



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

An appropriate response – befriending

The Heart Practice – befriending ourselves and experience

The power of friendliness

"You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection." ~ attributed to Sharon Salzberg

"Kindness is not a passive sentimentality, but an active, courageous, and unconditional friendliness that is the foundation of our path to freedom." ~ Christina Feldman

We continue to navigate this second part of our journey – to abandon harmful cravings and compulsions. Having identified that suffering naturally arises and that suffering intensifies through craving (*tanha*). We now turn to the 'Appropriate Response' needed to support us in *letting go*: Befriending (*Metta*), the Heart Practice which acts as a vital second rope, binding the newly acquired materials of our raft together.

Metta is the Pali word for friendliness, goodwill and benevolence, also widely translated as 'loving kindness'. It is an active interest in the well-being and happiness of the self and all beings. It is a warm, open-hearted quality, cultivated intentionally, that wishes well without expectation of return. It is distinct from conditional affection or mere politeness; it is a boundless quality, ideally extended universally. For our purposes within this workbook, we have

chosen to translate Metta as ‘Befriending’.

Why is ‘Befriending’ the appropriate response when dealing with powerful urges, ingrained patterns, and the discomfort of letting go? Because meeting these difficult inner states with harshness, aversion, self-criticism, or judgment often backfires! It tightens the knot of suffering, increases resistance, and can sometimes, even fuel the desire to escape back into old patterns of destructive behaviours that limit freedom. As the Buddhist teacher Christina Feldman suggests: *"It is always easier to hate and blame than to understand and embrace the difficult and painful"*. Befriending offers an alternative way by embracing difficulty with kindness.

Self-reflections

Consider the experience with friendliness and kindness:

- ★ What is the ease or difficulty in genuinely wishing well for the self? What thoughts or feelings arise that hinder this?
- ★ When self-criticism arises, what does that inner voice sound like? What is its felt experience in the body?
- ★ Consider an experience of uncomplicated kindness towards another. What is the felt sense of that? Can a similar feeling be directed towards the self?
- ★ How might cultivating ‘*Metta*’ change the relationship with cravings or difficult emotions as they arise?
- ★ What does ‘befriending experience’ mean to you?
- ★ What is the quality of the inner voice that arises during moments of struggle? Is it harsh, critical, or kind?
- ★ What does the concept of unconditional self-kindness bring up? Does it feel accessible, difficult, or unfamiliar?
- ★ Can instances be recalled when an act of kindness—from the self or another—made a positive difference in a challenging situation?
- ★ What obstacles to kindness can be observed? Are there beliefs that it is self-indulgent or that one does not deserve it?
- ★ Reflecting on the ‘near enemy’ of befriending (conditional friendliness), are there ways in which kindness is offered to the self only on a conditional basis (for example, ‘kindness will be offered if success is achieved’)?

Journaling prompts

Explore the practice of befriending more deeply through journaling:

- ★ **Self-kindness practice:** Commit to practicing ‘Metta phrases’ for the self for ten minutes daily for one week. Journal about the experience: What was the ease or difficulty? What feelings arose? Were any shifts noticed?
- ★ **Obstacles to self-kindness:** Write honestly about beliefs or feelings that make it difficult to be kind to the self (for example, "I don't deserve it," "I am weak," "I need to be hard on myself"). Gently question these beliefs.
- ★ **Extending befriending:** Choose one category (benefactor, friend, neutral person, difficult person – starting where it feels manageable). Practice extending the ‘Befriending phrases’ to them in your mind for a few minutes. Journal about the experience.
- ★ **Kindness in action:** Identify one small, concrete act of kindness that could be offered – either to the self (for example, taking a restful break, forgiving a small mistake) or to another – today. Plan and reflect on it afterwards.
- ★ **Universal friendliness:** Reflect on the line from the ‘Karaniya Metta Sutta’ about radiating boundless friendliness "Above, below and all across." What would be the felt sense of approaching the world, just for a few moments, with this attitude?
- ★ **Observing the inner critic:** For one day, notice the arising of the inner critic. Instead of engaging with it, simply note its presence and its message. Later, write about this process of observation without judgment. What happens when the critical voice is not automatically believed? “I see you, Mara!”
- ★ **Kindness versus other responses:** Think of a recent challenging situation. What was the initial reaction? Was it kindness, or something else like anger, fear, or blame? Explore how that reaction affected the situation and overall well-being. How might responding with kindness have changed the experience?
- ★ **The rope metaphor:** Reflect on how ‘Befriending’ can act as a ‘rope’ binding your raft. How might this quality provide strength and flexibility when facing challenges, preventing your raft from falling apart under the stress of craving or aversion?
- ★ **Observing the habitual responses:** When a strong urge or a difficult emotion arises, what is the immediate, habitual response of the mind? Is it

one of aversion and a desire to push away, or is there space for a different quality, like friendliness or curiosity?

- ★ **Conditional kindness versus unconditional kindness:** Consider the distinction between conditional affection (the ‘near enemy’) and unconditional kindness. Can instances be recalled where kindness was offered to the self only when things were going well? What would it mean to offer friendliness even in moments of perceived failure or imperfection?
 - ★ **Befriending experience:** Reflect on the idea of befriending an experience, not just a person. What would it be like to meet a physical pain, a moment of anxiety, or an unwelcome thought with the same gentle intention offered in *Metta* practice? “*Hello darkness, my old friend*”.
 - ★ **Body connection:** Notice the connection between the body and the mind's attitude. What physical sensations accompany a state of self-criticism or ill-will? Conversely, what subtle shifts in the body can be felt when a phrase of kindness is silently repeated?
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Remember to remember

Befriending (*Metta*) is the appropriate response and an essential heart practice for providing the warmth, acceptance, and resilience needed to undertake the challenging work of ‘Abandoning’ harmful craving and compulsions. It is the second vital rope that softens our approach, counters self-aggression, and makes the often-difficult process of letting go sustainable and ultimately healing. By consciously cultivating friendliness towards the self – its struggles, its setbacks, its inherent worthiness – and extending it outwards, an inner environment is created where harmful cravings have less power and wholesome states can flourish.

Remember Gotama’s words: the self is truly deserving of its own kindness. As we continue to gather the materials to build our raft, within the second stage of our journey, let self-kindness infuse our efforts. It is the gentle strength that holds our raft together as we navigate troubled waters towards the freedom of the safe shore. Having established this crucial heart quality - an appropriate response to abandoning harmful cravings and compulsions – we are better prepared to explore the specific tools and insights needed for this abandoning, beginning with ‘Mindfulness of feeling tones’.

"Kindness is the revolutionary act of treating ourselves and others with a tenderness that recognises the suffering inherent in the human condition." ~ Pema Chödrön

"Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind; the second is to be kind, and the third is to be kind." ~ Henry James

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