

Cultivating Loving-Kindness

A Three-Day Retreat

Section One

The Basics

Introduction

Dhamma Greetings! You have taken your first step into a journey of the heart and mind. Before you read on, please smile. Even if you do not feel like, just let your lips curl up into a smile. Hold it there. Wait. Allow that smile to deepen. Do you feel anything? Maybe the mind is saying, “yeah this feels good.” Or “this is just silly. I should stop.” Don’t listen to it. Instead, allow the smile to help you. In this retreat, it’s all about letting go, smiling and having fun. You have permission to smile. In fact, share your smile everywhere you go. Whether you believe you’re happy or not, you are tricking your body and brain into thinking you are relaxed and in an uplifted mood.

Here’s something to try – look at your face in the mirror. Try to make an angry face. Now smile. Consider how it looks. Silly, isn’t it? No one expressing outright anger or sadness smiles. But anytime you feel good, you smile. And any time you smile, you feel good. So do it more during this weekend retreat. This is a vacation for the body and mind to relax into a deeper state of awareness. And it all starts with smiling!

Guidelines

A few guidelines. You are completely free to choose how you want to do this retreat. As long as you remain silent – meaning you don’t allow your voice to distract you or to distract others – you are free to do whatever else you please, as long as it does not deter anyone from having a good time for themselves on their personal retreat.

Your Choices

There is an indicative schedule that will show you the structure for this retreat. First, get enough rest. Get enough to eat. And get enough to drink. Keep the body healthy and happy and the mind will respond in the same manner. Now, it is your choice whether you want to attend the group meditations, the Dhamma talks, or wake up at 5 AM and take the Virtues.

No one is going to hold your hand in this retreat. Everything begins with a choice in every moment. You are responsible for your own well being, so in that regard take it seriously. But while you do, remember to smile!

Meals

For Saturday, you will be taking the 8 Virtues, which includes not eating after the noonday meal and hence no dinner will be served. Should you have any dietary requirements related to health concerns, special arrangements can be made.

Sleep

It's important to get sufficient rest. We invite all meditators to maintain a schedule in which one gets at least 6-7 hours of sleep. You may not be used to waking up at 5 AM, but it is important to do so during retreat. Mind at this time is naturally silent, due to a different dimension of quietude in the early hours of the morning, which is conducive for meditation. However, if you feel like you did not receive enough rest, you are welcome to take naps throughout your day in between meals, interviews, and meditations.

Possessions

The retreat location is not responsible for your possessions. This is why we encourage you to keep all of your valuables at home. Even if you have brought your laptops and mobile phones, keep them off. Again, no one is going to monitor your use of electronics, but you must hold yourself to a higher standard if you want to get the peace and mental awareness you are keen on experiencing on this retreat. It is better to stay connected within your mind and body than with the outside world for this retreat.

Clothing

There are no special clothing requirements. Wearing loose fit, comfortable clothes will help meditators feel at ease. Wearing clothes that cover the whole body is a proper way of showing respect for yourself and for others.

Interviews

Participants will have a one-on-one private discussion with the teacher about their practice and experiences. This is meant to be a sacred time for you to be able to share your practice with the teacher, so that they may provide you with the information best suited for your situation and level of experience you are at, which means you must be succinct and mindful of the time you spend. Every participant will have limited time to discuss with the teacher.

Interviews are helpful in many ways:

- Learning how to avoid certain habits or mental states.
- Learning how to abandon certain habits or mental states,
- Learning how to cultivate certain habits or mental states,
- Learning how to protect certain habits or mental states.
- Learning some new wholesome perspectives and views.

And how to put them into practice.

Here are a few ideas of valuable questions that could be asked when meeting on interviews:

- Can you bring up the feeling of loving-kindness?
- Are there any difficulties with the feeling?
- How long does the mind stay with the feeling of loving-kindness before it wanders away and becomes distracted?
- How long does the mind take to notice it is distracted?
- Is the span of attention on the feeling of loving-kindness increasing?
- Can you feel joy within the body?
- How was your best meditation since your last interview?
- How long was your best or longest meditation?
- Have you done any walking meditation?
- Are you experiencing any difficulties or problems?
- Do you have any other questions?

Taking Refuge

Taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha is a very powerful and profound act of dedication and faith. This is to be done only from the basis of one's own desire. Faith or confidence is the first step to any project or ambition. Taking the three refuges helps acquiring courage, understanding and determination.

