

CONCENTRATION MEDITATION: *METTA* (LOVING KINDNESS)

Becoming Safely Embodied Handout

Metta Practice

To do the *metta* exercise, you'll need three or four benevolent phrases that invite a positive internal experience. The traditional *metta* phrases are:

May I be happy.

May I be at peace.

May I live with ease.

May I be free from suffering.

You may use these very phrases, or you may want to use a mantra, a chorus from a song, a repetitive movement, a simple centering prayer, a few nurturing affirmations of your own, or a structured prayer with prayer beads. Once you have your phrases in mind, find a quiet space and sit in a comfortable position. Take a few long breaths. Relax. Softly focus your eyes on a spot in front of you, or close your eyes if that is more comfortable.

Begin saying one of the phrases you've selected—slowly, with intention. Say the first. Let that settle in. Then say the next, or even repeat the first. Breathe deeply and let each settle in before moving on to the next.

Over and over, for as long a time as you like, repeat the phrases, allowing yourself to resonate with the qualities they describe, as well as your intention to become aligned with those qualities.

If your mind jumps to the opposite of what your phrase/intention invites, let go of the practice and come back to it at another time. The next time, limit yourself to 1-5 minutes of practice. As it becomes more comfortable to stay with your intention, gradually increase the time.

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Remember, there is no right way to do this. It's a practice to find the softest, easiest, most comfortable way to develop concentration. Don't push yourself if it doesn't feel right. Just try it again another time. If, for whatever reason, you find you are beating yourself up, remember compassion! And focus on your desire to feel good (another kind of concentration practice) instead of feeling bad. You could also shift to mindfulness practice and begin noting whatever is arising. Mindfulness practice might very well create some space between who you are and the thoughts or feelings that are coming up.

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Classical Phrases:

- May I be happy.
- May I be at peace.
- May I live with ease.
- May I be free from suffering.

Benefits of a Concentration Practice:

- Focusing creates blissful states
- Mind gets focused, not scattered
- The ability to direct your experience is strengthened
- You begin to recognize that you're not at the mercy of your mind-states

Cautions of a Concentration Practice:

- Since internal boundaries are relaxed there may be a tendency to feel out of control. It can be hard to know where you begin and end.
- Regression becomes more probable.
- Self-hate can initially intensify.

Directions

Find a quiet space and sit in a comfortable position. Take a few long breaths. Relax. Softly focus your eyes on a spot in front of you, or close your eyes if that is comfortable for you.

Find a phrase that feels nurturing and satisfying for you—something that you want to cultivate. Begin saying that phrase, or couple of phrases, to yourself. Say the first. Let that settle

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in. Then say the next (or repeat the first). Again, breathe and let that settle in before moving on to the next.

Over and over, for as long a time as you like, repeat the phrases. Allow yourself to resonate with these qualities.

Don't be concerned if you find yourself resonating with the opposite of the phrase (for example, if you find yourself feeling angry instead of happy). If that happens, just let go of the practice and come back to it for a shorter period of time the next time. Start with 1-5 minutes, and as it becomes more comfortable, add a little more time.

Remember, there is no right way to do this. It's a practice to find the softest, easiest, most comfortable way to develop concentration. Don't push if it doesn't feel right. Just try it again another time. If you notice that you're beating yourself up, for whatever reason, practice compassion! And focus on your desire to feel good (another kind of concentration practice!) instead of feeling bad!!!

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That I feed the beggar, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy ... all these are undoubtedly great virtues... But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of the beggars, the most impudent of all offenders, yea the very fiend himself—that these are within me, and that I myself stand in the need of the alms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved—what then?

Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*

Optional Reading:

Chapter 2, Relearning *Loveliness* in *Loving Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg

Reflections:

Notice how often you feel you need to give to others instead of yourself. What would it be like at those times to stop and observe the thoughts, feelings, and impulses that arise when you don't automatically act? It may be hard to do, but give it a try.

What would you "normally" do? What's familiar about it? How do you usually feel after doing the "normal" behavior?

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Are there thoughts and feelings about *not* engaging in this same behavior? What do you imagine will happen if you don't do this?

What happens if you give to yourself that which you were wanting to give to another?

Explore with yourself. Have fun! There's no "right" way to do any of this.
