

Using Variety to “Freshen Up” our Meditation

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Note: This is Chapter Seven of the book: *The Beautiful Breath: The Comprehensive, Step-By-Step Buddhist Meditation Instruction of Ajahn Brahmavamso*, to be published in the future.

Introduction

In this chapter I'd like to discuss some different types of meditation in order to increase the repertoire. I hope you're getting the idea by now that in order to develop sustained attention and to get success in your meditation there needs to be a certain degree of entertaining the mind, giving it some joy, giving it some fun. You might find it very useful to try different types of meditation. It's actually the same basic process, but you're just using different objects to focus your attention on. By using different objects to focus your attention on, the mind avoids getting bored through always plugging away at the same object. This stops us getting sleepy as well. You'll find a lot of sleepiness, a lot of sloth and torpor, comes from boredom when you're always doing the same thing over and over again.

So in my own practice I like to cultivate a few different objects of meditation. I also teach others to do the same, especially when they're doing a lot of meditation. Not only does this give the variety that keeps the mind's interest, it also develops some different abilities of the mind which you'll find helpful in attaining peaceful states. In this chapter I shall cover three different types of meditation: Loving-kindness (Metta), Letting Be or Letting Go, and Walking Meditation.

Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta)

Metta is the Buddhist word for "loving-kindness." It refers to the emotion of goodwill, that which wishes happiness for another. It embraces forgiveness, because Metta says: "The door to my heart is open to you. No matter who you are or what you have done, come in." It is that kindness which does not judge and is given freely, expecting nothing in return. The Buddha compared Metta to a mother's love for her child (Sn, 149). A mother may not always like her child or agree with everything it does, but she will always care for her child, wishing it only happiness. Such openhearted, non-discriminating kindness is Metta.

Metta meditation is that meditation which focuses the attention on the feeling of loving-kindness, developing that beautiful transcending emotion until it fills the whole mind. There are many methods for developing Metta meditation. Here is just one way. I'll cover the basic principles with some instruction in this chapter. (A complete guided Metta meditation can be found in Appendix. This section and the appendix are intended to complement and reinforce each other, and I urge you to make use of both).

Begin with the first steps of the "Basic Method", presented at the beginning of the book. Take the method only as far as stage one, Present Moment Awareness.

The way you then develop loving-kindness meditation is by choosing some object which you find easy to feel loving kindness toward. The simile I often use is that of lighting a fire. You need kindling to light a fire. One can't put a match to a big log and expect the match to ignite that log. The log is far too big. So you have to find something which will take the flame easily, something which is easy to light. It could be some of the firelighters you get for

barbecues, or paper, or straw -- anything that takes the fire very easily will do. You build up the first flames of loving-kindness on that kindling and then later one can put on more solid pieces of wood. First of all one uses just twigs and then branches, then you can put big logs on that fire. It's always the case that only when there's a big roaring fire -- really strong and very hot -- only then can you put on the big "sappy logs." The big sappy logs in this simile stand for your enemies. Sometimes for many of you, the biggest sappy log is yourself! When you find the fire of loving-kindness is very strong, you can put yourself on that fire, "dry out" and ignite the biggest, sappiest log of all.

Once the fire is strong, you can give loving-kindness towards even your worst enemies. It may surprise you that you can actually do this. You think of this person towards whom you've always had anger and wanted revenge, and you find that you are now in a mind state where you can actually love them, really give them goodwill. And you're not playing around either. It's actually happening! This is the result of the gradual process of development of this emotion called "loving-kindness".

Now as to the "kindling", this is where you use your power of imagination and visualisation together with your mental commentary. Here you encourage the commentary, but you keep your commentary just to a certain topic. You're, as it were, "psyching yourself up" to develop loving-kindness towards a small visual object, an imaginary object. Don't be afraid of imagination, because visualisation and imagination are tools of the mind that you can use to your benefit.

Keeping your eyes closed, imagine in front of you a small kitten or a puppy or a baby or whatever you find it easy to generate loving-kindness towards. (I personally like using a small kitten.) Imagine it to be abandoned, hungry, afraid, and in your mind open your heart to it. Take it up gently, in imaginary arms, and use inner speech to say: "May you not feel so afraid. Be at peace. May you be happy. I will look after you, be your friend and protector. I care for you. Whatever you do, wherever you go, my heart will always welcome you. I give you my love unconditionally, always." Say those words inside (or similar one's that you make up) with full meaning, even though it is to a being only in your imagination. Say them many times until you feel the joy of Metta arise in you heart like a golden glow. Stay with this exercise until the feeling of Metta is strong and stable.

Metta Includes Compassion

Loving-kindness includes compassion, so you can use compassion to generate Metta. You look at that imaginary being and focus on its suffering, real or potential. You see the fact that it is subject to pain -- not just physical pain but also the mental pain of loneliness and rejection. You see how very vulnerable it is. When I do this with my little imaginary kitten I always think that there's no one else in the whole world to look after that small being. If I don't look after it, if I don't take it in, I just imagine what sort of death that little being is going to have -- cold, rejected, hungry, thirsty and sick. When I start to see the suffering (the dukkha), in that being and how it is so vulnerable to pain, then straight away it encourages compassion in me towards it. I want to protect and care for it.

As soon as that compassion, that sense of looking after the little being comes up, it's very easy at the same time to have loving-kindness, (which is basically goodwill). Compassion is goodwill towards someone who's suffering. In this instance it's goodwill to ease the suffering of that imaginary being, and if its not suffering, to make its happiness even more delightful. I deliberately generate feelings of goodwill, of kindness, of compassion and of care.

All of these words are centering in on this concept of "loving-kindness", and I enter into a commentary with myself at this time, just imagining what might happen to that being, imagining looking after it, saying words of kindness, of protection. I do imaginary exercises

like getting eye contact with that little being. When you can actually contact the imaginary being's eyes it becomes very emotional. Then I just keep on developing those images. I continue that commentary until such time that the loving-kindness towards that imaginary being is really, really strong.

