CHAPTER-V

Relevance of the advanced practices of Mettā in the Global society

Introduction

This chapter will emphasize on three aspects of Metta and analysis of Metta from the point of ethical, psychological, and meditational aspects according to Theravada Buddhist literature. Then the chapter will discuss in detail why the New Global Society should apply Metta in their daily life, and will clearly point out the differences between societies which apply Metta and which do not apply Metta.

The Ethics of Mettā

Ethics, in the Buddhist context, is right conduct, which brings happiness and peace of mind, and never gives rise to remorse, worry or restlessness of mind (Kukkucca). This is the immediate psychological benefit. Right conduct also leads to a happy rebirth, enabling an aspirant to progress further on the onward path to spiritual liberation. It is also the basis for progress in Dhamma here and now. In other words, right speech, right action and right livelihood of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path constitute right conduct in the best sense.

Buddhist ethics is twofold: fulfillment of certain virtues (Cārītta)\textsuperscript{198} and precepts of abstinence (Vāritta)\textsuperscript{199}.

\textsuperscript{198} A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms, p.159; By moral obligations is meant certain obligations that must be fulfilled. In Buddhist ethics certain moral obligations are incumbent on one such as: paying respects, welcoming, making obeisance, showing reverence and attending on one’s elders who may be senior in age or in status, and one has to fulfil them. Such fulfillment is called virtuous conduct, caritta sīla.
Cāritta, as found in the Metta Sutta, is as follows:

He who seeks to promote his welfare, and who has anticipated in the attainment of the state of perfect peace should be able to be, honest, upright, discussable, gentle, and humble, contented, easy to support, not over busy, simple in living, tranquil in his senses, prudent, modest, and not fawning on families.

Vāritta is covered by the next gāthā-stanzā:

He must refrain from any action for which the wise men might reprove him. Cāritta and Vāritta are thus practiced through Metta expressed in bodily and verbal action; the resultant inner happiness and altruistic urge is reflected by the aspirant's Metta of mental action, as found in the conclusion of the stanza:

May all be well and secure! May all beings be happy!

The ethics of Metta thus provides not only subjective well-being, or the opportunity to progress in Dhamma here and now and to enjoy a happy rebirth in the future, but it means the giving of fearlessness and security Abhayadāna in Pāli.\(^{200}\)

An analysis of the behavior-pattern and traits commended by the Metta Sutta for meaningful interaction, both with reference to persons individually and to society as a whole, provides ample insight into the great implications of the Sutta for mental health.

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199 A Diction of Buddhist Terms, p.203; Morality which is based on the observance of abstentions decreed by the Buddha is vārīta sīla. Constant observance of the five precepts, etc., nicca sīla, is fulfilled through abstention.

200 CPA, p.295. The granting of safety or security with respect to life (i.e. giving of fearlessness or giving of protection to beings) is named as Abhayadāna.
Ability is not just mere efficiency or skill, but means doing a thing well, out of consideration for others, so that one may not cause inconvenience to others. As an able man can become very conceited, the practitioner is advised to be “honest and upright,” while being “gentle in speech, meek and not proud” - indeed a perfect synthesis and an equilibrium of traits.

He who is contented is “easy to support.” Frugality, from consideration of others, is a noble trait. To the extent that one's own needs are cut down as an example to others and as a means not to inconvenience them, to that extent one shows refinement. The more gross and materialistic a person becomes, the more his needs increase. The yardstick to judge the mental health of a given society is thus the diminution of needs, that is to say, the element of satisfaction.

A materialistic and egocentric life is characterized by not only an increase in wants but also restlessness, showing itself in being over-busy and overactive and lacking in moderation and self-restraint. Metta, which promotes the well-being of all, naturally has to be built on such qualities of sober humanism as are reflected in having a few meaningful and select tasks which conduce to the maximum well-being of all concerned.

