



**the urban retreat 2013**

**course material for day 1: saturday**

*exploring further*

## introduction

This week we're going to be exploring in more depth and detail the meditation practice known as the *metta bhavana*, or 'development of loving-kindness'. Some people love this practice and find it liberating. Other people don't always find it easy. (In fact, at one of our Buddhist Centres they run special courses titled: "*Who hates the metta bhavana?*"!) Probably, you'll experience both of these things at different times of doing the practice. There will be times of breakthrough and times of challenge... and also times of boredom. It is all part of the process of meditation and transformation. This retreat will hopefully give you a reminder of the basics of this practice, a bit of a refresher, and also some new ideas and inspiration. We hope you enjoy it and that by the end of the retreat you don't hate the metta bhavana, but consider it a friend!

This meditation practice can be challenging precisely because it is transformative; it is getting at the underlying emotional attitudes and preferences which drive what we do, what we say, and what we think. Our emotions are strong and so influential, even when we are not fully aware of them! But it is because the practice is demanding that it can also be so rewarding. You could argue that the practice contains Buddhist values more explicitly than a practice like the mindfulness of breathing. In fact, you could say that if you could only do one practice, it would be best if it was the metta bhavana – because it can have such a transforming effect. So, I'm encouraging you to really give the

metta bhavana your best shot for the duration of this retreat! It is about really bringing alive the Buddhist quality of compassion.

Today and tomorrow, the content is quite simple. **There is a led meditation** for you to try, and then some questions for reflection. Please do give these questions time for consideration... the more conscious and aware you are of what is going on in your meditation, the more you'll get out of the following days teaching.

Each day (see below) there will also be input from Subhadramati, with a suggestion or reflection for loving-kindness in action in our lives, off the meditation cushion. And from Monday there will also be the daily 10-minute talks from Vessantara.

### **questions for reflection:**

- 1) What is your underlying attitude to the metta bhavana? Do you do it regularly? Do you tend to choose or prefer other practices? If so, why?
- 2) What do you like or enjoy about the practice? How has it helped you or changed you in the past?
- 3) What have you found difficult about the practice, or where have you tended to get a bit stuck with it? Can you identify what this is?
- 4) I'd like to suggest you take 10 minutes to **read** or **watch** or **listen to** the introductory material for today (you may need to log in). Although much of it will be familiar, it can be really useful to go back to basics and get a refresher. In particular, have a look/listen to the material on

the four principles by which the practice works. Then think about which of these you tend to give attention to, and which might be less present in your meditation. Is there something you can do next time you meditate, in response to this?

In the next few days, we'll be making plenty of suggestions. In the meantime, here is the first of the "daily practice" reflections from Subhdramati...

### **daily practice: actions and consequences**

Each day there will also be a box like this with a practical suggestion, or a suggested reflection. These are all adapted from a recently published book by [Subhadramati: Not About Being Good](#) from [Windhorse Publications](#). The book is about ethics and the excerpts we've chosen are all about loving-kindness in action. Today's excerpt is a reflection on the likely effect of acting with more, or less, kindness and awareness.

Sit quietly, close your eyes, and bring to mind, as vividly as you can, something mean or unkind you've done recently. Spend one minute on each of the following:

- \* Tune in to how it makes you feel physically, and how it makes you feel about yourself.
- \* Tune in to how it makes you feel in relation to the world at large.
- \* Perhaps you could open your eyes and write three or four words that

\* sum up how you felt about yourself and how you felt in relation to the world at large.

Now close your eyes again and bring to mind, as vividly as you can, something kind and generous you've done recently, no matter how small. Again, spend about a minute on each of the following:

\* Tune in to how it makes you feel physically, and how it makes you feel about yourself.

\* Tune in to how it makes you feel in relation to the world at large.

\* Perhaps you could open your eyes and write three or four words that sum up how you felt about yourself and how you felt in relation to the world at large.

Now sit quietly for another minute to absorb the experience.