You will find -- at least I find anyway -- that it's so much easier to light a fire of loving-kindness on such easy kindling. First of all, my imaginary kitten is a lovely furry animal. It's imaginary, so I can make it whatever I want. It's young. If it were actually real even little kittens can sometimes be pests. But if it's imaginary you've got full control over it to make it as furry, or as soft as you like. It purrs at the right time, and it doesn't poo on your lap. So you can do everything you want, just to make it a very nice little being. It's imaginary. You've got control over it.

Choose An Object You Can Relate To.

One person I know didn't have much empathy towards little animals, nor did she like children. What she did was very innovative. She'd just been planting some small flowers in some pots in her house; so she just imagined a small plant in the earth. Just like the little kitten or the puppy, the plant is also a being that needs care and protection. She put all her motherly instincts, which she didn't really have towards children, towards that little plant, nurturing it and just imagining it growing. When it was a young seedling, it was just so tender and so easily hurt and broken. It had a long way to go before it was a full fledged flower. She imagined herself nurturing it, protecting it, loving it, caring for it until such time that the little flower burst forth and repaid her kindness with this beautiful smile of a flower in bloom. She really "got off" on that. That was for her the first time that meditation actually seemed to work. It was the first time she wasn't waiting for me to ring the bell. So this is another way of developing loving-kindness, instead of towards an animal or a human being, towards even a plant. And you can do that.

The point is, as long as you are nurturing this emotion and making it grow, you're allowed to use your commentary, and it's good to use it at this point to keep the fire burning. When you put a match to a piece of paper, you've got to blow; you've got to fan. You've got to keep it going. Sometimes you need two or three matches to get it alight. You work until the fire is going, and once loving-kindness is going, always remember to experience the warmth from time to time. So you're working to get the fire going, but you're also pausing now and again, to experience the result of your work. And as you see the result of your work, it gives you encouragement.

So you're just using this imaginary "kindling" as a means to develop loving-kindness, to get it started. As you go along, quite naturally you'll be aware of the feel of loving-kindness. When the flame starts to take and there's a fire starting, you can feel its warmth. Loving-kindness when it gets started is a very pleasurable emotion. Once you start to feel its warmth, then you really get into it.

Now let go of the imaginary being, and imagine in its place a real person, someone very close to you emotionally, your best friend maybe. Choose someone to whom you also find it easy to generate and maintain loving-kindness towards. With inner speech say to them: "May you live in happiness. I sincerely wish you joy. I give you my love, without discrimination. You will always have a place in my heart. I truly care for you." -- or similar words of your own design. Use whatever arouses the warm glow of Metta in your heart. Stay with this person. Imagine they are right before you until the Metta glows bright and constant around them.

When the Metta glows bright and constant, let go of the image of that person. Substitute another close acquaintance, creating the feeling of Metta around them using your inner speech in the same way: "May you live in happiness..."

Next substitute a whole group of people, perhaps all of the people who are in the house you are in. Develop the caring glow of Metta around them, all in the same way. "May you all be happy and well..."

See if you can imagine Metta to be a golden radiance coming from a beautiful white lotus flower in the middle of your heart. Allow that radiance of loving-kindness to expand in all directions, embracing more and more living beings, until it becomes boundless, filling up all that you can imagine. "May all living beings, near or far, great or small, be happy and at peace..." Bathe the whole universe in the warmth of the golden light of loving-kindness. Stay there for a while.

Now imagine yourself, as if looking in a mirror at yourself. Say with your inner speech, with full sincerity: "I wish me well. I now give myself the gift of happiness. Too long the door to my heart has been closed to me; now I open it. No matter what I have done, or will ever do, the door to my own love and respect is always open to me. I forgive myself unreservedly. Come home. I now give myself that love which does not judge. I care for this vulnerable being called 'me'. I embrace all of me with the loving-kindness of Metta..." Invent your own words here to let the warmth of loving-kindness sink deep inside you, to that part which is most frightened. Let it melt all resistance until you are one with Metta, non-limiting loving-kindness, like a mother to her child.

When you feel it is time to conclude, pause for a minute or two to reflect on how you feel inside. Notice the effect that this meditation has had on you. Metta meditation can produce heavenly bliss. Now imagine that golden glow of Metta one more time, originating from the beautiful white lotus in your heart. Gently draw that golden light back into the lotus, leaving the warmth outside. When the glow is a tiny ball of intense light in the centre of the lotus, gently close the petals of the lotus, guarding the seed of Metta within your heart, ready to be released again in your next Metta meditation. Open your eyes and get up slowly.

Recapitulation.

Now to recapitulate what we've covered so far: when you practice the above method of Metta meditation, it is helpful to use easy objects at the beginning. Again Metta meditation is like lighting a fire. You start by using some paper and kindling which easily takes the flame. Once that is alight, you put on some thicker sticks, and when these are burning well, you add some bigger pieces of wood. Eventually, once the fire is established, you can put on the big pieces of fuel. When the fire is roaring you can even put on a big, wet and sappy log, and there is enough heat for that to catch light and burn too. In this simile, the "big, wet and sappy log" stands for your "enemy," someone you find it especially hard to forgive and be kind to. This enemy is often yourself. Once Metta has been established on the easy objects, though, you will be surprised at how even the "enemy" can "take the flame" of Metta. You find, in this way, that you can actually love your enemy.

A Softening of the Mind

Something is happening. It's a softening of the mind. The mind is turning towards this emotion of love, goodwill and care. It's becoming selfless, not so concerned with its own needs. It's becoming more in tune with giving, with sharing with other beings in this universe. Emotion, when it begins to be generated like this, feels very beautiful, and as you develop it more and more, that happiness of the emotion of loving-kindness gets very strong. It gets to the point that it's self-sustaining, like a fire is self-sustaining. When it's got enough fuel, then that's when you don't need to keep on with the commentary of loving-kindness. You can actually just go to its warmth, just the feeling of loving-kindness.

