

INSPIRE 2026 – International Schema Therapy Conference, Thessaloniki, Greece

Developing Self-Love and Self-Acceptance

Definitions: Love & Compassion

Love (pali *mettā*; sanskrit *maitrī*):

The wish that oneself or other sentient beings may experience happiness and well-being. (Love in this sense is unconditional, non-possessive, and does not depend on the other behaving in a particular way.)

Compassion (*karuṇa*):

the wish that oneself or other sentient beings may not experience suffering (or be free from it)

The classical progression — five groups:

1. Giving to oneself
 2. Giving to a close person
 3. Giving to a neutral person
 4. Giving to a neutral person
 5. Giving to enemies or those who have caused harm (generally presupposes the capacity to forgive oneself and others)
-

Key Distinction: Love vs. Attachment

The Buddhist Definition:

Attachment is a mental factor that perceives an impermanent object as inherently attractive and consequently desires to possess it. (Yeshe Gyaltsen)

Attachment is conditional and easily turns to aversion when its object changes or disappears. Love and attachment must be clearly distinguished — conflating them is one of the most common obstacles in practice.

In practice:

- Love wishes well — attachment wants and clings
- Love can remain stable and even hold an angry person with warmth — attachment easily turns to disappointment, anger, and frustration
- Love can be extended to all beings — attachment is selective and possessive

Self-love in this sense is not narcissism: it is a stable, warm, unconditional goodwill toward oneself (see research by Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff)

A further distinction: to have a wish for the fulfilment of a basic need — such as being seen or loved — is not attachment. It is a wholesome aspiration, because its fulfilment genuinely leads to greater well-being.

Key Distinction: Love vs. Attachment

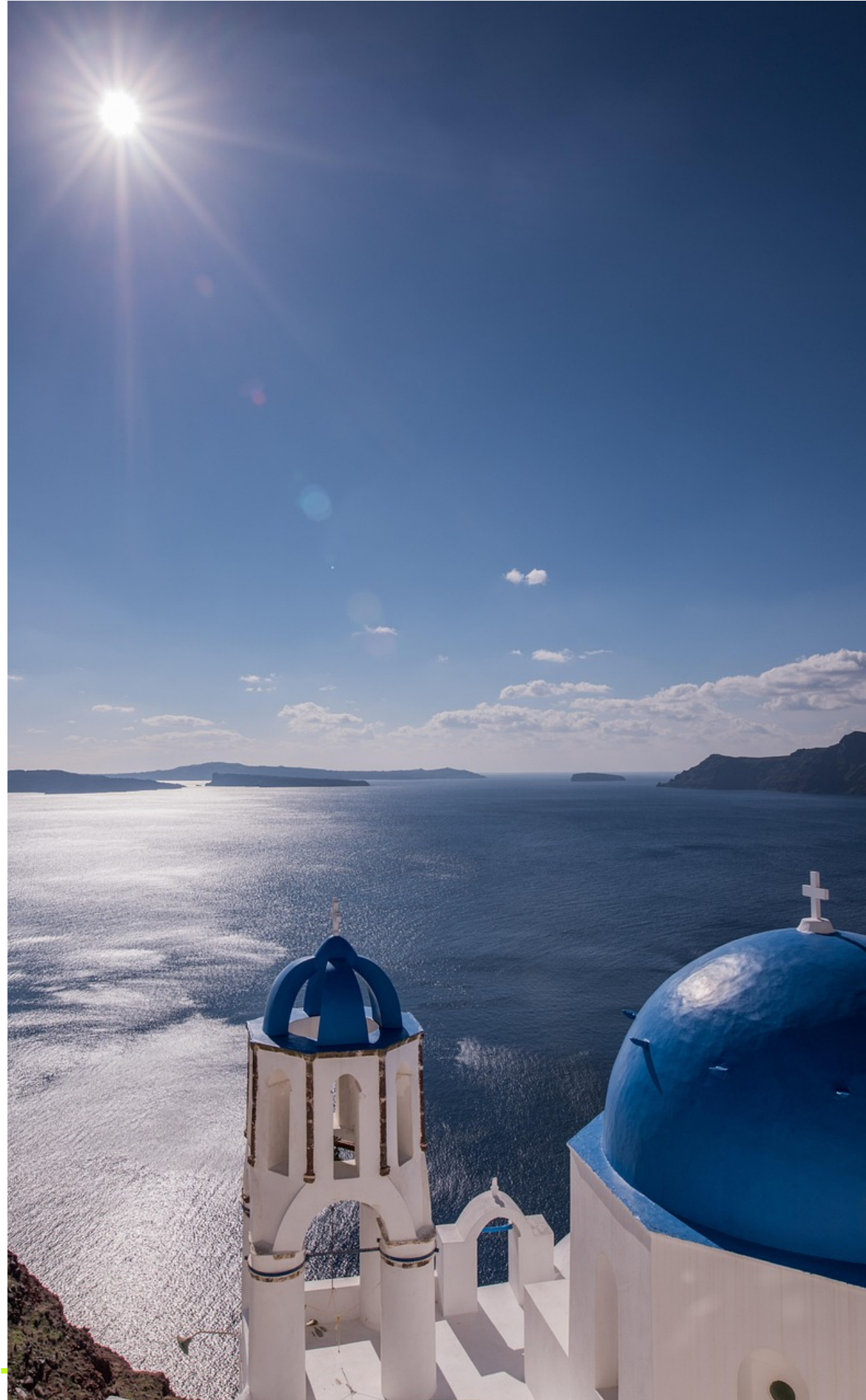
Further possible obstacles to self-love:

- Too intellectual — understanding the concept without embodying the feeling
- Insufficient love and compassion received in childhood
- Trauma or deep relational wounds

Possible strategies:

- Clear conceptual distinction between love and attachment
 - Fake it until you make it — beginning with small, manageable steps
 - Embracing and staying with difficult emotions rather than bypassing them
 - Patience and no expectations — this is a gradual cultivation
 - Ensuring physical and emotional safety, especially with trauma
 - If possible, seek and maintain contact with a person (or persons) who offers genuine love without attachment — as the schema therapist does in the role of limited reparenting
-

Love is like the midday sun



Love (mettā) radiates equally in all directions — bright, warm, unconditional. Like the midday sun, it does not choose where to shine. It simply shines and spreads warmth — including itself!

