# **LOVINGKINDNESS**

**He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble and skilled at using loving speech. He or she will practice living simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away with the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. [And this is what he or she contemplates]:**

**May we all be happy and safe, and may our hearts be filled with joy.**

**May all living beings live in security and peace, beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May we all dwell in perfect tranquility.**

**Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone harm.**

**Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, may we cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. May this boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. May this love know no obstacles, and may our hearts be absolutely free from hatred or enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying down, as long as we are awake, may we maintain this mindfulness of love in our own hearts. This is the noblest way of living.**

**Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death.**

**The Buddha**

# May I be safe

**May I be happy**

**May I be healthy**

**May I be content**

**May I love myself sincerely**

**And with gently patient kindness**

**Just as I am now**

## No matter what happens

# **May I be safe**

**May I be happy**

**May I be healthy**

**May I be content**

**May I love you sincerely**

**And with gently patient kindness**

**Just as you are now**

**No matter what happens**

**May you be safe**

**May you be happy**

**May you be healthy**

**May you be content**

# **May you love yourself sincerely**

**And with gently patient kindness**

**Just as you are now**

**No matter what happens**

**May we be safe**

**May we be happy**

**May we be healthy**

**May we be content**

**May we love each other sincerely**

**And with gently patient kindness**

**Just as we are now**

**No matter what happens**

**May all beings be safe**

**May all beings be happy**

**May all beings be content**

**May all beings love life sincerely**

**And with gently patient kindness**

**Just as it is now**

**No matter what happens**

**LOVINGKINDNESS**

Lovingkindness is an important part of Buddhist meditation practice. The wisdom and virtue factors of Buddhist spiritual practice emphasize the importance of creating and sustaining a consciousness that has no intention of ill-will or greed. This can be accomplished through the practice of the four “Divine Abidings” of lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. In actuality, the other three abidings are subsets of lovingkindness. It is said that the sincere practice of these meditations will promote good fortune, good rest and good health. In addition, having a mind unclouded by greed or hatred is essential for developing the quality of mindfulness necessary for spiritual attainment. These notes describe specific instructions that will accomplish these harmonious states of mind.

Sit in a balanced, upright position that is not too comfortable or uncomfortable. Close your eyes, or, if you prefer, focus your eyes on a simple object a few feet away. Sweep your attention through the body, noting and relaxing any unnecessary tension. Bring your attention to the area around your heart, alert to notice and allow the growth of any feelings of love or kindness that are apparent. These feelings might be physical, such as a pulsing or tightness. They might be emotional—a yearning or opening of the heart to love and tenderness. It is not the craving associated with lust or sensuality. Don’t be concerned if the sensations are of tension, aching, or there seems to be no sensation at all. Simply rest your awareness right in the middle of your chest persistently.

The goal of this practice is to recall feelings of love in the area around the heart and allow them to grow. The feeling may be fleeting or incomplete. Meditating is much like learning to ride a bike—climb on, wobble around a bit, fall off, then climb back on again. After a while, balance and steadiness are achieved and, like recalling how to ride a bike, the feeling of lovingkindness surges up easily and can be steadily kept in awareness.

The feeling is focused on the sort of love that is tender, gentle, and accepting of each moment as it is. It grows from the inside out and is not dependent on others. It is similar to carefully guarding and cultivating a tiny spark of fire on a cold, dark night. Keep the focus on the feeling, protecting it from being “blown out” by anger or regret, and adding more “twigs” of memory until a warm glow in the heart is easily maintained.

Consciously recall a time of pure and clear love and caring from the past. Perhaps it is only of one incident, the memory of a person or a pet. Often, it is initially difficult to notice feelings of love that aren’t blurred or distorted by lust, guilt, fear, pain, or resentment. Many people are not easily able to visualize such memories. In that case, simply use words and phrases to evoke feelings of lovingkindness. Traditionally, repeating a certain phrase is used for this purpose. A few examples include: **“May I be happy, peaceful and free from suffering.” “May I be safe, may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be content, and may I love myself sincerely and with gently patient kindness, just as I am now, no matter what happens.”** a “short form” might be **“May I find loving release from greed, hatred and delusion.”** Keep the focus on the center of your chest while repeating the phrase and contemplate what happiness (peace, health, contentment, etc.) feels like as quality of the mind, as well as how to express this in daily life. When some other thought, sensation, or emotion arises, simply guide your attention back to the feeling of lovingkindness that emerges from the mantra and the middle of your chest.

Often, strong emotions other than love arise during this practice, because previous experience has linked love so strongly with pain, anger, confusion, jealousy, disappointment, lust, and so on. Simply notice the distraction, and then return to recalling lovingkindness, cultivating it by repeating the phrase.

