



Loving-Kindness: Steading your Mind in Difficult Times July 13, 2020

Dear friends,

We humans are built for community. During this time of social distancing, it's crucial that we remain connected, holding one another in love and support. It's for this reason that **each week during the COVID-19 crisis, we'll be sending you a short resource** to use in a virtual meeting held over the phone or via video conferencing. This weekly resource is a great tool to stay connected with your current and past JFM small groups. It is also a great resource to use individually, or with groups of friends or family to stay connected and engaged in a meaningful way. These reflections will provide a time to pray together, check in with one another, and have conversation around a short passage.

In the meantime, we're offering tips and tools for facilitating all of our current programs through videoconferencing. While we hope that this weekly resource will spiritually sustain your community while in quarantine, [now is also the perfect time to start one of our regular programs](#). The call to seek justice is just as important now as ever!

Last but not least, generosity is, at its core, a benefit to everyone. When you donate today, your gift helps us sustain individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out](#). Also, please feel free to [forward this resource](#) to friends and family!

Thank you for continuing to care for one another during this time of heightened anxiety. Know that we are praying for you!

Stay well,

The JustFaith Ministries Staff



Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

When everyone has dialed in, begin your time together with these or similar words:

Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you, despite that we can't be together in person. Today we'll begin with prayer and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation around a short reflection before closing in prayer. Most importantly, though, this will be a time to care for one another and to be the community we're called to be.

Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.

Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer. As you read each line of the prayer, pause for 10 seconds between verses. Encourage folks to inhale deeply for the count of 4, and exhale for the count of 6 as you pause for 10 seconds. This encourages mindful listening.

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you. Your ideas mature gradually - let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste.



Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955)

<https://friendsofsilence.net/>

Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

Ask these open-ended questions. If you're by yourself, journal about them.

Note: If you're with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.

- **Before we begin this week's reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).
- **What is something you're struggling with this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

Other optional questions include: What is something you've learned about yourself during this time of social distancing? Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week? What is one new behavior you'd like to continue doing when the virus has passed us by?

Reflection (15 minutes or so)

Introduce the reflection with these or similar words:

This year has presented us with many lessons. Its stage has been set with uncertainty, pain, and fear. While it is easy to feel out of control, we can't forget that we always have a choice available - what we cultivate in our minds. This gives us the freedom to hold space for a certain amount of tragedy in the world and respond with love. It is not an easy practice, and it requires courage to open your heart a little wider than you feel comfortable - here we can radiate compassion. As we steady our minds, our hearts bloom in love. Exploring the concept of "Loving-Kindness" from the Buddhist tradition can support our journey with a Christian contemplative practice and help us live out the idea of what "love of neighbor" really means.

Read aloud the following excerpt from the article, "Open Your Heart Further," written for Lion's Roar by Pema Khandro Rinpoche [the full article can be found here: <https://www.lionsroar.com/open-your-heart-further/>].

Don't give up on love. When love is hard or painful, open your heart even further...

We can open up to greater love in moments of sorrow because our vulnerability and our compassion are intertwined...

We can begin to open our hearts by feeling compassion toward ourselves, and then bring to mind others who are in the same situation. This practice goes against our usual self-protective instinct. Yet it turns out that when we contemplate the suffering of others and open our hearts further, it actually gives us more strength. It gives us purpose and endurance. Opening our hearts awakens our intrinsic courage because our compassion and natural heroism are connected.

But our wish to live a life of loving-kindness is often eclipsed by our habitual neuroses. We may start out with loving intentions, but we get so easily co-opted by grasping at expectations or getting lost in fluffy artifice. So how can we cultivate boundless love in a way that is grounded in wisdom?

... boundless love should be developed "one by one." We start from our own immediate experience. We remember the love we received from one person, or that we feel for one person. Then we expand it to include another, and another, until our love includes all beings as limitless as the sky.

Boundless love extends out from the love we know firsthand. This is why Buddhism reminds us to remember the love we have received from our mothers and fathers (or caregivers), and



then build on that. Maybe our relationship with our parents was not an easy love, maybe even thinking in this way brings up heartache. But that is part of the practice too, as cultivating love puts us in touch with the whole experience of life—both the beauty of the world and its pain.

Remembering the experience of love and kindness that we have received urges us onward beyond the separation we feel. It helps melt the walls we build between ourselves and others. Discovering our natural tenderness, we realize that the path of loving-kindness is a more authentic way of life because our authenticity and the tender heart of compassion are tied together.

The practice of love is hard at times, even outrageously painful. One day we resolve to be loving and kind and maybe the next day we can't connect with love at all. What is missing? Where is our love when we can't feel it?

Then read the following excerpt from the article, “How to Practice Metta for a Troubled Time,” written for Lion’s Roar by Mushim Patricia Ikeda [the full article can be found here: <https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-metta-for-a-troubled-time/>].

Metta [Loving-Kindness] meditation is not a magical spell you can cast on the population of the U.S. in order to produce a state of utopian bliss. It is not a cure-all for oppression and the unequal distribution of power and privilege.

Metta meditation doesn't work like that. It's about being determined, courageous, and patient in purifying your own heart and mind.

Metta is a meditation practice that involves concentrating and reciting, either silently or out loud, phrases of good wishes toward yourself and others. Metta is usually translated as “loving-kindness,” but I prefer Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s translation of metta as “good will.”

What this form of meditation is designed to do—and for many people does very successfully—is to purify us of hatred and ill will. Good will is the antidote to ill will. Good will, or loving-kindness, is the antidote to ill will, hatred, and enmity.

When you practice good will, you remove fear and negative reactivity from your mind. For me, this is what is most important about many people practicing metta, together or



individually, whenever it is necessary to reduce the conflict and hatred that emerge so quickly from fear and spread in a viral fashion.

When you practice metta, you kind of work up a ladder. You go from people like family and friends, people it's easy for you to feel good will toward, to those you don't know. Then, ascending as you are able to—not forcing anything—you extend wishes for safety, happiness, and peace to those you dislike and those you consider your enemies. Finally, at the ultimate level, you extend your good will to all living beings in the universe.

It's a pretty tall order—although possible for some people—to feel loving and kind toward those who are perpetrators of violence and oppression. Even to feel good will toward them might be difficult. So we can frame this meditation as the cultivation of nonhatred and nonfear in order to become stronger, more stable, and more centered. Then we can move forward in a positive fashion to battle oppression and create some improvement for our communities and the United States overall.

Let us pause for silent meditation.

Pause for 30 seconds.

Then ask:

- How are these passages speaking to you today? What wisdom can you receive from them? How can you take these lessons and apply them to your Christian faith?
- Pema Khandro Rinpoche states, “*The practice of love is hard at times, even outrageously painful. One day we resolve to be loving and kind and maybe the next day we can't connect with love at all. What is missing? Where is our love when we can't feel it?*” Can you reflect on a time over the past 6 months where this was true for you?
- Have you ever tried a loving-kindness practice during your prayer time? If so, how have you used it? Do you have an example of how it changed your relationship with someone?

Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Then say: Before we join in the closing meditation let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.



Pause for 30 seconds

You can close your eyes or keep them open during the meditation. Then play the following guided metta (loving-kindness) meditation from Jack Kornfield.

Worldwide Healing of Love

<https://jackkornfield.com/worldwide-healing-of-love/>

Then, in these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it:

We are disciples on a journey.

We are the body of Christ, broken for the world.

We hold one another as we carry the concerns of our neighbors.

If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.

Leader: We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country. Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more just and peaceful world. Amen.