

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.

This is a meditation of care, concern, tenderness, loving kindness, friendship—a feeling of warmth for oneself and others. The practice is the softening of the mind and heart, an opening to deeper and deeper levels of the feeling of kindness, of pure love. It does not depend on relationships, on how the other person feels about us. The process is first one of softening, breaking down barriers that we feel inwardly toward ourselves, and then those that we feel toward others.

DROPPING INTO THE BODY

Take a very comfortable posture. Make your posture relaxed and comfortable.

Begin to focus around the solar plexus, your chest area, your “heart center”.

Breathe in and out from that area, as if you are breathing from the heart center and as if all experience is happening from there.

KINDNESS TO OURSELVES

Begin by generating kind feeling toward yourself. Feel any areas of mental blockage or numbness, self-judgment, self-hatred. Then drop beneath that to the place where we care for ourselves, where we want strength and health and safety for ourselves. Say to yourself:

I have suffered. I have not always received to my good, I have experienced being separated from love and inclusion. I have known pain and fear. I have felt alone, my heart closed.

Continuing to breathe in and out, use either these traditional phrases or ones you choose yourself. Say or think them several times.

- May I be free of suffering.
- May I be happy and at ease.
- May I find the healing that I seek.
- May I love and be loved.
- May I give and receive the joy of kindness.
- May I find peace.

RADIATING KINDNESS TO OTHERS

Next, move to a person who most invites the feeling of loving kindness, the love that does not depend on getting anything back. The first person is usually someone we consider a mentor, a benefactor, an elder. It might be a parent, grandparent, teacher, someone toward whom it takes no effort to feel respect and reverence. It does not need to be a human, it may be a beloved pet.

Repeat the phrases for this person:

I know that you have suffered....

Then the metta phrases

May you be free of suffering.....

Now move to a neutral person, someone for whom you feel neither strong like nor dislike. It may be someone you do not know well, someone you see at the store or at the gym.

As you repeat the phrases, allow yourself to feel tenderness, loving care for their welfare.

Now move to someone you have difficulty with—hostile feelings, resentments.

Repeat the phrases for this person. If you have difficulty doing this, you can say before the phrases, “To the best of my ability I wish that you be....” If you begin to feel ill will toward this person, allow yourself to feel compassion for yourself. Then return to this person.

Let the phrases spread through your whole body, mind, and heart.

Finally, radiate loving kindness out to all beings. Stay in touch with the ember of warm, tender loving-kindness at the center of your being, and begin to visualize or engender a felt sense of all living beings.