



"Then the goddesses, saluting Vimalakirti, said to him, 'Householder, how should we live in the abode of the Maras?'"

"Vimalakirti replied, 'Sisters, there is a door of the Dharma called "The Inexhaustible Lamp." Practice it! What is it? Sisters, a single lamp may light hundreds of thousands of lamps without itself being diminished. Likewise, sisters, a single bodhisattva may establish many hundreds of thousands of living beings in enlightenment without his mindfulness being diminished. In fact, not only does it not diminish, it grows stronger. Likewise, the more you teach and demonstrate virtuous qualities to others, the more you grow with respect to these virtuous qualities. This is the door of the Dharma called "The Inexhaustible Lamp." When you are living in the realm of Mara, inspire innumerable gods and goddesses with the spirit of enlightenment. In such a way, you will repay the kindness of the Tathagata, and you will become the benefactors of all living beings.'

Introducing Metta Bhavana

EXAMPLES AND IDEAS
FOR
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Lighting the Flame

Ruchiraketu
November 2004

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Lighting the Flame





Introduction

The ideas given in the following sections are to give practical tips for designing experiential exercises while introducing Metta Bhavana to newcomers. They were written in response to a request for more help with teaching Metta Bhavana from meditation teachers participating in a *Lighting the Flame* survey. So although some of the sections are relevant to teaching meditation in general, they are aimed particularly at teaching Metta Bhavana. (If there is interest, I may write something on the other practices later) I hope they will stimulate more experimentation with an experiential approach to learning.

*Education
is not filling
a bucket
but lighting
a fire*
W B Yeats

They are not a complete course in themselves but are provided to supplement whatever teaching you might normally do. Adapt them to suit your own style and purposes. They are not procedures to follow but just examples of an experiential approach for you to modify and adapt for yourself.

These symbols are guides through the sections:

	Aims:	What that section is designed to achieve
	Key Ideas:	The main ideas to get across to the class
	Guiding Principles:	Why the material is being presented in this way
	Comments:	For the benefit of the class leader

Although the sections are arranged roughly in the order in which they might be used on a meditation course, many of them can be used independently for a single class. Some of them overlap and repeat similar points so it's worth scanning through them all to choose or adapt the ones you want.

*I don't try
to teach my
students,
I only try to
create the
conditions
for
learning*
Albert
Einstein

They have all been successfully tried out in meditation courses at the Cambridge Buddhist Centre over the last couple of years. However be aware that whenever you introduce an experiential element, people may not respond in the way that you expect! If you can demonstrate an open and exploratory attitude at such times then they won't be setbacks but opportunities for learning...

Do let me have your feedback and suggestions for improvements

Ruchiraketu
November 2004

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What meditation is and isn't

Aims	🎯 To introduce and clarify with the group what we mean by 'meditation'
	🎯 To involve the group in a safe atmosphere
Key ideas	🔑 Meditation is a useful and enjoyable practice, it's not something weird or miraculous
Guiding Principles	✳️ To clarify the scope of something (especially if there are already views about it) it's helpful to say both what it is <i>and</i> what it is not
Time	🕒 30 minutes (flexible)
Materials	📄 Flipchart (useful but not strictly necessary)
Comments	📋 This is useful for introducing meditation in general, after some icebreaker (e.g. Talking in groups of 3 about 'why you've come')

(1) What meditation is

📋 *While asking questions of the group is a good way to involve people you may not always get the sort of answers you were hoping for. At least it lets you know where they are coming from. Unless the answers are completely misleading, to encourage a safe atmosphere it's best to - Create sangha first, clarify later!*

If I have ever made any valuable discoveries, it has been owing more to patient attention, than to any other talent

Isaac Newton

Ask the whole group:

“What is meditation about?”

What do you associate with meditation?”

📋 *The question is deliberately broad (...about?) to encourage a range of replies from the group. You are only asking for what they associate with meditation, beginning an exploration of the topic. They might be shy about answering the more definite question “What is meditation?”*

Write key words for the replies up on the flip chart and discuss each contribution appreciatively.

📋 *You are likely to receive answers involving relaxing, focus, stillness, letting go,, exploring, self-knowledge, development, etc. You might indicate that some of them are more about the fruits of meditating while some are more about the process of meditating*

Through discussion you eventually want to include points such as the following:

- Meditation is a practice, that is it's something one does

- It involves working with the mind and awareness
- It involves being present with your experience
- It involves investigative personal discovery
- It involves cultivating positive mental states through setting up appropriate conditions
- The ideas you hold about meditation will influence your practice.

(2) What meditation isn't

Again using the flip chart explore:

‘What meditation isn't about’

“Now that we've seen some of the things that meditation is about, what would be some of the things that meditation is **not** about?”



You could ask this question of the group, but you may need to give quite a lot of help in order to bring out the main points.







Write up key words for points such as the following, and discuss (as shown in brackets)


- Not about blanking the mind (but about being aware)
- Not a specifically religious practice (although it may be used spiritually)
- Not about forcing (but about balancing directing attention with being receptively aware of what is going on)
- Not about being comatose or going into a hypnotic trance
- Not just about relaxing
- Not about running away from reality (but instead helps you to accept reality fully)
- Not a selfish activity (and instead can help us become genuinely selfless)
- Not a quick fix or a cure-all (although it may sometimes help – you could mention some of the benefits of meditation)



*To continue defining the area of meditation in general you might usefully follow this section with the section on the **four types of meditation*** □


The four types of meditation

Aims	 To provide a broad framework for the meditation practices that we do
Key ideas	 Four types: Concentrative, Receptive, Generative, and Reflective
Guiding Principles	 Useful distinctions help to organise experience
Materials	 (Optional) Flipchart and ‘The four types of meditation’ handout
Time	 30 minutes (flexible)
Comments	 This is a very useful framework for meditation in general, and the practices that we teach in the FWBO. Although it’s presented here as for newcomers, experienced meditators could also find it helpful. It can be referred back to as you introduce different emphases throughout a course.

