

The Essential
Guide to
**Loving-
Kindness**

(Also known as *Metta*)



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May All Beings Be at Ease!

Metta—kindness or goodwill—is one of Buddhism’s most valued virtues. With compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity, it is one of the four “divine abodes” (*brahmaviharas*) of the enlightened ones.

In the *Metta Sutta*, the Buddha teaches his monks how to live a moral and upright life, with *metta* at its center. In these stanzas, he tells us how to live with complete kindness.

*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 upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this mindfulness.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.*

From “Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Buddha’s Words on Loving-Kindness”
(Sn 1.8), translated from the Pali by The Amaravati Sangha. Access to
Insight (BCBS Edition), 2 November 2013,

How to Practice Loving-Kindness

JoAnna Hardy teaches us the famed Buddhist practice of metta—offering love to ourselves and others.

When I was introduced to the practice of metta—most often translated as loving-kindness practice—I definitely knew it wasn't for me. It was too mushy and sentimental for my pragmatic mind. It was reminiscent of the wishful praying that I thought was reserved for the type of faith I had left behind.

I didn't really believe that I—or maybe any living being—could possibly find the happiness, safety, ease, and freedom being offered through metta practice. Maybe we didn't even deserve it! When I put my hand on my heart, as we are often asked to do during this practice, I felt numb and disconnected. I thought of loving-kindness as an unnecessary additive to the more important four foundations of mindfulness. I ignored the practice for many years.

Then, a wise and insightful teacher saw me struggling and assigned metta as my daily practice for three months. It wasn't because my teacher thought I was not a kind and loving person—I am—but I needed a way to love all beings, and to offer that love to myself too.

I discovered that while loving-kindness is taught in many ways by different teachers, ultimately it is an equalizer and an antidote to hatred and aversion. It is a state that can be developed through practices that help us cultivate the unconditional, expansive qualities of the heart. Metta is the great balancer to insight and mindfulness practices.

When I discovered other translations of the word metta, like care, friendliness, goodwill, and benevolence, the practice began to feel more accessible and less lofty. Metta felt like something I could touch and cultivate daily. The great balancer began to do its work. My doubt began to melt.

In trying times such as these, it seems difficult to imagine that we could soften our hearts and find love amid all of the suffering we hear about daily. Yet, the prescription of the Buddha is that even in the darkest of places and times, our heart-mind has the capacity to be free from the burdens of hatred.

Here is a four-step instruction for metta. These steps are for practicing loving-kindness for yourself. You can also practice metta for others in different categories, such as people close to you, friends, people you are neutral toward, people you find difficult, and ultimately all living beings.

Initially, set aside 15-20 minutes to do the four steps. As you develop your practice, you can add more time as you wish. Setting a timer is helpful.

1. Put your body at ease.

Find a physically comfortable space. Sitting in a comfortable chair or lying down is helpful. If you feel at ease on a meditation cushion, that is fine too. The idea is to find a posture that allows the

body to be in as much ease as possible. Allow yourself to feel held and supported by whatever you're sitting or lying on. Closing the eyes can help to facilitate ease. If that's not comfortable, then allow the eyes to be open and gazing softly at a singular point.

2. Soften the belly and chest.

Intentionally soften the belly to start. Feel the expansion and contraction as each breath fills the belly and chest area. Allow your breathing to facilitate space in your belly and chest area. Take your time; there's no rush. If you feel tension, that's okay.

3. Recall feelings of love and kindness.

Focus on the heart area. Placing your hand on your heart can add to this step. See if you can recall feelings of care, kindness, and friendliness. Let them permeate your heart area. Stay with this while moving into the next step. If the feelings seem inaccessible or difficult right now, stay with the spaciousness and breathing into the belly and chest areas.

4. Do the recitation.

Reciting phrases is a classic way of practicing metta. Whether we believe the phrases in the moment or not, it's still useful to say them; they give the heart and mind something to land on and to aspire to. You can express them in any way you want, with these basic sentiments in mind. Repeat these phrases for the length of your practice period:

*May I be safe
May I be healthy
May I be happy
May I be at ease
May I be filled with loving-kindness
May I be peaceful*

In metta practice, it is normal for the doubting mind to pop up and challenge the notion of loving ourselves and others. Don't let this doubt stop you. It is important to know that metta is not a practice of perfection, but one of cultivation. This is our practice—freeing our heart and mind from the clutches of fear, hatred, and confusion, regardless of what is happening in the world around us. I am happy to report, after trying it myself, that this skeptic is now convinced!

