

*Kindness and Wisdom
Practice*

*A Quick Guide to
Mettā-Paññā Meditation*

Doug Kraft

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*In gratitude to my teachers, especially
Bhante Vimalaramsi
and
John Travis*

Other Books by Doug Kraft

Circling Home: Spirituality Through a Unitarian Universalist Lens (CreateSpace, 2010).

God(s) and Consciousness: Mapping the Development of Consciousness Through Views of Ultimacy (Doug Kraft Books, 2011).

Buddha's Map: His Original Teachings on Awakening, Ease, and Insight in the Heart of Meditation (Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2013).

Beginning the Journey: Initial Meditation Instructions Using the Buddha's Map (Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2014).

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Introduction

What's in a Name?

“*Mettā-paññā*” means “kindness and wisdom.”

Half a dozen years ago I began training with a monk, Bhante Vimalaramsi, who had combed through the earliest recordings of the Buddha’s talks to find what the Buddha had actually said about meditation. Bhante set aside all he had learned from the commentaries and shaped his meditation to follow only the Buddha’s guidance. He found a simple, elegant, and extremely effective practice. The Buddha was a gifted meditation teacher – perhaps the best the world has known.

When I began teaching this style of practice, meditators asked me, “What do you call it?” I said, “The Buddha’s meditation.” They said, “That’s not helpful. There are many practices called ‘Buddhist meditation.’” They wanted a more specific name.

Gradually I began calling it “*mettā-paññā*” or “kindness and wisdom meditation.”¹ It uses two tightly integrated practices: one cultivates kindness, the other cultivates wisdom.

Kindness without wisdom is not kind. Wisdom without kindness is not wise. So *mettā-paññā* does not refer to separate qualities that have been yoked together, but to two ways of viewing an awakened mind-heart.

Similarly, *mettā-paññā* meditation uses two practices that intimately support one another. The first

¹ Many of Bhante’s students call this practice “TWIM,” which stands for “Tranquility, Wisdom, and Insight Meditation.”

practice generates mettā – loving kindness and other wholesome qualities. As you meditate, hindrances will soon grab your attention. The second practice allows you to see clearly what hijacked your awareness, release it, relax, smile, and return to generating mettā. We affectionately call this second practice “The Six Rs”: Recognize, Release, Relax, Re-smile, Return, and Repeat as often as needed.

Used together, these practices gradually reveal not only the distraction, but what caused it and what caused the cause. As you relax these causal links, the heart becomes peaceful and the mind becomes clear: mettā-paññā.

Sri Nisargadatta once said, “Wisdom says I am nothing. Love says I am everything. Between these two, my life flows.”

Life is flow, change, and motion. Death is stasis. The Buddha did not recommend trying to cultivate permanent states of happiness, peace, clarity, or anything else. States of consciousness, like everything in the world, are impermanent. They come and go.

So the Buddha’s meditation is not about trying to control the mind-heart, but about remembering to observe the flow of the mind’s attention. This patient observation cultivates clarity, peace, and wisdom: mettā-paññā.

What’s in a Jhāna?

“Jhāna” means “stage of meditative knowledge.” It’s not something you can be told about or figure out. It’s knowledge you gain through direct experience.

Imagine hiking up a high mountain. You experience many things: the terrain changes from forest

to alpine meadows to craggy rocks; the view becomes increasingly panoramic; the thinning altitude affects your breathing; the exertion affects your body; the temperature varies. Before departing, you may figure out that these changes will occur. But those calculations are a dim substitute for embodied experience.

Similarly, jhānas are stages of embodied knowing. Jhānas are not states of consciousness, though states are associated with each. They aren't particular perspectives, though your views of life will shift. They aren't a specific practice, though the way you practice will change. Jhānas are clusters that include phenomena, perspectives, stages, qualities, practices, and more.

A forest is very different from a meadow. But the transition from one to another is not a sharp line. Similarly, the movement from one jhāna to another is not always dramatic. Nevertheless, jhānas provide useful markers to understand where you are on the mountain and what to do next.