As the practice goes on, it is desirable to expand the lovingkindness beyond yourself. There are several strategies for this:

1. Imagine your heart as the center of the universe and that lovingkindness is radiating out in all directions, like radio waves from a broadcasting tower. Gradually include others—in the room, the neighborhood, the county, etc., in this growing, radiant sphere of lovingkindness.
2. Recall various people encountered during the day and project lovingkindness to them. In this case, it is recommended to practice first with respected acquaintances, then friends, family members, then those with whom you have difficult relations. When feelings of lust, fear, guilt, or hatred arise, practice turning away from the feelings and back to the lovingkindness, while keeping that person in mind.
3. Visualize categories of beings; first humans, then animals, then plants, then buildings, cars, etc., while remaining open to feelings of lovingkindness emanating from the heart, and with determination to bring this love into every encounter in life.

Remember that the main goal of the practice is to develop and project to yourself and others feelings of love and kindness, regardless of whether others are aware of it or appreciate it. Eventually, you will be able to practice this practically everywhere—in traffic, while waiting in a line, dealing with customers, coworkers, family, politicians, t.v. personalities, flowers, trees, and so on.

It is very useful to practice this when feeling strong emotions of fear, anger, or discouragement. As mentioned above, we all are conditioned to be preoccupied with and controlled by unpleasant emotions, and practicing self-hatred does absolutely no good. This meditative strategy is a great way to cleanse yourself of those useless thoughts and feelings. It is important to realize that whatever angry or hurt emotion we feel in response to a situation is not about the other party—freedom from suffering comes from releasing your attachment to an expected outcome. Even if your expectations are reasonable and the other person is in the wrong, your salvation comes from addressing your own attachments first, then focusing on external changes.

**COMPASSION and FORGIVENESS**

This is an extension of lovingkindness. Its purpose is to bridge gaps caused by disappointment or betrayal. Much of human loving and kindness seems to be a “give to get” transaction. I will love you in the manner I imagine you will like, and you will correspond with imagining and providing exactly what kind of love I expect in return. If you or I don’t fulfill those expectations, then hatred and mistrust arise.

Of course, this attitude is bound to create disappointment, because none of us can read minds, and we all often betray our own good intentions due to confusion, desire and fear. When the love transaction goes sour, our own mistakes and the mistakes of others are regarded as critically destructive and threatening, and it seems that reconciliation can’t occur easily, or without some gesture of atonement or punishment. When this arises frequently, in yourself or interpersonally, then your personality operates out of a “shame-based personal economy”, alternating between feeling like a perpetrator or a victim, and relationships become power struggles or “morality plays”. We want to punish or expect to be punished, and then our ability to identify and express love in wholesome ways becomes compromised.

The key concept of compassion is to “walk a mile in the other person’s shoes”, i.e., to open up the heart meditatively to the suffering inevitably present as the byproduct of greed, hatred, and ignorance. In addition it is important to realize that the suffering that comes from disease, accidents and disasters is best addressed with an attitude of compassionate helpfulness rather than pity. If the theme of lovingkindness is “May you be happy”, the theme of compassion is “May you be free from suffering”.

During this meditation, sit in the same posture as when practicing lovingkindness, let go of unnecessary tension, and focus your attention on the heart, to recall lovingkindness. Once lovingkindness has been recalled, systematically review a memory of conflict in a relationship, past or present, which creates an interpersonal gap of mistrust or resentment in the mind. Be aware of how the factors of greed, hatred, or unrealistic thoughts may have affected you or the other person(s). With an attitude of gentleness, realize the suffering in that situation, and how difficult it is for anyone to avoid imperfection. Use a phrase to open up your heart to forgiveness, starting with yourself: **“May I be forgiven—may I be more thoughtful, more generous and less hurtful in the future.”** Wish for this sincerely and humbly. Even if there is a justification for you to focus on the fault of the other person, own your part in the experience. If you have been completely innocent, recall how you may have done something similar to someone else in the past. This is not meant to justify the wrong; it is meant to develop a perspective that includes an awareness of how often human choices are twisted by greed, hatred or delusion. When strong feelings of guilt, anger, or regret arise, return to lovingkindness. Be determined not to poison yourself with self-hatred or hatred of others, but build your resolve to not hurt yourself or another in that way again.

It is reasonable to focus on forgiveness for the other. However, the goal is first and foremost to come to some resolution and forgiveness about your own responsibility in the situation. Then you can say something to yourself such as: **“I forgive you—I understand from my own mistakes how much suffering comes to you from your greed, hatred, and delusion. I hope you can also find peace with yourself.”**

To address the suffering caused by disease and other misfortune, a useful meditation might be: **“May my thoughts and actions help to ease your pain while respecting your dignity”**.

