

## **BENEFITS OF METTA**

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UNESCO is perhaps the largest and the most popular international organisation founded for the specific purpose of promoting *world peace* by bringing about the necessary changes in the minds of men. The preamble to its constitution, therefore, says thus: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." Here men, of course, mean men and women. You are also one of them. If you wish to have peace of mind, you must also construct defence of peace in your own mind. Even if you cannot make the whole world happy, surely, you can make yourself happy, if you have peace of mind. All those with whom you associate too, will be happy, when you are happy. Thereby you yourself become a mobile institution for promoting peace wherever you go. However, peace must begin in the minds of men as wars too begin in the minds of men.

Even if you are not interested in promoting world peace, surely you must be interested in yourself, and perhaps in your close associates such as your wife (or husband), or brothers and sisters, or children and grand-children, or your friends. Therefore you may wish to know how you can promote peace in your own mind and thereby make all your associates also happy. Buddha, as you perhaps know, was himself a man, born in India. He lived among men, spent his whole lifetime trying to make men and women wiser, nobler and happier than they were. He has left us a method of promoting peace and happiness in our own minds. It is a meditation called *METTA* or *LOVING KINDNESS*. He has successfully practised Metta and all those who practise Metta even today know by personal experience that it is very effective and produces immediate results. According to the Buddha, Metta can promote peace in the minds of men.

Metta, in short, is somewhat like the loving kindness or the affectionate attitude of mind that a good mother has towards her only son while protecting him even at the risk of her own life. If you can cultivate such an attitude of mind towards all, breaking down all barriers of caste, colour, creed, sex, etc. then you have cultivated Metta in full. It is not of course easy for anyone to attain this high standard at once, unless one had such past experience in this 'round of rebirth' called Samsara. However, anyone can

acquire this standard by following a graduated course of meditation and conscious application of the principle in everyday life. This definition of Metta referred to here is found in the well known Metta Sutta or Sermon on Loving Kindness. This Metta is not the same as the love or lust which a man and a woman may have towards each other, but is somewhat similar to the love that a good mother has towards her only son.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, Metta is the first of a group of four related concepts that indicate four attitudes of mind necessary for social well being and individual peace. All these four taken together are called the *Brahma Vihara* or Sublime States. *Karuna* or Compassion towards the suffering of others. *Mudita* or Altruistic Joy which makes a person to be happy when others are happy. *Upekkha* or Equanimity which gives a balance of mind to face one's life experiences quite dispassionately, are the other three concepts of this group which includes Metta as the first and Upekkha as the last.

Most outstanding characteristic of Metta is the absence of its opposites viz, *hatred, anger, and ill-will*. To the extent that one reduces these undesirable tendencies of hatred, anger and ill-will, one can develop Metta or Loving Kindness. On the other hand, to the extent that one cultivates Metta, one can also reduce these undesirable tendencies. They are two opposites that are inter-related in this manner, one reducing the other, or one's presence causing the other's absence. Therefore the first step in the meditation of developing Metta is to reduce the opposite tendencies of hatred, anger and ill-will.

You need not necessarily be a professed Buddhist to develop Metta in your mind. A non-Buddhist too may do so provided he follows the necessary instructions and adopts the prescribed techniques; preferably with the guidance of someone who is competent to help him. Even if you are a Buddhist, you may not be competent to guide a beginner, unless you have studied it and perhaps applied it to your own life. Therefore if you wish to try it out, you should first know what Metta is and how Metta can be developed in your mind.

According to the Buddha too, war and peace both begin in the minds of men. Therefore most of the teachings, if not all, are directed towards understanding, developing and controlling the mind, eventually leading to perfect purity of conduct, perfect peace of mind, and perfect wisdom. Metta

is only one such method prescribed by the Buddha for the purpose of this mind culture. If you develop Metta, your attitude of mind will change for the better and that will in turn change your whole personality. Therefore even before you learn the methods of developing Metta, you may like to know all the benefits of Metta as found in the sacred literature that contains the teachings of the Buddha and his followers who applied these teachings to their lives.

Fortunately for us, most of these teachings as understood, interpreted, and applied by his followers in Ceylon have been recorded first in Sinhala, in the first century, and later in Pali, during the fifth century. Out of the extent Pali texts give us this information about Buddha's system of mind culture, the famous Buddhist Psychology book called *Visuddhi Magga*, (Path of Purification) is by far the best and the most authoritative. This was compiled by Buddhaghosha, an Indian scholar monk, who came to Ceylon to study the teachings of Buddha as found in the unbroken Sinhala tradition. Buddhism was brought to Ceylon in the third century B.C. by Mahinda, the son of Asoka. This Pali text called *Visuddhi Magga* is also the best single book which can provide us with all the relevant information about this subject of Metta too.