JoAnna Hardy practices in the Theravada Insight tradition, with a focus on teaching meditation in communities dedicated to seeing the truth of how racism, gender inequality, and oppression go hand in hand with the compassionate-action teachings in Buddhism. She is leader of the Lion's Roar Online Learning course, *How to Cultivate a Loving Heart: The Buddhist Practice of Metta*.

“Why I Do Metta”

Author and educator Janice Lynne Lundy shares her perspective on the practice of loving-kindness meditation –why she loves it, and why it goes with her everywhere.

My favorite form of meditation is “Metta,” or loving-kindness practice. Here’s why: When I say the four phrases of blessing, first, for myself ...

May I be happy.

May I be healthy and strong.

May I be safe.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

... I remember that it is good to be kind to myself; to hold myself in loving embrace as I am; to be gentle, open, forgiving, and accepting.

When I repeat the four phrases again, it opens me up: to wise others, loved ones, friends, *you*, people I don't even know, everyone on the planet. Metta helps me connect with *your* essence, your inner beauty, your pain and suffering. Again, I am softened into compassion.

I try to take the Metta mindset with me wherever I go; it serves as portable peace. I stand in line at the grocery store, noticing someone's downcast face.

May you find ease and know happiness today.

In American Eagle, music blaring, shopping with my teen daughter, I notice a young mother struggling with two babies in a stroller. She is trying to shop for herself, yet her children tug and pull. Her frustration grows.

May you know patience. May you feel comforted.

This morning my husband awoke with his "ego blaring," as he puts it. I lay my hand on his heart and silently offer Metta to him.

My sweetheart, may you be at peace today. May your day unfold with ease.

This is why I do metta. It lets me lead with love.

Today...

May YOU be happy.

May you be well, healthy, and strong for the day ahead.

May you be safe and secure.

May you be peaceful and at ease with all the circumstances of your life.

Janice Lynne Lundy is a long-term student of mindfulness and Metta who sources her life, writing, and teaching in the practice of compassion. She is an Interfaith Spiritual Director/Mentor and the author of several books including, *The Mindful Mommy's Back-to-School Survival Guide*. She is also the founder and editor of the online magazine/community, "Meditate Like A Girl." You can connect with Jan via her website: www.JanLundy.com

Loving-Kindness Starts with You

Josh Korda on how to free your naturally loving heart and expand your goodwill to include all beings through loving-kindness meditation.

I haven't had a drink or a self-prescribed mood-altering drug in nineteen years. I make that statement with both pride and wonder, given the amount of suffering that preceded my renunciation of booze, pills, and the like. I mostly attribute my sobriety to my spiritual practice, the support of my Buddhist community, and our local twelve-step gatherings. But if one practice or tool has helped me get and stay sober, it is the practice of Metta, or loving-kindness.

I grew up in an unpredictable household. My father, an alcoholic, could shift from pleasant joviality to rage-induced violence over the course of a few glasses of wine. I vividly remember plates suddenly flying toward my head during tense dinners and the sound of my mom's muffled cries while locked in a bathroom. In short, the stuff that leads to years of analysis later in life.

By my teens I was hypervigilant of others and self-absorbed, the victim of a self-critical inner tyrant. I felt unworthy of others' love and worked hard to hide emotional states my father couldn't tolerate during his "episodes"—any sign of weakness, frustration, or sadness.

My underlying assumption was simple: if others could see these authentic energies, they wouldn't accept me either. Yet I desperately needed emotional tolerance and interpersonal bonding. My life around others became a self-conscious performance. Suppressing so much resulted in an agitated mind, which set me up for addictive behaviors. Alcohol and drugs, I found, relieved the stress created by my concealment and self-judgment.

The underlying darkness was kept at bay, until my world fell apart and I wound up in my final detox stint, everything and everyone lost as a result of my heedlessness.

My early days of sobriety were buoyed by the Buddhist practice I had developed over the years. But breath concentration and Vipassana practice weren't enough to deal with my deeply embedded feelings of low self-esteem. The self-critical tyrant remained on his throne, barking his angry rebukes and rebuttals, which I continued to believe, despite having a path in which I cultivated virtue and volunteerism. I was deeply despairing and incapable of lasting relationships and deep friendships. And so, when I heard of loving-kindness practice from wonderful teachers like Ajahn Sucitto and Sharon Salzberg, I dove in.

Metta is a powerful meditation practice that heals agitated minds with the development of goodwill toward ourselves and others. Of great therapeutic benefit, Metta relieves our stressful thought patterns and can result in immediate improvements in well-being.

How to Do Loving-Kindness Meditation

Traditionally, we begin loving-kindness practice by taking a comfortable seat. We can quietly shift positions when necessary, as this is not a time to investigate physical discomfort.

