

Buddhist Hour Radio Script No. 1019
Christmas Bhavana Course 2018 - Part 1
Broadcast 13th January 2019

Today we will be reading about the teachings we received during our recent Christmas Bhavana Course, which was held from 27th - 31st December 2018. The retreat was conducted under the guidance of Venerable Bhante Vimalaramsi and Venerable Sister Khanti Khema of Dhamma Sukha Meditation Centre in Annapolis, Missouri, through their online retreat program. The teachings which we will be sharing with you today can be accessed from the Dhamma Sukha website, www.dhammasukha.org.

Our five day bhavana retreat began on Thursday 27th of December 2018.

We had requested Sister Khema to lead the retreat to help us to understand Bhante Vimalaramsi's teachings when they visited our Centre in October 2018. We loved what we heard and requested teachings from Bhante Vimilaramsi. We were thrilled to learn that they gave retreats online and many of Bhante's already recorded teachings could be found online.

We began each day by establishing refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha by chanting the Vandana for Buddha, 5 precepts and Triple Gem refuge.

We kept 8 precepts as advised by the Buddha so the retreat would be of great benefit and our mind would be peaceful.

We cleared our minds and payed close attention and said together:

1. I undertake to keep the precept to abstain from killing or harming living beings, on purpose.
2. I undertake to keep the precept to abstain from taking what is not given.
3. I undertake to keep the precept to abstain from all sexual activity.
4. I undertake to keep the precept to abstain from telling lies, using harsh speech, gossip, or slander.
5. I undertake to keep the precept to abstain from taking drugs or alcohol.
6. I undertake to keep the precept to abstain from eating solid food after the noon-day meal.
7. I undertake to keep the precept to abstain from listening to music, singing, dancing, or beautifying my body with makeup, flowers or perfumes.
8. I undertake to keep the precept to be loving and kind to myself and all beings.

Next, we read out the following sayings from the Dhammapada:

1]* Mind is the forerunner of all evil states. Mind is chief; mind made are they. If one speaks or acts with an unwholesome mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draft-ox.

2] Mind is the forerunner of all good states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves.

3]* “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”, in those who harbor such thoughts hatred is not appeased.

4] “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”, in those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred is appeased.

5] Hatred is never overcome by hatred in this world. Hatred is only overcome by love. This is an eternal law.

11]* In the unessential we imagine the essential, in the essential we see the unessential, anyone who entertains such wrong thoughts never will realize the truth.

12] What is essential we regard as essential, what is unessential we regard as unessential, anyone who entertains such right thoughts will realize the truth.

16]* Here one develops a mind that rejoices now, and in the future one rejoices. In both states the well-doer rejoices. One who rejoices a lot will be able to see the purity of their own deeds, speech and thoughts

18] When one is happy now, they will be happy in the future. In both states the well-doer is happy. Thinking “I have done good in the past” one becomes happy and will easily experience a blissful state of mind.

19] *Though a person recites sacred texts, but doesn’t act accordingly, that heedless person is like a cowherd who counts others’ cows. They have no share in the fruits of the holy life.

20] Though a person recites the sacred texts very little, but acts in

accordance with the teaching, they give up lust, hatred and delusion. They truly know what is good and this leads to a mind that is free from suffering. They cling to nothing here and in the future. In this way, one shares the fruits of the holy life.

We would then conclude our morning chanting as it was provided with the following quote from Rumi:

“It is said that love comes
through a window in the heart.
But if there are no walls,
there is no need to have a window.”

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Students sat in meditation for 30 minutes whilst listening to a talk by Sister Khema on metta meditation. We will now read out the transcript of the talk, which can be found at www.dhammasukha.org:

HOW TO FIRST BEGIN YOUR PRACTICE

As read by Venerable Sister Khema online.

Loving Kindness:

When practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation, you first start by sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself. Begin by remembering a time when you were happy. When the feeling of happiness arises, it is a warm glowing feeling in the center of your chest.

Now, when this feeling arises, make a very sincere wish for your own happiness. “May I be happy”... “May I be filled with joy”... “May I be peaceful and calm”... “May I be cheerful and kind”, etc. Make any wholesome sincere wish that has meaning for you, feeling the wish in your heart. The key word here is “sincere”, if your wish isn't a sincere wish then it will turn into a mantra that is, it may become a statement repeated by rote, with no real meaning. Then you would be on the surface repeating the statement while thinking about other things. So it is very important that the wish you make for yourself (and later for your spiritual friend) has real meaning for you and uses your whole undivided attention. Don't continually repeat the wish for happiness: “May I be happy... may I be happy... may I be happy... may I be happy”. Make the wish for your own happiness when the feeling of Loving-Kindness begins to fade a little.