If you have a trustworthy teacher, understanding what jhāna marker is nearest is not important – all you need is the teacher's guidance. If you don't have such a guide, then ascertaining what jhāna you are passing through can help you locate yourself on the Buddha's Map and guide you along the way.

I learned the jhānas as eight numbered stages and still present them that way. Traditionally, they are described as four jhānas and four bases as shown below.

Number Name / Base

One	<no name>
Two	<no name>
Three	Equanimity with Body
Four	Equanimity without Body
Five	Base of Infinite Space
Six	Base of Infinite Consciousness
Seven	Base of Nothingness
Eight	Base of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception

What's in This Booklet?

This booklet offers an overview of this meditation practice: it provides the bare-bones instructions.

If you are new to this practice, this booklet gives you a feel for how it works. It also introduces you to each jhāna. As your practice unfolds, the Buddha's instructions shift to take advantage of your deepening equanimity and clarity.

If you are an experienced student of this style, this booklet gives you some quick reminders of those essential instructions as you move along.

For a more complete description of the practice, see *Buddha's Map*,² *Breath of Love*,³ *Moving Dhamma*,⁴ or the many dhamma talks by Bhante Vimalaramsi found at

² Doug Kraft, *Buddha's Map: His Original Teachings on Awakening, Ease, and Insight in the Heart of Meditation*. (Grass Valley, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2013).

³ Bhante Vimalaramsi Mahāthera, *The Breath of Love* (City of Ehipassiko Foundation, 2012).

⁴ Bhante Vimalaramsi, *Moving Dhamma, Volume 1* (Annapolis, MO: Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center, 2012).

<http://www.dhammasukha.org>. The beginning instructions can also be found in more detail in the booklet *Buddha's Map: Beginning the Journey*⁵. There are also supporting talks, articles, and videos at <http://www.easingawake.com>.

⁵ Doug Kraft, *Beginning the Journey: Initial Meditation Instructions Using the Buddha's Map* (Grass Valley, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2014).

Practice

Preparation

The best preparation for meditation is to smile whenever you think of it. Smiling helps calm and open the mind-heart. You can hold the smile on your lips, in your eyes, or in the heart.

Spiritual Friend

Before starting this practice, choose a spiritual friend. A spiritual friend is someone who is alive and someone for whom it is relatively easy for you to wish the best. Your friend should not be a partner or an adolescent daughter or son. You may have much love for him or her, but those relationships can be complicated. For meditation purposes, it is best to choose a simpler relationship. For similar reasons it is best to choose someone of the gender for which you are least likely to have sexual feelings.

A few examples of good spiritual friends include a teacher who has your best interest at heart; an aunt, uncle, or grandparent who always looks out for you; or a kind friend you can always trust.

Once you have settled on a spiritual friend, you will stay with them throughout the early phases of your practice. It is not helpful to switch spiritual friends from sitting to sitting.

Seclusion

Find a place to meditate that is relatively secluded: quiet, no phones, no interruptions, and comfortable seating. While the perfect location is not possible, it helps

to do what is reasonable to be comfortable and quiet.

Posture

Posture, ultimately, is unimportant. There is nothing better about sitting with crossed legs versus sitting on a chair. So sit in a posture that is relatively comfortable and relatively upright. Once you settle into meditation, it is best to not move. The urge to move should be Six-R'd (the Six Rs are explained on the next page). When you have to move, it is better to get up and do walking meditation than to wiggle around and try to continue sitting.

Mettā Phrases

To generate mettā, begin with simple phrases: "May I be happy." "May I have ease." "May I feel joy." "May I feel safe." "May I be comfortable." "May I know kindness." Any uplifted state is fine. The phrases are used to "prime the pump" – to generate some feeling of uplift. Once the feeling arises, it becomes the primary object of meditation. Seventy-five percent of your attention goes to this feeling. Twenty percent goes to the person to whom you are sending mettā. And five percent – a very small amount – goes to the actual phrases.

