

# Buddha-hood & the Art of

## Being Present

### Week Five

In many traditions - Buddhist, Christian, Quaker, Muslim - we are encouraged to show love to others.

Indeed in the Christian faith one of the main teachings of Jesus was to 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

The final lesson in the five week meditation journey is to the simplest, most beautiful yet in many ways the most difficult.

#### **The Metta Bhavan**

This method of practice can have the most powerful and far reaching effects. Buddhists the world over use the practice to refine their personalities and improve their karma. It is the practice of displaying in practical terms loving kindness to all beings.

It seems to me that the practice of the Metta Bhavan in whatever guise is the ultimate goal for peace seekers everywhere. Mindfulness, detachment, awareness of the impermanence of all things and being present could be considered the road map to enlightenment. You could compare the five steps we have explored in the five lessons to the pilgrimage that disciples of all faiths follow. Learning to overcome obstacles and barriers both in the physical and spiritual world, journeying through dark times, learning to let go of judgment and to seek the greater good for all mankind.

For me however it parallels in many ways the journey of my own yoga. (For those of you unfamiliar with my background I have taught asana and pranayama yoga for nearly 20 years.) The practice of Raja yoga also known as the royal road has offered me a

method through asanas or physical postures, and pranayama which is correct and proper breath control, a pathway to purify the body and the mind leading me towards the state of Samadhi or the state of bliss.

**The Metta Bhavan** teaches individuals the power of love, love for themselves, others, the community and all sentient beings. It could be called *Universal Love*.

In the abstract this seems so simple, to send love to all those we come in contact with is the ultimate act of compassion, the ability to forgive what has happened in the past and live in the present with an open and compassionate heart on paper makes a lot of sense. Holding onto past wrongs is a habit which can be very difficult to break. In our culture which is set up as the me me me society, it is expected that we push ourselves forward and make no time for the weaker, those who hold us back or for those who cannot contribute in any way to furtherance in our career or personal life. Respect for the elders in the community is now for many in our Western population something to be sneered at.

The practice of Metta or loving kindness helps us to develop a kindness within our souls which will enable us to firstly truly love and respect our selves and by so doing find the resources to respond in a loving and compassionate way to our family, friends, community and the world at large.

**What can be the possible point in this compassion? Isn't it all a bit flaky? Going around loving everyone?**

If we consider, the source of much of the sadness and disharmony we can see comes from a lack of love and respect for others. Intolerance of others' religious beliefs has been a source of the death of millions of people. If we truly loved our neighbour we would surely respect their need to express their religious beliefs in a way that suited them culturally and spiritually.

Unhappiness can be caused within relationships by trying to cling to a person and or mould them into the ideal for us. If we truly loved that person it would be possible to

give them the freedom to be themselves. We would not become attached to love of that person, it would become possible to experience love without attachment.

**But closer to home than that, what about you yourself?** How can developing metta help you? Is it not egotistical to love yourself? Of course not - lack of self love leads to damaging behaviours and so called protective mechanisms. Loving oneself quite simply allows us to love one another.

Lack of love for self and the resulting discordance in the physical, spiritual and emotional fields can cause illness both physical and mental, and this effect ripples to those around you. You must learn to develop compassion for the child, teenager, adult and person you were and are now. Develop love and forgiveness for the person you have been, are, and are becoming. Once you can do this for yourself then it will be possible to do it for others. It is by using this method that one learns to become accepting of oneself, and once mastered we will see the limitations and suffering of all beings - and this is the first step to compassion.

**You can learn to love others even if they don't love you back.**

This is a powerful tool, to develop a level of compassion which does not rely on the love of those around you but is grounded in self love and a connection to the universe and all of its beings. Love for the greater good.

Develop and focus on non-attachment and compassion to all beings and soon you will find love and compassion for all beings grow inside you like a tree taken root in fertile soil. The soil is the world you are in and the water, sun and air to make it grow are the practices of non-attachment, compassion and diligence.

How does this work in the real world?

*How can I go around being all loving when everyone is out to get one over on me?*

I hear this often when I come to this point in teaching the principles of enlightenment. And really it highlights just how trapped we all can become in our own egos. Being a compassionate individual does not mean we become a pushover. A loving parent does not roll over every time the child stamps his or her foot. An enlightened individual knows his or her own mind, has boundaries, is righteous in pursuing truth and right action but holds love and compassion for all in their heart and so in their actions. It is not the role of the enlightened one to point out the so-called flaws of others. That will be their karma, rather it is the role of the Buddha to shine like a beacon of beauty and purity by example.

