with the outside elements.

I've got no time to spare

To practice mindfulness is a rare chance as we 'hardly have time'. When we think of doing it, a great number of excuses for not doing it will come up, including but not limited to 'I don't have time,' 'I don't feel well', and 'It isn't convenient.'

Our mind is like a dense forest with thorny thickets obstructing our path, and these excuses are our own creation, a nearly insurmountable obstacle. Attending meditation sessions is like untangling the thicket of the mind from our spiritual path.

Even a minute is worthwhile

*We can practice mettā in all positions:
standing, walking, seated or lying down.*

Mettā is not easy to grow, neither is it too difficult. *Mettā* comprises of *sati*. When we have *mettā*, we have *sati*. Cultivating *sati* is not a complicated activity; just arousing kindness in all movements of the body is enough to train our mind.

Whenever your mind becomes gentle and kind even for one minute, that minute is worth our existence.

Loving-kindness and compassion: similar but different?

What you should be aware of is that *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuna* (compassion), though apparently similar, are different. Compassion is a wish to help others, which is one of a *Bodhisatta*'s spiritual virtues.

As we haven't reached the mental state of *mudita* (sympathetic joy), we can't practice *karuna* meditation as we have limitations in helping our fellow human or sentient beings. If we meditate on *karuna*, we will face anguish because we can't help them as we want to.

On the other hand, cultivating *mettā* demonstrates a clear focus and purpose, which is love, support, and gentleness for all sentient beings, in particular ourselves.

Do I have to fake it until I make it?

Some people may feel that despite their steadfast efforts, when they chant: "May all beings be happy" to feel *mettā*, they don't feel a tiny bit of *mettā* in their heart! It is all words! This is because their heart has engaged only with experiences of anger, irritation or stress since life at the office, and difficult interactions with people, have formed harsh husks around their heart.

Nonetheless, all of us, at one point in our life, have experienced a special feeling of gentleness, which is love or affection for an individual or an object. Has your face been tinted with a smile when you see a lovely flower? Have you, when seeing a cute dog or cat, ever wanted to hold it? Please recollect the gentle feelings that arise in your heart when you think

of things that you like. Even a simple flower can soften your heart.

Furthermore, as I have mentioned earlier in the book that preparing the land is crucial to grow saplings, so is the preparation of a gentle mind fundamental for the practice of *mettā* meditation. A simple preparation is every single time that you can remember, add gentleness and softness in everything you do. If you are typing on your computer, add softness into your fingertips.

Keep on doing this every time you can recall this advice until one day adding softness and gentleness into everything you do has become part of you, and then when you chant: “May all beings be happy,” love for all sentient beings will just flow from your heart in all directions.

Where is my daily dose of happiness?

Well, that’s why we should sit and practice *mettā* meditation! This is to provide our heart a home, a pillar, a harbor or a haven.

*Our back must lean on the dhamma.
Our mind must reside in the home of mettā.*

Mettā resides in the Brahma’s home called “*Brahma-Vihara* (divine abodes)”. People may walk by this residence, and see how cool and pleasant it is, but that is all they do: walking by, not stopping by.

Whenever our heart feels soft and tender with happiness or peace and calm, it’s as if we saw on our path a house with lots of trees. Outside its fence the shade from the broad and dense canopy of mighty trees provides respite to passers-by. We just gratefully walk or rest a while in this blissful shade.

After a while, we feel refreshed and relaxed, but somehow the thought of going inside this paradise never enter our mind. We just walk past it towards the block of small and steamy hot apartments, one of which is our rented space for living.

Every time we feel soft and gentle, and kind and happy, but do not bother to allow these beautiful sentiments to penetrate deep into our heart to nurture a fully beneficial feeling, or to collect in our heart these wholesome feelings, it's no different from seeing shades and shelters but deciding to walk past, feeling contented only with temporary coolness. Only a few people actually stop by that cool house and ask if there is space within for us to reside.

Several zones in the *mettā* estate?

The inside of the house of *mettā* is much larger, much refreshing and much more pleasant than what one perceives with a quick glance from outside. Our superficial perception is not reality.

Mettā meditation is like a botanical garden where fruits and flowers abound.

Mettā is like a paradise.

Our mind is able to create a paradise where only peace and contentment reside. It is the beauty of our heart which creates such a splendid dwelling. All we have to do is to walk inside.

In this divine garden called *Nandana* or the Garden of Delight live a great number of beings full of kindness and compassion and so ready to offer us friendship. We are welcome to reside in this infinite garden.

At the gate of this garden, one will find four keys to open four gates to find the wondrous garden deep inside. Everyone has to go through all the four gates as there is no shortcut.

The first gate is like a food zone. We have to consume just enough. The second zone is the land of garments and adornments. The third gate opens to silver and gold, whilst the last and most valuable zone is filled with gemstones.

I have given all the four keys to the four zones to all of you, which is tenderness in your heart that you have been cultivating. Tenderness of the body and tenderness of the mind with *mettā* and friendliness.

When we have developed a soft and gentle heart, we have developed a key to the first zone of the *mettā* meditation.

The first zone is like food that we need to eat enough of in order to survive. It is sending *mettā* to oneself.

When you choose food to eat, you will choose what you like. Likewise, in meditation, you choose to save a beautiful feeling of *mettā* when you see lovely flowers or animals as food for your heart. Allow your mind to savour *mettā*.

When sending *mettā* to yourself, send it extensively. Eat a lot of *mettā* until you feel full inside your heart, enjoying a heart full of *mettā*!

*The first zone is
sending mettā to oneself.*

Send yourself so much *mettā* that both your body and mind become *mettā* by arousing and maintaining gentleness in your mind. There are many techniques, including the use of a mantra.

