



静心学堂丛书

The Mindful Peace Academy Collection

中英双语 Chinese-English Edition

《慈经》的修行

The Practice of the Metta Sutta

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《慈经》一直是我们重要的修学内容，既是交流前的常规仪式，也是同喜阶段的定课。但我们究竟对此有多少认识？是作为背景音乐听一听，起到静心的效果，还是能随文入观，使之成为慈心的修行？

如果没有方法，往往只能起到前一种作用，甚至连这一点都未必有保障，一边听着，一边依然妄想纷飞。想让《慈经》真正成为慈心的修行，必须了解经文内涵，改变固有认识，再辅以相应的观修和实践。以下，我从七个方面介绍《慈经》的修习重点。

一、慈心是什么

生起慈心

一方面和众生建立连接

对众生有感觉

愿意友好地对待他们，帮助他们

另一方面要打开心量

接纳各种众生

慈为与乐，是给予众生快乐的心。常常和慈同时出现的还有悲，意为拔苦，希望帮助众生摆脱痛苦。这些心理是有前提的，因为很多人对众生没感觉，无法和自己产生连接，自然生不起与乐拔苦之心。还有人对某些众生是讨厌、排斥的，甚至会幸灾乐祸，希望他们过得不好，更谈不上与乐拔苦。

生起慈心，必须克服这些障碍。一方面和众生建立连接，对众生有感觉，愿意友好地对待他们，帮助他们；另一方面要打开心量，接纳各种众生。做到这两点，才能真正对众生生起慈爱之心。

二、修慈心的意义

认识到慈心对生命的意义及生起之因
是修习慈心的必备前提
如果不认可这两点
即使听着《慈经》，觉得内容很好
也会像旁观者那样，觉得只是经文而已
无法和自己产生联系，引起共鸣

有人觉得，我做好自己就行了，为什么要对那些本来没关系的人修慈心，希望他们过得好？这么做对自己有什么好处？对世界有什么好处？

我们知道，修行的关键在于调心。当我们修习慈心时，可以克服内心的冷漠、对立、仇恨，使自己变得温暖而祥和，进而散发这种正向气息。一个具备慈心的人，可以让众生产生亲和感。这样才能与他人建立善缘，形成良好的氛围。

慈心也是福报的源泉，《宝行王正论》云：“一日三时施，美食三百器，福不及刹那，行慈百分一。天人等爱护，日夜受喜乐，免怨火毒杖，是行慈现果。无功用获财，后生于色界，得慈十功德。”说明慈心

能感得巨大的福报。

慈心还是利他的动力，可以让我们成就佛菩萨那样的大慈大悲。佛菩萨有两大品质，一是智慧的成就，一是慈悲的成就。在修习菩提心的七支因果中，慈心是菩提心的重要基础。如果没有慈悲，不希望众生得到快乐，不愿意为众生解除痛苦，就不可能生起菩提心，修行也无法圆满。

七支因果中，以知母、念恩、报恩为引导，由此生起慈心和悲心，再由增上意乐导向菩提心。这也告诉我们，慈悲是有前提的，就像前面说的，要改变对众生的冷漠、无感、嗔恨。如何改变？就是和众生建立连接，从轮回的角度认识到，无始劫来，六道众生都曾当过我们的母亲。

仅仅这样想还不够，因为很多人对现世的母亲都不孝顺，更顾不上往昔的母亲了，所以要在知母之后，进一步忆念母恩，发愿报恩。《道次第》和省庵大师的《劝发菩提心文》中，都有关于念恩的思维。没有母亲的生养，就没有我们的生命，没有我们现在拥有的一切，这份恩德是怎么报答都不够的。在此基础上

生起的慈心，才能真切并落到实处。

认识到慈心对生命的意义及生起之因，是修习慈心的必备前提。如果不认可这两点，即使听着《慈经》，觉得内容很好，也会像旁观者那样，觉得只是经文而已，无法和自己产生联系，引起共鸣。又或者，仅仅当作美妙的音乐在听，觉得很悦耳，很舒服，起不到调心的作用，更想不到听了要做什么。

除了对心行的调整，慈心还可以消除对立和仇恨，这是世界一切冲突乃至战争的源头。如果更多的人拥有慈心，散布慈心，让慈心形成强大的场，就能使人心安定，社会和谐。现代人都担心空气污染，其实最大的污染不是空气中的有害物质，而是人心散发的戾气，是嗔恨、残暴带来的不祥之气。在这样的世界中，格外需要慈心的净化。

可见，修习慈心不论对自身还是世界都意义重大。

三、《慈经》说了什么

当你以慈心面对一切时
你的世界就是美好的
进一步，还能把这样的美好带给众生
能不能有这样的效果
取决于你的慈心有多少力量
是不是纯粹、圆满、没有夹杂
这是需要训练和培养的

《慈经》到底告诉我们什么道理？如果不清楚，只是那么听着，往往过耳即忘。即使一字一句地念着，也往往有口无心。这样的听和念，是达不到修心效果的。《慈经》的内容包括两部分，一是修慈心的方法，二是修慈心的对象。

1. 修慈心的方法

从方法来说，就是核心的四句话：第一，愿我乃至一切众生无敌意，无危险；第二，愿我乃至一切众生无精神的痛苦；第三，愿我乃至一切众生无身体的痛苦；第四，愿我乃至一切众生保持快乐。

这四句话看似简单，但我们想一想，如果自己和世界没有任何对立，也没有来自他者的敌意和危险，就不必有任何担忧，充满安全感。进一步，没有烦恼纠结带来的精神痛苦，没有四大不调带来的身体痛苦，时时都能保持快乐，不正是最圆满的人生吗？

看看我们当下的现状，想想我们努力追求的一切，为了什么？无非是为了获得安全感，为了解除身心痛苦，得到快乐。所以我们要用这四句话来祝福自己，祝福众生。如果大家都能拥有这样的理想生活，不正是最美好的世界吗？

可能有人会说：难道想一想，世界就会好吗？事实上，当你以慈心面对一切时，你的世界就是美好的。进一步，还能把这样的美好带给众生。能不能有这样的效果，取决于你的慈心有多少力量，是不是纯粹、圆满、没有夹杂？这是需要训练和培养的。所以慈心不是生起一次，也不仅仅是在座上祝愿，而要让这样的心逐步增长、强大并延展。

2. 修慈心的对象

如何让一念慈心，扩大到一切时，一切处，一切众生？从对象来说有三个层面，是逐步扩大的过程。

首先是对自己修慈心。我们的五蕴身心虽然是假我，如梦如幻，但它又是修行不可或缺的助道之缘，可以借假修真，所以我们要关爱它，祝福它。有人说，一个不爱自己的人，是不会爱他人的，因为他根本不懂得爱是什么。在慈心的修行中，我们要去体会慈心是什么样的心理，由衷的祝福是什么样的感觉。虽然这些概念听起来很熟悉，没有难度，但在我们心中未必有多少经验，也未必能马上调动起来，所以自己是最好的切入点。

我们现在学习的身体扫描，就是从对身体的熟悉到关爱，赋予它正念、正气、正向力量，排除身心的负面感受和情绪，使自己以健康的身心来修行，来利益众生。当我们自身具备慈心之后，才谈得上散布慈心。

其次是对身边的人修慈心。把对自己修习并体会

到的慈心，散布给父母、导师、亲戚、朋友、同修，包括我们这个道场中的出家众、在家众，真诚祝愿他们无敌意，无危险，无精神的痛苦，无身体的痛苦，愿他们保持快乐。这些都是我们熟悉的人，很具体，修起来不会太难。当然也不是一下子对那么多人修，开始可以分批进行，让观修清晰、稳定后再扩大。

第三是对一切众生修慈心。从有形体到有名相的众生，从圣者到非圣者；从东方、西方、北方、南方、东南方、西北方、东北方、西南方、下方、上方的众生，到陆地、水中和空中的众生；从人类到最高的天众，再到苦道中的众生……总之，祝愿十法界的众生无敌意，无危险，无精神的痛苦，无身体的痛苦，愿他们保持快乐。

修慈心是不断打开心量的过程，通过由己及他、由亲及疏的次第，把一切众生作为散布慈心的对象，排除内心的冷漠、嫉妒、仇恨、愤怒，排除对自己和他人的负面情绪。只有了解经文的含义，才能将这一引导落实到心行。

