**Thanks to Susan Fehl for this reflection**

The Metta Sutra suggests how to be Bodhisattva-like in thought and deed. It includes roughly twice as many references to the characteristics of the SELF—the individual Bodhisattva—than it does references to how the Bodhisattva thinks about and engages with other beings. Perhaps it is written this way because the extent to which we compassionately receive ourselves can become a gate to the way we receive others. At various times, the gate can be open or closed or somewhere in between. Thankfully, practicing Metta, lovingkindness—on our cushions and in everyday life—helps us push open our gate.

Please allow me to share the important reminder we hear each week: 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. This paying attention is essential. It’s at the heart of Metta’s transformative potential. Furthermore, it is in itself a potent act of self-care: by acknowledging our true heart without fear or judgment, we release ourselves from the burden of trying to be someone other than who we are while simultaneously allowing the possibility of growth.

Learning to accept the role of the Bodhisattva is the nature of Buddhist practice. In Buddhist practice we are guided to meditate on emptiness and selflessness. Bodhisattvas do not try to prolong consciousness; they move rapidly from moments of consciousness to moments of consciousness.

We can learn the way of the merciful and compassionate Bodhisattva by raising self-awareness. In moments where the rough edges of self-orientation are revealed, we need not dally in thoughts of judgement, shame, regret or other self-deprecation. Rather we can move swiftly to other-orientation, oneness-orientation. For example, we can:

* Move swiftly from self-preoccupation and so tune into the suffering of other beings.
* Recognize self-consciousness, swiftly move to UNself-conscious and so avoid perfectionism, the foundation of attachment to an unchanging "self" and an unrealistic ideal.
* Move swiftly from selfish to UNselfish and so avoid self-pleasure that cares little for the harm done to others.

By swiftly moving to oneness-orientation, our compassion expands, both benevolence and reverence:

* Benevolence, our love for those who need our love, and
* Reverence, our love for those who express their love to us.

I invite you to offer Metta for yourself, a person it is easy for you to appreciate, and one who it’s not, and for all beings without exception. After saying each intention, check in with your heart. Notice if any unwanted or uncomfortable feelings have arisen. If they have, just let them be, moving swiftly from one moment of consciousness to the next. If you can’t let go of the tendency to make them a problem, just let that be - another moment of consciousness. Whatever comes up, meet it with good will and keep practicing.

I will guide you in our usual core intentions and during the quiet time, if you wish, amend them in any way that speaks to you.

Let’s begin by offering Metta for yourself.

* 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
* May I accept my self-orientation, knowing that it need not limit the openness of my heart

Next think of a person it is easy for you to appreciate/it is not easy for you to appreciate. This need not be someone you know personally but someone such as an author, a teacher, or someone else who has benefited you in some way. As you say the intention, understand its meaning; do not allow it to be rote. After saying the phrase, acknowledge whatever comes up and greet it as a moment of consciousness. Let’s extend goodwill and lovingkindness toward them now.

* May you be happy and content
* May you be free from harm and ill will
* May you be healthy
* May you live with ease, free from fear and anxiety

Next we extend our intentions for all beings without exception. We use the phrase “without exception” to remind ourselves that our practice is a universal, nondiscriminating caring grounded in the profound connection among all beings. We do not pick and choose who is worthy and deserving of kindness; rather, we recognize that all beings are. After saying the phrase, acknowledge whatever comes up and greet it as a moment of consciousness. Let’s extend goodwill and lovingkindness toward all beings now.

* May all beings without exception be happy and content
* May all beings without exception be free from harm and ill will
* May all beings without exception be healthy
* May all beings without exception live with ease, free from fear and anxiety

As we bring our morning to a close, let’s return to offering lovingkindness to 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
* May I accept my self-orientation, knowing that it need not limit the openness of my heart

Before we close for the week, let’s take a moment to offer lovingkindess to one another, as I share the words of Longchenpa, an 14th-century Buddhist scholar from Tibet:

Let the flower of compassion bloom

In the soil of kindness

Attend it with the pure water of equanimity and impartiality

In the cool shade of joy.