

Mettā Sutta (5 of 5) Breathing Room for the Good Heart

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

loving-kindness, goodwill, abiding, virtuous, freedom, reborn, *brahmavihāras*, chant, protect

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We have come to the fifth talk on the “*Mettā Sutta*.” Yesterday I talked about the fourth section of the sutta, which is about cultivating *mettā* – loving-kindness, goodwill – in a boundless, unlimited way. Loving-kindness is not held in check or restricted by any attachments, hostility, greed, or ways we define and limit ourselves. There is an openness and freedom from which our goodwill – our good heart – can radiate.

My translation of the sutta is on the IMC website at <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/metta-sutta/>.

The last section of the sutta reads as follows:

*Standing or walking, sitting or lying down,
Whenever one is alert,
May one stay with this recollection* (with this perspective).

This is called a sublime abiding, here and now.

“Abiding” is a way of living. Whether sitting quietly in meditation or going about our lives, we sense that we are resting in a lot of goodness. We are resting in loving-kindness and goodwill. Abiding is like a disposition or attitude that comes along with us rather than something we keep practicing.

Whether we are standing, walking, sitting, or lying down – whatever we are doing – it is imperative not to be caught up in our thoughts. Not to be ruminating, lost in preoccupations, or involved in resentments, annoyances, and complaints. In particular, not to be caught up or involved with negative self-thinking.

Buddhism focuses a lot on the absence of anything unwholesome in the mind and heart. One description of the ultimate goal in Buddhism is to be free of greed, hatred, and delusion. We realize that hatred, delusion, and greed can be embedded very subtly in us. Some people say: “Well, being free of greed, hate, and delusion is not good enough. We should have a greater goal, like love.”

It is wonderful to be free of greed, hate, and delusion. Greed, hate, and delusion cause a lot of harm to yourself and others. To simply be free of them. Be free of any negative self-thinking. Be free of any hostility or

criticalness towards yourself. Be free of any idea that you are anything less than beautiful. A song about thirty years ago had the lyrics: “How could anyone ever tell you, you were anything less than beautiful? How could anyone ever tell you, you were less than whole?” Some people tell themselves that.

We are trying in Buddhist practice to free ourselves from greed, hatred, and delusion. To experience ourselves without negative self-thinking, and to feel confident that it is okay to do so. There is no authority telling us that we are wrong, bad, less than, or unacceptable in some way. To let go of all the negative self-talk. To let go of the idea of only if I have more will I be happy – only if I have more will I be respected and loved.

Greed has a way of limiting our good hearts. How could anyone ever tell you that you need more to be beautiful? How could anyone ever tell you that you need more to be whole? Your wholeness and beauty do not depend on getting more things or having more experiences. It is already here waiting for you – so rest in that. Find that attitude and trust it. Live with that attitude in your life. Carry it with you and remember it. Remember to have kind regard as you go through life.

The sutta continues:

*One who is virtuous, endowed with vision,
Not taken by views,*

*And having overcome all greed for sensual
pleasure
Will not be reborn again.*

“Virtuous” is not to be caught in the constrictions of unwholesomeness. Not to be caught in meanness and hostility towards anyone, or caught in greed concerning other people. To be virtuous means living from a very different place than greed, hatred, and delusion.

“Endowed with vision” is to be quiet, still, and calm enough to see clearly. We cannot see clearly when we are agitated, spinning – thoughts jumping from one to another – and jumping to conclusions. Endowed with vision is to be able to see well what is going on here.

“Not taken by views” means not to be involved in fixed views – not attached to particular views. There are views, ideas, opinions, and interpretations that have some value. But when we hold on to them tightly – insisting that we are right – it tends to cause harm to self and others. Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on not holding on to fixed views. Not to hammer our views into other people. Instead, to be fluid, relaxed, and flexible with things.

“To be virtuous,” “endowed with vision,” “not taken by views,” and “having overcome all greed for sensual pleasures” – these represent a high level of maturity in

Buddhist practice. This is where Buddhist practice is meant to go, evolve, drop into. Sensual pleasures are okay – it is greed that is the problem.

If you do all those things, the sutta goes on to say, “One will not be reborn again.” “Not be reborn again” is an expression that refers to a liberated heart. The theory goes that when we die, the heart-mind that has no clinging, grasping, and attachment will not reach out and grab on to the next life. Without that greed, we allow freedom to be the end result of life, which is considered beautiful in Buddhism. At the end of life, we let go into freedom. We have done enough grasping in our lives. To come back and grasp more is not considered ideal in Buddhism.

I tend to interpret these ideas about rebirth as how we are born and reborn moment by moment, day by day. When we are no longer reborn in this moment-to-moment way, we live in freedom. We also live in love, goodwill, and *mettā*. One great thing about liberation is that it releases and frees up the goodness of our hearts – the goodwill, compassion, and care that we have for all living beings, and maybe even for our planet itself.

We see in the ancient teachings of the Buddha that with liberation comes easy access to all four of the *brahmavihāras* – loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), appreciative joy (*muditā*), equanimity

(*upekkhā*). The *brahmavihāras*, in a sense, live in us. They get revealed when we have let go of all the things that get in the way. Some things that get in the way are not believing in ourselves, not trusting and valuing the goodness of our hearts, and allowing other things to seem much more important.

Your good heart is probably your most important wealth – your most important asset. Stay close to it. Protect it and allow it to grow. So much goodness and wonderfulness come when your good heart has breathing room to be a part of your life.

When we lose contact with that good heart, from a Buddhist perspective, we are impoverished. No amount of wealth, defensiveness, and acquisition will ever be enough to fulfill us. We are fulfilled from the inside out when we relax, open, and provide breathing room for our good hearts.

I hope that spending this week on the “*Mettā Sutta*,” the discourse on loving-kindness, has been nice for you. It is a wonderful text. You might consider memorizing it.

It is said in Buddhism that the loving-kindness sutta, in particular, is a protective chant. If you recite it to yourself, it protects you. Perhaps, it protects you mostly from yourself. That is probably where we need the most protection. But who knows what wonderful field of

goodwill chanting the loving-kindness sutta helps create. It may also safeguard you from others.

I certainly encourage you to memorize it and recite it to yourself. May you be happy and well and appreciate yourself. Thank you