Compassion is like the evening sun



Compassion (karuṇā) meets pain and suffering — just as the evening sun meets the darkness. To not be swallowed by that darkness, compassion needs to go hand in hand with *peaceful acceptance*: the capacity *to be with* suffering, *to hold it*, without being overwhelmed by it, fleeing from it, or denying it — which are the typical responses of the threat system.

Metta (Loving-Kindness): Four Methods

Method 1: Brach / Kornfield

1. Direct loving-kindness toward a beloved person or being
2. Receive it back from them
3. In a third step, take it inward — toward oneself

Method 2 — Sensing One's Own Reality

1. Feel into the inner longing for well-being and happiness (and freedom from suffering)
2. Affirm this longing and gently amplify it
3. Recognise the basic right to happiness
4. Allow a warm-hearted feeling to grow — images such as the sun, or a mother opening her arms to embrace her most beloved child

Method 3 — A Space Full of Love

1. Begin with a space meditation — resting in open, boundless space
2. Allow the space to fill with love — from the universe, from a divine figure, an imagined being of light, just warm light or whatever resonates

Method 4 — Ayya Khema: Breathing Love

A simple, direct practice: breathe in *peace* — breathe out *love*. The love breathed out is not directed away from oneself; it includes oneself.

With each exhalation, love extends outward and simultaneously returns inward.

Fun fact: The US Declaration of Independence (1776) lists “*the pursuit of happiness*” as an unalienable right — alongside life and liberty.

Metta Phrases: Brach & Kornfield

Below are traditional metta phrases and alternative phrases.

You can start with a simple set and invite people to change them in whatever way reflects their best intentions. It can be helpful to give examples from the lists below.

May you/I be filled with lovingkindness.

May you/I be safe from inner and outer dangers.

May you/I be well in body and mind.

May you/I be at ease and happy.

May I be safe.

May I be peaceful.

May I be healthy.

May I live with ease.

In addition, these phrases can help people generate greater self-compassion when they are experiencing feelings of personal inadequacy:

May I be kind to myself. May I accept myself as I am.

Or if the suffering stems from external circumstances: *May I accept my life as it is.*

Alternatives if “May I” feels too much like a prayer or asking permission from an authority figure: The phrase can begin, “I wish to be,” or, “I hope . . .” or, “I want.” You can also add “as possible” if that is more realistic: “May I be as safe as possible.”

MAY I BE SAFE

May I be free from danger

May I be safe from inner and outer harm.

May I be safe and protected from inner and outer danger and harm.

May I live in safety.

May I be free from fear.

May I know safety and the causes of safety.

MAY I BE HAPPY

May I be peaceful.

May I be happy and joyful.

May I be liberated.

May I have mental happiness.

May I know happiness and the causes of happiness.

MAY I BE HEALTHY

May I be physically strong and healthy.

May I be free from pain.

May I be healed.

May I have physical well-being.

May I make a friend of my body.

May I embody my love and understanding.

May I know physical happiness and the causes of physical happiness.

MAY I LIVE WITH EASE

May the elements of daily life—work, family—go easily and not be a struggle.

May I live with ease of well-being.

May lovingkindness manifest throughout my life.

May I dwell in peace.

May I know ease of well-being and the causes of ease and well-being.

May I be filled with lovingkindness, held in lovingkindness.

May I touch/know a deep and natural peace.

May I be happy and healthy.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

May I accept myself completely just as I am in this moment.

May I take care of myself wisely, happily, joyfully.

May I experience love, joy, wonder, and wisdom in this life just as it is.

May I be well in body and mind. May I be held in the heart of love.

May I awaken (to the truth of loving presence or to full liberation) and be free (of suffering).

The Traditional Metta Phrases



The Traditional Metta Phrases



The Traditional Metta Phrases

For oneself:

Ahaṃ sukhito homi

May I be happy

Niddukkho homi

May I be free from suffering

Avero homi

May I be free from enmity and animosity

Abyāpajjho homi

May I be free from oppression

Anīgho homi

May I be free from trouble

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi

May I look after myself with ease

For others (sabbe sattā = all beings / or tuṃ = you):

Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu

May all beings be happy

Niddukkha hontu

May they be free from suffering

Avera hontu

May they be free from enmity

Abyāpajjha hontu

May they be free from oppression

Anīgha hontu

May they be free from trouble

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharany

May they look after themselves with ease

How to adapt the phrases:

For a specific person, replace sabbe sattā (all beings) with tvaṃ (you singular) or tuṃhē (you plural).

For the five groups, work through: oneself → close person → neutral person → person toward whom one feels aversion → enemies / those who have caused harm.

Note: The phrases can also be shortened to three: May I/you/all beings be happy — be free from suffering — live with ease. Use whatever resonates and opens the heart.

Sources:

Visuddhimagga (Buddhaghosa, 5th century) — the classical Pali meditation manual | Bhante Sujiva, Loving Kindness Meditation (follows this tradition directly) | Karaniya Metta Sutta (Sn 1.8) — the Buddha's discourse on loving-kindness
