

Meditations on (1) Kindness & Gratitude (2) Love
by Ven. Thubten Chodron©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle

Contents (click on any heading to view text)

- Preparation
 - Meditation on Kindness & Gratitude
 - Meditation on Love
 - Conclusion
 - Word of Advice
-

Preparation

We begin the meditation by focusing on our breath in order to let our mind settle down. So simply breathe normally and naturally, without forcing your breath. Let your breathing pattern be as it is. And then focus your attention either at the nostrils, or at the abdomen. And simply experience the breath as it goes in and out.

So if you're focusing at the nostrils, you're going to feel the sense of touch as the air passes through your nostrils and goes along the upper lip.

If you're focusing at your abdomen, you're going to be aware of the rise of your abdomen as you inhale, and aware of its falling as you exhale.

So for a few minutes, just let your breath be. Focus on your breath, be aware of being nourished by the environment, by the breath which connects you to the environment you live in.

If distractions arise, don't follow them. Acknowledge them, be it a sound or an intruding thought, but don't get involved in it, don't make a story about it. Just recognize something else has come into your field of attention, and then return your attention back to the breath.

So let's just do that for a minute or two to let our mind settle down and become more concentrated.

[Pause]

Meditation on Kindness & Gratitude

First we're going to do the meditation on kindness, to help us see that we've received a lot of benefit from others. When we reflect on the benefit we've received from others, let's not get hung up on whether or not others had the intention to benefit us. That's not the issue at this point; here, it is simply the fact that we have received benefit from others. Regardless of what their intention is, the bottom-line is that their actions have helped us in one way or another.

And as we contemplate this benefit we've received or the kindness we've received from others, let's let our heart open in a feeling of gratitude towards them. This gratitude does not mean a feeling of obligation but a real warmth and open-heartedness, and feeling of connection and happiness, and affection, when we see others.

living beings we've received kindness from. And again let your heart open in a feeling of gratitude and affection for those beings, even though we don't know them, because they have been kind to us.

[Pause]

And let's think specifically of the kindness of our family. The fact that as infants, we couldn't take care of ourselves. We couldn't feed and clothe ourselves, protect ourselves from the elements. Others took care of us. Often our parents are the direct care-givers, sometimes our parents couldn't take care of us, so they arranged for other adults to take care of us. They wanted us to live, they made other arrangements even though they couldn't do it. And we've received benefit from those other adults.

So think of all the time we spent as infants – people feeding us, changing our diapers, cuddling us when we cried, all the times they've had to rescue us when we almost fell off the edge of the bed or choked on something that we've stuck in our mouth. Those of you who have children know how much care it takes to take care of infants and toddlers, and we've been recipient of that exact same care simply because of the fact that we have lived. Others protected us during that time when we couldn't take care of ourselves.

They taught us to speak. Our family also is generally involved in our education. So our ability to speak and communicate, we often take for granted, but we don't have this ability by ourselves. It's because our family taught us. We don't have our education by ourselves, and our knowledge by ourselves, it's because our family taught us, or they sent us to school and made arrangements for other people to teach us. Because they encouraged us to learn.

It's very important to reflect on the kindness of our family or whichever adults took care of us when we were young, and also the kindness of our teachers. All the teachers who had thirty kids in their class tried to take care of us the best they could. They didn't give up on us even though sometimes we acted quite obnoxiously.

It's important to be able to look into our childhood, at our parents and our teachers, and reflect on their kindness, and reflect on how difficult it must have been on them sometimes to raise us and to bring us up. Because as children, we may not have been the easiest people to be with, the most cooperative living being. They often had to discipline us, to teach us some manners, to teach us how to get along with others, and even though we didn't like their discipline, somehow we did learn that we have to be aware of and be sensitive to others' needs and concerns, we can't just trample through life not caring how we affect others. So we learn this from our parents, our family, from our teachers. And in spite of things that may not have gone well in our childhood, different painful things that may have happened, the fact still remains that we do receive a tremendous amount of benefit from others. So let's let ourselves feel the recipient of that benefit and kindness, and open our hearts in a sensation of gratitude and affection in return.