Living a simple life was an expression of Metta it involves a reorientation of one's outlook and conduct, even in our competitive, pleasure-seeking and possession-minded world. A man of simple living is gentle, yet efficient and effective, and has restraint over his sense-faculties, being moderate, frugal and controlled. Mental culture through meditation for
such a person becomes natural and effortless: hence the attribute “tranquil in his senses.”

*Metta* in conduct includes the exercising of prudence, that is to say, practical wisdom. It is only a sagacious and wise person who can really practice *Metta* in all its varied forms in daily life, and through all modes of human relationship. Self-righteousness, arising from a sense of being better or more devout than others, can be (and often is) a masquerade of spiritual practice. To be “neither brazen, nor fawning on families” thus is a pointer for the person of *Metta* not to indulge in self-righteousness of any form.

Further, the practitioner of *Metta* is advised to refrain from any action, even social conventions, for which a wise man may reprove him as lacking in prudence or propriety.

It is not good enough that one should be good, but one should also appear to be good, in consideration not only of one’s own well-being but also of others’ well-being. An exemplary life is to be lived for the benefit of all, for the welfare of society.

A person living thus now plunges into the cultivation of the all-embracing mind of *Metta* through definite techniques of meditation as envisaged in the remaining part of the *Sutta*.

*Metta* is also called a *Paritta* a spiritual formula capable of safeguarding one's well-being, protecting one against all dangers, and rescuing one from mishaps and misfortunes.

When the monks could not stay and meditate in that beautiful forest provided with all facilities because the deities were hostile to them, they had
to leave the place. And when they were armed with the protection of the 
Metta Sutta, which they recited and meditated upon throughout their 
journey, by the time they reached the place, the deities were full of friendly 
feelings and already waiting for them. Hostility had been turned into 
hospitality.

The protection of Paritta works both subjectively and objectively. 
Subjectively, as Metta cleanses and strengthens the mind, it also awakens the 
dormant potentials, resulting in the spiritual transmutation of the personality. 
Transformed by Metta, the mind is no longer haunted by greed, hatred, lust, 
jealousy and those other mind-polluting factors which are one's real enemy 
and source of misfortune.

Objectively, Metta as a thought-force is capable of affecting any mind 
anywhere, developed or undeveloped. The radiation of Metta can not only 
calm a person or remove the darts of hate from within him, but in some 
cases can even cure him of severe illness. It is a common experience in 
Buddhist countries to see how people are cured from all sorts of diseases and 
freed from misfortunes through the recitation of Paritta. Thus Metta is a real 
healing power. In this way does Metta act as a Paritta, a healing formula 
affording safeguards.

The Psychology of Mettā

The Pāli commentaries explain:

One loves all beings:

(a) By the non-harassment of all beings and thus avoids 
harassment;
(b) By being inoffensive (to all beings) and thus avoids offensiveness;

(c) By not torturing (all beings) and thus avoids torturing;

(d) By the non-destruction (of all life) and thus avoids destructiveness;

(e) By being non-vexing (to all beings) and thus avoids vexing;

(f) By projecting the thought, “May all beings be friendly and not hostile”;

(g) By projecting the thought, “May all beings be happy and not unhappy”;

(h) By projecting the thought, “May all beings enjoy well-being and not be distressed.”

In these eight ways one loves all beings; therefore, it is called universal love. And since one conceives (within) this quality (of love), it is of the mind. And since this mind is free from all thoughts of ill-will, the aggregate of love, mind and freedom is defined as universal love leading to freedom of mind.

From the above passage it will be seen that Metta implies the “outgrowing” of negative traits by actively putting into practice the correlative positive virtues. It is only when one actively practices non-harassment towards all beings that one can outgrow the tendency to harass others. Similarly, it is with the other qualities of inoffensiveness, non-tormenting, non-destroying and non-vexing indeed, word and thought that
one can outgrow the negative traits of being offensive, of tormenting others, of destructiveness and of vexatiousness.

Over and above such positive conduct and principled way of life, one further cultivates the mind through that specific technique of meditation called Ṝettā-呾haṇa, which generates powerful thoughts of spiritualized love that grow boundless, making consciousness itself infinite and universal.

