

One:

The *Mettā Sutta* is one of the best-loved poems of the Buddhist tradition, a jewel sparkling softly but compellingly through the centuries. Its message and appeal are truly timeless. The *Mettā Sutta* speaks of universal good will toward all creatures, giving shape to one of the most beautiful and fundamentally wholesome states of mind of which the human being is capable.

It is located in the *Sutta Nipāta*, a verse collection that includes both some of the oldest and some of the most popular poetry. There it runs for ten stanzas, from verse 143 to verse 152. It is also included in the anthology of core popular teachings called the *Khuddakapāṭha*. Both these texts are in the fifth and miscellaneous section of the Sutta collection of the *Tipitaka*, the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.

The overall organization of the poem can be taken as three-fold, following the basic structure of the Buddha's teachings: 1) virtue (*sīla*); 2) concentration (*samādhi*); 3) wisdom (*paññā*). The second section, on concentration, seems to further break down into two parts. This sense of symmetry and completeness is part of the *Mettā Sutta*'s charm, and contributes greatly to its value as an enduring dharma teaching.

Two:

The first part on virtue or morality runs from the opening verse through the first half of the third verse. Virtue is said to lay down a solid ethical foundation upon which the development of the mind can become established. The first verse states that this ethical base is both a strategy for attaining the goal of awakening, as well as an expression of the quality of one's character. Specific virtues are listed, and then a general statement summing up all the others culminates the section.

Three:

Half way through the third verse, the voice changes to reflect a transition to a meditation practice. Imperative verbs and direct speech are used to guide intention in the present moment to the generation of loving kindness or good will. While the virtues are discussed conceptually, from a distance, here the quality of mind that actively and intentionally wishes well for all beings is enjoined. This aligns the poem with the actual practice of *mettā bhāvanā*, or loving kindness meditation, and these phrases can be taken as guiding that meditation practice.

Four:

Between the sixth and seventh verse the verbs change from imperative to optative, suggesting a little more backing away from direct practice toward a more discursive view of the *mettā* practice. It might be taken as a sort of commentary on that practice, offering encouragement and further guidance on how one should hold oneself while practicing the meditation. The lovely image of a mother caring for her child is introduced, along with the classical image of "sending" *mettā* in all directions like a trumpeter might do. We also hear a direct confirmation of the label this practice gets as "divine abiding" (*Brahma vihāra*).

Five:

The final verse of the *Mettā Sutta* shifts the emphasis to the highest plane of Buddhist aspiration, the attainment of wisdom. This is the culmination of the path, the destination reached when diligent meditation practice is developed upon a firm foundation of virtue. It emphasizes the purification of view, and the ability to see clearly. It suggests the overcoming of desire in the construction of experience, and names emancipation from rebirth and suffering as the fruit of awakening.