Taking them directly in front of the Saṅgha is particularly meaningful. But this is entirely left to each meditator's discretion. One who takes refuge is then called a "lay practitioner." One who has entered the Buddha's dispensation. This can be done at any time of the retreat, whenever one feels like this might be appropriate or not, one can approach the teacher and request.

For the retreat, a meditator is wise to leave beside other teachings and traditions and practices to fully experience and try the Buddha's Teaching. In this way, meditators would be wise to practice taking refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha in their heart, for the time of the retreat and place some faith in the Teaching and to give it a genuine try.

Participants are also welcome to take refuge silently in the privacy of their room, with folded hands, and to repeat mentally the following from a mindset of openness and humility:

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Dhamma.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

For the second time, I take refuge in the Buddha.

*For the second time, I take refuge in the Dhamma.
For the second time, I take refuge in the Sangha.*

*For the third time, I take refuge in the Buddha.
For the third time, I take refuge in the Dhamma.
For the third time, I take refuge in the Sangha.*

Virtues

Taking the virtues, on the other hand, is essential. It is a very minimum requisite of engagement that the meditator should commit to on retreat. A retreat cannot be conducted to people who do not value the virtues.

Any kind of attempt to meditate without undertaking certain guidelines of good conduct is like trying to extinguish a fire while continuing to throw fuel on it.

There is a mental component to taking and maintaining the Five Virtues in relation to one's meditation practice. As you will become more acquainted with the practice you will be made aware of the reasons why one keeps these Virtues in your own mind. Making a commitment to follow these Virtues provides stability in one's mind both in daily living and in meditation practice.

The Eight Virtues

I undertake the practice to refrain from intentionally harming other beings.

I undertake the practice to refrain from intentionally taking what is not given.

I undertake the practice to refrain from sexual misconduct.

I undertake the practice to refrain from false speech.

I undertake the practice to refrain from taking drinks or substances that cause negligence.

I undertake the practice to refrain from eating at improper times.

I undertake the practice to refrain from dancing, singing, listening to music, seeing entertainment shows, wearing necklaces, perfumes and beautifying the body with cosmetics

I undertake the practice to refrain from high and luxurious beds and seats.

(On Saturday and Sunday Morning, all 8 Virtues are taken, while on Monday Morning, only the 5 Virtues out of the 8 are taken)

The Five Virtues and the Five Hindrances

There is an invariable connection between following or not following of the Five Virtues and the arising or non-arising of the Five Hindrances, which are the common categories of distractions in one's mind during meditation. In short, the origin of the Five Hindrances is not following the Five Virtues and the cessation of the Five Hindrances is keeping the Five Virtues.

When one intentionally harms (with speech, action or thought) or kills another living being, one cultivates the hindrance of Ill Will. This is because one acts from Ill Will whenever there is an intention to harm.

When one intentionally takes what is not given, one cultivates the hindrance of Restlessness. This is because one has developed a view through such action that causes the mind to always be in a state of paranoia, as one takes from others in a way that is unwholesome by essentially having the intention to take away what is not given freely (time, resources, credit, attention, etc.), which only deepens the hold of conceit. Through this conceit, there is the subtlest fear and worry that one's own "possessions" or on a broader level what one may consider to be a need from the sense of conceit (both tangible and intangible, and physical, mental and emotional) will be taken away in the same way.

When one indulges in sensual (which includes sexual) pleasures to the point of heedlessness and misconduct, one cultivates the hindrance of Sensual Desire. This is because one has indulged the senses to the point that one identifies in their pleasure and becomes prone to misconduct, to acting in a way that causes harm to another being and to oneself.

When one uses false speech, one cultivates the hindrance of Doubt. This is because if one develops an attitude of tricking others with false speech, one continues to create a view to doubt others of their trustworthiness. This then translates to doubt in one's own capabilities and capacities, both in daily living and in meditation.

When one uses intoxicants, one cultivates the hindrance of Sloth and Torpor. This is because if one indulges in alcohol, drugs, or overindulges even in the use of social media, phones, the Internet, and even coffee or tea in general, which create surges of various neurotransmitters, including dopamine and serotonin, one loses one's ability to stay balanced. This makes one seek happiness outside of themselves and become dependent on these things to make them happy. Even if there is indulgence in a stimulant, which may produce energy in the short-term and in fact cause restlessness immediately after its use, the long-term effect is dullness of mind. The overuse and dependence on anything that creates imbalances in one's thoughts thus dulls the mind and dampens its abilities to cultivate wholesome qualities.

