

LovingKindness Practices



"Lately I've been getting into compassion."



Love Yourself

© Mayumi Oda

Here are some examples of the phrases different teachers use:

May I be happy.

May I live in safety.

May I be healthy.

May I live with ease.

Sharon Salzberg

May I be filled with lovingkindness.

May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.

May I be well in body and mind.

May I be at ease and happy.

Jack Kornfield

May all beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness.

May we be free from suffering and the root of suffering.

May we never be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.

May we dwell in the great equanimity, free from passion, aggression and prejudice.

Pema Chodron

May I be peaceful, happy and light in body and spirit.

May I be safe and free from injury.

May I be free from anger, afflictions, fear and anxiety.

Thich Nhat Hanh

May I be safe and free from harm.

May I have good health, mentally and physically.

May my suffering, and the roots of my suffering, be reduced.

May I experience peace of mind and ease of well-being.

May I feel happiness and joy.

Renée Burgard

"Meditation practice isn't about trying to throw ourselves away and become something different. It's about befriending who we are already."

Pema Chodron

Metta is the Pali word for love. The meditation technique begins with developing self-love and then extending outward to develop openness and compassion for everyone.

In her book on Loving-Kindness, Sharon Salzberg writes: "We spend our lives searching for something we don't think we have, something that makes us happy. But sometimes the very love and happiness we want can be found just by sitting down. The path to true happiness is one of integrating and fully accepting all aspects of our experience. We must move from trying to control the uncontrollable cycles of pleasure and pain, and instead learn how to connect, to open, and to love no matter what is happening. By following this path, we learn to develop skillful mental states and let go of unskillful ones. We align ourselves with an expansive vision of what is possible for us, and we use the tools of spiritual practice to sustain that vision."

Pema Chodron adds: "When we talk about mindfulness and awareness, we're not talking about something stern, a discipline that we impose on ourselves so that we can clean up our act. It's more that we practice some sense of loving kindness towards all the details of our lives. We realize that we're always standing at the center of a sacred circle. Our life's work is to wake up, to open, be curious and develop some sense of sympathy for everything that comes along."

"Maitri is the basis of compassion. It's a Sanskrit word that means 'unconditional friendship with oneself.' It's about feeling at home with your own mind and body. And we can use meditation as a tool to cultivate Maitri."

Pema Chodron

A LovingKindness & Compassion Practice to do on your own (if you like, using river pebbles)

Using the formula: “May I/you/we (have, be, experience, find, know, etc.) _____” → and completing these 5 lovingkindness phrases for yourself and/or others: then writing the key words for each on one river stone each, for daily use— in your own creative ways....e.g. 1) in walking meditation (helpful especially when grieving or angry); 2) choosing one each day and carrying it with you, practicing with it; 3) you may like to carry the stones in a small bag....and use the 5 stones for a 5- minute meditation one or more times each day, spending a moment breathing in and breathing out with awareness, with each stone in turn.

A suggestion for writing the phrases is to make 2 or 3 phrases that wish yourself/others well in a positive, encouraging way:

e.g. May I/you/we experience happiness, good health, joy, peace of mind, ease of well-being, safety and be free from harm, or anything you would like to wish;

and 2 or 3 phrases that support you/others in connection with a struggle or challenge or difficulty in your/their life/ lives:

e.g. May I/you/we accept that I/you/we have negative emotions, may I/you/we find tolerance for my/your/ our failures/suffering, may I/you/we be kind to myself/yourself/ ourselves when I/you/we notice I/you/we am/are judging myself/yourself/ ourselves, etc.

May I be safe and free from harm.

May I have good health, mentally and physically.

May my suffering, and the roots of my suffering, be reduced.

May I experience peace of mind and ease of well-being.

May I feel happiness and joy.

May I/you/we _____

Here are some additional examples of guided practices from leading teachers:

From *Teachings on Love* by Thich Nhat Hanh

*May I be peaceful, happy and light in body and spirit.
May he/she be peaceful, happy and light in body and spirit.
May they be peaceful, happy and light in body and spirit.*

*May I be safe and free from injury.
May he/she be safe and free from injury.
May they be safe and free from injury.*

*May I be free from anger, afflictions, fear and anxiety.
May he/she be free from anger, afflictions, fear and anxiety.
May they be free from anger, afflictions, fear and anxiety.*

We begin practicing this love meditation for ourselves (I). Until we are able to love and take care of ourselves, we cannot be of much help to others. After that we can practice for others (he/she, they, we) - first on someone we like, then on someone neutral to us, then someone we love, then someone the mere thought of whom makes us suffer. Then for all beings....

**from Part I of Loving-friendliness Meditation
by Bhante Gunaratna**

May all beings have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

May all beings always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness and wisdom.

From *Maitri, The Love That Never Dies*

By Pema Chodron (this practice includes statements for each of what are called "The 4 Immeasurable Qualities" or "The 4 Heavenly Abodes:

Equanimity, Lovingkindness, Compassion, and Sympathetic Joy

May all beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness.
This first line refers to lovingkindness.

