

## Self-Compassion Meditations

### Try This: *Loving-Kindness Meditation*

There are traditionally six categories of people with whom we train ourselves in the art of loving-kindness. The trick is to start with an easy target, reinforce the loving-kindness habit, and work up from there.

1. *Self* – Your personal identity, usually located within the skin.
2. *Benefactor* – Someone who makes you consistently smile, such as a mentor, a child, a spiritual guide, a pet, or a piece of nature.
3. *Friend* – A supportive person toward whom you feel trust and gratitude and have mostly positive feelings.
4. *Neutral* – Any living being whom you don't know and therefore neither like nor dislike.
5. *Difficult* – Someone who has caused you pain, or toward whom you have negative feelings.
6. *Groups* – Any group of living beings, e.g., everybody listed above, everyone in your home, workplace, or city.

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Please set aside 20 minutes for the purpose of giving yourself loving attention. Sit in a comfortable position, reasonably upright and relaxed. Close your eyes and bring your attention to the heart region of your body. Now take three slow, easy breaths from the heart.

- Form an image of yourself sitting down. Note your posture on the chair as if you were seeing yourself from the outside. Feel the sensations in your body as you sit.
- Recall that every living being wants to live peacefully and happily. Connect with that deep wish: “Just as all beings wish to be happy and free from suffering, may I be happy and free from suffering.” Let yourself feel the warmth of that loving intention.
- Now, keeping an image of yourself sitting in the chair and feeling good will in your heart, repeat the following phrases silently and gently:
  - *May I be safe.*
  - *May I be happy.*
  - *May I be healthy.*
  - *May I live with ease.*
- Let each phrase mean what it says. If necessary, repeat one phrase a few times for the sake of clarity. You can also repeat just one

word of a phrase—“safe...safe...safe”—to experience the meaning.

- Take your time. Keep an image of yourself in your mind’s eye, enjoy your loving heart, and savor the meaning of the words. When you notice that your mind has wandered, which it will do after a few seconds, repeat the phrases again. If the words become meaningless, revisualize yourself in the chair and offer yourself the phrases again. If both the image of yourself sitting and the words become vague or blurry, put your hand on your heart and recall your intention to fill yourself with loving-kindness: “Just as all beings wish to be happy and free from suffering, may I be happy and free from suffering.” Then return to the phrases. Whenever you feel lost, return to the phrases.
  - Let this exercise be easy. Don’t try too hard. Loving-kindness is the most natural thing in the world. Distractions will always arise, and when you notice them, let them go and return to the phrases. When your attention wanders, return to giving love to yourself. Sitting with yourself is like sitting with a dear friend who’s not feeling well; you may not cure your friend, but you’ll have offered the kindness he or she deserves.
  - Now gently open your eyes.
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### **Try This: *The Benefactor***

This meditation will take 20 minutes. Begin metta meditation as described in Chapter 6: bring your attention to your heart region, take a few breaths, form an image of yourself in the sitting position, and recall that *all* beings wish to be happy and free from suffering. Then start repeating the phrases for yourself for 5 minutes or begin straightaway with your benefactor.

- Bring the benefactor’s image clearly to mind and let yourself feel what it’s like to be in that person’s presence. Allow yourself to enjoy the good company. Also, recognize how vulnerable your benefactor is--just like you, subject to sickness, old age, and death.
- Say to yourself, “Just as I wish to be happy and free from suffering, may you be happy and free from suffering.”
- Repeat softly and gently, feeling the importance of your words:

*May you be safe.*

*May you be happy.*

*May you be healthy.*

*May you live with ease.*

- When you notice that your mind has wandered, return to the words and the image of your benefactor. Linger with any warm feelings that may arise.

Go slow. If you want to return to yourself, feel free do that at any time and then switch back to your benefactor when you're ready.

- After 20 minutes, and before you end the meditation, say:

*May I and all beings be safe.*  
*May I and all beings be happy.*  
*May I and all beings be healthy.*  
*May I and all beings live with ease.*

- Gently open your eyes.
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### **Try This: *The Difficult Person***

This meditation will also take 20 minutes. Prepare for meditation in the manner described earlier and then begin repeating the metta phrases to yourself and your benefactor (in either order) for about 5 minutes.