 *Any given meditation practice may involve all four types. These four approaches correspond to the four traditional antidotes to the hindrances, Suppression, Sky-like attitude, Cultivating the opposite, and Considering the consequences.*

Short meditation

Tell the group that you will be introducing them to a useful framework for understanding meditation but first you would like them to engage in a little experience.

 *While it is ok to simply introduce the four types, it will be more connected to experience and more meaningful if it is introduced after some experience of meditating, however rudimentary.*

 *For experienced meditators see **Option for experiencing the Four Types** later in this section*

Ask them to attend quietly to the sensations of their breathing for a few minutes...



After bringing their attention back to the room, you can tell them that they have already begun meditating!

You could comment on the range of experiences they are likely to have experienced: from ‘calm and peaceful’ to different forms of mind-wandering.

“There are hundreds of formal meditation practices which are all designed to work with our mental states in various ways. They can usefully be categorised as being of these four types...”

The four types of meditation

Introduce the four types of meditation, including such points as the following (see next page and **The Four Types of Meditation handout**);

- **as four ways of working with the mind:**
 - Calming and focussing (Concentrative)
 - Just being open to experience (Receptive)
 - Bringing qualities into being such as contentment, confidence, or kindness (Generative)
 - Dwelling (not too discursively) on some theme such as ‘interconnectedness’ or ‘impermanence’ (Reflective)



They also correspond to the four ways of working with the hindrances as mentioned in the first comment above

- **as ways of categorising meditation practices** where a particular way of working is emphasised, for example,
 - Concentrative: looking at a candle flame, mindfulness of breathing, kasina meditations, etc.
 - Generative: Loving-kindness (which we are going to explore in more detail later in the course...) and the other Brahma Viharas, some visualisations, etc.



You could give them ‘the four types of meditation’ handout as on the next page – see the ‘handouts’ section

Option for experiencing the Four Types

Within say the third stage of the mindfulness of breathing try doing the practice emphasising each of the four ways of working for a few minutes at a time. This really amounts to cycling through the traditional antidotes to the hindrances within the practice, but without necessarily waiting for the hindrances to arise



*This can encourage a more flexible and balanced approach.
Sometimes we tend to rely on only one approach, always suppressing, or being receptive, for example.
This could be tried even on an intermediate-level meditation session.*

The four types of meditation

The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind.
William James

Meditation is largely a matter of mental training through consciously attending to particular types of positive experiences - experiences which sometimes arise quite naturally in the course of everyday living.

The many hundreds of formal meditation techniques found in religious or secular traditions throughout the world can usefully be considered as belonging to one or a combination of the following four loose categories:

- Concentrative** for calming and focussing the mind
- Generative** for bringing some quality or ability into being
- Receptive** for being in a mode of receptive attention to experience
- Reflective** for contemplating some theme (such as ‘interconnectedness’ or ‘impermanence’)

Any particular meditation practice will include elements of all the four approaches but with the emphasis particularly on one aspect.

The ‘mindfulness of breathing’ meditation, for example, is primarily a concentrative meditation practice, where one settles the mind through attending to the sensations of the breathing as a focus.








In the ‘development of loving-kindness’ meditation (*metta bhavana*) one develops an attitude of loving-kindness using memory, imagination and awareness of bodily sensations.

In either of these meditation practices, however, a balance needs to be maintained between consciously guiding attention (leading) and being receptive to whatever experience is arising (following). This attitude of open receptive attention is the emphasis of the receptive type of meditation practice.


Reflective meditation involves repeatedly returning the attention to some theme, again whilst being open to whatever arises.



Short Experiment – The value in being systematic


Aims	 To show how being systematic helps organise your experience
Key ideas	 Being systematic is of value, meditation practices help with this
Guiding Principles	 An experiential comparison is used to highlight a learning point
Materials	 None
Time	 A few minutes
Comments	 This might help while introducing meditation for the first time. It's a useful setup for introducing the body awareness exercise (body scan).  Be aware that any time you ask people to compare things in their experience, you run the risk that they won't experience what you expect! If that happens it could be an opportunity for you (and the group) to find out why.

Say something like:

 *Comparisons are very useful for highlighting elements of experience, which might not be noticed in themselves. It's easier to describe a difference between experiences than to describe an experience.*


“Compare the ease with which you can follow each of the following instructions”

“Become aware of your body”


 *pause while they do this (for about half a minute)*

“And now compare what that was like with the following instruction:”

“Beginning with your toes and feet, and moving up through each part of your body, become aware of your body”

 *Again pause while they do this*

“Now, which of those two was easier to do and why?”








 *Most people will find it easier to follow the second one. It helps to have a sequential structure to attend within*


Take some feedback from the group.

Comment on the value of being systematic. Make the point that the formal meditation practices are structures to help you in organising your experience.




Becoming aware of the body (body scan)

Aims	 To practise becoming aware of the body
	 To practise directing attention in a way which is relatively easy to do
Key ideas	 This is often a good way to begin a session of meditation
Guiding Principles	 How things are phrased makes a difference (see comments in the text)
Materials	 None
Time	 10 –15 minutes
Comments	


 *This can be modified from a body awareness exercise to a body relaxation by making the appropriate suggestions as you go along*


Make sure that people are sitting in a reasonably relaxed upright posture and begin the body awareness practice saying something like the following:


“We are now going to practise bringing awareness to the body.”

 *You might have mentioned earlier that the awareness that we will be bringing to the body is a ‘kind awareness’ (see ‘Short experiment –the effect of ‘kind awareness’)*

“Beginning with your toes, bring your awareness into your feet and notice any sensations that you might notice there.”


