

WEEK 1

TEACHINGS ON LOVING-KINDNESS

Metta is a vehicle to transform, open, and awaken your heart. Not only is it the first of the brahma-viharas but it also serves as the foundation of your heart practice you are beginning to develop today. The Pali word *metta* is often translated as “loving-kindness” or “friendliness.” As a practice, it teaches us how to extend genuine kindness and friendship to ourselves and then outwardly to others. *Metta* is also translated as “love.” I have found thinking of metta through these three facets—kindness, friendliness, and love—to be extremely helpful when adding metta into meditation practice. One of the main purposes of the heart practices is to be able to meet yourself and the situations, circumstances, and setbacks that you find yourself in through these three facets of metta. Meeting your moment-to-moment experience with metta alone will begin to change your relationship to the daily human moments we all encounter. Further, metta will also make you feel better in the magical medicinal kind of way it is known for.

kindness, friendliness, and love

On one day, you might find metta will be most useful in the form of total unfiltered kindness. The warm wash of real kindness will be exactly what is needed when facing guilt about saying something you didn't mean to say or a lapse in judgment or a mistake. On another day, metta will be most useful in the form of friendship. The very concept of becoming your own inner bestie—offering yourself a hand of friendship, genuinely having your own back in the face of adversity, meeting yourself with kindness instead of judgment—changes the quality of your life. When you learn to give unwavering, caring, nonjudgmental friendship to your own heart and mind, soon you'll find natural friendliness more easily extendable to others, such as the people you work with, your good pals, or your difficult family members.

Then, on other days and in your most needed moments, metta will be most useful and medicinal in the form of love—that is, real love; not to be confused with romantic love or the type of love we normally think about or even aspire to in a personal way. In one of its strongest manifestations, metta is the conscious choice to respond with the presence of love, acceptance, and nonjudgmental compassion instead of the commonly hardwired reactionary fear or hatred. Love dissipates our past conditioning, painful cycles of unconscious reactionary patterns, and the obstacles faced when learning to love in a way we may never have loved before—the wise way.

The purpose of metta is to become heart-based and unbounded in our ability to truly love, to meet fear and difficulty with love, and to face our own anxious and fearful tendencies without the harshness of judgment. If you have ever felt like your mind is a kind of perilous place to be at times. Or if you have some pretty negative and nasty self-narratives circling on

repeat (hello, inner critic). Such as, “I’m not pretty enough, thin enough, or fashionable enough to really put myself out there online or to date right now”; “I need to be more put together”; “I need to be more prepared for the meeting with my team lead that I’ve known about for over a week.” Metta is going to prescriptively change the narrative by infusing it with kindness, friendliness, and love, one metta moment at a time.

aspirations versus affirmations

Metta is an aspirational practice that is different from repeating positive affirmations to ourselves. Aspiration practices are focused on willingness. Are you *willing* to wholeheartedly plant the seeds of well-being you want to embody and bloom in your heart? Are you *willing* to put in effort and intention when it's not so easy to be kind, forgiving, or compassionate with someone who has hurt you or not followed through on something they said they were going to do? Are you *willing* to stretch your heart and grow it beyond its current comfort zone and offer loving-kindness, appreciative joy, and empathy even when you don't want to?

Metta is training to love unconditionally, remaining open instead of closing down, and staying with yourself and your discomfort even when it's not your first choice to do so. It is also the aspiration to not abandon yourself or others along the path of being human and gaining wisdom from your heartbreak and mistakes. Your greatest aspirations will take the biggest willingness from deep within you. Aspirations allow for the willingness to not abandon any piece or part of your life, which takes a resilience that can only be found in the heart.

Affirmations, which reside in the mental plane only, are statements or phrases telling you to be, do, or feel a certain way even when you may not feel that way in the moment. Affirmations are

good reminders of what you aspire to, yet reminders will not get you very far without the strength required from the heart. Aspirations give you room and permission to grow into the qualities that you wish for and intend for, often with the much-needed support of patience, kindness, and allowance for imperfection. The more you practice metta, the more you will find out exactly where in your life your heart is open, where it's still shut down, and where there's room for growth.

One way I like to think of practicing metta is by viewing each phrase as a seed holding an intention that I would like to plant for myself or others. When I say to myself, "May I be happy," "May Anna be happy," or "May Mark be happy," each repetition represents planting a seed of the intention embedded within a wish. I am planting a seed for happiness deep within the layers of my heart and mind.

Metta is much like gardening: when the season, causes, and conditions are right; and with the right care, sunlight, and nutrients; whatever specific intentions and aspirational qualities you plant eventually will begin to root and flower.

how to practice

- Silently repeat metta mantras (phrases)—genuine wishes for kindness, friendliness, and love that emanate from the heart and mind.
- Rest your attention on the metta phrases and the feelings that emanate from these very intentional wishes.

METTA TOWARD SELF

The motivation to implement any great change or shift in our lives has to come from within. The same is true with metta. Therefore, Days 1 through 4 in *Kindness Now* are focused on sending metta toward yourself. In doing so, you are training