Don't Move!

During your meditation, please don't move your body at all while sitting. Don't wiggle your toes; don't wiggle your fingers; don't scratch; don't rub; don't rock your body; don't change your posture at all. In fact, if you can sit as still as the Buddha image in front of you, this would be the best! If you move around, it becomes a big distraction to your practice and you won't progress very quickly at all.

While you are sitting, radiating the warm-glowing feeling of Loving-Kindness in the center of your chest and making a sincere wish, feeling that wish in your heart, your mind will wander away and begin to think about other things. This is normal.

Relax Tension

The following is a very important part of the meditation:

After every wish for your own happiness, please notice that there is some slight tension or tightness in your head, in your mind. Let it go.

You do this by relaxing mind completely. Feel mind open up and become calm, but do this only one time.

If the tightness doesn't go away never mind, you will be able to let it go while on the meditation object (your home base).

Don't continually try to keep relaxing mind, without coming back to the home base; always softly redirect your tranquil attention back to the feeling of happiness.

Upcoming Thoughts

When we do this meditation, thoughts are never your enemy. They will continue to come up during your meditation. Our job is NOT to stop mind from producing thoughts. They will subside on their own if we do not pay attention to them. So, please don't fight with them or try to push them away. When a series of thoughts do come up that do carry you away, they you are to **RECOGNIZE** that you are not experiencing the feeling of Loving-Kindness and making a wish for your own happiness. Then, simply **RELEASE** your attention on that thought, let it go **AND RELAX!**, Even if you are in mid-sentence, just release the thought, let it be there by itself. This is done by not continuing to think the thought, no matter how important it seems at that time.

Just let it go and relax. Then, you **RE-SMILE and RETURN** to the feeling of Loving Kindness and the wish for your friend and you **KEEP YOUR PRACTICE GOING** and you **REPEAT THE CYCLE AS NEEDED ONLY when your attention is pulled away!**

That cycle is →

- RECOGNIZE when mind's attention is pulled away;
- RELEASE mind's attention off the thought and RELAX the tension in the head and body (just let go);
- RE-SMILE to lighten up mind and sharpen awareness as you RETURN to your object of meditation OR to your task that you were doing before you were pulled away.
- REPEAT this cycle to retrain mind's attention to stay more in the present with what you are doing...

This is a living practice that you can keep going all the time in life. It applies to everything. It helps you learn to stay more fully in the present time and as you keep it going and mind accepts it, gradually, this cycle will automatically begin to happen. So don't be surprised!

Remember to relax!

It is a very important step when you release it that you then RELAX:

- Notice the Tension when something arises: Notice the tightness or tension in your head/mind, now relax. Feel the tightness open. Mind feels like it expands and relaxes. It then becomes very tranquil and calm. At this time there are no thoughts, and mind is exceptionally clear and alert. Immediately, bring that mind back to your object of meditation, that is, the feeling of

Loving-Kindness and making a wish for your own happiness.

It doesn't matter how many times your mind goes away and thinks about other things. What really matters is that, you see that your mind has become distracted by a thought. The same method holds true even for any sensation or emotional feeling that pulls your attention to it, notice mind's movement or distraction away from Loving-Kindness, and let it go. Then relax the tightness or tension in your head/mind and softly redirect your calm attention back to the object of meditation.

- Strengthen Awareness: Every time you let go of a distraction or make a wish for your happiness, relax the tightness caused by the movement of mind's attention, and redirect your tranquil attention back to the feeling of being happy, you are strengthening your mindfulness (awareness). So please don't criticize yourself because you think that you "should" do better, or that your thoughts, sensations and emotional feelings are the enemy to be squashed and destroyed.

These kinds of critical, hard-hearted thoughts and feelings contain aversion, and aversion is the opposite of the practice of "Loving-Acceptance". Loving-Kindness and Loving-Acceptance are different words that say basically the same thing. So please be kind to yourself. Make this a fun kind of game to play with, not an enemy to fight with.

The importance of relaxing the tightness or tension after every thought, sensation or emotional feeling is released can't be stated enough. When you let go of this tightness you are letting go of craving. It is very important to understand this, because craving is the cause of

all suffering. This tightness or tension is where our wrong idea about ego-identification is.

