

Loving kindness

Welcome to the RelationKit mindfulness series. In this meditation we will develop the positive emotion of loving kindness, first for oneself, and then we will share and send out this love to those around us in our lives, remembering that unless we have this positive regard for ourselves first, it's harder to truly find love for others in our life. This meditation really helps us find inner peace.

Give yourself some time to become calm and steady, sitting or lying. Take a deep breath and as you breathe in, feel calmness spreading throughout the body. As you are breathing out, say to yourself silently, “*relax*”. Let the facial muscles soften, your jaw gently part and the tongue to be at ease. Allow the eyes to soften. Notice your neck and shoulders letting go, releasing, the chest and back muscles release, your arms relax, the hips un-grip and release, your legs relax, and your feet relax.

You can imagine your mind as a muscle also and relax your mind. If thoughts come up, let them be there, and then release them with the flow of your out-breaths.

Stay focused on your breath, and then expand your attention to your whole body, feeling your whole body breathing in, and feeling your whole body breathing out. When you notice your mind wanders, notice where it went, and gently bring it back to your breath.

When you are ready, allow some or perhaps all of these phrases to come to mind, changing the words if you choose, so that they connect to you and develop a friendliness – a sense of love - towards yourself:

May I be filled with loving kindness.

May I be safe and free from suffering.

May I be as happy and healthy as I can be.

May I be at peace.

Take your time to repeat those phrases silently to yourself. And then listen to any reaction in thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations. There is no need to question what arises – just noticing. This is for you.

If you find it difficult to bring forth any sense of friendship towards yourself, bring to mind a person, or even a pet, who either in the past or present, has loved or supported you no matter what. Once you have a clear sense of their love for you, see if you can return to giving this love to yourself:

May I be filled with loving kindness.

May I be safe and free from suffering.

May I be as happy and healthy as I can be.

May I be at peace.

Continue with this for a few more moments, speaking these words to yourself.

Now bring to mind a loved one, and wish them well in the same way, repeating the phrases, using he, she or they, as you prefer:

May they be filled with loving kindness.

May they be safe and free from suffering.

May they be as happy and healthy as I can be.

May they be at peace.

Once again, see what arises in mind and body as you hold the person in mind and heart, wishing them well. Take your time, breathing and pausing between phrases, listening closely to what comes up for you.

When you are ready to move on, choose a stranger. This may be someone you see all the time, maybe in the street or on the bus or train; someone you recognise, but may not know the name of; someone you feel neutral about, recognising that, although you do not know them, they probably also have a life full of hopes and fears as you have. They too wish to be happy, as you do. So, keeping them in heart and mind, repeat the phrases and wish them well.

May they be filled with loving kindness.

May they be safe and free from suffering.

May they be as happy and healthy as I can be.

May they be at peace.

Notice anything that comes up again, any resistance, any judgement, and continue to offer those phrases of loving kindness towards them.

Now, if you choose to develop this meditation further, you might wish to bring to mind someone whom you find difficult - past or present. Maybe you choose your child's other parent, but remember, it doesn't have to be the most difficult person in your life. Whoever you choose, now gently bring them to be in your heart and mind, accept that they, too, may wish, or have wished, to be happy, and to be free from suffering.

See if you can find it in your heart to repeat the phrases silently towards them:

May they be filled with loving kindness.

May they be safe and free from suffering.

May they be as happy and healthy as I can be.

May they be at peace.

Repeat those phrases out to those difficult people in your life, if you can. Pausing, listening, feeling anything that is occurring in your body. Seeing if you are able to explore these feelings without changing them or questioning yourself. Remember that if at time any you feel overwhelmed or gripped or taken away by strong feelings or thoughts, you can come back to the breath – back into your body - to anchor yourself into the present moment, where you'll treat yourself with kindness.

Finally, send loving kindness to all beings, including your loved ones, strangers and those whom you find difficult. The intention here is to send love and friendship to all living beings on the planet - and remembering that all living beings includes you as well.

May all of us be filled with loving kindness.

May all of us be safe and free from suffering.

May all of us be as happy and healthy as we can be.

May all of us be at peace.

Take time now just to sit with your breath and your body, resting in clear awareness of the present moment. Whatever feeling of this practice has been, recognise your own courage in taking time to nourish yourself and others in this way.

Remembering that loving kindness can be practiced anywhere. You can use this meditation when in queues or in traffic jams, when you're finding someone particularly difficult. As you silently practice this meditation around people, you will come to feel a deep connection with them. This is the power of loving kindness. It will calm you and bring you more peace to your mind. Sit in the energy of loving kindness for a few more moments.

And just when the time feels right for you, bringing your meditation to a close, and gently blinking your eyes back into the room.

Lots of love to you today. Take care and I'll see you next time.