A Note on Translation

Generally, the Eightfold Path is translated in English as:

Right View
Right Intention
Right Speech
Right Action
Right Livelihood
Right Effort
Right Mindfulness
Right Concentration

However, for the purpose of this booklet and this retreat, the words have been changed to reflect an alternate translation. Therefore,

Right View becomes **Effective Vision**
Right Intention becomes **Effective Choice**
Right Speech becomes **Effective Speech**
Right Action becomes **Effective Behavior**
Right Effort becomes **Effective Application**
Right Livelihood becomes **Effective Living**
Right Mindfulness becomes **Effective Observation**
Right Concentration becomes **Effective Collectedness**

Section Two

The Retreat

Retreat Outline

This three-day retreat revolves around the practice of the 6Rs (“Effective Application”) and the Brahmaviharas, starting with Metta (loving-kindness) Practice. It is also meant to introduce people to the jhanas, levels of deep understanding and awareness, as taught by the Buddha.

The topics and suttas discussed for each day of the retreat are as follows:

Day 1 – Effective Choice and Effective Application

Effective Choice is the choice to be in a wholesome state, while Effective Application is the process in which mind roots out unwholesome states, brings to fruition wholesome states and maintains them. This will be shown through the process of what is known as the 6Rs, while using loving-kindness as the object of one’s meditation.

Sutta References:

What is Effective Choice? That is, the Choice of contentment, the Choice of non-anger, the Choice of harmlessness. This is called Effective Choice.

SN45.8 – Vibhanga Sutta (Section on Effective Choice)

Objective: Understand what Effective Choice means in relation to making an intention for this retreat, and to learn how to apply the Four Right Applications to keep one’s observation unified with the object of meditation, which is bringing up loving-kindness.

Day 2 – Cultivating Wholesome States

There are two sorts of thoughts in one’s mind – wholesome and unwholesome. It is one’s attention that will make one or the other thought grow stronger. Cultivating a wholesome state leads to deeper levels of mind, opening one to insight and providing relief to a mind burdened by continually unwholesome states and qualities, and in that relief one begins to observe and understand new levels of awareness, as well as cultivates wisdom.

Sutta References:

Blindness was driven out and clear understanding arose. Darkness was driven out and light arose, just as happens in one who meditates, attentive, intent and resolute.

MN19 – Dvedhāvitakka Sutta (Two Kinds of Thought)

Objective: Understand how letting go every time a hindrance or unwholesome state arises and relaxing the tension caused by that state immediately leads to a sense of relief and a wholesome state. By doing so, one enters into jhana, a deeper level of understanding the mind and reality as it is.

Day 3 – Deepening Metta in Daily Life

Being kind in general is important. Remaining kind when all around may not be kind is what is more helpful for both one's state of mind and for the unkind persons. In deepening the practice of Metta in all circumstances, we open up to a new dimension of living and begin to noticeably spread that goodness to other beings, who in turn give it back to us as well as pay it forward.

Sutta References:

Our minds will be unshaken, and we will not retaliate with hurtful words. We will dwell with a heart full of Love, caring for their well-being.

MN 21 – Kakacūpama Sutta (Analogy of the Saw)

Objective: Understand that cultivating an attitude of Metta in meditation affects the way one behaves in daily living, which is positive, uplifting and wholesome. Likewise, when one continues practicing loving-kindness in daily life, it cultivates a wholesome mind state that can easily meditate. The key to this is one's smile and application of the 6Rs.

Day One – Effective Choice and Effective Application

Effective Choice

What is Choice?

Every thought, word and action begins with a choice, rooted in intention. Think and reflect on the following and see for yourself how your choices, thoughts and intentions arose –

Why did you join this retreat? Is it to find more peace in your life? Is it to attain Nibbana? Is it something else?

After reflecting on the intentions behind your choices, now clarify whether they arose from a Craving Mindset or a wholesome Mindset, born from letting go for the need to control and accepting Reality as it is.

Once you understand the intentions behind your choice, you begin to see how choices come to be.

Reflect on how your intentions come to be. Do they arise as a reaction or as a response?

