

## LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

Loving Kindness is the quality that goes hand in hand with the practice of mindfulness. Loving Kindness is the “heartfulness” aspect of mindfulness. It is the meeting of ourselves and our experience with kindness – the welcoming and befriending of our experience whatever it is.

In Loving Kindness practice we transition from wishing ourselves compassion and kindness to extending that compassion and lovingkindness to others. Loving Kindness moves beyond suffering & compassion to include wishes for wellbeing and an aspiration for others and ourselves to be well and happy and free from suffering. Within it is the recognition that we are all inter-connected in so many ways. We see that when others are suffering, then we too suffer. We see the when others are happy and nourished, then this too benefits us. We can celebrate in the good fortune of others and feel a heart-felt compassion when we know that others are in difficulty.

So we will be using simple phrases...these phrases invite the qualities of love and compassion. We can't make these qualities come...we are watering the soil and holding the seeds of love and loving kindness.

In this practice we begin as we would in any other mindfulness practice, by settling into the body and bringing attention to whatever is arising noticing the breath as you breath in and out...and the quality of the breath in this moment...noticing the state of mind and any thoughts or emotions or mood state. During this meditation, feeling free to adjust your posture if you become uncomfortable.

And then...bringing to mind someone who has loved and cherished you in your life, simply for who you are – unconditionally. This may be someone who is still around in your life, or someone who is no longer with you. Sometimes we may have only experienced this for a moment in our lives...perhaps this has even been from an animal. Someone or some being for whom you've felt loved...allowing yourself to feel bathed in that love...to fill you...feeling what it feels like to feel kindness and care without having to change anything at all about yourself. – If neither a human or animal comes to mind who has offered such love – imagining what this would be like...how it would be for you right now...to be held unconditionally...and allowing it to fill you...and soothe you...

As you are sensing this, imagine this person/being directing loving kindness phrases to you...

May you be safe & protected

May you be well

May you be tender with the difficulties

May you be loving & strong

As you are ready, allowing this image to slowly dissolve...In the place of that person/being who has loved you unconditionally...place yourself. Offering yourself that same love...same kindness and care...that same affection & warmth...just as you are...not because of something you've done...but just as you are. It may help to use our imagination and to picture our self as a young child standing in front of us (perhaps five or six years of age), if that allows the feelings of loving kindness to flow more easily...and wishing ourselves the phrases...

May I be safe & protected

May I be well

May I be tender with the difficulties

May I be loving & strong

We are not trying to force anything or to squeeze out any particular feeling from our hearts. If things feel dry or distant, that is fine. That is our experience in this moment. We can allow whatever is there just to be there as it is. In time, we may find that our experience changes and deepens.

As you are ready, allowing that image of yourself to subside...resting in the chest and in the heart...and in it's place...bringing to mind a circle of loved ones, those who are dear to us... and imagine radiating out love to them... And then beginning to direct loving kindness phrases to them...holding them in our warm embrace...

May you be safe & protected

May I be well

May I be tender with the difficulties

May I be loving & strong

Lift your arms out to your sides, just a little bit, maybe 6" to 1' away from your body...as if you could hold hands with a circle of people. Imagine & feel that you're holding hands not just with your loved ones, but the circle of humanity...all of us together...struggling, full of love and tenderness, fear and confusion and every possibility...and yet we're going through this together...and when we hold hands we can offer support...whoever you are:

May you be free from hatred & fear...& confusion

May you be safe and protected

May you stay well

May you be tender & compassionate with all those around you and with all your own difficulties

May you be tender with your difficulties

May you be strong & loving

Send this out to the circle of humanity and your place in it.

As you are ready, returning awareness to the breath and the body – feeling what is here to be felt – knowing as well that even if this practice felt uncomfortable or even contrived – if it touched you in any way – you can continue for small moments, many times during the day - offering to yourself and others – a moment of warmth. Resting in the awareness of the heart – and when you are ready allowing your eye to open – noticing perhaps that you can be in touch with the heart even as you are receiving awareness of the environment.