四、让每句话成为自己的愿望

把《慈经》作为定课，每天听闻
就是通过重复来强化这种愿望
让经文一遍遍刻在自己心上
不断提醒自己
最终使慈心成为生命的底色
用现在的话说
就是让慈心成为本能反应

了解《慈经》每句话的含义后，接下来要做的，是从听闻者成为真正的实践者。这就需要看到慈心对自己、众生和世界的意义，最好能发起菩提心。即使同喜阶段达不到这个层次，也要认识到，慈心有益于我们的身心健康、人生幸福乃至社会和谐。

当你有了慈心，对人不再冷漠、对立，不论在家庭、工作还是人际交往中，都会主动关爱他人，祝愿他人摆脱身心之苦，保持快乐，这样就能营造和谐友爱的氛围。有句话叫作“赠人玫瑰，手有余香”，而当我们散布慈心时，不仅让对方感受到你的善意，自己的慈心也会增长广大，越用越有。

我们要把《慈经》的每一句话，变成发自内心

的愿望。就像我们身患重病时，由衷地希望自己早日健康；也像我们想得到最需要的东西时，急切地期盼自己心想事成。这种愿望是真真切切的，纯粹而没有掺杂。

把《慈经》作为定课，每天听闻，就是通过重复来强化这种愿望，让经文一遍遍刻在自己心上，不断提醒自己，最终使慈心成为生命的底色。用现在的话说，就是让慈心成为本能反应。这样的话，不管我们平时在说什么，做什么，都不会减弱这个愿望。随时随地，都能调动并散布慈心。

当《慈经》从法义变成观念和心态，我们自然愿意为众生的利益和福祉去做些什么。通过这些实践，又能进一步强化观念和心态，完成生命品质的转变。

五、《慈经》的观修

我们在听闻《慈经》的过程中
要辅以观修，使慈心的力量日益强大
内心的阴暗随之消除
生命就会越来越祥和
如果暂时观修不起来
先把经中每句话当作发自内心的真诚愿望
这样做也是有力量的

修慈心时，如何把经文转化成自己切实的感受？观修是很好的手段。我们可以把慈心观想成普照大地的阳光。阳光是光合作用的能量源泉，有了它，万物才能生机勃勃；阳光是驱除病毒的天然利器，晒一晒，那些潮湿、发霉的东西就能消毒、除霉；阳光还给我们带来温暖，尤其是冬日的阳光，让人由内而外地舒展、放松而欢喜。

想到这些，我们应该对慈心有直观的感受。然后带着这样的心，把《慈经》的每一句话转化成阳光。观想我们的祝愿如阳光般遍照一切，驱散世间的敌意和危险，驱散众生精神和身体的痛苦，使他们的每个细胞得到能量，快乐无忧。当我们这样观想时，眼前

仿佛看到日出东方，所到之处黑暗消散，万物生长，大地欣欣向荣。

我们知道，观音菩萨可以千处祈求千处应。《普门品》讲到，当我们遇到水灾、火灾、风灾、盗贼、刀兵等天灾人祸时，只要“念彼观音力”，就能化险为夷，转危为安。为什么观音菩萨能消灾免难？就在于慈悲的力量。久远劫来，观音菩萨一直修习慈悲，最终成就无缘大慈，同体大悲，才能救众生于一切危难之中。

我们在听闻《慈经》的过程中，也要辅以观修，使慈心的力量日益强大，内心的阴暗随之消除，生命就会越来越祥和。如果暂时观修不起来，先把经中每句话当作发自内心的真诚愿望，这样做也是有力量的。

六、从座上到座下

生活中
我们能不能对一切众生平等相待
利他时
我们能不能对一切众生友好关爱
这是检验慈心的关键所在
否则，座上修得再多也可能是空头支票
必须到座下去充值

我们在座上修慈心时，有时会感觉良好，似乎已经充满慈心，可一到座下就没感觉了，再遇到什么对境，慈心更是无影无踪。之所以会这样，说明慈心并没有真正生起。我们知道，菩提心有愿菩提心和行菩提心之分，慈心也是同样。只有经过座下的检验，我们才知道座上修到了什么程度。

我们首先要在座上真诚祝愿，通过观想，在内心不断模拟、建立、长养慈心，让自己成为慈心的蓄电站和发射台。念每一句话的时候，都在散布慈心，散布到四维上下，十方世界。有时，我们会想到自己讨厌或没感觉的人，慈心可能被卡住。这就需要重新认识自己和众生的关系，去理解并接纳对方，感恩他们

给了自己检验修行的机会。

进一步，还要在座下落实慈心。生活中，我们不能对一切众生平等相待？利他时，我们能不能对一切众生友好关爱？这是检验慈心的关键所在。否则，座上修得再多也可能是空头支票，必须到座下去充值。

利他，是长养慈心的有效方式，其中有初级、中级和高级之分。初级的利他，是从理解、同情、接纳，到建立随喜、感恩之心。修慈心时为什么会卡住？为什么看到有些人无法生起慈心？是因为我们活在自己感觉中，无法理解他人，就做不到同情和接纳，更谈不上随喜和感恩。即使有，也只是极其有限的一小部分，无法遍及众生。这些冷漠、隔阂、对立，都是我执惹的祸。

我们要扩大慈心，必须放下我执，学会用缘起的思维，通过理解、同情来接纳众生。有些人之所以伤害我们，因为他本身就是贪嗔痴的受害者，是轮回的重病患者，是在烦恼控制下，身不由己地做出这些行为。理解到这些，我们就会从对立转为同情。

有时我们会在做事过程中对别人有很多要求，不

理解别人的想法和做法，也是因为从自我的立场看问题。如果学会缘起的思维，就能尊重个体的差异性。生命是无尽的累积，每个人会形成什么样的性格、习惯、想法、思维方式，代表他的生命累积。我们可以做的，是在尊重缘起的前提下，去理解，去接纳，然后用适合对方的手段加以引导。

总之，我执是修习慈心的最大障碍。尤其在座下，这一问题表现得更为突出，需要用智慧去处理。我们面对的众生有三类，一是喜欢并亲近的，二是没感觉的，三是讨厌并疏远的。在修慈心的过程中，要把无感变成有感，把讨厌变成接受，把疏远变成亲近。这样才能以慈心面对现实中的众生，而不是把座上座下打成两截。

观音菩萨的大慈大悲，到底大到什么程度？是不是把众生度尽才能圆满？其实不是。否则，那么多众生还在沉沦，佛菩萨是怎么成就的呢？圆满的标准是在于，你對自己接触的每个众生都能生起慈悲，愿意尽己所能地帮助对方，没有丝毫冷漠、仇恨、对立，那你的慈悲就圆满了。

中级的利他，是建立广大悲愿，修习六度四摄。高级的利他，是在利他中做到平等、无我、无所得。这就必须体认空性，了知六道众生在根本上是一体的，所有的自他分别都是出于我执。这样才能从世俗菩提心升华为胜义菩提心，利他而三轮体空，度众生而无众生可度。

总之，座上修习的重点，是把经中每句话当作对众生的真切祝愿，全身心地散布慈爱。然后在座下不断落实，把想法变成做法，把祝愿变成行动。二者是相互促进的，座上修是座下修的引导和基础，座下修则是座上修的检验和增上。

七、《慈经》修习次第

通常，我们是把慈心作为
菩提心修行的基础
但发起菩提心再来修慈心
就可以使慈心更有力量
从有限扩大到无限。再结合空性见
真正成就无缘大慈，同体大悲
这是我们需要在修行中不断提升的

根据我们的定课要求，听《慈经》时要随文入观，观想自己的心无所不在。心是无相的，心包太虚，量周沙界。所以尽虚空遍法界都是你的心，录音机也是你的心，它所发出的每句话都是心声，是我们内心的真切愿望。我们每听一遍，都是在不断宣誓，在提醒并强化这一愿心。

《慈经》的所缘对象很广泛，从自我到身边的人，再到六道众生，乃至一切圣贤。我们在修习初期，应该分阶段观修，否则会抓不住重点，只有泛泛的感觉。先总的听一遍，然后单独强化某一部分内容。