Reaction vs. Response

A reaction is immediate and filled with taking everything personal and the need to control a situation, and therefore it doesn't provide a space for thoughtful reflection.

In choosing to react, one is choosing to act out of Craving and when Craving blinds one, one does not act with wisdom or understanding and may choose to cause harm through thoughts, words, or actions

A response is reflective, arising out of wisdom. A response provides you a pause between what you have received in the way of your senses and the output you provide to the world.

In this way, one acts from a choice rooted in wisdom and as such one is attentive to each situation as it occurs, always being understanding and always thinking, speaking or acting out of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity or tranquility, in which case one does not harm another through thoughts, words, or actions.

Effective Application

Meditation Instructions

Remember a time when you were happy — when you felt that warm, glowing feeling of loving-kindness, contentment or happiness. Perhaps you were holding a baby and looking into its eyes, and you felt this radiant feeling of loving-kindness in your heart. Or perhaps a puppy or a kitten. You can also reflect on all the things you are grateful for in your life. This brings up a happy, content and peaceful feeling.

Take that feeling and radiate it to yourself. Help it along with phrases like “May I be happy,” “May I be content,” “May I be peaceful,” or whatever wholesome feeling arises.

Sit for a minimum of 30 minutes and do not move – no twitching or changing posture.

This is a smiling meditation. Put a little Buddha smile on your lips and feel it. Also, smile from your eyes and from your mind. Smile for the whole sitting. When you lose your smile, you have likely lost that warm feeling so Re-smile and feel that smile again, and again.

Radiate this feeling to yourself for the first 10 minutes of the sitting. Do not move - not at all!

The next 20 minutes of the sitting (or balance thereof) pick out a spiritual friend. This is someone you like and respect, they are the same gender, and they are alive. This person cannot be a relative or family member.

For the balance of the session, send loving-kindness to the spiritual friend. Put them in your heart and radiate this warm, glowing feeling of loving-kindness to them using appropriate phrases like “May John/Mary be happy”; “Just as I feel this warm loving-kindness, may they feel this feeling themselves.” “May they be safe/content/peaceful.”

Now, your mind is going to wander away. At first, you might only be on the meditation object for 5 seconds or, at most, a minute. The hindrances of sensual desire, ill will, doubt, restlessness or sloth and torpor will come to distract your mind away from radiating that happy feeling to your friend.

6R it!

6R the stories and thoughts and disturbances/distractions that arise. 6R the mind that starts to go off and think, and spin more stories. So, what are the 6Rs?

Recognize you were taken away from the feeling of loving-kindness,
Release your attention to those thoughts – just stop thinking about them right there,
Relax any tension and tightness that is left in the body or mind, and that keeps pulling you back to thinking those thoughts or beating yourself up for having them. Just relax, especially the head!
Re-Smile – put that smile back on your lips, eyes, and mind,
Return to the feeling of loving-kindness, and stay with that until the next distraction arises.
Repeat: Stay with loving-kindness and your spiritual friend. 6R if you wander.

Your goal is to stay with your spiritual friend for as long as you can. Do not push or try too hard, just do it. You are on vacation and are just relaxing comfortably, without a care in the world. Share this contentment with your friend and smile. Don't push – just like when you hold a baby you don't try to feel love – you just do.

Walking Meditation:

Pick out a place to walk that is quiet and away from disturbances. Stroll at a moderate pace. Radiate loving-kindness to your spiritual friend. Keep them in your heart while you walk and wish them a happy feeling. 6R whenever there is a distraction. This is the same as sitting only that you are walking now.

The Four Effective Applications and the 6Rs

The Four Effective Applications are fundamental to root out unwholesome notions, concepts, and conditions in mind and to replace them with wholesome conditions.

In doing so, one is effectively purifying the mental processes in order to create the circumstances for mind to experience deeper levels of happiness.

Preventing

One generates the intention for the non-emergence of inexistent, unfavorable, unwholesome states of mind. One endeavors with determination, strives and supports this with one's mind.

When one RECOGNIZES that mind has strayed due to a hindrance, one effectively sees and then prevents that hindrance from further distracting the mind.

Releasing

One generates the intention for the abandonment of existent, unfavorable, unwholesome states of mind. One endeavors with determination, strives and supports this with one's mind.