 *The phrasing has shifted from the inclusive but often over-used language of ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’ to the more separate but straightforwardly directive language of ‘you’ and ‘your’. Also, even though you are addressing a plurality you can speak in the singular as each listener will be following your guidance as though it were directed to them individually(e.g. ‘your body’ not ‘your bodies’)*

 *‘Beginning with your toes, bring your awareness into your feet’ gives a specific place to start and continue from. It reflects the pattern of the rest of the exercise – a systematic sequencing of attention throughout the whole body.*


 *“Bring your awareness into” is more integrating than “Become aware of” or even “Direct your awareness towards” each part of your body. The latter suggests a split between you as the subject*

and the objects of your awareness. It could be instructive for you to try phrasing this both ways for yourself to feel the difference in your experience that the language makes.


“If you don’t notice any sensations that’s fine, just be aware of the absence of sensations in that part of your body”

 *This allows anyone who can’t notice any sensations in their feet to relax, and the implication is that this will be okay for other parts of the body where one doesn’t notice any sensations*


Leave an appropriate pause each time for the listener to do what you are asking them to do.

 *This will be easier if you are simultaneously doing the practice yourself*

“Now bringing your awareness into your ankles...”


 *The present continuous tense (‘bringing’, ‘becoming aware’, ‘noticing’ ‘relaxing’, etc. helps the listener to stay dynamically in their present experience*

“And now into your lower legs, the shins and calves...”


 *The word ‘now’ brings attention into the present and allows one to move on from whatever one was doing*

“And now bringing your awareness into your knees, and noticing any sensations that might be present there...”

“And if your attention wanders away from the body at any time just gently bring it back and continue bringing your awareness into whatever part of the body that I’m guiding you through...”

 *It’s reassuring to know what to do if you get distracted*

“Now bringing your awareness into your thighs and upper legs...”


 *It’s best to use simple non-medical language for the parts of the body*

“Now into your buttocks and groin, feeling the contact with the cushion or seat...”

Continue guiding systematically throughout the rest of the body, in a similar way. (the lower back and sides, the upper back, the shoulders and neck, the head and scalp, feeling the head poised at the top of the spine,

now from the shoulders down the arms and into your hands, your front, the stomach and chest, your face and jaw)

“And now, having brought your awareness sequentially through your body in this way, just sit for a few moments with an overall sense of your whole body”

 *This is just guiding from the parts back to the whole, and also creating a context for (optionally) continuing by attending to the breathing.*


And now let your awareness settle on the sensations of your breathing...

“We’ll just sit quietly like this for a few minutes attending to the sensations of the breathing.”







“If your attention wanders just bring it back gently to your body and then allow it to settle again on the sensations of your breathing”



“And now, in your own time, just gently bring your awareness back to the room.”

 *This body awareness exercise is good for training the attention with a relatively gross and stable object. This makes it useful for making the transitions from everyday activity to meditation practice.* □

Short Experiment – The effect of ‘kind awareness’


Aims	 To explore the effect of an attitude of ‘kind awareness’ on experience
Key ideas	 Awareness in Buddhism is not emotionally disconnected
Guiding Principles	 An experiential comparison is used to highlight a learning point
Materials	 None
Time	 5-10 minutes (longer if you have group discussions)
Comments	 This is an excellent way to move towards introducing Metta Bhavana

Say something like:


“The way we are aware influences what we notice.”

“Compare your experience of the two following ways of attending to your experience of your body.


“First, briefly bring your awareness through your body and notice whatever you notice.”

 *Allow a minute or two for this. There is no need to ask people to get into meditation posture.*

“Now bring your awareness through your body again,
this time with an attitude of kind awareness,
and notice whatever you notice.”

 *Again allow a minute or two.*

“How are the two experiences different?”

 *People are likely to find that kind awareness is softer, that they are more aware of feelings, more ‘in’ their experience and less detached.*








You could either let people talk about their experience in small groups or take feedback in the large group, depending on the size of the group and how comfortable everyone is about talking about their experience.

Say something about the importance of positive emotions in developing awareness, for example:

- The type of awareness we are trying to cultivate in meditation is not cold and emotionally alienated but warm and living
- We are cultivating an awareness of ourselves as living subjects, not only as objects of our own awareness.
- We normally balance our practice of mindfulness and loving-kindness.





Preparing for Bhavana – What do you not want to change?


Aims	 To notice positive things that are already present in your life
	 To generate a positive atmosphere
Key ideas	 It can be easier to develop from a place of abundance rather than lack
Guiding Principles	 Noticing what you don't want to change helps you appreciate it
Materials	 None
Time	 About 20 minutes
Comments	 Small-group discussion. (See other 'preparing for bhavana' sections)

Say something like:


“ Assuming that you and your life are going to change as a result of your meditation practice, in a minute or so I would like you to get together in groups of three or four for about 10 minutes and share a few of the things currently in your life that you do **not** want to change. (e.g. qualities, friends, dog, spouse, etc)” Give people a little time to reflect for themselves before breaking into the groups.

 *In terms of the four right efforts it's better to consider what positive factors one would like to **maintain before** considering what qualities one could **develop**. Many people are motivated to develop and come along to meditation classes because they are experiencing some lack in themselves, but this can be a difficult place from which to start. Also many find it much easier to say what they don't want rather than what they do want – a focus on the negative. A more productive focus is to attend to the qualities they have, even if they think that they could improve further. This will tend to make their aspirations feel more possible.*








 *Although the group could simply be asked to reflect privately on what they don't want to change expressing it to others makes it more real*

 *The idea that meditation will help one to change is reinforced by presupposing that it will.*

After the small groups invite feedback and comments and discuss the benefits of attending to what you already have and value.

 *Variations on this exercise can also be given as homework, including asking your friends what it is about you that they would like to continue. □*

Preparing for Bhavana – ‘Maintaining’ before ‘Developing’

Aims	 To explore experientially our attitudes towards ‘Development’
Key ideas	 It’s easier to develop from a place of abundance
	 To beware unwittingly undermining while thinking of ‘development’
Guiding Principles	 Orienting TO a positive may accentuate coming FROM a lack
Materials	 A flipchart is useful. The handout is useful
Time	 30 minutes
Comments	 This is a great sequence for illustrating the surprising fact that thinking of our ideals can undermine us, depending on how we do it.