*Vimutti Magga* or Path of Liberation was the work of a Sinhala Monk called Upatissa, during the first century. According to this *Vimutti Magga* and its successor *Visuddhi Magga* both, there are eleven benefits of *Metta*. They record the teachings of the Buddha here too, as in many other places. All these benefits can be obtained in full by anyone who has perfected the practice of Metta in full as prescribed by the Buddha. However, some of them can be gained by anyone here and now, proportionate to the extent of one's development in Metta. Most of the benefits are verifiable by direct personal experience of the follower. Out of these, the first one itself belongs to this verifiable group. One who practises Metta will enjoy a sound undisturbed sleep. This is mentioned as the first benefit of Metta.

The second benefit of Metta as taught by the Buddha and as found in the *Visuddhi Magga* is a happy and comfortable waking after sleep. This too may be verified by anyone who wishes to do so. The third benefit also refers to sleep. One who has developed Metta will not have the unpleasant experience of seeing undesirable dreams. So the first three benefits of Metta will help the followers to enjoy a good sleep which is a fundamental requirement for anyone's health and well being. Metta therefore helps us to

commence, continue, and conclude our sleep in a healthy and desirable manner.

Everyone perhaps knows how important a sound sleep is, for one's happiness and well being. This is a fundamental need to be met daily if one is to live in peace and promote peace. Those of you who have had the unpleasant experience of working with people who do not enjoy a sound sleep will know how irritable and sensitive such persons are in their interpersonal relationships. You may also know what an amount of tension results from the extraordinary behavior of a person who does not have the privilege of enjoying a sound sleep regularly. Some people often use even drugs to induce sleep, but most of these artificial methods have their own unpleasant after-effects, unlike a sound sleep resulting from the development of this psychological skill called Metta.

A person who practises this meditation called Metta will be dear to all those with whom he associates. Those who meet him and have any dealings with him will consider it a pleasant experience; such a person is seldom disliked. This benefit may be explained perhaps by causally relating it to the other benefits referred to earlier, because a person with sound sleep often tends to behave in a pleasant way leading to less tension and lesser unpleasant feelings. To those who believe in unobservable and unverifiable experience that do not come within our perpetual field of the senses, other explanations too may be given for this benefit. However, a person who practises Metta appears to develop a force that attracts all.

This fifth, sixth and seventh benefits of Metta are rather unusual and may not be believed by those skeptics and rationalists who discard all supernatural extra-sensory experiences. A person who has developed Metta will be liked by (or dear to) non-human beings. Buddha's dispensation and his cosmic system contained therein, include thirty one planes of existence and hundreds of thousands of world systems. Human beings and animals that we see with our unpurified, untamed, naked eyes are only two of these thirty one. Non-human beings here mean those other spirits we humans do not easily see unless we develop our spiritual faculties that are latent in all of us in varying degrees. This benefit of Metta is also one that may be verified by those who have unpleasant experiences with spirits. That is why most Buddhists in Ceylon and in other countries use Metta as a part of their culture to ward off the evil influence of spirits whether imaginary or real or both.

Sixth benefit of Metta also deals with what may be called spiritual or supernatural or extra-sensory experiences. According to this, one who practises Metta will be looked after or guarded by devas or deities. Everyone knows that a reasonable proportion of the human race, whether they are Buddhist or not, believe in the existence of other beings, who are said to be more powerful than humans, at least in certain respects, if not in all respects. As such, some believe in one god while others in several. Most of them expect these supernatural powers to help them when they are in distress. Whether this is right or wrong is to be decided by each individual according to one's own experiences and spiritual maturity. However if you expect such powers to help you or answer your "prayer" you can qualify for it by practising Metta as a part of your regular prayer and conduct.

If you believe in such God or gods who can answer your prayer or with whom you wish to have communion, you may supplement your regular methods with the practice of Metta and see the results yourself. According to the *Visuddhi Magga*, the sixth benefit of Metta specifically states that one who practises Metta will be guarded by the deities or devas. Surely, unless you are dear to them, they will not guard you or listen to your prayer. Therefore practice of Metta is undoubtedly an effective method of qualifying yourself to have direct access to those in celestial planes too, because Metta even attracts divine beings.

