

Mettā Practice - Guidelines and Instructions

Mettā is a cultivation practice. Developing an attitude of friendliness, kindness, and welcoming. It is an attitude we can cultivate towards all beings and all experiences.

In this practice, rather than trying to create an emotional state or an emotional experience, we are sowing seeds of intention to grow Mettā.

It's helpful in the practice to start with a more easeful and friendly relationship, and gently expand the goodwill of Mettā outwards. In the beginning of our practice we experiment with the easy to see what helps get the first sprouts of Mettā to appear.

For some of us this is a challenging practice and can bring up resistance or difficult emotions such as unworthiness. There is no need to force the practice. If you don't find a way into the practice and experience a lot of struggle and resistance, it can be more skilful to let it go for now and concentrate on mindfulness and insight practices. Mettā is in these anyway so it is being cultivated in the background as you practice: mindfulness (paying attention to) is an act of kindness; insights free us from dukkha (ill-will), so freedom from dukkha is mettā: as welcoming and goodwill.

The traditional practice uses skilful verbal fabrication in the form of phrases, and a skilful use of the imagination to call certain beings to mind. Choose just 3 or 4 phrases to keep the practice simple and flowing. Feel free to find your own phrases, especially translate them into your native language.

For some practitioners it can feel quite an unfamiliar practice. Experiment and improvise to help it connect. For example; representing mettā with just one or two words can be simpler to stay with than multiple phrases; an image or felt sense of mettā can be less problematic than words.

If this sounds very different to your usual practice, give it time to become familiar.

The practice:

Settle in to your posture.

Feel the body resting into your seat and into the ground.

Gently expand the awareness to feel the breathing happening in the body.

For a few minutes rest the awareness with the gentle flow of the breath.

Or invite awareness to spread through the whole body.

Keeping gentle contact with the body and a relaxing opening breath, invite into your awareness a being with whom it is easy and natural to feel a sense of goodwill and

friendship. Some people enjoy to start with sending mettā to themselves. This is not selfish and can be a very wise approach. Simply sustain attention with this being for a few breaths, then begin sending Mettā, using images, a felt-sense of mettā, words or phrases like:

- May I/you be happy
- May I/you be safe and well
- May I/you be peaceful
- May I/you live with ease

The felt sense of this being and the phrases etc. are now the object of your attention. Experiment to find the right speed & rhythm with the phrases to keep the practice alive and engaging. Minds wander in all meditations; it is their nature. Don't slip into blame or shame. Relax the body from any tension that may have built up, and come back to the image or felt sense of the being you are sharing mettā with. Then reestablish the practice with the phrases, words, images, or felt sense of mettā that is being used.

After some time (around 5 - 15 minutes), invite into your awareness another being; either a being you have a more neutral relationship with or to yourself. If it is still too challenging to send Mettā to yourself come back to the easy being. Use the same phrases etc. notice if they feel different with this being.

If this is your first time practicing with mettā, skip to the instructions in the next paragraph. Over time we can slowly increase the range of beings, gently inclining from the easeful and caring relationships towards those we have a more difficult relationship with. Expand gently; this is not a wise practice to force. Exploring kindly where mettā can go today, and where it can't. No blame or shame for the existence of a range, but also being interested in playing with the boundaries skilfully.

It is wise to let mettā find its unlimited nature in the closing of the meditation. After some time expand your awareness to the people sitting next to you or around you. Repeating the phrases while feeling into the practice of sending Mettā in turn to more and more beings. At your own pace, expand the awareness and send Mettā:

- To all the beings in the room, building, or location you are in,
- Then to the whole village/town/city, then to all the beings in this region,
- Then to all the beings in the whole country you find yourself, then all the neighbouring countries,
- Then to all beings; the whole of this living planet, and possibly out into space...

May all beings be happy and peaceful
May all beings be healthy and safe
May all beings be free