The feeling is usually centered around your chest, around your heart region. At least with me it is. It's a very pleasant physical feeling, and it's a very pleasant mental feeling as well. It's very joyful to actually give unconditional love to another being (even one that's imaginary). It's an unlimited loving-kindness, without any conditions on that love. You're just going to love that being no matter what it does. That brings out the aspect of loving-kindness which is a complete embracing of that being, with full forgiveness, without any faultfinding. When there is full loving-kindness, the "faultfinding mind" is completely transcended and there's the "accepting mind".

Loving-kindness is a very useful emotion to develop in meditation. To repeat: if you can develop a little bit of loving-kindness meditation like this, then you're softening the mind. You're softening the heart and you find that there's not so much faultfinding. You find there's more embracing instead. Faultfinding is being critical, seeing part of the whole -- especially the part that is wrong. Whereas loving-kindness embraces the wholeness of something. By accepting even an imaginary being like the little kitten or little puppy exactly as it is, you embrace forgiveness. This is acceptance. When you can develop this acceptance toward a little puppy or a kitten or a flower, you find that when you do other meditations, even the meditation on the breath, you can be much more accepting and not so critical of the process. You won't be so faultfinding towards the moment. You'll find you have much more contentment. You'll be able to embrace the moment as it is rather than being aware of so much that is wrong in the moment. The whole attitude of mind is changing. "The world is the world." It's what we add to the world that creates the difficulties. We can add the faults to the world or we can add acceptance to the world. It's really up to us.

Looking at the World in a Different Way

Here we're training the mind to look at the world in a completely different way. We can develop loving-kindness meditation so that we can regard the world through the emotion of loving-kindness, embracing and forgiveness. Because we can do that, we can also transfer that loving-kindness onto something like the breath. When we are watching the breath, we can watch it with loving-kindness, with full embracing. We nurture it just like that little seedling. (I find that if I can generate loving-kindness with breath meditation, it becomes a very, very powerful combination.) Loving-kindness avoids the faultfinding mind and gives us the ability to embrace the breath as it is, and the breath meditation is what's going to take us into deep and peaceful states. The deep states of meditation, the Jhanas especially, are emotional states. They're not intellectual states. If we want to develop those states we have to be able to trust in the emotions.

Sometimes I say a bit facetiously that Jhanas are feely-feely states like loving-kindness -- feely, feely, feely! You've got to feel your way into these states, rather than think your way in. This is why, when you do loving-kindness meditation with the breath, you're able to add that emotional sensitivity to breath meditation. You're able to trust in that part of the mind that can feel and can delight in just the simple breath. So this is one of the reasons why it's very handy to do Metta meditation, because it develops trust in your emotions.

Secondly of course, it gets rid of the faultfinding mind and especially the hindrance of ill will. As we discussed earlier in this section (as well as in detail in Chapter Four), ill will can be directed toward all sorts of people, but especially toward oneself. I have mentioned that it is one of the big hindrances to people attaining deep meditation. They simply don't allow themselves to do it; or they're too critical of themselves and therefore think they can't do it, and this is very close to ill will. They think, "I lack self esteem". Lack of self-confidence is right next door to ill will. So what loving-kindness does is to allow you to experience the very heights of meditation. It permits you to experience bliss, and it also gives you the confidence that you can achieve these things.

So often it's the case that if a person thinks they can't achieve, they won't achieve. If a person even doubts whether they can achieve, they won't achieve. Someone -- you! -- is putting the obstacle in front of yourself needlessly. So loving-kindness is like a form of encouragement. It frees you to achieve anything that is there to achieve in the world.

Again: ill will towards oneself is because of a lack of forgiveness towards oneself. That's why near the end of a loving-kindness meditation, when the feeling is strong, you can "invite yourself into your heart", as it were, and give yourself complete forgiveness. As it says in the Metta Sutta (Sn, 149), "... just as a mother loves her child, her only child." This is what a mother does to her child. She loves the child, meaning she gives full forgiveness no matter what the child does in the world. She'll always be the mother, and she'll never abandon her child. Even animals can be like this. You know this when you've seen cats with kittens. The mother cat eats all of the kitten's faeces. It licks the kittens and cleans them. The mother eats up all their dirt. It's an amazing sort of sacrifice the mother makes for her children; that amount of forgiveness and tolerance. This is what we mean by loving-kindness -- being able to accept, embrace and forgive everything. That's the important part of Metta meditation.

We seek to develop that loving-kindness towards ourselves so completely that we reach the point where ill will is abandoned. Only then, when ill will is overcome can we give ourselves good will, can we wish ourselves well, can we allow happiness to come into us, and we can start to enjoy meditation. If there's ill will there, it's such a huge obstacle that it will come up at one stage or another of the meditation. It can sometimes come up towards the breath. It can sometimes come up towards the teacher. It can sometimes even come up towards your meditation cushion -- "stupid cushion!". All of that ill will is stopping you enjoying your meditation.

Loving-Kindness Is Very Beautiful

So loving-kindness meditation is very beautiful to develop, and you can develop it at any time. You don't have to be sitting meditation. You can do it while you're walking on the path. Develop loving-kindness in whichever way you can, but remember to try to develop it on simple objects first of all. Once more -- imaginary objects are usually the best. Build it up until it's really, really strong. When you have very, very strong loving-kindness, you can either turn to the breath if you wish (and you'll find the breath is just so easy to watch); or if you want to, you can carry on with loving-kindness and take that into a Jhana.

Taking Metta into a Jhana.

