

Ruth King
Week 4, *Ungripping the Heart and Mind*
March 27, 2017
“Practicing Kindness”



Welcome back for the fourth and final session on practices that support us in ungripping the heart and mind. In this final session, what I'd like to offer is the practice of *metta*, or as it's referred to in the Pali language, kindness and friendliness. Metta is the antidote for the gripped heart, for aversion, and for those ways that we hold ourselves captive. It is the elixir—the lubricant—for the joints and the hardness of life. It's a beautiful practice to soften and open the heart, to build atmosphere and influence the weather so that whatever arises in our hearts and minds is in this atmosphere of friendliness and kindness.

It's one of my favorite practices. As someone who has had heart surgery and written a book about rage, I found it to be a practice that has served to soften and open the heart in very subtle and profound ways. I know many of you probably have a metta practice, but I'd like to walk through just a few basics of that. Then, we will practice together.

Metta is one of four practices of love that the Buddha offered, which are practices of the heart. Metta is friendliness, or kindness. There's also *karuna*, which is compassion; *mudita*, which is sympathetic joy; and *upaka*, which is equanimity. This is one way that we can directly know the experience of a vast and open heart [dwelling in] kindness and friendliness.

Metta is a sincere wish for all beings to be free from suffering without exception. This is an offering of generosity that is without exception in the world. It's not like I'm going to send you some metta because I like you, but then over here [another person] doesn't get any. It's indiscriminate, like the high noon sun that shines and touches on all things. That's the capacity that it represents. When we're in the practice, we can radiate from the inside in all directions of friendliness. This supports the well-being of the collective, this vast skinless body of awareness.

The Dalai Lama says, “my religion is kindness.” That's kind of a simple way of saying that it's everything. It has everything to do with everything. It's a beautiful practice to have. I also find it

Ruth King
Week 4, *Ungripping the Heart and Mind*
March 27, 2017
“Practicing Kindness”



to be a decision. Kindness is a decision. It's a decision to incline the heart towards good will for all beings, especially those that are suffering in ignorance, knowingly or unknowingly. It's just a beautiful way to extend the heart. It's something that we can do. I actually think it's something we must do.

Let's practice together. Once again, take some time to turn your attention inward into the body. Scan the body and invite awareness to soften the body. Right now we want to just park our beliefs, or that habit we have of being elsewhere. See if we can stay close to the body and the breath as we sit together.

With metta, it's useful to recall a moment of loving presence or a moment of deep gratitude. Just bring that moment into your heart and mind. I always suggest a moment instead of a person because a person can change and does change. If we can just focus on that moment of kindness and loving presence, or a moment of gratitude, that's what we want to touch in on. Allow yourself to embody that moment as fully as you can as a way of igniting your direct experience with love and kindness.

If it helps to put your hand on your heart as a way of really feeling contact, that's OK as well. Fully imagine that person sitting before you right now. Imagine that person sitting before you, taking joy in you, and wishing you well. Feel the happiness and the joy being exchanged between you both. It's a soft opening—an acceptance—that allows for relaxing. This naturally happens when you're in the presence of a dear one or in a precious moment. Don't let this just be a thought; let the body experience the thought or the memory.

You can let yourself be touched by this recollection in this very moment. Really take your time to allow every cell in your body to bathe in this loving presence. For now, you can allow the person to fade away, or the image of them to fade away. Thank them. Maintain the essence of the loving presence and that palpable quality of kindness and love.

Ruth King
Week 4, *Ungripping the Heart and Mind*
March 27, 2017
“Practicing Kindness”



As you sit in this essence of genuine care, I'll offer these phrases for you. Just allow [them] to touch you lightly. The idea is to not just hear what I'm saying, but to see how you're touched by it. May I be safe from inner and outer harm. May I be safe. May I be happy and content. May I be healthy and strong. May I live with ease. May I live with ease and well-being. Feel the good intention of these phrases as you say them in your heart and mind. Just like you wish these things for yourself, all beings also wish to have the same kindness. So, we offer it to them. May all beings be safe from inner and outer harm. Extend this good will outwardly and indiscriminately. May all beings be happy and content.

Notice how it feels in the body to make this offering, or this sincere wish. May all beings be healthy and strong. May all beings live with an open heart. May whatever blocks my heart be dissolved, and may whatever block your heart be dissolved. May you be free. May all beings have good friends and much joy. May all beings live with ease and well-being. Continue with praises that work for you. May all beings be happy and at rest. May all beings be free from animosity and free from oppression. May all beings be safe from inner and outer harm.

Metta is lovely to do in your daily sitting practice, but also throughout the day— especially the practice of sending metta to people who are suffering near and far. Don't forget to send metta to yourself. If you find it difficult to send metta, then you can send metta to the part of you that's struggling with sending metta as a practice. [This is] a kind way to be with [whatever is] not ready to be forgiven.

I encourage you to do metta. This time we live in is a good time to keep the heart well liquidated with kindness. Everybody that's walking around has a story. [Everyone] has struggled and has got some kind of shaping that has influenced how they defend themselves and how they show up in the world. Bring a certain curiosity to these situations and perceptions and also allow your heart to be in the mix. Don't shut down your heart, especially when you're gripped. See if there's a way you can allow kindness to be a part of your inquiry.

Ruth King
Week 4, *Ungripping the Heart and Mind*
March 27, 2017
“Practicing Kindness”



We've had four weeks of looking at four strategies to ungrasp the heart. We looked at cultivating ease by working with the body and the breath. We looked at intimacy with our impulses, which is a pausing to know *vedana*—the feeling tone—so that we can more deeply understand what our programming is and what drives our experience. We've looked at nothing being personal, permanent, or perfect as a way of understanding the three natural laws of our existence. [We also looked at] how we can play with that as a mantra in a daily practice.

In this session we looked at metta. We practiced with metta as a way of creating an atmosphere of kindness, [which we can] continue to examine as we walk tenderly in this life and do what must be done. Thank you for your practice. I'll see you on the path.