

Meditations on (1) Kindness & Gratitude (2) Love
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Preparation

We begin the meditation by focusing on our breath in order to let our mind settle down. So simply breathe normally and naturally, without forcing your breath. Let your breathing pattern be as it is. And then focus your attention either at the nostrils, or at the abdomen. And simply experience the breath as it goes in and out.

So if you're focusing at the nostrils, you're going to feel the sense of touch as the air passes through your nostrils and goes along the upper lip.

If you're focusing at your abdomen, you're going to be aware of the rise of your abdomen as you inhale, and aware of its falling as you exhale.

So for a few minutes, just let your breath be. Focus on your breath, be aware of being nourished by the environment, by the breath which connects you to the environment you live in.

If distractions arise, don't follow them. Acknowledge them, be it a sound or an intruding thought, but don't get involved in it, don't make a story about it. Just recognize something else has come into your field of attention, and then return your attention back to the breath.

So let's just do that for a minute or two to let our mind settle down and become more concentrated.

[Pause]

Meditation on Kindness & Gratitude

First we're going to do the meditation on kindness, to help us see that we've received a lot of benefit from others. When we reflect on the benefit we've received from others, let's not get hung up on whether or not others had the intention to benefit us. That's not the issue at this point; here, it is simply the fact that we have received benefit from others. Regardless of what their intention is, the bottom-line is that their actions have helped us in one way or another.

And as we contemplate this benefit we've received or the kindness we've received from others, let's let our heart open in a feeling of gratitude towards them. This gratitude does not mean a feeling of obligation but a real warmth and open-heartedness, and feeling of connection and happiness, and affection, when we see others.

So begin by thinking of the benefit that we've received, the kindness we've received from our friends and relatives. The help they've given us in moving house, or when we've been sick, in encouraging us in our projects, in listening to us when we have something we want to talk over with them. So think of all of the various ways that we have been helped and supported by our friends.

And as we contemplate this, we don't want to let the attitude of attachment and clinging arise towards these friends. We don't want to cling to them because they've helped us, but simply to acknowledge the kindness that they've shown so that we don't take them for granted, so that we don't just expect their kindness and fail to recognize it.

So by making some examples from your own life, really reflect for a few minutes on the kindness that you've received from your friends and those who are dear to you.

[Pause]

Our friends encourage us when we're feeling down. They're kind in often pointing out our faults to us in kind ways so that we can correct them. They take care of us when we're ill. They do many small favors for us in our life. They just make life easier. And we're able to share a lot of things with them. And so really appreciate our friends. Let's not take them for granted. And really feel ourselves as the recipient of their care and let our heart open in a feeling of gratitude and affection towards them.

[Pause]

Then we consider the kindness of strangers. So here we think about all the people whom we don't know, without whose efforts, we wouldn't be able to function, we wouldn't be able to survive. Think of all the people and the animals, all the living creatures that go into growing our food, transforming the food, packaging it and selling it. All the people who work in the mines, at the iron and the steel factories, the truck factories and the automobile factories, to produce the vehicles that then we drive, or the vehicles that transport our food to the store.

Let's think of all the people who build the roads that we drive on. People who work at the public utilities board so that we have gas and electricity and water, things we take so much for granted. That we wouldn't have these things without the work and the effort of so many people.

Think of the people who work at the telephone company. Think of the people who work in government offices. Again our lives are so intertwined with everybody in the society, not just in our own country and community, but internationally now. That we've received so much from these others. We don't know the people who made our house, [inaudible] electricians, the carpenters, [inaudible] engineers, construction workers – so many people made our home and made the office we work in, the other buildings we use, so let's open our heart to feel the connection and gratitude to them for all the work they've done. They may not have had us in mind particularly when they did their work, but that's not important. The bottom-line is, that they worked hard, and we're receiving benefit from them. And we don't even know who those people are to be able to thank them.

When we think of how many goods we use that have been made in other countries, who are those people who made the goods, what are their [inaudible] conditions, what pain and happiness do they have, and think of how we use the things that they've made with so much effort, and we don't even know who they are to be able to say "Thank you". And yet without their efforts and their actions, we wouldn't have the things that we use in our daily life. So make many, many, many examples from your life. Just take one object in the room where you are, and trace back how many living beings were involved in its existence. How many

living beings we've received kindness from. And again let your heart open in a feeling of gratitude and affection for those beings, even though we don't know them, because they have been kind to us.

