

Family, Friends, & Coworkers: A Lovingkindness Mindful Awareness Practice

Introduction

For the Family, Friends & Coworkers section, we will do a loving-kindness practice. Loving-kindness is practiced in many religious traditions in various forms. In this practice, we offer kindness and well wishes for others and ourselves.

If you decide to keep doing a practice like this, you can tailor it to your own spiritual tradition. It may take the form of a particular kind of prayer, reading texts or scripture, meditation, spending time in nature, social activism, silence, or something else that best expresses your beliefs.

Practice

Let's begin this practice by finding a comfortable place. This could be lying down on a bed or couch, sitting in a chair, or even walking.

(Pause)

See if it is possible to let your body relax right now—just 5% more. This might mean letting your jaw soften, letting your shoulders release, or letting your abdomen relax. Again, remember, just relaxing the body only 5%. That's all.

(Pause)

Let's begin our practice by breathing in and out from the center of the chest. This is sometimes called the heart center or the heart space. Imagine that with each in-breath the heart expands—even if it expands only a little. And, with each outbreath, imagine releasing those things you no longer need to carry.

(Pause)

Know that you may *not* feel loving or kind as you practice loving-kindness. This is not uncommon. If this is your experience, consider practicing anyway. It's like exercise. When you begin a program, the body may not exactly want to go along with the exercise program. It may resist and not like doing it. That is okay. If it is overwhelming, simply stop your practice and consider another practice instead. No need to force it. After all, this is about kindness—towards ourselves too!

(Pause)

Let's begin the loving-kindness practice by picturing yourself in your mind's eye. Make it a positive image, as much as possible. Maybe you picture yourself at this time in your life or at another time. Maybe you see yourself as a child. Allow a picture to come to you. Maybe a picture in a photo album or on someone's phone.

See if it is possible to see yourself in as much detail as possible.

(Pause)

Next, let's offer the following loving-kindness phrases:

(Pause)

May I be safe and protected. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May I be healthy and strong. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May I be at peace and be calm. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May I be at ease. May life not be so difficult. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

Next, try letting go of the picture of yourself and return to breathing in and out from the center of the chest. If it is possible, imagine that with each in-breath the heart expands—even if it expands only a little. And, with each outbreath imagine releasing those things you no longer need to carry.

(Pause)

Next let's offer the loving-kindness practice for someone who has been a positive force in your life. Someone who has been there for you. Someone who has always had your best interest at heart. Someone who has your back. This is someone with whom you feel happy and safe to be around. Someone who has showed you the ropes and helped you get your start. Allow a picture of this someone to come to you. It might be a neighbor, a friend, a family member, or a fellow Veteran. It might be a pet. See if it is possible to picture this person or pet in as much detail as possible.

Let's offer the following loving-kindness phrases:

(Pause)

May they be safe and protected. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May they be healthy and strong. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May they be at peace and be calm. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May they be at ease. May life not be so difficult. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

Next, let go of the picture in your mind's eye and return to breathing in and out from the center of the chest. If it is possible, imagine that with each in-breath the heart expands—even if it expands only a little. And, with each outbreath, imagine releasing those things you no longer need to carry.

(Pause)

Next let's offer the loving-kindness practice for your family, your partner, other loved ones, and your fellow Veterans. You can expand to offer it to everyone in your neighborhood, your city, your state and country. Even to all living things. Take a moment to invite all of these others into your practice today.

See if it is possible to picture these beings in as much detail as possible.

(Pause)

Once again, let's offer the following loving-kindness phrases:

(Pause)

May all of these beings be safe and protected. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May all of these beings be healthy and strong. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May all of these beings be at peace and be calm. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

May all of these beings be at ease. May life not be so difficult. (Repeat twice)

(Pause)

Next, try letting go of the picture of all of these beings in your mind's eye and returning to breathing in and out from the center of the chest. If it is possible, imagine that with each In-breath the heart expands—even if it expands only a little. And, with each outbreath imagine releasing those things you no longer need to carry.

(Pause)

If your eyes are closed, slowly opening the eyes and returning to the room.

(Pause)

Great job!

In the future, as you practice, you may consider other phrases. Consider phrases that resonate with you. Some examples: “May I be more accepting.” “May I learn to let go.” “May I breathe.” You may also consider other groups to offer the phrases to. Some loving-kindness practices encourage you to offer the phrases to people you find difficult or challenging as well.

Questions

1. What do you feel in the body after doing the lovingkindness practice?
2. If you did this practice regularly, what is your best guess about how it might impact your health, well-being and stress level?
3. Consider doing a “mini” lovingkindness practice today. Is it possible to do it when you are doing something like running errands or waiting at the doctor’s office?
4. Consider offering lovingkindness practice to a person you meet today. What do you think that would be like?