In practicing this meditation, I have often found it useful to simply say to myself **“May I (or you) be free from this suffering”** when hurt or offended by the attitudes and actions of others. The attitude of lovingkindness makes my heart less hardened and brittle and compassionate, creating a projection of safety toward the other person, which may make them less defensive and more inclined to be thoughtful and less hurtful. This meditation is not meant to justify or give permission for someone to be thoughtless and abusive, and then expect forgiveness without consequences. The intention is for your heart to consider the consequences with compassion, not hatred or vengeful thoughts.

**SYMPATHETIC JOY and GENEROSITY**

This meditation contradicts greed, jealousy, and envy. Despite the teachings of religion, our capitalist and consumer culture operates through cultivating and justifying the gaining and hoarding of power and wealth, causing great suffering for individuals and society.

A key concept of healing and awakening in this practice is the use of intentional renunciation and opportunities for “letting go” of attachments that cause suffering for you and others. This counters the mistaken belief that the more you have the less you suffer. While it is certainly true that having wealth and power can have a beneficial effect, it doesn’t guarantee peace of mind. Often, people become obsessed with hoarding the wealth and abusing the power, due to greed, fear and attachment.

To practice meditating on generosity, start meditating in the same manner as before, with a focus on the chest and lovingkindness. Relax your body/mind, focus on your heart, and intentionally recall a time when you freely gave something to someone else, and the joy you experienced at seeing the other person’s delight and gratitude. Allow this to grow in your heart and consider bringing that same joy to yourself and others in every encounter. Contemplate being generous with attention, time, resources, kindness, and so on, wherever you go.

To practice meditating on sympathetic joy, as a contradiction of jealousy and envy, recall with an open heart a time you experienced some success—you won a prize, achieved some special recognition, or reached a milestone in your life. Open up your heart to the joy you felt at that time and allow yourself to contemplate bringing that same experience to mind the next time you notice someone else’s success and you feel left out or jealous. Feeling gifted and special is fleeting and precious. “Gift” someone else with your appreciation, praise, etc., regardless of whether or not you are praised yourself.

Life brings much unhappiness and disappointment. Feeling successful or important is infrequent, unreliable, and transitory. Therefore it is precious; allow your heart to open up to anyone’s joy, as well as your own. This will certainly diminish or even eliminated the harsh feelings of jealousy and envy.

**EQUANIMITY**

This meditation decreases emotional reactivity and increases acceptance. It is the ability to pay close attention to disturbances of tranquility in your body/mind without being overwhelmed with urgency. It does not mean indifference. It means the ability to find and maintain emotional balance and dignity no matter what happens.

Much of what drives us is a deeply conditioned desire to avoid discomfort and maximize pleasure and comfort. Having a comfortable, satisfying life is good, but we frequently will go to unreasonable lengths (such as behaving addictively) to avoid discomfort. We become enslaved by a lack of acceptance of what is happening in the body/mind. Developing and sustaining unconditional acceptance is what constitutes serenity.

Here’s how to meditate on equanimity: Take the typical meditative posture, focusing on the heart and lovingkindness. Make a commitment to yourself to practice letting go of reacting to whatever happens. Still guide your attention to the heart and lovingkindness, but relax into whatever happens, rather than contract or tense up. Just let whatever happens, happen. Keep an open heart and mind. Be curious. It might be useful to use phrases such as “**May my mind and heart always be in balance.**” or “**Everything that arises passes away; may I be at peace in the midst of it all.**” For example, when fear arises, allow it to take up as much of your attention as you can manage emotionally. Do your muscles contract, and if so, which ones? What does fear urgency really feel like? How much of it can you tolerate without feeling overwhelmed? Can you love yourself even when the mind is fearful or angrily self-critical? When the feeling of fear becomes overwhelming, return to lovingkindness to calm and clear the mind. This is not an exercise in self-torture but is meant to increase your tolerance for emotional intensity gradually, in the same way that someone may slowly increase weight on barbells during a workout in order to get stronger without straining muscles. Notice and examine the physical, emotional and mental components of the fear, with special attention to the urgency of the fear. Desensitize the urgency. Learn to tolerate it without tensing up physically or emotionally. If joy or desire arises while meditating, have the same attitude of non-reactive curiosity and willingness to accept balance as you practice with unpleasant feelings.

The goal is to be aware of, but not controlled by any emotional state—to be just as steady and undisturbed by failure or pain as by success and pleasure.

All of the “heart” meditations are meant to provide a stable, loving connectedness to any experience that arises, without alienation, fear, or desire. This doesn’t mean that life becomes flat. In my many years of meditation practice, my emotional awareness has become enriched, mainly as a result of my acceptance of and examination of a wide range of emotional states. Additionally, the non-reactive but alert state of mind that equanimity manifests is essential for any high level of spiritual awareness or peace of mind.

I sincerely hope that these notes help you find your way to true joy and happiness, bringing to your life and that of others freedom from suffering. I wish you well.