May All Beings Be At Ease

INTRODUCTION: As we begin today’s meditation, allow yourself to feel ordinary, content and at home just as you are. We take time to settle in at the beginning of our meditation for a couple of reasons. First is to help us be here now; to set aside any preoccupations we might have about the days past or the days ahead. Second is to help us touch the tenderness within, something that eludes us when we are preoccupied or otherwise not fully present. This doesn’t have to be a big feeling; just a little bit of tenderness is enough. It’s important to understand that taking time to settle in is itself an expression of metta, of good will: Twice the sutra expresses the wish that all beings be at ease.

Simply be with your breathing. There’s no need to change anything about it, but if you wish, you can even your breath by counting to the same number on the inhale as on the exhale—2, 3, or 4, whatever number is comfortable for you. To whatever extent you can, experience your breath throughout your whole body. By withdrawing attention from your upper body in this way, we can begin to bring to rest any chattering going on in your head. Pay attention to your tactile presence: the weight of your body on the chair; the feeling of your feet on the ground; the rising and falling of your belly as you breathe. Appreciate that this rising and falling in your own body is nothing other than the arising and falling of life itself.

Be aware of your whole body and especially be aware that your body has a front and a back. We often live from the front; we get ahead of ourselves. Sometimes we’re beside ourselves. When that happens, we can focus deeply within, to the core of our being, to help ground and center us. Bring your attention to the area around your heart—if you wish, place your hand over your heart; doing so may help you attune to tenderness.

Be as fully present as you can be. If you are fighting any battles inside of you, bring forward the intention to set them aside for now. In metta practice we don’t state our intentions and then pretend we feel that way. Rather, we state our intentions and then pay attention to how we actually feel. We notice when confusion, boredom, resistance, cynicism, fear, or other afflictive feelings come up. Do not be concerned about them. These are simply opportunities to get to know the rough edges of our hearts—the places that most need kindness, good will, and compassion.

Let’s gather our intention to extend good will to all beings, beginning with ourselves.

May I be happy and content.

May I be free from harm and ill will.

May I be healthy.

May I live with ease, free from fear and anxiety.

Continue to repeat these or other kind intentions to yourself for a few minutes.

REFLECTION: The metta sutra expresses the desire that all beings live with ease. Being at ease counters our constant tendency to grasp and chase after things. To be at ease, to be undisturbed by the fluid, ever-changing rhythm of our lives, is to be secure in the knowledge that right now we lack nothing. *We lack nothing*. This is another way to say that what’s required of us is to show up to our life however we are at the moment. Consider what a radical departure this is from our usual quest to be more, be different, be better, or have more.

We need to become aware of when we are being driven by this sense of lack; otherwise, it can become the unacknowledged and unconscious backdrop to our lives, sucking us into a never-ending cycle of grasping, rejecting, having and lacking. It is a corrosive habit of the heart that distances us from ourselves and others.

Being at ease is to appreciate and understand the ebb and flow of life—to deeply appreciate the fact that sometimes it’s to our liking and sometimes it’s not. Sometimes it’s terrifying; other times it’s as sweet and lovely as birdsong in the spring. It is so simple but so difficult to live this understanding in the moment when our expectations are upended, as for example when someone who is usually kind and understanding speaks harshly to us; when we inexplicably set aside our values and behave in a way that disappoints us; when the child, the spouse, the friend, or the nation we thought we knew becomes a stranger. When we are at ease, we can be vulnerable enough *with ourselves* to engage fully with whatever shows up in our life with a measure of equanimity. We can meet life as it shows up rather than react to it.

To be at ease means that feelings and experiences move through us without getting stuck. There is a bodily component to this. To be at ease is to feel spaciousness; to be uneasy is to be tense, constricted, pulled in on ourselves. With practice and attention we can learn to recognize both the spaciousness of being at ease and the bodily constrictions associated with dis-ease. To simply to notice a constriction is to begin to release it.

Being at ease is a skill that we refine in metta practice when we acknowledge the rough edges of our hearts. We learn that we need not fear or judge difficult feelings, for we meet whatever arises with tenderness and good will. This is an attitude we can adopt in every moment of our lives.

There is a wonderful Taoist practice that can help us be at ease. Visualize a subtle smile upon your heart, as though your heart is actually smiling. This is literally heartwarming and can allow tenderness of heart to shine forth. It helps begin to dissolve any sense of lack that has a foothold. Take a moment to consider whether and how a sense of lack plays a role in your life. What would it mean to give it up? Can you relax into knowing that you are enough just as you are? Can you be at ease right now?

Here are some possible intentions you can use to extend good will to yourself, to someone you appreciate, someone with whom you have difficulty and to all beings without exception. Or use your own words or an image. It is important to remember, especially when working with someone who is difficult for you, that we offer these intentions for the sake of their wellbeing, not ours.

May I/you appreciate my/your life just as it is

May I/you relax into tenderness

May I/you be at ease with whatever the moment brings

May my/your words and actions always flow from ease and good will