

Metta meditation

from <http://info.med.yale.edu/psych/3s/metta.html>

The Pali word 'Metta' is commonly translated in English as 'loving-kindness.' Metta signifies friendship and non-violence as well as "a strong wish for the happiness of others." Though it refers to many seemingly disparate ideas, Metta is in fact a very specific form of love -- a caring for another independent of all self-interest -- and thus is likened to one's love for one's child or parent. Understandably, this energy is often difficult to describe with words; however, in the practice of Metta meditation, one recites specific words and phrases in order to evoke this "boundless warm-hearted feeling." The strength of this feeling is not limited to or by family, religion, or social class. Indeed, Metta is a tool that permits one's generosity and kindness to be applied to all beings and, as a consequence, one finds true happiness in another person's happiness, no matter who the individual is.

The Practice

The hard work and repetition required of an individual engaged in Metta practice endows the four universal wishes (to live happily and to be free from hostility, affliction, and distress), with a very personal inner love, and by so doing, it has the power for personal transformation. Although serious practitioners of Metta meditation offer Metta for an hour or more morning and evening, you may wish to begin by offering Metta for just 10-15 minutes each day. You may do your practice as a formal sitting meditation or while walking (preferably without destination). You may also choose to integrate your Metta practice with daily chores.

To begin, take a few moments to quiet your mind and focus your attention on the experience of loving kindness. You will begin by offering Metta to yourself. If distracting thoughts arise, acknowledge them, make a mental note to return to them after your Metta practice, but quickly move them aside to maintain concentration.

Recite the following phrases to yourself at a pace that keeps you focused and alert.

1. May I be safe and protected.
2. May I be peaceful and happy.
3. May I be healthy and strong.
4. May I have ease of well being (and accept all the conditions of the world)

Continue reciting the phrases in the first person.

Then when you are comfortable, try offering Metta to a beneficiary, someone who supports you, who has always "been on your side." Forming visualizations of this person while reciting the phrases can be helpful; for example, imagining this beneficiary as a child or grandparent, can assist in 'opening the heart.'

1. May s/he be safe and protected.

2. May s/he be peaceful and happy.
3. May s/he be healthy and strong.
4. May s/he have ease of well being (and accept all the conditions of the world)

Next offer Metta to a loved one.

1. May s/he be safe and protected.
2. May s/he be peaceful and happy.
3. May s/he be healthy and strong.
4. May s/he have ease of well being (and accept all the conditions of the world)

Once your Metta flows easily to a loved one, begin to include in your practice one or more of the following categories of persons to whom you will offer Metta:

- A close friend.
- A neutral person (someone you neither like nor dislike)
- A difficult person (no need to start with the most difficult person, but someone whom you have a distaste for)

All beings, individuals, personalities, creatures (choose whichever word to describe all 'beings' that you please; it may be helpful to break up this category into subcategories; i.e., all men, and then all women, all enlightened ones, and then, all unenlightened ones, all beings who are happy, and then all beings who are both happy and suffering, and all beings who are primarily suffering.

1. May s/he/it be safe and protected.
2. May s/he/it be peaceful and happy.
3. May s/he/it be healthy and strong.
4. May s/he/it have ease of well being (and accept all the conditions of the world)

Although one traditionally starts by offering Metta for 'oneself ' and ends by offering Metta to 'all beings,' please do not expect to be able immediately to offer these phrases to all beings from the onset of your practice. We all struggle to offer this unconditional love to many people in our lives, and it is truly difficult to include everyone, though this aspiration is reasonable if we are committed to Metta practice. Between these two 'categories' -- oneself and all beings -- one should choose freely from any category or any number of categories. Categorical divisions serve only as tools to keep Metta from overwhelming someone new to the practice. They should not create restrictions within the practice once one gains familiarity with it.

In truth, any one individual may fit into a number of different categories. This ambiguity should be expected and embraced. Awareness of our feelings toward another is always the first step in converting this energy into loving-kindness. Noticing a feeling of aversion, or indecisiveness, when evoking the image of a particular person in your practice does not mean you are failing to offer Metta. Rather, you

are leaping forward in your practice. According to Buddhist teachings, the worst plague a human being can suffer is one that s/he cannot identify, or does not even know exists. Similarly, aversions (and cravings) that lie below the level of conscious awareness fuel habit patterns of the mind that inevitably lead to suffering. So, as you peel away the layers of self, allow any negative emotions to arise, so that you can actively replace them with Metta, a loving-kindness.

May you be safe and protected.

May you be peaceful and happy.

May you be healthy and strong.

May you have ease of well being. (and accept all the conditions of the world)