比如“愿我无敌意，无危险，无精神的痛苦，无身体的痛苦”，这四句话可以分别观修或总的观修，

一遍遍地不断重复，知道敌意和危险意味着什么，无敌意和无危险又意味着什么。重复的过程，是在修习专注力；对念的过程清清楚楚，则是在修觉察力。

在相关心行清晰、稳定、持续之后，再修其他。所谓清晰，即确定这是什么样的愿望，不是模模糊糊的感觉，就像糖的甜味和盐的咸味一样，不会混淆；所谓稳定，是随时可以提起相应心行，且达到一定强度，不是时有时无或时强时弱；所谓持续，是修习时念念相续，不被妄念干扰，而且能将这样的心行延续到座下。忆念这句话的时候，就能散发强大的慈心，仿佛阳光普照大地，驱除黑暗，让生命充满慈悲、祥和、寂静。

在所缘对象上，也要分阶段修。从对自己修，再对身边的人修，然后进一步扩大心量，到一切众生。未来我们也可以结合《普贤行愿品》的观修，使慈心和菩提心的修行相结合。

通常，我们是把慈心作为菩提心修行的基础；但发起菩提心再来修慈心，就可以使慈心更有力量，从有限扩大到无限。再结合空性见，真正成就无缘大慈，同体大悲。这是我们需要在修行过程中不断提升的。

八、结 说

《慈经》的修行大体有以下几个重点
把经文内容变成自己对众生的真切愿望
把座上的愿望带到座下
学习《慈经》的观修
依慈心发菩提心，依菩提心圆满慈心
建立无缘大慈、同体大悲之心

总之，《慈经》的修行大体有以下几个重点：一、了解《慈经》的每句话，把经文内容变成自己对众生的真切愿望。二、把座上的愿望带到座下，在生活中实践并检验。三、学习《慈经》的观修，驱除身心的阴暗、冷漠、对立，与他人建立友好、祥和、温暖的关系。四、立足于普贤行愿的见地，依慈心发菩提心，依菩提心圆满广大慈心。五、依平等、无我、无所得的见地，建立无缘大慈、同体大悲之心。作为学士、修士阶段的修学，能做到前三点就很好了，至于后两点，是胜士、智士努力的方向。

附

大乘佛教的慈悲观及其 心理治疗中的转化作用

The Mahayana Buddhist View of Compassion
and Its Transformative Role in Psychotherapy

2009年讲于
第四届心理分析与中国文化国际论坛

心，是佛教和心理学共同关注的重点所在。在我们的内心，既有良性潜质，能够发展出高尚人格，带来幸福安乐，也有负面心理，并由此滋生心理疾病，制造痛苦烦恼。当身体出现疾病时，我们都会及时治疗，以免延误病情，损害健康。而当心灵出现疾病时，同样需要重视，需要积极对治。虽然这种疾病是无形无相的，但若掉以轻心的话，其危害绝不亚于身体病变，发展到极致，还会使人走上绝路。据有关资料显示，因心理问题致病乃至死亡的人数正在逐年上升，不容忽视。

在治疗范围上，心理学比较偏向心理疾病的治疗。它所关注的，主要在于病态的、非常规的心理，

至于人类共有的贪嗔痴等烦恼习气，并不在其解决之列。而在佛法修行中，不仅要解除负面心理，同时也重视正向心理的建立。在佛陀成就的三德中，断德是由断除烦恼而成就，是对负面心理的彻底解脱。而智德和悲德分别代表大智慧和大慈悲，是人类潜在的良性心理品质的完全展现。其中，智慧偏向自利，而慈悲偏向利他，它们共同构成了大乘佛教自利利他、自觉觉他的内涵。尤其是对慈悲的修习和实践，更是大乘佛教不共声闻的殊胜之处。以下，将从三个方面简单介绍一下大乘佛教的慈悲观及其心理治疗中的转化作用。

一、何为慈悲

我们平时所说的慈悲
也许只是针对某个人
虽然强烈，但并不普遍
也许只是由重大灾难所激发的情感
虽然普遍，但并不持久
不能一以贯之地保持下去
原因是什么
因为凡夫是有“我执”的

1. 慈悲

慈悲，是生活中经常提及的一个词。我们评价某人富有爱心时，会说“他很慈悲”，这时的慈悲，是德行的象征。我们希望博得他人同情时，会请求对方“发发慈悲”，这时的慈悲，又代表一种实际帮助。

至于慈悲和佛教的关系，很多人可能会知道“出家人慈悲为怀”这句话，但并不知道，慈悲一词本就出自佛典。慈，是慈爱众生并给予快乐；悲，是怜悯众生并拔除其苦。两者虽然有着不同侧重，但其实是相通的。因为究竟的给予快乐，必然包含着拔苦；而真正的拔苦，必能带给对方快乐。

在佛教中，慈悲既是一种实践的法门，如慈心观等，同时也是佛菩萨所成就的悲智两大品质之一。作为佛菩萨品质特征的慈悲，并不是一个泛泛的概念，而是有着特定的内涵和考量标准。那么，佛菩萨的慈悲又有什么特点呢？

2. 大慈大悲

佛菩萨的慈悲，特点就在于大慈大悲。所谓大，即慈悲的无限扩大。这种慈悲的对象，包括亲人，也包括冤家；包括人类，也包括动物，包括六道一切众生。换言之，只要还有一个众生是我们不愿利益的，是我们漠视甚至敌视的，就不是佛菩萨所成就的大慈大悲。而从另一方面来说，佛菩萨的慈悲又是长远的，是尽未来际永不改变的。所以说，这种慈悲是有着量化指标的，是可以对照心行进行检测的。

而我们平时所说的慈悲，也许只是针对某个人，比如母亲对儿女的慈悲，虽然强烈，但并不普遍，不能扩展到儿女以外的其他人。也许只是由重大灾难所

激发的情感，如四川地震时全国上下所表现出的关爱之情，虽然普遍，但并不持久，不能一以贯之地保持下去。原因是什么？因为凡夫是有“我执”的，这种执著蕴含着强烈的自我重要感，使我们本能地关注自己而忽略他人。母亲对子女的关爱，看似忘我，但多半只是对“我”的一种延伸，所以这种慈悲无法继续扩展到其他众生。也正是因为有“我”，我们才难以对“我”以外的“他”保有持久关怀。即使因特定事件使这种情感被激发起来，但一段时间后，又会习惯性地转向对“我”的重视。如果不通过禅修加以纠正，这个“我”将始终占据主导，使我们忽略甚至忘记，世间还有许许多多需要帮助的人。

3. 无缘大慈，同体大悲

佛菩萨之所以能成就无限的慈悲，关键就在于，他们已证得空性，已体认无我，已消除自我和众生之间的对立和隔阂，所以这种慈悲又称为“无缘大慈，同体大悲”。所谓无缘，就是没有任何亲疏、爱憎之

分，没有哪个众生是菩萨舍弃的，是菩萨不愿施以援手的。所谓同体，就是将众生和自己视为一体。就像你的脚扭伤时，手自然会去抚摸以减轻疼痛，这种帮助是身体的自然反应，是不需要加以考虑的。而在疼痛解决之前，这种帮助决不会半途而废，也不会去分别，手是施恩者而脚是受惠者。

菩萨对众生的慈悲也是同样，观音菩萨之所以能“寻声救苦”，之所以能“千处祈求千处应，苦海常作渡人舟”，也正是因为体证到众生和自己本来就是一体。因此，这种帮助不需要任何条件为前提，不需要考量其中是否有利可图，能否得到回报。同时，这种慈悲是“三轮体空”的，不存在施者和受者之间的对立。正如《金刚经》所说：“菩萨灭度无量众生，实无众生得灭度者。”因为无我，才能无住；因为无住，才能无限。

那么，我们怎样才能将现有的这点慈悲扩大为佛菩萨那样的大慈大悲呢？这就需要通过相应的禅修训练。

二、慈悲的修习

很多人会对慈悲这一品质表示认同
但未必愿意身体力行地去实践
因为在人们心目中
慈悲似乎就意味着奉献，意味着付出
意味着个人利益的损失
这种患得患失的心理
使很多人只是将慈悲作为一种说法