[Pause]

And let's think specifically of the kindness of our family. The fact that as infants, we couldn't take care of ourselves. We couldn't feed and clothe ourselves, protect ourselves from the elements. Others took care of us. Often our parents are the direct care-givers, sometimes our parents couldn't take care of us, so they arranged for other adults to take care of us. They wanted us to live, they made other arrangements even though they couldn't do it. And we've received benefit from those other adults.

So think of all the time we spent as infants – people feeding us, changing our diapers, cuddling us when we cried, all the times they've had to rescue us when we almost fell off the edge of the bed or choked on something that we've stuck in our mouth. Those of you who have children know how much care it takes to take care of infants and toddlers, and we've been recipient of that exact same care simply because of the fact that we have lived. Others protected us during that time when we couldn't take care of ourselves.

They taught us to speak. Our family also is generally involved in our education. So our ability to speak and communicate, we often take for granted, but we don't have this ability by ourselves. It's because our family taught us. We don't have our education by ourselves, and our knowledge by ourselves, it's because our family taught us, or they sent us to school and made arrangements for other people to teach us. Because they encouraged us to learn.

It's very important to reflect on the kindness of our family or whichever adults took care of us when we were young, and also the kindness of our teachers. All the teachers who had thirty kids in their class tried to take care of us the best they could. They didn't give up on us even though sometimes we acted quite obnoxiously.

It's important to be able to look into our childhood, at our parents and our teachers, and reflect on their kindness, and reflect on how difficult it must have been on them sometimes to raise us and to bring us up. Because as children, we may not have been the easiest people to be with, the most cooperative living being. They often had to discipline us, to teach us some manners, to teach us how to get along with others, and even though we didn't like their discipline, somehow we did learn that we have to be aware of and be sensitive to others' needs and concerns, we can't just trample through life not caring how we affect others. So we learn this from our parents, our family, from our teachers. And in spite of things that may not have gone well in our childhood, different painful things that may have happened, the fact still remains that we do receive a tremendous amount of benefit from others. So let's let ourselves feel the recipient of that benefit and kindness, and open our hearts in a sensation of gratitude and affection in return.

[Pause]

And then let's think of the benefit we've received even from people who have harmed us. In spite of the harm we've received from others, we have all grown. And actually it's not even in spite of the harm, it's *because of* the harm, and if we look back upon those painful episodes in our life, we can see that we did come out of them stronger, we developed our own internal resources, we were shaken up and challenged out of our complacency, and so this growth, although it may have been painful, although it may have been difficult, although we may have felt we weren't ready for it yet, still, we grew, we've developed, and all of that came about due to the people who did harm us and challenge us, the people who put us in difficult situations.

So if we can appreciate our own internal strength and resources, then we can also appreciate the people who cause those qualities to develop. And feel some gratitude towards them. In other words, people don't have to wish us well in order for us to benefit from them. And we can still feel gratitude and affection no matter how they treated us or what their attitude towards us was, simply by the fact that we did benefit from what they did.

And the people who harmed us, or who make us feel threatened, people who we disapprove of, also gave us the opportunity to practice patience. We can't practice patience with people who're kind to us. We can only practice patience with the people who threatened us or who we disapprove of or who have harmed us. The development of patience is a very essential quality for spiritual practice, and this arises on the basis of the people who have disturbed us. So again, we have received a lot of benefit from those people because without them, we couldn't develop patience. Without patience, we couldn't develop ourselves spiritually or internally to be of greater benefit. So let's let ourselves feel a sense of gratitude also towards the people who we don't get along with very well, or who we mistrust, because they've enabled us to practice patience, because they've enabled us to find internal resources and talents and skills and qualities to cope with difficult situations that we didn't know we had before.

[Pause]

And so let your mind rest in this feeling of affection and gratitude. As that feeling arises, then let your mind rest in it. Let your mind become stable in that feeling of gratitude and affection. Keep the mind focused on that feeling without letting it get distracted towards other things.