[Pause]

And then let's think of the benefit we've received even from people who have harmed us. In spite of the harm we've received from others, we have all grown. And actually it's not even in spite of the harm, it's *because of* the harm, and if we look back upon those painful episodes in our life, we can see that we did come out of them stronger, we developed our own internal resources, we were shaken up and challenged out of our complacency, and so this growth, although it may have been painful, although it may have been difficult, although we may have felt we weren't ready for it yet, still, we grew, we've developed, and all of that came about due to the people who did harm us and challenge us, the people who put us in difficult situations.

So if we can appreciate our own internal strength and resources, then we can also appreciate the people who cause those qualities to develop. And feel some gratitude towards them. In other words, people don't have to wish us well in order for us to benefit from them. And we can still feel gratitude and affection no matter how they treated us or what their attitude towards us was, simply by the fact that we did benefit from what they did.

And the people who harmed us, or who make us feel threatened, people who we disapprove of, also gave us the opportunity to practice patience. We can't practice patience with people who're kind to us. We can only practice patience with the people who threatened us or who we disapprove of or who have harmed us. The development of patience is a very essential quality for spiritual practice, and this arises on the basis of the people who have disturbed us. So again, we have received a lot of benefit from those people because without them, we couldn't develop patience. Without patience, we couldn't develop ourselves spiritually or internally to be of greater benefit. So let's let ourselves feel a sense of gratitude also towards the people who we don't get along with very well, or who we mistrust, because they've enabled us to practice patience, because they've enabled us to find internal resources and talents and skills and qualities to cope with difficult situations that we didn't know we had before.

[Pause]

And so let your mind rest in this feeling of affection and gratitude. As that feeling arises, then let your mind rest in it. Let your mind become stable in that feeling of gratitude and affection. Keep the mind focused on that feeling without letting it get distracted towards other things.

(If you wish to conclude your meditation session at this point, please dedicate the positive potential as instructed in "Conclusion" below.)

Meditation on Love

We'll go on now to do the meditation on loving kindness. In loving kindness, we're wishing others to have happiness and its causes. And so we have to think deeply about what happiness means, because there're different levels of happiness. So we're wishing others to have not only happiness in the sense of good food, cloths and shelter, we're wishing them not only to have happiness of this life – good friends, career fulfillment, happy family, serene environment and so on, we're wishing them to have the happiness that comes through internal spiritual development, the happiness also that comes through being free of grudges and belligerence and spite, the happiness that comes through being able to forgive and apologize, the happiness that comes through being able to open our hearts in affection to others no matter how they've treated us in return, the happiness that comes through seeing that every living being has the potential to actualize and realize and expose the clear light nature of their mind and the internal good nature of their mind.

So as we're wishing others happiness, let's think deeply of the meaning of happiness, the various levels of happiness: the short-term happiness, but especially the long-term happiness that comes through internal growth.

So here we start, again first with our family and our friends... but actually before we start with them, let's start with ourselves. And let's wish ourselves to be well and happy. And let's wish ourselves to have temporal happiness, the good things of this life, as well as the deeper, long lasting happiness that comes through spiritual development. Let's spend a minute or two wishing that kind of happiness for ourselves, imagining ourselves being happy, thinking in detail of the kind of happiness that we wish for ourselves.

Word of Advice

So these meditations have been gone through rather briefly. Again you can do them on your own or press the pause button so that you can contemplate each point more fully. It's good to do them on a regular basis, because we can really see the difference in our mind after we do this kind of meditation. But because we're unfamiliar with these feelings they often aren't sustained for a long time in our daily life. But if we take time to nourish ourselves internally the same way as we take time to nourish our physical body, then these attitudes can become more stable and more long lasting in ourselves.