1. 开启慈悲心

在修习慈悲之前，首先要认识到，这一心理对生命发展的意义所在。相信很多人会对慈悲这一品质表示认同，表示赞叹，但未必愿意身体力行地去实践。因为在人们心目中，慈悲似乎就意味着奉献，意味着付出，意味着个人利益的损失。这种患得患失的心理，使很多人只是将慈悲作为一种说法。即使做一点，也无法像对待自己那么在意，那么投入。因为在我们心目中，他人始终被排斥在自己之外，而自利与利他也始终是彼此对立的。

但佛教告诉我们，慈悲不仅是利他的善行，更

是一种使人格得到提升的自利行为。当我们对他人心怀慈悲时，内心是调柔而开放的。这种调柔能使我们感到安宁与祥和，而这种开放则能使我们建立和谐的人际关系。从这个角度来说，善待他人就是善待自己。如果能认识到这一点，慈悲就会成为主动自觉的行为。因为我们在付出的同时就在收获，这种收获不在于他人的回报，而是自身心理的改善。

但这种认识还是基于自利，或者说，是把利他作为自利的途径。一旦面对具体的、形形色色的众生时，新的考验又出现了。因为凡夫心是有好恶的，是不平等的，尤其是对那些我们没有好感的众生，即使当作任务去做，也是勉为其难的。这样的慈悲，往往会使我们感到沉重而退缩。那么，如何才能使慈悲快速成长，成为内心的主导力量？

2. 慈悲的修习

大乘佛教中，主要为我们提供了三个修习项目，由此成就慈悲的广度、力度和纯度。

一是广度，通过发起菩提心，使慈悲得到扩大。菩提心，是觉悟而又利他的心，不仅要自我觉悟，更要帮助一切众生走向觉悟，究竟解除生命存在的一切痛苦。这种崇高的利他主义愿望，是慈悲得以扩展的强劲动力。但我们内心还有种种其他愿望，怎样才能使菩提心不因干扰而模糊？这就需要受持菩提心戒，通过庄严的宣誓对此进行确认，使这一愿望真正成为生命的立足点。当我们像誓言中所说的那样，时时心系众生并尽力给予帮助时，心量就会逐渐打开，慈悲也会随之增长。

二是力度，通过修习菩提心，使慈悲得到强化。受持菩提心戒，只是在内心播下菩提种子，但面对无始以来的串习，这种力量是微不足道的，这就必须不断为之提供养分。一方面，是在座上修习菩提心仪轨，每天提醒自己，以“利益一切众生”为使命。另一方面，还要将这种愿望落实到生活中，带着这种愿望去做每件事。通过正确而又持续的修习，使慈悲种子茁壮成长，成为具有绝对优势的主导力量，成为想忘也忘不了的强烈意愿，成为不受任何外在影响左右

的终极目标。

三是纯度，通过修习空性见，使慈悲得到升华。凡夫心是错综复杂的，所以，我们在长养慈悲的同时，往往还伴随着自我、贪执、嗔恨等不良心理。比如有些人是为了博得名声而利他，有些人则会因行善不得理解而心生怨恨，这都会障碍慈悲的成就。因为我执，而难以无限；因为爱憎，而难以平等。所以需要修习空性见，认识到自我及外在世界是因缘所生，其中没有固定不变的特质。我们执以为真实的一切，只是自我的设定和颠倒妄想，并非客观世界的真相。如果我们具备这种认知，不良心理将失去依托基础，并在空性见的观照下挥发一空。当夹杂于慈悲中的杂质被逐一剔除，才能成就佛菩萨那样广大而纯净无染的慈悲品质。

三、慈悲在心理治疗中的转化作用

常规的心理治疗
往往是通过某种外在疏导帮助患者
这种方式确实也能解除一些心理问题
但未必能从根本上斩除病根
而佛教修行不仅是以正见解除病态心理
同时更重视正向心理的建立

1. 慈悲能加强人与人的沟通

对于心理治疗师来说，与人沟通也是必须具备的专业技能之一。但仅仅依靠技巧，未必就能真正走入对方的内心。比如“共情”的运用，要求治疗师从病人的视角看待世界，以此进行沟通。但正如心理学家欧文·亚隆教授所说的那样：“真正了解一个人的感受是极端困难的一件事情，太多的时候，是我们把自己的感情投射在其他人身上。”

障碍这种“共情”的，正是我执，是强烈的自我重要感。这就使得我们总是带着自己的标准和好恶看待问题，无法做到真正的共情。而大乘佛教的慈

悲，则是以强烈的利他主义愿望为前提，这是走近对方、接纳对方、包容对方的首要条件。在修习慈悲的过程中，要在空性见的观照下不断克服我执，摆脱自我中心感，这样才能消除自他双方的隔阂，走进对方的心灵世界，达到真正共情的效果。

大乘佛教有一部《入菩萨行论》，由寂天菩萨所造。这部论典为我们提供了一套“自他相换”的修法，其理论基础，就是认识到我执的过患和利他的利益。具备这一认知，进而将对自我的重视转向一切众生，把对众生的漠视转向对待自己。换言之，就是将自我和众生在心目中的地位进行对换。这种修习可以帮助我们舍弃自我的重要感，建立利他之心，也是达成共情的善巧方法。

2. 慈悲能化解各种心理问题

常规的心理治疗，往往是通过某种外在疏导帮助患者。这种方式确实也能解除一些心理问题，但未必能从根本上斩除病根。因为我们的生命是以迷惑和

烦恼为基础，这将不断制造问题，使我们永远处在被动状态，疲于应付。

而佛教修行不仅是以正见解除病态心理，同时更重视正向心理的建立。这种正向心理，也就是佛教所说的正念，慈悲便是其中一项重要内容。当然，普通人的慈悲也具有化解嗔恨等其他负面心理的力量，但作用毕竟有限。大乘佛教所说的慈悲，是建立在空性慧的基础上。这种空性慧代表心灵内在的觉醒，也是生命本具的自我解除烦恼的能力，是佛菩萨所以能解脱自在的根本所在。也正因为空性慧有如此威力，建立在空性慧基础上的慈悲，自然具备化解一切心理问题的能力。就像有着超强免疫力的身体，本身就能应对一切病毒的入侵，使之没有可乘之机。即使原本已经发生的病变，也能随着免疫力的提高而自我调节，恢复健康。所以说，这种力量才是化解心理问题的根本。

以上，主要从大乘佛教的角度，介绍了佛法所说的慈悲与世间慈悲的异同，佛教对慈悲的具体修法和完善途径，以及慈悲在心理治疗中的作用，希望我的发言对大家有所启发。





THE PRACTICE OF THE METTA SUTTA

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The *Metta Sutta*¹ has always been an important part of our practice, serving as both a customary ritual before discussion sessions and an integral part of our daily morning meditation. Yet, how much do we actually know about the *Metta Sutta*? Are we using it merely as a soothing background music, or do we fully meditate according to its texts, turning it into a true practice of loving-kindness?

1. (Chinese: Ci jing 慈经) In Pali, the “Discourse on Loving-Kindness”; one of the best-loved and most frequently recited texts in the Buddhist world.

Without the right approach, the *Metta Sutta* could just become background music, and even that is not guaranteed, as our minds may still wander with distractions while listening. To truly make the *Metta Sutta* a practice of loving-kindness, we must grasp the scripture's essence, change our fixed beliefs, perform corresponding visualization practices, and integrate its teachings into daily lives. I will now introduce seven essential aspects of practicing the *Metta Sutta*.

I

WHAT IS METTA?

Metta, or loving-kindness, is the wish to bring happiness to other sentient beings. It is often accompanied by compassion—the desire to ease the suffering of others. However, there are certain obstacles we must overcome first. Many people struggle to cultivate loving-kindness or compassion because they feel disconnected or indifferent. Some may even harbor ill will or rejection towards certain beings, taking pleasure in their misfortunes. With such a mindset, it is impossible to foster loving-kindness.

Therefore, these obstacles must be addressed. To cultivate Metta, we need to establish connections with others.

This will lead us to care about them, treat them kindly, and offer help when needed. We also have to expand our hearts to embrace all kinds of sentient beings. By doing so, we can truly develop a heart of loving-kindness towards all.

II

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTIVATING METTA

Some people believe they just need to mind their own business and wonder, “Why should I practice Metta towards strangers or wish them well? How would that benefit me and the world?”

