

The Diversity of Love Journal

ISSN: 3070-3859

Loving-Kindness in Buddhist Culture as a Form of Benevolent Love

Article published on **September 10, 2026** by **Victor Karandashev**

Retrieved from: <https://love-diversity.org/the-benevolence-of-loving-kindness/>



Grounded in Buddhist philosophy and practice, this article examines *maitrī* and *mettā* as active forms of benevolent love. It explores how cultivating unselfish kindness and dissolving ego boundaries through daily prosocial actions can strengthen human connection and community well-being.

Introduction: The Core of Loving-Kindness

People across the world have a fundamental, enduring need for connection and mutual support. Love expressed in the acts of kindness fosters the growth of

feeling love. In recent years, the concept of “loving kindness” has become very popular among researchers and practitioners in cultural studies, psychology, and mental health. Its popularity came from the original Buddhist philosophy and culture.

This article presents a specific cultural and philosophical case examining how Buddhist traditions operationalize love as active benevolence. While much of contemporary psychological research treats *prosociality* as a behavioral variable, contemplative traditions view loving-kindness as a foundational paradigm of human existence. Across diverse academic disciplines—ranging from relationship science and linguistic anthropology to evolutionary biology—scholars recognize that the deliberate cultivation of kindness is essential not only for individual mental health, but for the very survival and social cohesion of human communities (Karandashev, 2017, 2019, 2022; Wierzbicka, 1999).

The Buddhist philosophies, alongside the ancient traditions of Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, and the Chinese culture of love, teach people to cultivate universal loving-kindness, benevolence, and compassion in their minds.

The Buddhist and Other Cultural Heritage of Love

The Sanskrit word “*maitrī*” is usually translated into English as loving-kindness, benevolence, good will, and active interest in others.

In Buddhist cultural teaching, loving kindness is the mental state of unselfish and unconditional kindness to all beings and to each one.

The Buddhist philosophies, the ancient religions of Hinduism and Jainism, teach people to cultivate universal loving-kindness, benevolence, and compassion in their minds.

In some regards, this Buddhist teaching of loving-kindness resembles [the Christian teaching of agape](#), as altruistic love for others, , as well as the [ancient Chinese culture of altruistic love](#).

Kindly and Benevolently Love Another as Yourself

Loving kindness lets us stay connected. It has the power to eliminate barriers between us and others.

The core concept of Buddhist teaching—"anatta"—denies the existence of a separate self. As Zen Master Dogen (1985/2010) put it:

"To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barriers between oneself and others."

This means that "self" does not exist within individual existence in the sense of a permanent autonomous being. Modern psychological and philosophical inquiries echo this ancient insight, demonstrating that ego-centric isolation restricts human empathy. As the Dalai Lama noted:

What we think of as our self, our personality and ego, are temporary creations, if not delusions.(Dalai Lama, 2007).

When individuals recognize the fluid, interdependent nature of human personality, the rigid psychological boundaries separating "self" and "other" begin to dissolve. This dissolution enables the unobstructed flow of benevolent care, allowing individuals to experience deep empathy and shared humanity across cultural and social divides (Fredrickson et al., 2008). In psychological terms, meditation practices centered on *maitrī* and *mettā* systematically restructure cognitive appraisals, reducing threat-based self-focus and heightening other-regarding compassion (Goleman, 2003; Lutz et al., 2008).

Empirical neuroimaging studies confirm that long-term practitioners of loving-kindness meditation exhibit marked plasticity in neural circuits associated with empathy, emotional regulation, and affiliation (Davidson & McEwen, 2012).

Loving Kindness Can Be Contagious

Why is being kind so important? Kindness is an expression of love and a way that love grows.

Keep in mind that loving kindness can be contagious. Practicing loving kindness every day in relationships with others can breed loving kindness in others. When people see or receive expressions and acts of love and kindness, they tend to repay or transfer such loving kindness to others.

Recent empirical research in social networks and behavioral economics confirms this phenomenon, demonstrating that cooperative behavior and prosocial acts cascade across social ties (Fowler & Christakis, 2010). Daily and random acts of kindness can increase feelings of happiness, optimism, and confidence in those who love and those who are loved. They may also inspire others to replicate the kind and benevolent actions they have witnessed.

From a neurobiological standpoint, witnessing or receiving acts of kindness activates mirror-neuron networks and stimulates oxytocinergic pathways, reinforcing prosocial neural circuits (Iacoboni, 2008; Carter, 1998). Therefore, these expressions and acts of loving kindness can contribute to a more positive community.

The kindness of love has the potential to make the world a better place. As longitudinal public health studies indicate, individuals who consistently engage in benevolent actions experience lower stress markers and enhanced longevity, proving that kindness is biologically and socially self-sustaining

(Post, 2005; Brown et al., 2005). When prosocial habits are integrated into community spaces, they generate a social feedback loop that buffers against social alienation, mitigates interpersonal conflict, and fosters robust civic trust (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

11 Simple Ways to Be Loving, Kind, and Benevolent in Daily Life

There are several ways to practice loving kindness in everyday life. Among those are these simple ethical rules:

- Kindness puts others at the center.
- Pay attention to others.
- Be there to listen.
- Smile at others.
- Show them that you care for them.
- Offer a hand to help.
- Stay connected.
- Pay attention to what you give rather than what you receive.
- Compliment others rather than expect compliments.
- Expect good things to happen. Be a positive light.

Following these ways is so simple but so beneficial for others as well as for you. Loving kindness brings wellbeing for all. By shifting interpersonal communication away from transactional expectations and toward unconditional goodwill, individuals cultivate sustainable emotional environments that support mutual thriving (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005).

These micro-behaviors serve as the practical architecture through which abstract philosophical ideals of benevolence are translated into tangible, everyday interpersonal reality, proving that global harmony begins with local, intentional acts of grace.

Conclusion

Be kind, benevolent, and kindly loving and the world will be a better place to live for you and for them. As ancient contemplative wisdom, world cultures, and modern relationship science demonstrate, loving-kindness is not merely a poetic ideal; it is an active practice of benevolence. By integrating the timeless insights of traditions like *maitrī* and *mettā* into our daily routines, we honor our deepest human interpersonal connections, elevate community well-being, and fulfill the true benevolent potential of love.

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