*Each zone completed increases
the dhamma path traveler's energy.*

When we have perfected our practice in Zone 1, we are now ready to move to Zone 2. I would like to emphasise again that it is imperative that each zone needs perfect completion before you can move on to the next one.

After Zone 1, we open the gate to Zone 2, which is compared to beautiful clothes. So, Zone 2 is a person we love. When we open the gate to Zone 2, Zones 1 and 2 will combine together, as the love we feel for ourselves and for those we love are equal.

Zone 2 has one rule and one condition. The rule is not to send *mettā* to the person of the opposite gender, and the condition is not to send *mettā* to a person who has already passed away. This is an ironclad rule that you must not break.

When you are practicing in this zone, carefully observe and sustain the feeling of *mettā* you are trying to cultivate for the person you love.

From my teaching experience, many people can complete this zone easily. It might be because our mind tends to go towards the person we love.

What you need to be mindful of all the time when you are in Zone 2, is that the feeling of *mettā* that we are sending to the person that you love must be equal, in both quality and quantity, to the *mettā* that you give to yourself. Both can be compared to water from the very same glass when poured into two glasses. The water in both glasses must be equally the same. Likewise, the intensity and degree of *mettā* that you give to the person that you love must be the same as what you give to yourself.

This is the most harmonious moment, when we feel the unbroken flow of *mettā* between the two zones.

You have completed your goal in Zone 2 when the *mettā* you send to the person you love equals that which you give to

yourself. No difference. Only harmony.

The next ones, Zones 3 and 4, require a great amount of tenacity. The best way to ensure readiness is to review your practice in Zones 1 and 2.

When you are confident that you are ready, fluent in generating equal *mettā* to both the person you love and yourself, then you can proceed to Zone 3, the land of gold and silver. Of course, to attain such valuables, you need to put in much effort.

You have to try hard because Zone 3 is when you send *mettā* to a neutral person to whom you do not feel either love or hate. Such a person can be a co-worker that you see from afar but never actually socialize or work with, or a cleaner at a shopping centre that you walked past earlier that day.

Because sending *mettā* to a stranger is very difficult, the *mettā* that arises is thus valuable. It can be compared to precious minerals like gold and silver.

The crucial restriction for this zone is similar to that for Zones 1 and 2: the object of your *mettā* must be of the same gender as you.

Please remember that before you open the gate to any zone, you always start with the gate to Zone 1.

Even when you have entered Zone 2 and now want to practice doing Zone 2 to be fully adept, every time you sit to meditate, you have to start with Zone 1, with no exception.

When you are confident that your mind is ready for Zone 3, you have to open the first door to Zone 1, and then continue to Zone 2 before you open the door to Zone 3.

In other words, every time you do *mettā* meditation, you have to start with *mettā* to yourself, then to a person that you love, then to a neutral person. You must not start with a Zone 3 person.

After you have traveled the three zones thoroughly, and the love and *mettā* that you have for yourself, for a person you love, and for a neutral person is all equally profound, and your mind is noticeably gentle and tender as if *mettā* was circulating in your blood stream all of the time, then you are ready to move forward to the land of rare and precious gemstones.

Zone 4 is the last hurdle of *mettā* meditation: sending *mettā* to a person that we do not like, or an enemy of the same gender.

Human beings usually harbor ill-will towards people that they do not like. So, sending love and goodwill, wishing them happiness, is contrary to our usual adversarial defilement. So, at the initial stage of working in Zone 4, I would recommend that you find someone that you dislike just a little.

Again, don't forget to start *mettā* meditation with Zone 1. So, when you practice extending love to your enemy, start with sending love to yourself, then to a person you love, then to a neutral person, and finally you can send goodwill to an enemy.

Don't get discouraged if you fail. Zone 4 is compared to a land of precious gemstones for a good reason: you need to try very hard before you will find it, but what you will get is exquisite like gemstones. In fact, it is incomparable.

People of the world admire those who adorn themselves beautifully with jewelry, but the heart of a person filled with love and *mettā* for the four types of people is much more exalted.

Short cut, please!

Mettā is like a wondrous wild bird.

Our meditation practice focuses on cultivating *mettā*. It is a delicate meditation method, and a challenging one as it is a challenge to maintain *mettā*.

Mettā meditation is enigmatic. It's like a beautiful bird in a bamboo grove, the sight of which is very delightful to our mind. When *mettā* arises in our heart, serenity and contentment spread through our whole being. Yet, please remember that this is a wild bird, which will fly away when we are trying to catch it.

*Maintaining mettā in our mind
as one of our treasures
is as daunting as catching a wild bird.*

Try catching a wild bird with your bare hands, and you will realise that you can try forever, but to no avail. Nevertheless, we can go to the woods and admire beautiful birds for an hour or even a day; likewise, we can cultivate *mettā* and keep it in our hearts for even a moment.

Some thus compare *mettā* to a beautiful wild bird, and cultivating *mettā* is like growing a fruit tree. A thriving tree with a wealth of leaves and flowers and fruits attracting birds, so we should possess essential qualities of the tree: fruits for birds. The beautiful feeling in our heart is food for *mettā*.

*Birds linger in a cool shade.
Mettā resides in a serene heart.*

There's no shortcut for *mettā* cultivation. There's no big leap of success. We all have to walk on this path step by step with

perseverance. Each one of us has to walk the path ourselves for *mettā* to arise in our heart.

When the tree of *mettā* has become established in your heart and there is tender love and care in every move you make, and every breath you take, one day this heartfelt commitment will bring utmost joy to you, when the *mettā* blossoming in your heart bursts into full bloom.

Phra Mahā Chatchai Rakkhitacitto

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