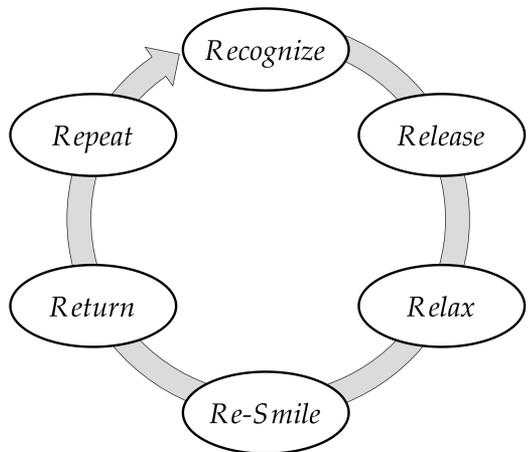
Send the feeling of mettā or other uplifted states to yourself or your spiritual friend (see detailed instructions in the First Jhāna section). Rather than send the feeling, some people find it easier to imagine themselves or their spiritual friend in their heart and surrounding them with kindness, ease, joy, or well-being. Either way – sending mettā out or surrounding the person in your heart with mettā – is fine. Use whatever method is easiest for you.

Say a phrase silently no more than once per breath. If the feeling of mettā or uplift is strong, use the phrase less often. The phrases need not be synchronized with the breathing. Repeating the phrases mechanically or quickly is of little value. Choose wording that works for you so that you can say the phrases sincerely.

Six Rs

Thoughts, sounds, physical sensations, and other distractions will inevitably arise. If some of your attention remains with the feeling of loving-kindness or with your spiritual friend, just ignore the distractions. They are not a problem. Don't be concerned about them.

However, when a distraction completely hijacks your attention, use the Six Rs: Recognize (see and know where your attention went), Release (let the distraction be there without holding onto it or pushing it away), Relax (soften the body, emotions, and mind), Re-Smile (bring in an uplifted state; if none feels natural, then raise the corners of the mouth in a half smile), Return (bring this relaxed and uplifted consciousness back to the object of meditation), and Repeat (know that it is normal and natural to use the Six Rs many times in the course of a sitting).



Forgiveness

Sometimes the practice gets bogged down in grief, remorse, or discouragement or comes to a standstill for no clear reason. This may happen at any phase of the practice. It's an indication that forgiveness may be helpful.

The forgiveness practices uses phrase like "I forgive myself for not understanding," "...for making a mistake," "...for harming myself or someone else," "...for not following my own ideals," or other phrases that resonate with you. Repeat a phrase or two slowly until you feel the feeling itself. Then radiate that soft acceptance to yourself. If the mind wanders, Six-R the distraction and return to a forgiveness phrase.

After forgiving yourself for a while, the mind may shift to a person who hurt or abandoned you. If so, shift the phrases to "I forgive you for not understanding," "...for making a mistake," "...for harming," or "...for not following my values." Don't get involved in the story about what they did. Just say a phrase or two sincerely until you really feel it.

After a while, the mind may shift to someone you hurt or abandoned. Imagine them saying to you, "I forgive you for..." Allow the feeling to soak in.

This brings the practice full circle from forgiving yourself, to forgiving another, to being forgiven.

If the forgiveness practice itself gets stuck or doesn't work, it may be because of subtle attachment or aversion. Forgive yourself and release the attachment gently.

During the day you can deepen this practice by forgiving yourself for everything: dropping something, letting the door slam, losing your keys, getting annoyed

on the phone, getting distracted...everything. This helps soften an overzealous inner critic and allows you to relax into a kind embrace.

After a few days, or a few weeks, you'll find you're living with more kindness. The forgiveness may not be needed. You can then return to the regular mettā-paññā practice.

