

Loving-kindness Instruction

Remember, in this practice you touch your own natural tenderness and begin extending it out in wider and wider circles, first to a friend, then to a stranger, to an enemy, and finally to all beings. This practice can be done seated in formal meditation posture, sitting in an easy chair, or lying in bed. Eyes can be open or closed.

Begin with yourself. You bring each person's face to mind, beginning with your own. See yourself in your mind's eye and think for a moment about how hard you work to create happiness for yourself and others, make a living, express yourself, accomplish something in this life. You make so much effort. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but somehow you keep trying. With these thoughts in mind, allow yourself to wish for your own happiness. Say to yourself, silently:

May I be happy.

May I be healthy.

May I be peaceful.

May I live with ease.

These phrases are used in traditional Loving-kindness meditation practice. If these words don't feel quite right to you, you can substitute others.

Let your awareness of yourself and your own efforts to be happy fade. Bring someone you love to mind, someone who, when you think of him, causes your heart to soften. It could be a parent, partner, child, or dear friend. If you can't think of anyone who makes you feel this way, you could bring to mind a pet or a character in a book or

movie who has moved you. Think about how hard this person has tried to create happiness, how he has struggled and worked. Then send this loved one the loving-kindness phrases:

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you be peaceful.

May you live with ease.

Next, bring to mind a friend. It doesn't have to be your very best friend, although it could be. This should be a person who has been kind, or helpful to you, or let you lean on her. Think about her efforts to be happy and send the phrases to them.

After this, call a stranger's face to mind and wish him well, too. It's totally possible to wish someone well when you don't even know him.

Now think of an enemy—someone who has wronged you. Let your enemy's face come to mind. Know that this person too is just trying to be happy, no matter how strange her attempts may look to you. Send her the phrases and try to really mean it.

In the last stage of the practice, let any particular person go. Realize that all the people in the world have friends and enemies, people they love, and those they are indifferent to. Each of these people, every single one, is trying to find happiness. All creatures are. Take a few minutes and wish that all beings could be happy.

Let the practice go, and relax for a few moments before getting up.

One of the great things about Loving-kindness is that you can flash on it and extend it anytime—walking down the street, you could extend it to a stranger. You could offer Loving-kindness to a friend who is upset, on the spot. You could offer it to yourself before an important meeting or a scary doctor's visit.