What you should do to access Jhana through Metta, is be able to see the fire of loving-kindness without any fuel. (The fuel is like the kitten, the puppy, the dear person, etc.) Just have love. Metta is perceived as a power, as a fire or as a light -- whatever way you wish to imagine it. However, now no person is giving out that Metta, and no being is receiving it. There is just disembodied loving-kindness, rather than it being aimed at anyone. If you start to focus on what loving-kindness actually is, rather than where it's coming from or where it's going to, then loving-kindness by itself, alone, becomes a very beautiful object of meditation. You become aware of just Metta because it's a very beautiful object indeed! It's inherently beautiful. Once it's generated, once the fire is there, it's not that difficult to sustain your attention on it, because it delights the mind.

However, one of the difficulties is that Metta without a sender or object is not that stable at first. But if you can stay with loving-kindness, it delights the mind. Try and calm the mind down and make it very peaceful and refined. Then that experience of loving-kindness itself will become your Nimitta. It will take you into a Jhana: a Metta Jhana. So developing loving-kindness is one of the ways into Jhanas. But as with all of these Jhanas, you have to simplify what you are aware of. It has to become a mental awareness, a mental object -- not a

physical awareness.

Another Approach, Doing Deep Samadhi First.

Another way of doing loving-kindness meditation applies if you've done a lot of breath meditation and got a deep Samadhi, not necessarily into Jhanas, but at least some degree of Samadhi. Then you can take up loving-kindness. When you've already developed a degree of deep meditation or Samadhi and you take up loving-kindness, it's so easy to do. If you've had a deep meditation and you start thinking about loving-kindness, you can spread it to the whole world so easily, because the mind is soft. You can work with the mind once it has done deep Samadhi. What Samadhi does to the mind is make it like a piece of clay. If clay is too dry, you can't make it into anything. If it's too wet and soggy, it just goes all over the place. But if there is just the right amount of water in that clay, you can turn it into all sorts of shapes. When there's just the right amount of softness in the mind (as there is after deep meditation), you can turn it into anything. You can do beautiful loving-kindness meditation.

We used to do this chant in our monastery some time ago. It was the Four Divine Abidings (Brahmaviharas). We chanted the spreading of loving-kindness, (Metta) and then compassion (Karuna) and then sympathetic joy (Mudita) and then equanimity (Upekkha). We did this all in about five minutes. After one very nice meditation when we started doing this chant, I just got stuck on the first part (Metta) and I couldn't go anywhere else. Just as soon as I started chanting, the mind was so workable, as it were, so easy to point towards whatever I wanted to, that as those words came up I was just immersed in loving-kindness. I couldn't do anything else! I got stuck in loving-kindness, a really powerful loving-kindness as well. I never got to the second part of the chant.

This example shows what you can do with a mind that is well trained. You can really do loving-kindness meditation. I discovered from that experience that a lot of the loving-kindness I had done before was just messing around, scratching at the surface. So when you develop a very deep mind state on the breath meditation, it's very good when you come out to do loving-kindness meditation and experience its power, experience its bliss. Direct it to all beings, and also include yourself. Because your mind has been empowered, loving-kindness is extremely strong, and it can really direct a lot of benefit towards yourself and towards other beings.

In Sum

So these are some of the ways of doing loving-kindness meditation, especially to: overcome the hindrance of ill will, be able to look at the breath kindly and to nurture the breath, give the mind something else to do so you're not always doing breath meditation, and to get these very beneficial attitudes of forgiveness towards oneself and all other beings. This way one isn't carrying around the faultfinding mind that sees all the mistakes in oneself, and in other beings, and in the world.

(To continue on with a "hands on" treatment of Metta, please turn to the Appendix. Enjoy!)

Letting Be, Letting Go Meditation

Another meditation object that I would like to discuss is the meditation on "letting be," or "letting go". This is one of the other meditations that I often practise. Sometimes instead of trying to watch the breath as my object, or taking loving-kindness as my object, I look at my mind and realise the best thing it needs at the moment is just to let things be. Basically, letting be meditation is just this second stage of breath meditation, just silent awareness of the present moment. It has to be silent, because to really let things go means you give no orders; you don't have any complaints. If you really let things be, you've got nothing to say,

nothing to talk about. "Letting be" happens in the present moment. You're just aware of things as they're appearing right now, and you allow them to come in. You allow them to stay. And you allow them to go whenever they want. Letting be meditation is like sitting here, and whoever comes in the door, you let them come in. They can stay as long as they like. If they are terrible demons, you allow them to come in and sit down. They can stay as long as they like, and you are not at all fazed. If the Buddha himself comes in all his glory, you just sit here, just the same, completely equanimous. "You can come in if you want." "You can go whenever you want." This is letting be meditation. Whatever comes into your mind, the beautiful or the gross, just stand back and let it be, with no reactions at all -- quietly observing, practising silent awareness in the present moment.

The Garden Simile

I will now introduce the simile of "Just sitting out in the garden" to explain the letting be meditation more fully.

Many here in Australia have a garden at the back of their house and they often spend many hours working in their garden making it look beautiful. But a garden is to be enjoyed, not just to be worked in. So I advise my students that they should frequently just go sit in their "garden" and enjoy its great beauty.

The most stupid of my students decide that they must mow the grass first, then prune the bushes, water the flower bed, rake the leaves.....getting the garden perfect before they can sit down to enjoy it. Of course, the garden never is perfect no matter how hard they work. So they never get to rest in peace, except when they're dead (R.I.P.)!

The second type of student also lacks wisdom. They decide not to do any work, but as soon as they sit out in their garden they begin to think. "The grass needs mowing and the bushes should be pruned. The flowers are looking dry and the leaves really need raking, and the nice native bush would look nice over there, and....." When they are thinking how they can make the garden perfect they are not simply enjoying it. They find no peace.