When one RELEASES their Attention from the hindrance, they have effectively given up that hindrance and when one RELAXES the tension in mind and body, they have let go of the Craving that arose due to that hindrance.

Bring Up Wholesome Qualities of Mind

One generates the intention for the emergence of inexistent, wholesome states of mind. One endeavors with determination, strives and supports this with one's mind.

When one SMILES (or RE-SMILES) one is immediately and effectively bringing mind back into a wholesome state.

Smiling reconditions the mind to be light and relaxed, to see Reality without taking it personal or imposing demands upon it.

When one smiles, one understands Reality as it is and is not fighting it. If that Reality is unwholesome for that present moment, smiling shifts that Perception and brings mind back to a state of balance, replacing the previously unwholesome quality of mind with a wholesome quality.

Maintaining

One generates the intention for the persistence of already emerged wholesome states for their non-confusion, Growth, Maturation, Development and Culmination. One endeavors with determination, strives and supports this with one's mind.

When one RETURNS to the feeling loving-kindness, which is itself a wholesome quality, one is effectively allowing that quality to grow and come to fruition to the next level of a wholesome quality.

When one REPEATS the process, if required, they are fundamentally tranquilizing the mental processes and reconditioning those processes to be able to bring about a wholesome level of thought, word and action.

In doing so, one is practicing in meditation the deepening of Effective Observation and Effective Collectedness, and in daily life one is applying Effective Choice, Effective Speech and Effective Behavior.

Day Two – Cultivating Wholesome States

Rolling your 6Rs

Let's say you're sending out loving-kindness to your spiritual friend. You just observe the loving-kindness. While you observe, suddenly a thought comes up about a meeting you had earlier.

You're no longer observing the loving-kindness, so it takes you a few seconds to realize, "oh, I'm not meditating," and that is recognition, so you let go of thinking about the meeting and relax any other thoughts associated with that or any tension in the head, then you notice if you're smiling or not and make sure you are doing so.

Finally, you return to observing the loving-kindness and repeat the process when you get distracted again. The time it takes from recognizing to releasing to relaxing to smiling to returning to the loving-kindness should take no more than 5 seconds at the most if you're doing it right. This is what rolling the 6Rs means.

Now, if you feel tension in the head while sending out the energy, you know you're trying too hard, so you recognize this, release your focus on the tension, relax the tension, smile and go back to just a relaxed observation of the loving-kindness and stay with that observance. This observance is like just watching a movie - you're engrossed in it but you're not trying too hard to stay focused because you are enjoying it. The keyword here is to ENJOY the loving-kindness.

Seeing and Relaxing Tension

Tension in the head is the number one complaint of beginning meditators (and meditators from other practices). It feels like a knot and no matter what you do you just can't make it go away.

It arose by trying too hard to force your attention on the feeling of loving-kindness. The feeling arises naturally. You can't force a feeling and you can't force meditation.

And there lies the problem. Trying too hard to make it do something other than what is there. You have aversion and you don't like it. It is painful and it distracts your meditation. So you put your attention there and demand it to relax and just go away. That won't work because you are doing what caused it to eliminate it. You're feeding it with your attention.

What to do? Exactly the opposite. Allow it to be there because that is the truth of the moment. Don't see it as something to get rid of. Tell yourself to stop trying to make it go away and welcome it in - have some tea prepared and kindly offer it to this tension now but then just don't pay attention to it anymore. Just relax and smile.

So in releasing this tension, what did we do?

First we **Recognized** it was there. Then we **Released** and allowed it to be there without pushing it away- we observe there is tension and there is pain. That's all right.

Now we **Relax** the tension knot ONE time and we relax and release our ATTENTION to that knot ONE time. We don't stay with it, trying to relax it until it is gone. Ultimately trying to physically relax it won't help, especially if you bring your expectations and demands to it, which just makes it tighter.

Then **Re-Smile** and **Return** to the feeling of loving-kindness - if that pain is in the background then let it be there. It is as if you *didn't like* your breath - would you try to avoid it and avoid breathing? Well - you aren't going to be successful by stopping breathing so accept that that pain is there in whatever form it arises; bring some kindness to it - welcome it - allow it - smile into it and 6R one time and come back to your feeling of loving-kindness.

Relax – the cornerstone of the practice

Many people seem to glaze over the **Relax** step, not really taking time to understand what it is. It is the relaxing of the mind, body and tightness in both.

