

Align Your Light

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How do we Align our Light in a world so often out of balance?

Meditation and writing are two essential tools. Though they are not usually practiced together, practicing together can deepen the benefits of both.

I want to share with you a loving kindness, or *metta*, meditation, and some writing exercises to accompany it.

The ancient *metta* practice can help you align your life whatever the circumstances. It's a beautiful, healing, life-transforming meditation.

Whether you have years of practice or are only beginning, come to this practice as if for the first time, with the eyes and heart of a beginner, and embrace it, taking it into your life and into the world.

See what happens when you commit to practicing with it in the morning when you wake up and see what changes come into your life.

Practicing *metta* and doing the writing exercises beneath helps you clear away the clutter and helps you live with the clarity, simplicity, radiance and fullness that allows you to be your most radically open, wise, and powerful self. This practice helps you be who you want and were meant to be—both for yourself and for others.

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There are many different wordings of this meditation. My favorite, below, is borrowed from Buddhist teacher Sylvia Boorstein. I have added the last line.

May I feel protected and safe

May I feel contented and pleased

May my physical body protect me with ease

May my life unfold smoothly with ease

May my light shine unobstructed with ease.

Explanation

I've said this meditation/prayer/ blessing to my children before they go to sleep at night for years.

The traditional *metta* meditation includes only the first four lines above, but when I started saying this to my children at night something felt missing: I wanted not just “ease” in their lives, but also agency, fire, light, and so we added the last line—coming up with the wording together.

The meditation asks for five things.

Safety

Contentment / A Sense of Enoughness / Gratitude

Health

Well Being / Freedom

Purpose / Passion / Clarity / Radiance

These five things are all important aspects of a fulfilled life.

And in every life there are times that these conditions will not be present—but we'll come back to that later.

How to Practice

Normally *metta* is practiced in a typical seated meditation position—in crossed legs with a straight back so that the air can travel freely up and down the spine—or on a chair with a straight back.

But you can practice anywhere. In bed when you first wake up and in bed right before you go to sleep are great places and times to practice.

You can also practice as you go about your day. If you start to feel frustrated or upset with someone or with yourself; if you feel angry and sad; or if you feel happy and want to grow that happiness, say the *metta* prayer above.

In a traditional *metta* practice we practice first for ourselves (may I be protected and safe, etc.) .

Then for a person we love (may my friend be protected and safe).

Then for an acquaintance (think of someone you know but are not very close to).

And then to a person you find challenging (over time you can work up to the person you find most challenging).

Finally we practice for the entire universe.

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How and why the Meditation Works

We live in a world in which the boundaries between self and other are often rigidly drawn.

The meditation is so powerful because it recognizes that our true happiness, clarity and strength come from a place in which we are able to extend loving kindness to all beings.

And it is so powerful because it recognizes that this capacity for love, joy and light starts with our capacity for self-love.

If we don't love ourselves and feel comfortable with ourselves, we cannot extend that good will to others.

Often sending loving kindness to ourselves is the most challenging part of the meditation.

If it is very challenging, start instead with sending loving kindness to a loved one, and then send *metta* to yourself.

With practice, the meditation builds our capacity for freedom, radiance and joy.

Start whenever and however you can.

Whether this is your first time with a *metta* meditation or whether you have been practicing *metta* for decades, become curious about your process—what happens as you say these words?

Where do you feel lighter? Where do you feel caught?

What happens if you don't have the conditions you are asking for?

When we do this meditation, we are not setting goals that we need to obtain. Instead we are setting an intention, an aspiration. We are spreading our love and our wish for well being.

Notice and keep going—the process has benefits that develop even if you can't see or understand them right away!

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Just Practice—Don't Overthink It!

There is great wisdom in just practicing. Our monkey mind will give us 1001 reasons not to practice. We will argue, debate, analyze before we practice then we are not practicing.

But practicing will naturally dissolve our inner tensions, our inner resistances, our misgivings and misunderstandings.

