

LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

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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.

One minute of silence

Begin to reflect on your deepest desire for happiness and freedom from suffering. Allow your heart's sincere longing for truth and well-being to come into your consciousness.

Pause

With each breath, breathe into the heart's center the acknowledgment of your wish to be free from harm, safe and protected, and to experience love and kindness.

Pause

Slowly begin to offer yourself kind and friendly phrases with the intention to uncover the heart's sometimes-hidden loving and kind response. Your phrases can be as simple as the following:

May I be happy.

May I be at ease.

May I be free from suffering.

If those phrases do not mean anything to you, create your own words to meditate on. Find a few simple phrases that have a loving and kind 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 back into thinking about other things or resisting and judging the practice or your capacity for love. It takes a gentle and persistent effort to return to the next phrase each time the attention wanders:

May I be happy.

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

Pause

May I be at ease.

Notice where the mind goes with each phrase.

Pause

May I be free from suffering.

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 loving or kind as result of this practice. Sometimes all we see is our lack of kindness and the judging mind's resistance. Simply acknowledge what is happening and continue to repeat the phrases, being as friendly and merciful with yourself as possible in the process.

Three minutes of silence

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

Pause

Now please bring someone to mind who has been beneficial for you to know or know of, someone who has inspired you or shown you great kindness. Recognizing that just as you wish to be happy and at peace that benefactor too shares the universal desire for well-being and love,

begin offering her or him the loving and kind phrases. Slowly repeat each phrase with that person in mind as the object of your well-wishing:

Just as I wish to be happy, peaceful, and free, may you too be happy.

Pause

May you be at ease.

Pause

May you be free from suffering.

Pause

Continue offering these phrases from your heart to your benefactor's, developing the feeling of kindness and response of love to others. When the mind gets lost in a story, memory, or fantasy, simply return to the practice. Begin again offering loving-kindness to the benefactor.

One minute of silence

Having spent a few minutes sending loving-kindness to the benefactor, let him or her go and return to your direct experience of the breath and body. Pay extra attention to your heart or emotional experience.

Pause

Now expand the practice to include family and friends toward whom your feelings may be mixed, both loving and difficult:

May you be happy.

May you be at ease.

May you be free from suffering.

Two minutes of silence

Now bring attention back to your breath and body again. 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 hold resentment.)

With even the most basic understanding of human nature, it will become clear that all beings wish to be met with love and kindness; all beings— even the annoying, unskillful, violent, confused, and unkind— wish to be happy.

Pause

With this in mind and with the intention to free yourself from hatred, fear, and ill will, allow someone who is a source of difficulty in your mind or heart to be the object of your loving-kindness meditation.

Pause

Meeting the difficult person with the same phrases:

May you be happy.

May you be at ease.

May you be free from suffering.

Two minutes of silence

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

Pause

Imagine covering the whole world with these positive thoughts. Send loving-kindness to the north and south, east and west.

Pause

Radiate an open heart and fearless mind 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:

May all beings be happy.

Pause

May all beings be at ease.

Pause

May all beings be free from suffering.

Two minutes of silence

Now 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)