

meditation

Loving Kindness

Loving-kindness meditation, also known as “Metta” is powerful compassion practice. The following description and instructions are adapted from the book *The Issue at Hand*, a beautiful book written by Gil Fronsdal as a gift to the community. It is freely given and available on the Insight Meditation Center website.



Metta is “the heartfelt wish for the well-being of oneself and others.”

What is metta? Why is it helpful?

Metta practice is the cultivation of our capacity for loving-kindness. It does not involve either positive thinking or the imposition of an artificial positive attitude. There is no need to feel loving or kind during metta practice. Rather, we meditate on our intentions, however weak or strong they may be. At its heart, loving-kindness practice involves giving expression to our wishes for the well-being and happiness of ourselves or others.

Recognizing and expressing goodwill have a softening effect on our hearts. At times this evokes feelings of love, tenderness, and warmth. At other times this softening of the heart can expose difficult or painful buried emotions. Allowing all these emotions to surface in their own time is one function of loving-kindness practice.

When we find difficulty in relating to others and ourselves with intentions of kindness, the practice of metta can provide a useful reference point to help us see what we are in fact feeling. The absence of loving-kindness can be an important cue, not to provoke self-criticism, but to remind us to slow down and pay more careful attention to what is actually happening.

The practices of mindfulness and loving-kindness support one another. Metta practice complements mindfulness by encouraging an attitude of friendliness toward our experience regardless of how difficult it may be. Mindfulness complements loving-kindness by guarding it from becoming partial or sentimental. Metta can foster a closeness in our relationships to others; mindfulness can help keep us balanced in those relationships.

Brief Instructions for Loving-Kindness Meditation

To practice loving-kindness meditation, sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long and complete exhalations. Let go of any concerns or preoccupations. For a few minutes, feel or imagine the breath moving through the center of your chest - in the area of your heart.

Metta is first practiced toward oneself, since we often have difficulty loving others without first loving ourselves. Sitting quietly, mentally repeat, slowly and steadily, the following or similar phrases:

May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease.

While you say these phrases, allow yourself to sink into the intentions they express. Loving-kindness meditation consists primarily of connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness. However, if feelings of warmth, friendliness, or love arise in the body or mind, connect to them, allowing them to grow as you repeat the phrases. As an aid to the meditation, you might hold an image of yourself in your mind's eye. This helps reinforce the intentions expressed in the phrases.

After a period of directing loving-kindness toward yourself, bring to mind a friend or someone in your life who has deeply cared for you. Then slowly repeat phrases of loving-kindness toward them:

May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease.

As you say these phrases, again sink into their intention or heartfelt meaning. And, if any feelings of loving-kindness arise, connect the feelings with the phrases so that the feelings may become stronger as you repeat the words.

As you continue the meditation, you can bring to mind other friends, neighbors, acquaintances, strangers, and finally people with whom you have difficulty. You can either use the same phrases, repeating them again and again, or make up phrases that better represent the loving-kindness you feel toward these individuals.

Sometimes during loving-kindness meditation, seemingly opposite feelings such as anger, grief, or sadness may arise. Take these to be signs that your heart is softening, revealing what is held there. You can either shift to mindfulness practice or you can—with whatever patience, acceptance, and kindness you can muster for such feelings—direct loving-kindness toward them. Above all, remember that there is no need to judge yourself for having these feelings.

Adapted from *The Issues at Hand* by G. Fronsdal