May we be free from suffering and the root of suffering.
And this second line refers to compassion.

May we never be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.
This refers to joy.

May we dwell in the great equanimity, free from passion, aggression and prejudice. This refers to equanimity.

Lovingkindness (towards ourselves) Meditation by Sharon Salzberg:
<http://diydbharma.org/lovingkindness-towards-ourselves-sharon-salzberg>

Lovingkindness (for all beings) Meditation by Salzberg
http://diydbharma.org/audio/by/title/lovingkindness_for_all_beings

Pema Chodron guides a brief LovingKindness Practice on YouTube
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7s-rRMUI04I>

Here are 3 guided practices by the best-known Insight Meditation teachers in America – you may find that you respond to them differently...

Meditation on Lovingkindness *by Jack Kornfield*

"I am larger and better than I thought. I did not know I held so much goodness."
- Walt Whitman

This meditation uses words, images, and feelings to evoke a lovingkindness and friendliness toward oneself and others. With each recitation of the phrases, we are expressing an intention, planting the seeds of loving wishes over and over in our heart.

With a loving heart as the background, all that we attempt, all that we encounter will open and flow more easily. You can begin the practice of lovingkindness by meditating for fifteen or twenty minutes in a quiet place. Let yourself sit in a comfortable fashion. Let your body rest and be relaxed. Let your heart be soft. Let go of any plans or preoccupations.

Begin with yourself. Breathe gently, and recite inwardly the following traditional phrases directed toward our own well-being. You begin with yourself because without loving yourself it is almost impossible to love others.

May I be filled with lovingkindness.

May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.

May I be well in body and mind.

May I be at ease and happy.

As you repeat these phrases, picture yourself as you are now, and hold that image in a heart of lovingkindness. Or perhaps you will find it easier to picture yourself as a young and beloved child. Adjust the words and images in any way you wish. Create the exact phrases that best open your heart of kindness. Repeat these phrases over and over again, letting the feelings permeate your body and mind. Practice this meditation for a number of weeks, until the sense of lovingkindness for yourself grows.

Be aware that this meditation may at times feel mechanical or awkward. It can also bring up feelings contrary to lovingkindness, 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.

When you feel you have established some stronger sense of lovingkindness for yourself, you can then expand your meditation to include others. **After focusing on yourself ..., choose a few benefactors**, people in your life who have loved and truly cared for you. Picture these people and carefully recite the same phrases:

May you be filled with lovingkindness.

May you be safe from inner and outer dangers.

May you be well in body and mind.

May you be at ease and happy.

Let the image and feelings you have for your benefactors support the meditation. Whether the image or feelings are clear or not does not matter. In meditation they will be subject to change. Simply continue to plant the seeds of loving wishes, repeating the phrases gently no matter what arises.

Expressing gratitude to our benefactors is a natural form of love. In fact, some people find lovingkindness for themselves so hard, they begin their practice with a benefactor. This too is fine. ***The rule in lovingkindness practice is to follow the way that most easily opens your heart.***

When lovingkindness for your benefactor has developed, you can gradually begin to include other people in your meditation.

Picturing each beloved person, recite inwardly the same phrases, evoking a sense of lovingkindness for each person in turn.

After this you can include others: Spend some time wishing well to a **wider circle of friends**. Then gradually extend your meditation to picture and include **community members, neighbors, people everywhere, animals, all beings, the whole earth**.

Finally, include the difficult people in your life, even your enemies, wishing that they too may be filled with lovingkindness and peace. This will take practice. But as your heart opens, first to loved ones and friends, you will find that in the end you won't want to close it anymore.

Lovingkindness can be practiced anywhere. You can use this meditation in traffic jams, in buses, and on airplanes. As you silently practice this meditation among people, you will come to feel a wonderful connection with them - the power of lovingkindness. It will calm your mind and keep you connected to your heart.

A Lovingkindness Meditation Transcript

by Sharon Salzberg

You can begin by sitting down in a comfortable position, closing your eyes. Sit with your back erect, without being strained or overarched.

Take a few deep breaths, relax your body. Feel your energy settle into your body and into the moment.

See if certain phrases emerge from your heart that express what you wish most deeply for yourself, not just for today, but in an enduring way. Phrases that are big enough and general enough that you can ultimately wish them for all of life, for all beings everywhere.

Classical phrases are things like, **"May I live in safety. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I live with ease."**

You can gently repeat these phrases over and over again, have your mind rest in the phrases and whenever you find your attention has wandered, don't worry about it. When you recognize you've lost touch with the moment, see if you can gently let go and begin again.

May I live in safety, be happy, be healthy, live with ease.

Call to mind somebody that you care about--a good friend, or someone who's helped you in your life, someone who inspires you. You can visualize them, say their name to yourself. Get a feeling for their presence, and then direct the phrases of lovingkindness to them.

May you live in safety, be happy, be healthy, live with ease.

