

## **Appreciative Joy Meditation**

Find a comfortable way to sit, and allow your eyes to close. Bring attention into the present-time experience of the body.

*Pause*

Relax any physical tension that is being held in the body by softening the belly; relax the eyes and jaw and allow your shoulders to naturally fall away from the head.

*Pause*

After a short period of settling into present-time awareness, begin to reflect on your deepest desire for happiness or freedom from suffering. Allow your heart's truest longing for truth and well-being to come into consciousness.

*Pause*

With each breath, breathe into the heart's center the acknowledgment and appreciation of the joy and happiness you have experienced in your life.

*Pause*

Slowly begin to silently offer yourself appreciative and encouraging phrases with the intention to uncover the heart's sometimes-hidden response of gratitude. Your phrases can be as simple as the following:

*May I learn to appreciate the happiness and joy I experience.*

*Pause*

*May the joy I experience continue and grow.*

*Pause*

*May I be filled with gratitude and nonattached appreciation.*

If those phrases do not mean anything to you, create your own words to

meditate on. Find a few simple phrases that have an ap-preciative intention, and slowly begin to offer these well wishes to yourself.

*Pause*

As you sit in meditation repeating these phrases in your mind, the attention will be drawn, as with mindfulness meditation, back into thinking about other things or resisting and judging the practice or your own capacity for appreciation and gratitude. It takes a gentle and persistent effort to return to the next phrase each time the attention wanders:

*Pause*

*May I learn to appreciate the happiness and joy I experience.*

Feel the breath and the body's response to each phrase.

*Pause*

*May the joy I experience grow.*

Notice where the mind goes with each phrase.

*Pause*

*May I be filled with gratitude and nonattached appreciation.*

*Pause*

Allow the mind and body to relax into the reverberations of each phrase.

Simply repeat these phrases over and over to yourself like a kind of mantra or statement of positive intention. But don't expect to instantly feel grateful through this practice. Sometimes all we see is our lack of appreciation and the judging mind's resistance.

*Pause*

Simply acknowledge what is happening and continue to repeat the phrases, being as friendly and merciful with yourself as possible in the

process.

*Two minutes of silence*

Now bring the attention back to the breath and body, again relaxing into the posture.

Then bring someone to mind who has been beneficial for you to know or know of, who has inspired you or brought joy to your life.

*Pause*

Recognize that just as you wish to be happy and successful in life that benefactor too shares the universal desire to be met with encouragement, support, and appreciation, begin offering him or her the phrases. Slowly repeat each phrase with that person in mind as the object of your well-wishing:

*Just as I wish to learn to appreciate the happiness and joy in life, may you too experience joy, and may you be filled with appreciation for your happiness and success.*

*Pause*

*May your happiness and joy increase.*

*Pause*

*May you be successful and met with appreciation.*

*Pause*

Continue offering these phrases from your heart to your benefactor's, developing the feeling of appreciation in relation to the joy and success of others. When the mind gets lost in a story, memory, or fantasy, simply return to the practice. Begin again offering appreciation and gratitude to the benefactor.

*Two minutes of silence*

Now let the benefactor go and return to your direct experience of the breath and body. Pay extra attention to your heart or emotional experience.

*Pause*

Then bring to mind someone that you do not know well, someone who is neutral. Someone you neither love nor hate—perhaps someone you don't know at all, a person you saw here today, or walking down the street or in traffic. With the understanding that the desire for joy is universal, begin offering that person the appreciative phrases:

*May your happiness and joy increase.*

*May the joy in your life continue and grow.*

*May you be successful and met with appreciation.*

*Two minutes of silence*

Now bring attention back to your breath and body. Then expand the practice to include family and friends toward whom your feelings may be mixed, both loving and at times difficult:

*May your happiness and joy increase.*

*May the joy in your life continue and grow.*

*May you be successful and met with appreciation.*

*Two minutes of silence*

Now bring attention back to your breath and body. Then expand the practice to include the difficult people in your life and in the world. (By difficult we mean those whom you have put out of your heart, those toward whom you feel jealous of or hold resentment.)

*Pause*

With even the most basic understanding of human nature, it will become

clear that all beings wish to be met with appreciation; all beings—even the annoying, unskillful, violent, confused, and greedy—wish to experience joy. With this in mind, and with the intention to free yourself from jealousy, fear, and ill will, allow someone who is a source of difficulty in your mind or heart to be the object of your appreciation meditation.

*Pause*

Meet that person with the same phrases, paying close attention to your heart-mind's response:

*May your happiness and joy increase.*

*May the joy in your life continue and grow.*

*May you be successful and met with appreciation.*

*Two minutes of silence*

Now let's begin to expand the field of appreciation to all those who are in your immediate vicinity. Start by sending phrases of appreciation to everyone in the room with us. Then gradually expand to those in our town or city, allowing your positive intention of meeting everyone with appreciation to spread out in all directions.

*Pause*

Imagine covering the whole world with these positive thoughts. Send appreciation to the north and south, east and west. Radiate gratitude and appreciation to all beings in existence—those above and below, the seen and the unseen, those being born and those who are dying. With a boundless and friendly intention, begin to repeat the phrases of appreciative joy:

*May all beings experience happiness and joy.*

*May the joy in this world continue and grow.*

*May all beings be successful and met with appreciation.*

*Two minutes of silence*

Now it is time to let go of the phrases and bring attention back to your breath and body, investigating the sensations and emotions that are present now. Then, whenever you are ready, allow your eyes to open and your attention to come back to your surroundings.

(Ring Bell)