The third type of student is the wise meditator. They have done a lot of work in their garden, but now is their time for rest. They say: "Even though the lawn could be mown, even though the bushes could be pruned, even though the flowers could be watered and the leaves raked.....Not now! The garden is good enough, natural even". And they can rest a while, not feeling guilty in the midst of imperfection.

Letting be meditation is just the same. Don't try and make everything perfect, tying up all those loose ends, before you let things be. Life is never perfect and duties are never finished. Don't even think on how you can make this more perfect. Letting be is having the courage to sit quietly and rest the mind in the midst of imperfection, in spite of unfinished business. Let it be for now. The time for gardening work will come later.

Letting Be Can Become Quite Powerful

Letting be meditation can become quite powerful. If your breath meditation is not working, if Metta meditation doesn't work, or you try any other type of meditation and it's not working, very often it's because you haven't got the foundation correct. So just do the letting be meditation. You can just "sit out in the garden" and just let things be. Whatever is happening, that's O.K. Whatever I'm experiencing is fine -- no preference, no choice, no good, no bad, no argument and no commentary. "Just let things be." You can have a little bit of a commentary inside but just the commentary about "Let be", "Let things go". Just be with what is; i.e. just be with the commentary that is about the meditation subject, but not about anything else. That way the meditation becomes close to complete silent awareness of the present moment.

You can use that meditation as I use it: if I'm in pain, got a headache or a stomachache or whatever other ache I have, or if the mosquitoes are biting. "Just let it be." Don't argue with it. Don't get upset about it. Just watch the feelings in the body as the mosquito pushes its nose into your flesh followed by the itch that comes. "Just let things be." Lying in bed at night and you can't go to sleep. "Let it be." Or there's a pain that won't go away. "Just let it be." Just be with it. "Just let it be." Don't try running away. It's like the demons have come into the room. You're not going to try and push them away. You're not going to invite them to stay either. You're just going to let them be.

This is equanimity; this is the practice of letting be. And it is one of the other meditations that I do from time to time. It can be a useful addition to your repertoire.

Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is beautiful, especially in the early morning. Often when one gets up early in the morning, in particular when you're not used to getting up early, you're quite tired and the mind isn't bright. One of the advantages of walking meditation is that you can't nod while you're walking. You don't snore either! You're awake because you have to be. So if you're tired, walking meditation is very good to do. It brings up some energy, and also you can get very peaceful.

Walking meditation was both praised and practised by the Buddha. If you read the Suttas, (the teachings in the Pali Canon), you find that the Buddha would usually walk meditation in the early morning. He wouldn't be sitting, he'd be walking.

Many monks and nuns became enlightened on the walking meditation path. It's a very effective way of developing both calm and insight (but not to the extent of Jhana). For some monks that I know in Thailand, their main practice is walking meditation. They do very little sitting. They do a lot of walking, and many get tremendously powerful insights while they're walking.

Another benefit of walking meditation is that it is especially suitable for those who have physical discomfort in sitting for long periods. If you find it difficult to sit meditation because of pains in the body, walking meditation can be very effective.

So please don't look at walking meditation as a "second class" meditation. If you want to spend most of your meditation time this way, please do so. But do it well, do it carefully. See if you can develop that happiness born of serenity as you're walking backwards and forwards.

Setting Up Walking Meditation

Choose a clear, straight path between twenty and thirty paces long. This can be a corridor in a house, a path in the garden or just a track on the grass. Use whatever is available, even if it's a bit less than twenty paces long. If it's comfortable to do so, walk without shoes, enjoying the contact of your bare feet on the ground.

Stand at one end of your path. Compose the mind. Relax the body and begin walking. Begin walking back and forth at a pace that seems natural to you. While you are walking, place your hands comfortably in front of you, and rest your gaze on the ground about two metres in front of you. Be careful not to look around. If you're doing walking meditation, it's a waste of time to look over here and look over there, because that would just distract the attention from the feet, where it should be.

The Stages of Meditation Apply Here Too

Do you remember the stages of meditation covered so carefully in the chapters on the basic method (Chapters Two and Three)? Well, the first four stages apply here too. But here attention eventually comes to rest on the foot rather than the breath.

At first, aim to develop present moment awareness, as in Stage one, described in Chapter Two, "The Basic Meditation: Part One". Use the techniques described there to reach the state of just walking, easily, in the here-and-now. When you feel that you have settled into the present moment, where business to do with the past and future is absent from the mind, then aim to develop silent walking in the present moment. Just as in Stage Two as described in Chapter Two, gradually let go of all thinking. Walk without commentary. Make use of some of the techniques described in "The Basic Method" to reach this stage of silent walking. Thus you begin walking meditation by developing the same two initial stages as with sitting meditation.

Once the inner commentary has slowed to a bare trickle of inner speech, deliberately focus your attention on the feeling of movement in the feet and lower legs. Do so to the extent that you clearly notice every step on the path. Know every left step, know every right step – one after the other without missing one. Know every step as you turn around at the end of the path. The famous Chinese proverb of the "Journey of one thousand miles" is helpful here. Such a journey is in fact only one step long -- that step which you are walking now. So, just be silently aware of this "one step" and let everything else go. When you have completed ten return trips up and down the path without missing one left step and without missing one right step, then you have fulfilled Stage Three of the walking meditation and may proceed to the next stage.

As the attention increases you notice every feeling of movement in the left step, from the very beginning when the left foot starts to move and lift up from the ground. Notice as it goes up, forward, down and then rests on the ground again, taking the weight of the body. Develop this continuous awareness of the left step and then similar smooth, unbroken awareness of the right step. Do this throughout every step to the end of the path. Then as you turn around notice every feeling in the turning-around movement, not missing a moment.

When you can walk for fifteen minutes or more comfortably sustaining the attention on every moment of walking, without a single break, then you have reached the Fourth Stage of walking meditation, full awareness of walking. At this point the process of walking so fully occupies the attention that the mind cannot be distracted. You know when this happens because the mind goes into a state of Samadhi (Sustained Attention) and becomes very peaceful.