The essence of Buddhist practice is cultivating the mind. By cultivating a loving-kindness mindset, we can overcome our inner indifference, hostility, and hatred, becoming warm and peaceful individuals who exude positive energy. Those with Metta are agreeable, which helps them to build good relationships and create a harmonious atmosphere.

Metta also acts as a source of merit. As shown in Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland of Advice for a King*, "Even three times a day, offering three hundred cooking pots of food does not match a portion of the merit acquired in one instant of Metta. Devas and humans, even non humans, will protect you. You will have pleasures of the mind and the body. Poison and weapons will not harm you. Effortlessly you will attain your aims and be reborn in the form realm." As shown by these verses, cultivating Metta can bring boundless merits.

Loving-kindness is also a driving force for altruism, enabling us to achieve the great compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas. These enlightened beings possess two major qualities: the attainment of wisdom and the attainment of compassion. In the Seven-Point Cause and Effect Method for cultivating bodhicitta, Metta serves as a crucial foundation. Without Metta—without the desire for sentient beings to experience happiness and the willingness to alleviate their suffering—we cannot possibly give rise to bodhicitta or perfect our spiritual practice.

The Seven-Point Cause and Effect Method uses a sequential technique to help us develop Metta and compassion. It starts by making us realize that in the beginningless samsara, all sentient beings have once been our mothers. This realization evokes gratitude for their dedication and care, ultimately kindling our resolve to repay their love. After establishing Metta and compassion by using this method, we meditate on our altruistic resolve to liberate all sentient beings from samsara, which will guide us towards cultivating bodhicitta. The Seven-Point Cause and Effect Method demonstrates that we must overcome certain hurdles, such as our disconnection, indifference, and animosity towards others to nurture loving-kindness and compassion. How do we achieve this? The key lies in building connections with others by recognizing that, in the beginningless samsara, all beings across the six realms have once been our mothers.

However, merely acknowledging this fact is insufficient, as many individuals struggle to show filial devotion to their present mothers, let alone those from previous lives.

Therefore, after accepting that all beings had been our mothers, we must reflect on their motherly love and pledge to reciprocate it. Both Master Tsongkhapa's the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* and Master Xing'an's *An Inspiration to Give Rise to the Bodhi Mind* contain sections that help us contemplate the selfless devotion of our current and past mothers. For example, we must reflect on the truth that without our mothers bringing us into this world and caring for us, our current life and all we have would not exist. As such, we can never repay her in full. Genuine Metta that can inspire action must spring from this fundamental understanding.

In conclusion, to effectively cultivate Metta, it is essential to know its importance and the correct methods to develop it. If we fail to meet these prerequisites, we may find ourselves listening to the *Metta Sutta* without fully engaging with its message, or like detached observers merely appreciating a soothing, pleasant melody. In this case, the *Metta Sutta* would merely become another sutra that appears unrelated to our lives, providing neither guidance

nor direction for personal growth.

Metta, beyond refining our mindset, can eliminate the hostility and hatred at the heart of all conflicts and wars. If more people embrace and spread Metta, they can generate a powerful field of loving-kindness that eases anxious minds and fosters social harmony. In a world where many are concerned about air pollution, the most harmful pollution is actually not in the air we breathe but in the negativity stemming from hatred and cruelty. Such a world desperately needs the purifying power of Metta.

Therefore, practicing Metta is crucial for both individuals and the world.

III

WHAT DOES THE METTA SUTTA SAY?

What exactly does the *Metta Sutta* teach us? If we do not have a clear understanding, we may just listen to it and forget about it soon after. Even when reciting it word by word, we may be lacking sincerity. This type of passive listening and recitation will not help us cultivate the mind. The *Metta Sutta* has two components: the methods for cultivating Metta and the targets of our Metta practice.

1. Methods for Cultivating Metta

The core methods revolve around four essential wishes:

May I and all living beings be free from hostility and danger.

May I and all living beings be free from emotional harm.

May I and all living beings be free from physical harm.

May I and all living beings remain happy.

At first glance, these four phrases may seem simple, but let us deeply consider their relationship to our lives. Being free from conflicts and hostility allows us to feel truly safe and worry-free. Being free from emotional harm and physical imbalances enables us to experience lasting happiness. Is this not the perfect life?

Ask yourself: what is the ultimate goal of all your efforts? It all comes down to these four things—a sense of security, freedom from physical harm, freedom from emotional harm, and ultimately, happiness. So let us bless ourselves and all sentient beings with these four wishes. When everyone can enjoy such an ideal life, is the world not at its best?

Some may wonder: can the world really become better

just by thinking positively about it? The truth is, if we approach everything with loving-kindness, our world will naturally become beautiful. Then, we can spread this beauty to all sentient beings. How effectively we can do this depends on the strength of our Metta—is it pure, complete, and sincere? Indeed, cultivating Metta requires constant practice and nurturing. It is more than a one-time event or a simple wish made during meditation; it is a mental force that needs to be strengthened and expanded.

2. The Targets of Our Metta Practice

How do we extend a single thought of Metta to encompass all beings, everywhere, and at every moment? This involves three progressive stages.

First, we need to focus on cultivating Metta towards ourselves. Our body and mind, the five aggregates, although illusory like a dream, serve as indispensable conditions that aid our practice. This is because we can use these illusory elements to attain the ultimate truth. For this

reason, we should take care of our bodies and give them blessings. It is said that those who do not love themselves cannot genuinely love others because they do not know what love truly is. When practicing loving-kindness, we need to first allow ourselves to immerse in the feelings of loving-kindness and sincere blessings. Although concepts like “loving-kindness” and “sincere blessings” may seem familiar and straightforward on paper, deeper within our minds, we may lack experience in expressing them, or we may struggle to evoke them quickly in actual practice. Therefore, beginning with self-practice is the most effective approach.

The “body scanning meditation” we are learning also starts with familiarizing ourselves with our body, caring for it, and imbuing it with right mindfulness and positive energy and strength. This helps us to dispel negative feelings, enabling us to have a healthy body and mind when practicing Buddhism and benefiting others. Only after cultivating loving-kindness within ourselves can we effectively spread it.

Next, we need to practice Metta towards people around us. We should extend the Metta we have personally cultivated and experienced to our parents, teachers, relatives, friends, fellow practitioners, monks, and lay disciples in our community. We should sincerely wish for them to be free from hostility, danger, mental and physical suffering, and hope that they experience ongoing happiness. Since these people are familiar to us, it should not be too difficult to practice Metta towards them. Still, in the beginning, it is not necessary to visualize them all at once. We can divide these people into smaller groups to make our visualizations clearer and steadier before broadening our practice to encompass more of them.

Lastly, we need to cultivate Metta towards all sentient beings. From all beings with form and name; from all saints to non-saints; from all beings in the east, west, north, south, southeast, northwest, northeast, southwest, below, and above; to all those on land, in water, and in the air; from humans to the highest deities; and to all those in the woeful planes... In short, we should wish for all beings in

the ten Dharma realms to be free from hostility, danger, mental suffering, and physical suffering, and hope they maintain happiness.

In conclusion, the cultivation of Metta is an ongoing journey of opening our hearts. By gradually progressing from ourselves to others, and from close connections to more distant ones, we can eventually encompass all sentient beings as recipients of our loving-kindness. This process will help us dispel indifference, jealousy, hatred, and anger within us, as well as negative emotions towards ourselves and others. Truly understanding the teachings of the *Metta Sutta* is crucial for implementing this guidance within our minds.

IV

MAKING EACH SENTENCE A HEARTFELT WISH

Once we understand the meaning of each sentence in the *Metta Sutta*, the next step is to move from being a mere listener to an active practitioner. This requires acknowledging the importance of loving-kindness for oneself, all beings, and the world. Of course, it will be best if you can develop bodhicitta. But even if you are in the initial stage of the Mindful Peace Courses and cannot yet attain this level, it is still essential to at least recognize the positive impact of loving-kindness on our physical and mental well-being, happiness, and social harmony.

When we embrace loving-kindness, we leave behind

indifference and opposition. Then, in our family, work, and interpersonal connections, we will actively care for others, hoping they find relief from physical and mental distress and enjoy lasting happiness. This will establish a warm and harmonious atmosphere around us. As the saying goes, “When you give a rose, its scent remains with you.” By extending loving-kindness, we not only demonstrate our goodwill to others, but also strengthen our loving-kindness. Indeed, the more we use our loving-kindness, the more it multiplies.