Thoughts that wish all beings to be friendly and never hostile, happy and never unhappy, to enjoy well-being and never be distressed, imply not only sublimity and boundlessness, but also utter freedom of mind. Hence the appropriateness of the expression “universal love leading to freedom of mind”.

As for the meanings of the five aspects opposed by Ṝetta, harassment is the desire to oppress or damage; offensiveness is the tendency to hurt or injure; torturing is a synonym of the sadistic tendency to torment, subjecting others to pain or misery; destructiveness is to put an end to or to finish, the trait of the extremist and the iconoclast; vexing is to tax, trouble or cause others worry and strain. Each of these tendencies is rooted in antipathy and malevolence, and provides a contrast with Ṝetta, both as a mode of conduct and as a psychological state or attitude of mind.

The substitution of a negative trait by the opposed positive course implies a very developed and mature approach to life. The ability to remain non-harassing, inoffensive, non-torturing, non-destructive and non-vexing means a very refined, beautiful and loving mode of behavior in a world where interaction between human beings creates so much tension and misery.
According to the *Visuddhimagga*, *Metta* is a “solvent” that “melts” not only one’s own psychic pollutants of anger, resentment and offensiveness, but also others’ psychic pollutants of anger, resentment and offensiveness. Since it takes the approach of friendship, even the hostile one turns to be a friend.

*Metta* is characterized as that which “promotes welfare.” Its function is to “prefer well-being” rather than ill will. It manifests as a force that “removes annoyance” and its proximate cause is the tendency to see the good side of things and beings and never the faults. *Metta* succeeds when it loves, and it fails when it degenerates into worldly affection.

It will be clear from this analysis that only when one tends to see the good in people, and prefers the welfare of others, and accordingly is inoffensive (to remove any annoyance or hurt) and actively promotes well-being, does *Metta* function as a solvent. It is said that the ultimate purpose of *Metta* is to attain transcendental insight, and if that is not possible, it will at least affect a rebirth in the sublime sphere of the Brahma world, apart from bringing inner peace and a healthy state of mind here and now. Hence the Buddha’s assurance in the *Metta Sutta*:

*Holding no more to wrong beliefs,*

*With virtue and vision of the ultimate,*

*And having overcome all sensual desire,*

*Never in a womb is he born again.*

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201 Sn, p.302.
Love wards off ill-will, which is the most damaging of emotions. Hence it is said: “For this is the escape from ill-will, friends, that is to say, the freedom of mind wrought by universal love”.\textsuperscript{202}

In the practice of Metta it is important to understand the emotions which nullify Metta either by being similar or being dissimilar. The Visuddhimagga calls them “the two enemies the near and the remote.” Greed, lust, worldly affection, sensuality all these are said to be the “near enemies” because they are similar in tendencies. The lustful also sees the “good side” or “beauty,” and therefore gets involved. Love should be protected from it lest the masquerades of these emotions deceive the meditator.

Ill will, anger and hatred, being dissimilar emotions, therefore constitute the “remote enemy.” The remote enemy can easily be distinguished so one need not be afraid of it, but one should overcome it by projecting a higher force, that of love. But one has to be wary of the near enemy because it creates self-deception, which is the worst thing that could happen to an individual.

It is said that Metta begins only when there is zeal in the form of a desire to act. Having commenced through earnest effort, it can be continued only when the five mental hindrances sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt are put down. Metta reaches consummation with the attainment of absorption (jhāna).

\textsuperscript{202} D, Vol-(iii), p.238; \textit{Nissaraṇāṁ hetaṁ āhuso byāpādassa yadidaṁ mettāceto vimutti}. 
Meditation on Mettā

There are various ways of practising Mettā-Bhāvanā, the meditation on universal love. Three of the principal methods will be explained here. These instructions, based on canonical and commentarial sources, are intended to explain the practice of mettā-meditation in a clear, simple and direct way so that anyone who is earnest about taking up the practice will have no doubts about how to proceed. For full instructions on the theory and practice of mettā-bhāvanā the reader is referred to the Visuddhimagga.

