

Loving Kindness Meditation

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We are often taught as children that we should love others. But how do we learn to love others? We are born to love, and we learn to love through example certainly, but can we more directly expand our capacity for love? How do we learn to grow our love? And what happens if we don't particularly like, never mind love, ourselves or someone else? Loving kindness meditation practice is a practical means by which we encourage love for ourselves and others. Sometimes our love comes easily and spontaneously, but sometimes we need to work at it; cultivate it; develop it. Kindness and compassion are learned skills which can be cultivated and developed.

Loving kindness meditation, is a method for developing compassion. It is a practice that helps us to actively cultivate positive emotional states towards ourselves and others, so that we become more patient, kind, accepting, and compassionate. It has no conditions. It does not depend on whether one "deserves" it or not. It can help free us to love from abundance, not limited simply by how others treat us. It is not restricted to friends and family; it extends out from personal categories to include all people, and all of creation. The practice can help move us from judgment to acceptance, from isolation to unity, from hate to love. You don't need to immediately get rid of or ignore feelings of dislike or hate. You don't need to fix yourself or anyone else. The practice simply encourages movement in the broad direction of care for ourselves and others.

During the practice, we internally say kind and loving phrases, repeating them several times, beginning with ourselves, for unless we have a measure of unconditional love for and acceptance of ourselves, it is difficult to extend it to others. Then we include others who are special to us, next strangers or acquaintances. We then broaden our love to include our enemies, and, ultimately, we cultivate love for all people and all of creation. This meditation uses words, images, and emotions to cultivate love and kindness toward ourselves and others. Gradually, both the visualization and the phrases blend into the actual experience; the thoughts, feelings and sensations of loving kindness. The saying, "take the body and the mind will follow" can be useful here. Act, "as if" and see how behavior and attitude might influence thinking and emotions.

Begin The Meditation:

Sit in a relatively comfortable posture encouraging a sense of ease. Take 3 long, slow breaths in and out. Now allow the breath to move naturally, breathing gently. Briefly scan the body and mind, noticing any areas of mental blockage or tension; any judgments, or resentments. Then, drop beneath that to the place where you want strength, health and peace for yourself and for everyone else.

Continuing to breathe in and out, use the following (or similar) phrases, applying them to various people: "May (add name) be filled with lovingkindness, may (add name) be filled with healing, may (add name) be filled with peace." Silently, say them, repeating each phase 2 or 3 times. We start with cultivating love for ourselves and move on to others.

1. **Myself:** Let's begin by offering ourselves kindness. Create an image of yourself in your mind. It may be an image of yourself as you are now, or maybe you as a small child, or at another time in your life. Look for an image that helps you connect to yourself as one who is worthy of receiving lovingkindness. Try to cultivate a soft, loving heart towards yourself. Extend grace and love toward yourself. Now, imagine yourself as safe and secure. Just let yourself rest for a moment. (Pause)

Now, silently say:

May I be filled with lovingkindness
May I be filled with healing
May I be filled with peace

2. **A Loved One:** Next, move to a person who most invites the feeling of pure unconditional love; the kind of love that rarely depends on you getting anything back. Imagine your partner, a best friend, a sister or brother; a child or parent; someone who naturally and spontaneously brings you deep feelings of love, tenderness, and care. This person can be living or dead. Get a mental picture of that person. Open your heart and extend love and kindness towards them. Imagine this person safe and secure, letting them rest for a moment. (Pause)

Extend kindness and peace to this person whom you love. Repeat the phrases as you picture them in your mind's eye. You may insert their name in place of the word, "you". Repeat the phrases 2 or 3 times.

Now, silently say:

May you/(name) be filled with lovingkindness

May you/(name) be filled with healing

May you/(name) be filled with peace

3. **A Neutral Person:** Now move to a neutral person, someone for whom you feel neither strong like nor dislike; a waiter or waitress; a toll collector; the cashier at the grocery store. As you repeat the phrases, allow yourself to feel tenderness and care for this person's welfare. Open your heart to this person and extend love and grace towards them. Imagine this person safe and secure, letting them rest for a moment. (Pause) Repeat the phrases 2 or 3 times using the person's name if you know it. Now, silently say:

May you/(name) be filled with lovingkindness

May you/(name) be filled with healing

May you/(name) be filled with peace

4. **A Difficult Person:** Now move to someone with whom you have difficulty. This is someone who causes tension, anger or negative emotions when you interact with them or when you remember them. This person can be living or dead. Imagine this person in your mind's eye, and try to hold them gently in your heart, with feelings of benevolence and gentleness. If feelings of anger or tension arise, try to release these feelings by just letting go and opening your heart. You are not excusing the hurt they have caused you, you're just working with your own capacity to express kindness and love to even those who are difficult or hurtful. If you have difficulty doing this, you can say before the phrases, "To the best of my ability I wish that you may be...." Imagine this difficult person safe and secure, letting them rest for a moment. (Pause) If you continue to feel ill will toward this person, return to your loved one and let the loving kindness arise again. Now, silently say:

May you/(name) be filled with lovingkindness

May you/(name) be filled with healing

May you/(name) be filled with peace

5. **All:** Finally, radiate lovingkindness out to all creation. Stay in touch with the ember of warm, tender lovingkindness at the center of your being, and begin to visualize or engender a felt sense of all living things. All that has ever been made, all that is and was and is to come. Imagine a beautiful, blue-green earth in your mind, full of plants and animals and so many people, so many creatures. If you like, continue expanding the sense of loving kindness, filling the endless emptiness of the universe. Imagine this whole world or universe as safe and secure, letting it rest for a moment. (Pause). Now, silently say:

May all be filled with lovingkindness

May all be filled with healing

May all be filled with peace

Closing Note: Adjust the words and images in any way you wish. Create the exact phrases that best opens your heart to kindness and compassion. Repeat these phrases over and over again, letting the feelings permeate your body and mind. Practice this meditation for a number of weeks, until the sense of lovingkindness for yourself and others grows. This meditation may also bring up feelings contrary to lovingkindness, feelings of irritation and anger. If this happens, just be patient and kind toward yourself, allowing whatever arises to be received in a spirit of friendliness and kind affection, without judgement.