Samadhi on the Walking Path

Even the sound of the birds disappears as your attention is fully taken up with the experience of walking. Your attention is easily concentrated on one thing, sustained on one thing, settled on one thing. You will find this a very pleasant experience indeed.

As your mindfulness increases, you get to know more and more of the sensations of walking. Then you find that walking does have this sense of beauty and peace to it. It becomes a "beautiful step". And it can very easily absorb all your attention because you become fascinated and peaceful, just putting all your attention on walking. You can get a great deal of Samadhi through walking meditation in this way. That Samadhi is a sense of peacefulness, a sense of stillness, a sense of the mind just being very comfortable and very peaceful in it's corner of the world.

I started my walking meditation when I first ordained as a monk in a temple in Thailand. I would choose a path, and quite naturally, without forcing it, I'd walk very slowly. (You don't need to walk fast; you don't need to walk slow; just do what feels comfortable). I used to get into beautiful Samadhi states during walking meditation. I recall once being disturbed because I'd been walking too long. I hadn't noticed the time pass, and I was needed to go to a ceremony in this temple in Bangkok. One of the monks had been sent to go and get me. And I recall this monk came up to me and said, "Brahmavamso, you've got to come to a Dana". I was looking at a space about two meters in front. My arms were in front of me, and my hands folded. When I heard that, it was as if hearing it from a thousand miles away, because I was so absorbed into what I was doing. He repeated, "Brahmavamso, you have to come now". It took me about one minute to actually lift my head from the ground and to turn it around to the side where this senior monk was trying to get my attention. And as I met his eyes, all I could say was "Pardon?" It took such a long time to get out of that Samadhi and actually do anything quickly. The mind was so cool and so peaceful and so still.

I hope you experience this peacefulness for yourselves when you try walking meditation. Many people I've taught walking meditation to for the first time have said: "Wow! This is amazing. This is beautiful". Just slowing down, you get into peace. You're getting into calm by just watching the sensations as you walk. So this is one other type of meditation that I am suggesting to you, giving to you to experiment with.

Choosing the Right Meditation for the Right Time

Sometimes people ask when one should do which meditation. How do you choose what to do? A first, you should experiment with doing different meditations at different times. Eventually you'll develop the wisdom which knows what your mind is like and what your mind needs. Observing is the way to find out what type of meditation to do.

Sometimes your practice is like working with a piece of wood from the wood yard. You want to make some furniture, say a meditation stool. The first thing you do is to look at the piece of wood. Usually, it needs to be planed down initially, and then you apply the roughest grade of sandpaper, then a medium grade, then a fine grade of sandpaper. After that you get out a polishing cloth with some wax or some oil; or if you want to, you coat it with varnish instead. But if you use a cloth, you use it only at the end, after you've used the finest sandpaper and the wood is really smooth. Only then do you get the cloth out and polish it up. This way it ends up as this beautiful, shiny, smooth piece of furniture. But you have to examine the piece of wood first of all. If you get a piece of wood from the wood yard just freshly sawn with all of the burrs on it and you get the polishing cloth out straight away, you're going to ruin a lot of polishing cloths. And you're not going to make that wood smooth at all. In meditation this is like trying to go too deep too fast.

If you look at your mind and it's really rough and coarse and you want to go straight onto the Samadhi Nimitta, then you're wasting your time. You've got to get the "plane" and the "sandpaper" out first of all. Sometimes it is the case that you get a piece of wood from the shop that is just so smooth already, that all you need to do is to use the polishing cloth. Sometimes you may sit down on that cushion and the mind is already so peaceful that you don't need to go through all the preliminaries. You just go straight onto the breath, straight onto the beautiful breath, sometimes even straight onto the Samadhi Nimitta! So you look at your "piece of wood" -- your mind. The skillful meditator in you knows what it needs. If it needs loving-kindness, O.K., spend a few minutes doing loving-kindness meditation. If it needs some "letting be" meditation because it's quite coarse, just "take it out to the garden" and let it be. You know what it needs by looking at your mind and by recognising the state of the mind. This is similar to the insight practice of meditation that I'll say more about in the next chapter. You recognise the problems, and you know the solutions.

Conclusion

So these are just some types of meditation. There's a whole range of other types of meditation that I could discuss, but this is enough to practise for now. Just to sum up: I talked about Metta meditation. (Please do some, it is very important and you'll find it'll help the other meditations that you do.) I've discussed "letting be" meditation. And I've discussed walking meditation. Hopefully these ways of practice will help you, as well as sitting meditation. Try them out; see how they go. Also see if they don't spill over into your daily life with wonderful effects.

Whatever You Are Doing, Do It With Everything You've Got

I'll finish this chapter with one last story. I was with a teacher in Thailand for over nine years, quite a famous teacher in the world of Buddhism. An Australian man told me one of his teachings to me many years after the teacher, Ajahn Chah, had stopped teaching. I never heard these instructions myself.

The man had gone to visit Ajahn Chah in the north east of Thailand, which was a difficult place to get to. He made a special journey, and when he got to this place -- some seven hundred kilometres from Bangkok -- he found that Ajahn Chah was surrounded with people. The man was on the outskirts of these people trying to ask the questions which he wanted to ask of this wise old monk, but he found that there was no way he was going to be able to catch his attention. There were just too many people.

The man had arranged for a taxi to come back and pick him up later to take him to the station to get the train back to Bangkok -- an all night journey. The taxi wasn't going to come back for another hour. He knew he wasn't going to see the teacher and ask his profound questions. He saw some monks sweeping the paths in the monastery and he thought, "Well I've come all this way, I might as well do something useful". He picked up a broom and started to sweep. He was sweeping the leaves from the path when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around, and to his surprise and delight it was the teacher, Ajahn Chah. Ajahn Chah had seen this westerner coming and not having a chance to ask any questions, but unfortunately Ajahn Chah had only left the big group around him because he had another appointment himself. A car was waiting for him. So he just gave this young Australian man a very simple teaching. He told him, "If you are going to sweep, sweep with one hundred percent of what you've got". Then he went away.

