

HOW TO MEDITATE ON JOY, FOR YOURSELF AND FOR OTHERS

We begin this meditation as we would begin our other meditations. For this exercise, practice it formally. That means that you'll set aside some time to do this. Once you've had practice doing this and have it as a part of your practice, then you can "take it to the streets," using other people as the subject of your compassionate meditation on joy.

Sitting on a straight-backed chair or couch or on a cushion on the floor, allow your body to become still. The back is straight without being stiff; the posture is relaxed, awake, and dignified. The hands can rest gently on the knees or in the lap. The eyes are open, simply resting the gaze on whatever is in front of you, without thinking too much about what you're viewing. Settling into this moment, begin watching the breath.

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.

Allow the breath to naturally breathe itself, not needing to change it in any way, giving full attention to each breath. Observe the full cycle of each breath, locating the very beginning of the breath, as it enters the nose or mouth, and following it as it fills the lungs and expands the chest and the abdomen, then comes to the gap where there is neither in-breath nor out-breath, before it turns around and makes its journey out of the body. Simply remain present for the cycle of each breath, being there, letting your attention gently float on the awareness of your breath.

After you've maintained a minimal level of distraction within your mind, picture in your mind someone in your life who is or **has been a source of deep love and who brings you great joy**. It might be a parent, spouse or partner, or child. Just vividly picture someone who has brought joy to you, maybe who you have shared good times with. Allow the feeling of this joy and love to rise within your mind, and feel the physiology of this joy in your body.

After you've established the feeling of joy in your body, begin to imagine directing that same feeling toward the person who evoked this feeling within you. Imagine that this it 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 joy and 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 someone who is sad, depressed, or downtrodden. This could be someone who you've seen on the street, someone on the news, or someone you know. ***This could even be you if you're feeling really sad.*** 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 when you saw this person. Continue with this exercise for a while.

Now just as you did when you directed a feeling of joy 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 joy, 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.

There's no "right way" to do this exercise. Even if you were distracted, or if you couldn't visualize the person, even if you thought about yourself most or all of the time; whatever you do is fine. The purpose of this exercise is to get you familiar with working with the feeling of joy and getting it into your body. Take time, have a sense of humor and know that it's working. Research has shown that even pretending to do this can positively affect your physiology, how your body works, the chemistry of the brain.

Enjoy this exercise. Let me know how this works. Feel free to leave me feedback on my site: <http://www.mindingthebedside.com>