

Sati and Mettā (Mindfulness and Loving-kindness)

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Thank you for your practice - each one of you. Your practice is an act in many ways, but it is also a quiet form of resistance against all the painful and destructive things happening in the world right now. It is a private form of protest, if you like. By cultivating clarity, kindness, and wisdom, you are refusing to add more confusion, hatred, or fear to the world.

I would like to begin by sharing some reflections on *Sati* and *Mettā*: mindfulness and loving-kindness. I am sure you have noticed in your own experience how closely intertwined these two qualities are. When we are fully present in a relaxed and open way, there is almost always an attitude of friendliness and interest - that is *Mettā*. And when there is *Mettā*, especially when we actively cultivate it, mindfulness must be present. We need to know where the mind is and what it is doing.

Although *Sati* and *Mettā* are closely connected, they are not the same. They have different characteristics, different functions, and they appear differently in experience. Please do not confuse them. And yet, they are like perfect twins: distinct, but always working together.

In *Vipassanā* practice, mindfulness and wisdom come to the foreground. We are cultivating clear seeing - awareness of what is. In *Mettā* practice, the emphasis is different. We are actively cultivating an attitude of friendliness, care, and kindness. In English we speak of "careful attention," and that word *care* is important. To pay attention deeply, the mind has to care. This caring quality is already *Mettā*, even though it is not the explicit phrase-based practice of *Mettā-bhāvanā*.

When we practice *Mettā*, we intentionally turn the mind toward wishes such as, "May I be well. May I be happy. May I be at ease." We are cultivating one of the *Brahmavihāras* - loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, or equanimity - using phrases to guide the mind. But to do this, mindfulness must be present. We need to know what we are saying, to be aware of the intention and the feeling behind it. Mindfulness allows *Mettā* to arise fully; *Mettā* allows mindfulness to deepen into something far more than bare awareness.

Together, they open the door to wisdom - not wisdom as an idea, but wisdom as direct understanding of the way things actually are, rather than how we wish they were. To see clearly, we need tenderness. I often think of this as devotion: devotion to this moment of experience, just as it is.

This quality of engagement is essential for our unfolding in the Dhamma. It is very easy to take daily practice for granted. I know this in my own experience. I sit on the cushion, tired or distracted, and the mind simply zones out. Or it thinks about the next task, or about something troubling. That is not really engaging in the practice.

Thoughts will arise - that is the nature of the mind. But then what happens? Do we simply let the thinking run on endlessly, telling ourselves we are being kind by not interfering? Or do we notice: "Thinking is happening"? Do we become curious about it? Do we observe its nature?

Engaged practice sounds like this: "I sat down to be mindful, and five minutes passed in thinking. Interesting. The mind is not controllable." That is not a concept - it is direct seeing. Or: "There was mindfulness, and then it disappeared." That is change, directly known. Every moment of noticing like this is information. This is how wisdom develops.

Rather than drifting on the surface - telling ourselves vaguely that "everything is impermanent" or "there is suffering today" - we look more closely. How is it suffering? How is it changing? What just arose? What just

passed away? Moment by moment, we gather this data, and gradually a three-dimensional understanding of reality forms on its own.

This careful attention, infused with *Mettā*, is one of the kindest things you can do for yourself. Five minutes of truly engaged practice is far more powerful than an hour of half-engaged sitting. Habit matters. Many of you know what the early days of a retreat can be like: enthusiasm is there, but the mind resists. That resistance does not arise in a vacuum - it reflects the habits we have been cultivating all along.

If you practice daily with genuine engagement, even briefly, the mind learns what to do. When you sit down on retreat, it recognizes the territory. But if daily practice becomes a time to rest, zone out, or think about your life, that is what the mind will do later as well. We are not alone in this; this is human. As the Buddha said, whatever one frequently thinks about becomes the inclination of the mind.

Practice is not about perfection. Do not expect the mind to obey you. If the mind were controllable, we would all have been enlightened decades ago. Wisdom and compassion do not arise by force. They develop gradually, through patient, kind engagement.

Light is what you are cultivating. Please do not underestimate the power of this. Often we do not know what we are doing when we practice. We do not see the results immediately. *Mettā* practice is a good example: you repeat the phrases thousands of times, and nothing seems to happen. And then one day, something difficult occurs, and a spontaneous kindness arises in the mind - unexpected, unforced. That is how it works.

We cannot command wholesome states to arise. But if we practice patiently and kindly, they will arise on their own. Every moment of practice is a gift to your future self: "May you be happy. May you be free from suffering."

Mindfulness and *Mettā* working together are immensely powerful. We never know when a seed will ripen, or what it will look like when it does. Enlightenment is never what we imagine. As the Buddha said, whatever you conceive in the mind, the truth is always different - especially when it comes to *Nibbāna*. Expectation only gets in the way. That is why friendliness toward each moment is essential. If we are not open to what is here, we will miss it.

Although I have spoken a lot about cushion practice, the Buddha was very clear: practice happens while sitting, standing, walking, and lying down - in every waking moment. Please do not limit practice to formal meditation. In daily life, start small. Change happens most easily in small steps.

Choose something simple and repetitive. Walking up stairs. Washing your hands. Stroking your cat. Notice the body. Notice the mind. Or choose something less pleasant - going to the toilet, for example. This is an area where we usually tune out, and the Buddha explicitly encouraged mindfulness there. Disgust, aversion, neutrality - these are all experiences worth knowing. This body is nature. It is not personal. It does not need to be liked, only understood and accepted with kindness.

Find one small activity each day and use it as a private meditation hall. Engage fully. Be curious. Be gentle. Trust yourself. Sometimes it is helpful to stay close to the breath; sometimes to open awareness more broadly; sometimes to do *Mettā-bhāvanā*. One approach is not more advanced than another. The practice is responsive, not rigid.

Engagement is never casual. It is not drifting or thinking *about* experience. It is being fully with experience, in a way that is appropriate to the moment. What develops from this is balance - equanimity infused with care, wisdom free from clinging. This balance is deeply needed in our world.

Liberating wisdom takes time. If you are interested in freedom from clinging, that is the work of a lifetime. This is a gradual path, with moments of sudden insight along the way. Those moments come as gifts - often from a version of yourself who practiced sincerely years ago, or yesterday, or five minutes ago.

So please be patient. Be kind. Keep engaging. You are planting seeds, even when you cannot see them yet.