

Instructions for Metta Practice  
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## **The Art of Loving Kindness Practice**

Metta is an essential practice to bring loving kindness or good will to yourself, to those around you and eventually to all beings everywhere. It is training the mind to foster freedom, peace and good will.

It's important to do this practice in the easiest way possible, so can grow with it gently and naturally. Like other Mindfulness practices, Metta is a gentleness practice that begins with self-compassion.

The basic Metta Practice is very simple. We begin by offering loving kindness, or good will to ourselves, and focus there for some period of time. You can think of this as a healing balm for your difficulties with self acceptance and self compassion.

After some period, we broaden our circle of loving kindness; first to someone close to us - maybe a spouse, partner, best friend or benefactor. Then we extend this energy to other people in our lives - friends or loved ones who are doing well, then those who are having difficulty. We continue to broaden the circle to more neutral people in our lives - the checker at the grocery store, the woman who walks her dog past your house every day. There's a woman who frequently power walks my neighborhood with weights in her hands.

Then, if it feels okay, we broaden the circle to include difficult people in our lives. Again, I emphasize gentleness. We begin this part of Metta practice with someone who is mildly irritating, the waiter who was rude to you, the driver who cut you off on the highway, your neighbor who mows the lawn too early on Saturday morning. If you want, *when you're ready*, you can start to offer Metta for more difficult people, people you've struggled with for longer periods of time, where the feelings may run deeper. But we don't begin there, and again, not until you're ready, if at all, and then only in a way that supports kindness and gentleness for yourself.

In Alcoholics Anonymous, it's suggested that if you resent someone, you pray for that person's well-being for two weeks, and the resentment will dissolve. Metta is a good practice for that.

Finally, we turn the practice to offer loving kindness or good will to all beings everywhere. It's as if we're radiating good will from our hearts out into the whole world.

## **The Practice**

To begin this practice, bring yourself to your meditative space. Assume your meditation posture. Gently close your eyes. Bring your attention to your breathing. Settle.

We do metta practice by repeating phrases in our minds that foster loving kindness and good will. You can use whatever phrases you like. But I learned these from a meditation teacher and I like them.

May I be happy,  
May I be well,  
May I be safe,

May I be at ease and at peace.

I repeat these in my mind for some period of time. You may do Metta for yourself for your entire meditation period, if you like. One person I know practiced Metta for herself for a week.

Then you move on to someone close to you - maybe a spouse, partner, best friend or benefactor. Hold that person in your mind - imagine an image of that person, or say their name, and say:

May you be happy,  
May you be well,  
May you be safe,  
May you be at ease and at peace.

Then we continue to broaden the circle.

Again, when offering Metta practice to a difficult person, it's important to be kind and gentle with yourself. If it feels like too much, stop. Don't judge yourself. When you're ready, you can pick up the practice again with an easier person. Offering loving kindness to yourself may ease you through this process.

Finally, we conclude our Metta practice by offering loving kindness or good will to all beings everywhere:

May all beings be happy,  
May all beings be well,  
May all beings be safe,  
May all beings be at ease and at peace.

Metta practice takes time. It may feel dry or rote at first. That's okay. Just be with whatever unfolds. As you continue, you may notice that you begin to soften toward yourself and others. You may notice you're letting yourself off the hook more easily when you make a mistake. We're not trying to make something happen. We're just letting this practice unfold as it will.

May you be happy,  
May you be well,  
May you be safe,  
May you be at ease and at peace.