The Dalai Lama is an example of such purity. He daily practises The Metta Bhavan, sending compassion to Chairman Mao who was responsible for the massacre of millions of Tibetans. The Dalai Lama sees beyond his actions and sends the man compassion. This immense gift of compassion is a true shining example of non-attachment, loving kindness and diligence. How can I struggle with forgiving a past snub or comment when Dalai Lama is prepared to do this act of kindness?

How can I develop love when I am constantly irritated by the behaviour of people around me?

I struggled with this meditation for years and to be fair on some days it is still a struggle. There were people in my life that drove me nuts, I worked with them, I lived with them, I was even married to one. It was impossible to love these people as they seemed to do things deliberately to drive me crazy. I resigned myself to sitting for hours trying desperately to feel compassion for them but instead would end up with an argument in my mind which went something like this: 'He doesn't deserve compassion - he is horrible to me.' Or 'Why should I send her compassion - she stole from me.' Or 'What did I ever do to deserve such dreadful luck - I try to be nice to people!'

OH DEAR, I really had not understood the teaching at all. I was so **attached** to the behaviour of the other people in my life I had failed to look at the obvious link. ME! I can't control a thing about anyone else. I can't make them like me - much less be in love with me. I can't make my boss be respectful or my friends practise compassionate behaviour - what was I thinking? The only thing I could do was control how I behaved, control my interaction with people. I learnt eventually that if something isn't working for you then only you can change it. If a relationship doesn't sit right, if it makes you a hard hearted uncompassionate soul, then this isn't a healthy relationship. If a friendship urges you to addictive behaviour or unkind thoughts, then this isn't a healthy friendship to be in. One can never change another, but we can choose to change our reaction. We can learn to take the heat of the situation through compassion.

A powerful tool to taking the heat out of angry situations is to literally send back love. If you bathe the person in love, the heat just dissipates. So with these people I was so angry at, I have learnt to step back and view them with the fullness of compassion. I see them as a rounded out person just as I - with a past, with their own karma and their own personal demons, and suddenly it is so much easier to feel love and compassion for them.

*A trick for the REALLY difficult ones is to see that person as a small child and send the child compassion and love - it worked a miracle for my ex-husband. I thoroughly recommend it as a practice.*

So to move this practice forward and fully embrace the Buddha in you, you must develop this compassionate heart. It must be done daily and with diligence, only by regular practice - by exposing yourself continually to suffering of all beings - can this Buddha nature become part of your personality.

And imagine how wonderful that could be, to feel love and compassion for all. Imagine the feeling that could engender in your home, when you learn to take a step back from the tantrums, snapping, bad behaviour, and see it for what it was - just the other person's suffering. Nothing at all to do with you, and certainly not personal. And armed

with that knowledge, take it into the workplace, your friendships, your community, the world. The power of Metta Bhavan is phenomenal - it has the power to change lives, build better relationships, enhance communities and stop wars.

Be a shining beacon in your community and join me and millions of others who journey together to develop the shining light of Universal Love.

**To practise the Metta Bhavan, follow this:**

Sit comfortable and allocate about fifteen minutes. If you are worried about the time, set an alarm to go off when you wish to finish.

Spend a few minutes with each group. Imagine in advance how you are going to send loving kindness, it could be a feeling, or seeing the person covered in a warm glow or colour, or visualising the person receiving a gift. Or some other way which you can imagine loving kindness. Try to make the visualization big bold and bright - it helps to increase the depth of the practice.

If feelings of resistance come up, don't push them down inside you. Let them arise, look at them, and then let them go with love and compassion for yourself - after all it is you who is suffering here. The resistance is simply attachment to the old ways of being, and it will take some time to develop a new way of being and thinking - but diligent effort always brings results!

*Visualize a person you know and are close to - Send them loving kindness*

*Visualize a person you have seen around but have no attachment to - Send them loving kindness*

*Visualize a person you dislike or who rubs you up the wrong way - Send them loving kindness*

*Visualize yourself - Send yourself loving kindness*

*Visualize your community - Send it loving kindness*

*Visualize the whole world - Send the world loving kindness*