

Things that are worth learning are often difficult. What is worth more than learning to love and accept yourself? - Unknown

CLASS FOUR: LOVING KINDNESS AND SELF-COMPASSION

In practicing mindfulness, we cultivate a sense of curiosity and openness to all experiences. In doing so, we discover new ways to relate to stressful internal or external events. Pain and suffering are universal experiences. By becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations that arise in each moment, it allows us the possibility of freeing ourselves from habitual, automatic ways of reacting.

In general, we react to experiences in one of three ways:

- With boredom, where we leave the present moment and go off into daydreaming or engage with external distractions.
- With clinging, perhaps wanting things to stay the same, or dwelling on problems to fix, control or solve.
- With avoidance, distracting or distancing ourselves from difficulties or pain.

Mindfulness offers us the opportunity to notice when we have drifted away from present moment awareness, learn to respond with loving kindness to our wandering mind and to gently guide our attention back to present moment experience.

Consider that we're often driven by a need to be perfect and invulnerable in order to avoid emotional pain and to feel ok about ourselves. It's exhausting, considering nobody is perfect. During the formal practice of Loving Kindness, the goal is to direct positive emotions and qualities to whatever arises in your stream of awareness. This can include yourself, others, animals or nature. This practice is a sort of training, where we learn to show ourselves kindness, acceptance and support when difficult things happen.

Unconditional compassion and acceptance does not mean giving up, resignation or passivity. It means noticing the present moment, without judgment, defense or self-criticism. The goal is not to eliminate unpleasant feelings or thoughts when they arise, but to become more aware of them.

Think about a cut on your finger; how does your body heal? When the right conditions are established, the body heals from the inside out. So what environment is needed for the mind to heal? The answer is, one without blame, shame and self-judgment. One of self-awareness, acceptance, kindness and compassion.

Class Four Practice

1) Practice guided [Befriending Meditation](#) daily for the next six days. Record your experiences, reactions, discoveries and challenges on the [homework log](#), as this will help with the inquiry process.

<https://soundcloud.com/hachetteaudiouk/meditation-seven-befriending>

Note: If you are finding it difficult to accept these well wishes to yourself during the Befriending Meditation, know that the intention of wishing well upon yourself and others is enough. If you find your mind being drawn to painful memories or experiences, you may always return your attention to the breath and body, and use this as an anchor to ground back to the present moment. Become aware when your mind shifts from cultivating a sense of kindness, to creating a story based on your experience. If this happens, notice that your attention has drifted and gently guide it back to the practice.

2) You may also start to combine different meditations to prolong your practice. Create a playlist, and try listening to [Breath and Body](#), [Sounds and Thoughts](#) and [Befriending Meditation](#) all in one sitting.

3) Choose two routines in your day and make a deliberate effort to bring moment-to-moment awareness to that activity, but also try to incorporate Loving Kindness into these activities as well.

4) Complete [Loving Kindness Reflective Worksheet](#) optional activity and readings.

Reference

Williams M. & Penman D. (2011). *Mindfulness: An eight-week plan to finding peace in a frantic world*. New York: Rodale Books. Chapter 10 and 11.