



We need national healing. But what are we getting from many leaders in media, politics, entertainment and academia? Across the political spectrum, people in positions of influence are setting us against one another. They tell us that those who disagree with us politically are ruining our country, that ideological differences aren't a matter of differing opinions but reflect moral turpitude, and that our side must utterly vanquish the other side even if it leaves our neighbors without a voice.

We are living in a culture of contempt.

What is the cure (for a culture of contempt)? I believe that it's not civility or tolerance; instead, it's love for one another and our country. It is up to us to join together and work to subvert the culture of contempt. I don't know if this movement will be successful or popular, as it runs so counter to the prevailing currents.

Arthur Brooks

Read the quote above in a reflective manner. Where might you be susceptible to contempt? Allow the words to move you to love even when it's hard to do so.

The Sanskrit word maitri and the Pali word metta both mean “lovingkindness” or “loving care,” and refer to an attitude of friendliness, goodwill, and generosity of heart. When we are filled with lovingkindness, we have a very simple wish: May all beings be happy.

This kind of love has many qualities that distinguish it from our more usual experiences of love mixed with desire or attachment. Born of great generosity, metta is a caring and kindness that does not seek self-benefit.

Joseph Goldstein



Practicing Metta

In week three of our series, we explored the idea of loving the unlovable. Is that even possible? Can we love another if we feel even the slightest contempt? Is there a way to remove contempt so we can practice metta?

Metta is a lovingkindness detached from expectation. It expects nothing in return. It is, as Joseph Goldstein suggests, free from desire or attachment.

Reflect/Discuss

Think about a time you offered Metta to an unlovable person. What made it possible to offer lovingkindness and what did you learn from the experience?

Practicing Metta

We considered three actions that help us practice metta.

Change Your Why – *To offer metta requires we move from a reciprocity mindset (I'll love you if you love me) to a purity of mind mindset (I offer you goodwill because it cleanses my mind of toxic thoughts and desires).*

Become the Other – *Imagine being the person you cannot love. Imagine the world from his/her vantage point. Allow this to bring you to a place of compassion – a place of deep feeling for the unlovable.*

Find Openings for Goodness – *Look for ways where you can bring goodness to the unlovable. This will require contemplation before action. It could lead to removing yourself from the situation. But it could just as likely mean serving the unlovable through some deliberate action.*

Reflect/Discuss

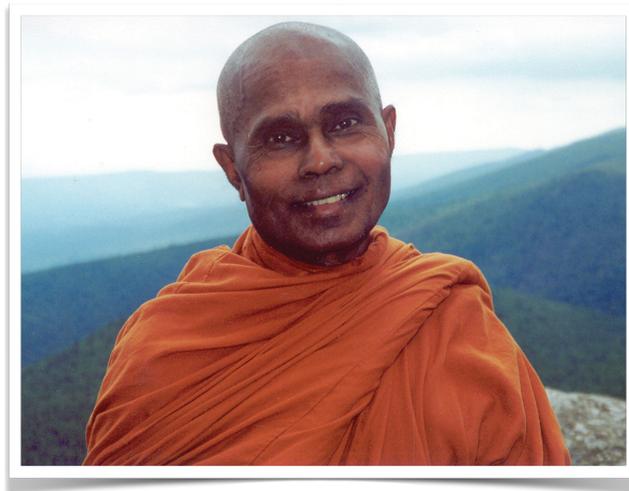
Consider all three of the actions that enable metta (above). How could you specifically demonstrate one or more of the actions toward an unlovable person? Where would you start? Is one of the three actions more needed right now in your life?

Going Deeper

Here is a fascinating look at how to practice metta. What do you think of the ideas put forth in the condensed article below? Could you see yourself treating an unlovable person (in your life) as described in one of the scenarios below. Choose one of the ideas below and practice it as you encounter the unlovable this week.

Overcoming Ill Will: How to change the way we interact with those who anger us.

Bhante Gunaratana



As a practice that trains the mind to become gentle and considerate metta is a powerful method to dissolve our habits of thinking about, speaking to, and treating others with ill will.

In the *Discourse on Repression of Ill Will (Aghata Vinaya Sutta)*, Sariputta, one of the Buddha's leading disciples, offers five practices for overcoming ill will and practicing loving-friendliness.

These examples show us simple ways to think about complex, difficult situations. When we are with others, as our metta is sprouting in our hearts, we may face situations that challenge us. We know that we need to overcome whatever ill will remains in our minds toward others, but we are tempted to fall into old patterns of judging and distancing ourselves from them. These practices offer a different way of interacting with people who anger us.

The Dirty Rag

We may come across people whose words are kind, but whose bodily behavior is not. They make promises they can't keep and act evasively, or say nice things to us but act poorly. We can consider behaving toward them like the monk who, while walking down the road, comes across a dirty rag. The rag is so filthy he can't even pick it up with his hands, so he holds it with one foot while he kicks it with the other foot to clean it off. Then he picks it up with two fingers, shakes it off, brings it home, and washes it. He sees that this once-dirty rag is in fact completely functional and he sews it onto his patchwork robes!

When we encounter people whose deeds are not good but whose words are pleasant, we can search for ways to arouse loving-friendliness within ourselves. We can certainly find one reason or another to do so—we can grasp onto their kind words in the same way the monk saw the value of the cloth obscured by dirt. We admire and respect these people for their words and arouse our own loving-friendliness to share with them. If we are able to associate with them and show them loving-friendliness, it might encourage them to change their way of acting. But we do not pay attention to their actions. Focusing on and encouraging others' positive words gives their kindness room to blossom naturally. Additionally, when

we learn to practice compassion and equanimity toward people in this way, our own thoughts of ill will toward them are subdued.