Method One

Sit down in a comfortable posture in a quiet place a shrine room, a quiet room, a park, or any other place providing privacy and silence. Keeping the eyes closed, repeat the word “mettā” a few times and mentally conjure up its significance love as the opposite of hatred, resentment, malevolence, impatience, pride and arrogance, and as a profound feeling of good will, sympathy and kindness promoting the happiness and well-being of others.

Now visualise your own face in a happy and radiant mood. Every time you see your face in the mirror, see yourself in a happy mood and put yourself in this mood during meditation. A person in a happy mood cannot become angry or harbor negative thoughts and feelings. Having visualised yourself in a happy frame of mind, now charge yourself with the thought; “May I be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may I live happily.” As you suffuse yourself in this way with the positive thought-force of love, you become like a filled vessel, its contents ready to overflow in all directions.
Next, visualise your meditation teacher, if living; if not, choose some other living teacher or revered person. See him in a happy frame of mind and project the thought: “May my teacher be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may he live happily.”

Then think of other people who are to be revered, and who also are living monks, teachers, parents and elders, and intensely spread towards each one of them the thought of mettā in the manner mentioned already: “May they be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

The visualisation must be clear and the thought-radiation must be “willed” well. If the visualisation is hurried or the wishing is performed in a perfunctory or mechanical way, the practice will be of little avail, for then it will be merely an intellectual pastime of thinking about mettā. One must clearly understand that to think about mettā is one thing, and to do mettā, to actively project the will-force of loving kindness, is quite another.

Note that only a living person is to be visualised, not a dead one. The reason for this is that the dead person, having changed form, will be out of the focus of mettā-projection. The object of mettā always is a living being, and the thought-force will become ineffective if the object is not alive.

Having radiated the thoughts of mettā in order as already mentioned by oneself, the meditation teacher and other revered persons one should now visualise, one by one, one’s dear ones beginning with the members of one’s family, suffusing each one with abundant rays of loving kindness. Charity begins at home: if one cannot love one’s own people one will not be able to love others.
While spreading *mettā* towards one’s own family members, care should be taken to think of a very dear one, like one’s husband or wife, at the end of this circle. The reason for this is that the intimacy between husband and wife introduces the element of worldly love which defiles *mettā*. Spiritual love must be the same towards all. Similarly, if one has had a temporary misunderstanding or quarrel with any family member or relative, he or she should be visualised at a later stage to avoid recalling the unpleasant incidents.

Next, one should visualise neutral people, people for whom one has neither like nor dislike, such as one’s neighbors, colleagues in one’s place of work, bare acquaintances, and so on. Having radiated loving thoughts on everyone in the neutral circle, one should now visualise persons for whom one has dislike, hostility or prejudice, even those with whom one may have had a temporary misunderstanding. As one visualises disliked persons, to each one must mentally repeat: “I have no hostility towards him/her, may he/she also not have any hostility towards me. May he/she be happy!”

Thus, as one visualises the persons of the different circles, one “breaks the barrier” caused by likes and dislikes, attachment and hatred. When one is able to regard an enemy without ill will and with the same amount of goodwill that one has for a very dear friend, *mettā* then acquires a sublime impartiality, elevating the mind upward and outward as if in a spiral movement of ever-widening circles until it becomes all-embracing.

By visualisation is meant “calling to mind” or visualising certain objects, such as a person, a certain area or a direction or a category of beings. In other words it means imagining the people towards whom
thoughts of love are to be projected or spread. For instance, you imagine your father and visualise his face in a very happy and radiant mood and project the thought towards the visualised image, mentally saying: “May he be happy! May he be free from disease or trouble! May he enjoy good health.” You may use any thought which promotes his well-being.