Jhānas

First Jhāna - Joy

To begin, sit comfortably in your secluded space and send mettā (or any uplifted feeling) to yourself. Alternately you can place yourself in your heart and surround your heart with mettā. Do it sincerely. If you are unhappy, the wish that you feel happiness can still be very sincere. That's all that matters.

Send this well-wishing to yourself for about ten minutes. Then send it to your spiritual friend for the remainder of the sitting.

It is best to sit for at least thirty to forty minutes. More is better if you can do so without strain.

As your practice develops, at some point a feeling of genuine joy will arise. It may be very short in duration, or it may linger for a longer time. This feeling quiets into happiness. Happiness is similar to joy but has less energy and more spaciousness. Happiness in turn quiets into peaceful equanimity. Equanimity can be so subtle that it fades from awareness.

The cycle of joy to happiness to equanimity is a sign of the first jhāna. The cycle may pass through and fade very quickly. That's fine. With patience, it will return. Meanwhile, know that you are making progress.

It is not necessary, however, that you know what jhāna you are in. You may not recognize them even when you're in them because words do not adequately describe the actual experience: the jhāna may not feel exactly as you expect it to feel. All that is important is sending mettā or well-wishing, and Six-R-ing distractions. Everything else will take care of itself.

Second Jhāna - Confidence

With practice, the cycle from joy to happiness to equanimity lasts longer. Perhaps the happiness or equanimity lingers for a while without fading. Distracting thoughts arise less often and less insistently. It becomes easier to Six-R. You may notice a confidence that the practice really works.

These are signs of the second jhāna. It is not a distinct break from the first. Rather it is a deepening of joy, happiness, equanimity, and confidence and a lessening of distractions. There are still plenty of distractions – they just are not as powerful.

You may find that the phrases begin to feel coarse or awkward: the well-wishing flows naturally, and the words seem less helpful. If so, it's okay to drop the phrases. You still have the person and the feeling of the words in the mind-heart: you continue to send mettā to them but do so in inner silence. This is called "noble silence."

Some people find at this stage that sending mettā to themselves first and then remembering when to switch to a spiritual friend seems to keep the practice from going deeper. In the second jhāna, it is okay to just send the loving kindness to your spiritual friend. You will be included in the feeling just by sending it out. You don't have to keep purposely sending it to yourself for the first ten minutes.

However, if you sense that it would be of value or uplifting to spend some time sending it to yourself first, that is fine as well.

Third Jhāna - Peace

As your meditation deepens, joy arises less often or

may not arise at all. Rather than going through the cycle from joy to happiness to equanimity, you find there is just equanimity. The feeling is strong and tangible rather than elusive as it was in the beginning. It is not uncommon for some meditators to think there is something wrong with their practice because there is less joy. For other meditators, joy shifts from a bright and relatively coarse feeling to a broad, pervasive sense of peace.

You find you naturally want to sit longer and that there are longer stretches without distractions – or at least without distractions strong enough to capture your attention.

These are all signs of the third jhāna.

The shifts from the first to the second to the third jhāna are not distinct. Often there is no sudden shift of energy or feeling – just a steady deepening. If you are working with a meditation teacher, they may not hint at what jhāna you are in even as they adjust instructions. Worrying about which jhāna you are in is not helpful. Just take care of the practice, and the practice will take care of you.

Fourth Jhāna – Fading of the Body

As you continue to relax attentively, your body becomes so tranquil that physical sensations fade. At first it may just be in one area of your body – perhaps you notice no sensations in your hands. However, if you move them slightly or direct your attention toward them, you feel them. Similarly, sounds may fade into the distance. Perhaps you don't notice them at all unless you think about them. Or perhaps they do not disappear but seem far away. They have less capacity to disturb you.

Meanwhile you are sitting for longer stretches. And during your best sitting, you are staying with your object of meditation, without drifting, for longer periods of time.

You are in the fourth jhāna. According to the early Buddhist texts, you have become an advanced meditator.

