

Wellness Tips

Lovingkindness Practice

Lovingkindness practice stems from the tradition of “metta” meditations, meaning *friend* or *friendship*. This is an intentional emotional stance of kindheartedness, benevolence, and goodwill. It can arise at any time, in relation to any object.

Lovingkindness meditation is traditionally done by generating wishes of goodwill, love, and kindness and sending those wishes to all life on Earth including yourself, those close to you, those you feel neutral toward, those with whom you have difficulty, the human family, and non-human species. Practicing lovingkindness cultivates the healthiest parts of you by embracing the universal connectedness of all life on earth.

You may be asking *Why would I want to include myself, strangers, or people with whom I have difficulty in this circle of compassion? Why would I want to generate wishes of love, peace, health, or safety?*

Simply put, lovingkindness is about you. By choosing a stance of benevolence toward self and others, you develop more healthy mental & emotional states of being. Hatred or wishes of ill will, on the other hand, are inherently toxic and cause harm to your mind and body. Holding on to hatred, disapproval, ill will, and annoyance stunts personal growth and development.

When wishing lovingkindness in all directions – to *all* beings without exception -- you are becoming a kinder person, one who will be more likely to respond with lovingkindness in the future. And the more often you can conjure up these wishes and sustain them over time, the better off you are.

To initially learn, it can help to follow along with a guided practice. One option is from the Palouse Mindfulness site and is found here: <https://palousemindfulness.com/meditations/lovingkindness.html> This audio track (13:17) walks you through a Lovingkindness Meditation. If you prefer to read and follow along, you'll find an abbreviated practice below:

Position yourself comfortably and take a moment to be aware of any thoughts or feelings you may be experiencing, acknowledging how things are for you right now. When you are ready, begin to bring awareness to your body, feeling the movement of your breath, reminding yourself that you are here, alive, whole.

Bring to mind the image of a person who you know to be loving and kind to you, someone who evokes feelings of warmth - it could be a partner, parent, or family member, a mentor or close friend. Someone who has been good to you, whose caring easily emanates from them to you. If a person, past or present, doesn't come to mind, maybe someone who inspires you may come to mind. Imagine saying to the person you are envisioning:

*May you be happy, healthy, and whole,
May you have love, warmth, and affection,
May you be protected from harm and free from fear,
May you be alive, engaged, and joyful,
May you experience inner peace and ease.*

[You may have your own words and wishes for them, so feel free to use words that resonate with you]

Now see if you can have these wishes for yourself, saying to yourself:

*May I be happy, healthy, and whole,
May I have love, warmth, and affection,
May I be protected from harm and free from fear,
May I be alive, engaged, and joyful,*

May I experience inner peace and ease.

See if there are others in your life you can extend these wishes to - a friend or co-worker, maybe extending out to acquaintances, neighbors, even people you have sporadic contact with - saying internally to them:

*May you be happy and healthy and loved in your life,
May you be safe and protected, free from harm,
May you be alive, engaged, and joyful,
And may you have inner peace and ease.*

Try extending these wishes to someone who is difficult for you right now, someone for whom there's been some sort of frustration. In doing this remember, like you, they want to be loved and at peace. You could say to yourself:

*Just like me, they want to feel happiness and joy,
Just like me, they want peace and ease,
They want to be loved and to know their loved ones are safe and healthy.*

And if it feels possible to you, silently say to them...

*May you feel peace and ease,
May you have love and warmth in your life,
May you be happy, healthy, and whole.*

And now extend the circle to include all the people you don't know who live far away, in other places, saying:

*May you be happy and healthy,
May you have peace and ease.
May you have love and warmth in your life.*

You could even imagine extending wishes to include animals & plants, all life on Earth, including yourself, saying:

*May we all be happy and healthy,
May we all be safe and protected,
May we all live together in peace, ease, and happiness.*

Take time to feel what's been generated through this experience. Even if there were difficult parts, know this practice has the potential to increase your sense of connection and belonging. It can be done briefly, taking a few minutes and repeating the phrases for yourself, or in extended form by gradually expanding the circle of lovingkindness from yourself outward. There are many resources online for additional guidance.

If you'd like to talk with someone about cultivating more compassion, or for any other questions/concerns, feel free to contact the MSCC to talk with a counselor or schedule an appointment:
Medical Student Counseling Center osac-mscc@uiowa.edu 319-335-8056 1240 MERF

Check out the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips:

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Remember, life is really hard at times - be gentle with yourself and others!

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Pronouns: she/her