

A lovingkindness meditation in response to the 9/11 disasters.

Welcome to this special version of the Metta Bhavana meditation practice – the Development of Lovingkindness -- which I've made in response to the recent attacks on New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania.

You might wish to read this meditation aloud at a church or meditation group. Take your time with the reading, relaxing as you do so and leaving a pause after each sentence so that people have time to process what you have said. The original recording lasts for just under 17 minutes.

“Metta” is the Buddhist word for love – a love that transcends national, religious, and cultural barriers. And “Metta Bhavana” means the cultivation of metta; the cultivation of this kind of love. It's a practice that promotes healing and promotes wholeness, and I hope that you will find this practice useful in dealing with the aftermath of these disasters.

Posture and relaxation

So, first of all, you can set up for your meditation practice by getting yourself into a comfortable, relaxed posture; preferably sitting upright so that you're able to maintain some awareness, maintain some sense of energy and vitality. And we're all a little tense just now, so take your awareness into your body, and relax your muscles. Letting go in the shoulders and your arms, and in the legs. Relaxing the muscles in the back of your neck, relaxing your jaw, and your eyes, and your forehead.

And as you breath out, you can imagine a wave of relaxation sweeping downwards through your body, washing all of your tensions down, out of your body, into the earth. And as you breath in, you can imagine a wave of energy flowing upwards from the earth into your body, filing every fiber of your being.

1. Cultivating love for yourself

And so, having relaxed and having energized yourself, you can begin to take your awareness into your heart – into the area around your heart – becoming aware of whatever feelings and emotions are present. And the emotions that are present may be positive emotions, they may be negative emotions, or perhaps you're feeling a little numb and you're not too sure how you're feeling right now. But whatever you find there, just regard that as being where you're starting from. Wherever you are is the only place you can start from. We're going to be working with whatever's there. So just open up to whatever is there; whatever is present in your heart.

And we've probably all experienced a wide variety of emotions over the last week; perhaps fear, perhaps ill will, and I'd like you to forgive yourself for any negative

emotions that have arisen. And we need to forgive ourselves in the context of resolving to live up to whatever is best within ourselves. We need to forgive ourselves in the context of resolving to develop as much love and as much wisdom as we can. For one thing we have learned is that there's not enough love and not enough wisdom in the world. And so we can do something about that right now.

So staying in touch with your emotions, I'd like you to wish yourself well. And you can do that by repeating the phrase, "May I be well, may I be happy, may I be free from suffering." And you can imagine yourself well and happy. So just keep on repeating those phrases, "May I be well, may I be happy, may I be free from suffering." Noticing what effects those words, those phrases, have upon your heart.

Continuing to relax. Working patiently with your emotions.

Taking your time. There's no hurry. Repeating these phrases and letting your emotions unfold in their own time.

2. Cultivating love for friends and benefactors

And in the next stage of the practice we're going to call to mind friends and benefactors – those who are directly or indirectly involved in these disasters. May they live without fear. May they be well. May they be happy. May they be free from suffering.

We can cultivate our aspiration that our friends develop their own love and wisdom, so that they may respond compassionately and appropriately to these events.

Wishing our friends well; strengthening the love that we already have for them; increasing the amount of love that's in the world.

And there are many people who are friends to us that we tend to take for granted. We have many benefactors in the world. There are those who protect us and who protect our freedoms. There are the armed forces and the volunteer reserves; may those people be well, may they be happy, may they be free from suffering. May their love and wisdom grow.

There are the rescuers, the firefighters, the hospital workers; those who tirelessly serve, protecting us, benefiting us. May we experience gratitude towards them. May we appreciate the efforts they make. May they be well, may they be happy, may they be free from suffering.

3. Loving "Neutral" people

And in the third stage of the practice, we can call to mind people that we don't know; people that we haven't met and who have been directly or indirectly affected by these disasters. We can call to mind those who have died, we can call to mind their families and friends who are grieving, and we can wish them well.

May they be well, may they find happiness once more. May their suffering come to a close

as quickly as is appropriate.

And perhaps one of the things that we can learn from this disaster – from our encounters with people on the news and newspapers, if that no-one is neutral when we consider their suffering. Whenever we consider that someone is suffering, there is a part of us that responds with compassion and with love.

So here we're strengthening our connection – our solidarity – with people we don't know, wishing them well. Wishing that they be free from suffering

4. Loving our enemies

And we also don't know our enemies – those who have perpetrated these atrocities. And we may not want or be able to forgive the perpetrators of these violent acts. But we should remember that they too are capable of love; they too are capable of change. And it would be a beneficial thing for the world if they could find the peace and love in their hearts to cease from violence. So we can wish that they be well, that they be well, that they be happy, that they be free from suffering.

And in wishing this we're not wishing that they fulfill their darkest desires. We're wishing that they find a true love that allows them to relate differently to the world. We wish that they will experience metta; a love for others that transcends national, religious, and cultural boundaries. We can wish that they let go of their hatreds and find peace. May they be well, may they find true happiness. May they be free from suffering. May they realize the consequences of their actions and act accordingly.

5. Loving all sentient beings

And in the last stage of this practice we're going to wish that all sentient beings – all beings capable of feeling suffering – be well. May they all be happy. May they all be free from suffering. And you can imagine that you're holding the whole of this beautiful, precious world in your heart, bathing the world in a healing love; bathing the world in metta. Letting go of our own hatreds so that we can make the world a better place. For there is too much hatred in this world that we live in.

May all beings be well, may all beings be happy, may all beings be free from suffering.

Concluding the practice

And then, finally, letting go of the practice. Coming back to an awareness of ourselves sitting here. Being aware of the changes that have taken place in our hearts, whether those changes are quite subtle or whether they are quite noticeable.

The slowly, in our own time, opening our eyes, and taking our metta – our love – back into the world.