Once seated, we start by inwardly directing loving-kindness and goodwill to ourselves: perhaps toward a visual sense of our appearance or toward an area of the body where we experience core emotions, such as the chest or abdomen.

During initial forays into Metta the mind will often rebel; thoughts critical of the meditation's value or stories of our unworthiness are swift to arise. All this means is that we need this practice, for, as the Buddha taught, we each deserve goodwill and if we cannot summon it easily for ourselves, we'll never feel true compassion for other beings.

When I first started my loving-kindness practice, developing thoughts of self-regard was a struggle, to say the least. Finally it occurred to me that I was addressing myself, in my thoughts, in ways I would never address anyone publicly, even those I detested. I made a pact in my practice that I would say the same things to myself that a good friend might say. My first choice

of phrasing was begrudging, along the lines of “I suppose you deserve some happiness.” It’s a sign of the degree to which I’ve healed that my phrase of choice these days is “I love you, keep going.”

Once some self-compassion has arisen, we bring to mind images of friends, mentors, or others we hold in high regard. This stage of Metta is generally uncomplicated, requiring little effort, as the admiration we feel for these people naturally results in goodwill.

Next, though, we direct goodwill in more challenging directions. We start with people we are indifferent toward, about whom we have neither positive nor negative feelings. This stage requires more effort, as the human mind is quite facile at developing opinions about people. Choosing a neutral person—for example, someone we see regularly during a commute or in a store we frequent—may require memory jogging.

Finally, we move to the most challenging stage of Metta practice: radiating goodwill toward those we’ve reviled or struggled with. (Dick Cheney and the Doobie Brothers almost instantly come to mind, but maybe that’s just me.) This part of the practice is as essential as developing self-compassion, since holding resentment is a primary source of agitation and suffering. The limits of our goodwill form the ultimate boundaries of our peace of mind, for we cannot achieve peace while aversion is present.

The goal of Metta practice is to free our natural feelings of benevolence from their limited confines. Loving-kindness and goodwill conditioned by agendas or expectations are not deeply beneficial. In Metta, we work to develop feelings of ease and love as boundless as the oceans that nourish and sustain our world.

Josh Korda has been the teacher at New York Dharma Punx since 2005. He has also taught at New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care and New York Insight Meditation Center.

Sharon Salzberg's *Aha!* Moment

Recalling the early days of Barre, Massachusetts' Insight Meditation Society—of which she was a co-founder—the meditation teacher shares the moment that metta hit home. As told to *Lindsay Kyte*.

It was a time of excitement—and debate. Even the word “metta,” which adorns the entrance at IMS, was a source of controversy. Some people thought they should use an English word, like loving-kindness. “In the end, it just stayed,” says Salzberg, and today metta is a recognized term in the Western spiritual vocabulary.

There was no programming scheduled for the first month of IMS's existence, so Salzberg decided to immerse herself in metta practice, something she had only done before as a ceremonial ending to retreats.

“I did it for an entire week and just kept repeating these phrases, and I felt absolutely nothing,” she says. “Then one day, I dropped this big glass jar and it shattered and stuff went

everywhere. I noticed that the first thought that came up in my mind was, 'You are really a klutz. But I love you.' I thought, 'Look at that!' Something was happening."

Salzberg says this is a lesson she's witnessed over and over again: "People expect a rush of feeling, like a breakthrough—'I finally loved myself,' or 'I finally forgave that jerk.' First of all, I don't think things are final, and, more often, it's a gradual but very, very deep process. Very profound changes happen within you, but they are much subtler."

Metta and mindfulness became the main focuses of Salzberg's teaching and practice. "I thought of metta as unconditional love. I had learned the word 'loving-kindness' as the standard translation of metta, but when I'm teaching now I usually say 'connection'—a profound sense of connection. It's knowing somebody counts, that everybody wants to be happy, and that our lives have something to do with one another."

Lindsay Kyte works as a freelance journalist, playwright, and performer.

How to Practice Metta for a Troubled Time

Mushim Patricia Ikeda teaches us how to generate loving-kindness and good will as an antidote to hatred and fear.

Metta meditation is not a magical spell you can cast on the population of the U.S. in order to produce a state of utopian bliss. It is not a cure-all for oppression and the unequal distribution of power and privilege.

Metta meditation doesn't work like that. It's about being determined, courageous, and patient in purifying your own heart and mind.

Metta is a meditation practice that involves concentrating and reciting, either silently or out loud, phrases of good wishes toward yourself and others. *Metta* is usually translated as “loving-kindness,” but I prefer Thanissaro Bhikkhu's translation of metta as “good will.”

