

Practicing Good Will

Part I. The theory

Practicing mindfulness increases one's awareness of self and of others, and in so doing, deepens one's relationship to oneself and others in a very positive way. A particular mindfulness practice, known traditionally as "metta," furthers the development of one's positive relationship to self and others.

The goal of the practice is to intentionally produce positive thoughts that evoke feelings of love and good will toward yourself and toward others. This "good will" practice can reduce stress, ease frustration, increase the mind's capacity to embrace the full reality of "what is", and create an experience of calm, centered love-ability.

Practicing good will can be a powerfully transformative practice. After becoming familiar with it, experiment with focusing your good will on someone with whom you are having difficulty, before you have an interaction with that person. See what transformation comes in your relationship through daily practice. The good will practice can be used to give focus and intention to your life. Try the practice upon awakening each morning, for yourself, first, and then for others.

Part II. The Practice

The traditional "metta" practice uses a structured series of phrases, which are good will intentions. The precise wording of the phrases is not as important as the intent. The traditional practice uses five cycles of intention, beginning with directing good will toward the self, then expanding to direct good will towards an acquaintance or a stranger; then to a person that you know and like; then to a person that you love dearly; and finally to a person that you despise or fear.

Start with the following phrases (Weiss, 2004):

Cycle 1:

- Say each phrase to yourself on one slow inbreath and outbreath.
- Pause for several slow in and out breaths after completing this stage.

May I be well and happy.

May I be strong, confident, and peaceful. .

May I have ease and well-being.

Cycles 2 – 5:

2. Send good will by saying the phrases while imaging an acquaintance;
3. then to someone you know and like very much;
4. then to someone you love dearly;
5. and then to someone you despise or fear:

*May you be well and happy.
May you be strong, confident, and peaceful.
May you have ease and well-being.*

- Say each phrase to yourself on one slow inbreath and outbreath.
- Pause for several slow in and out breaths after completing each stage.

Part IV. Options and Resources

Expanded Good Will Cycle

This optional cycle for an extended period of practice involves expanding your love-ability to send good will to all creatures here and beyond.

- to all of the people in our community.
- to all of the people living on planet earth.
- to all creatures on the earth and in the sky and in the seas.
- to all beings and energies in the universe.

Feel free to be creative in adapting this good will practice after becoming familiar with it. For example, you may repeat each single phrase or each sequence of phrases several times, or you may focus just on saying one of the phrases over and over. You may also create your own words to convey your intentions of love and good will.

Another common name for this practice is “loving-kindness.” Commonly used phrases for the loving kindness practice are:

May I be filled with loving kindness.

May I be well.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

May I be happy.

(“Happy” indicates the concept of happiness without conditions.)

Resources:

On the Mindfulness Resource List see Andrew Weiss and Shinzen Young.