- Bring an image of your “difficult person” to mind. Remind yourself that the difficult person is struggling to find his or her way through life and, in so doing, is causing you pain. Say to yourself, “Just as I wish to be peaceful and free from suffering, may you, too, find inner peace.”
- Repeat the phrases softly, keeping the image of the difficult person in your mind while sensing the value of your words:

*May you be safe.*  
*May you be happy.*  
*May you be healthy.*  
*May you live with ease.*

- Feelings of aversion, disgust, anger, guilt, shame, or sadness will immediately arise. The metta phrases may sound hollow alongside these emotions. Give a label to the emotion you're feeling (“sadness,” “anger”) and practice compassion for yourself (“May I be safe...”). When you feel better, try again with your difficult person.
- Go back and forth between yourself (or your benefactor) and the difficult person. Make sure the experience of good will describes your meditation session overall.
- Before you end, release the difficult person and say:

*May I and all beings be safe.*  
*May I and all beings be happy.*  
*May I and all beings be healthy.*  
*May I and all beings live with ease.*

- Gently open your eyes.
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### **Try This: *Compassionate Walking***

Plan to walk for 10 minutes or longer, anywhere you like. Dedicate the time specifically to cultivating loving-kindness and compassion.

- Stand still for a moment and anchor your attention in your body. Be aware of yourself in the standing posture. Feel your body.
- Recall that every living being wants to live peacefully and happily. Connect with that deep wish: “Just as all beings wish to be happy and free from suffering, may I be happy and free from suffering.”
- Begin walking. Note yourself moving through space in the upright position. Feel the sensations of your body, perhaps noting the pressure of your feet on the ground or the wind in your face. Keep your eyes softly focused and walk at a normal pace.
- After walking for a few minutes, repeat the loving-kindness phrases to yourself:

*May I be safe.*

*May I be happy.*

*May I be healthy.*

*May I live with ease.*

The phrases will keep your attention anchored in your body and start to evoke the attitude of loving-kindness. Try to synchronize the phrases with each step or with each breath. It may help to shorten the phrases to a single word: “safe, happy, healthy, ease” or “love, love, love, love.”

- When your mind wanders, gently return to the phrases. If you find yourself hastening to your destination, slow down and refocus on your purpose.
- Do this with kindness, especially a feeling of gratitude toward your feet for supporting your entire body. Appreciate the marvel of walking.
- After a few minutes, expand loving-kindness to others. When someone catches your attention, say to yourself:

*May you and I be safe.*

*May you and I be happy.*

*May you and I be healthy.*

*May you and I live with ease.*

You also say “May you be safe....” or just “safe...happy... healthy...ease” or “love...love... love...love.” Don’t try to include

everyone; just do it one person at a time, keeping the attitude of loving-kindness alive.

- Eventually include all forms of life in the circle of your loving-kindness, e.g., dogs, birds, insects, and plants.
  - Allow yourself to *receive* any expressions of kindness that may come your way.
  - At the end of the walking period, stand still for a moment and repeat “May all beings be happy and free from suffering” before you go on to your next activity.
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### **Try This: *Mindful Self-Compassion Meditation***

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three, deep, relaxing breaths.
  - Open your awareness to the sounds in your environment. Come into the present moment by simply listening to whatever presents itself to your ears.
  - Form an image of yourself sitting in the chair. Note your posture as if you were seeing yourself from the outside.
  - Next, bring your awareness *inside* your body. Note the world of sensation occurring there in this very moment.
  - Now feel your breathing wherever it’s most obvious to you. Pay special attention to every out-breath. (Use a different anchor for you attention if you feel more comfortable doing so.)
  - Replace your out-breath with the loving-kindness phrases. For the next few minutes, slowly repeat the phrases, returning now and again to an image of yourself sitting in the chair.
  - Gently open your eyes.
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### **Giving and Taking (*Tong-len*) Meditation**

- *Overwhelmed?* Take loving-kindness from those who love you. Give loving-kindness to those who love you.
  - *Disturbed?* Take in your own suffering. Give loving-kindness to *yourself*.
  - *Distressed?* Take in your own suffering. Give loving-kindness to *yourself and others*.
  - *Dissatisfied?* Take in your suffering *and the suffering of others*. Give loving-kindness to *others*.
  - *Content?* Take in others' suffering. Give others loving-kindness.
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## **Try This: *Giving and Taking Meditation***

- Sit quietly for a few moments.
  - Take a few conscious breaths, breathing in and out through all the pores of your body. *Feel* your breath as you inhale and as you exhale. You might want to imagine your body as a balloon that's being inflated with every in-breath. Do this until your attention is anchored in your breathing.
  - Open yourself to *physical* sensation in your body and locate any discomfort. If you have any, where is it located? Your stomach, chest, neck, or head?
  - Now focus on your heart area and see if you're carrying any *emotional* distress. If so, what's its *texture*? Does it feel "thick," "turbulent," "hard," "rough," or "heavy"? How does it *look* in your mind's eye? Does it appear "dark," "gray," or "murky"? Try to get a sense of the discomfort so you can clearly identify it. Give it a name, if you wish, such as "pain," "discouraged," or "worried."
  - Link your discomfort to your breath. With every in-breath, draw your distress deeply inside. Take a rich, full breath. Inhale the discomfort from wherever it's located in your body.
  - Imagine that your discomfort is being transformed in the gap between your in- and out-breaths, perhaps by light in the center of your being, or simply on its own.
  - Breathe out spaciousness and relief *to yourself and others*. Breathe from your center through your own body, suffusing it with well-being, and into the world.
  - Let your out-breath be the opposite of your in-breath. If you are breathing in darkness, send out light. If you're inhaling tightness, exhale softness. If you're breathing in roughness, send out smoothness. Practice in a way that you can feel the difference. If you're visualizing your body as an empty balloon, let the air out, releasing clean, pure air to all beings. You can send out ease and well-being to specific, needy persons or to the world in general.
  - Feel free to take more than one breath to inhale suffering or to exhale well-being, until you get the hang of it. Then let your breath gradually settle into a natural, easy rhythm, breathing *in* your distress and breathing *out* kindness and well-being.
  - Close your meditation by sitting quietly, allowing your entire internal experience to be just as it is.
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## **Try This: *Giving and Taking When Overwhelmed with Emotion***