What this form of meditation is designed to do—and for many people does very successfully—is to purify us of hatred and ill will. Good will is the antidote to ill will. Good will, or loving-kindness, is the antidote to ill will, hatred, and enmity.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., talked about the need for “aggressive nonviolence.” There are times and situations in which we have to show up and throw down, and this may be such a time. Whether I do that from a mind of toxic hatred, or from a mind that recognizes that every human being has at some point been my mother, my parent, or guardian, depends on how well I practice metta.

When you practice good will, you remove fear and negative reactivity from your mind. For me, this is what is most important about many people practicing metta, together or individually, whenever it is necessary to reduce the conflict and hatred that emerge so quickly from fear and spread in a viral fashion.

When you practice metta, you kind of work up a ladder. You go from people like family and friends, people it’s easy for you to feel good will toward, to those you don’t know. Then, ascending as you are able to—not forcing anything—you extend wishes for safety, happiness, and peace to those you dislike and those you consider your enemies. Finally, at the ultimate level, you extend your good will to all living beings in the universe.

It’s a pretty tall order—although possible for some people—to feel loving and kind toward those who are perpetrators of violence and oppression. Even to feel good will toward them might be difficult. So we can frame this meditation as the cultivation of non-hatred and nonfear in order to become stronger, more stable, and

more centered. Then we can move forward in a positive fashion to battle oppression and create some improvement for our communities and the United States overall.

Metta meditation can be done in a brief flash of good wishes or it can be practiced continuously over many days. First, find a place to sit or lie down quietly and comfortably. Make sure that you're in a place of reasonable safety. You can close your eyes or keep them open a little. You might take a few deep breaths to begin, calming and steadying yourself to the best of your ability. You might want to gently and lightly place a hand on your heart or your cheek or another part of your body in any way that promotes a feeling of inner safety and that helps to connect you to your courage and compassion. Then you can begin the practice.

Good Will Toward Yourself

Using these words or others—because you can adapt this however you like—you begin with these wishes of good will to yourself: “May I be safe and protected from physical and mental harm. May I be strong and healthy and enjoy well-being. May I be peaceful and truly happy. May I live my life with more joy and ease.”

Toward Friends

Now extend those good wishes to those whom you like, your family, mentors, good friends, and others: “May you be safe and protected from physical and mental harm. May you be strong and healthy. May you be peaceful and happy. May you live with joy and ease.”

Toward Neutral Beings

Now we extend our good will toward neutral beings—people and other living beings we neither like nor dislike. It’s always useful to check in: do you actually have neutral beings in your life? I don’t. My mind will quickly divide, even very slightly, between those I like and those I don’t like. That is something worth noting if it’s true for you.

Then you can recite something like: “Though you are a neutral being to me—meaning I do not engage with you that much—I know you are like me in that you have joys, sorrows, and pain in your life. Therefore, I wish you well. May you live your life with more joy and ease.”

Toward Enemies

Thich Nhat Hanh said, “While it is easy to love the lovable, it may be the unlovable who need our love more.” So the next stage is to express your good will, to the extent you can, toward someone who has caused you some slight injury. Then, to the extent possible, you can extend these good wishes toward people who have caused you more pain, and to institutions and organizations that have caused you, your family, or your community pain and suffering. Let this develop naturally; relax and invite yourself to experiment with it.

Toward All Beings

Finally, you extend metta to all living beings in the universe. You might visualize yourself as a kind of lighthouse, with good will and loving-kindness streaming out from your heart and body in every direction, including up and down. We want to be 360 degrees of metta. “May all beings be safe and protected from harm. May each and every being without exception be strong and healthy. May all living beings be peaceful and know true happiness. May each and every living being without exception live their lives with more joy and ease. And together may we complete the great journey of awakening.”

Mushim Ikeda is a social activist and teacher at East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland, California. She also works as a diversity and inclusion consultant.

Meet Bad Habits with Loving-Kindness

Sylvia Boorstein unpacks the foundational Buddhist teaching “Recognize unwholesome states in the mind and replace them with wholesome states.”

Here’s my spiritual practice these days: moment-to-moment I try to be mindful of the arising of ill will in my mind and try to meet it with a clear, compassionate response. This reflects the Buddha’s basic instruction on how to work with our negative patterns: “Recognizing unwholesome states in the mind and replacing them with wholesome states.”

Wholesome states, such as generosity, gratitude, and patience, are soothing and gladdening to the mind. They support clear understanding and wise choices. Unwholesome states, such as lust, anger, and revenge, are doubly painful: they are painful feelings in themselves and they confuse the mind so we choose maladaptive responses to situations that only make things worse. That’s why they are called “hindrances” in classical Buddhism. They hinder clear thinking.