Craving and Ego-identification or taking things personally:

Craving and the false idea of self always manifests as tightness or tension in your head/mind. When you let go of tightness, what you are actually doing is, letting go of craving and the false idea of “self” or “ego identification” with all of the thoughts, sensations and emotional feelings that arise. This is how you purify your mind and become happier and more uplifted, all of the time.

While you are sitting still, there may be some sensations that arise in your body. You may feel an itch, heat, tension, a feeling of coughing or wanting to sneeze, or pain. Please don't move your body at all. When such a feeling arises, your mind will immediately go to that feeling, let's say an itch or cough. You don't have to direct mind, it goes by itself. The first thing mind does is think about the feeling: “I wish this would go away”... “I want this to stop bothering me”... “I hate this feeling”... “Why doesn't it just go away”... “I want this to stop.”

Every time you entertain this kind of a thought, the sensation becomes bigger and more intense. It actually turns into an emergency in your mind. Then you won't be able to stand it anymore, and you have to move. But the instructions are: don't move your body for any reason at all. Watch the movements of mind instead.

So what can we do? We need to open up and allow the feeling to be there:

Opening up to the pure mind:

First, notice that your mind has gone to the itch or cough, etc., and the thoughts about that sensation. Now let go of those thoughts, simply let them be. Next notice the tightness in your head/mind and relax. Every time a sensation (or emotional feeling) arises, it is only natural for mind to make a tight fist around it, this tight mental fist is aversion. So, open up and allow the itch (or emotional feeling) to be there. Remember that it is okay if the tightness doesn't go away immediately.

The "Truth (Dhamma) of the present moment", is that when an itch or any other sensation arises, it is there. What you do with this Dhamma dictates whether you will suffer more unnecessarily or not. Resisting the itch and trying to think it away produces both more subtle and gross pain.

Five Aggregates

We have five different things that make up this mind/body process in the Human being. These are called the Five Aggregates. They are:

Physical Body (head to toe), **Feeling**, **Perception**, **Thoughts**, and **Consciousness**

As you can see, feelings are one thing and thoughts are another. If we try to control our feelings with our thoughts, the resistance that you have to this feeling causes it to get bigger and more intense. This is because we are giving it our personal attention as nutriment (food). In fact, it becomes so big that it turns into a true emergency (real unsatisfactoriness = Dukkha), and you can't stand the sensation (or

emotional feeling) anymore.

Then it feels like you have to move. While you are sitting in meditation, if you move your body even a little bit, it breaks the continuity of practice and you have to start over again.

So letting go of the thoughts about the sensation (or emotional feeling) means that you are letting go of the want to control the feeling with your thoughts. It also means that you are letting go of craving, which directly leads to the cessation of suffering.

Next, you notice the tight mental fist around the sensation, and let go of that aversion to it. Simply allow the itch or cough (sensation or emotional feeling) to be there by itself. See it as if it were a bubble floating in the air, the bubble floats freely. Whichever way the wind blows, the bubble will float in that direction. If the wind changes and blows in another direction, the bubble goes in that direction without any resistance at all.

This practice is learning how to lovingly-accept whatever arises in the present moment. Now again notice that subtle tightness or tension in your head/mind, relax and softly redirect your gentle loving attention back to the feeling of radiating love from your heart and making a wish for your own happiness.

The true nature of these kinds of sensations (and emotional feelings) is that they don't go away right away. So your mind will bounce back and forth from your object of meditation (that is radiating the feeling of love and making a sincere wish for your happiness) and to that feeling. Every time this happens you treat it in the same way:

- Release the attention on the feeling: Let go of any thoughts, sensations or emotions.
- Relax: Relax the tightness, let go of the tight mental fist around the feeling, let it be.
- Smile, and come back: Come back to your object of meditation which is 'radiating the feeling of love and making a sincere wish for your happiness and feeling that wish in your heart'.

Radiating Love; allowing it to flow out from you to your spiritual friend

Remember its O.K. for that thought, sensation or emotional feeling to be there, because that is the truth of -the present moment. An acronym that works very well to help as a reminder is, "DROPSS" "**D**on't **R**esist **O**r **P**ush - **S**often and **S**MILE".

Allow the thought, sensation, or emotional feeling to be, without trying to make it be anything other than it is. Now, relax the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) tightness or tension in your head/mind, and gently redirect your tranquil attention back to your meditation.

After doing this for about 10-minutes, you begin sending loving and kind thoughts to your spiritual friend. This is your practice target to learn how this power works. When you have developed your skill to a certain point, then you will send wishes to other kinds of people.

What is a Spiritual Friend?