This man remembered this teaching that if you're going to sweep, sweep with everything you've got. And he realised this was more than a teaching on how to keep the monastery clean. It was a teaching on how to live life. If you're going to meditate, meditate with everything you've got; if you're going to write a letter, write with everything you've got. If you're going to brush your teeth, wash your car, take an exam, make that telephone call, speak with a person near you, give them everything you've got.

This is the way of Buddhist meditation. It's not that hard! Try walking meditation; you'll find it's easy. Learn meditation on the breath, and you'll find that easy too. Whatever you do in life: instead of doing it half-heartedly, quarter-heartedly or one-eighth-heartedly, give it everything you've got, and you will find that life will start to come together./.

Ajahn Brahmavamso
("Dhamma Journal", Buddhist Society of Western Australia, July 2001)

Appendix

Guided Loving-Kindness (Metta) Meditation

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When we practise meditation it benefits not only ourselves, it brings happiness to many others as well. The calmer and more peaceful we become, the more we can give to others. If there's no peace in our hearts, how can we give peace to anyone else? So when it comes to practising compassion, meditation is one of the kindest things that we can do for others. If we've built up some beautiful energy through meditation, then it is time to share that energy with other beings, recognizing that there is a connection between us all. What we do in our own meditation and practise does have a profound effect on all other beings throughout the universe. So this is why I will now describe a guided loving-kindness meditation.

Because this is a guided meditation, it might be better to experience it as the spoken word rather than the written word. Therefore you may want someone to read the instructions to you or perhaps better yet to actually tape record your own guided meditation. When guiding, it's important to pause from time to time, and good places to do this are indicated in square brackets throughout the text.

First of all, sit down comfortably in a quiet place, close your eyes and give permission to your mind to let go of all burdens. Allow your mind to let go of all past and future, remembering that you deserve some peace. Be kind enough to grant yourself the gift that is the present. Be now, be gently. Now be kind to your body making sure it's comfortable. Being so careful, because that is what careful means, "full of care." See to it that even little things like your toes are all cared for to make sure they are comfortable. Go through each part of the body, relaxing the body and offering it some gratitude, some thanks, for allowing you to sit meditation. Sometimes you may have been quite hard on your body, but now thank it for giving you the opportunity to be at peace. Let's care for this body, show it respect. Relax the body into a soft state of ease so it becomes a fine vehicle for loving kindness meditation.

Take a few minutes just to experience the body and bring it to ease.

[Pause]

Now let's do a little bit of breath meditation. Begin with this breath which is feeding you the oxygen which brings all this good energy into the body. Show gratitude for this breath as it brings all this energy in, giving light, giving warmth, and giving that energy to each part of your body. Imagine the breath coming in and bringing golden light to every part of your body and then taking out all the used gases. Giving out into the world, as someone said, as a gift for the flowers and the trees that take the carbon dioxide as food. Breathing in with gratitude, with care, and breathing out as a gift to nature. Breathing in and out naturally with a sense of kindness and warmth towards this breath, giving a sense of kindness and warmth and gratitude towards this present moment. This present moment is giving you so much happiness and wisdom. Say thank you, to "now".

[Pause]

Give gratitude to silence, the place where peace resides, the place where that bliss of freedom bubbles up like a spring from the ground. Give gratitude to the cool, clear, refreshing water of stillness. Breathe in so gently, so warmly. Look upon your breath in that silence as if it were a child born of your own body, a part of you, something which you caress with your mindfulness, with softness, with warmth, with care. Trust in that loving attention of mindfulness as you once trusted as a young child in the arms of your mother. Be unworried, unconcerned for the future, just as if you were a baby in the arms of your mother -- being walked backwards and forwards with the breath, backwards and forwards as the breath goes in and the breath goes out.

Pause for a while. Enjoy the breath.

[Pause]

Now we will begin the loving kindness meditation. Choose an object in the mind's eye -- imagining a baby, a small kitten, a puppy or whatever object you can bring up into your mind through imagination. Choose an object towards which you find it easy to generate feelings of warmth, of love, of care. As you visualise that being in front of you, imagine it has only one person in this world to look after it and to care for it -- you. If it were not for you, that small baby, kitten or puppy would surely die - would die of hunger and cold, or a lack of love.

See if you can look that being in the eye, and give it trust, give it kindness, give it care. Say to that imaginary being, "I have kindness and love towards you. I will look after you, feed you, protect you and love you no matter what happens. I will always be there for you". As you bring that small kitten, puppy or baby into your arms close to your chest, still keeping that eye contact, feel the small being giving you back love, trust, kindness. Using whatever words, ideas, commentary which you can bring up, generate more kindness and care, more love towards that small being, such as saying to that imaginary being: "The door of my heart is always open to you. No matter what you ever do I will never take away my love, my care. My Metta is unconditional, unbounded with no limitations".

[Pause]

You should now make that small being your very, very close friend. As you give that warmth, that Metta, that loving kindness -- unbounded and unconditioned -- to that small imaginary being, notice how it feels inside your own heart. When you give that love it creates this beautiful warmth, this golden light of loving-kindness. Just dwell on that imaginary being until that warmth and that flow of loving-kindness towards that kitten, puppy or baby is just so strong, as if that being is not imaginary at all but is real. Give it your wholehearted love, care and protection. "May you be happy and well forever. I truly care. Whatever you do, wherever you go, I will always give you my love."

How does that golden glow of loving kindness towards another being feel inside? Pause for a while. Enjoy the feeling.

