

Metta is a specific meditation practice used to cultivate the openness of the heart. The practice of metta turns the mind to the possibility that the loving sentiments expressed align us with the heart's innate openness.

Whenever you invoke something, the barriers to it will also show up. Thus, we need to look at both sides of the coin. If we do only one, the unseen side will eventually engulf us.

Again, we don't 'fix' ourselves when we notice our energy is low and our hearts are closed. We notice what opens and closes our energy, and get to know how this works more deeply and clearly, both for ourselves and for others.

METTA SUTTA

Let's return to the cultivation of the open heart and metta.

For this, let's return to the metta sutta; what is done by those who are skilled in goodness and who know the path of peace. The first section describes how to cultivate heart opening for ourselves and others.

This is what should be done
By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:
Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech.
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied.
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful,
Not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.

At our meeting, we each picked out one phrase that seemed to jump out at us and wrote it down on a card. We then rewrote this phrase in our own

words what this might look like for each one of us. This will be your Koan, your phrase to reflect on over the coming days.
A couple of things to keep in mind as we work with this sutta.

The “should” factor.

The importance of starting where you are. Otherwise, this becomes another veneer of ‘fixing’ yourself, and creates inner fragmentation and inadequacy, not wholeness. As per Pema Chodron, seeing yourself as someone who needs fixing is an innately aggressive and violent stance. We acknowledging our humanness, not seeing this as another “must achieve” in order to be OK (remember, this is just that ego/mind identification suffering coming up).

The most important part of practice is to accept and say ‘yes’ to life as it is - first for oneself, then we find we can also accept and extend kindness to others.

Seeing “should” as an ideal which gives us vision

Sojun Roshi states, “When we say “should be”, we are expressing the ideal.... The ideal gives us some vision. Vision and ideal give us a direction. The tension between the ideal and the actual is always present in our life... We wonder if these practices are attainable by human beings.

The most important part of the practice is to accept oneself just as we are, then we can accept everyone else in the same way they are, and we can keep our eye on the right direction. That’s the “ideal.”

Seeing the perfection already in place.

Another possibility is seeing this description as who you are already. When reading it this way, the body opens with gladness.

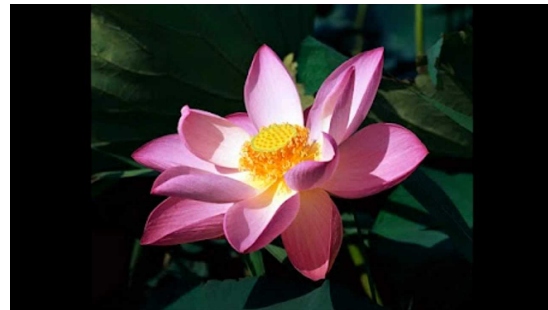
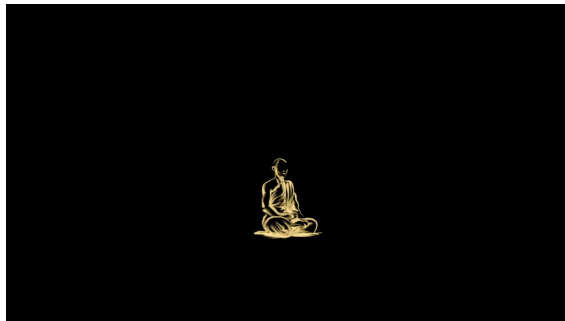
The heart feels relief and relaxation. (Try a simple rereading of the sutta as present already, starting with “When in the present moment, this is who I am, skilled in goodness and knowing the path to peace. I am able and upright....)

Sojun Roshi again: “Deep joy arises from this ground of being... This quality of happiness or joy is not dependent on circumstances, good or bad. When we settle (in practice), we are grounded in a happiness which is beyond the duality of happy/unhappy. “

We work the end we're on, seeing these qualities in our true nature when we are present in the moment, and cultivating them even when they seem far away.

HOMEWORK:

Read the metta sutta at the beginning of your sitting practice. Read aloud, actually say the words. Here are a couple of links to hear the sutta chanted.



Post your card somewhere where you will see it in the morning. Take it on as a koan.

Extra credit:

Rewrite this first part of the sutra in your own words. This is a powerful way to see what is true for you. I first started by crossing out words here and there and inserting other words, then just tossed the original and thought, so what is true for me? Here's what came out for me:

This is the nature of my deepest being, my inner wisdom is skilled in goodness and at peace with life as it is.

I have a set of talents and abilities to contribute to the world, I give them freely and ably.

Accepting myself where I am grounds me in integrity and without the need to hide myself or be other than who i am.

Gentleness in my interactions with others allows love and understanding to grow.

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Life unfolds in its perfect way. Knowing this results in contentedness. There is no longer any need to have my own way or to have my views prevail. There is nothing to demand from others.

Being centered in the present moment allows me to perform my duties without stress or worry.

Wisdom sees the difference between needs and what is excess, remembering the old saying "enough is enough, but too much is never enough".

I aspire to be mindfully connected to the inner peace and wisdom that is always available, freeing me and those around me from the demands of the ego/mind.

I know and experience the result of mindful living as freedom from regret for past actions.