

# Lovingkindness Meditation

## Introduction

Lovingkindness is an ancient meditation that, it is said, the Buddha first taught to monks who were so afraid of predatory animals that they were unable to meditate in the forest. The Buddha did not want to eliminate the healthy functioning of their fear circuitry, in response to real threats. Rather, he gave them a method to calm that circuitry, so it would not play tricks on their minds and get in the way of their meditation practice. In Buddhist psychology it is taught that kindness, love and compassion are the strongest antidotes to fear, anger, and hatred.

We can understand this practice in terms of key brain circuitries: (1) Wishing health, happiness, freedom from suffering, etc. harnesses the seeking circuitry to the pursuit of kindness, love and compassion. (2) Using the image and repeating the phrases harnesses visual and language brain circuits that might otherwise be lost in the “default mode” circuitry’s plans, daydreams, memories, etc. (3) Experiencing kindness, love and compassion in our bodies (a) occupies the embodiment circuitry with loving sensations, including warmth, softness, gentleness, etc., (b) activates the satisfaction circuitry, which can bring peace, contentment and be deeply fulfilling, and (c) calms the circuitries of seeking and fear/aversion.

## Sequence of Activities

1. Find an image that causes feelings and motivations of kindness, love and compassion to arise spontaneously and effortlessly. It could be a cute little baby, a puppy, a kitten – whatever works for you. Don’t use an image of someone or something about which you also have negative feelings or memories. Feel free to experiment with your imagination and/or *Google Images* until you find one that works for you.

Write your image here: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Find a comfortable position sitting on a cushion, pillow or chair. Give yourself some time to settle into the posture. Notice the points of contact between your body, the floor and whatever you’re sitting on or against. Notice your breathing without trying to change it.
3. Close your eyes and focus on the image, while repeating the phrases below – or other similar phrases that feel right to you, which you can write on the lines below. Again, feel free to experiment, but eventually stick with four simple phrases of kindness, love and compassion.

May you be happy \_\_\_\_\_

May you be healthy \_\_\_\_\_

May you be free of suffering \_\_\_\_\_

May you have a calm, gentle and loving mind \_\_\_\_\_

4. Whenever you get distracted (which is totally normal), gently bring your attention back to the image, the phrases, and the sensations arising in your body as you focus on the image, the words and your wishes for happiness, health, etc.
5. Do the practice for 5 to 15 minutes, as long as feels comfortable for you.

### **Optional Experiments**

1. After trying the practice a few times and becoming familiar with it, see how it changes your experience of something that you find upsetting or angering.
  - a. Before doing the practice, for 1-2 minutes remember and think about something that you have found upsetting or angering. Pick something mildly to moderately disturbing, not something extreme or traumatic.
  - b. Notice and write down on the lines below the dominant thoughts, feelings and body sensations that you experience while remembering and thinking about it.

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- c. Do the lovingkindness practice for 5-15 minutes.
  - d. After finishing the practice, spend 1-2 minutes remembering and thinking about the same thing you did before engaging in the practice. Again, notice and write down the dominant thoughts, feelings and body sensation that you experience.

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- e. Compare the thoughts, feelings and body sensations that you experienced before and after doing the lovingkindness practice.

2. After trying the practice a few times and becoming familiar with it, see how it changes your experience of a person toward whom you have felt emotionally neutral.
- a. Before doing the practice, for 1-2 minutes remember and think about a person who you see every day but have little or no interaction with, and have no significant positive or negative feelings toward (e.g., a kid you don't know well who's in a class or two with you; a staff person at school with whom you have just a little contact, like someone in an office or on the cafeteria staff; a bus driver or neighbor).
  - b. Notice and write down on the lines below any thoughts, feelings and body sensations that you experience while remembering and thinking about that person.  
  

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  - c. Do the lovingkindness practice for 5-15 minutes.
  - d. After finishing the practice, spend 1-2 minutes remembering and thinking about the same person you did before engaging in the practice. Again, notice and write down the dominant thoughts, feelings and body sensation that you experience.  
  

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  - e. Compare the thoughts, feelings and body sensations that you experienced before and after doing the lovingkindness practice.
  - f. When you encounter that person over the next few days, notice if you experience him or her differently than you did before the practice. Feel free to do this practice over several days and notice any changes in your experience of that person, or how you relate to him or her.

See also: Free written and audio guided meditations for cultivating compassion at [mindfulnesscompassion.org](http://mindfulnesscompassion.org) (under "Meditations").