Lead the group through the following three steps so that you can discuss their experience of it later.


“There are a few stages to this next exploration of how we relate to development.

“First of all I’d like you to identify some quality that you would like to develop – you can keep the content of it private and it needn’t be some big spiritual quality although it’s fine if it is...

“Now has everyone thought of something that you would like to develop?

“Okay, Here is **step number one** of three. What I would like you to do now is to think of this quality that you would like to develop and as you continue thinking of it, notice how you are feeling, so that you can compare this feeling with how you feel in the next couple of stages.

(Pause for about half a minute while they do this.)

 *Many people will feel some degree of anxiety at this stage, which will become more apparent compared with how they feel in steps two and three. However if someone is already in a positive state of mind they are more likely to do this first step in the manner of step three and feel confident and excited rather than anxious.*


“**Now step two.** Think of a quality that you have already developed, at least to some extent, and notice how you are feeling as you think of this quality that you have already developed”...

(Pause while they do this , and then add)

“Just notice for yourself now how the feeling you are having while thinking of this quality that you have already developed is different from how you

were feeling in step one when you were thinking of a quality that you would like to develop...”

Pause while they make the comparison of feelings.

 *People will often find that they feel more relaxed now than they did in step one.*

“**Now step 3.** Begin by continuing as you were in step 2 by bringing the quality that you have already developed to mind...”


“ and now think in terms of adding the quality that you wish to develop (from step one) to this quality that you have already developed,

and notice how you are feeling ...”

“How is your present feeling different from how you were feeling in step one when you were first thinking of this quality you would like to develop?”

(Pause while they make this complex comparison)


Ask for verbal feedback on any differences that they noticed, particularly between the feelings in steps one and three.


 *Many people feel more confident while thinking in this way than they do in step one. They may speak of the desired quality as feeling ‘closer’ more ‘real’ or ‘attainable’.*
For those who were already thinking in this way from the beginning the change in feelings won’t be very significant.

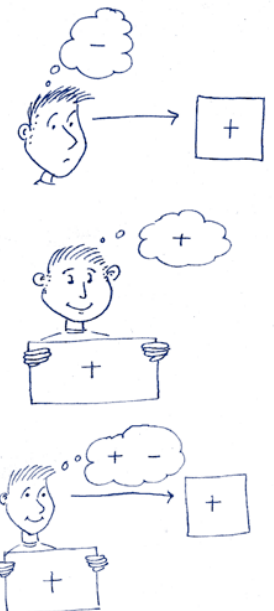
Explain and discuss each of the three steps using a diagram on the flip chart or the handout (stick-men drawings will do – see the examples on the next page and the handouts section) to illustrate the steps.

Discuss its practical relevance to development in general and generative meditation practices such as Metta Bhavana in particular. Include points such as the following:

- Beware unwittingly undermining yourself or others while thinking/speaking of ‘ideals’, ‘development’
- It’s easier to develop from a place of abundance
- Prepare for metta bhavana as adding to your abundance rather than as curing a miserable sinner!

 *Possibly mention the ‘4 right efforts’: preventing, eradicating, developing, maintaining*

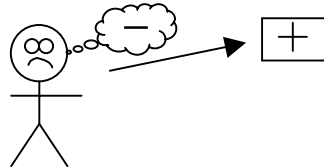
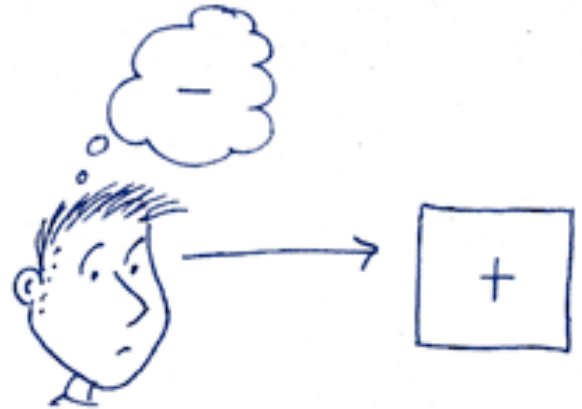
 *For more explorations along these lines see the other ‘preparing for bhavana’ sections*



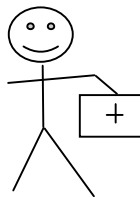
The exercise above can be used to draw out many points about how we approach our personal development (see 3 Steps Diagram handout):

*Our doubts
are traitors,
And make us
lose the good
we oft might
win
By fearing to
attempt.*
**William
Shakespeare**

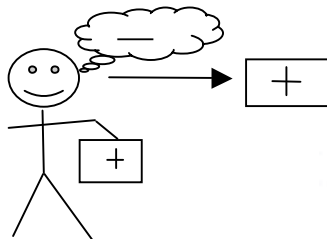
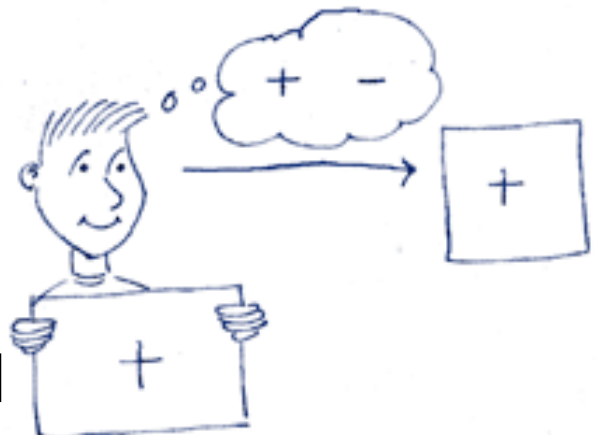
Step 1. Although you are thinking of the quality that you wish to develop, in order to identify a quality to develop you attend to some lack in your experience, which can feel discouraging. Also the desired quality is only a future possibility while the lack is experienced as a reality in the present.









