

## Metta or Lovingkindness Meditation

The Buddha taught that the mind/heart is naturally radiant and pure. It is because of the tormenting qualities of greed, hatred, and delusion that all beings come to suffer in life.

Metta practice is a way to work toward reawakening this naturally loving mind/heart we share with all beings. Metta is a Pali word meaning “love” or “loving kindness” or “friendliness.” It is the first of the four qualities the Buddha taught as the path to liberation from suffering: love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. It is unconditional love, like water flowing from one vessel to another, taking the shape of the vessels and not changing its essence.

To practice Metta, we start with developing friendliness and loving kindness toward ourselves. If we judge ourselves and find ourselves lacking, we will be constantly comparing ourselves to others and judging them. We may fear giving love to others or fear not giving love to others, because we are so afraid it will take something away from us. We put conditions on our love for others. Some of us may feel unworthy of others’ love or even of our own love. We have been taught that it is bad to love ourselves or to put ourselves first. Buddhist practice is called the “middle way” between self-denial and self-aggrandizement.

Metta meditation is different from asking a god for a blessing, a god that may or may not grant your wish. This

practice is declaring to yourself and the universe your desire to be safe, well, and happy, now and always, and also remembering that every other sentient being also wants to be safe, well, and happy. It is about developing an abiding, constant intention of kindness toward ourselves and others.

In Metta meditation, we typically move from self to benefactor, beloved friend, neutral person, difficult person, and all beings. The subjects of meditation can be living or dead, people or animals, real or fictional.

It is important to be comfortable and in a quiet, undisturbed location. Start with gently focusing on your breath to settle and become calm.

Take a few moments to think of yourself in a friendly way. If this is hard to do, try imagining yourself as an innocent baby or toddler. Think of some quality that you have that reflects the natural goodness we all share. Think of something you have done that reflects this goodness. When you can feel friendliness toward yourself, repeat the metta phrases in a rhythm that feels comfortable to you. If you don't believe them, repeat them anyway.

Repeat the phrases silently to yourself:

May I be free from danger.

May I have mental happiness.

May I have physical happiness.

May I have ease of well-being.

(You can choose other similar phrases that have meaning for you.)

You can repeat one per breath. Let the meaning wash over you and try to let yourself stay friendly and non-judgmental about whether you are happy now or if you deserve to be happy.

Then choose a benefactor or some being who has helped you. It should be someone who makes you smile just thinking of him or her. Visualize this being in front of you, and say the phrases to this individual:

May you be free from danger.

May you have mental happiness.

May you have physical happiness.

May you have ease of well-being.

Next, think of a beloved friend. Picture this individual in front of you and repeat the phrases:

May you be free from danger.

May you have mental happiness.

May you have physical happiness.

May you have ease of well-being.

Now, think of a person toward whom you don't have strong negative or positive feelings; a neutral person. It could be a check-out clerk at the grocery store or post office.

Visualize this person in front of you and repeat the phrases:

May you be free from danger.

May you have mental happiness.

May you have physical happiness.  
May you have ease of well-being.

Next bring to mind a person with whom you have some conflict or difficulty or who has caused you harm. For many people it is difficult to wish this individual well, but this makes metta practice with this person the most effective in strengthening our compassion. Picture this individual in front of you, and repeat the phrases:

May you be free from danger.  
May you have mental happiness.  
May you have physical happiness.  
May you have ease of well-being.

Finally, extend the intention of kindness to all beings everywhere. It sometimes helps to picture different insects, animals, humans, imaginary beings, all over the world. Imagine all beings sharing your intention of happiness and well-being.

May you be free from danger.  
May you have mental happiness.  
May you have physical happiness.  
May you have ease of well-being.

At the end of meditation, many people dedicate the merit or power of the practice to all beings.

“May the merit of this practice be shared by all beings so they may be liberated from suffering.”

## Metta meditation phrases

Here are some alternative phrases. Use the phrases that have the most meaning for you. Make up your own.

May I be free from physical suffering.

May I be free from mental suffering.

May I be filled with lovingkindness.

May I be healthy and well.

May I be peaceful.

May I be free from fear.

May I be liberated.

May I make a friend of my body.

May I take care of myself happily.

May I live with ease.

May I dwell in peace.