

Standing, walking, sitting or lying down,
As long as one is devoid of torpor,
One would resolve upon this mindfulness
—This is known as sublime abiding here.

tittham caram nisinno vā
sayāno vā yāvat’ assa vigatamiddho,
etam satim adhittheyya,
brahmam etam vihāram idha-m-āhu.

“Standing, walking, sitting or lying down,”

These four are meant to cover all the positions one can place the body in, thus conveying the idea that both loving kindness and mindfulness can be practiced at all times, without exception. (Ananda is said to be one who was awakened in none of these positions, as the moment of his awakening was said to take place in the instant he was rising to his feet from a sitting position, but this, I think we can presume, is getting more technically precise than necessary.) Usually meditation practice is considered to be sitting meditation, unless one is doing the more formal walking meditation in between sitting sessions in order to move the body a bit while on retreat. But we should recall that the other two positions are equally valid and useful.

The danger of lying down, of course, is that it is quite easy to fall asleep, and in a traditional setting like a Dharma hall it can feel like a disrespectful pose. Yet there are many situations in life where we find ourselves lying down anyway, and there is no reason not to remind ourselves that these, too, are opportunities for practice. Perhaps one can cultivate mindfulness and loving kindness in those moments, long or short, between lying down in bed at the end of the day and actually falling asleep. Can you fall asleep mindfully? It almost sounds like a contradiction in terms, but if one regards falling asleep as a natural process, there is no reason why it should not be watched carefully and investigated with interest. Of course, at a certain point mindfulness will degenerate and you will actually be sleeping, but up until that point there might be plenty to learn from paying attention to what is arising and passing away in experience. Even when stretched out in the back yard in a hammock with a glass of lemonade in hand, one might think of inclining the mind to thoughts of loving kindness for all beings.

Sometimes the prone position is all we have available to us. Anyone who has fallen ill, has had an accident, or is otherwise confined to a reclining position will welcome the opportunity to practice in this bodily position. Indeed, meditation practice can be all that is really available to us in certain circumstances, and should therefore be cherished all the more. If you one day find yourself in the hospital or a long-term care facility, and are likely to be there for a long time, practicing both mindfulness and loving kindness can be a true blessing and a refuge.

Standing meditation is even more accessible in daily life, and is a useful skill to have when you are waiting in a long line, riding a bus or train where no seating is available, or otherwise standing in one place for some length of time. It can feel very much like sitting meditation—relaxing the muscles of the body (at least those not needed to keep standing), feeling the nuances of sensations come and go in the body, and attending carefully to the breath. Standing meditation is also a preferred alternative to sitting if there is a lot of drowsiness present for whatever reason.

Practice suggestion: See if you can get into the habit of noting the transition between these four postures of the body whenever it occurs. Even if you cannot be mindful of every step while walking during the day, for example, at least see if you can train yourself to notice when the walking stops and turns into standing, and when the standing moves again into walking. The same goes for the other positions.

“As long as one is devoid of torpor,”

This phrase serves in part to widen the scope of the four postures to cover any other possible positions the body might take in the interest of making this teaching as comprehensive as possible. (Thus this clause would cover Ananda’s unique situation.) Running, for example, might be construed as something other than walking, or reclining might be identified as a position somewhere between sitting and lying down. More importantly, the phrase points out the simple fact that one is only able to be mindful, and thus only able to thoroughly direct loving kindness to others, when the mind is free of torpor. This is a rather archaic word, not frequent in modern usage, but covers such states as sleepiness, sluggishness, laziness, dullness, fatigue, etc. Mindfulness is the antithesis of torpor in all its forms, and actually dispels the torpor when it arises.

