

Metta Sutta

This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness and who would know 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 wise and calm 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.
Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be at ease.

Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill will wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother protects with her life Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world;
Spreading upward to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outward and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill will.

Whether standing or walking,
Seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.

By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense-desires,
Is not born again into this world.

Metta Practice

The following can be worked as a contemplation practice.

In a meditation posture, say the following to yourself, slowly; as tenderly as you might tap a gong or bell.

Experience whatever arises as you might experience the sound from gong or bell. Be aware of any visualization, reactivity or other mental formations that might ripple through you. Note the quality of the beginning, full presence, and the fading or dying away. Does it flow freely or does it encounter any resistance?

Here are both a simple, very traditional set of phrases, and an extended set. Try them both at different times and use whichever works best for you.

May I be safe
May I be healthy (or, May I be well)
May I be peaceful and at ease
May I be happy

May I be filled with Loving Kindness
May I be safe and protected from all harm; may I bring harm to no one
May I be healthy and strong – in body, mind, and spirit
May I be peaceful and at ease
May I be happy

Repeat whichever phrases you choose slowly to yourself several times, letting yourself fully explore the experiences that arise in your mind.

Do this with *yourself* in mind, giving as much time with these thoughts and reflections as you wish. When your mind is at peace and your heart open to yourself, next, bring to mind a person who fits the following descriptions, one at a time, and repeat the phrases again, substituting “You” for “I” (i.e., addressing that person in your thoughts) and continue this guided meditation. Repeat this process slowly and patiently with someone from each group described.

- Someone who has been very good to you, for whom we feel gratitude and respect. In the traditional terminology, this person is known as a "benefactor."
- A beloved friend
- Someone toward whom you feel neutral, someone for whom we feel neither great liking nor disliking; perhaps a casual acquaintance at work or at a place where you shop.
- Someone with whom we have experienced conflict, someone toward whom we feel lack of forgiveness, or anger, or fear; a “difficult” person. In the Buddhist scriptures this person is somewhat dramatically known as "the enemy."
- All beings, great and small, in all conditions and states

There's no need to touch on all these groups in any one sitting, or if you choose to do so avoid predetermining the length of the sitting. This practice is about embracing an inclination of mind to loving-kindness and then exploring the reaches of whatever arises. Ideally it should not be over-structured or forced in any way.

Alternative phrases and categories of “recipients”

Metta is very responsive to the condition and needs of whatever it touches. At its fullest it embraces all of the immeasurable qualities of the Brahma Viharas – loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. The standard metta phrases, even the extended ones, are certainly on the mark but are necessarily general. This generality serves us well at times, but at other times and for certain people you may find other phrases, perhaps very specific ones, come to mind. By all means, acknowledge these and include them in your practice.

These may be a reflection of your needs as the “sender”, in which case you may want to incorporate them into your ongoing practice. Or they may be a reflection of your understanding of a given person's needs as “recipient”, in which case consider them as offering you insight into your understanding of that person.

The same considerations apply to any thoughts you may have of alternative categories of people to “receive” metta. Be mindful of any ill will that arises consistently and consider what category is related to this in your thinking. For example, if political views are a hot button for you, consider sending metta to liberals, conservatives, independents, libertarians, etc..

Be open to trying new phrases and “sending” metta to members of new groups. Whether these arise spontaneously or through reflection, they can be very worthwhile. This is a way for your metta practice to be alive and growing.

Metta Benediction

May suffering ones be suffering free
May the fear-struck fearless be
May the grieving shed all grief
May all beings find relief.