A spiritual friend is someone who, when you think of them and their good qualities, it makes you happy. This is a friend who is of the same sex, (so that no lust arises to interrupt your practice) and they are alive, and not a member of your family. This is for right now, later you will be able to send Loving-Kindness to all of the members of your family, but for this training period please choose another friend and stay with that one friend while you develop your practice.

Once you start sending Loving-Kindness to your spiritual friend, please don't change to another person. Stay with your same spiritual friend until you get to the third meditation stage (Jhāna). So, you are sending a sincere wish for your own happiness, then mentally you say: "As I wish this feeling of peace and calm (happiness, joy, whatever) for myself, I wish this feeling for you, too". "May you be well, happy and peaceful". Then start radiating this feeling of love and peace to our friend. It is quite important for you to feel the sincere wish and that you place that feeling in your heart.

Visualization

You also visualize your friend in your mind's eye. For example, you can visualize your friend as if it was like a photograph or you can see them moving around as if in a movie. The exact visualization doesn't matter. But when you see your friend, see him or her smiling and happy. This can help to remind you to be smiling and happy, too!

The visualization can be somewhat difficult. It can be cloudy or fuzzy, or a long distance away or it can be there for just a moment and disappear. That is all right. Don't try too hard because it will give you

a headache. Some people can't visualize at all, so it is all right to bring your friend into your heart by using their name. You want about 70% of your time spent on the feeling of Loving-Kindness, 20% (less or more, depending on what is happening) on making a sincere wish and feeling that wish in your heart, this helps the feeling for your friend's happiness to grow. Only about 10% of your time should be spent on visualizing your friend. So you can see that the "Feeling of Loving-Kindness" is by far the most important part of the meditation, and the visualization is the least important part. But still put a little effort into the visualization. Eventually it will get better and easier.

Smiling

This is a smiling meditation. While you are sitting and radiating love to your spiritual friend (or to yourself), smile with your mind. Even though your eyes are closed during the meditation, smile with your eyes. This helps to let go of tension in your face. Put a little smile on your lips and put a smile in your heart. Smiling is nice and most helpful to practice all of the time, but especially when you are sitting in meditation. The more we can learn to smile the happier mind becomes.

It may sound a little silly, but scientists have discovered that raising the corners of our mouth is very important; the position of the mouth corresponds to different mental states. When the corners of your mouth turns down your thoughts tend to become heavy and unwholesome. When the corners of your mouth go up, mind becomes more uplifted and clear, so joy can arise more often.

This is important to remember because a smile can help you to

change your perspective about all kinds of feelings and thoughts. So try to remember to smile into everything that arises and everything that you direct your mind. In other words, smile as much as you can into everything.

Dullness of mind

The more sincere and enthusiastic you are in sending Loving-Kindness to yourself and your spiritual friend, the less you will experience sleepiness or dullness of mind. When sleepiness or dullness occurs your body may begin to slump. This is the only time that you can move your body and straighten up. But don't do this too often, either.

If you see your mind starting to dull out, then take more interest in your friend; see him or her doing things that you truly appreciate. For example, you can visualize times that they were helpful and generous, or times when they made you happy and you laughed with them. This can help to increase your interest and energy, and then the dullness will subside.

Please, once you begin this meditation, start by sitting for half an hour. The first ten minutes you send Loving-Kindness to yourself. The rest of the time, send love to your spiritual friend (remember the same friend all of the time). When your meditation becomes better and you feel more comfortable, you can sit for a longer period of time (whatever is appropriate for you with your time constraints). But don't sit for less than thirty minutes a day in the beginning! More if you have the time.

This is a living active meditation

This is not simply a passive meditation to be practiced only when you are sitting in a chair or cushion...It's a meditation to be practiced all of the time, especially when you do your daily activities. So many times we walk around in a mental haze of random nonsense thoughts. Why not try practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation whenever we can possibly remember? When you are walking from your house to your car or your car to your job, what is your mind doing? Ho- hum! Probably just more nonsense thoughts are coming up.

This is the time to notice what your mind is doing in the present moment and let go of these distracting thoughts. Relax the tightness in your head/mind and wish someone happiness! It doesn't matter who you send loving thoughts and feelings to in your daily activities. It can be to the person walking next to you, your spiritual friend, yourself, or all beings. The key words here are to "send love", smiling and feeling that sincere wish. Try to do this as much as possible during the day.

The more we focus on sending and radiating loving and kind thoughts, the more we affect the world around us in a positive way. As a result your mind becomes uplifted and happy at the same time. Nice!

