

## Loving-kindness Meditation

*Loving-kindness meditation originally comes from ancient Buddhist traditions, in which there are many ways to cultivate this quality of warmth, friendliness, caring, and generosity. I have changed the traditional Buddhist phrases and instructions (such as 'May I be happy' ) in order to make it consistent with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.*

Begin by finding a comfortable position, and practising mindfulness of the breath for a couple of minutes. Then, bring your awareness to the sensations around your heart area. As you focus, allow the sensations to be as they are, with an attitude of openness, interests, and receptiveness. Sometimes this is enough to connect with feelings of loving-kindness.

Next, think of a person who has been very kind and loving towards you. Reflect on what they've done for you, and why you're grateful to them. Remember a specific act they did, that was very loving or kind or caring, and remember how that felt.

Now imagine yourself radiating warm feelings of love, friendliness, kindness, generosity towards that person. As you do that, hold that person in your mind, and slowly and silently, repeat the phrases below (or rewrite them to suit your own needs, or make them more personally significant).

May you be healthy  
May you be peaceful  
May you be content  
May you experience love  
May you experience kindness  
May your life be rich and full and meaningful

As you say them, feel the meaning of the words, and radiate feelings of warmth, love, kindness, tenderness to this person.

Next, think of yourself, and the pain you've experienced, and radiate these same warm feelings towards yourself, while you say the same phrases, slowly and gently:

May I be healthy  
May I be peaceful  
May I be content  
May I experience love  
May I experience kindness  
May my life be rich and full and meaningful

As you say them, feel the meaning of the words, and radiate feelings of warmth, love, kindness, tenderness throughout your body, completely accepting every aspect of yourself. (And if your mind makes negative judgments or comments during the process, just let them come and go, like passing cars, or silently say 'Thanks, mind!').

Next, bring to mind someone who is a good friend, or someone (such as a child) for whom you have a strong sense of care, and radiate warm loving-kindness to that person. Imagine them filling up with those feelings. And once again, repeat the phrases:

May you be healthy  
May you be peaceful  
May you be content  
May you experience love  
May you experience kindness  
May your life be rich and full and meaningful

Next, bring to mind a 'neutral' person – someone who you have no particular feelings towards (e.g. a neighbour, or a local shopkeeper). Now radiate loving-kindness to them, as you repeat the phrases:

May you be healthy  
May you be peaceful  
May you be content  
May you experience love  
May you experience kindness  
May your life be rich and full and meaningful

Finally bring to mind someone with whom you may be having some difficulty or conflict, and radiate loving-kindness to them. (Don't start with the most difficult person in your life! Start with someone who gives you a mild-to-moderate degree of difficulty.)

May you be healthy  
May you be peaceful  
May you be content  
May you experience love  
May you experience kindness  
May your life be rich and full and meaningful

Finish off by once more practising mindfulness of the breath.

Note: if you're full of self-blame or self-loathing, you may initially find it hard to send loving-kindness to yourself. That's okay. If it's too difficult, just skip that bit initially. As you keep practicing this exercise, and get better at sending loving-kindness to others, you will find there comes a time when you are able to send it to yourself.