Relaxing the bodily, mental, and verbal processes leads the mind into what is like a clear space, a pristine, thoughtless space with no Craving. Body is relaxed but not slouching. Mind is clear, like a cloudless sky, and thoughts are gone, barely wisps if they are present at all.

When one learns to pinpoint the relaxing of the processes in this manner, they can immediately understand the Relax step.

The suggestion here is to just let mind be and then intend the relaxation. Relax, relax, relax - then, one is able to see what it means to cease Craving and have that open spacious mind so one can quickly go to it as one lets go of the distraction, and then sees that open mind.

Some people seem to associate the Relax step with a sharp intake of air and a letting go of breath. This is a reactionary aspect of the Relax step, but not the Relax step of stilling processes in and of itself.

Just Observe, Don't Force It

Now, the other thing to consider is that mind may have the tendency to attach itself to the feeling of loving-kindness.

Here, it's important to pay Attention to mind **observing** - just watching the feeling of loving-kindness.

The sensations that come up from the feeling must be observed, and 6R'd if they distract one from staying with the observation of the feeling.

Likewise, one observes that one was distracted – *not getting attached* to the distraction by fighting it or ignoring it. Any such effort will only cause more Craving and clinging.

Allow the mind to do its work. **It will unravel itself.**

Observation is not focus – it is the mere watching and seeing what occurs, not becoming involved or identifying with the feeling of loving-kindness. This then becomes absorption concentration, too much focus, pushing down insights to arise naturally.

This is why relaxing is important - it provides the mind space required for insights to naturally arise.

Of course, one caveat - one mustn't just relax during the actual meditation. Once you understand what it feels like, one uses it as part of the 6R effort. Then, there is development and progress as it is intended. Besides, one mustn't just relax, relax, relax in the beginning because mind will then become dull with no object.

It's only after one's mind has reached stability that mind can then watch its own clarity, luminosity, and radiance - the bright, quiet, clear mind, where at this point all processes have been relaxed.

Day Three – Deepening Metta in Daily Life

The Power of Smiling

The quickest way to deepen your practice outside of retreat is to keep smiling and keep remembering to smile. By smiling, you continue to be in an uplifted state of mind that is most conducive for sending out loving-kindness to all beings in daily life and strengthening your meditation practice. Not only is it fun, but you also spread that smile to others. Just read the two articles below to give you some motivation –

Neuroscience Says Doing This 1 Thing Makes You Just as Happy as Eating 2,000 Chocolate Bars

It also gives you the same neurological boost as receiving \$25,000.

(Article from Inc. by Melanie Curtin)

Wanting to be happier is a universal trait. It's rare to find a person whose reply to, "How would you like to feel today?" is, "Morose, please."

The scientific study of happiness (aka positive psychology) has mushroomed over the last two decades. Major research institutions have taken on substantial and often thought-provoking forays into the joy of joy, with surprising and often enlightening results.

One such study took place in the UK, where researchers used electromagnetic brain scans and heart-rate monitors to generate what they called "mood-boosting values" for different stimuli. In other words, they had participants do, look at, or listen to different things, and measured how happy it made them.

One thing trumped all else. It emerged as giving participants the equivalent level of brain stimulation as up to 2,000 chocolate bars. It was just as stimulating as receiving up to \$25,000. What was this magic stimulus?

A smile.

Smiling, as it turns out, has truly remarkable effects. First, doing it actually makes you feel good even if you're not feeling good in the moment. A 2009 fMRI study out of Echnische Universität in Munich demonstrated conclusively that the brain's happiness circuitry is activated when you smile (regardless of your current mood). If you're down, smiling actually prompts your brain to produce feel-good hormones, giving credence to the adage, "fake it til you make it" when it comes to your state of mind.

Smiling is also a predictor of longevity. In a 2010 out of Wayne State University, researchers looked at Major League baseball card photos from 1952. They found that the span of a player's smile actually predicted his lifespan -- unsmiling players lived 72.9 years on average, while beaming players lived a full seven years longer.

Similarly, a 30-year longitudinal study out of UC Berkeley examined the smiles of students in an old yearbook, with almost spooky results. The width of students' smiles turned out to be accurate predictors of how high their standardized tests of well-being and general happiness would be, how inspiring others would find them, even how fulfilling their marriages would end up. Those with the biggest smiles came up on top in all the rankings.

