

Love and Kindness Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Fully or partially close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment. Put your hand on your heart for a moment as a reminder to be kind to yourself.

- Form an image of yourself sitting down. Note your posture on the chair as if you were seeing yourself from the outside
- Now bring your attention *inside* your body and feel the pulsation and vibration of your body.
- Locate your breathing where you can feel it most easily. Feel how your breath moves in your body, and when your attention wanders, gently feel the movement of your breath once again.
- After a few minutes, start to notice *physical sensations* of stress that you're holding in your body, perhaps in your neck, jaw, belly, or forehead.
- Also notice if you're holding some *difficult emotions*, such as worry about the future or uneasiness about the past. Understand that every human body bears stress and worry throughout the day.
- Now offer yourself goodwill *because* of what you're holding in your body right now. Say the following phrases to yourself, softly and gently:

May I be safe.

May I be peaceful.

May I be kind to myself.

May I accept myself as I am.

- When you notice that your mind has wandered, return to the words or the experience of discomfort in your body or mind. Go slow.
- If you are ever overwhelmed with emotion, you can always return to your breathing. You can also name the emotion, or find it in the physical body and soften that area. Then, when you're comfortable, return to the phrases.
- Finally, take a few breaths and just rest; sit quietly in your own body. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.
- Gently open your eyes.

2. When you feel comfortable resting with the flow of your breathing, picture someone in your life who loves you, or who loved you unconditionally. Evoking and giving yourself over to feeling the qualities of the selfless love and kindness they accord you, or accorded you, and the whole aura or field of their love for you—right here right now breathing with these feelings, bathing in them, resting in the warmth and radiance of their heartfelt embracing of you just as you are. Or drinking in the experience that you are unequivocally and unconditionally loved and accepted as you are—without having to be different, without having to be worthy of their love, without having to be particularly deserving.

In fact, you may not feel particularly worthy or deserving. That does not matter. It is in fact irrelevant. The relevant fact is that you were or are loved. Their love is for you, just as you are. For who you are now, already, and perhaps always have been. Allowing your own heart to bask in these feelings, to be cradled in them, entrained into them. To be rocked moment by moment in the swinging rhythmic beating of the loving heart of another. And in the cadences of your own breathing, allowing your heart to be held and bathed in this way, by the warmth of this radiant pulsing field of loving-kindness.

3. If you encounter some difficulty in bringing to mind or conjuring up such a person from memory in this moment, then see if you can imagine someone treating you in that way. And imagine with great vividness the feelings of love and kindness and regard. And that can actually serve equally well in this practice.

10. So, if you are open to expanding the field of loving-kindness out from your own heart and your own body and your own being, in your mind's eye and in your heart, evoking for now the feeling or image of an individual, a person for whom you have great affection, someone you were close to emotionally. Can you hold this person in your heart with the same quality of loving-kindness that you have been directing towards yourself? Whether it is a child or a parent, a brother or a sister, a grandparent or other relative near or distant, a close friend or a cherished neighbor, singly or together. Breathing with them in your heart. Holding them in your heart. Imagining them in your heart as best you can. Because, just to let you know, this practice is so intrinsically powerful that none of the imaging of yourself or others needs to be very vivid for it to be hugely effective. And wishing them well: *May she, he, they be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm. May she, he, they be happy and contented. May she, he, they be healthy and whole to whatever degree possible. May she, he, they experience ease of well-being.*

Linger, moment by moment, in the field of loving-kindness within your own heart. With these phrases as you voice them silently to yourself, and even more with the feeling behind them. Repeating them in order over and over, not mechanically, not like a mantra, but mindfully with full awareness, knowing what you're saying. Feeling the intention behind the feeling, the intention and feeling behind each phrase. *May she, he, they be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm. May she, he, they be happy and contented.*

May she, he, or they be healthy and whole to whatever degree possible. May she, he, or they experience ease of well-being.

And from here, if you care to, you can once again expand the field of awareness to include one or more individuals who are actually problematic for you in one way or another, with whom you share a difficult past, perhaps. Who may have harmed you in one way or another who for whatever reason you consider to be more of an adversary or an obstacle than a friend. This does not mean that you are being asked to forgive them for what they may have done to hurt you, or to cause you or others harm. You are simply recognizing that they too are human beings, that they too have aspirations, that they too, in all likelihood, desire to be happy and safe.