Transformation happens not through the head, but through experience. We don't need to understand love, we just fall in love. We don't need to understand how to grow a baby inside of us, the baby just grows, and we feed ourselves nourishing food and take care of our body to keep that baby as healthy as possible.

Just practicing will grow a sense of the very things that the loving kindness meditation asks for: it will grow a sense of safety, contentment, well-being and radiance.

It will also grow compassion—towards oneself and towards others.

Trust me. Do it. And see what happens!

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Writing Exercise Around, Through and to Deepen the Practice

When we practice we just practice; allow whichever thoughts come to your mind to come, and let them go—don't attach to them.

It takes practice to practice. Allow the process to develop organically and trust it.

At the same time, there are also great benefits to listening to our thoughts, in the proper times and places.

Writing can help us pay attention to our inner voices, and to the rich world around and within ourselves.

Indeed, having a writing practice alongside a meditation practice can be beneficial in many ways.

One of the ways in which its beneficial is that instead of ignoring or repressing thoughts in meditation, when they arise we know that we will give them time later when we write, and so they will usually quiet down more quickly.

Another benefit of writing around a meditation practice is that what comes up usually is important; it carries some kind of message, some insight, some wisdom.

Even if what comes up is just resistance to the meditation, there is a reason that resistance is coming up, a message that part of you is telling yourself.

So it behooves you to listen to yourself—in the right way at the right time.

I invite you to write about, around and through your experience of *metta*.

Your writing is the place that you can allow your monkey mind, your critical mind, the mind that insists on what it wants and its own unique perspective to have space.

Your writing may also be the place that you can stretch yourself, that you can wish, aspire, love more, that you can grow your wonder, that you can fly even higher.

Many people have reported to me that writing around the practice of *metta* deepens the practice. Your monkey mind becomes more quiet when you practice, because it knows that it has the paper to be active on. And you have a deeper, more personal connection to the practice; you fall in love with it.

So I invite you to do these following exercises:

ONE a):

Write out the *metta* meditation. I suggest writing it out in longhand—the physical act of writing brings this meditation into your body in a new way. But if you want to use a computer, that is fine too.

When you are writing the meditation out, pay attention to your reactions.

Try to pay attention to what your mind says:

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Here's an example:

You write out:

May I feel protected and safe

your mind might go something like this:

“How am I supposed to be protected and safe when I know that global warming might very well sink the city that I live in and also sink the city that I grew up in? I’m not feeling very safe right now, and why SHOULD I feel safe? Wouldn’t it be better if I felt unsafe and started to advocate to DO something so that we aren’t just sitting around meditating, but actually making a real difference?”

So now, instead of just deciding that the meditation is silly, you write out your argument, your worries, your fears, your sense of urgency.

Have a conversation with the meditation on paper.

If this also seems silly, I urge you to stay with it. And I want to pose the following question:

Imagine what you would say to a child who felt very insecure and scared. Imagine sitting with an eight year old child or a four year old child. What would you wish for that child?

Perhaps you might say to the child,

“Yes, I know that the threat of global warming is deeply worrisome, and because of that I still hope that you, dear child, will enjoy the feeling of protection and safety. I wish for you this wonderful experience.”

Can you reconcile your own *wish* for wellbeing with whatever holds you back from feeling that wish freely?

Or perhaps what comes to mind when you say this line is not a worry about the future, but a sharp memory of time that you felt very scared—write about that time.

Or perhaps you are concerned about the people suffering right now because of war, disease, injustice. They may be people that we know and love, or people that we do not know, but whom we are concerned about. Write through those concerns.

Not only negative reactions will come to mind.

Perhaps right now you do not feel protected and safe. Can you write about this sense of security that you feel right now?

Or perhaps what comes to mind when you write this line is an image of the place in which you feel most protected and safe; perhaps you remember a tree house you used to go to with a warm blanket when you were a child, or you see the face of a trustworthy friend, or you feel a flood of gratitude for your lover's arms.