Finally, research demonstrates that when we smile, we look better to others. Not only are we perceived as more likable and courteous, but those who benefit from our sunny grins actually see us as more competent (something to keep in mind while giving presentations or interacting in the office).

Want to know where you stack up when it comes to smiling? Know this: under 14% of us smile fewer than 5 times a day (you probably don't want to be in that group). Over 30% of us smile over 20 times a day. And there's one population that absolutely dominates in the smile game, clocking in at as many as 400 smiles a day: children.

So there you have it: smiling makes you feel good, makes you look good, and gets you a better marriage in the end.

Seems like something to smile about.

(end of article)

This simple tactic can 'trick' your brain into feeling happier, researchers say

(Article from CNBC by Jade Scipioni)

Fake it 'til you feel it? That's what researchers at University at South Australia say could help when you're feeling down.

According to a recent study published in the journal *Experimental Psychology*, researchers found smiling — even a fake smile — can have positive impact on mood. Essentially, triggering certain facial muscles by smiling can “trick” your brain into thinking you're happy.

“When your muscles say you're happy, you're more likely to see the world around you in a positive way,” Fernando Marmolejo-Ramos, study author and human and artificial cognition expert at the University of South Australia, said in a press release.

To conduct the study, researchers asked 120 participants (55 males and 65 females) to smile by holding a pen between their teeth, which forced their facial muscles to replicate the movement of a smile.

They found that facial muscular activity not only altered one's facial expression but also generated more positive emotions.

Marmolejo-Ramos said the muscle movements of a smile stimulate the amygdala — the part of your brain that allows you to feel emotions — by releasing neurotransmitters “to encourage an emotionally positive state.”

“For mental health, this has interesting implications. If we can trick the brain into perceiving stimuli as ‘happy,’ then we can potentially use this mechanism to help boost mental health,” Marmolejo-Ramos said.

Research from New York-based neurologist Dr. Isha Gupta also found that the mere act of smiling can increase levels of hormones like dopamine and serotonin in the body.

“Dopamine increases our feelings of happiness. Serotonin release is associated with reduced stress. Low levels of serotonin are associated with depression and aggression,” Gupta previously told NBC News.

What's more, another 2009 study from researchers at the the University of Cardiff in Wales found a small group (about 25 people) of botox users were happier on average because of their inability to frown compared to those who could frown. While other studies link smiling to lower blood pressure and longevity.

In a nutshell, said Marmolejo-Ramos, there is a strong link between action and perception.

“A ‘fake it ‘til you make it’ approach could have more credit than we expect,” he said.

(end of article)

Metta in Daily Life

The following are excerpts from Bhante Vimalaramsi and David Johnson's book, *A Guide to Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation*, in which they provide advice on how to keep applying loving-kindness in daily life –

Add Metta to everything you can. Bring loving-kindness into everything that you do. Generally, you will do your sitting at home, but you can also smile and radiate well-being and happiness to all beings when you are out and about. If you are just going out walking or shopping, you do not have to stay with a spiritual friend. Stay with a general feeling of Metta. Smile more. Notice and 6R emotional upsets that arise.

When unwholesome states of mind arise, see them as opportunities. Let them be and bring up wholesome ones. This is the meaning of Right Effort in the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

Continue to sit and practice. Listen to talks, read our books, and study more about the concepts surrounding this practice. There are many resources on our website (<https://www.dhammasukha.org/>).

When starting any new practice, it is usually best to immerse yourself in that practice, setting aside other practices you may have done in the past, until you understand the new practice deeply and thoroughly. Otherwise, you may be confused with the various opinions and practices that are out there.

Again, when you are outside moving around in daily life, remember to smile and radiate Metta to all beings. Use Right Effort to recondition your mind. Bring up the wholesome quality of loving-kindness instead of allowing whatever "ho-hum" mind is there. Stuck in a long line at the checkout line? Radiate Metta. It is a tough job being a cashier at a store, so smile at the cashier and be friendly. Traffic bogged down, and you just can't move? Rather than getting upset, radiate Metta to your fellow drivers. 6R your upset mind and replace it with a wholesome, uplifted mind.

Share what you have learned with other people, and let them benefit from your practice. Pay this practice forward once you understand it. Don't proselytize! Just talk about what happened to you in your own words. How is it helping you be happier? Be the Buddha rather than a Buddhist!