OM beginnings

Living the teachings — yoga’s everyday spiritual meanings

**Metta : Loving Kindness**

*Metta* means ‘love’ (in a non-romantic sense), friendliness, or kindness: hence ‘loving-kindness’ for short. It is an emotion, something you feel in your heart. Essentially metta is an altruistic attitude of love and friendliness, there is no self-interest involved here. Through metta we turn away from being offensive, harbouring resentment or animosity of any kind, instead our thoughts turn towards the well-being and happiness of others. True metta is an all embracing love that overcomes social, religious or economic barriers.

Metta is also called a *paritta* — a spiritual formula capable of safeguarding our well-being, protecting us against danger, and rescuing us from some of the mishaps and misfortunes of life. In Buddhist countries Metta is held in great reverence with faith in its healing powers. It is thought that as Metta radiates out from us it can calm us, strengthen our minds and even cure disease.

So how can we practise Metta as part of our regular yoga practice? Metta is an active form of meditation where instead of focusing on the breath, we focus on sending loving kindness out into the world, and we imagine that those people in our thoughts are touched by our good will. Metta meditation can take this even further by imagining that whoever the object of our metta may be (and this includes ourselves) is relieved of their particular form of discomfort, unease or pain as they are touched by the power of our goodwill, hence why practising Buddhists hold this in such great reverence. So how do we practice Metta ?

**Metta Meditation :**

Sit in your regular meditation posture with a tall spine. Connect with your breathing and spend a few minutes focusing on the **movement of the breath**. Notice the physical sensations that accompany this movement, especially at the level of your heart.

When you feel ready, think about someone you care about or someone that needs loving kindness then use the following words either spoken out loud or in your mind:

* May you be safe
* **May you be happy**
* May you be healthy
* May your mind be at ease.

You may also offer yourself loving kindness:

* May I be safe
* May I be happy
* May I be healthy
* May my mind be at ease.

Metta is also a wonderful way to practice forgiveness or letting go of negativity towards someone that may have got on the wrong side of you for whatever reason. We know that forgiveness is healing and that by harbouring resentment, in reality we are harming ourselves more than the person that is the cause of the animosity.

Notice any feelings that arise during the practice with an open mind. You might have very strong feelings if you imagine someone you care about who is in distress, or someone you dislike intensely. Let the feelings come and go naturally, without clinging to or judging them. Allow yourself to feel the warm-heartedness that accompanies metta meditation. It can be a really calming practice if you are anxious about someone that you love. Practicing Metta can really feel as though you are helping them in quite a powerful way.

It is said that those who practice Metta meditation will be able to forgive more easily, have their anxiety reduced, will sleep better and will be able to give and receive love more easily, all very good reasons to head to your mat and give it a go.