



**the urban retreat 2013**

**course material for day 8: saturday**

## introduction

Today we are exploring the end of the practice – expanding our awareness out to include more and more people. This doesn't have to be only *human* beings, our concern and metta can include *all living beings*, a concern for all that lives.

## suggestions for practice

Here are a few suggestions for how to approach this stage of the practice, and how to “expand outwards”. As we've emphasised before, however, there is no one right way. What works is what works for you. Approach the meditation in a spirit of experiment and exploration. What helps you to cultivate a warm, expansive awareness of others?

A first suggestion is to **expand outwards “geographically”**. There are the four of you in the practice so far, and then you think of others who may be in the same building as you, the same street, the same town or city, the same region, and so on. You expand outwards, radiating a sense of well-wishing and loving-kindness out as far as you can.

Another idea is to **consider people in different “life situations”**. For example, bringing to mind that in some parts of the world people are just waking up and in other places their day is just ending, there are rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick. Right now, as you do this meditation, children are being born and other people are dying.

A third possibility is to **think of “representative examples”**. If the techniques suggested above become too abstract, then you can focus more on individuals and take them as “representing” a wider humanity. For example, you may know someone in New Zealand and you think of them specifically, and then you think of his or her family (whom you might know less well), and then his or her friends, work colleagues (whom you don't know at all). In this way, starting with someone specific, you can start to feel more connected with other people in a particular country or region of the world.

### three things to watch out for

One thing that can happen at any stage of the meditation, though perhaps especially during this stage, is **distraction**. Because you are broadening out, and bringing more and more living beings to mind, there is more chance that your mind will “hook-up” onto something and take you off into fantasy and distraction. Don't give yourself a hard time about this. It happens to all of us. When you notice it, just come back to the practice. It might help to come back to “thinking of everyone in the practice so far”, and then expanding outwards again from there.

Another thing that can happen is that **it might go a bit “nice” – a bit sugary and sentimental**. It feels warm and pleasant, but maybe not so real. Again, don't worry too much about this. If you keep doing the practice over time, it will gradually become more and more emotionally real; it will steadily go deeper. Don't expect too much, too soon. However, you might find that using the “representative examples”

technique mentioned above does help keep the practice grounded in the real. On the other hand, it is good to use your imagination; it can help keep the practice alive. Just try not to get too elaborate or distracted by what you imagine; it is about *an imaginative identification with other people*, not imagination as an end in itself. You are trying to see the common humanity we all have, and how that manifests in unique and particular human lives.

Lastly, sometimes people experience **“overwhelm”** through being aware of more and more living beings and, particularly, that there is so much suffering in the world. If this happens, it can be helpful to do three things. First, tell yourself that – in a way – this is a sign of success rather than failure. You are contacting feeling and concern for others, and that is a good thing. Secondly, remind yourself that by meditating you are doing something positive – you are not just being helpless and passive, but doing something to cultivate love and compassion, and that will make you more able to act with compassion in your life. Thirdly, it can help to make sure your approach to the meditation is balanced and that, as you expand your awareness out, you include people who are doing amazing things to alleviate suffering, as well as people who are suffering.

### **finishing well**

Last but not least: try to finish each meditation practice well, not getting up quickly and rushing straight into an activity, but having time at the end of the meditation to assimilate, to bring your awareness back into your body and into the room where you are sitting.

Just do what you can in the meditation. It will vary day to day. Sometimes you'll naturally feel happy and buoyant. Other days you'll just wake up grumpy and irritable. One day the practice will be naturally expansive, the next day you'll struggle to get beyond stages 1 and 2. Sometimes your mind is busy, sometimes sluggish. It is all OK; it is all part of life and part of our practice. Whatever you are doing to try to be more aware and to have a positive intention will have a good effect – on you and, through you, on the world around.

This has been a fairly brief introduction to a profound and far-reaching meditation practice. I hope you've got a sense of its potential and feel inspired to keep meditating. Good luck!

The **final 30 minute led meditation** takes you through the whole practice, with a special focus on the final stage.

### **daily practice: acting on the positive**

The next time you have a generous impulse, for example to buy someone a gift or a card, or to give some money to charity, try acting on it unreservedly (as long as this will not cause harm to yourself, such as putting yourself into debt).

Afterwards, take some time to reflect on the experience:

\* How did acting on your generous impulse make you feel about yourself?

\* How did it make you feel in relation to the world at large?

\* Are you going to continue this practice?

If you've enjoyed Subhadramati's suggestions and reflections for daily practice and been helped and encouraged by them, you might like to [buy the book!](#) It contains a lot more ideas, stories, and inspiration for how to live a more truly human life, one guided and informed by kindness, courage, generosity, and wisdom.