There are a number of shifts in the practice with this jhāna. Your equanimity is so powerful that your teacher (if you have one) is less concerned with you wondering about which jhāna you are in. She or he may speak now more openly about the jhānas.

Since the body tends to fade from awareness, it becomes difficult to send mettā from the heart because you have so little physical sensation. You may find yourself sending it more from the head or the crown of the head. Or your teacher may invite you to try that.

Removing the Barriers

At this point, your teacher may invite you to use several different practices. If you don't have a teacher but sense you are in the fourth jhāna, you may engage these practices on your own. The first practice is to send mettā or well-wishing to several different spiritual friends. You do this until you can see each of them smiling. Then you shift to another friend.

When you've done this for several people, send it to other significant people in your life, including family members. If some of these are difficult for you, skip them for now and come back to them when you get to the last group of people.

When all of them have smiled in your mind's eye, send mettā to several neutral people.

Finally send it to the people you know personally who push your buttons, irritate you, or who you find difficult. It's important not to get involved with the storylines with these people. If the practice gets tough, come back to a neutral person until the mettā flows easily, then shift back to the difficult person. Once you can see them smiling, you are done with them in this practice.

Indiscriminate Mettā

When you have done this practice for all the significant people in your life, send mettā to all beings in all six directions. At the beginning of each sitting, it helps to get a feel for the directions by doing one direction at a time: in front, behind, to the left, to the right, above, and below. After you have a good sense of the six directions, you send out well-being to all beings in all directions all at once.

When you can do this, your equanimity is indeed well established. From here on, you continue to send out kindness, joy, well-being, or other uplifted qualities in all directions and to all beings.

Fifth Jhāna - Spaciousness

Some of the traditions refer to only four jhānas with the fourth having four different "bases." I find it simpler to just refer to the bases as the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth jhānas.

In the fifth jhāna, a vast feeling of spaciousness arises. This jhāna is called "the base of infinite space" and is described as a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere. It feels as if it continues to expand, though it is already infinite. You send out spaciousness in all directions.

The feeling of mettā may shift subtly – it becomes a little softer or more comforting. The texts refer to this as compassion.

Sixth Jhāna – Gaps

As you relax into spaciousness, there are moments when there seems to be nothing going on – there are gaps in your awareness. Or there may be periods of deep stillness, or blinks when everything stops for a fraction of a second. Your consciousness is so relaxed that none of this is disturbing. It feels natural. You are seeing consciousness itself arise and fade.

This is the sixth jhāna. The field of awareness may feel deeply and quietly joyful. It is called the “base of infinite consciousness.”

The mind-heart’s attention tends to be drawn to feelings, sensations, and thoughts more than gaps in awareness or moments of deep stillness. So in the sixth jhāna it helps to gently direct your awareness into these gaps or deeply peaceful places.

Seventh Jhāna – No Things

When your awareness goes into these gaps, you find yourself in the seventh jhāna. Here you experience longer stretches where awareness remains on the object of meditation – sending out equanimity, spaciousness, peace, and well-being. The distractions that do arise have nothing to do with anything outside the mind itself. You may notice pushes and pulls, various kinds of energies, moments of peace, and moments of restlessness. But there are no thoughts about what's for dinner or how to make the next tuition payment. "Outside" references have faded.

At this stage your awareness is very refined and

subtle. It may not seem so because there are still many disturbances – but they are all internal. The seventh jhāna is traditionally called "the base of nothingness." There is nothing going on related to the "outside" world, but there is a lot going on inside. I call it "no thing-ness" because there are no external objects.

In the seventh jhāna it is particularly helpful to pay some attention to the seven awakening factors. The seven include three energizing factors (joy, investigation, and energy), three calming factors (tranquility, collectedness, and equanimity), and mindfulness. If one factor seems to be weak, you can gently ask that it be strengthened to bring the mind into balance.