There will be times when torpor is inevitable, such as when one is sleeping or under the influence of various forms of medication, and one might do well to recognize that trying to practice at these times is not likely to be fruitful. But most times when one notices that torpor is present it can be abandoned by cultivating energy and by re-orienting the mind to the field of experience. Try practicing this as much as possible: whenever you become mindful of inner states and notice the presence of torpor, rouse the energy needed to dispel the torpor and establish mindfulness in its presence. This is not likely to work in the other direction—noticing when mindfulness falls away and torpor arises—but it may well be possible to deliberately replace torpor with mindfulness, and even to get into the habit of doing so.

The practice of loving kindness, as well as mindfulness, depends upon our ability to be free of torpor, for one simply cannot manage the sustained efforts described in previous verses to direct the mind to particular mental objects. When the mind gets tired or lazy it tends to drift from one association to another; mental discipline requires the overcoming of torpor in order to direct the mind in the deliberate ways called for in the formal practice of loving kindness.

“One would resolve upon this mindfulness”

I’m sure you have noticed that the emphasis has shifted in this verse from loving kindness to mindfulness. One does not exclude the other; rather each is required to sustain the other. All the cultivation of loving kindness described in the *Mettā Sutta*, such as sustaining the emotion of kindness or shifting the mind from one object to another in a systematic way, depends upon the ability to keep such things present in experience. Mindfulness involves a certain steadiness of mind, a non-wavering ability to focus fully upon a particular object, and as such is an important component of *mettā* or loving kindness meditation. Similarly, mindfulness involves a benevolent attitude towards the object of experience, an attitude that is not clinging to something desirable, but which also is far from pushing it away. In Abhidhamma teachings, the later, systematic renderings of Buddhist psychology, both mindfulness (*satī*) and loving kindness (*mettā*) always arise together, each one rounding out and supporting the other.

The sense of resolve or steadiness referred to in this verse is important as well. Both mindfulness and loving kindness are not states of mind that one drifts into or stumbles across, but are states to be set up, established, instantiated, or otherwise made steady in experience (the word for “resolve” here, based upon the Indo-European root $\sqrt{sthā}$, is related to English words like “stand” “steady”, and “establish”). So see if you can explore the relationship between these two states, mindfulness and loving kindness, in your own direct experience. Can you experience one without the other (the classical sources would say “no”)? Can you discern a distinction between the two, noticing where one leaves off and the other begins (the traditions answer here is “yes—if you look closely enough”)?

“—This is known as sublime abiding here.”

Finally, toward the very end of the *Mettā Sutta*, we find reference to the *mettā* as a *brahma-vihāra*, although here it does not seem to be used as a technical term as ubiquitously as in later Theravada tradition. There are four *brahma-vihāras* on the classical lists, where loving kindness (*mettā*) is joined by compassion (*karunā*), appreciative joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). “Sublime abiding” is only one of a number of common translations. It is a difficult term to render because it is used as a symbolic rather than a literal expression. The word “*Brahmā*” more or less means “God,” but of course as a non-theistic tradition Buddhism it is using the notion “godly” or “holy” or “sublime” in an oblique rather than a direct sense.

Rather than trying to parse the meaning of this phrase linguistically, try instead to explore it in your own direct experience. It just feels better to love somebody than to hate them, doesn't it? Yes, it can feel gratifying to be hateful when you feel justified (“That person is such a jerk!”) or self-righteous (“And thus they deserve my scorn!”), but I think the Buddha would say that this pleasure is coming out of an unwholesome and unhealthy mind state and is thus doing more harm than good. The pleasure that co-arises with wholesome states of mind is more subtle but more profound than the pleasure arising in unwholesome states. This is a matter to be investigated directly. Can you feel a slight elevation, a lightening of the mind, and lifting of the heart when you are able to transform a harmful thought into a benevolent thought? Can you feel how it is a more noble, uplifting, and yes, an almost angelic or divine way of holding oneself in relation to the object of experience? The practice of loving kindness and mindfulness taught here in the *Mettā Sutta* involves a steady, gradual development of the understanding that kindness is indeed a sublime state of mind and is worthy of continual cultivation.