(If you wish to conclude your meditation session at this point, please dedicate the positive potential as instructed in "Conclusion" below.)

Meditation on Love

We'll go on now to do the meditation on loving kindness. In loving kindness, we're wishing others to have happiness and its causes. And so we have to think deeply about what happiness means, because there're different levels of happiness. So we're wishing others to have not only happiness in the sense of good food, cloths and shelter, we're wishing them not only to have happiness of this life – good friends, career fulfillment, happy family, serene environment and so on, we're wishing them to have the happiness that comes through internal spiritual development, the happiness also that comes through being free of grudges and belligerence and spite, the happiness that comes through being able to forgive and apologize, the happiness that comes through being able to open our hearts in affection to others no matter how they've treated us in return, the happiness that comes through seeing that every living being has the potential to actualize and realize and expose the clear light nature of their mind and the internal good nature of their mind.

So as we're wishing others happiness, let's think deeply of the meaning of happiness, the various levels of happiness: the short-term happiness, but especially the long-term happiness that comes through internal growth.

So here we start, again first with our family and our friends... but actually before we start with them, let's start with ourselves. And let's wish ourselves to be well and happy. And let's wish ourselves to have temporal happiness, the good things of this life, as well as the deeper, long lasting happiness that comes through spiritual development. Let's spend a minute or two wishing that kind of happiness for ourselves, imagining ourselves being happy, thinking in detail of the kind of happiness that we wish for ourselves.

[Pause]

And then let's expand that wish for happiness to include our friends and family, thinking again of specific people, and wishing them both the temporal happiness of this life, but also the long-term happiness that comes through spiritual growth. So as in all these meditations, make them very personal and think of specific people that you generate these feelings towards, here in this case, your own family and friends, and really imagine them being happy.

[Pause]

And then wish this happiness for strangers, all the people in the society, internationally, who contribute to our complex, interdependent world, and who we've received benefit from, all these people who we don't know, who want happiness, who want to be free of suffering with the same intensity that we do, let's also wish them to be happy, both the happiness that comes from food and education and shelter and so forth this lifetime, and the happiness that comes through being free of ignorance, anger and attachment, the happiness that comes through spiritual development. Let's imagine them being happy and really wish that for them, thinking of all the different people who contributed to our survival who we don't even know.

[Pause]

And then let's think of the people that we don't get along with very well, how they also want to be happy, they also want to be free of suffering. And that if they were happy, if they were satisfied, if they were free from the neurotic tendencies that propel them to do the things that we find troublesome, if they have that kind of happiness, then we'd all get along much better. So when we wish others happiness, it's not necessarily wishing that they have everything they want, because sometimes people want things that in fact destroy their own happiness, eg alcohol and other substances [inaudible] abuse, so when we wish people happiness, we're not necessarily wishing that they have everything they want, we're wishing that they have the things they need to survive off, and that they have the circumstances in their life so that they can recognize their own inner potential, so that they can recognize the fruitlessness of their destructive behavior, so that they can generate a sense of positive self-worth and confidence and make their lives meaningful. And so that kind of happiness we can certainly wish for everybody, no matter whether they've helped us or harmed us, or they're neutral towards us. So here concentrate especially on the people who we have difficulty with, and wanting them to be happy and free of suffering.

[Pause]

And let's let that feeling of love spread to all living beings throughout the universe, whoever they are, whatever they're experiencing, and so by feeling that affection and interconnection, and love wishing them to be happy, compassion wishing them to be free of suffering, just hold those feelings in the mind, let the mind and the heart rest in it. Let those feelings become our nature.

[Pause]

Conclusion

And then to conclude, let's dedicate all the positive energy and potential that we've accumulated through our meditation, and let's imagine sending that out, dedicating it to the welfare of each and every living being, ourselves and all others.

Word of Advice

So these meditations have been gone through rather briefly. Again you can do them on your own or press the pause button so that you can contemplate each point more fully. It's good to do them on a regular basis, because we can really see the difference in our mind after we do this kind of meditation. But because we're unfamiliar with these feelings they often aren't sustained for a long time in our daily life. But if we take time to nourish ourselves internally the same way as we take time to nourish our physical body, then these attitudes can become more stable and more long lasting in ourselves.