

One would not do even the slightest thing  
That others who are wise would speak against.  
May they be secure and profoundly well;  
—May all beings be happy in themselves.

na ca khuddam samācare kiñci,  
yena viññū pare upavadeyyum.  
sukhino vā khemino hontu  
sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā:

**“One would not do even the slightest thing  
That others who are wise would speak against.”**

It is interesting how these lines are phrased. Buddhist ethics are not about absolutes, and do not articulate a “right” and a “wrong” way of acting in the world. Rather they speak of cause and effect, seed and fruit, action and consequence. If you behave in wholesome and healthy ways, there are likely to be wholesome and healthy results, while the reverse is also true. In this verse the matter of ethical guidance is put in an even more simple and practical way: consider what people whom you respect would think of what you are doing.

The idea here is not to hear the scolding voice of your parent or schoolteacher berating you for wrongdoing. It is more about developing the habit of reflecting upon the quality of your actions before, after, and while you are doing them, in light of the fact that there is a well-developed tradition dedicated to supporting wholesome moral development.

It is left to you to decide whom you consider to be “those who are wise.” It might be the Buddha himself (“What would Buddha say?”); or it might be a teacher you respect and have worked with; or it might be a friend who is considered “a companion on the way,” a member of your sitting group or co-meditator. It might easily be a non-Buddhist—this is not necessarily about promulgating Buddhist values directly. As the Dalai Lama is fond of saying, practicing kindness is more important than practicing Buddhism. Nevertheless there is an implied sense here that a person is considered wise in the sense of knowing the value of upright behavior.

The way to practice with this verse in daily life is to keep it in the back of your mind and let it percolate into view from time to time. This action I am about to initiate...is it a wholesome action? With what quality of mind am I engaging it? How might I feel if someone captured the deed on video, posted it on the internet, and drew the attention of everyone I know to watch what I am doing? Would I feel embarrassed? Humiliated? Proud? The same goes for actions you are doing in the present moment, and even for actions done in the past.

**“May they be secure and profoundly well.”**

These verses can be practiced almost any time in almost any situation. It really does not matter too much who “they” are; *mettā* can be directed to anyone or to anything. The object is not as important as the quality of heart and mind with which the object is regarded. Traditionally one tends to direct the intention of wishing security and well-

being to a loved one, an acquaintance, a colleague, to strangers, to adversaries or even enemies, and also to oneself. Or it is directed outward directionally, to the north, south, east, west, above and below.

While the wish for the other's well-being is sincere, the actual purification taking place is of your own mind. *Mettā* practice is not a kind of magic where other people are healed or protected by our "sending" *mettā* to them. This view has more in common with the way one might pray for the recovery of someone in distress or for blessings to be bestowed on a loved one, where we are actually calling upon a higher power to intervene. When practicing loving kindness meditation, one is healing and protecting oneself, partly by dispersing all unwholesome thoughts that might otherwise invade the mind, and partly by cultivating and developing wholesome mind states that will strengthen one's own dispositions and transform one's own character.

In this regard, it might be useful to practice *mettā* in non-traditional circumstances as well as using the usual phrases and techniques. How about developing *mettā* for the birds in your back yard, for the whales swimming in far-off oceans, or even for some individual, entirely unknown to yourself, who lives on the direct opposite side of the planet? I don't think it is even too outrageous to feel loving kindness for inanimate objects once and a while (an not just the ones we are attached to). So the idea is not "May my new car be safe and protected from dents" but rather "May the clouds in the sky be secure and profoundly well." This is not about holding on to a particular cloud pattern and protecting it from change, but more about cultivating a state of harmlessness and loving kindness at all times, even when we are not in the presence of or calling to mind a person or a living being.

**“—May all beings be happy in themselves.”**

This line adds the nuance that the attitude of loving kindness is entirely selfless, insofar as the emphasis is upon wanting the other person to feel happiness. Again, I am not happy *for* the other person (that would be *muditā*, appreciative joy, a different quality of mind altogether) but I am wishing the other person to feel happiness *themselves*. Not only in a way that meets my approval, or that serves my ends, but as a pure act of benevolence toward the other.

Another way to work with this phrase is by embracing its absolute universality. We might try, at any given moment, repeating the phrase and see if we can conjure up a thoroughly expansive feeling of loving kindness that is no directed to anything in particular. May all beings, not only the ones we can see, but those on the other side of the world; not only those we can think of, but unthinkable beings (in far future time periods, for example, or on other planets far away)—may everyone and everything everywhere be happy in every way at every time. It is that big.