

## Meditation on Loving-kindness

The quality of loving-kindness is the fertile soil out of which an integrated spiritual life can grow. With a loving heart as the back ground, all that we attempt, all that we encounter, will open and flow more easily. While loving-kindness can arise naturally in us in many circumstances, it can also be cultivated.

The following meditation is a 2,500-year-old practice that uses repeated phrases, images, and feelings to evoke loving-kindness and friendliness toward oneself and others. You can experiment with this practice to see if it is useful for you. It is best to begin by repeating it over and over for fifteen or twenty minutes once or twice daily in a quiet place for several months. At first this meditation may feel mechanical or awkward or even bring up its opposite, feelings of irritation and anger. If this happens, it is especially important to be patient and kind toward yourself, allowing whatever arises to be received in a spirit of friendliness and kind affection.

In its own time, even in the face of inner difficulties, loving-kindness will develop.

Sit in a comfortable fashion. Let your body relax and be at rest. As best you can, let your mind be quiet, letting go of plans and preoccupations. Then begin to recite inwardly the following phrases directed to yourself. You begin with yourself because without loving yourself it is almost impossible to love others.

May I be filled with loving-kindness.

May I be well.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

May I be happy.

As you say the phrases, you may also wish to use the image from the Buddha's instructions: picture yourself as a young and beloved child, or sense yourself as you are now, held in a heart of loving-kindness. Let the feelings arise with the words. Adjust the words and images so that you find the exact phrases that best open your heart of kindness. Repeat the phrases again and again, letting the feelings permeate your body and mind.

Practice this meditation repeatedly for a number of weeks until the sense of loving-kindness for yourself grows.

When you feel ready, in the same meditation period you can gradually expand the focus of your loving-kindness to include others. After yourself, choose a benefactor, someone in your life who has truly cared for you. Picture them and carefully recite the same phrases, May he/she be filled with loving-kindness, and so forth. When loving-kindness for your benefactor has developed, begin to include other people you love in the meditation, picturing them and reciting the same phrases, evoking a sense of loving-kindness for them.

After this you can gradually begin to include others: friends, community members, neighbours, people everywhere, animals, the whole earth, and all beings. Then you can even experiment with including the most difficult people in your life, wishing that they, too, be filled with loving-kindness and peace. With some practice a steady sense of loving-kindness can develop and in the course of fifteen or twenty minutes you will be able to include many beings in your meditation, moving from yourself, to a benefactor and loved ones, to all beings everywhere.

Then you can learn to practice it anywhere. You can use this meditation in traffic jams, in buses and airplanes, in doctors' waiting rooms, and in a thousand other circumstances. As you silently practice this loving-kindness meditation among people, you will immediately feel a wonderful connection with them—the power of loving-kindness. It will calm your life and keep you connected to your heart.

*Used with the kind permission of the author and meditation teacher Jack Kornfield; from the book 'A Path With Heart' published by Rider & Co; ISBN-10: 0712657800*

## The Buddha's Words on Loving-kindness

*For one who is skilled in working out their own well-being,  
and who wishes to attain that state of perfect peace should act thus:*

*They should be able, honest and upright; gentle in speech, humble, not proud.  
They should be contented, easily supportable, not overly busy, and simple in living.  
They should be controlled in their senses, serene, prudent, courteous and enjoy solitude.  
Also, they must refrain from any action for which the wise would find fault.*

*Let them cultivate these thoughts: May all be well, happy and peaceful.  
Whatever living creatures there may be, without exception;  
Weak or strong, short or tall, small, middle sized or large, visible or invisible;  
Those living near or far, born or yet to be born;  
May all beings be well, happy and peaceful.*

*Let no one deceive nor despise another in any way;  
Let no one wish another harm in anger or frustration.  
Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so;  
Let one cultivate unconditional loving-kindness towards all beings.  
Let them radiate boundless loving-kindness towards the entire world,  
Above, below and all across, unrestricted, with compassion for all.  
Standing, walking, sitting or lying down, as long as they are awake,  
Let them develop this mindfulness.*

*This, they say, is 'Noble Living' here and now.  
Holding on to no wrong beliefs, being virtuous,  
Endowed with insight and having overcome all selfish desires,  
They are free from future sorrow.*