

# Loving Kindness Meditation

---

---

*Without mercy, without loving-kindness, regardless of how much discipline we have, regardless of how serious we are about practice, we will still stay stuck in the subtle mercilessness of the mind that tells us that we are basically and fundamentally unworthy.*

---

Unfortunately, the practice of loving-kindness is often presented in a way that bypasses dealing with our fears and self-judgments. It makes affirmations like “may I be happy”, “may I be free of suffering”, and so on; and it is easy to misuse this type of practice by generating a superficial loving feeling to cover over unhealed pain, or by trying to seem more ‘loving.’ We’ll be doing something quite different.

So what does it mean to awaken loving-kindness?

We could define loving-kindness as a sense of goodwill, or friendliness, often accompanied by sensations of warmth and receptivity. This openness, this sense of allowing, diminishes the tendency of the mind to constantly judge.

Breathing into the center of the chest, which is an essential aspect of the Loving Kindness meditation, somehow undercuts the solidity of our judgmental mind, and allows us to access this capacity to be open, where we can let ourselves, let others, let life, just be.

However, it is important to remember that in doing this practice we are not trying to feel some special way, such as loving or kind. This can’t be emphasized enough. Rather, we are

attending to how we are right now, which includes attending to whatever keeps our natural loving-kindness from coming forth.

At its most profound, the heart of loving-kindness is who we are. It is the nature of our being.

So here’s something to keep in mind: there will certainly be times when we will feel some sense of loving-kindness as we breathe into the heart. But just as often, we may feel numbness or even anger and fear. However, acknowledging and experiencing whatever is present will allow our natural kindness to gradually begin to flow.

The meditation consists of some lines that repeat several times. The first line or round of lines is oriented toward yourself; the second and following rounds are offered toward people close to you. The last round of the meditation is offered toward all beings.

The lines themselves are important in that they help us to focus and direct our attention. Of course, as in any other meditation, we will repeatedly wander off into daydreams, plans, and fantasies. But in staying with the lines as best we can, we’ll at the very least sharpen our focus.

### ***First Round, Toward Yourself***

Take a couple of deep breaths. Become aware of the breath and begin to follow it into the center of the chest. Experience the area around the heart. Does it feel closed and constricted? Does it feel clear and open? Does it feel warm or cool? Is it neutral? Whatever you feel, just be aware of that. With each in breath let awareness go a little deeper.

To activate the quality of Loving Kindness first think of someone for whom you have very positive feelings. Picture them. Breathe them in. Let your innate Loving Kindness be activated.

Now we'll turn Loving Kindness toward ourselves by repeating four lines in rhythm with our breathing:

1. On the in breath, bring awareness, via the breath, into the center of the chest. As you exhale, silently say the words,

#### ***Dwelling in the Heart***

allowing whatever warmth may be present in the heart region to extend through your whole body, your whole being. If there is no warmth, no loving-kindness to extend, simply notice this, and continue. Repeat the first line for several breaths.

2. On the in breath, again bring awareness into the heart region. As you exhale, say the words,

#### ***Attending to whatever blocks Love***

becoming aware of any aspect of yourself—anger, protections, self-judgment, basic fears—that blocks access to the open heart.

Extend the warmth and loving-kindness of awareness into these aspects of yourself, wherever you can feel them. Do this for a few breaths, remembering that you are not trying to get rid of anything. Rather, you are extending the compassion of awareness to these closed-off areas.

3. Continue breathing into the heart region. On the exhale, say the third line,  
***Being awake in this very moment, exactly as it is*** becoming aware of everything around you and within you—sounds, smells, sights, physical sensations, mood, thoughts—and letting yourself experience all of it, letting life be just as it is. Stay with this wide-open awareness for several breaths, continuing to breathe in and out of the heart. When the mind wanders, come back to your awareness of breath and heart softly, without self-judgment.

4. Again, breathe into the center of the chest. On the out breath, say the words,

#### ***Extending the Heart to all others***

extending whatever loving-kindness arises to other beings, including any specific people who may come into your awareness. Say this fourth line for several breaths.

Repeat this round of four lines again while breathing in and out of the heart.

#### ***Dwelling in the Heart***

#### ***Attending to whatever blocks Love***

***Being awake in this very moment, exactly as it is***

***Extending the Heart to all others.***

### ***Second Round, Toward a Loved One***

Now bring into awareness the presence of someone close to you, for whom you have positive feelings, to whom you wish to extend loving-kindness.

Breathe the person's image, her presence, into the center of the chest on the in breath. On the out breath extend loving-kindness toward this person while repeating the four lines. If you feel resistance, just acknowledge and experience whatever is in the way.

*May you dwell in the open heart.*

*May you be healed in your suffering.*

*May you be awake in this moment, just as it is.*

*May the awakened heart be extended to all others.*

### ***More Rounds, Toward Others Close To You***

Choose another person for whom you have positive feelings and repeat the four lines, remembering to breathe in and out of the heart as you say the words of loving-kindness.

*May you dwell in the open heart.*

*May you be healed in your suffering.*

*May you be awake in this moment, just as it is.*

*May the awakened heart be extended to all others.*

### ***Last Round, Toward All Beings***

Finally, expand awareness to all beings, however you conceive of this notion. Bring this awareness into the center of the chest with the inbreath, and with the outbreath repeat these four lines, allowing loving-kindness to be extended to all beings.

*May all beings dwell in the open heart.*

*May all beings be healed in their suffering.*

*May all beings be awake in this moment, just as it is.*

*May all beings awaken their hearts to each other.*

Now come back to simply breathing in and out of the center of the chest, experiencing the texture and quality of the heart. Simply experience whatever is there, going deeper with each in breath.

Remember, at first it may feel uncomfortable to experience the breath in and out of the heart. It may also feel foreign to silently repeat the words of loving-kindness. It's worth the effort, however, to stay with your initial discomfort or cynicism. There is perhaps no other practice so effective in undercutting the solidity of the judgmental mind or in helping break through our chronic state of separateness. The power of breathing in and out of the heart can't be explained, nor can it be denied. The only way to feel it is to make this meditation an integral and regular part of your practice life.