We should transform each sentence of the *Metta Sutta* into a heartfelt wish—just as we do when we are seriously ill and sincerely hope for a speedy recovery, or when we deeply desire something we need. Our wishes must be genuine, pure, and untainted.

By making the *Metta Sutta* a daily practice and listening to it repeatedly, we strengthen these wishes, etching the scripture into our hearts, constantly reminding ourselves, and ultimately making loving-kindness the foundation of

our lives. In contemporary terms, this means turning loving-kindness into a natural reflex. Thus, our wishes can remain strong, no matter what we say or do, allowing us to evoke loving-kindness anytime, anywhere.

As the *Metta Sutta*'s teachings become our own perspectives and mindsets, we will naturally develop a desire to contribute to the well-being of others. Then, by actualizing loving-kindness through real-life altruistic deeds, we further strengthen these positive perspectives and mindsets, leading to a profound transformation in the quality of our lives.

V

PRACTICING THE METTA SUTTA: VISUALIZATION AND CULTIVATION

When practicing loving-kindness, how can we convert the *Metta Sutta's* teachings into our genuine feelings? Visualization is a powerful technique. We can picture loving-kindness as sunlight bathing the earth. Sunlight sustains photosynthesis, making life flourish. It also acts as a natural disinfectant, clearing away dampness and mold. Moreover, it offers warmth, particularly during winter, instilling relaxation and happiness within us.

By visualizing our loving-kindness using these three attributes of sunlight, we can get a tangible sense of what loving-kindness feels like. Once we know what

loving-kindness truly feels like, we can then go back to the *Metta Sutta* and turn each wish from it into radiant beams of sunlight. Visualize this sunlight spreading across all lands, eradicating the world's animosity and threats, dispelling the mental and physical suffering of all sentient beings, and infusing their cells with energy and carefree joy. As we visualize in this manner, it should feel as if we are observing a sunrise, darkness vanishing as life thrives.

Avalokitesvara is known for responding to prayers in countless locations. In the *Universal Gate: A Commentary on Avalokitesvara's Universal Gate Sutra*, it is said that merely reciting Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's name can free us from perils such as floods, fires, storms, weapon assaults, and attacks by malevolent brigands. How can Avalokitesvara alleviate these disasters? The answer lies in his immense loving-kindness. He has cultivated loving-kindness over countless eons, eventually achieving great unconditional loving-kindness and universal compassion for all beings, empowering him to safeguard them from danger.

In summary, to enhance our Metta, we need to integrate visualization techniques when meditating on the *Metta Sutta*. By practicing these visualizations daily, we will continuously strengthen our Metta, dispel the darkness in our minds, and nurture a growing sense of peace in our lives. If this visualization technique is challenging at first, we can start by treating each sentence in the *Metta Sutta* as a heartfelt wish, which can be powerful in its own right.

VI

FROM SEATED MEDITATION TO PRACTICING IN DAILY LIFE

When we cultivate loving-kindness during meditation, we sometimes feel really good, as if our hearts are filled with compassion. However, once off the cushion, that feeling may quickly dissipate as we encounter real-life challenges. This indicates that true loving-kindness has not genuinely arisen. We know that bodhicitta has two aspects: aspirational bodhicitta and engaged bodhicitta. Loving-kindness is similar. It is only through testing it off the cushion that we can truly understand the extent of our practice on the cushion.

First, during Metta meditation, we should make genuine

wishes and use visualization to consistently cultivate and exercise loving-kindness, transforming ourselves into a reservoir and transmitter of loving-kindness. As we recite each phrase, we should spread Metta in every direction and across all the ten Dharma realms. However, at times, our Metta may be obstructed when we think of people we dislike or feel indifferent towards. In these situations, it is important to revisit our relationship with all sentient beings, working to understand and accept even those we dislike or do not care about, and appreciate the opportunities they offer to test our practice.

Then, we must bring this loving-kindness into our daily lives. Can we treat all sentient beings with equal respect? When doing altruistic deeds, can we extend friendliness and care to all? This is the real measure of our loving-kindness. Otherwise, regardless of how much we practice Metta meditation, it may only amount to an empty promise without practical application.

Altruism is an effective way to cultivate loving-kindness,

and it can be divided into elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels.

1. Three Levels of Altruism: Elementary

Elementary altruism involves understanding, sympathy, and acceptance, nurturing a mindset that takes joy in the successes of others and consistently feels grateful. Why do we get stuck when practicing Metta? Why do we find it difficult to generate loving-kindness towards certain people? It is because we are immersed in our own feelings and unable to understand others, making sympathy and acceptance impossible, let alone rejoicing and expressing gratitude. Even if we do have these qualities, they are extremely limited and do not extend to all beings. This indifference, separation, and opposition are the result of our self-attachment.

Thus, in order to expand our Metta, we must let go of self-attachment. This can be achieved by embracing the concept of dependent origination and fostering

understanding and empathy, thereby allowing us to genuinely accept all sentient beings. We should recognize that those who harm us are victims themselves, ensnared by their own greed, anger, and ignorance. Like patients suffering from a grave illness, they are severely ill within samsara, causing them to act in ways that are beyond their control. This understanding can help us shift from opposition to empathy.

We sometimes impose expectations on others and cannot understand their actions and thoughts. This is also because we habitually look at situations from our own perspective. If we can learn to embrace the concept of dependent origination, we will be able to better appreciate individual differences. The principle of dependent origination reminds us that life is an infinite accumulation, and each person's character, habits, thoughts, and ways of thinking reflect their unique experiences. We should respect the principle of dependent origination, understand and accept others, and offer guidance using the most appropriate methods.

In conclusion, the greatest barrier to cultivating Metta is self-attachment, which becomes more pronounced in everyday experiences. To overcome self-attachment, profound Buddhist wisdom is needed. We interact with three types of sentient beings: those we like and feel close to, those we are indifferent towards, and those we dislike and reject. When practicing Metta, we should transform indifference into empathy, dislike into acceptance, and distance into close connection. Only then can we approach all sentient beings in daily life with loving-kindness, rather than separating Metta meditation from our everyday experiences.

How extensive is Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's great loving-kindness? Does achieving perfection in loving-kindness require him to free all sentient beings from samsara? Actually, it does not, because if that were the case, with countless beings still mired in samsara, how could buddhas and bodhisattvas have reached enlightenment? Having perfected loving-kindness means being able to generate Metta towards every sentient being we meet,

providing help to the best of our abilities, and eradicating all traces of indifference, hatred, and opposition. Once this is achieved, we then have perfected loving-kindness.

2. Three Levels of Altruism: Intermediate and Advanced

At the intermediate level, altruism involves making the vow of great compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas and practicing the six perfections¹ and the four means of conversion².

Finally, advanced altruism is achieved by helping others while practicing equality, no-self, and no-obtain. This requires experiencing emptiness and understanding that all sentient beings in the six realms are fundamentally one. This realization helps us see that all distinctions

1. Six perfections: giving, morality, forbearance, vigor, meditative absorption, wisdom

2. Four means of conversion: generosity, kind words, helpfulness, and consistency between words and deeds

between self and others arise from self-attachment. Only through such practices can one elevate conventional bodhicitta to ultimate bodhicitta, allowing us to engage in altruistic acts while recognizing that the three aspects—the giver, the recipient, and the act itself—are all empty. Thus, one aids sentient beings without clinging to the notion of sentient beings being saved.

In summary, the key focus when meditating on the *Metta Sutta* is to treat every sentence in the scripture as a sincere wish for the well-being of all sentient beings, wholeheartedly spreading loving-kindness. Then, off the cushion, continuously put these thoughts into practice, turning wishes into actions. The two aspects mutually reinforce each other: meditation provides guidance and a foundation for daily actions, while daily actions serve as a test and enhancement for meditation.

