

Loving Kindness Meditation

(*Mettà Bhàvnà*)

The main purpose of everybody's life is happiness. That is why Buddhism points out "everybody likes happiness and dislikes suffering (*Sukkha kamani Bhutani, dukkha patikkulanani*)". Therefore Buddhism always guides us to get rid of suffering and reach real happiness which is the main purpose of our life. Whether we are happy or not depends on how far we have purified our mind from defilements, and how is our attitude about the world. Getting rid of negative thoughts such as anger, desire, ill-will, jealousy, delusion and cultivating positive thoughts is the path for happiness. Here, practicing three meritorious deeds such as practicing generosity (*Dana*), morality (*Seela*) and meditation (*Bhavana*) is the main cause for our happiness.

Practicing generosity is the first meritorious deed that motivates us to go forward on the path of happiness. When we offer something to others kindly, concerning the receivers' qualities or needs, our mind is kind, helpful, pure and calm. According to Buddhism, generosity can be practiced in three ways, as giving of material offerings (*amisa-dana*), giving of fearlessness (*abhaya-dana*) and the giving of Dhamma (*Dhamma-dana*). These are the things which purify our mind and decorate it. Its final result is happiness. That is why the Buddha says "**Practicing merits means gaining happiness**" (*Sukho punnassa uccayo*). Doing more merits is having more happiness. Therefore the person, who listened to the Buddha's advice, is always ready to offer something to others with cleaned hands. He offers or donates not only for his close relatives and friends but for any person who is in need. Practicing generosity is like ornaments which decorate our mind with happiness.

The second meritorious deed that gives us peace of mind is practicing morality which is higher than generosity. The more we listen to the Buddha's message, the greater is our courage to go on the path of freedom. In the pursuit of perfect happiness we still want to go forward on the path. That is why we discipline our behavior and speech as morality. We discipline our behavior and speech not just because of fear of being criticized by others or next rebirth but for the sake of our mental culture itself. Good discipline in our behavior brings comfort to our life. If someone has a good discipline, it also means that he has not given reasons for others so that they can blame or criticize him. He can remember his past with a happy mind because of his disciplined behavior.

The third and the most important merit that Buddhism points out is meditation. Here we practice our mind in the correct way using some kind of meditation techniques such as loving kindness, breathing meditation etc. Meditation is the highest, fastest and most successful way to develop our spirit to the maximum level. Among the forty techniques of meditation in Buddhism, practicing loving kindness is very important and useful at the very beginning of mental culture. In many discourses, the Buddha has emphasized its need and benefits.

According to right understanding (*Samma ditthi*) which is the very first step of the eight fold path (*Ariya Attangika Magga*), when we have right vision about the world and the method of purification, we adjust our attitude in accordance with right view resulting in right thoughts (*Samma samkappa*). It means we practice loving kindness. Here we genuinely wish others' success like ours. We look at others with kind eyes. If we can gradually develop loving kindness, we are able to overcome anger which especially disturbs our peace of mind. We mostly suffer due to others' mistake or misbehavior. If we can meditate on loving kindness, we can overcome suffering little by little. That is why the Buddha says us to practice loving kindness at the very beginning of the path of mental culture. In the discourse of metta, the Buddha explains how far we have to practice loving kindness. It says we should have an ability to see any person as one's only son or daughter. It means our mind is very advanced in terms of spirituality and merits.

When we practice loving kindness, first of all we develop it for ourselves. For example we may wish like this ***"May I be well, happy and peaceful !, May I be free from suffering!, May I be free from illness. May I be free from stress. May no harm come to me. May no problems come to me. May no difficulties come to me. May I succeed in all good. May I attain final bliss of liberation."*** Then we extend it to others who are in the universe wishing as ***"May all beings be well, happy and peaceful. May all beings be free from suffering. May all beings be free from illness. May all beings be free from stress. May no harm come to them. May no problem come to them. May no difficulty come to them. May they succeed in all good. May they attain final bliss of liberation."*** When we practice this concept again and again, our mind is going to cool down. The more we practice this positive thought, the friendlier we become to others, and we have no stress and grudges over the mistakes or misbehavior of others'. Here we practice loving kindness not only verbally, but also physically and mentally. With the power of spirit in loving kindness, we are always ready to forgive others' mistakes. Because of calm, pure and strong, others' mistakes can't disturb our

peace of mind. And others can't steal our good qualities that we have practiced in our *Sansaric* journey. We don't give any chance to an external person or thing to steal our peace of mind. It means we are strong in mindfulness of loving kindness to face external disturbances.

In the discourse of *mettanisamsa sutta*, the Buddha explains the eleven results of practicing loving kindness. He who practices loving kindness;

- Sleeps comfortably (*Sukham supati*)
- Wakes comfortably (*Sukham patibujjhati*)
- Doesn't see bad dreams (*Na papakam supinam passati*)
- Is dear to and beloved by human beings (*Manussanam piyo hoti*)
- Is just as dear to non-human beings (*Amanussanam piyo hoti*)
- Deities guard him as a mother and father guard a child (*Devata rakkhanti*)
- Fire, poison and weapons don't affect him (*Nassa aggi va visam va sattham khamati*)
- Mind is easily concentrated (*tuvatam cittam samadhiyati*)
- He appears to be calm and attractive (*Mukha vanno vippsidati*)
- He dies unconfused (*Asammulho kalam karoti*)
- If he didn't attain enlightenment, when he falls from his life, he reappears in the braham realm (*Uttarim appativijjantho bhrahmaloko uppajjati*)

As the result of practicing loving kindness, other three qualities also increase which are compassion (*karuna*), sympatric or altruistic joy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkha*). These four things are named four boundless states (*appamanna*) or sublime abodes (*brahma vihara*). If a person practices these qualities, he can live as a brahma like in the brahma realm. He is fully concentrated with happiness. Compassion means his heart is warm if a person is in trouble. He considers others' suffering as his. He is always ready to help others, when others are in trouble. Further he regards others' success as his. He is happy when others are successful because he has no jealousy. He is equal between suffering and happiness. He sees everything and everybody with equal mind. Living with these four sublime abodes is his whole life. He always spreads these four to all over the world boundlessly. He looks at the world like his own family. It causes us to live peacefully as a divine or brahma with pure mind. If our mind is purified from negative feelings such as anger, ill will, lust, jealousy, it means we are so happy.

Practicing loving kindness is not the end of the path of purification that Buddhism explains, but just the start. With the concentration of loving kindness, further we have to go forward with understanding of impermanence. When mind is concentrated, we reflect on impermanence about mind and body. It has to be practiced again and again with higher understanding. If we investigate arising and ceasing of all experience, we are going to be silent when the world changes. It means gradually impermanent happiness is going to be permanent. In the changing world, we can create an unshaken mind which can't be disturbed by anything or anybody. It means we live fully mindfully in the present moment seeing impermanence as arising and ceasing. Here we have an understanding that world arises and ceases at the moment. The most valuable and interesting explanation in Buddhism is impermanence. It says in Buddhism; Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence. (අනුත්ථා සම්භවං භුත්ථා න භවිස්සති). This is the nature of impermanence that Buddhism illuminates. Every moment the experience that we receive through our senses arises and ceases without anything remaining. This is the highest result of practicing loving kindness and impermanence. Buddhism always encourages us to come to this level without delay as soon as we can. This is the highest result of our rare and valuable life. It is the way how we show our proficiency. We have to dedicate all our energy, courage, time, wealth in the name of this success. With birth most of us have received this potential. We can improve it to the maximum level by associating noble friends.

May the Triple Gem Bless You!

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