

Metta Bhavana

Introduction

Bhavana means bringing into being. Metta is an attitude of well-wishing, loving kindness, and friendliness. While this may involve feelings of warmth, it is primarily an *attitude* of well-wishing. Metta bhavana involves increasingly developing an attitude of loving-kindness towards all beings, independent of your likes and dislikes.

You already demonstrate loving-kindness to some extent, in the way you care for yourself in keeping warm and dry, for example, or the way you would protect a person from stepping out into oncoming traffic. Metta bhavana is about developing this and extending it to more beings.

How to cultivate metta

There are many different ways to develop metta so it's worth noticing and exploring what does or doesn't work for you at any given time, such as:

- Using **phrases** to focus your intention, such as:
 - may I/you/he/she be happy
 - may I/you/he/she be well
 - may I/you/he/she be free from suffering
 - may I/you/he/she make progress
- Using **memories**, such as reconnecting with times when you were experiencing an attitude of loving-kindness in the past.
- Using **imagination**, for example, to imagine people being happy or well or to include them in warm rays of light.
- Attending to **sensations** in your body associated with loving-kindness, for example, openness, warmth and relaxation.

The stages of the practice

*The ultimate lesson
all of us have to
learn is
unconditional love,
which includes not
only others but
ourselves as well.*
Elisabeth
Kubler-Ross

*Our friends show us
what we can do,
our enemies teach
us what we must do.*
Goethe

It is usually best to choose the people for the stages below before you begin the meditation.

You begin the practice by acknowledging your current emotional state, whatever this is. Then it is helpful to search for any elements of metta that may be already present, however small (such as an attitude of kindness, appreciation or well-wishing) and to dwell on them with a view to increasing them.

1st stage: Self Contact and develop an attitude of loving-kindness in relation to yourself.

2nd stage: Friend Extend this attitude of loving-kindness towards someone you like or appreciate. To more easily differentiate metta from other emotional attitudes it is usually best to choose a living person of about your own age, and for whom you don't have sexual feelings.

3rd stage: Neutral person Now extend your well-wishing and loving kindness towards a 'neutral' person, preferably someone you have some contact with but for whom you have no particular feelings of like or dislike

4th stage: Enemy Include in your loving-kindness a person you dislike or currently have a difficulty with (not someone you *loathe* which might overwhelm your metta: also bear in mind that well-wishing does not necessarily imply approval of any of their specific behaviours).

5th stage: Everyone First equalise your well-wishing across all four people so far: yourself, the friend, neutral person and enemy.

Then gradually extend the well-wishing to include all living beings.