By radiation is meant, as explained above, the projection of certain thoughts promoting the well-being of those persons towards whom one’s mind is directed. A mettā-thought is a powerful thought-force. It can actually effect what has been willed. For wishing well-being is willing and thus is creative action. In fact, all that man has created in different fields is the result of what he has willed, whether it is a city or a hydro-electric project, a rocket going to the moon, a weapon of destruction, or an artistic or literary masterpiece. Radiation of thoughts of mettā, too, is the development of a willpower that can effect whatever is willed. It is not a rare experience to see diseases cured or misfortunes warded off, even from a great distance, by the application of the thought-force of mettā. But this thought-force has to be generated in a very specific and skilful way, following a certain sequence.

The formula for radiating mettā that is used here has come down from the ancient Paṭisambhidāmagga: “May they be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily” (averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhi attānam pariharantu). The commentarial explanations of these terms are highly significant. “Free from hostility” (averā) means absence of hostility whether aroused on account of oneself or others, or on account of oneself because of others or of others because of oneself or others. One’s anger towards oneself might take the

203 Vism.IX, p. 323.
form of self-pity, remorse or a gripping sense of guilt. It can be conditioned
by interaction with others. Hostility combines anger and enmity. “Free from
affliction” (ābyāpajjha) means absence of pain or physical suffering. “Free
from distress” (anāgha) means the absence of mental suffering, anguish or
anxiety, which often follows upon hostility or bodily affliction. It is only
when one is free from hostility, affliction and distress that one “lives
happily,” that is, conducts oneself with ease and happiness. Thus all these
terms are interconnected.

By order is meant visualising objects, one after the other, by taking
the path of least resistance, in a graduated sequence, which progressively
widens the circle and therewith the mind itself. The *Visuddhimagga* is
emphatic about this order. According to Ācariya Buddhaghosa,
one must
start the meditation on *mettā* by visualising oneself, and thereafter a person
for whom one has reverence, then one’s dear ones, then neutral people, then
hostile persons. As one radiates thoughts of love in this order, the mind
breaks all barriers between oneself, a revered one, a dear one, a neutral one
and a hostile one. Everyone comes to be looked upon equally with the eye of
loving kindness.204

In the *Visuddhimagga* Ācariya Buddhaghosa gives a very apt analogy
for the breaking of the barriers: “Suppose bandits were to come to the
meditator who is sitting in a place with a respected, a dear, a neutral, and a
hostile or wicked person and demand, ’Friend, we want one of you for the
purpose of offering human sacrifice.’ If the meditator were to think, ’Let
him take this one or that one,’ he has not broken down the barriers. And
even if he were to think, ’Let none of these be taken, but let them take me,’

204 Ibid.
even then he has not broken down the barriers since he seeks his own harm, and *mettā* meditation signifies the well-being of all. But when he does not see the need for anyone to be given to the bandits and impartially projects the thought of love towards all, including the bandits, it is then that he would break down the barriers.”

**Method Two**

The first method of practising meditation on *mettā* employs the projection of loving thoughts to specific individuals in order to increase remoteness from oneself. The second method presents an impersonal mode of radiating *mettā* which makes the mind truly all-embracing, as suggested by the *Pāli* term *mettā cetovimutti*, “the liberation of mind through universal love.”

The unliberated mind is imprisoned within the walls of egocentricity, greed, hatred, delusion, jealousy and meanness. As long as the mind is in the grip of these defiling and limiting mental factors, so long it remains insular and fettered. By breaking these bonds, *mettā* liberates the mind, and the liberated mind naturally grows boundless and immeasurable. Just as the earth cannot be rendered “earth less,” even so the mind of *mettā* cannot be limited.

After completing the radiation of *mettā* towards selected persons, when the mind breaks the barriers existing between oneself and revered ones, beloved ones, friends, neutral ones and hostile ones, the meditator now embarks on the great voyage of impersonal radiation, even as an ocean-worthy of ship voyages through the vast, measureless ocean, nevertheless retaining a route and a goal as well. The technique is as follows.

