



EXERCISE # 4 - LOVING-KINDNESS PRACTICE

Begin by finding an unhurried place and time when you can devote at least five minutes to this exercise. Perhaps you're at work and can get away for a break (you can even do this on a "bathroom break," – believe me, I've done just that!) Whatever else is going on in your life will wait for a few minutes while you do this exercise.

Become aware of the fact that you're breathing. Become aware of the movement of the breath as it flows into and out of the body. Feel the breath as it comes into the body and as it leaves the body. Simply remain aware of the breath flowing in and flowing out, not manipulating the breathing in any way. Simply being aware of it and noticing how it feels.

When your mind becomes distracted—and it will become distracted—simply return to the breath. No commentary. No judgment.

Allow yourself to be with this flow of breath, coming in and going out. Notice the feeling of the breath as the lungs fill with air on the in-breath and deflate as you breathe out, the chest expanding and collapsing. Perhaps feeling the breath in the abdomen, rising as you breathe in and flattening and sinking as you breathe out. Allow your attention to gently ride on the sensation of each breath, not thinking about breathing, without the need to comment. Simply watching your breathing.

After you've maintained a minimal level of distraction within your mind, just as you did in the previous exercise, picture in your mind someone in your life who is or has been a source of deep love. It might be a parent, spouse or partner, or child. Just vividly picture someone who has been very loving to you or who you deeply love and who has taught you what it means to love and to be loved. Allow the feeling of this love to rise within your mind, and feel the physiology of this love in your body.

After you've established the feeling of love in your body, begin to imagine directing that same love toward the person who evoked this feeling within you. Imagine that this love is emanating from you and going directly toward this person. If it enhances the feeling, you can imagine it streaming from your heart or the center of your chest, or you can see this person and imagine them receiving this feeling of love from you. Some people find that they can do this exercise more easily if they imagine or visualize a color or stream of light, or perhaps a mistlike stream emanating from themselves to the other person. Please do whatever works for you and whatever enhances your ability to concentrate and focus. Do this for a short while, coming back to the breath as an anchor whenever you find yourself distracted.

Next, picture in your mind a patient who you've cared for who evoked a sense of appreciation, affection, or even love. If you can't picture the person clearly, just get a "feel" for the individual, connect with a physical or emotional aspect of how you felt (or still feel if you're presently caring for them) when you cared for this person. Continue with this exercise for a while.

Now just as you did when you directed a feeling of love toward the person familiar to you, do the same with this person. Allow a feeling of immeasurable compassion for this person to arise and direct it from yourself, from your mind, to this person. Stay with this for a while, always remembering to come back to the breath when you find yourself distracted.

Imagine that this love or compassion is emanating from you and going directly toward this person. As before, if it enhances the feeling, you can imagine it streaming from your heart or the center of your chest, or you can see this person and imagine them receiving this feeling of love from you.

If you find that you have difficulties visualizing this process, just allow the feelings to arise in your mind, allow the intention to remain in your mind. Maintain the focus, remembering to come back to the breath when you find yourself distracted.

And now, relax. Just be. Drop all methods. Remain in the undistracted state of the mind, calmly abiding.