METTA – THE PRACTICE OF LOVINGKINDNESS

Metta is a a mind-state as well as a practice of intention and letting go. Metta (translated as loving kindness, loving friendliness or goodwill) was first taught by the Buddha as an antidote to fear. It can also be an antidote to aversion, hatred or low self-esteem. We traditionally practice by repeating phrases which develop concentration and purification.

When beginning loving kindness practice it can be helpful to bring to mind a person or animal one loves without question and then notice the felt, body experience of the mind/heart state of love before starting the phrases. The phrases can also be repeated without a feeling of love; over time the feeling develops naturally of its own accord. It helps us connect with the heart of gladness that is in each of us.

Metta is the first brahma-vihara, or abode of the gods. The second is *karuna*, or compassion, which is a natural response if beings are suffering. The third is *mudita*, or sympathetic joy, joy in others' joy. All are balanced by *upekkha*, or equanimity, a sense of knowing things are as they are, and will surely change. There are also phrases for practicing these other three abodes.

One always begins the practice with oneself. No one, no thing in the universe deserves to be loved any more than you. Then offer the phrases to others in various systematic ways, described below. Offering metta before you begin your daily sit can help quiet and concentrate the mind. Offering metta at the end of a sit is an excellent way to recognize the effort you have made and share the blessings. Practice not expecting anything. Practice not clinging to anything. We water the seed of what is actually in our heart--calm and great love—allowing it to flower.

Many benefits of practicing metta meditation are traditionally cited, including better sleep, being loved by others, serenity, and mental clarity. Communities who practice metta together can find their way through difficulties more open-heartedly.

In some traditions, we start with a forgiveness practice to help open the heart.

<u>Forgiveness Practice</u>
If by deed, thought or word, I have harmed someone, I ask their forgiveness.
I forgive myself for any harm I may have caused myself.
I forgive (or I willingly undertake the practice of forgiving) those who have harmed me.

Ways to Practice Lovingkindness

Traditional Phrases	Possible Modifications
May I be free from enmity and danger.	May I be safe.
May I be free from mental suffering.	May I have mental happiness.
May I be free from physical suffering.	May I have physical happiness.
May I have ease of well being.	May I be free from struggle.

One can develop one's own phrases, or use a single word. It is recommended to have about four phrases or words to use most of the time. This helps develop concentration. However, when specific situations are on our minds, we can develop phrases to help us calm and open our hearts for those situations.

By Way of Persons	By Way of Location
May I….	May I….
My parents (living or dead)	All beings in this room
Loved ones; Mentors/teachers	in this Neighborhood; Town, State, Country
Neutral persons	Hemisphere, World
Difficult persons	Universe
All Beings	All Beings

By way of characteristics
Beings who walk, crawl, fly, swim
Live on land, in water, in air
Known and unknown
Born and yet-to-be born

A Prayer
May suffering ones be suffering-free
And the fear-struck, fearless be.
May the grieving shed all grief,
And all beings find relief.

Sharing Merit
May all beings share this merit which we have thus acquired, for the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.

Developed by Kathy Schwerin/Christy Tews.
See also *Lovingkindness; the Revolutionary Art of Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg

revised 11/2025