Entirely avoiding afflictive states (another term for hindrances) isn't possible. Annoying things happen. The mind starts "growling" in response. Disappointment happens. The mind loses its buoyancy as hope disappears from it.

Frightening things happen to us. A nervous system built for survival leaps into action to counteract the danger. Calm goodwill may not help us in situations of actual danger, but it does help us move gracefully through the less dire tribulations of the mind—the Wows! and Phooeys! of daily life. Goodwill provides the ballast that supports clear understanding, moment-by-moment, of what is happening to us and what the most skillful response to it is.

"May all beings be peaceful and happy and come to the end of suffering" was the phrase I heard Maha Ghosananda, the senior Buddhist prelate of Cambodia, repeating to himself under his breath, all the while participating in a forum we both were part of.

Meditation: A Song of Metta

In my version of the *metta* (loving-kindness) prayer, I silently sing a song to myself, to the tune of "Happy Birthday," when an affliction begins to arise. You too can sing it and give yourself the loving-kindness you need.

*May I feel protected and safe
 May I feel contented and pleased
 May my body be strong
 And may I live with ease*

I've recently added two new verses that I find are necessary when an afflictive emotion has arisen strongly enough to be spawning an out-of-control mind-storm of confusion and ill will:

*I am polluting my mind
It is turning into shit
I am mortgaging my happiness
So I am vowing to quit
I am concentrating on what is good
I am mindful of who is kind
I am amplifying my blessing
So I am purifying my mind
May I feel protected and safe
May I feel contented and pleased
May my body be strong
And may I live with ease*

The tune is apt! Every mind-moment that arises free of afflictive emotions is a felicitous rebirth. Happy birthday to you!

Sylvia Boorstein is a psychologist and leading teacher of Insight Meditation. Her many bestselling books include *Pay Attention, for Goodness' Sake* and *Happiness Is An Inside Job*.

Loving-Kindness: Healing Your Inner Child

Peggy Rowe Ward and Larry Ward on how to give yourself the love and compassion you deserve. And send some of that love to the wounded child inside you. They need it.

Thich Nhat Hanh, our teacher, described love as an extremely powerful energy that has the capacity to transform ourselves and others. But many of us find it difficult to direct love toward ourselves. We quickly become aware of negative feelings like shame, guilt, and self-criticism that make it hard to love and care for ourselves. Unfortunately, this is all too common.

Luckily for us, the seeds of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are in our store consciousness, ready and waiting to grow. We can study and practice in such a way that we shrink the seeds of self-aversion, self-criticism, shame, and guilt inside us and grow our hearts as wide as the world. When we are able to practice self-love consistently, returning over and over to maintain a soft heart in the face of our own suffering, eventually we're able to let go of our negative thought patterns and find ourselves transformed.

Thich Nhat Hanh talked about healing the inner child within each of us as a key way to give ourselves the love and compassion we need. For children to feel a sense of belonging, they need to feel understood and loved. They need the feeling of connectedness that comes when they are seen and held in love. But if our parents, teachers, or society didn't listen to or respond to our fears, or sent messages that we were not good enough, we may continue these behaviors with ourselves as adults. We may disconnect from and bury parts of our inner life because they are too painful to face.

The inner child may hold memories of abuse, neglect, and other traumas we endured during childhood. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events in a child's life that can have lasting negative effects on our health and well-being.

ACEs may include the following: psychological, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; violence against their mother; neglect; bullying; or living with household members who were substance abusers, mentally ill, suicidal, criminal, or imprisoned. Such maltreatment causes chronic stress that can disrupt early brain development and the development of the nervous and immune systems. Over time, ACEs can lead to post-traumatic stress, migraines, chronic muscle tension, fatigue, and chronic illnesses such as autoimmune diseases and skin conditions.

These childhood traumas can impact our capacity for self-love as a result of stress trapped in the body. This is one of the reasons that the following meditation begins by strengthening our heart and mind with the somatic sensations of love and peace.

However, it is important to remember that the inner child is not a separate, unchangeable self. It is not a permanent essence or state of being, but rather deep patterns resulting from many causes, conditions, and perceptions that are both individual and collective. While these patterns may arise in any moment, it is our good fortune that there is a natural neuroplasticity of our brain and mind. This plasticity allows for deep healing and transformation illuminating the divine child hidden in the suffering of adversity.

Healing that inner child within us is the first and most important expression of love and kindness toward ourselves. Here are several ways we can practice love for ourselves, heal the wounds within us, and expand our capacity to love other people, because to fully love others we must first love ourselves.

Send Love to Your Five-Year-Old Self

When we experience our own suffering, the first invitation is to name this experience. In Thich Nhat Hanh's words, "We call it by its true name."

