



the urban retreat 2013

course material for day 4: tuesday

introduction

Today we are focusing on the second stage of the metta bhavana practice – the stage where we try and cultivate loving-kindness towards a good friend. Take a moment to think about how you have found this stage of the meditation so far...

suggestions for practice

Similar to yesterday, we've got a couple of suggested approaches to try in this stage of the meditation.

The first, a bit like yesterday, is to **focus on appreciation, gladness, and gratitude**. What is it you appreciate and admire about your friend? Try and make it as real and as accurate as you can. What makes your friend unique, what is their particular, special quality – or “sparkle”? Sometimes it is those who are closest to us that we can take most for granted, so it is good to take time to really notice someone and appreciate their good qualities.

Although, in a sense, doing the practice is about *them*, not about you, it is still good to enjoy it! Allow any feelings of appreciation, joy, and love! Look for any sense of contentment or ease or happiness and allow the emergence of positive qualities and emotions.

The second suggestion is to **focus on empathy and concern**. Particularly if there is challenge and difficulty in your friend's life, be aware of that, bring it into the meditation. How might they be experiencing life these days? What must it be like for them? Is there

anything that might help, or at least is there a way you can let them know you are aware and that you care?

a couple of things to watch out for

People naturally do this practice in different ways. Some people have a strong visual sense and might “see” their friend in their mind's eye. Others might hear their friend's voice. For others it might seem more cognitive and reflective. Or it might be a “felt sense” in the heart or the body. Or the practice might work through images that seem intuitively “right” and significant, perhaps, for example, a sense of golden light radiating out to your friend. It is not that one of these is “right” and the others are “wrong”. **What works is what works for you.** What is important is that you are trying to develop loving-kindness. You are trying to connect with empathy and appreciation. You are, in a way, simply trying to be aware of your friend and their life, though it is an awareness imbued with warmth and concern. Whatever helps you to do that is good.

Also, **be aware of unhelpful expectations and a resultant wilfulness.** Sometimes people feel they aren't doing the practice “properly” if they don't feel strong emotions right there and then. But, again, we are all temperamentally different and some people will “feel” more strongly and immediately than others. Doing this practice will make you more alive to your feelings and emotions. However, there is a distinction to be made between the kinds of wishes, intentions, and aspirations you are encouraging in this practice, and a strong *feeling* of love – which is felt more rarely. You can't make yourself feel an

emotion through willpower. But you can plant seeds of positive intention which will grow and fruit later.

There is now [a 30 minute led-through meditation](#) which focuses especially on the second stage of the metta bhavana, although it also takes you through the other stages. Try it and see how you get on.

And here is a suggestion for how to take the metta bhavana practice off the cushion, and into your daily life. Have a look at this after the meditation if you've got time, or come back to it later today. Once again, it is adapted from [Subhadramati's book 'Not About Being Good'](#).

daily practice: reaching out

In the next day or so, do something for someone else where there is nothing obvious in it for you; you could even do it anonymously. Make the effort to take the person in and check, as best you can, that what you choose to do is truly helpful. And do it as wholeheartedly as you can.

Afterwards, review how you go on:

- * What effect did your action have on you?
- * What effect might it have had on the other person?
- * Would you like to continue this practice of reaching out?

Lastly, take some time to reflect on the third stage of the practice, which we'll be looking at more fully tomorrow. Do you find the neutral person stage easy or difficult, interesting or boring? What tends to happen in that stage of the practice? We'll explore more tomorrow.

Don't forget you can also join-in, post comments and questions, and hear how others are getting-on [if you log in to the space on The Buddhist Centre Online](#). There is also the [daily talk from Vessantara](#), as well as other talks and [a daily film](#) highlighting some aspect of loving-kindness in action in the Triratna Buddhist Community.