Good will, the Buddha said, is not a feeling. He calls it a “determination.” An unflinching resolve born of a considered decision. In metta practice, that decision is to have an attitude of goodwill for all beings. But why? Why is it worth our time and energy to develop an attitude of good will for all beings? There are a lot of people in this world who are all too happy to spread ill will and they have the capability to do it. It’s fair to say it’s paddling against the stream to be committed to good will for all.

But the simple truth is that if we don’t have good will for all beings, we are going to act in unskillful ways–out of fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, vengeance, or the reactive energy of our habits, to name a few. Acting in unskillful ways increases the likelihood of harming others. They will suffer. We will suffer. We will perpetuate the suffering in the world.

In clarifying why we practice metta, it’s good to ask ourselves, who are we extending good will for? We’re extending good will **to** other beings, but **for** our own good. Metta protects us, primarily from our own unskillful intentions and actions. In this regard, we are seriously mistaken if we think that metta is just a trendy, feel-good Buddhist way to be nice and pleasant. Metta is, in fact, tough as nails. It requires us to be strong. I have had students express the fear that if they have good will for all beings they will be taken advantage of; people will step all over them. But that’s not what good will means. Metta does not require us to relinquish healthy boundaries. We’re not turning ourselves into some sort of Buddhist doormat. Good will means that we wish all beings without exception to behave in skillful ways **for their own good**. You hope that they can do it voluntarily, and perhaps you can assist them, but you have to know when to say no. As the dharma teacher Thanissaro Bhikku puts it, “It’s totally possible to have boundaries within limitless good will, because the help we give others is a form of generosity. Good will may be limitless, but your generosity has its limits in terms of your strength, your wealth, your position in life. It’s good to see the difference between the two.”

So having good will for others doesn’t mean you’re weak and let others do whatever they want to do. Metta’s not the wish that we’re going to be there for everyone under all circumstances. Rather, it’s a wish that they’re going to *be there for themselves*. And if we can do anything to help in that direction, we do.

Take a moment to reflect on metta as a strong mental state and a protection. Consider the ways in which you are vulnerable to unskillful thoughts and actions, being as specific as you can. As you extend metta to yourself, be aware of and appreciate metta’s protective embrace.

As we extend thoughts and intentions of good will toward others today, be aware that we offer metta to express our desire that they care for themselves skillfully and with ease. In turn, offer metta to someone it is easy for you to appreciate, a neutral person, someone with whom you have difficulty, and all beings without exception. Use the following intentions or other words/images that express your thoughts of good will.

May you be free from animosity.

May you be free from harm.

May you be free from troubles of mind and body.

May you care for yourself with ease.