Whatever arises, you can name it and send it the energy of loving-kindness. You can say, "I am experiencing the energy of shame and self-criticism. I put my arms of love around these

feelings.” Although you are not trying to fix or change anything, the practice of holding your suffering in arms of love will help it to shrink and your self-love to grow.

Perhaps you have an experience of being held this way. A few days after Peggy’s first husband, Steve, passed away, a close friend came to the house. Peggy remembers: “I was sitting on the couch. He put his arm solidly and yet loosely around me and held me for at least half an hour. He didn’t fidget, speak, or move. He didn’t squeeze or pat. He just sat with me. He met me where I was. I cried for many minutes and then experienced a great peace. He didn’t want anything from me. He was just there to be with me in my suffering.”

This is the kind of love in which we hold the suffering child within us.

Sometimes, though, you may experience that the suffering child is afraid to appear. Sometimes it seems this child is in a lost place. Sometimes the child does not trust you. This is to be expected. You will have to move slowly. You have observed that with children and animals, you shouldn’t approach them too quickly. The best method is to let them come to you in their own time.

There are several practices from Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition that have helped each of us build a loving and trusting relationship with the suffering child within us. One practice is to have a

family altar. On this altar, Thich Nhat Hanh encouraged us to have photographs of ourselves as young children. This practice helps us build a relationship that honors our inner child.

A Meditation to Heal Your Inner Child

The following meditation has helped us heal from early childhood experiences. We regularly practice this meditation because it provides a kind space for the body, heart, and mind to gently remember. It offers a living space of inclusivity and compassion for childhood memories and all previous experience as we continue to deepen and grow in self-love.

1. Tap Your Resources of Love and Support

Thich Nhat Hanh once spoke about cooking up love. He reminded us of how we can use pieces of straw or paper to start a good fire. Our resources for love are the pieces of straw that help us generate the energy of loving-kindness.

Resources that help us develop self-love include people, places, pets, activities, and beautiful memories that soften our hearts and nourish our gratitude, love, and compassion. In your practice, take a few minutes to recall such a resource deeply. Make it come alive by activating your senses.

One resource we are both grateful for is the wise and compassionate therapists, body healers, and shamans who have supported our journey of transformation and healing. We often tell our friends that a somatic and trauma-informed therapist can be an essential support person for those on a spiritual path.

A resource that opens our hearts is our dog, Charlie. Peggy imagines the weight of his body in her lap and the feel of his fur under her hand. She pictures his jaunty, bouncy walk and smile. When she brings Charlie to mind, she feels her body relax and her face and eyes soften.

When Peggy needs even more support with her practice, she imagines the Pieta in the Vatican, a beautiful statue by Leonardo da Vinci of Mary holding Jesus. She says, “Sometimes Jesus is holding me, but more frequently, I rest myself in the arms of the Mother Mary. Mary helps the mother in me who is learning how to love myself with each breath.”

It is very important to take the time to savor your own resources of love so they are committed to long-term memory. Use all of your senses and anchor these sensations of goodness in your body and mind as you direct the energy of loving-kindness toward yourself.

2. Attend to Your Body

Once we are able to experience the positive sensations of being in touch with our resource, we attend to our body. The first foundation of mindfulness is the body. We love our self by being connected with our body and recognizing the miracle of our body.

Find a place where you can slow down without distraction so that you can be aware of the body and the breath with some degree of comfort. Be thorough in your practice of establishing your posture so that your breath is easeful and you can truly be present.

Scan your body, feet to crown, bringing your mindful attention to your entire body with kindness. Invite your body to relax and soften, settling the body, sinking into your cushion or chair. Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that this is how we keep our appointment with life. He said, “We stop, we calm, we rest, we heal, and we transform.” Sending this mindful energy of kindness to your body is an act of self-love.

3. Offer Love to Your Inner Child

Then the invitation is to silently offer these words of guided meditation to yourself:

Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.

Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out

*I bring my kind attention to the in-breath
I bring my kind attention to the out-breath.
Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body, right here
Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body, right here
Aware of body, here and now
Breathing in, I see myself as a five-year-old child, fragile and
vulnerable.
Breathing out, I smile to myself as a five-year-old child.
Breathing in, I am aware that the five-year-old child is in me.
Breathing out, I hold this child tenderly.*

Allow as much time as you would like to experience holding this child that is you. When we first practiced with the little one inside of ourselves, we found it took patience and persistence to connect to the child within. Larry would visualize the child or else he'd visualize a black panther to support his practice. As a kinesthetic learner, Peggy found it helpful to experience the sensation of holding a puppy or kitten. We had to build our relationship and trust by continuing to practice just welcoming this child. Find your own way that helps you to feel solid and at ease.