Step 2. You feel more confident when experiencing a quality you have already. However there is the danger of passivity and complacency.




Step 3. If you keep in mind what you already have, then you feel more confident about developing something new.




Avoiding the pitfalls in the first stage of the Metta Bhavana

Aims	 To explore a way of developing appreciation for yourself
Key ideas	 You can appreciate yourself the way you appreciate others
Guiding Principles	 Explore and learn externally first, then apply internally
Materials	 None, although you could use a flipchart to note a few keywords
Time	 About 20 minutes
Comments	 Avoids some of the pitfalls of the 1st stage of Metta Bhavana


 *There are several stages to this experiential exploration, each of which is creating a part of a structure for appreciating oneself*


Tell the group that you are going to explore the development of positive emotions and ask them to just make a mental note of how they are feeling at the moment.


 *This gives a reference point to compare with later*

Then set them up in pairs as follows

“In pairs, preferably with someone that you don’t know yet, take a few minutes each to share with your partner what it is that you appreciate about someone that you appreciate at the moment, possibly a friend.”

 *Notice that it doesn’t specify that it should be a friend. This is in case they are not feeling particularly appreciative of their friends at the moment- or in case they can’t think of one.*

 *Talking about what you appreciate about someone is easier than trying to feel something directly. This stage is about what you appreciate, the next stage is about how you were being while appreciating. While focussing on what they appreciate, they can un-self-consciously experience their appreciation*


 *Make sure that each person has an opportunity to do this, perhaps reminding them to swap over half-way through if they are doing it one at a time*

Call everyone’s attention back to you and the wider group (but without disrupting things by having them move back to where they were sitting previously).

“Now my next question to you is this; as you were talking about what you appreciate about the person, how were you being or feeling in yourself? Just spend some time noticing this now...”

(Allow a minute or so for people to experience how they were feeling before asking for replies.)

“Okay, now it might not be easy to put into words but how would you describe how you were being or feeling?”

 *You are likely to get replies such as ‘ more open’, ‘happy’, ‘expansive’ – you could give some hints*


Take their feedback appreciatively, perhaps writing up some positive keywords on a flipchart.

Move on to the next stage fairly quickly to keep the contact with the positive feelings going.


“Now, recollecting how you were feeling as you were appreciating that person...

 *you are asking people to re-contact the feeling*

feeling warm, expansive and so on...


 *Shifting into the present tense as they are now experiencing the feeling again*

you can feel like this even though you know they are not perfect...

 *This is introducing a light negative (‘not perfect’ could be a euphemism for some big flaws) into the positive atmosphere. This reflects the pattern of the metta bhavana meditation where a positive atmosphere is built up before introducing the ‘enemy’ in the fourth stage*

How come? I’d like you to notice how can you feel like this even though you know they are not perfect. How do you do it?”

Again allow a little time for people to experience this before asking for verbal replies.

 *You are likely to get answers such as ‘their faults are in the perspective of their good qualities’*










“You have a sense of appreciating this other person and their qualities although they are not perfect. Now for the next few minutes I’d like you to try thinking of yourself in the same perspective, to think appreciatively of yourself in the same way even though you are not perfect! This is perhaps the way your friends see you, appreciatively, despite your imperfections! ...”

“So spend a few minutes now seeing yourself in this way and feeling some appreciation for yourself...”

After the meditation you could ask for feedback on how they found it.


The wise man does not permit himself to set up even in his own mind any comparisons of his friends. His friendship is capable of going to extremes with many people, evoked as it is by many qualities
Charles Dudley Warner.

Exploring how to develop positive emotions and metta

Aims	 To introduce and explore the practice of developing positive emotions
	 To introduce metta and explore ways to develop it
Key ideas	 We can develop positive emotions, how to do it
	 What metta is: an attitude and a practice
	 Ways to develop metta: Attending to existing positive emotions and using phrases, memory, imagination, sensations, intentions etc.
Guiding Principles	 It's easier to 'own' and develop something that's yours already
Materials	 A flipchart would be useful
Time	 45 –50 minutes
Comments	 This section only introduces metta, not the whole practice


Introduce the idea of intentionally developing positive emotions

Introduce the idea of generative meditations.

 *It's helpful to introduce the idea of metta and the practice of metta bhavana in the context of the four types of meditation – as a generative meditation practice- see the '**Four types of meditation**' section.*

With the group, consider how one might develop a positive emotion, for example:

“How would you develop more confidence, contentment or indeed any positive emotional state?”

 *You are later going to ask them to consider this in more depth in small-groups so for now you are just considering more generally how generative meditations might work.*

When you have some suggestions (which might mostly have come from you) such as remembering a time when you experienced it, or by noticing elements of it in your experience already you can go on to introduce the idea of metta.

Introduce the idea of metta

Introduce metta and make points such as the following

- It is an attitude of well-wishing and not just a feeling, although it may be accompanied by warm feelings.
- We naturally feel metta. For example, we find ourselves a plaster when we have cut ourselves, and

we would naturally try to protect a small child who was playing at the edge of a cliff. So we want to cultivate further something that we have already.

- It is universal and unconditional. It is universal in the sense that it is an attitude that doesn't depend on who or what it finds, but is there for all. It's unconditional in the way that a mother's love is not altered when her baby soils its nappies.
- It is caring for yourself as well as others.

Explore (in small groups) how to develop metta

Tell people that you would like them to get into small groups of four, and to spend ten minutes coming up with possible ways to develop an attitude of loving-kindness.



To make sure they've got the right idea in the small groups first explore a few ways of developing it in the big group. You may need to give suggestions.









