



Metta Meditation / Loving-Kindness Prayer

Description



Lesson Overview

In this lesson, we introduce the topic of *metta*, and describe Metta Meditation, also known as the Loving-Kindness Prayer.

Objective

Become knowledgeable about Metta Meditation.

Description

Explain the origins and meaning of â??mettaâ?• and describe the intention of the word in a way that differentiates it from a feeling or wish that is passive in nature. Clarify how the practice of *metta* is different from trying to â??be niceâ?• and what qualities of love itâ??s said to develop. Define Metta Meditation, describe for whom each round of the prayer is dedicated and note the part of the body the practitioner focuses on. List the benefits said to result from Metta Meditation and describe some common issues that may arise during the practice as well as ways you might respond to them.

About Metta



In Pali (the language of Buddhist texts) â??mettaâ?• means loving-kindness. In Sanskrit, a word with a similar meaning is â??maitri.â?•

The Pali word *metta* is a multi-significant term meaning loving-kindness, friendliness, goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, inoffensiveness and non-violenceâ?| True *metta* is devoid of self-interest. It evokes within a warm-hearted feeling of fellowship, sympathy and love, which grows boundless with practice and overcomes all social, religious, racial, political and economic barriers. Metta is indeed a universal, unselfish and all-embracing love. â?? **Acharya Buddharakkhita**

A key point in understanding the meaning of the word *metta* and the intention behind the practice is that in this use, loving-kindness is not a feeling one might have. Rather, itâ??s something **cultivated through practice**. As noted below, this is not the same as trying to â??be nice.â??

The classic explanation is that *Metta* is a wish for all beings to be happy, and *Karuna* is a wish for all beings to be free from suffering. *Wish* is probably not the right word, though, because wishing seems passive. **It might be more accurate to say directing oneâ??s attention or concern to the happiness or suffering of others.** Developing loving kindness is essential to doing away with the self-clinging that binds us to suffering (*dukkha*). *Metta* is the antidote to selfishness, anger, and fearâ?| Being â??niceâ?? often is about self-preservation and maintaining a sense of belonging in a group. We are â??niceâ?? because we want people to like us, or at least not get angry with us. Thereâ??s nothing wrong with being nice, most of the time, but itâ??s not the same thing as loving kindnessâ?| As long as your â??practiceâ?? is about you being a nice person, you are just play-acting. This may seem paradoxical, but unselfishness begins by gaining insight into yourself and understanding the source of your ill will, irritations, and insensitivity. â?? **Barbara Oâ??Brien, ThoughtCo**

Metta Meditation Overview





Introduction

Metta Meditation, also known as the Loving-Kindness Meditation or Loving-Kindness Prayer, focuses the attention on the heart center while silently repeating certain phrases. (See phrases and variations below.)

Practice Steps

1. Sit in a comfortable posture. Begin to focus on the heart center, breathing in and out from that area. Anchor the mind on the sensations in the heart center.
2. Traditionally, the prayer is done first for oneself.
3. Then the prayer is said for successively wider circles: those closest to you, followed by those who you feel neutral toward, and then those with whom you have difficulties and, finally, all beings.
4. Avoid any tendency to rush the words.
5. As you say or think the words, feel any area of mental blockage or numbness, judgment or hatred. Then “drop beneath it.”
6. Continue to breathe in and out.

The Practice

It begins with well-wishes for oneself:

*May I be safe
May I be happy
May I be healthy
May I live with ease*

Successive rounds typically direct the prayer to those close to you, then to those who you feel neutral about, and then to those with whom you have difficulty, and finally closing with:

*May all beings be safe
May all beings be happy
May all beings be healthy
May all beings live with ease*

INSPIRATIONAL PERSPECTIVE FROM SHARON SALZBERG

I really do believe that one answer to the universal search for meaning and connection is lovingkindness – the practice of cultivating love, compassion, joy, and equanimity for ourselves and for all beings! When I teach lovingkindness meditation to students around the world, I usually try to qualify the term so that it doesn’t come off as sounding “saccharine” or even “cheesy.” The practice is not about an obligation to some platitude of kindness! Rather, lovingkindness is a deep knowing that every individual’s life is inextricably interwoven. We all want to be happy, in other words. Keeping this simple adage in mind as a universal, inarguable fact establishes a simple foundation upon which we can really connect with others. When we see each other’s [vulnerability](#) as something common, the idea of friendship as something manufactured slips away. Connection



becomes something much larger, much less concrete, and much more powerful. â?? **Sharon Salzberg**