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205 Vism, IX, p.333.
Imagine the people residing in your house as forming an aggregate, then embrace all of them within your heart, radiating the mettā thoughts: “May all those dwelling in this house be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.” Having visualised one’s own house in this manner, one must now visualise the next house, and all its residents, and then the next house, and the next, and so on, until all the houses in that street are similarly covered by all-embracing loving kindness. Now the meditator should take up the next street, and the next, until the entire neighbourhood or village is covered. Thereafter extension by extension, direction-wise, should be clearly visualised and spread with mettā-rays in abundant measure. In this way the entire town or the city is to be covered; then the district and the entire state should be covered and radiated with thoughts of mettā.

Next, one should visualise state after state, starting with one’s own state, then the rest of the states in the different directions, the east, south, west and north. Thus one should cover the whole of one’s country, geographically visualising the people of this land regardless of class, race, sect or religion. Think: “May everyone in this great land abides in peace and well-being! May there be no war, no strife, no misfortune, no maladies! Radiant with friendliness and good fortune, with compassion and wisdom, may all those in this great country enjoy peace and plenty.”

One should now cover the entire continent, country by country, in the eastern, southern, western and northern directions. Geographically imagining each country and the people therein according to their looks, one should radiate in abundant measure thoughts of mettā: “May they be happy! May there be no strife and discord! May goodwill and understanding
prevail! May peace be unto all!” Thereafter one should take up all the continents Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North and South America visualising country by country and people by people, covering the entire globe. Imagine yourself at a particular point of the globe and then project powerful rays of mettā, enveloping one direction of the globe, then another, then another and so on until the whole globe is flooded and thoroughly enveloped with glowing thoughts of universal love.

One should now project into the vastness of space powerful beams of mettā towards all beings living in other realms, first in the four cardinal directions east, south, west and north then in the intermediary directions northeast, southeast, southwest, northwest and then above and below, covering all the ten directions with abundant and measureless thoughts of universal love.

**Method Three**

According to the cosmology of Buddhism there are numberless world-systems inhabited by infinitely varied categories of beings in different stages of evolution. Our earth is only a speck in our world-system, which again is a minute dot in the universe with its innumerable world-systems. Towards all beings everywhere one should radiate thoughts of boundless love. This is developed in the next method of practice, the universalization of mettā.

The universalization of mettā is effected in these three specific modes:

1. Generalised radiation (*anodhiso-pharaṇa*),
2. Specified radiation (*odhiso-pharaṇa*),
3. Directional radiation (*disa-pharaṇa*).
According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the generalised radiation of *mettā* is practised in five ways, the specified radiation in seven ways, and the directional radiation in ten ways. These ten directional ways may be combined with the five categories of general radiation and with the seven categories of specified radiation, as we will show. In each of these modes of practice, any of the four phrases of the standard *mettā* formula “May they be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily” may be used as the thought of radiation. Thus four types of thought applied to five, seven, and 120 objects of *mettā* amount to 528 modes of radiation. Any of these can be used as a vehicle for attaining absorption (*jhāna*) through the technique of *mettā-bhāvanā*.

**Generalised Radiation**

The five ways of generalised radiation are as follows:

1. “May all beings (*sabbe sattā*) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

2. “May all breathing things (*sabbe pāṇā*) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

3. “May all those who are born (*sabbe bhūtā*) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

4. “May all persons (*sabbe puggalā*) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

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206 Vism. IX, p.337
5. “May all those who have a personality (sabbe attabhāvapariyapannā) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

**Specified Radiation**

The seven ways of specified radiation are as follows:

1. “May all females (sabbā itthiyo) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

2. “May all males (sabbe purisā) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

3. “May all of the Noble Ones (sabbe ariyā) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

4. “May all worldlings (sabbe anariyā) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

5. “May all gods (sabbe devā) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

6. “May all human beings (sabbe manussā) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”

7. “May all those in the states of woe (sabbe vinipātikā) be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress; may they live happily.”