

Loving kindness - Oct 4, 2015

We did a guided meditation on loving kindness, using the power of our previous experiences of giving and receiving love. Seeing and feeling our muses, in front of us, and using the power of repeating phrases that support our connection to the wishes for wellness, happiness, health, safety, ease and peace, we practiced in the following sequence:

Benefactor - receiving from
self- confirming the wisdom of the wish
benefactor - giving to
dear friend

Further development of this practice includes the following muses:

neutral person or familiar stranger
difficult person
categories of beings
all beings

There has been significant scientific investigation into the effects of LK meditation. Here is a quote referring to both neuroscience and psychosocial science results:

The results were clear. The practice of LKM changed several important brain regions: both the insula and the temporal parietal juncture (TPJ) lit up as a result of LKM. The insula is the part of the brain responsible for our ability to empathize with others, and to make oneself aware of emotional and physical present-moment experiences. While both groups saw an increase in insula activity, the group with 10,000 hours of experience showed significantly more activation than the other group. This group was experiencing higher levels of compassion than the non-practicing group.

A similar finding appeared for the TPJ. The TPJ, like the insula, is also related to our ability to process empathy and our ability to attune to the emotional states of others. Again, compared to short-term meditators, those with a long-term meditation practice showed significant activation of this brain region.

Loving-kindness creates feelings of social connection

Given this research, it is no surprise that LKM has been shown to increase social connectedness, even for strangers. [A study](#) conducted by a group of researchers from Stanford University found that in just seven minutes of LKM, subjects reported greater social connection toward others. Other studies have shown that the feeling of social connection can predict changes in a person vagal tone (a physiological measurement of resilience and overall well-being).

Loving kindness supports us in developing the concentration that is needed for deeper levels of mindfulness. It also supports us letting go of difficult mind states, such as fear, anger, hurt, confusion, envy, and destructive desires.

The other traditional trainings are:

compassion - bringing loving kindness to suffering

sympathetic joy - bringing loving kindness to other's happiness

equanimity - developing an evenness of mind, a state where all experiences can arise and depart without disturbing the mind

In our sitting practice, we can:

- dedicate a whole session to the cultivation of loving kindness
- start the session with some LK practice to help settle and collect the mind and set a tone of ease in the mind
- end the session with LK practice, and often this is done to turn our mind toward sharing the benefits of the practice
- loving kindness can be used in mindfulness practice where we are experiencing unpleasantness, we can cultivate some loving kindness and soften the unpleasantness

The opposite of loving kindness is ill will or hatred and near misses of loving kindness are sentimentality and desire or wanting. With desire, our wish for the other person or ourselves is tainted by expectation.

In daily life, we can use times of waiting to cultivate loving kindness. When we are in a challenging situation, it can be helpful to cultivate loving kindness both for ourselves and the other person. In making transitions from one locale to another we can stop and spend some time cultivating loving kindness for those people whom we are going to be entering into relationship with when we arrive.

When we have received a shock, we can stop and give ourselves loving kindness. Sylvia Boorstein recommends the phrase, "Relax sweetheart, I love you." You may come up with your own.

When we have periods of doubt, about ourselves or our practice, a recommended phrase is, "I love you, keep going."

It was a pleasure to practice with you. I look forward to the ongoing sharing of this mindfulness tradition.