

Devin Berry

*Metta and Karuna: Two Heart Practices to Cultivate in Meditation and Daily Life*

Week Two: “Metta Off the Cushion and Into the World”

December 10, 2022



Hello, and welcome back. Today, I’m going to talk about stealth metta. First I’m going to start with how every day, we have the opportunity to change the direction of the mind and the heart, transforming mind states and protecting us from inner harm.

I want to read you something by the late bell hooks. It’s something that I use to frame my own metta practice at times. She said, “The most basic form of activism that we can have in our lives is to live consciously in a nation living in fantasy.” We can see metta, or this stealth metta, as I’m calling it, as consciously planting seeds of goodwill and love, trusting the laws of nature to grow metta and noticing it bloom over time through the intention that ourselves and all beings be happy, be peaceful, be safe and protected, and live with ease and well-being. In this way, metta is a thread that directly connects our dharma practice and social transformation. That transformation is not dependent on anyone else. It begins with each of us, and the engine is our intention and wholehearted presence.

The great strength of lovingkindness and goodwill is vulnerability, and that vulnerability is what sets the compass of the heart in the direction of connection and belonging. I like the analogy of lighting a pilot light on a heater to bring warmth to a room. Metta isn’t a quick fix, and oftentimes the opposite comes up. It is a purification practice as well. But initially, we stick with it, and we begin to allow it to purify the heart. Over time, we may begin to see or notice that some of the grooves of habits and conditioning aren’t so deep. We may notice that we are kinder or lighter, connecting to the wish that all beings be happy. We bring warmth and light to whatever space that we’re in.

Now, on a practical level, stealth metta comes from the fact that metta is portable and mobile and can be done anywhere at any time. It’s not just something formally done sitting on the cushion working through categories. Outside of retreat, I practice in this way more and more, starting

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with where it easily works, with those that I most care about, dear friends, those that I’m reuniting with, pet beings, animal friends. You can spark a fire to bring warmth by rubbing two sticks together, and you can also spread the warmth or the natural warmth of goodwill, friendliness, love, and connection. Working with what’s easiest is skillful means, and then you take it to the streets.

Traditionally, when doing metta practice, you may work through a series of categories. And of course, in working with stealth metta, you can do the same. But we can also work with the neutral category, those that we don’t know so well, or those that we may have a little charge with or that we don’t know at all. These at times can include people coming to clean the gutters on your house. This can include the Amazon drivers, postal workers, store clerks, and neighbors.

So as I go about my day, while out and about, I often offer metta phrases, and I offer these particular phrases: “May you be happy and peaceful. May you be safe and protected. May you live with ease and well-being.” Of course, you can find your own phrases. There are classical phrases to use. Those phrases came to me 20+ years ago, and they’re comfortable and rhythmic and they have meaning and I can put intention behind them. I offer these phrases to whatever beings I cross paths with, and it’s been quite a transformative practice in that I’ve been able to cut through quite a bit of the projections and stories that the mind is holding with beings whose stories I don’t actually know.

For a few years, one of my favorite practices has been to practice while I was sitting in the back of an Uber or Lyft. In the city, my work had me traveling to different parts of the city and different parts of the county. I had sold my car, and I was walking and riding a bike and using public transportation, and oftentimes I found myself in an Uber or Lyft. I began to offer metta to those that were driving me to these places. What I noticed is that if I wasn’t actually staring at

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my phone doomscrolling and I was actually connected to the phrases and I could drop under the meaning of the words and into the intentions and see the person that was actually there, then I actually began to connect with that person as I was offering these metta phrases.

This led to conversations with different strangers from Afghanistan, Poland, Russia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Somalia, Colombia, and many different Buddhist Asian countries. With those folks, I would notice a Buddhist statue or some other iconography or symbol of the dharma as I was saying the phrases. Sometimes I would ask about it, and they would tell me their name and tell me about this and were curious about my curiosity about the practice. This often led to further conversation. Sometimes it led to coffee, it led to tea, or it led to lunch. It led to a few of the people becoming acquaintances, and it led to a couple of them actually becoming dear friends. I credit all of this to the presence of metta, clear intention and the mind settling down while I was focused, while my intention and attention was on the person, the being that was in front of me and not on my distracted mind or my rushing mind waiting to get somewhere or scrolling around on my phone.

I noticed that a number of these folks moved from this neutral category to becoming acquaintances and dear friends, and it was all quite a radical departure from quietly sitting in the back of the car, not connecting and not engaging another being. And that's all a radical departure from letting the mind run wild with projections while walking around the city, fearful and anxious with these other hundreds of thousands of strangers around me.

For me, stealth metta truly presents us with this opportunity to plant the seeds of goodwill, lovingkindness, and friendliness that naturally grow and bloom into strong threads or strong bonds between our dharma practice and social transformation, and it colors how we engage in the world.

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May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you be safe and protected. May you live with ease and well-being. And may we all awaken and be free. Please join me next time when we explore holding others in our heart with karuna, or compassion. Thank you.