Afterwards, take feedback from the small groups and add any extra suggestions to include such points as the following:


- phrases
 - may I/he/she be happy
 - may I/he/she be well
 - may I/he/she be free from suffering
 - may I/he/she make progress
- finding something to appreciate and then extend it, for example start by appreciating the room
- using memories, such as memories of times when you or they were at their best.
- using imagination, such as imagining rays of sunshine falling on people in turn or imagining people smiling.
- identifying positive qualities within your experience, such as kindness, contentment and appreciation and developing them.
- attending to physical sensations, such as opening around the heart and warmth

Lead a meditation to try out each of the main methods for a couple of minutes each, through developing loving-kindness towards a friend.




Designing a 25-minute loving-kindness meditation in 5 stages

Aims	 To explore the structure of the practice in order to ‘own it’ more
	 To introduce the traditional procedure in an exploratory context
Key ideas	 The structure is there to help, so don’t be intimidated by it
Guiding Principles	 People will engage more creatively with the procedures if they understand the principles and patterns involved
Materials	 A flipchart or a handout with the traditional 5 Stages
Time	 45 minutes (more if you lead through the practice)
Comments	 This section partly overlaps with the section on ‘ How to develop positive emotions and metta ’ and might best be done shortly after it.
	 If you prepare them, many groups will do very well with this


 *This exercise will work best if the group has been ‘warmed up’ and perhaps been given some hints as to how to go about it, for example by doing some of the explorations in the other sections.*

If you haven’t already done so introduce the idea of developing positive emotions and briefly introduce metta as an attitude of universal loving kindness

 *You can keep this quite short and without being too definite about what metta is, so as not to limit the explorations of the group. There will be more of an opportunity to clarify what metta is as you present the practice later.*

Tell people that although you will introduce them to a traditional meditation practice later you would like them first to have a go at designing a meditation practice for themselves. You would like them to do this in groups of four and you’ll give them about 10–15 minutes to do it.

What you would like them to do is to design a 25 minute meditation in five stages to develop loving-kindness, which will end up wishing well to all beings whatsoever!


 *The idea that you are going to end up wishing well to all beings whatsoever can be presented as a light humoured challenge. Most groups will have a laugh at the idea of attempting such a thing.*


“Even if you know a traditional way of doing it, try to explore it afresh. The idea is not just to come up with a technique but to enjoy exploring how it could work”

“So where would you start?”


“And who would you include in each of the five stages?”

You might get some suggestions from the large group first to make sure that they've got some ideas about how to do it.


 *So if someone suggests that you might begin with your family, for example, accept that as a possible way to begin.*

 *It can be helpful to have a team member in each group to help keep them on track but who won't just supply the answers.*


As they do the exercise in the small groups keep your ears open to check that they are roughly on track or are having a useful discussion.

 *You might go around dropping in a few hints or tips, being careful not to take away the initiative*

When the time is up (or earlier if they seem in danger of slowing down) take feedback from the groups, being positive about all the contributions.

 *You don't have to take feedback from the groups, after all the value of the exercise is more in their exploring than in their conclusions. However they probably will appreciate an opportunity to share their conclusions or hear a little from the other groups.*
Also you don't need to go around each group, if they are likely to repeat each other or to find it awkward. After you have heard from one group you can just ask if there are any variations or new ideas that others would like to contribute.

Using a flipchart or handout describe the traditional 5 stage metta bhavana using self, friend etc. perhaps making some of the points on the next page.

 *Apparently the way of practicing metta with our 5 stages is not found anywhere in the discourses but only in the commentaries .e.g. Buddhaghosha's Visuddhimagga page 296. (see note 57 page 196 of **Satipatthana the direct path to realisation** by **Anlayo (Windhorse 2003)** Anālayo says that what the Buddha taught was 'an unspecified pervasion of all directions with an attitude of loving-kindness (cf e.g. MI 38)'*

Perhaps recommend that people do the practice in this traditional way as the structure can guard against a lopsided practice of metta

Describe the 5 Stages:

1. **self**: if this stage is too difficult then do the second stage first.



Perhaps mention the ways in which one already have a caring attitude to oneself (e.g. food, clothes, caring for health etc.)

2. **a friend**: it is best to choose someone of about your age and for whom you have no sexual feelings. They do not have to be a best friend, just someone you like or are getting on well with at the moment. We are building up positive emotion in a case where it is easy.



For some, it might make it easier to choose people for the stages if you point out that the categories of friend, enemy etc. are not sharply distinct: for example, nobody is completely 'neutral' so you don't have to choose exactly the right person.



*Beware of labouring the age/gender/not parental or filial/living-not dead aspects at this stage. Those details can be spelled out later – one doesn't want to give the impression that there are lots of ways of going **wrong**.*









3. **a neutral person**, preferably someone you know but for whom you have no particular feeling, otherwise the postman or a shop assistant
We are extending the scope of metta as we are aiming for something unconditional.
4. **an enemy** or difficult person or someone you have an aversion towards.
It is like bringing in a negative which tests how unconditional well-wishing is. Perhaps consider how their friends would see them...
5. **All beings**: first equalise well-wishing across all four people so far
Then include everyone in the room, then move outwards to the town or city you are in, then to the whole country, then out to the whole world, then all living beings whatsoever on Earth, then all living beings in the universe
to the limits of your imagination

Before leading them through the practice ask them to choose the people for the stages, check that they are ready and then lead the group through the practice




For their physical comfort keep the stages short, 3-5 minutes max

Short exploration- scaling questions for positive emotions


Aims	 to explore the difference between ‘all or nothing’ and gradual steps
Key ideas	 ‘Degrees of’ not just ‘all or nothing’ (also ‘process’ not just ‘result’)
	 Attend to existing positive qualities (e.g. contentment and confidence)
	 Develop and increase gradually
Guiding Principles	 Incremental language/thinking may make changing experience easier
Materials	 none
Time	 5 minutes (more with discussion)
Comments	 Many points can be drawn from this short exploration.