SEPARATE THE SEQUENCE OF PHRASES INTO MULTIPLE PRACTICES, AS DESIRED

The loving-kindness meditation sequence focuses on yourself first, and then you move down the list to different people within a category. You do not have to complete the sequence during every meditation session; sometimes you can sit with the feeling of one person throughout your entire practice or, as Salzberg recommended for me, break the sequence into four weeks to allow the love and compassion of the practice to slowly take hold. â?? **Samantha Trueheart**

DONâ??T WORRY IF YOU DONâ??T GET A CLEAR PICTURE

To practice *metta*, we simply repeat phrases to ourselves over and over at a comfortable pace while holding the image of the receiver of our lovingkindness in our mind. Donâ??t worry if you donâ??t get a clear picture, the strong intention to do so will be enough. Try to send the *metta* from your heart area; just imagine the thoughts coming from within your chest. â?? **Bemindful.org**

NEUTRAL PERSON OR â??FAMILIAR STRANGERâ?• EXAMPLE

Think of someone that you rarely think about but that youâ??d recognize if you met. I always think about Paula whoâ??s been cutting my hair for ten years. I like her very much, but I normally donâ??t think about her in between. So, I like to think about her sometimes in the middle of blessing, because my relationship with her becomes a little dearer. Think of a person thatâ??s a familiar stranger and wish for them, â??May you feel safe. May you feel contentâ?|â?• â?? **Sylvia Boorstein**

Benefits



Four Qualities of Love

This meditation is said to help develop four qualities of love:

- Friendliness (*metta*)
- Compassion (*caruna*)
- Appreciative Joy (*mudita*)
- Equanimity (*upekkha*)

More

In addition to developing friendliness/lovingkindness (*metta*), compassion (*caruna*), appreciative joy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkha*), Metta Meditation is designed to help:

- Cultivate positive emotional state toward others and self
- Bring more harmony into relationships by resolving existing difficulties and deepening connections
- Help to overcome anger, resentment and hurt
- Develop empathy, kindness, forgiveness and appreciation

Responding to Common Issues

Some common issues that might arise include:

1. Difficulty in seeing goodness in others
2. The arising of opposite feelings
3. The arising of random memories or other thoughts
4. Disappointment at not getting expected results

Please see the following expert advice addressing these issues.

WHEN IT'S DIFFICULT TO SEE GOODNESS IN OTHERS

Sometimes it's difficult to see goodness in others. If this is the case, we can remind ourselves that all beings are seeking to be happy just as we are and feel some connection with them in this common struggle. Guilt is another barrier to Metta practice. Guilt has an element of self-hatred in it, it drains energy, it paralyzes us. Remorse is freeing, we forgive ourselves for the harm we have done to self or others and use the freed energy to work to improve ourselves, make sure we don't repeat the offense. We need all of our energy if we're to overcome our unskillful habits especially aversion and hatred. We need to move from the trap of guilt to the freedom of remorse; forgive ourselves and move on. [Bemindful.org](#)

WHEN OPPOSITE FEELINGS ARISE

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. [Metta Institute](#)

MORE ON STUFF COMING UP

Sometimes random memories or repressed, shameful moments from my past would surface during my practice. Memories of my anxious pre-teen days surfaced, or how I might not have been as loving as I would have liked in interactions with family and friends. I tried to focus on the offering of love, to [forgive](#) myself and to let go of the memory as a reminder that it no longer served me in the present moment. [Samantha Trueheart](#)

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS EXERCISE

Sometimes when people are beginning to learn lovingkindness meditation they think that lovingkindness is something that's to be manufactured. And sometimes, if you make a lot of internal effort, you can become somewhat excited and convince yourself that you're developing lovingkindness. But more often a sense of disappointment and even despondency sets in, because you don't get the expected result. You can't actually make emotions happen all you can do is set up the conditions for them to arise and then see what happens. Love can't be manufactured through meditation. It can't be squeezed out of our being. Try this exercise:

- Sit quietly, and bring your awareness into your body



- As best you can, relax each muscle as you bring awareness to it
- Bring your awareness to your heart area, and see what emotions are present, smile, and watch what happens
- If youâ??re not sure what youâ??re feeling, pay attention to the kind of thoughts youâ??re having. Are they anxious? Critical? Self-critical? Depressive? Joyful? Your thoughts can give you a clue to how youâ??re feeling.
- If youâ??re not sure about how youâ??re feeling, see if you can notice how you feel about not being sure about how you feel! Sometimes that makes it clearer.
- Remember: whatever emotions you are feeling (good, bad, or even neutral) are fine. You can work with those emotions, and you can only start from where you are
- See if you can be kind to yourself. Be patient as you attempt to find out how youâ??re feeling.
- Donâ??t try to find out what youâ??re feeling. Rather than a frantic search, think more of relaxing into an awareness of whatâ??s already there.
- Gently bring yourself back to the outside world

â?? wildmind buddhist meditation, Ways of Cultivating Metta â?? Introduction

Variations

May all beings be filled with loving-kindness

May all beings be well

May all beings be peaceful and at ease

May all beings be happy

* * *

May all beings feel safe

May all beings feel content

May all beings feel strong

May all beings live with ease

* * *

May all beings be healthy and strong

May all beings be happy

May all beings be filled with ease

May all beings be peaceful

* * *

May all beings be happy, healthy and whole

May they have love, warmth and affection

May they be protected from harm and free from fear

May they be engaged and joyful

May all beings enjoy inner peace and ease

May that peace expand into their world and throughout the Universe.



* * *

*May all beings be at peace. May all beings be filled with loving-kindness
May all beings be well
May all beings be peaceful and at ease
May all beings be happy
May all beings' hearts remain open.
May all beings awaken to the light of their own true nature.
May all beings be healed.
May all beings be a source of healing for others.*

* * *

*May I forgive myself
May I be strong
May I be compassionate to myself
May I learn from my experiences
May I accept myself as I am in this moment
May I be patient
May I give myself the kindness and compassion that I need
[This last version from Jennifer Weinberg]*

Self-Compassion Meditations



Kelly McGonigle

- *To body or a body part â?? May you be healthy. May you be happy. May you be free from suffering. May you know peace.*
- *To whole self â?? May I be healthy. May I be happy. May I be free from suffering. May I know peace.*
- *Focusing on choice in this moment â?? In this moment, I am already healthy and whole. In this moment, I choose to be happy. In this moment, I choose to be free of suffering. In this moment, I am at peace with my body, mind, and present experience.*

Jennie Lee

*May I be free of all obstacles to love in my heart.
May I be held in loveâ??s peaceful embrace.
May I experience ease in my body, mind, and soul.*

May I feel myself as love.

More Readings



SUPPORTS OTHER AWARENESS PRACTICES

The practice of metta meditation is a beautiful support to other awareness practices. One recites specific words and phrases evoking a “boundless warm-hearted feeling.” The strength of this feeling is not limited to or by family, religion, or social class. We begin with ourselves and gradually extend the wish for well-being and happiness to all beings. “ **Metta Institute**

UNCONDITIONAL, INCLUSIVE LOVE

Loving-kindness, or *metta*, as it is called in the Pali language, is unconditional, inclusive love, a love with wisdom. It has no conditions; it does not depend on whether one “deserves” it or not; it is not restricted to friends and family; it extends out from personal categories to include all living beings. There are no expectations of anything in return. This is the ideal, pure love, which everyone has in potential. We begin with loving ourselves, for unless we have a measure of this unconditional love and



acceptance for ourselves, it is difficult to extend it to others. Then we include others who are special to us, and, ultimately, all living things. Gradually, both the visualization and the meditation phrases blend into the actual experience, the feeling of loving kindness. â?? **The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society**

IMPORTANT ASPECT IS CULTIVATING METTA TOWARDS OURSELVES

In this meditation practice, we also cultivate *metta* towards ourselves, so that we experience less internal conflict, and learn to appreciate ourselves more. This is a particularly important aspect of the practice. Itâ??s traditionally held that we all cherish ourselves, and that what we need to do is to expand our love from ourselves to othersâ?!. And yet many of us in the west have been brought up to hate ourselves. We donâ??t thoroughly hate ourselves, of course. In fact we tend to treat ourselves very well! But we do tend to keep up an undercurrent of negative self-talk. And to the extent to which we hate ourselves, weâ??re unable to relate healthily to others. Lovingkindness practice helps us to feel more positive, accepting, kind, and patient toward ourselves, in order that we can be more compassionate and loving toward others. â?? **wildmind buddhist meditation**

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