VII

STAGES IN THE PRACTICE OF THE METTA SUTTA

While listening to the *Metta Sutta*, immerse yourself in the text and envision your mind as all-encompassing. It is formless, infinite, filling the vast emptiness, and spreading across countless world. In this way, your mind is everywhere, reaching all the void and the boundless Dharma realms. Thus, the device that is playing the *Metta Sutta*, too, represents your mind, and each phrase it utters is a genuine wish originating from within you. As you listen to the words of the *Metta Sutta*, you are continually re-affirming your vows, awakening and fortifying this loving-kindness wish.

The *Metta Sutta* covers a wide range of targets, from ourselves and the people around us to all sentient beings within the six realms, and even to all saints and sages. In the early stages of the practice, to thoroughly comprehend the main ideas of the sutra, it is essential to separate it into several sections and practice them one by one; otherwise, we might only develop a superficial understanding of the text. Begin by listening to the entire sutra, but then narrow your attention to work on a particular section.

For example, the phrases, “May I be free from hostility and danger. May I be free from mental suffering. May I be free from physical suffering”, can be practiced together or separately. By repeating these phrases, we gain a comprehensive understanding of hostility and danger and what it means to be liberated from them. Through repetition, we improve our concentration; and by maintaining clarity throughout the process, we strengthen our awareness.

We should only move on to practicing other sections

when the mindset developed in the current section is clear, stable, and continuous. By “clear,” we mean knowing exactly what these wishes are and how they make us feel—as unmistakable as the distinct flavors of sugar and salt. “Stable” means being able to generate the corresponding mental state at any time with consistent intensity, rather than sporadically. “Continuous” implies that during Metta meditation, our loving-kindness mindset can be sustained without interruption between thoughts and remains undisturbed by delusive ideas. Furthermore, it means we can extend this loving-kindness into our everyday life. By achieving these three objectives, we can invoke the phrases from the *Metta Sutta* at any time, allowing us to emanate powerful loving-kindness akin to sunlight—illuminating the earth, banishing darkness, and filling all lives with love, harmony, and peace.

Meanwhile, when it comes to the target of our Metta, we also need to progress in stages. Start with yourself, then shift your focus to those around you, and ultimately

broaden your Metta to include all sentient beings. In the future, we can integrate our Metta practice with the contemplations of the *Vows of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra Sutra*, merging the cultivation of Metta and bodhicitta.

Metta is often regarded as the foundation for cultivating bodhicitta. However, even after developing bodhicitta, we should continue practicing Metta. This is because bodhicitta enables us to strengthen our Metta, expanding it from finite to infinite. By integrating this with the experience of emptiness, we can truly achieve unconditional great loving-kindness and universal compassion. This is the journey we embark upon in our Metta practice.

VIII

SUMMARY

In summary, the practice of the *Metta Sutta* generally includes the following key points:

1. Understand Each Sentence: Transform the content of the sutra into your sincere wishes for all sentient beings.
2. Incorporate Aspirations into Daily Life: Practice and test these wishes in your daily life, bringing the aspirations from meditation into your everyday actions.
3. Meditative Practice: Learn the meditative techniques of the sutra to dispel darkness, indifference, and

opposition within your body and mind, and to establish friendly, harmonious, and warm relationships with others.

4. Bodhicitta and Loving-Kindness: Based on the perspectives from the *Vows of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra Sutra*, develop bodhicitta through loving-kindness and perfect great compassion through bodhicitta.
5. Equality and Selflessness: Cultivate boundless compassion and great empathy based on the views of equality, no-self, and non-obtain.

For those at the stages of Scholarly and Practitioner, achieving the first three points is commendable. The last two points are the focus of advanced practitioners in the Victorious and Sagacious stages.

————— Appendix —————

THE MAHAYANA BUDDHIST VIEW
OF COMPASSION
AND ITS TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE
IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

**Lectured at the Fourth International Forum
on Psychoanalysis and Chinese Culture, 2009**

The mind is a key point of shared concern for both Buddhism and psychology. Within our minds, there is the potential for good, which can develop into a noble character and bring happiness and comfort. There are also negative psychological aspects that can give rise to mental illnesses, causing afflictions and suffering. When the body experiences illness, we seek timely medical treatment to prevent the condition from worsening and damaging our health. Similarly, when our minds suffer from ailments, we must also take them seriously and treat them actively. Although these mental illnesses are

intangible and formless, if neglected, their harm can be as severe as physical illnesses. In extreme cases, they can drive people to despair. According to available data, the number of people who fall ill or even die due to mental problems is on the rise annually, which should not be overlooked.

In terms of treatment scope, psychology mainly focuses on treating psychological disorders. It primarily addresses pathological and abnormal psychological conditions, but does not cover common human afflictions such as greed, hatred, and ignorance. In contrast, Buddhist practice not only aims to eliminate negative mental states but also emphasizes the cultivation of positive mental qualities. Among the three virtues attained by the Buddha, the virtue of cessation is attained through the eradication of afflictions, representing the ultimate liberation from negative mental states. The virtues of wisdom and compassion embody great wisdom and great compassion, respectively, representing the full manifestation of humanity's inherent positive psychological qualities. Wisdom tends to benefit oneself, while compassion tends to benefit

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others. Together, they constitute the essence of Mahayana Buddhism, which emphasizes benefiting oneself and others, and awakening oneself and others. The cultivation and practice of compassion, in particular, is a unique and distinguished aspect of Mahayana Buddhism, setting it apart from Shravaka Buddhism. In this lecture, I will briefly introduce the Mahayana Buddhist view of compassion and its transformative role in psychotherapy, focusing on three key aspects.

I

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

1. Compassion

“Compassion” is a word frequently mentioned in our daily life. When we describe someone as loving, we might say, “he is very compassionate.” In this case, compassion is a symbol of virtue. When we seek sympathy from others, we might ask them to “show some compassion.” In this context, compassion represents a form of practical help.

As for the relationship between compassion and Buddhism, many people may be familiar with the phrase “Monastics hold compassion in their hearts,” but they

might not know that the term “compassion” (*ci-bei*) originates from the Buddhist scriptures. *Ci* means loving-kindness to all sentient beings and giving them happiness, while *bei* means compassion for all beings and eliminating their suffering. Although *ci* (loving-kindness) and *bei* (compassion) emphasize different aspects, they are interconnected. The ultimate giving of happiness inevitably involves alleviating suffering, and the true alleviation of suffering will undoubtedly bring happiness to others.

In Buddhism, compassion is not only a practical method of practice, such as loving-kindness meditation, but also one of the two main qualities—wisdom and compassion—attained by buddhas and bodhisattvas. As a defining quality of buddhas and bodhisattvas, compassion is not a vague concept; it has specific connotations and evaluation criteria. So, what are the characteristics of the compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas?

2. Great Loving-Kindness and Great Compassion

The compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas is characterized by great loving-kindness and great compassion. The term “great” here refers to the boundless expansion of compassion. This type of compassion extends to relatives as well as enemies; it includes humans and animals, covering all beings in the six realms. In other words, as long as there is a single being whom we are unwilling to benefit, whom we ignore or even view as an adversary, it does not represent the great loving-kindness and great compassion achieved by buddhas and bodhisattvas. Furthermore, the compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas is enduring and unchanging, extending to infinite future generations. Therefore, this type of compassion has measurable criteria and can be assessed through one’s intentions and actions.

However, the compassion we typically refer to may only apply to specific individuals. For example, a mother’s compassion for her children, while intense, is not universal

and cannot be extended beyond her children. This type of compassion could merely be an emotion triggered by significant disasters, such as the nationwide outpouring of care that followed the Sichuan earthquake. Although such care was widespread, it was not lasting and could not be consistently maintained. What is the reason for this? It's because ordinary people have "self-attachment," which involves a strong sense of self-importance that instinctively drives us to focus on ourselves and overlook others. A mother's love for her children, although seemingly selfless, is often just an extension of the "self"; therefore, such compassion cannot be further extended to other sentient beings. It is also because of this "self" that we find it difficult to maintain sustained care for "others" beyond ourselves. Even if such emotions are initially sparked by specific events, they typically revert to habitual self-concern over time. Without correction through meditation, this "self" will continue to dominate, leading us to neglect or even forget the many others in the world who need help.