Call to mind someone you know who's having a difficult time right now. They've experienced a loss, painful feeling, a difficult situation. If somebody like that comes to mind, bring them here.

Imagine them sitting in front of you. Say their name. Get a feeling for their presence and offer the phrases of lovingkindness to them.

"May you live in safety. Be happy. Be healthy, live with ease."

Think of someone who plays some role in your life, some function that you don't know very well, that you don't have a particular feeling for, or against. Maybe the checkout person at the supermarket where you shop, the gas-station attendant, somebody that you see periodically. If someone like that comes to mind, imagine them sitting in front of you, and offer these same phrases of lovingkindness to them.

May you live in safety. Be happy. Be healthy, live with ease.

We connect into these phrases, aiming the heart in this way, we're opening ourselves to the possibility of including, rather than excluding, of connecting, rather than overlooking, of caring, rather than being indifferent. And ultimately, we open in this way to all beings everywhere, without distinction, without separation.

May all beings live in safety, be happy, be healthy, live with ease.

All people, all animals, all creatures, all those in existence, near and far, known to us and unknown to us. All beings on the earth, in the air, in the water. Those being born, those dying.

May all beings everywhere live in safety, be happy, be healthy, live with ease.

You feel the energy of this aspiration extending infinitely in front of you, to either side, behind you, above and below. As the heart extends in a boundless way, leaving no one out, may all beings live in safety, be happy, be healthy, live with ease.

And when you feel ready, you can open your eyes and see if you can bring this energy with you throughout the day.

Gil Fronsdahl's Guided Loving-Kindness Practice

To practice loving-kindness meditation, sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long and complete exhalations. Let go of any concerns or preoccupations. For a few minutes, feel or imagine the breath moving through the center of your chest - in the area of your heart.

Metta is first practiced toward oneself, since we often have difficulty loving others without first loving ourselves. Sitting quietly, mentally repeat, slowly and steadily, the following or similar phrases:

May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease.

While you say these phrases, allow yourself to sink into the intentions they express. **Loving-kindness meditation consists primarily of connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness.** However, if feelings of warmth, friendliness, or love arise in the body or mind, connect to them, allowing them to grow as you repeat the phrases. **As an aid to the meditation, you might hold an image of yourself in your mind's eye.** This helps reinforce the intentions expressed in the phrases.

After a period of directing loving-kindness toward yourself, bring to mind a friend or someone in your life who has deeply cared for you. Then slowly repeat phrases of loving-kindness toward them:

May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease.

As you say these phrases, again sink into their intention or heartfelt meaning. And, if any feelings of loving-kindness arise, connect the feelings with the phrases so that the feelings may become stronger as you repeat the words.

As you continue the meditation, you can bring to mind **other friends, neighbors, acquaintances, strangers, animals, and finally people with whom you have difficulty.**

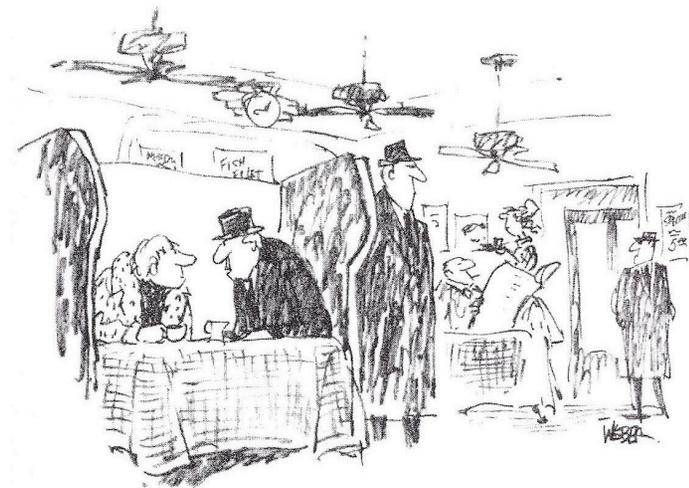
You can either use the same phrases, repeating them again and again, or make up phrases that better represent the loving-kindness you feel toward these beings.

In addition to simple and perhaps personal and creative forms of metta practice, there is a classic and systematic approach to metta as an intensive meditation practice. Because the classic meditation is fairly elaborate, it is usually undertaken during periods of intensive metta practice on retreat.

Sometimes during loving-kindness meditation, seemingly opposite feelings such as anger, grief, or sadness may arise. Take these to be signs that your heart is softening, revealing what is held there. You can either shift to mindfulness practice or you can - with whatever patience, acceptance, and kindness you can muster for such feelings - direct loving-kindness toward them. Above all, remember that there is no need to judge yourself for having these feelings.

As you become familiar with loving-kindness practice during meditation, you can also begin to use it in your daily life. While in your car, or at work, or in public anywhere, privately practice metta toward those around you. There can be a great delight in establishing a heartfelt connection to all those we encounter, friends and strangers alike.

Gil Fronsdahl



"I've got a little job for you, Kretchmer. I want you to infiltrate the I.R.S. and sow the seeds of compassion."