Keep in mind that the layers of conditioning on a person have made them difficult to handle, just like the layers of dirt on the cloth. Perhaps they have faced hardship unknown to us—such as losing a friend or family member, home, or job. Maybe they were mistreated or abused as a child and this contributed to their thinking that rough behavior is a normal part of life. What matters for us is that we see that someone is suffering. We can offer them our loving-friendliness.

The Algae-Covered Pond

Next, consider how you become angry with a person whose speech is unkind but whose actions are respectful. For example, someone disparages you for doing a task incorrectly but then does the task for you so that you can learn from them. Sariputta compares this type of person to a pond covered with algae. Say that there is a pond nearby on a hot day when you are very thirsty. You are sweaty and feeling exhausted, and a cool dip would feel so refreshing. But the pond is covered with algae, so how do you dive in? First you must clear the algae away with both hands.

Similarly, you can overlook this person's challenges and recognize that their heart opens to compassion and loving-friendliness from time to time. On this basis, you develop loving-friendliness toward that person. The ill will you may have felt toward them diminishes on its own.

The Hoofprint Puddle

The third type of person speaks both unwholesome words and does unwholesome deeds, but from time to time their heart opens to noble, friendly, and compassionate things. Sariputta suggests that such a person can be compared to a puddle on the road.

Suppose you are walking along a road and there is no water or well. You are thirsty and tired, desperately looking for water. Almost dehydrated, you find a little rainwater that has collected in the hoofprint of a cow in the middle of the road. There's very little water, and if you try to scoop it up by hand, you'll make it muddy. What to do? You kneel down and slowly bring your mouth to that bit of water and sip it without disturbing the mud, thus quenching your thirst.

From time to time, even with their bad words and deeds, you'll find that this person's heart opens to loving-friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. When you recognize a moment when their heart is open, take advantage of it—enter quickly. Say some loving words to keep their heart open. Speak kindly, showing metta in your tone and words. This is a wonderful opportunity to share with someone the benefit of metta. By patiently practicing loving-friendliness toward this person, despite all their weaknesses, you can produce a miracle. Others might give up and over time get tired and burn out. They might blame metta, saying it doesn't work; while it is a normal reaction to blame something that doesn't work, look closely. If you do something haphazardly and fail, don't blame the system. Find out what could be done differently and make the necessary adjustments.

Similarly, you can find a way even with this kind of person to cultivate loving-friendliness. Use whatever possible opening you can get to overcome your feelings of ill will, just as you would sip the water in the cow's hoofprint.

The Sick Traveler

The fourth type of person you may feel ill will toward has no visible redeeming qualities: their words are negative, their behavior is bad, and their heart does not open at all for anything noble.

Coming across such a person is like finding a patient, a sick man, walking alone on a road where there is no hospital, no village, and no other humans around. There is no water, no house to rest in, not a single tree to provide him shelter. This

person is afflicted and suffering from severe sickness. He needs immediate medical attention—otherwise he will die. You see him and feel very sorry for him. Your heart melts. You think, “How can I help this man? He needs water, medicine, food, and clothes. He needs somebody to help him.” When your heart responds with empathy, you find a way to help this person. Listen to that voice that wants to help him, and let that spark of kindness grow. Then you will volunteer to help that person in spite of any difficulty.

Similarly, when people are completely negative in thought, word, and deed, we can practice metta. Although we might normally react to them with anger, still we need to find a reason to develop thoughts of loving-friendliness and compassion toward them. Then we become like the sick person’s medicine.

One who practices metta should think about how this person’s unwholesome behavior creates so much suffering for himself, both now and in the future. If this man gives up his bad behavior and cultivates wholesome bodily and verbal behavior, he could find peace and happiness in this life. He could enjoy things available to him without grumbling. He could have many friends and live a happy and healthy life.

So instead, think: “I should help him to get rid of his hatred; if I do, I will be glad for the rest of my life thinking that I have done something wonderful.” Rather than being angry with such a person, let your heart open to him to see how much he suffers by acting in such a harmful way.

The Clear Lake

The fifth person’s words and behavior are sweet, and their heart is open for noble practices.

This person can be likened to a clear, calm lake. The water is sweet and cool, and the pool is surrounded by soft grass and shade trees. If someone comes along tired and overheated, taking a dip in this lake is most refreshing. In a similar way,

this person's thoughts are sweet and wonderful, and their words are beautiful and friendly. Their deeds are friendly, beautiful, and pure. Everything is ideal. It is easy for us to cultivate loving-friendliness toward that person. If you are unable to calm the anger you may feel toward such a person, reflect on their good qualities without harboring any jealousy. Know that it is possible for you as well to become like a clear lake in your thoughts, words, and deeds.

Consider the ways in which you can try to cultivate loving-friendliness equally toward all these five types of people without discrimination. Of course, you may find that it is not very easy—that there are times when you want to give in to ill will. Stretching our capacity for loving-friendliness sometimes requires that we make a great sacrifice—but what we sacrifice are our comfort, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. In other words, we sacrifice our old way of relating to the world. Remember that the purpose of developing metta for these people is to make *yourself* calm and peaceful. To make others comfortable, first make *yourself* comfortable with them. It is not very easy, but in time we may see it as worthwhile—even natural!

From *Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta*, by Bhante Gunaratana To be published by Wisdom Publications in March 2017.