

## *High Level Metta*

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When the Buddha talks about the three kinds of fabrication—bodily, verbal, mental—he does so in the context of dependent co-arising. And most people, as soon as they hear the term dependent co-arising, tune out because most of the treatments of it are so complex that it seems very far away from anything you're experiencing or doing in the meditation. But it's actually quite close. In fact, the three fabrications are one of the easiest entrees into dependent co-arising.

As the Buddha points out, if you do these kinds of fabrication in ignorance, they're going to lead to suffering. But if you do them with knowledge, they actually become part of the path. What are they? To begin with, we've got the breath, which is bodily fabrication. Well, that's right here. It's coming in and going out right now. It's a fabrication in the sense that you can shape it with your intentions. You can breathe in different ways. It's one of the few bodily processes that you actually can exert that much control over. So try to shape it well.

Notice what kind of breathing feels good for the body right now: long breathing, short breathing, fast, slow. It's entirely up to you what you like, although if the body doesn't like it, it'll let you know pretty quickly. So you've got to listen to the body's needs and notice that the breath, as it comes in, comes together with movement through the muscles. At the very least, they're the muscles in the chest that rise and fall, along with the muscles in the abdomen. As they're moving, the body—to maintain its balance—has to move other parts as well.

It makes you think of opening up the different blood vessels and nerves going through the body with a greater sense of ease, a sense that the whole body is participating in the breathing process.

Now, the way you do that involves the other two kinds of fabrication.

Verbal fabrication is basically the way you talk to yourself. The Buddha divides that into two processes. One is called directed thought and the other is evaluation. Directed thought is when you make up your mind as to what topic you're going to focus on. Evaluation includes all the comments and questions you address to yourself about that topic. So you ask yourself, "What kind of breathing feels good right now? Does this breathing feel good or does that breathing feel good?" That's directed thought and evaluation.

And when the breathing feels good, what do you do with it? If you think of it spreading through the body, you can also expand your range of awareness so that it spreads through the body too—so that you're not sitting up here like an owl perched on your shoulders looking down at the body. Think of the breath bathing the whole body. The head's connected with the body and it's all surrounded by breath. So where you are is surrounded by breath. Think of the breath bathing the body.

All those ways of thinking are directed thought and evaluation, but they also involve perceptions, in other words, images, labels. That's where you get into mental fabrication. If you hold a picture in your mind, what happens to the breath as it comes into the body? That's a perception. And the different perceptions will give rise to different feelings—of either pleasure or lack of pleasure, or neither. Those count as mental fabrication, too. Try to notice which perceptions lead to the most pleasant sensations in the body, the most pleasant ways of breathing.

You'll notice that these three forms of fabrication work together. The image you hold in your mind is going to have an effect on how you breathe. The way you breathe is going to have an impact on the feelings: You sense a pleasure here or tightness there. And then directed thought and evaluation go through and try to straighten things out—evaluating things, judging them, so as to dissolve the tension. This is the wisdom element in all this fabrication.

Now, if you bring knowledge to this, it actually becomes part of the path. You're developing right concentration. And as you get hands-on practice with these different kinds of fabrication, you begin to realize how you use them in different ways, creating different mind states throughout the day, different physical states throughout the day. And you can apply them to other areas of your life.

For example, suppose you want to develop thoughts of goodwill.

Goodwill, the Buddha said, is not a feeling. He doesn't use the word "feeling" to describe it. He doesn't use the word "prayer." He calls it a "determination." Determination is when you make up your mind that you want to do something. Here you decide that you want to develop an attitude of goodwill for all beings because you realize, if you don't have goodwill for all beings, you're going to act in unskillful ways—around some beings at least. You're going to suffer. They're going to suffer. So you learn how to think about it. You learn how to use all these kinds of fabrication to develop that kind of determination.

You start with the directed thought and evaluation. There are those phrases we chant: "May all beings be happy; free from suffering. May they look after themselves with ease." That's an important part of goodwill. Metta's not the wish that we're going to be around for everybody. It's a wish that they're going to be there for themselves. And you ask yourself, "What can I do to help in that direction?"

Then you look at the way you perceive your relationship to other people. If you feel that you're victimized by other people, that's a perception that's not going to help. You have to have the sense that you're well-grounded and safe, solid in your own well-being. And the breath helps here. If the bodily sensations feel uncomfortable, you'll have a hard time maintaining any real sense of well-being here, and that will make it harder to wish for the well-being of others, because the well-being has to start in here. As Ajaan Lee says, "If you say the thoughts of goodwill, but you don't really feel any sense of happiness or well being inside, it's like opening

up the faucet to an empty tank of water. Nothing but air comes out.” The coolness of air and the coolness of water are two very different things. What you want is water.

So you want to develop the cool water of a sense of well-being inside you. And the breath is a good place to start. Then you look at your thoughts—how you view your relationship to other people—and try to see yourself as in a position where you need these thoughts of goodwill. Remember that you’re doing this for their well-being as well as your well-being, but it’s all done within the context of karma.

There’s only so much you can do for other people’s well-being. You can show them the way to practice. You can give them advice, but there’s a limit on how far that can go. Think about the four noble truths, where the Buddha says we’re all suffering because of our own craving. Well, you can’t go in and change someone else’s craving. The craving you can work on is your own. So you work on that to be a good example—and to be more secure in yourself, because there are times when metta requires a little of what they call “tough love,” which is maybe an unfortunate way of putting it.

In Thailand, they have a better phrase. They call it “high level metta.” You want to do what’s actually best for other people whether they like it or not. I remember one monk, the monk who introduced me to Ajaan Fuang, who had a rough time with Ajaan Fuang one time because he was asking for some things that Ajaan Fuang thought were inappropriate. The monk eventually had to admit that. He said, “Ajaan Fuang’s metta is high level metta. He’s not out there to please people.” He saw that what they needed to do, what they needed to learn, was something they had to build within themselves. So sometimes Ajaan Fuang would do what was actually in their best interest, whether they saw it that way immediately or not.

It’s only when you’re really secure in yourself that your metta can become high level metta, because you can’t take these teachings out of the context of kamma. It’s always *their* actions that are going to lead to their happiness. You can’t be responsible for their actions. You have to be responsible for yours. Sometimes, the best you can do is be a good example. And then you have to be equanimous about whether or not other people are going to follow that example.

So, metta is a determination that you have to assemble with all these different forms of fabrication. You look at your perceptions with regard to other beings. You work on your understanding so that when you’re talking to yourself about what would be the kind thing to do or say or think in this situation, your thoughts are well informed.

Remember that thought: “May all beings look after themselves with ease.” What can you do to help them look after themselves with ease? That’s high level metta. It’s just one of the ways in which you can learn how to use these processes of fabrication in a way that’s done with knowledge so that they actually become part of the path. We do these things normally out of ignorance, which is why we suffer. Even the way we breathe sometimes contributes to our suffering if we don’t pay attention to it.

So you've got this time now. Pay attention to these things. What are you doing right now? How are you breathing? What are you thinking about? What are the perceptions that shape both how you breathe and how you think? What can you do to make them more skillful? These are some of the questions that come from looking at these three types of fabrication in a way that has an immediate impact.