

## Buddha's Top 11 Lovingkindness Benefits

### 11 Benefits of Loving-Friendliness Meditation —Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

We don't need an ideal society or a perfect world to practice loving-friendliness. We aren't practicing to save the world or make it perfect. We practice for ourselves, for our own peace and well-being. Any effects beyond that are byproducts. If the focus is outside ourselves, we will never succeed. But fortunately, our own well-being is intimately bound up with the well-being of others; so truly practicing metta (loving-friendliness) for our own benefit does benefit others.

In the Discourse on the Benefits of Loving-Friendliness (Metta Nisamsa Sutta), the Buddha lists 11 benefits derived from practicing metta—and I might add that many of these benefits are being confirmed by contemporary scientific research!

Here is the Buddha's list:

#### 1. You sleep well.

When you go to bed feeling loving-friendliness toward yourself and others, you will be relaxed and will sleep peacefully.

#### 2. You wake up feeling well.

When you get a good night's sleep, you wake up feeling rested and relaxed. With a relaxed mind and body, you are able to connect with family, friends, relatives, neighbors, and even strangers in a genuine and centered way. You feel fresh, uplifted, and joyful all day.

#### 3. You're not likely to have nightmares.

When you practice metta, you become solid enough to face whatever arises. And in fact, the Buddha said it's unlikely you'll have nightmares when you practice metta.

#### 4. Your body relaxes and your face is joyful.

Your body reflects your mind. When you feel love for all beings, it shows on your face. Seeing your honest, relaxed face, others will gravitate toward you and enjoy being around you.

#### 5. Even animals and celestial beings feel drawn to you.

When you practice metta, your mind generates a peaceful field around you. Children especially are tuned in to this energy—and non-humans feel it too!

### 6. Spirits protect you.

There are times we feel guided and protected by beings beyond our sight. Recognizing this as a kind of grace is a source of serenity. Whether it's literally true or there is some other energy that gives us this sense of guidance and protection, the Buddha included this among the benefits of practicing metta.

### 7. Fire, poisons, and weapons will not harm you.

When we read stories of old, many of the elements are symbolic or mythic. The Buddha shared tales of adepts who practiced metta and were protected from fire, poisons, and weapons. He explained that greed, hatred, and delusion are the fires, the poisons, and the weapons against which metta protects us.

In the Fire Sermon (Aditta Pariyaya Sutta), the Buddha said that poison is of three kinds—greed, hatred, and delusion. These weapons, like daggers, he said, can cut your peace into pieces. In the Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, the Buddha described bodily, verbal, and mental weapons. In the Udana, he said, "They quarrel, squabble, and argue with each other, stabbing each other with verbal daggers: 'This is dharma. That is not.'" In the Dhammapada, the Buddha said, "There is no fire like greed, no misfortune like hatred, no suffering like delusion, and no greater happiness than peace."

In a well-known story about the power of metta, Uttara, a devoted follower of the Buddha, was bereft. She had been given in marriage to a man who did not have high regard for the Buddha, and so she hadn't seen the Buddha or his disciples for two and a half months. She was feeling forlorn, and her father suggested she hire a courtesan to serve her husband while she joined the Buddha and his community for the final two weeks of their rainy-season retreat. Uttara agreed and was able to serve the Buddha and his disciples as a cook and attend his teachings.

One day as he was looking out the window of his mansion, Uttara's husband saw her working in the retreat kitchen wearing a stained apron and thought it pathetic she was attending the retreat rather than indulging in the luxuries of life with him. Noticing his disdain for his wife, Sirima, the courtesan, began plotting to harm Uttara so she herself could become the man's wife. Sirima boiled some ghee and left the house to splash it on Uttara.

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When Uttara saw the courtesan coming to harm her, she meditated on loving-friendliness and remained completely at peace. At the same time, Uttara's maidservants also saw this foul deed unfolding and ran to stop Sirima. The maids tackled Sirima and began to pummel her but Uttara intervened to save her attacker. After that, Uttara bathed Sirima in warm water and massaged her body with herbs and oil to soothe her wounds. Sirima fell to the ground and begged Uttara's forgiveness. Uttara said she would forgive Sirima if the Buddha advised it.