Benefits of Loving-Kindness

There are many benefits to practicing Loving-Kindness: you go to sleep easily and sleep soundly. When you wake up you wake easily and mind gets clear very quickly. People like you. Your face becomes radiant and beautiful, when you practice Loving-Kindness and your mind becomes clear more quickly than with any other type of meditation. Actually, the Lord Buddha mentioned this type of

meditation more times than he did “Mindfulness of Breathing” meditation. So you can see just how important he thought it was.

The Walking Meditation

If you break your sitting or understand it is time to stop and begin walking, then you gently and smoothly rise up from sitting and you begin doing your walking meditation. Do not put your attention on your feet; stay with your spiritual friend. Keep radiating Loving-kindness to your spiritual friend while you’re walking as if they are your secret friend that no one else can see. The walking is for exercise, to get your blood flowing.

Now one thing that happens in retreat and it’s very frustrating to me but I can’t get people to stop doing it, is you’ll be sitting on the floor and you say, “Well, I’m uncomfortable.” And it’s been forty-five minutes or an hour or something like that, and then you get up off the floor, and you sit in the chair. Don’t do that.

The walking meditation is every bit as important as the sitting meditation. If you get up from the floor and just go to a chair and sit, what happens is your mind starts to dull out because you haven’t got your circulation going so well. The walking meditation doesn’t have to be done slowly. With some practices there is a reason for this. But with TWIM you are learning something that you can keep going all the time as an integral part of your life. You don’t have to do it super slow. Just walk at a normal pace, but stay with your spiritual friend.

The walking meditation is a very important aspect to help break old habits of thinking while you’re walking instead of radiating Loving-

kindness. Therefore, at first, the walking meditation is going to be somewhat difficult because you're not used to it. You're used to walking around for the sake of walking from here over to there. Also, you're used to thinking this and thinking that and ho-humming around while you are walking.

Now I want you to keep your meditation going from the time of your sitting, getting up, going outside, keep your meditation on your spiritual friend. Walk no less than fifteen minutes. When your walking is good, you can walk longer. OK? You can walk up to forty-five minutes if you are sitting an hour of time or more. I don't think any longer than that is really useful. You get tired after that.

So after you do your walking you stay with your spiritual friend, come in again, sit another session. Now I want everybody to understand that I want you sitting no less than 30 minutes at a time when you sit. Less than that is not helping your development.

Loving Kindness practice and Nibbāna

The practice of Loving-Kindness Meditation can lead you to the experience of Nibbāna if you follow all of the Brahma Viharas: that is the practice of Loving- Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity. This is mentioned many times in the suttas (these contain the original discourses of the Buddha). The culmination of the practice of the Brahma Viharas goes as far as the Base of Nothingness. For the deeper far end of this path to attain Nibbana, the meditator uses only Mind for their object of meditation.

The Loving-Kindness Meditation object, as part of the Brahma

Viharas, will take the meditator to the fourth Jhāna or level of understanding. Compassion will support them through the Base of Infinite Space. Joy will support them through the Base of Infinite Consciousness. And Equanimity will support them into the realm of the Base of Nothingness. That is the path.

When the student reaches the base of the Fourth Jhana, their equanimity becomes very firm. With this kind of equanimity, they become stable enough to experience the deeper states which are divisions of the FOURTH Jhana. This is where the Lord Buddha tried to have all of the students who practiced meditation get to so that the meditator could experience stronger states of equanimity.

According to the suttas, there are three different paths that can be taken once the meditator reaches this level. They can take one directly to the experience of Nibbāna. We will not go into more detail about that at this time, because it may cause some confusion. But if you are interested in having more information, please start by reading some of the suttas like #62 The Maharahulovada Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya in the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha. Or, you could try sutta #27 The Culahatthipadopama Sutta in the same book.

I sincerely hope that these meditation instructions are helpful to you and that by practicing in this way you will benefit greatly and lead a truly happy and healthy life.

The merits were shared, and this concludes Venerable Sister Khema's talk on Loving Kindness Meditation.

The course gave us deep confidence in the Buddha's teachings and a real love for reading directly from the Suttas. Please tune in to the Buddhist Hour next week when we continue to share the teachings we received on Day 1 and 2 and will read some passages from the Majjhima Nikaya which were studied during the course.

Today's script was compiled by Anita Carter, Frank Carter, Claire Ransome and Simon Kearney from teachings we received during our recent Christmas Bhavana Course from Venerable Bhante Vimalaramsi and Venerable Sister Khanti Khema.

Reference for talk by Sister Khema:

<http://talks.dhammasukha.org/uploads/1/2/8/6/12865490/metta-bb-mm-030515.mp3>