

Handout #4

Meditation on Loving-Kindness for Self

Introduction

In this loving-kindness meditation, we extend loving-kindness towards ourselves by way of the support of a few simple phrases. We are free to experiment with different words, changing them as we go along. By repeating slowly and mindfully these phrases, we start by channeling our attention in the direction of genuine care and concern towards ourselves, while allowing time for our heart to respond with the appropriate feelings when it is ready. Our mindful awareness encompasses both ourselves (as the object of kindness) and the inner quality of loving-kindness itself as it suffuses our mind and heart.

To facilitate the arising of genuine loving-kindness toward ourselves, in between our repetition of the phrases of loving-kindness, we pause to reflect on the basis of having ourselves as the recipient of our own kindness and loving-concern. We can see that we are just like everyone else in that “all of us want to be happy and to not suffer.” Reflect on its validity in relation to our experiences —is it true that, deep down, I really want to be happy and not suffer?

We can also recollect other reasons to strengthen this quality of loving-kindness toward ourselves. For some of us, this could be seeing the goodness within us. For others, this could be sensing our yearning for love or remembering past experiences of happiness and wishing that for ourselves. And for some of us, no reason is needed for extending love and kindness to ourselves.

The following can be used as a meditation script to guide ourselves and others into meditation.

Motivation

We bring forth an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that we are meditating not just for our own individual benefit, but we are taking the time now to meditate and develop our mind to become a wiser and kinder person, able to be of benefit to all beings.

The main body of the meditation

We begin by adopting a suitable meditation posture, either sitting or lying down. We can sit on a chair, cross-legged on the floor, or lay down on our back...

We allow our spine to be in its natural and comfortable position. We rest our hands and arms on some physical support to allow our shoulders to be relaxed. We are free to close our eyes or leave them open.

We return our attention to our own body, to be in touch with the simple sensations here in order to settle our body into meditation.

Notice areas of softness, ease and relaxation with comfortable feelings. Can we welcome these feelings and allow ourselves to enjoy them while they are here?

Also notice areas of tension or tightness with uncomfortable feelings. Can we simply acknowledge them for the time being? Don't feel that we have to change them immediately for the better. Just let them be.

We check in with the sensations at our face. Are we tensing up any of the facial muscles? Those at the forehead, around our eyes or at the jaw? Can we gently relax these muscles and let in a different feeling, one of softness, ease and comfort into our face?

We can allow this softening and relaxing to spread on its own to the rest of our body, helping our body to settle into meditation in its own time.

Moving on to the meditation on loving-kindness towards ourselves, we choose a few simple phrases that best express our understanding of what it means to love, to care and to show concern. We can start with these stock phrases, change them as we go along.

"May I live in safety..." Wishing oneself to feel safe and to have security in life...

"May I be happy..." Wishing oneself to feel joy, cheerfulness and happiness in the mind and heart...

"May I be healthy..." Wishing oneself to enjoy physical health and wellbeing...

"May I live with ease..." Wishing one's daily life and work flows smoothly and easily.

"May I live in safety... May I be happy... May I be healthy... May I live with ease."

We repeat the phrases slowly and mindfully, at our own pace, and stay connected to the intentions behind these words and extend loving-kindness towards ourselves...

Coming back to the phrases when we get distracted, we don't have to worry if we are not feeling particularly loving. We can allow our heart plenty of time to respond in its own way. We can rely on the words to guide our heart towards loving-kindness...

When, on occasions, the nice, warm feelings of love and kindness arise, we can entwine them among the phrases and offer them to ourselves...

"May I live in safety... May I be happy... May I be healthy... May I live with ease."

In between repetitions, we can reflect on the basis that support or promote loving-kindness toward ourselves. Deep down, all of us want to be happy and not suffer. Can we pause and think about this statement? Is it true for us? How does this wish to be happy manifest in our life? When we feel ready, we can come back to the phrases and continue to offer loving-kindness...

"May I live in safety... May I be happy... May I be healthy... May I live with ease."

We can also reflect on other reasons that activate loving-kindness for ourselves. Some of us may see the goodness within us; others may remember past experiences of happiness and wish that to continue; and still others may sense the yearning for love within...

"May I live in safety... May I be happy... May I be healthy... May I live with ease."

[Long pause... till end of meditation]

Dedication

Finally, dedicate our positive energy and insights to the well-being and happiness of all living beings.