This meditation has helped us to see ourselves as children and experience the very real vulnerability of human beings. We find that we frequently underestimate our resilience and strength, as

well as our fragility and vulnerability. They are not separate. There is great power and strength in our vulnerability and fragility. Being in touch with vulnerability, while it may not be easy at first, is a powerful opportunity to be in touch with life and our own goodness. In doing so, the hidden divine child within can be healed and strengthened.

Larry captures benefits from his practice of honoring the inner child with these lines from a poem he wrote: “I am here now, waking up in the changing room of my soul’s department store. I am becoming what my young self once knew, gazing at stars from the attic window following a yellow and green caterpillar on the sidewalks of Cleveland to new worlds.”

Blessings on your practice of love.

Dr. Peggy Rowe Ward is an ordained dharma teacher who, with Larry Ward, directs the Lotus Institute and co-authored *Love’s Garden: A Guide to Mindful Relationships*.

Larry Ward (pronouns- he/him) is a senior teacher in Buddhist Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh’s Plum Village tradition, the author of the book *America’s Racial Karma*, and co-author with his wife, Peggy, of *Love’s Garden, A Guide To Mindful Relationships*. Dr. Ward brings twenty-five years of international experience in organizational change and local community renewal to his work as director of the Lotus Institute and as an advisor to the Executive Mind Leadership Institute at the Drucker School of Management. He holds a PhD in Religious Studies with an emphasis on Buddhism and the neuroscience of meditation.

How to Practice Metta with Children

You're never too young to practice loving-kindness. *Gail Silver* on how to teach metta to your kids.

When I returned home after attending my first silent retreat, I was overflowing with loving-kindness and found myself spontaneously reciting certain phrases of the Metta Prayer aloud:

May you be happy.

May you be safe.

May you be strong.

May you live with ease.

“Did you just tell me to live with ‘peas’?” my littlest one asked me. “No, honey,” I laughed. “I said, ‘ease.’ May you live with *ease*.”

Derived from the ancient Pali scriptures, metta is often translated as friendliness or loving-kindness. It's commonly used to refer to a type of meditation where the practitioner, by reciting specific phrases, wishes herself well-being and then gradually extends that wish to others before offering it universally to all beings everywhere.

Practicing metta enriches our lives by creating a warm-hearted feeling within us, and elevating our capacity for benevolence and compassion. This pleasant effect can be immediate, but more often it arises subtly, manifesting in our everyday life as contentment and a renewed appreciation for other people.

Once we understand metta, we can use it not only to inform and soften our lives but also those of our children.

Select a quiet space, free of distraction, and a time of day when your child is rested, fed, and relatively content. The duration of your practice will vary depending upon the age of your child, but as you progress together, your child's ability to sit for longer periods may become apparent. Yours may as well.

Sit comfortably on a cushion, chair, or sofa. The intention is for the body to feel at ease and the mind to be alert. Invite your child to close her eyes and feel her breath moving in and out of her body. If she'd like, she can count her breaths. Attending to the breath in this way allows the mind to release distracting thoughts and prepares it for the practice.

Explain that metta is a practice of making wishes for our well-being and for the well-being of others. Tell her that there are four specific phrases and that we begin by reciting them for ourselves.

The first phrase is, “May I be happy.” As she breathes in, suggest that she might like to smile. Breathing out, she can think, “May I be happy.” This does not mean that she has to be happy in this moment. She’s just experimenting with her thoughts, understanding how it feels to wish happiness for herself.

The second phrase is “May I be safe.” Breathing in, she might like to think about something that comforts her: a stuffed animal or a hug from a special grown-up. It’s okay if her mind doesn’t want to latch onto anything too specific. Saying the words is enough. With her exhalation, she can think, “May I be safe.”

The third phrase is “May I be strong.” Strength can be understood as having good health or the courage not to fall down when life doesn’t seem to be going our way. Breathing in, still and steady, your child can visualize herself in whatever way feels good for her, and breathing out, she can think, “May I be strong.”

The final phrase, “May I live with ease,” refers to freedom from suffering in both body and mind. It can be translated for a child as, “May things not be difficult for me, but if they are, may I not have too much difficulty with the difficulty.” Breathing in, she might like to envision a raft, floating effortlessly over waves as they come and go, and breathing out, she can think, “May I live with ease.”

Now, buoyed by good feelings, your child is ready to practice metta for others: someone she loves, a neutral person, a more difficult person, and finally for all beings everywhere. Teach her to recite the same phrases for others that she used for herself.

