

Limitless Thoughts of Wellbeing

Adapted from: Limitless Thoughts by Thanissaro Bhikhu

During loving kindness meditation, we radiate goodwill: goodwill for ourselves, goodwill for the people around us. And we can take this further. We can try to develop a continual attitude that arises from the loving kindness meditation. Keeping in mind the wish for your own true happiness and wishing for the true happiness of the people around us. Loving Kindness is one of those thoughts that doesn't need to have a limit. However much true happiness you gain, you're not taking anything else away from anyone else. However much they gain, they're not taking anything away from you. It's good to be able to put the mind in an unlimited state by thinking of unlimited things like that.

The Buddha talks about greed, anger, and delusion as things that make a limit. As long as we allow greed, anger, and delusion to hold sway over our minds, we're limiting ourselves. Then there's a whole question of self identification: That too is a limit. The Buddha says that whatever you identify as your self, that's a limit on you. We counteract these limited contactions with limitless thoughts of inclusion and loving kindness. In other words, while your mind is dwelling on the idea of goodwill for yourself, goodwill for other people, You are creating a wholesome state. You're not creating any opening for the limitations of greed or anger to come in to the mind. That way you help to open things up, open up the windows in your head, let the air come in. That puts you in the right frame of mind for meditation, focusing on your object of meditation.

One may forget that what determines the pain and pleasure in the mind, the stress and ease in the mind, the sorrow and happiness in the mind, comes from our perceptions and interpretations. It doesn't come from things. So as we're meditating, we're learning how to focus on our minds to see what we're doing, to see where there are slips in our awareness, lapses in our mindfulness that allow us to do things that are not in our best interest. This is why meditation focuses so much on developing continual mindfulness and alertness. These are the two most helpful qualities in the mind.

Mindfulness simply means keeping something in mind. Alertness means noticing what you're doing, and what's happening around you. We already have these qualities to a certain extent, but we've never fully developed them to see how far they can take us. So as we're meditating, that's what we're doing: developing these two most helpful qualities in our mind. Keep the object of meditation in mind. And watch the mind's movement. Alert sensitivity requires being fully present, and also being very open to noticing what's coming in through your senses.

When you're not really paying that much attention to the present moment, there are lots of distractions arising, and they fragment your attention. But the more fully you can immerse yourself in the object of meditation, the less room there is for unwholesome states to arise. The mind becomes more fully here so that you can observe it, so that you begin to watch it in action.

The Buddha's approach to dealing with the untamed and distracted mind is not so much tracing things back to what you did as a child, as is done in psychotherapy. BUddha tells you to focus more on looking at your habitual patterns as they arise, as they keep coming back again and again and again. You don't have to ask, "What happened when I was a child, why did this happen?" You just have to look at what you're doing, to see the unnecessary suffering you're causing yourself. Or you can keep an eye out for any lack of openness and honesty in the mind: What's that doing to the mind? Do you want to do that? Do you continue wanting to do that as you see the stress that it's causing?

Sometimes this may seem threatening, opening up these unwholesome patterns of behavior, but as meditating, staying with the object of meditation, making it very comfortable, you're also developing an attitude of gentleness, being gentle, not forcing it too much, just allowing yourself to feel really good and uplifted. The gentler you are in meditation, the more collected the mind gets. The more collected the mind is, the more you can really look into what's going on, with a gentleness that doesn't scare these things away, and a clarity that doesn't get swayed by distraction. That way you don't have to

be afraid of the things that get come up. You don't have to rejectl. You can acknowledge, yes, there is that the mind.

The world tells us that things that are happening and other people are on the other side of the world are the most important thing going on. But you don't have to believe that, because your world is being shaped by your what you pay attention to right now. You want to understand this process of attention and intentions. What does it mean for the mind to act? What's the difference between a simple event in the mind, the appearance of a feeling, and an action, the intention? How are intentions formed? What goes into that process? What kind of perceptions, what kind of questions do you ask yourself? What kind of connection in the mind and the body drives your decisions? Often you'll catch yourself doing something, and you'll say, "Wait a minute, what did that come from?" The decision seemed to be made by itself, and little tiny things triggered it. That's what you've got to look into, so that you can be more sensitive and actually see the trigger. Often the trigger, on closer inspection, will seem have to produced an over sized response. Why on earth did that trigger spark that intention, spark that action?

This is probably one of the scariest things about our own minds: Our minds are shaping our lives, and yet we don't know how and why they're doing it. As meditators, we're putting ourselves in a better position to see the *how* and the *why*, and gain more insight about and more control over those actions. But before you can see the movements of the mind, you have to be very still.

Cultivating this stillness in meditation is a very immediate way of showing goodwill to yourself and other—because it is both a wholesome and nurturing state to abide in and a way of developing skillful means to spread loving kindness in your daily life.

Dhammapada

- Buddha

1. Mind precedes all mental states.
Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought.
If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts
suffering follows one like the wheel that follows
the foot of the ox.
 2. Mind precedes all mental states.
Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought.
If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness
follows one like his never-departing shadow.
 3. "He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me,
he robbed me."
Those who harbor such thoughts **do not** still their
hatred.
 4. "He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me,
he robbed me."
Those who **do not harbor** such thoughts still their
hatred.
 5. Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world.
By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased.
This is a law eternal.
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