

# Metta Meditation: Cultivating Goodwill

Mindfulnessmeditationgroup.com

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## What Is Metta?

**Metta** is a Pali word often translated as *loving-kindness*, *benevolence*, or *friendliness*. It refers not to romantic love or attachment but to a **boundless, unconditional care for oneself and others**, grounded in goodwill.

Metta is one of the **Four Brahmaviharas** (Divine Abodes), alongside compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). Metta is a skillful mental quality that can be intentionally cultivated thru practice.

## The Practice of Inclining the Mind

At the heart of mettā practice is a deceptively simple insight: **the mind can be trained to incline in particular directions** — and that inclination, sustained over time, changes not just how we feel but how experience itself presents itself to us.

This is more than habit formation. When we repeatedly incline the mind toward goodwill, we are not merely strengthening a useful mental reflex. We are gradually reorienting the perceptual ground from which we meet the world. A mind habituated to ill-will or indifference doesn't just respond differently — it sees differently. Other people appear as threats, obstacles, or irrelevancies. A mind inclined toward mettā begins to perceive the same people, the same situations, as occasions for care.

The Buddha understood this as bhāvanā — cultivation — not technique. We are not installing a program. We are tending a direction, the way a gardener tends soil rather than forcing flowers.

This is why the practice begins with oneself. Not out of self-absorption, but because the quality of the ground determines what can grow. If the inclination toward goodwill cannot find purchase in our own experience, it will remain abstract when we try to extend it to others.

**Benefits of Metta Meditation** Mettā practice, as the Buddha described it, offers genuine benefits — not as goals to pursue, but as natural fruits of a mind that has learned to incline toward goodwill:

### 1. Emotional Well-Being

- Reduces anger, anxiety, and depression
- Cultivates positive emotions like joy, gratitude, and contentment

### 2. Stronger Relationships

- Increases empathy, patience, and compassion
- Builds a sense of connection even with difficult people

### 3. Physical Health

- Enhances immune function and reduces stress markers

- Improves heart rate variability and sleep quality

#### 4. Mental Clarity and Stability

- Strengthens concentration (samādhi)
- Diminishes obsessive thinking and rumination

#### What the Buddha Said About Metta

The Buddha praised Metta not just as a practice but as a **state or inclination of mind** to be developed and embodied. **From the Metta Sutta (Sutta Nipāta 1.8):** "*Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so should one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.*"

Metta is not limited to meditation sessions but is meant to **pervade our entire way of being**. It's a quality of mind we bring into every interaction, every thought, every moment.

#### How to Practice Metta Meditation

1. **Find a comfortable seated posture.** Allow the body to relax and the mind to settle.
2. **Begin with yourself.**  
Bring to mind your sincere wish for your own well-being. Silently repeat phrases such as:

*May I be well*  
*May I be happy*  
*May I be easily satisfied and content*  
*May I be peaceful and at ease.*

3. **Extend Metta to others, gradually widening the circle:**
  - A dear one, benefactor or someone who has cared for you
  - A neutral person
  - A difficult person (not someone deeply traumatic, especially at first)
  - All beings everywhere
  - Yourself again
4. With each, repeat the phrases with heartfelt intention.

*It's okay if the feeling isn't strong—keep planting the seeds with intention and repetition.*

#### Final Reflections

Metta is not a mood—it's a **commitment to engage with others and respond to life with goodwill**. It is a dwelling, a place to come from. The **Buddha said that appropriate mindfulness requires coming from Metta (goodwill)**. When practiced sincerely and steadily, it softens the heart, stabilizes the mind, and allows wisdom and compassion to arise naturally.

**The practice of Metta** is not about forcing positive feelings but rather about intentionally cultivating a mind that naturally inclines toward goodwill. Through consistent practice, we can reshape our mental habits, creating greater well-being for ourselves and contributing to a more compassionate world.

*"Just as water flows downhill, the mind flows in the direction we incline it through practice."*