You could introduce the following as an exploration in how we think of the qualities that we experience, such as contentment.


 *Depending on the context you might want to precede this with a little settling down, such as a body-scan. One context for talking about contentment, confidence and enthusiasm (CCE) is when you are talking about preparing for meditation practice and the body awareness could be done with an attitude of kind awareness (See the sections on body-scan or kind awareness. This section is also related to the ‘preparing for bhavana’ sections*

“Now I’d like you to attend to your level of contentment to be sitting here in the room with your experience. On a scale of one to ten, where ten is ‘totally contented’, and one is ‘barely contented at all’, roughly what number would you give to your current level of contentment?”

Pause for up to a minute while they do this.

 *The idea of a scale presupposes degrees or levels of the quality rather than making all or nothing judgements.*

*The best is
the enemy
of the good*
Voltaire

 *In the unlikely event that someone rates it at ‘1’ you might (later) explore if their criteria for the quality are too exacting.*

“Now whatever number you have, I’d like you to attend to and identify why it is not lower on the scale. Why did you not give it a lower number?”

Again, pause while they do this.



This is asking people to attend more to their reasons for feeling contentment. Often this attention will lead to an increase in the level.

“Now having done this, what has happened to the number? Would you still give it the original number or has the number moved in any way?”

After a pause take feedback. You are likely to find that most people are feeling more contented, that the number has increased by a small or even a large amount.

This can be the basis of further exploration or comments.



However, for some the number may not have changed at all. That’s okay, it all depends on how people process the questions. It can sometimes be interesting (and respectful) to find out in more detail how they have done it, although you may need to be careful not to wander too far from your main points.

Some of the **key ideas** which could be discussed are mentioned at the start of this section, and they could be related to the context of personal development and meditation.

For example, you could explain how the use of a scale helps to move away from thinking in terms of black and white – i.e. whether you are content or not. It can help you to focus on any elements of what you want to develop. If we dwell on them, they are likely to increase.

When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you have fun, you can do amazing things,
Joe Namath
US footballer

Other options

As well as ‘contentment’ you could also do this exploration with say ‘confidence about setting up your posture’ or ‘confidence about meditation x’

You could explore making small improvements, for example:









“How could you increase this quality by half a point (or even half a percent!)?”

“What would you need to do to make your next meditation just slightly better than your last one?”



As mentioned in the comment above, this little exploration is related to many of the other sections so might fit in with a number of them. □

Exploration – how would you prepare for metta bhavana?

Aims	 To consider how one would prepare (set-up) for metta bhavana
Key ideas	 Different practices benefit from different preparation  Some effort beforehand may make the practice easier
Guiding Principles	 Exploring with a question may stimulate more than statements would  It's good to practice and apply whatever theoretical conclusions
Materials	 none
Time	 5 – 10 minutes (more if followed by a meditation and feedback)
Comments	 This is for people who already know how to do the practice. This is just one example of many such explorations you could devise.

This exploration could be done in the large group or you could ask people to get together in small groups of three or four and spend 10 minutes discussing how to prepare for metta bhavana


You might raise the question like this:

“How would you modify your preparation or setting-up if you were planning to do the metta bhavana, rather than say, mindfulness of breathing?”

Take the feedback from the group(s) appreciatively and expand it to include points such as the following:







- It's helpful to choose the people for the stages.
- Choose some ways to work this time. For example with phrases, images, memories etc.
- Use kind awareness when bringing awareness to your experience.
- Generally focus more on emotions
- Cultivate positive emotions such as contentment, confidence and enthusiasm.

Apply the suggestions, as appropriate, to preparing for a session of metta bhavana.

 *The value of theoretical discussions will be emphasised if you make a habit of putting conclusions and suggestions into effect to try them out. It exemplifies a practical and exploratory attitude, especially if you evaluate later too.*

Afterwards you could ask people how they feel the preparation influenced the meditation. □

Life 'off the cushion', and a few homework ideas

Aims	 To extend the scope of developing metta beyond the meditation
Key ideas	 Meditation affects living and vice-versa
Guiding Principles	 What seems obvious to you may still need to be said
Materials	
Time	 Variable
Comments	 There's a lot more that could be done to extend this section, these are just a few ideas to get you started...

Extend the scope of the meditation by talking about it's relationship with the rest of one's life, ethics etc.

Perhaps give 'homework', some ideas below.

Expressing metta in daily life

How life 'on the cushion' affects life 'off the cushion' and vice-versa

Loving-kindness as the basis of Buddhist ethics, expressing metta in action.

The five precepts

Etc.

Some homework ideas

See also Maitreyabandhu's **meditation diary** booklet which is given to course participants with suggestions for activities throughout the week.


Below are just a few suggestions for practice throughout the week:

"Get into a comfortable posture and bring kind awareness to your body starting with your toes. Try letting go of any tensions you might notice."

"Notice when you are enjoying and appreciating your friends and when you are enjoying and appreciating yourself.

"Practice feeling gratitude towards your friends, and find a way to express it."

"Reflect on the things in your life that you don't want to change, perhaps asking your friends what about you they would like you not to change."

 *In Cambridge, we have sent people a 'Mindful Moments' email each week with a few suggestions for daily practice, which gave them a sense of connection and continuity beyond the course. □*

Handouts

The handouts on the following pages are used with this material:

The Four Types of Meditation

Maintaining then Developing (3 steps diagram)

Developing loving-kindness (metta bhavana)

The four types of meditation

The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind.
William James

Meditation is largely a matter of mental training through consciously attending to particular types of positive experiences - experiences which sometimes arise quite naturally in the course of everyday living.

