

Chalice lighting:

“Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die” Malachy McCourt

Closing words:

Quote: Buddha in the Dhammapada

“Hatred never ends through hatred.
By non-hate alone does it end.
This is an ancient truth.”

ARTICLE ON METTA

Excerpts from the book *The Issue at Hand* by Gil Fronsdal

May all beings be happy. May they live in safety and joy. All living beings, Whether weak or strong, Tall, stout, average or short, Seen or unseen, near or distant, Born or to be born, May they all be happy. -from the Metta Sutta ---Sutta Nipata I.8

Metta

Metta, or loving-kindness, is one of the most important Buddhist practices. Most simply, metta is the heartfelt wish for the well-being of oneself and others. When describing metta, the Buddha used the analogy of the care a mother gives her only child. Loving-kindness is closely related to the softening of the heart that allows us to feel empathy with the happiness and sorrow of the world.

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.

Metta practice is the cultivation of our capacity for loving-kindness. It does not involve either positive thinking or the imposition of an artificial positive attitude. There is no need to feel loving or kind during metta practice. Rather, we meditate on our intentions, however weak or strong they may be. At its heart, loving-kindness practice involves giving expression to our wishes for the well-being and happiness of ourselves or others.

In metta practice we water the seeds of our good intentions. When we water wholesome intentions instead of expressing unwholesome ones, we develop those wholesome tendencies within us. If these seeds are never watered they won't grow. When watered by regular practice they grow, sometimes in unexpected fashions. We may find that loving-kindness becomes the operating motivation in a situation that previously triggered anger or fear.

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.

When we find difficulty in relating to others and ourselves with intentions of kindness, the practice of metta can provide a useful reference point to help us see what we are in fact feeling. The absence of loving-kindness can be an important cue, not to provoke self-criticism, but to remind us to slow down and pay more careful attention to what is actually happening.

The practices of mindfulness and loving-kindness support one another. Metta practice complements mindfulness by encouraging an attitude of friendliness toward our experience regardless of how difficult it may be. Mindfulness complements loving-kindness by guarding it from becoming partial or sentimental. Metta can foster a closeness in our relationships to others; mindfulness can help keep us balanced in those relationships. Mindfulness can bring freedom; loving-kindness ensures that our path to freedom is not aloof from others.

A Lovingkindness Meditation - adaptation from the work of Sylvia Boorstein

<https://onbeing.org/blog/sylvia-boorstein-a-lovingkindness-meditation/>

This meditation is a guided version of a loving kindness meditation - we will be focusing on yourself, a loved one, a neutral person and a difficult person- it will be followed by the silent meditation portion of the service

It might be easier with closed eyes because I'm going to ask you to imagine somebody who might not be here, you might have an easier time imagining with your eyes closed.

Take a long breath in, and out.
And in again, and out.

Feel yourself sitting here. Feel yourself surrounded by all these people.

Feel yourself, I hope, ---- happy and content.

And think in your mind a blessing for yourself, metta always begins with a blessing for yourself. Think for yourself:

"May I feel safe.
May I feel content.

May I feel strong.
May I live with ease.”

Bring into your mind, someone that you love tremendously — a parent, a partner, a child, a sibling — Pick one just for this moment. As you visualize them think:

“May you feel safe.
May you feel content.
May you feel strong.
May you live with ease.”

Think of someone that you rarely think about but that you'd recognize if you met. A postal worker, hairdresser, tax accountant or whomever.

Think of a person that's a familiar stranger and wish for them:

“May you feel safe.
May you feel content.
May you feel strong.
May you live with ease.”

Now think of a person that is not an easy relationship - not the hardest relationship in your life- but more on the level of someone that annoys you - for example someone who cut you off in traffic or someone who always interrupts you at a work meeting: Picture them and think

“May you feel safe.
May you feel content.
May you feel strong.
May you live with ease.”

May all of us everywhere feel safe and content and strong and live with ease. Before the silent portion of the meditation, think of the person to your right, to your left, in back of you, in front of you. And see if as you say these phrases of blessing in your mind can actually feel that you are radiating out these blessings of well-wishing to them.

“May you feel safe.
May you feel content.
May you feel strong.
May you live with ease.”

I am going to start with a story about the origin of Metta by

Toni Bernhard from Turning Straw Into Gold

Lovingkindness meditation came about because of the Buddha's response to a group of monks who were scared. As the story goes, these monks had gone to a remote forest to engage in intensive mindfulness meditation. But when they got there, they started hearing strange noises, smelling terrible odors, and seeing scary spirits. They fled the forest and sought the Buddha's help.

The Buddha taught them lovingkindness meditation and told them to go back to the forest and cultivate lovingkindness for these scary spirits. The monks returned to the forest and began to practice lovingkindness meditation. Soon the spirits became as benevolent and friendly to the monks as the monks were being to the spirits. The monks stayed a long time in the forest, in harmony with the spirits.

I also happen to be in the forest when I first came across Metta - but to clarify it was inside a heated building located on the grounds of the Michigan Friends Center in Chelsea Michigan where they host a quarterly day long silent meditation with some parts of the day devoted to Buddhist teachings.