- Sit quietly for a few moments.

- Take a few breaths through all the pores of your body and also breathe out through all the pores of your body.
  - Think of a few people who love you and place them in a circle around you. Locate them as close to or as far away from you as you like. Visualize them patiently sitting, just for you, with love and care in their hearts. You can also visualize your favorite pets or see yourself in a natural setting, surrounded by beauty.
  - Place your hand on your heart.
  - Continue consciously breathing. As you inhale, breathe in their love. As you exhale, return the love. Get a sense of inhaling warmth and kindness and exhaling gratitude and love.
  - Breathe in and out as long as you wish, feeling the energy of loving-kindness radiating *toward* you and *from* you as you breathe.
  - Gently open your eyes.
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### **Try This: *Centering Meditation***

- Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take a few deep, relaxing breaths.
- Notice your posture—sitting, not lying down, not standing—and feel any sensations in your body. If you have any physical discomfort, gently touch it with your awareness. If you have emotional distress, notice it and let it be there.
- Now bring attention to your *breathing*, wherever you feel it most strongly. Nostrils? Chest? Belly? When your mind wanders, gently return to the sensation of breathing. As you breathe, let your awareness move deeply into the experience of breathing. Do this for 5-10 minutes.
- The breath comes seemingly out of nowhere—it’s actually breathing *you*, keeping you healthy even when you’re fast asleep. Go deeply into the breath, to the *source* of the breath. Let your awareness drop into the deep, empty space from which breathing emerges, from which the faintest movement originates. This place, beyond thoughts and words, is a field of great peace and freedom.
- Just continue to breathe and open your awareness to the source of your breath. As you do so, listen for any words that may bubble up. Open yourself up to a word or a phrase that might be *just what you need to hear right now*. If a word or phrase were to appear from the bottom of your heart, what would it be?
- Take a few minutes to do this. Breathe, relax, and open yourself to words that might bubble up from deep inside. If no words arise, just stay with your breath. If a *few* words arise, roll them over in your mind and select one that’s perfect for you at this time in your life. Some possibilities might be “love,” “let it be,” “I love you,” “yes,” “trust,” “peace” or “mercy.”

- When you have a word or phrase, allow yourself to savor it, rolling it over and over in your mind. If you notice that your mind has wandered, bring it ever so gently back to the word or words.
  - After a while, let go of what you're doing and simply be with your inner experience, letting yourself be just as you are.
  - Slowly open your eyes.
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### **Try This: *Light Meditation***

- Light a candle and place it before you. Sit comfortably with a reasonably straight back and take a few deep, relaxing breaths. Gaze at the candle for a minute as it quietly emanates light in all directions. Gently close your eyes.
  - Visualize the candlelight in the heart region of your body, as an unwavering flame or an orb of light. Let it shine in all directions just like a candle.
  - Continue to rest your attention in your heart area. Feel the soft glow of candlelight in your heart. If you wish, you can open and close your eyes a few times, seeing the flame before you and then visualizing the flame in your heart.
  - When your mind wanders, bring it ever so gently back to the light in your heart.
  - Now begin to slowly move the light to different parts of your body. If you are feeling discomfort in any part of your body, let the light linger there awhile longer before moving onward.
    - First bring it to your head. Let the light illuminate your brain.
    - Then, going back down through your heart region, bring it through your arms to your hands, one arm after another. Take all the time you need.
    - Again starting at your heart, now bring the light down your trunk and legs to your feet—one leg and then the next.
    - Then back to your heart. If you have any emotional pain, allow the discomfort to be there while you suffuse your heart with light.
  - Now let the light expand outside yourself, to include others in your room or house, your country, and the entire world. In your mind's eye, visualize yourself and your entire surroundings suffused with warm, radiant light.
  - Slowly open your eyes when you're ready.
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Germer, C. (2009). *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions*. New York: Guilford Press.

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