In the seventh jhāna, Six-R everything even if the distraction has not completely captured your attention. In earlier stages, it is not wise to attempt this, because there are so many coarse distractions that Six-R-ing everything generates restlessness from doing too much. But in the seventh jhāna, you have enough peace that it helps to Six-R things that have not completely captured your consciousness. And by now, the Six Rs should be automated: they are a deeply conditioned habit done with little effort. They all flow together in one motion rather than six separate phases.

Be sure that ease, well-being, or mettā continues to flow out from you in all directions. It may flow on its own without effort – which is fine. But if it's not flowing on its own, gently send it out until it flows by itself.

Eighth Jhāna – Loss of Ordinary Perception

It is difficult to describe the highest jhāna because

the mind-heart is so relaxed that ordinary perception and consciousness fade. It takes a small amount of tension to remember what you experienced a moment ago. It takes a tiny bit of tension to perceive what is going on now. So as consciousness relaxes deeply and subtly, normal perception fades. You enter the realm called "neither perception nor non-perception."

In this jhāna it is common for meditators to not be clear about what's going on in their practice. They may wonder if they can be both asleep and awake at the same time because it feels like falling asleep while remaining aware.

In the eighth jhāna, you cease all meditative effort except to Six-R anything that arises. Otherwise, you simply get out of the way and let the mind itself run the show.

If your progress seems to get stuck, you can ask intuitively what adjustments might help and follow that guidance. It helps to cultivate intuition.

There will be moments where everything is gone. You won't notice those moments until you come out of them. I call them "winking out" – short moments of gently blacking out. My Thai teacher, Ajahn Tong, called them "peaceful cessation." There are differences in the traditions and among teachers about when these periods of winking out are just part of neither perception nor non-perception, when they are true cessation (nirodha), and when they are nibbāna (nirvana).

In practical terms, what you call them is not important. When you come out of one, reflect for a moment on what was going on during the winking out. Sometimes you'll recall a lot or a little. In that case, Six-R

what you recall even though it has passed. Other times, reflecting on what happened feels like looking into a black emptiness. In that case, just continue on meditating.

When the winking out is true cessation or *nibbāna*, when you come out of it, the flow of Dependent Origination will be clearer than ever: you see easily how states lead from one to the next. Just notice this. Sometimes the pervading joy can be very intense even while it is serene.

Beyond the Jhānas

Once you are established in the eighth *jhāna*, the instructions stay the same until full awakening. You will go into short and then longer periods of *nibbāna* followed by clearer and clearer seeing of Dependent Origination. These times in *nibbāna* will help you move up through the various stages of enlightenment until you reach full liberation.

Exploration of these higher insights and of full awakening is beyond the scope of this booklet. But a few suggestions may help:

- Do nothing, Six-R everything. Six-R even the slightest of perceptions. Otherwise do nothing.
- Stay out of the way. Soften any sense of self that arises.
- Set an intention to awaken, but seek only clarity and acceptance. Dispassion naturally grows in the eighth *jhāna*. You are not trying to get anywhere anymore. You just want to see clearly what is and to be accepting and trusting of things as they are.
- Put your faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and

the Saṅgha. That is to say, put your faith in the truth of how things are, in your inherent enlightened nature, and in the collective wisdom of those who have walked this path ahead of us.

- Let go.

A Few Resources

Bhante Vimalaramsi, *Breath of Love* (Ehipassiko Foundation of Indonesia, 2012).

Bhante Vimalaramsi, *Moving Dhamma, Volume 1* (Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center, 2012).

Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center website:
<http://www.dhammasukha.org>.

Easing Awake website: <http://www.dougkraft.com>.

Kraft, Doug, *Buddha's Map: His Original Teachings on Awakening, Ease, and Insight in the Heart of Meditation* (Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2013).

Kraft, Doug, *Buddha's Map: Beginning the Journey*.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya, *Don't Look Down on Defilements, Dhamma Everywhere, and Awareness Alone Is Not Enough* (<http://www.sayadawutejaniya.org>).