

## Lovingkindness is Simply Healing

by Piya Tan

Every public session of lovingkindness meditation I have conducted brings a sense of joyful peace at the end of it. Often there are silent, sullen, even unhappy faces, at the start of the sitting, but at the end of the lovingkindness session, whether it is of the Forest Tradition or the Insight Method, the meditators show themselves to be more relaxed and smiling.

Sometimes the response of such meditators can be dramatic. There were occasions when a tough-looking person would relate how he "broke down" during the meditation recalling some past sad event, something he (or she) thought he had forgotten. At first blush, the memory was powerfully sad, but surprisingly with lovingkindness, he was able to unconditionally forgive that source of pain, and actually felt good, as there was closure finally.

Sometimes, a meditator would use a beautiful memory or imagery to strengthen the feeling of lovingkindness. Due to the calmness arising from the earlier sitting of breath meditation, he found such an image so strongly blissful that joyful tears would stream from his eyes.

For those who are experiencing this bliss of lovingkindness for the first time, it can be an earth-shaking experience, so to speak. Sometimes they wonder if it is all right to feel so blissful. Of course it is, that is what lovingkindness meditation (and the breath meditation, too) is about. It is about joy, zest and mental focus.

I suspect many people do try lovingkindness meditation by themselves without any teacher. And they have experienced such bliss or profound calm. But without some level of wisdom, they might fear these wonderful experiences, or simply do not know the value of such states. This is where a meditation teacher as a spiritual friend helps to strengthen the meditator's faith and effort in the practice.

Like breath meditation, lovingkindness should be cultivated without any expectation. Simply sit like a fresh beautiful flower in the bright sunlight. Visualize a very happy event (or events) in your life. Re-live the joyful feeling, and do not let the thoughts and details get in the way.

In lovingkindness practice, we feel the blissful states directly, without a thought, without a word. However, where is any distraction, a suitable sentence or two, such as "May I be well!" or "I accept myself just as I am!" slowly and subverbally said a few times would clear the mind. Then remain totally silent and let the lovingkindness grow.

The Buddha reminds us that cultivating lovingkindness even for a moment is to practise his teaching. For all good things start with a single thought.

Even if you have no time to sit in meditation, there is one moment in your life you should never neglect in keeping it positive. That is the moment just before falling asleep. As you lie comfortably to end the day, clear your mind of everything else: renounce the world for the night. Tell yourself all those happy thoughts you like: "May I be well, may I be happy, may I be at peace with myself." and similarly to those who are important to you.

Fall asleep happily, and wake up happily: this will change your life for good. Try it.

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