Fire, poison and weapons do not harm a person who has developed Metta. This is the seventh benefit and is also one that may be tentatively ignored by those who are inclined to disbelieve anything that is not verifiable here and now, by empirical methods. One is not entitled to deny entirely, the validity of these, till one has developed Metta and failed to obtain the benefits specified herein. Although there are instances of such strange situations in the life of certain saints, whose life-stories are recorded in the sacred books of all religions, one may not be inclined to believe them, till one gets a direct personal experience. Till then it is reasonable and even advisable perhaps, to leave it as an open question. It also conforms to the so-called scientific traditions of the age too. But others who are inclined towards believing such powers may develop Metta even as a protection against fire, poison and weapons.

The next benefit of Metta says that one can concentrate on anything very easily and promptly if one cultivates Metta. This does not belong to the

supernatural sphere and may be tested by personal experience here and now. You may test it for your own benefit by your experience. It is common knowledge that most of us find it extremely difficult to concentrate on something without much effort on our part. Nothing worthwhile of course, can be achieved without effort, but Metta helps a person to get the best out of his mental abilities with the minimum effort and strain. It is the skill of concentration that may be considered as the gateway even to intellectual success. Therefore one may benefit much from Metta even in one's intellectual pursuits that need much concentration.

The ninth benefit of Metta tends to make the facial appearance of the followers, quite serene. As you know, it is not every one whose face is serene, calm and attractive to look at. Neither is it easy to acquire such true serenity and calmness, which are invariably and surely, the external manifestations of the presence of peace in one's mind. One who has such a face will also have such words too. Both these will promote peace among all those who come under the influences of such a person, whether he is a parent or group leader or religious leader, or national or international leader. Therefore if one wishes to radiate peace both within and around oneself, one must develop a serene face by practising Metta.

Now we have already discussed nine benefits of the meditation called Metta or loving kindness, as found in the Buddhist texts. Out of these, at least three may not be acceptable to those who do not believe in supernatural or extra-sensory experiences. According to these three benefits one who practises Metta (a) will be dear to the non-human beings, (b) will be guarded by the divine beings, and (c) fire, poison and weapons will not harm him.

Out of the other benefits of this meditation called Metta or loving kindness, three are related to sleep. According to them one who practises Metta begins, continues and ends his sleep in comfort. In other words, such persons can enjoy a sound sleep with no unpleasant dreams. He will sleep in comfort, will not be disturbed by unpleasant dreams and will wake up also in comfort.

Out of the nine benefits of Metta that we have already studied, three are related to extra-sensory or supernormal powers, three are related to sleep, and the following three refer to the personality changes that will result from the practice of this meditation. One tends to make oneself dear to other

human beings another makes one's face serene and another facilitates the skill of concentration of the mind on any subject.

The tenth benefit of Metta shows how its followers not only live in peace but also die in peace. According to it, one who practises the meditation of Metta or loving kindness will die unconfused. No one among the surviving, of course, has had the experience of dying in present life. Therefore one may not be able to realize the value of this blessing. However, everyone can imagine how unfortunate it is to die with a confused mind. For those who believe in rebirth or a life after death, it is very desirable that the death occurs in such a state of unconfused consciousness. Buddhists of course, value this blessing much, because such death will help them to obtain a satisfactory birth.

The eleventh or the last benefit of this meditation also refers to the life after death. Those who do not believe in any life after death may tentatively ignore this, but those who believe in some form of rebirth will undoubtedly appreciate this blessing too. According to the *Visuddhi Magga*, one who cultivates Metta will be reborn after death at least in the *Brahma Loka* or the highest of heavens. However, whether we are born again or not, it is always good to be harmless to others and helpful to all. That is the attitude of mind, which will be cultivated if one practises the meditation of Metta or loving kindness. Such attitude will perhaps make this world itself a heaven for you even if you do not believe in a life after death. Therefore, one who practises Metta will try to be harmful to none and helpful to all.

Now even if one does not practise this meditation of *Metta* or loving kindness to such a great extent as to obtain all these eleven benefits, one can surely benefit according to one's own ability and skill of practising Metta. You can try it out yourself and see whether you will not be happier that you were. You will also observe a marked change in your attitude of mind and a change in your whole personality thereafter. If you have adequate patience to continue this meditation regularly at least for a few minutes each day and maintain the consequent attitude of mind throughout your waking life, you will realize how happy and pleasant you are. This is the cumulative and collective benefit of practising Metta even for a short time.