You might ask your child, “How does practicing metta make you feel?” or “What do you like most about metta?” She may be delighted to discover that in the same way a medicine brings down a fever or a throat lozenge soothes her sore throat, metta can ease the upsets of her inner landscape. Be sure to point out this distinction, though: unlike the top-shelf elixirs of the traditional medicine chest, a healthy dose of “mettaccine” is always within her reach.

Gail Silver is the founder of Yoga Child Inc. and The School Mindfulness Project. She’s the author of *Anh’s Anger* and other picture books.

Metta for Refugees

Zen priest *Liên Shutt* teaches a short meditation to foster compassion for beings in search of refuge.

Many people think Buddhism is about getting rid of desire. Really, our main focus is on promoting non-harming in the world. We look at how we can alleviate suffering.

Given the social climate of the world today, people often ask, “How do I know when to meditate and when to take action?”

I first met my teacher, Zenkei Blanche Hartman, during a Martin Luther King Day march many years ago. She died last year. In the later years of her teaching, she was very focused on the Buddhist practice of metta. Metta means “loving-kindness” or “goodwill,” and it’s a practice that helps us to access the qualities of groundedness and non-harming in the service of compassion.

Classically, we recite four phrases in metta practice. However, as a child, I lived through the war in Vietnam. As a result, a sense of home and safety is very important to me, so I've added a line referencing safety, based on tradition teachings on compassion, or the wish to alleviate suffering.

The five phases are:

May I be filled with loving-kindness [or goodwill, or unconditional friendliness].

May I be well.

May I have inner and outer safety.

May I have peace and ease.

May I be happy.

These are all things that everyone in the world is looking for, and should have as a human right.

For this specific theme, we'll recite these phrases in three categories of practice: for yourself, for refugees, and for all beings.

If we understand these phrases for ourselves first, it makes it easier to be able to offer them to others. So start by visualizing yourself, and repeat these phrases:

May I be filled with loving-kindness.

May I be well.

May I have inner and outer safety all the days of my life.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

Let me be happy all the days of my life.

Take a deep breath and bring it in. Know it to be true.

Now, visualize a refugee – a specific person or a group of people. Allow yourself to believe in these aspirations, as though they are gifts you are actually giving this person.

Repeat these phrases:

May this refugee be filled with unconditional kindness.

May they have good health.

May they have inner and outer safety all the days of their lives.

May they be peaceful and at ease.

Let them know happiness today and always.

Now visualize all beings and repeat these phrases:

May all beings, including myself, be filled with loving-kindness.

May we all know good health all the days of our lives.

Let us know that inner and outer safety is our right in all the days of our lives.

May we all be peaceful and at ease.

May all being in all directions and all times be happy all the days of their lives.

When you inhale, know these qualities to be right and true. And when you exhale, send unconditional sincerity to all beings.

From this grounded and connected place, may you be able to bring these intentions into your actions, “off the cushion,” for the benefit of all beings.

Thank you for your practice.

Rev. Keiryu Liên Shutt is a Dharma heir in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Born into a Buddhist family in Vietnam, she began her meditation practice in the Insight tradition. She was a founding member of the Buddhists of Color in 1998. Her Zen trainings began at Tassajara and then continued monastically in Japan and Vietnam. While she has placed her trust and faith in Soto Zen, she continues to enjoy the deep silence of Insight practices and has completed retreats in America and Thailand. Please go to AwakeInLife.org for info on the sitting group and other events.

Loving the Many Sides of You

Susan Piver shares her practice for loving all of your imperfections and contradictions.

Begin by offering loving-kindness to yourself in your ordinary form. This is the “you” that you see in the mirror.

Next, imagine yourself as a beloved. See yourself through the eyes of love and offer loving-kindness to this version of yourself. No matter how puny you may feel right now, there are still parts of you that you simply love. See this.

Next, see yourself as your most important teacher. There is a part of you that is wise and intuitive. Offer this “you” loving-kindness.

Move on to the view of yourself as a stranger. There are parts of you that you just can’t see, parts that are shrouded and mysterious. Offer loving-kindness to this stranger that is you.

After this, bring to mind yourself as an “enemy.” This does not mean what you dislike about yourself. It refers to the part of you that is most fragile and wounded, and therefore acts in ways that create chaos for you and those in your life. See yourself as this person who is laboring under great confusion. Offer loving-kindness to this version of yourself.

Finally, bring all of these fascinating, beautiful, difficult pieces together and offer loving-kindness to all of you.

Susan Piver is a Buddhist teacher and the New York Times bestselling author of many books, including *The Wisdom of a Broken Heart*, *Start Here Now: An Open-Hearted Guide to the Path and Practice of Meditation*, and *The Four Noble Truths of Love: Buddhist Wisdom for Modern Relationships*. She is founder of The Open Heart Project, an international online meditation community.