[Pause]

Now it's as if that image of a kitten, puppy or a baby disappears and in its place is the image of somebody who is very close to you in life -- it might be a husband or wife, a child, a parent or a close friend. Bring them up in front of you, imagining them in your mind's eye, knowing that they too are fragile. Without your love and your care, they too will hurt, they too will suffer. So give the same warmth, kindness and unconditional love to this person whose life is very close to you. Say to them, "I care about you; I give you my loving kindness unconditionally. The door of my heart will always be open for you. No matter what you do I will never take away my loving kindness. I wish for your well-being and happiness. Your happiness is my concern, my life-long concern". Give them that beautiful warm love. "May you really be happy; may you reach peace, reach Nibbana. May you be free from all suffering. If there is anything I can do to be of help in that quest, it is my privilege, my joy to help."

As you give resolutions of loving kindness towards that person who is important in your life, who you are imagining in front of you, feel that golden glow in your heart. Feel the warmth of loving kindness. It's as if you allow that golden glow to grow, to reach that person so close to you, to go all around them like a halo. Let the golden glow bathe them and give them energy,

happiness and health. Stay with that glow. Say in your mind, "I wish you happiness and well-being; may you be at peace; may all suffering end for you."

[Pause]

Now as you give that unconditional loving kindness towards your chosen person, allow that feeling of unconditional loving kindness to grow brighter and even more beautiful. Pause for a while. Just enjoy the feeling.

[Pause]

When you are ready, let go of the image of that person. Substitute another person you are close to. Repeat the process creating the feeling of Metta in the same way. Take as much time as you wish.

[Pause]

Now it's as if that second close person has disappeared too. Without opening your eyes imagine a whole group of people, perhaps all the people in the house you are in. Develop the caring glow of Metta around them all. "May you all be happy and well..." See if you can imagine Metta to be a golden radiance coming from a beautiful white lotus flower in the middle of your heart. Give loving kindness to all the beings in your home (or other group), all the visible and the invisible beings. Give your loving kindness to all these fellow beings. Say to yourself: "I truly wish you all happiness and peace. The door of my heart in this moment and forever is always open to you; no matter what you ever do, you will always be my friends. I give my care to you, all my love, and my kindness. If there is anything I can do to ease your pain, it is my privilege to do so". Bathe all the beings in your group in this increasingly splendid golden glow of loving kindness, "seeing" a halo around each person joining into a beautiful golden fire of care and goodwill and gratitude to all of them. As this golden glow of loving-kindness grows even greater, pause every now and again to feel what it's like inside you.

[Pause]

As you give selfless love towards others, you find there is a beautiful warm peace inside your own heart, a silence, an energy.

Give that golden glow your attention once more and spread it out beyond the group you have chosen, to all the people in the city or town where you live. To all the people in your city or town today who are suffering, who know no peace, who are having arguments at home, who are lost and alone, never really appreciating or knowing love. Know their emptiness; fill it with your own love. Give that golden glow indiscriminately around the whole of the city or town. "May all these beings be happy and well. May they feel the same peace that I'm feeling now, and may they feel the same acceptance and security that I am feeling now. I give this golden light of love as a gift, to all beings in this city or town. May you all be happy and well. May you all be at peace. May you all have health and joy in your hearts."

Pause again and enjoy the feeling. Savour it.

[Pause]

When you are ready, spread that golden glow wider and wider. Spread it to all the people in your home country. As it gets wider and wider, as it goes over the whole of this planet, it gets more beautiful. Say to yourself: "May all beings -- human, animal and invisible -- may all beings be happy. We are all friends in Samsara, in perpetual wandering from lifetime-to-

lifetime; all beings are subject to old age, sickness and death just like me. I give you my happiness as a gift. I give you my love; the door of my heart will always be open to all beings. I wish you well. I wish you peace, sincerely, with all my heart. This moment is for you."

Pause yet again.

[Pause]

Now direct your loving kindness towards the whole universe, telling yourself: "May all beings -- great or small, invisible or visible -- may all beings be free from suffering. May all beings realise the bliss of Enlightenment. May all beings know that ultimate happiness, selflessness, love, freedom and peace. This I give as a gift to all beings."

[Pause]

As this beautiful golden glow spreads, notice how it feels inside -- this unbounded, unconditional loving-kindness spreading over the whole universe. How does it feel inside you? How does it feel knowing that you are giving the whole universe that wonderful golden glow of love as you did to the images of people in your home, your best friend, a little kitten or puppy or baby?

Pause again.

[Pause]

When you are ready, put an image of yourself in front of you. Without opening your eyes, imagine you are watching in a mirror this person you have lived with since you were born, the one closest to you. Give yourself that golden glow. Say to yourself: "The door to my heart is open to me. I give myself my love, come inside." Then say this to your own image, "I wish you all happiness and well-being; whatever faults you have I forgive. The door of my heart is open to me no matter what I have ever done." Give unconditional love to this being inside, who we call "me." Say to yourself: "I allow myself to be happy. I give myself permission to be free. May I be Enlightened. May I be at peace, free from all suffering." Give yourself that beautiful warmth of love and kindness, indiscriminate, unconditional. Bathe yourself with the golden glow of Metta. Keep with that feeling of loving-kindness as long as you like. Enjoy it. Abide in it.

[Pause]

When you feel it is time to conclude, pause for another minute or two to reflect how you feel inside. Notice the effect that this meditation has had on you. Metta meditation can produce heavenly bliss.

[Pause]

Now imagine the golden glow of Metta one more time, arising from the beautiful white lotus in your heart. Gently draw that golden light back into the lotus, leaving the warmth outside. When the glow is a tiny ball of intense light in the middle of the lotus, gently close the petals, guarding the seed of Metta within your heart, ready to be released in your next Metta meditation. Now, when you are ready, open your eyes and get up slowly.

MAY ALL BEINGS BE HAPPY

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