

LOVING KINDNESS IN EVERY MOMENT

by Marlene Neufeld, MSW, RSW

When I was introduced to the Loving Kindness Meditation, I found it hard to generate loving kindness for myself. Since then I have been learning to bring loving kindness into every moment, to have loving kindness for myself permeate every action.

I have learned that loving myself is the key to loving kindness in the world. I grew up hearing the words of Jesus, "Love your neighbor as yourself" but didn't understand that loving myself needed to come first. My childhood seemed to be full of messages not to love myself; of how I could improve, of how I didn't measure up, to not be too proud, to beware of egotism.

I have learned that loving myself is very different from egotism. Egotism is trying to convince the world I'm loveable when I don't feel that way myself. Loving myself is a wholehearted embrace of everything I feel, everything I am, as well as everything I am not.

Mindfulness has helped me discover all the ways in which I limited myself, how I held myself back from experiencing love. I looked for others to love me, trying to have them give me what I was unwilling to give myself.

Then I learned that true loving kindness involved accepting myself and all of my unlovable parts. True loving kindness involved making friends with all of my feelings, even those which seemed inconvenient or scary; noticing and loving myself for my judgmental and critical thoughts; noticing my self-imposed limit on my ability to feel good (the upper limit to my capacity to give and receive love).

Here's a little loving kindness experiment you can do right now. (from Gay Hendricks, Learning to Love Yourself, 1982)

1. Think of something you have struggled with in yourself - maybe your weight or your fear of speaking in public. Let your mind settle on this so that you are clear about what it is.
2. Now think of someone or something that you know that you love. Perhaps it's a person, a pet, or an action like walking in the country on a sunny day. The only requirement is that you have reliably felt love in the presence of this person or thing.
3. Let yourself feel that love right now. Feel it in your body and mind.
4. Now take a leap: Let your love be big enough to include thing you have struggled with.

I invite you, as you go through your day, to pause occasionally to generate the kind of love for yourself that you most want from others.

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