3. Unconditional Great Loving-Kindness and Universal Great Compassion

The key reason that buddhas and bodhisattvas can achieve infinite compassion lies in their realization of emptiness, their understanding of no-self, and the elimination of opposition and barriers between themselves and others. Therefore, this kind of compassion is also known as “Unconditional Great Loving-Kindness and Universal Great Compassion.” “Unconditional” means that there are no distinctions of closeness or distance, love or hatred; there is no sentient being that the bodhisattvas abandon or are unwilling to help. “Universal” means seeing oneself and all sentient beings as one entity. Just like when your foot is sprained, your hand naturally reaches out to soothe it and relieve the pain. This assistance is a natural bodily reaction that requires no thought. Until the pain is alleviated, this help will not cease halfway, nor will there be any distinction between the hand as the benefactor and the foot as the beneficiary.

The compassion of bodhisattvas for all sentient beings is similar. Guanyin Bodhisattva can “perceive the call for help and alleviate suffering” and “respond to countless pleas for help and always ferry people across the sea of suffering like a boat” precisely because he realizes that all sentient beings and himself are inherently one. Therefore, such help is given without any preconditions, without judging whether it is profitable or whether there will be any return. At the same time, this compassion embodies the “emptiness of the three wheels” (the giver, the recipient, and the act of giving), with no opposition between the giver and the recipient. As stated in the *Diamond Sutra*, bodhisattvas “liberate innumerable sentient beings; in reality, no sentient beings are liberated.” Because of no-self, there is no-abidance; and because of no-abidance, there is infinity.

So, how can we expand our existing compassion to the great compassion akin to that of buddhas and bodhisattvas? This requires appropriate meditation practice.

II

THE PRACTICE OF COMPASSION

1. Awakening Compassion

Before practicing compassion, it is essential to recognize the significance of this mindset in shaping and developing one's life. Many appreciate and admire the quality of compassion but hesitate to put it into practice. This reluctance stems from the belief that compassion involves sacrifice, giving, and the loss of personal interests. Such concern about gain and loss leads many to treat compassion as a mere concept. Even when people perform acts of compassion, they cannot invest the same level of care and commitment as they would for themselves. This is

because in our minds, others are always seen as separate from ourselves, and self-interest and altruism are always viewed as inherently conflicting.

However, Buddhism teaches us that compassion is not only an altruistic act of kindness but also a self-beneficial practice that enhances one's character. When we harbor compassion for others, our hearts become gentle and open. This gentleness brings us peace and tranquility, while this openness helps us build harmonious relationships with others. From this perspective, treating others well is actually treating ourselves well. When we recognize this, compassion naturally becomes a proactive and conscious behavior. As we give, we simultaneously receive—not in the form of reciprocation from others, but through the improvement of our own mental state.

However, this understanding is still based on self-interest, or rather, it views altruism as a means to self-benefit. Once facing various sentient beings in concrete situations, new challenges arise. This is because the ordinary mind has

likes and dislikes and is inherently unequal. It is particularly challenging to feel compassion for those we do not favor. Even when we approach it as a duty, it feels forced and difficult. Such compassion often leaves us feeling burdened and inclined to withdraw. So how can we make compassion grow quickly and become the dominant force in our minds?

2. Practicing Compassion

In Mahayana Buddhism, three main practices are provided to help us achieve the breadth, strength, and purity of compassion.

First, there is breadth, achieved by arousing bodhicitta (the Bodhi mind) to expand compassion. Bodhicitta is a mind of enlightenment and altruism, striving not only for personal awakening but also for the enlightenment of all sentient beings, ultimately eliminating all suffering in life. This noble altruistic aspiration serves as a powerful force for the expansion of compassion. However, our minds

are filled with various other desires. How can we ensure that our bodhicitta remains clear and undisturbed? This requires taking the vows of bodhicitta. Through solemn vows, we affirm this aspiration and make it the true foundation of our lives. When we live according to these vows, always keeping sentient beings in mind and doing our utmost to help them, our hearts will gradually expand, and our compassion will blossom.

Second, there is strength, achieved by cultivating bodhicitta to reinforce compassion. Taking bodhicitta vows only plants the seed of bodhicitta in our minds, but given our ingrained habits from beginningless time, this initial strength is insignificant. Therefore, it is essential to nourish it continuously. This involves practicing the ritual meditation of bodhicitta, reminding ourselves daily of the mission to “benefit all sentient beings.” Additionally, it requires integrating this aspiration into our daily lives, carrying it with us in everything we do. Through proper and sustained practice, the seeds of compassion are nurtured to robust growth, becoming a dominant force with

unparalleled influence, a compelling intention that is unforgettable, and an ultimate goal, impervious to any external influences.

Third, there is purity, achieved by cultivating the view of emptiness to elevate compassion. The ordinary mind is complex, so when we nourish compassion, it is often intertwined with negative mental states such as ego, greed, attachment, and hatred. For instance, some people perform altruistic acts to gain fame, while others may feel resentful when their good deeds are misunderstood. These attitudes can hinder the attainment of true compassion. Self-attachment prevents us from being infinite, while love and hatred prevent us from being impartial. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate the view of emptiness, understanding that the self and the external world arise from dependent origination, without an inherent and unchanging essence. What we cling to as real is actually just our own assumptions and delusions, not the true nature of the objective world. With this understanding,

THE MAHAYANA BUDDHIST VIEW OF COMPASSION
AND ITS TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

negative mental states lose their foundation and instantly disappear under the insight of emptiness. Only when the impurities mixed with compassion are removed one by one can we attain the vast, pure, and undefiled compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

III

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF COMPASSION IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

1. Compassion Can Enhance Interpersonal Communication

For psychotherapists, effective communication is a necessary professional skill. However, relying solely on techniques may not allow one to truly reach the heart of another person. For example, using “empathy” requires therapists to see the world from the patient’s perspective in order to facilitate communication. But as psychologist Dr. Irvin D. Yalom has pointed out, “It is extremely difficult to truly understand another person’s feelings.

Too often, we project our own feelings onto others.”

What obstructs true “empathy” is precisely self-attachment, a strong sense of self-importance. This causes us to view problems through our own standards and preferences, making it impossible to achieve true empathy. In contrast, compassion in Mahayana Buddhism is based on a strong desire for altruism, which is the primary condition for approaching, accepting, and embracing others. In cultivating compassion, one must continually overcome self-attachment through the contemplation of emptiness, freeing oneself from self-centeredness. Only in this way can the barriers between self and others be removed, allowing one to enter the inner world of others and achieve true empathy.

In Mahayana Buddhism, there is a treatise called the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, authored by Bodhisattva Shantideva. This treatise provides a practice method called “exchanging self with others,” and its theoretical foundation lies in recognizing the faults of self-attachment and the benefits

of altruism. With this understanding, one can shift the importance placed on oneself onto all sentient beings and transform indifference towards others into the way one treats oneself. In other words, it is about reversing the positions of self and others in our minds. This practice helps us relinquish our self-importance and cultivate an altruistic mindset. It is also an effective method for achieving true empathy.

2. Compassion Can Resolve Various Psychological Issues

Conventional psychotherapy often aids patients through external guidance. While this approach may alleviate certain psychological problems, it does not necessarily eliminate the root causes. Because our lives are fundamentally based on confusion and afflictions, these continually generate problems and keep us in a perpetually reactive state, exhausted from coping.

In Buddhism, however, the practice not only involves

using right view to eliminate pathological psychology but also emphasizes the establishment of positive psychology. This positive psychology is known in Buddhism as right mindfulness, and compassion is an essential part of it. Although ordinary compassion has the power to resolve anger and other negative emotions, its effects are limited. Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism is based on the wisdom of emptiness. This wisdom of emptiness represents the inner awakening of the mind and the inherent ability of life to dispel afflictions. It is the fundamental reason why buddhas and bodhisattvas can attain liberation and freedom. Because of the power contained in the wisdom of emptiness, compassion based on this wisdom naturally has the ability to solve all psychological problems. Just like a body with strong immunity can defend itself against any viral infection, leaving no opportunity for the virus to take hold. Even existing ailments can be self-regulated and healed as the immune system is strengthened. Thus, this intrinsic power is the fundamental solution to solving psychological problems.

From the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism, the above primarily introduces the similarities and differences between Buddhist compassion and worldly compassion, the specific practices and methods for perfecting compassion in Buddhism, and the role of compassion in psychotherapy. I hope my talk has been thought-provoking for everyone.

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