

From love must come wisdom¹

TO HAVE OR TO BE. If a child seriously lacks love or were badly hurt as a child, he might spend the rest of his life seeking a mother-figure² or a father-figure.³ All is not lost if he truly understands why he is doing this, so that he is able to fill up such hollowness or loop-holes with love and understanding. Self-healing is possible at any stage of our lives, that is, as long as we have some depth in self-understanding,⁴ helped by spiritual mentorship or a truly loving partnership or good friendships.⁵

This is the stage when we need to understand the difference between *having* and *being*. What we have—friends, things, wealth, property—are really *external* to us. Hence, they often turn out to be something other than what we have expected. They are beneficial insofar as they make us happy, that is, we are happy with them.

Yet, even what we are—happy, healthy, learned, famous—all these would not always be what we expect them to be. We truly *are* only this moment: live it well, share it well—we are then on the way to being a healthy and fulfilled individual.

HEAVEN HERE AND NOW. The greatest spiritual significance of the divine abodes (lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity)⁶ is as a cultivation of unconditional love and joy as the basis for experiencing non-self. This is, of course, most effective when any of the abodes is cultivated to the level of dhyana.⁷ However, even without dhyana, but with some level of focussed practice, we can enjoy the profound bliss of lovingkindness. In our daily lives, we should at least make every effort to keep our hearts imbued with lovingkindness, no matter what.

With such a practice, one thing we are certain to notice is that it is not always easy to sustain lovingkindness in this way. In difficult and troubled times, when we least expect it, we might find ourselves allowing anger or hate to have the better of us when we are painfully affected by the badness, foolishness or weakness of others. We become like a lion with a splinter stuck in our paw, roaring in pain and anguish, but with no Androcles to remove the splinter.⁸ As humans, we are ourselves Androcles, unless we choose to go on lionising ourselves.

¹ From **Karaṇīya Metta Sutta** (Khp 9 = Sn 8.1) = SD 38.3 (7): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/38.3-Karaniya-Metta-S-khp-9-Sn-8.1-piya.pdf>

² On a negative side, the dominance of a mother over a man may delay, even prevent, him from a happy marriage. One solution is for the new couple to live together on their own so that they are able to build their life, friendship and partnership. As long there is warm love between the couple. Whether a wife is a mother, a sister, a friend or a handmaid to her husband, is no issue: see **Bhāriyā S** (A 7.59/4:91-94) = SD 90.3

³ A father who is too dominant may end up with a rebellious child who in due course might reject all that the father is or stands for, such as his religion. Or, the child might himself become dominant, even violent, echoing the conditioning he has received. If a child is used to an over-protective father-figure, he might be inclined to a father-figure religion, usu dependent on a God-idea. It should be noted that certain teachings in Buddhism, such as Amitabha or Guanyin worship, if taken as a God-figure (forgiving sins, providing succour, warding off bad luck, etc) could have similar effects or act as symptoms for underlying psychological difficulties which need to be addressed. Buddhist training is about self-understanding and healing through mindfulness and spiritual friendship.

⁴ On individuation, see **Saññoga S** (A 7.48) @ SD 8.7 (4): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/8.7-Sannoga-S-a7.48-piya.pdf>

⁵ See **Spiritual friendship** = SD 8.1: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/8.1-Spiritual-friendship-piya.pdf>

⁶ See **Brahma, vihāra** = SD 38.5: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/38.5-Brahmavihara-piya.pdf>

⁷ See **Brahma, vihāra** = SD 38.5 (7.4 & 8.3).

⁸ On the fable, see <http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/aesop/bl-aesop-androcles.htm>. See also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Androcles>.

MAKING THE OLD SELF NEW. When we review such moments, we will discover that we are “not ourselves,” that is, we would not under “normal circumstances,” react in such a negative way. Our negative habitual tendencies (the “old self” or past karmic habits) have overtaken us.

OVERCOMING REACTIVITY. However, if we cultivate lovingkindness well enough, we would be able to quickly overcome, even prevent, such reactions to negative situations. The fact remains that we are clearly aware of the unwholesomeness of such negative situations, and even wish to get away from them. These situations are not “places” we could move or keep away from, but they are mental states we need to overcome within ourselves.

One important way to know that we are heading in a self-healing direction is that we are more naturally able to direct our lovingkindness to those very people who are hurting or harming us. In fact, we might even feel a great compassion in our hearts that these people are incapable of behaving otherwise because they are spiritually weak themselves. Hence, all the more we need to invoke and sustain a healing ambience for them through our lovingkindness.

SELFLESS LOVING. On some higher level, we would come to realize that it is the idea of some kind of abiding “self” (“this is what I am,” “he or they are like *that*,” etc), that is causing all the hurt and hate. Lovingkindness allows us to see, even feel, as others would: it helps us to empathise with others. At some point in such a sustained practice, we might just catch a profound glimpse of what non-self is or is like. If not, we would surely have greater wisdom in understanding the nature of human feelings.

The cultivation of lovingkindness, in other words, can lead us to spiritual liberation or awakening. It should be noted, however, that this practice must be accompanied by insight (*dassanena*, Sn 152b; or *vipassanā*). Having attained a concentrated mind of lovingkindness or even before that, we should reflect on the three characteristics (namely, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, non-self).

AWAKENING THROUGH LOVE. In **the Mahā Govinda Sutta** (D 19), the Buddha declares that the cultivation of lovingkindness outside of the teaching does not lead to awakening. This passage refers to the brahminical (God-believing) practice (D 2:251), where there is a belief in an abiding entity (a soul).⁹ It should not be misunderstood as the Buddha’s condemnation or rejection of the practice itself; for, there are numerous sutta references extolling the cultivation of lovingkindness.¹⁰

Even on a worldly level, the proper practice of lovingkindness can bring eleven advantages: good sleep; waking in comfort; no disturbing dreams; personal popularity; beloved by non-humans; divine protection; safety from fire, poison and weapons; easy mental concentration; serene countenance; unconfused mind at death; and a good rebirth.¹¹

Man reaches his evolutionary peak and spiritual apex when he is able to truly see himself for what he really is. To do this, he has to rise above the noise and sway of the unthinking and unfeeling crowd and tribe. He has to fully be himself, and to do so he must be *alone* in full sight of his own heart, rising even beyond the limitations of his physical body to explore the inner space of his mind and enjoy the blissful beauty of his heart.

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⁹ D 19.61/2:251 = SD 63.4.

¹⁰ See eg A 2:128-130, 5:300; Dh 368; It 19 f, etc.

¹¹ **(Eka,dasa) Mettānisamsā S** (A 11.16/5:342) = SD 2.15: http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/2.15_Ekadasa_Mettanisamsa_S_a11.16_piya1.pdf; P 2:130; Vism 9:37/306 f.