The next day, Sirima asked the Buddha to forgive what she had tried to do. The Buddha asked Uttara how she felt as Sirima was pouring boiling ghee on her, and Uttara responded, "I was grateful to Sirima for serving my husband so I could spend two weeks with the noble community. I had no ill will toward her, only loving-friendliness." The Buddha commended her, "Well done, Uttara. By not bearing ill will, you were able to conquer the one who abuses you. By being generous, you conquered the one who is stingy. By speaking the truth, you conquered one who lies." Upon the advice of the Buddha, Uttara forgave Sirima, and Sirima took refuge in the Buddha.

In another story, the Buddha told of Culasiva Thera, who was not at all affected by poison because of his profound practice of metta. A Dhammapada commentary tells of four novice monks whose practice of loving-friendliness was so profound they were unaffected by a weapon. Not only were disciples of the Buddha protected by metta, but in one story a cow was spared being shot with an arrow because of her love and affection nursing her calf.

The Buddha taught that the six senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and cognizing—are on fire. Any one of them is sufficient to consume us. The antidote, he taught, is to know reality.

Be mindful and see how sensations and states affect you. Think of your own experience; see how much you burn with the fire of greed, hatred, and delusion, and how much you poison your mind with greed, hatred, and delusion. When you practice metta, your breathing becomes calm and you feel so much love and compassion that your mind naturally wishes all beings to live in peace and harmony.

#### **8. Your mind immediately becomes calm.**

Metta stimulates a friendly feeling that makes us calm and happy. It truly is a wonderful way of life!

#### **9. Your complexion brightens.**

Metta shows in your face. As you practice metta, joy arises. At first it is barely noticeable, but as the joy increases, it begins to pervade your whole mind and body. Metta does not rely on any particular time, place,

or condition. Once aroused, it can remain present in you the rest of your life. Your face cannot hide what is going on in your mind. When you are angry, it shows on your face. When you are peaceful, everyone notices. The energy of metta spreads through your bloodstream and nourishes your whole being. You look bright and clear, calm and peaceful.

#### **10. You'll die with a clear mind.**

The thought of dying peacefully can be comforting. When we have unresolved conflicts, death can be difficult. Loving-friendliness can make dying easier for the one passing away and for those around her.

There is a difference between true peace and the appearance of peace. You may seem cheerful; you might even make people laugh. But when you are approaching death, if greed, hatred, and delusion are still lurking deep down in your psyche, that joviality will vanish. Practicing loving-friendliness sinks into the depths of your consciousness and makes your mind genuinely calm. With metta, you will die peacefully, without confusion.

In the Anguttara Nikaya, Samavati, the wife of the king the Buddha had declared chief among those who practiced metta, was burned alive while leading a loving-friendliness retreat for women. Magandiya was the culprit. So proud of her rare beauty, Magandiya rejected suitor after suitor. One day her father saw the Buddha sitting under a tree and asked him to marry his daughter. The Buddha explained his vow of celibacy and declined in a way that Magandiya found offensive, and she was determined to seek revenge. Magandiya knew that Samavati was one of the Buddha's favorite laywomen, so she set fire to the house where Samavati was leading a metta retreat for 500 women. They all died in the fire. As she lay dying, Samavati declared, "Over many lifetimes our bodies have been burned over and over again. As you pass from birth to death and back to birth, be heedful!" Her words were so powerful that the 500 women dying alongside her were inspired to practice metta meditation in their final moments. Although their bodies were burned by fire, their minds were free.

#### **11. You'll die in peace.**

If at the time of death you do not yet comprehend the highest truth, you will still go to a realm of great peace. If you have not completed the path of awakening before you die, the peaceful mental state generated by metta will still allow you to be reborn in a heavenly realm. Regardless of whether we consider heaven a real or figurative place, this portends well and encourages us to practice loving-friendliness while we can!

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