At the end of this particular session our teacher, Carol Blotter, lead us in a guided Metta- similar to the one we did earlier in the service. I was into it - I had spent the whole day silent. I felt a deep stillness at times- and other times my brain was spinning with my do to list -- and then there were also a few unintentional naps....

So at this point in the day spoken words felt refreshing.

The Metta meditation at the end was going well --and we did the visualization for lot of loved ones - not just the one person we did today - and I love thinking about all the wonderful people in my life. And up until that point my thoughts were fluid and my body felt relaxed -

and then we got to the difficult person.

At the time - it was an easy choice of who to pick. I am a PA - physician assistant-and at that time I worked in the ER-- I got along with almost all of my collaborating physicians-

Except one. This one physician I worked with I found to be demoralizing, condescending and a downright scoundrel as Rev Alex would say. And there SHE was in my head during this beautiful day of meditation. I was annoyed to say the least.

I show up to these days of meditation for multiple reasons - one of which is meditation lets me see the world with what I believe to be a more objective viewpoint. And so I dug in and started -the teacher said for us to pick the words of Metta that resonate with us individually and these are the ones I use in my actual practice:

May Dr. S be healthy and strong,
 May Dr. S feel safe,
 May Dr. S be content and free of suffering,
 May Dr. S feel loved.

My shoulders had become tight, eyebrows tightened closer - helping develop a special wrinkle that graces the women in my family.

We were asked to do another difficult person for several rounds- I decided to stick with the same one - feeling there was still work to be done...

And then about the 3rd time focusing on this difficult person ----- I felt a slow releasing. Shoulders opening, face softening. And as I visualized the difficult person - i felt my perspective slowly shifting. Instead of the feeling of me vs. Dr. S - I was appreciating that we were both working moms - she is in a place of leadership under incredible scrutiny - she has the same desire to be healthy happy and content as I do.

--- and there it was.

This realization that we are all suffering and we are all trying to get by and strive for fulfillment and contentment in life - it takes away the separateness of being and reminds one of the commonality of the human experience. Which brings me to one of my favorite quotes:

Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

This is attributed to Buddha and I was fully disappointed finding out when I researched it for today that it isn't exactly a verifiable quote- but Buddha lived a really long time ago - and even if it lacks academic credibility - it represents a personal truth experienced by me that day.

And the way I felt the release almost at a cellular level also makes sense to me as a medical provider - we say 'stress is bad- limit your stress' without a lot of tools to do so - exercise definitely works to limit stress - stress in life is all too unavoidable and you can only go on a treadmill so many minutes in one of those time crunched stressful days...

I find Metta to be a real working tool along with insight meditation to change how I react to stress. Looking into this further I found some quantifiable evidence about what I feel intuitively to be true.

Scientifically - Metta or loving kindness meditation reduces stress response - some studies have shown evidence of decreased inflammation, increased compassion and possibly literally the possibility to change your brain-

"Neuroscientific meditation researcher Richard Davidson states the practice of LKM changed several important brain regions: both the insula and the temporal parietal juncture (TPJ) lit up as a result of lovingkindness meditation. The insula is the part of the brain responsible for our ability to empathize with others, and to make one self aware of emotional and physical present-moment experiences.

A similar finding appeared for the temporal parietal junction. This area, like the insula, is also related to our ability to process empathy and our ability to attune to the emotional states of others. There was significant activation of this brain region. The studies suggest intuitively that the more hours practiced the more these regions of the brain develop "

This idea of the brain's plasticity is especially relevant to me both as an individual and as a parent. This is the idea that you can not only change your own brain in a positive way but also have a significant influence on your child's brain development. Influencing your child's brain to process experiences in a healthy and well-adjusted way ---

that can feel like an opportunity or a liability-- depending on the day.

So to counterbalance the rage-cleaning mom screaming - 'for the third time pick up your pjs off the floor- can you even hear me!!!' I teach my children Metta as a tool.

My family love having found this church and religion - I am very jealous though sometimes of the concept of people praying at night to release all their troubles and "let go and let god" -- praying never felt worthwhile for me because I got caught up in the details - I wanted my children to have a way --and a language --of how to deal with the stressors and relationships that are dealt to them.

We will do a metta prayer about our loved ones and I see my children relax. They are young- 4 and 7- we have had small bumps in the road with friend relationships with our 7 year old but i am anticipating many more bumps and perhaps mountains the more they grow --will will have plenty of opportunities to process difficult experiences and people. I want my children to know that everyone has inherent worth and value like the first principle states.

Some people are like geodes and just need a little softness to allow others to see the crystals inside.

And there are some definite scoundrels and people make bad choices that are not ok.

Practicing Metta doesn't excuse bad behavior or horrible injustices - it just gives me a tool to not internalize it all and keep my heart soft. And I hope to pass on this skill to my children.

Love is so needed in this era-- as Doctor MLK jr. said "I have decided to stick with love, hate is too great of a burden to bear."

In closing

May you all be healthy and strong, May you all feel safe, May you all feel loved and May you all feel happy and content