The many hundreds of formal meditation techniques found in religious or secular traditions throughout the world can usefully be considered as belonging to one or a combination of the following four loose categories:

- Concentrative** for calming and focussing the mind
- Generative** for bringing some quality or ability into being
- Receptive** for being in a mode of receptive attention to experience
- Reflective** for contemplating some theme (such as ‘interconnectedness’ or ‘impermanence’)

Any particular meditation practice will include elements of all the four approaches but with the emphasis particularly on one aspect.

The ‘mindfulness of breathing’ meditation, for example, is primarily a concentrative meditation practice, where one settles the mind through attending to the sensations of the breathing as a focus.

In the ‘development of loving-kindness’ meditation (*metta bhavana*) one develops an attitude of loving-kindness using memory, imagination and awareness of bodily sensations.

In either of these meditation practices, however, a balance needs to be maintained between consciously guiding attention (leading) and being receptive to whatever experience is arising (following). This attitude of open receptive attention is the emphasis of the receptive type of meditation practice.

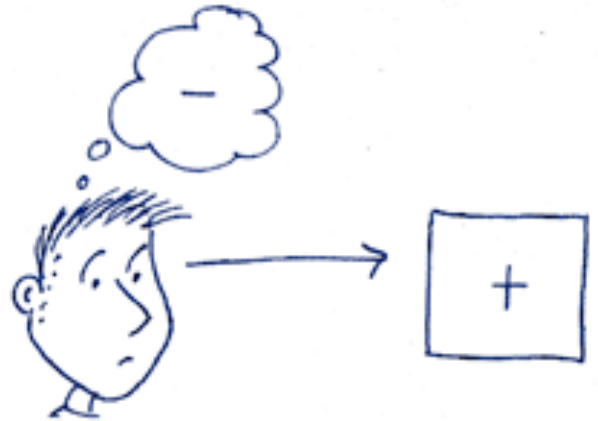
Reflective meditation involves repeatedly returning the attention to some theme, again whilst being open to whatever arises.



Maintaining then Developing (3 steps diagram)

*Our doubts
are traitors,
And make us
lose the good
we oft might
win
By fearing to
attempt.*
**William
Shakespeare**

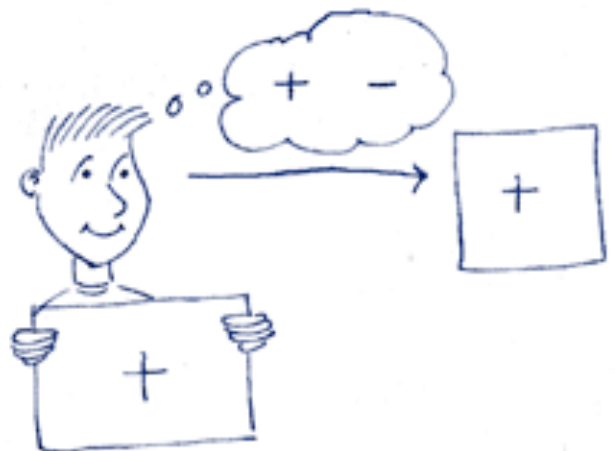
1. Although you are thinking of the quality that you wish to develop, in order to identify a quality to develop you attend to some lack in your experience, which can feel discouraging. Also the desired quality is only a future possibility while the lack is experienced as a reality in the present.



2. You feel more confident when experiencing a quality you have already. However there is the danger of passivity and complacency.



3. If you keep in mind what you already have, then you feel more confident about developing something new.



Developing Loving-kindness (Metta Bhavana)

Introduction

Bhavana means bringing into being. Metta is an attitude of well-wishing, loving kindness, and friendliness. While this may involve feelings of warmth, it is primarily an *attitude* of well-wishing. Metta bhavana involves increasingly developing an attitude of loving-kindness towards all beings, independent of your likes and dislikes.

You already demonstrate loving-kindness to some extent, in the way you care for yourself in keeping warm and dry, for example, or the way you would protect a person from stepping out into oncoming traffic. Metta bhavana is about developing this and extending it to more beings.

How to cultivate metta

There are many different ways to develop metta so it's worth noticing and exploring what does or doesn't work for you at any given time, such as:

- Using **phrases** to focus your intention, such as:
 - may I/you/he/she be happy
 - may I/you/he/she be well
 - may I/you/he/she be free from suffering
 - may I/you/he/she make progress
- Using **memories**, such as reconnecting with times when you were experiencing an attitude of loving-kindness in the past.
- Using **imagination**, for example, to imagine people being happy or well or to include them in warm rays of light.
- Attending to **sensations** in your body associated with loving-kindness, for example, openness, warmth and relaxation.

The stages of the practice

It is usually best to choose the people for the stages below before you begin the meditation.

You begin the practice by acknowledging your current emotional state, whatever this is. Then it is helpful to search for any elements of metta that may be already present, however small (such as an attitude of kindness, appreciation or well-wishing) and to dwell on them with a view to increasing them.

The ultimate lesson all of us have to learn is unconditional love, which includes not only others but ourselves as well.
Elisabeth
Kubler-Ross

1st stage: Self Contact and develop an attitude of loving-kindness in relation to yourself.

2nd stage: Friend Extend this attitude of loving-kindness towards someone you like or appreciate. To more easily differentiate metta from other emotional attitudes it is usually best to choose a living person of about your own age, and for whom you don't have sexual feelings.

3rd stage: Neutral person Now extend your well-wishing and loving kindness towards a 'neutral' person, preferably someone you have some contact with but for whom you have no particular feelings of like or dislike

4th stage: Enemy Include in your loving-kindness a person you dislike or currently have a difficulty with (not someone you *loathe* which might overwhelm your metta: also bear in mind that well-wishing does not necessarily imply approval of any of their specific behaviours).

5th stage: Everyone First equalise your well-wishing across all four people so far: yourself, the friend, neutral person and enemy.

Then gradually extend the well-wishing to include all living beings.

Our friends show us what we can do, our enemies teach us what we must do.
Goethe