If you develop Metta in you, you will start liking all those whom you associate with and will also be liked by them in return. This will lead to a whole fund of goodwill flowing to you and from you in all your

interpersonal relationships with others, may be with the members of your family, or may be into the society you live, or may be with those of your working group. Therefore *Metta* can radiate or release or generate a peace-promoting social-psychological force from the one who practises *Metta* regularly to those who associate with him. This peace-promoting social-psychological force will soon be a network of forces emanating from one another thereafter. This *Metta*-motivated peace force tends to breed peace everywhere it goes. It is more or less like an infection with *Metta* as the germ that spreads the necessary condition for peace.

These benefits as found in the teachings of the Buddha were no doubt preached to his direct followers who were devoting their whole life time for the attainment of perfect morality, perfect wisdom and perfect peace. Therefore theirs was not a matter of stopping half-way only as a preliminary step towards attaining world peace by reducing world tension. As such, these benefits may be attained in full only by persons prepared to devote at least a reasonable portion of their time (perhaps the wasting time) of this socially beneficial, culturally enriching, and intellectually satisfying spiritual experience called *Metta* or loving kindness to which the Buddha gives highest priority in the list of spiritual activities.

However, anyone who practises *Metta* even a few minutes a day or a short time will be rewarded in proportion to the sustained effort and the sincerity of purpose. One needs not wait long to see the result of such elementary practice. The meditator himself will feel the difference resulting from the presence of *Metta* as a dominant part of the content of his psychological field. This cannot be evaluated or tested merely by rational or conceptual argument for and against *Metta*. It has to be lived as a true experience even for a short time as a start. The best and perhaps the only test for *Metta* is its direct experience of the follower.

All those who do not believe in scientifically unverifiable, spiritual experiences and are concerned only with the socio-economic cultural experiences that lend themselves to empirical tests and observable benefits, may also give due consideration to *Metta* as a method of promoting human motivation towards social progress. If a parent as the leader of a family group practises *Metta*, the other members of the family will feel the difference in the leader's attitude to otherwise conflicting situations. If a temperamentally irritable and extremely sensitive leader of a working group practises *Metta*, the result of that new condition will be reflected in the

decreasing amount of heat and the increasing amount of light falling on the co-operative experiences that follow.

In working social groups of all types, political, religious, cultural, national or international, these benefits of Metta may be tested perhaps by all participants, practising Metta as prescribed by those who have already succeeded in obtaining these benefits. Subject to the common subjective factor creeping into any so-called “scientific” experiment dealing with and handled by, human beings, this experimental situation may not be out of the reach of human ingenuity in the contemporary society. Such experiments may be tried by those who are not prepared to depend even on their own personal experiences in dealing with matters of social significance as the reducing of inter-personal, inter-group, international, or inter-racial tension. In matters of this nature utilizing the benefits of Metta appears to be a psychological possibility even if it does not appeal to the scientific requirements of the modern rational age.

If we can continue and regularly practise this meditation of Metta, we may perhaps be able to radiate a spiritual peace force even in the whole universe. Such a force will know no physical bounds in space or temporal limits in time as we know them. It will also spread, breaking through and crossing, all other barriers, whether man-made or natural. Thus a force of that nature, emanating from several persons living in all parts of the world, will combine to be a massive force in the minds of most men if not all. Every temple, every church, every mosque, every praying hall or every meditation centre, every institution of spiritual endeavour, every educational congregation, every centre of cultural enterprises, and every assembly hall where human beings gather in different numbers for the purpose of considering the ways and means of serving and saving mankind can surely be converted to an institution for generating and radiating this universal force of promoting peace through the practice of Metta.

To those who believe in extra-sensory perception or supernatural experiences, a peace force of this nature radiating at least from all those who follow a religion, and those others who lead a good life even without professing any religion as such, will have the possibility of even reaching the celestial planes of heavenly beings, granted such planes and beings do exist. Such a collective and co-operative effort by man to promote world peace will undoubtedly bear better results than most of the international conferences and campaigns of the contemporary society, trying apparently to

save God from mankind instead of trying to save mankind from the animal in man. Metta may provide this universal peace force which will eventually enlist the full support of even the divine beings if such beings exist.

If this assumption is granted, it may not be the number of persons participating in such a co-operative spiritual endeavour that matters. It is the sincerity of purpose, continuity of the effort, and the clarity of the vision involved in the endeavour, that will ensure worthwhile results. Therefore even a few may make a good start augmenting all those existing campaigns directed towards the promoting of world peace. Even if you fail to achieve this laudable universal objective, by this spiritual experience, you are sure to become healthier, nobler and wiser than you were, in your personal life. That will also improve the quality of your social relationship with those you associate while the standard of your spiritual maturity will not remain static. All these will help Metta to reduce inter-group tension and promote harmony, racial, religious, or ideological, in any society.