Whatever comes to mind write it down.

In this process you will come to know your own mind, to see yourself more freely and clearly, to work through internal contradictions, to work through painful experiences, and to grow positive experiences.

Now we get to the harder, but equally, if not more, transformative part.

ONE b):

As you write the line, in addition to having a verbal or mental or visual response to the line and the wish, you also have a physical response.

Pay attention to that physical response. It is through our bodies that we are able to transform our habits, our reactions, our experiences.

But in order to transform, first we must pay attention to what is.

So again you write, "May I feel protected and safe"

Perhaps when you write that line you notice a slight shortening of breath. Stay with that sensation and write about it. Write with as much detail as you can.

What do you feel in your stomach? In your chest?

Perhaps you feel a sense of expansiveness, an opening?

Whether your sensations are negative, positive or neutral, just note them and write them down.

If you don't feel anything, be patient. Continue the practice. Eventually you will feel something.

Maybe you will feel a slight itching sensation on your head. You might think that has nothing to do with writing the line. That's okay. Just notice and write down

that itching sensation on your head. In this way you will become more attuned to your body and to the relationship between your body and mind.

Paying attention to your physical sensations is deeply transformative, and this writing can help develop your awareness.

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TWO

Now that you have written about the first line of the meditation, and your mental and physical reactions to it, I invite you to write about the second line and then the third all the way to the end of the meditation.

And then I invite you to write about your response when you write about sending the *metta* blessing to friends, acquaintances, enemies and the whole universe.

Obviously, writing about every stage of the meditation will take a lot of time.

That's okay. Move through it at your own pace. Choose the lines that stand out to you—one day choose your favorite line, the line that makes you feel the best.

The next day choose your most challenging line.

Experiment. Explore.

You can come back to these writing exercises throughout your life and notice the changes as they develop.

Doing exercises One and Two can be deeply therapeutic and transformative. Difficult material might come up. Just sit with it. If you need professional help, please get professional help.

Doing this practice can accelerate the healing that one does in therapy by a factor of ten or more—it gets directly at one's weaknesses, and it builds one's strengths.

To truly love oneself, and feel that love in one's body, and to truly love all beings, and feel that love in one's body is to approach the state of nirvana.

From a place of love, fear falls away. Whatever the imbalances and injustices of the outer world, you have your own center.

And to allow your light truly to shine unobstructed, without allowing external obstacles to get in the way of your own radiance and deep knowing, is its own state of happiness.

You can be a light for peace, health, justice, healing, creativity, joy, invention not just for yourself, but for everyone.

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THREE

Take the metta meditation as the start of a creative act of expression.

Start with a line and write a poem.

Start with a line from your responses to exercises one and two, and write a poem or a short story.

Write a song.

Write a love letter.

Write a short story.

Write a utopian novela.

Put words aside and paint a picture inspired by the meditation.

Paint a picture and include lines of the meditation in the picture.

Explore a form you don't normally explore.

Stretch yourself.

Put aside your critical mind and play.

Expand your creative self.

Share your creative talents.

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STICKING TO THE PRACTICE AND CHARTING YOUR OWN TRANSFORMATION

I recommend getting a notebook that you dedicate exclusively for this practice, so that you can chart your reactions and growth over time.

I also recommend sticking to a calendar.

Even if you don't practice every day or even if you don't practice every week, make a little calendar at the front of your journal and put a star on it for the days that you practice.

I've included a calendar that you can print out to chart your progress.

Meditate. Write. Practice.

Enjoy. Cry. Let yourself go. Learn. Grow.

I'd love to hear from you! nadiacolburn@gmail.com

I'm always grateful for feedback. Let me know if questions or challenges arise. And share your growth, challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments with me.

With thanks and blessings.

May you be radiant, and may you radiate your light on the world,

Nadia

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