

Metta and Insight

Introduction

This is an approach to meditation in the Spiritual Death quadrant in our system of practice

Spiritual death can be a discouraging term for some people. For myself, I prefer

- Awakening
- Liberation
- Freedom
- Insight
- Enlightenment

“Spiritual death” can easily be misunderstood in a nihilistic way. In fact, nothing “dies”. Experience goes on unfolding. The only thing we lose is a mistaken understanding or interpretation of it.

To help avoid the pitfall of nihilism, a safe way to approach spiritual death in meditation is through metta. In the system of practice, seen as a path, positive emotion is the basis for spiritual death. This approach of metta and insight is one that Maitridevi and Dayajoti have been developing at Taraloka.

Metta and Insight

There are two closely related ways of approaching metta as more of an insight practice

The Bodhisattva’s practice

At the beginning of his bodhisattva career, the bodhisattva is said to practice metta towards beings. In the middle of his career towards experiences (*dhammas*) and at the end of his career with no object at all.

1. Metta towards beings
2. Metta towards experiences
3. Metta with no object

The threefold letting go.

This also comes from the bodhisattva path, in which the bodhisattva is said to practice generosity

- With no sense of himself giving
- With no sense of an other receiving the gift
- With no sense of “a gift” given

So, in practicing metta we can let go

1. Of the sense of “this is me cultivating metta, sending metta”
2. Of the sense of “this is them receiving metta”
3. Of the label “metta”

Letting go of any sense of “me” sending metta leaves just a sense of metta towards the other.

Letting go of any sense of “an other” receiving metta leaves just a sense of metta radiating.

Letting go of the label “metta” leaves just the experience as it is. Unlabelled.

Bringing metta to what we do find

In the first stage of the metta bhavana

Whenever I look for my self, I always come back to some particular experience.

So, in the first stage of the practice,

- Turning one's attention towards what this label "my self" is pointing to
- Whatever you find in your experience
 - Bringing a kindly awareness to that
 - Welcoming it in to awareness as an experience, as a "something in me" that feels this way
 - If there's a resistance to this perspective, a "no it's not something in me – it's *me!*" then welcoming this resistance in to awareness as an experience
- And if you find, after a while, that this experience doesn't fit the label "my self", looking afresh for anything that this sense of self might be a sense **of**. What it is pointing to in your experience.

In the following stages

Similarly when I try to find the self of another I always come back to some aspect of my experience of them, and I can reflect that – their experience being of the same nature as mine – where they to search for their own self, they would always come back to some particular experience.

In the fourth stage

In relation to a person we're finding difficult, we can use this sort of approach to look for what it is that we're finding difficult. We're experiencing a reaction happening. Something's pushing a button of ours. This is a pointer to something that we're seeing as "them".

Each of us, as an individual, can be seen as a collection of five "heaps" or skhandhas. So we can see if we can find the thing that we're reacting to in these:

1. Like us, they have a body. This material body as an object – this carcass. Is this what we find difficult?

Their own experience of body, like yours, is a field of physical sensations. All experienced directly, all simply present. Are any of these physical sensations what we find difficult?

2. Like your own experience of body as lived from the inside, theirs too *feels* – sometimes painful, achy, unwell. Sometimes pleasant, vital, alive, energetic: is it these feeling tones that we find difficult?
3. Like you, they have the capacity to perceive their experience directly. It is simply present. Known to be just as it is apprehended to be. Perception just happens as sensations arise. Is it this perception of theirs that we find difficult?
4. Like us they have preferences: likes and dislikes, experiences they want and others they don't, emotions, intentions, volitions. Reactions that just get triggered when their buttons are pushed. Creative responses with more awareness around experience. Is it their volitions that we find difficult?
5. Like us, they have some level of awareness: perhaps wrapped up in their sense faculties as simple sense consciousness. Perhaps unfolded as a faculty in its own right. Is it this awareness that we find difficult?

We can practice the fourth stage as a looking for this thing that is essentially difficult in the other – and whatever we find as we look, bringing metta to that experience.