

## **Four Week Introductory Course on Loving-kindness** **1st Week: Loving-kindness Towards Oneself**

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### A Description of Metta (Loving-kindness):

*Metta* (*maitri* in Sanskrit) is the ancient Indian word signifying warm hearted well-wishing. Most commonly translated as “loving-kindness” it has also been translated into English as goodwill, benevolence, amity, kindness, and friendliness. “Loving-kindness” has the benefit of combining two concepts: love and kindness. For different people and at different times one word of this compound may be more meaningful than the other. The loving part emphasizes the deep, warm flow of appreciation and happiness felt either toward oneself, another person, or any living being. The kindness part suggests that the love is concerned with the welfare of others. Combined, the compound word has connotations of a love which is satisfyingly warm and at the same time interested in the happiness and well being of others. Although *metta* may have a soft aspect to it, it can be phenomenally powerful, especially when joined with unshakeable determination.

Loving-kindness is also understood as the innate friendliness of an open heart. Its close connection to friendship is reflected in its similarity to the Pali word for friend, *mitta*. However, *metta* is more than conventional friendship, for it includes being open-hearted even toward one’s enemies, cultivated perhaps from empathy or from insight into our shared humanity. For this more universal aspect of loving-kindness the Buddha likened it to the unconditional love a parent gives to his or her child.

### The Practice of Loving-kindness:

Loving-kindness, is one of the most important Buddhist practices. It involves cultivating and strengthening the heartfelt wish for the well-being of oneself and others. Doing this as a meditation practice is a powerful way of concentrating ourselves on this cultivation. Recognizing and expressing goodwill have a softening effect on our hearts. At times this evokes feelings of love, tenderness, and warmth. At other times this softening of the heart can expose difficult or painful buried emotions. Allowing all these emotions to surface in their own time is one function of loving-kindness practice. We try to meet any challenging feelings with our kindness.

It is not necessary to have warm, loving feelings when doing *metta* practice. Rather, we are watering the seeds of our good intentions. When we water wholesome intentions they strengthen. If these seeds are never watered they won’t grow. When intentions for kindness are watered by regular practice they sometimes blossom

in unexpected ways. We may find that loving-kindness becomes the operating motivation in a situation that previously triggered anger or fear.

The traditional practice of loving-kindness involves first cultivating loving-kindness toward oneself and then sequentially to a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, and a difficult person. It begins with focusing on one's self since it can be easier to have loving-kindness toward others if one first loves one's self. The first week of this course we will practice directing the loving-kindness to oneself. Then each week we will add the other categories.

### Loving-kindness meditation

To practice loving-kindness meditation, sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long and complete exhalations. Let go of any concerns or preoccupations. For a few minutes, feel or imagine the breath moving through the center of your chest – in the area of your heart. Then bring up whatever goodwill you can for yourself. This may be a very simple wish that you be happy. Once you have some intention or well wishing for yourself, give expression to this wish through mentally repeating, slowly and steadily, the following or similar phrases:

*May I be happy.*

*May I be well.*

*May I be safe.*

*May I be peaceful and at ease.*

While you say these phrases, allow yourself to sink into the intentions they express. Loving-kindness meditation consists primarily of connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness. However, if feelings of warmth, friendliness, or love arise in the body or mind, connect to them, allowing them to grow as you repeat the phrases. As an aid to the meditation, you might hold an image of yourself in your mind's eye. This may help reinforce the intentions expressed in the phrases.

If distracted thinking takes you away from the phrases, take a deeper breath, relax and start again. As you silently say the phrases try to establish a comfortable rhythm that helps maintain a steady continuity, repeating the set of phrases throughout the period of meditation.

*During this week, please practice loving-kindness meditation at least 20 minutes each day. This will lay a foundation for next week's instruction. Also, in the midst of your daily activities this week, do brief periods of loving-kindness practice whenever you find yourself waiting, for example for a traffic light to turn green, in line at the market, or sitting in the waiting room for some appointment.*