

Developing Loving Compassion for Happiness and Health

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Compassion is the feeling of love, kindness, or charity toward people. Neuropsychologists Dr. Richard Davidson and Dr. Antoine Lutz have measured the brains of people famous for their compassion, such as Buddhist monks and Carmelite nuns (with years of meditation practice) and found that they are much happier, calmer, and more creative and spontaneous than ordinary people. They then trained students in ten weeks of compassion meditation and found the students also became much happier and mentally healthier. When we practice compassion, it is easier for us to forgive and feel warm feelings towards all people, even those difficult people who trouble us.

How can we train our brains for compassion? The model Davidson and Lutz used focuses compassion for *loved one* first, then for *self*, then for *dear or close friend*, then for a *neutral person* (someone you don't know well), then for a *difficult person* (someone for whom you have unhappy feelings, an enemy so to speak), and finally for *all beings*. I have created an autogenic training script for this, since that is how I was trained. It is slightly different than the method Davidson used, but it appears to work very well.

Repeat the following phrases quietly and patiently to yourself. Repeat a phrase, pause and notice the feelings, and then repeat the next phrase. Visualize the person (yourself or the other person) with each step of the compassion meditation and include the name. When you come to your enemy, recognize the enemy suffers. You want to be free of suffering for yourself, so the Golden Rule says you should want the same even for your enemy. Think on the enemy's suffering and cultivate a wish that he or she be free of suffering.

"I feel quite quiet . . . My right arm feels heavy . . . My left arm feels heavy . . . My arms feel heavy and relaxed . . . My right leg feels heavy . . . My left leg feel heavy . . . My arms and legs feel heavy and relaxed . . .

"My right hand feels warm . . . Warmth flows into my right hand . . . My left hand feels warm . . . Warmth flows into my left hand . . . My hands are warm and relaxed . . . My right foot is warm . . . Warmth flows into my right foot . . . My left foot is warm . . . Warmth flows into my left foot . . . My hands and feet are warm . . .

Visualize someone you feel love for. Notice how your heart feels when you imagine them right in front of you. Say three times, "Dear [name here], may you be happy." Then, "May you be healthy." "May you safe from inner danger and outer danger." (Inner danger means anger, fear, insecurity, jealousy, and other inner feelings that torture us.)

Now see yourself, and use the same pattern: "May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be safe from dangers."

A friend: focus on the same three concepts, happiness, health, and safety. "Dear [name here], may you be happy . . ." and so on.

Next, focus on someone you know only slightly. Expand your warmth and concern for people not close to you.

Now focus on a difficult person, an enemy, so to speak. Ponder that you yourself are likely someone's difficult person, so you can wish your enemy well, as you'd want someone to wish you well. Perhaps you can link yourself to the enemy and say, "May we both be happy, may we both be healthy, may we both be safe."

Now expand your love to your neighborhood, your town, city, state, nation, and to the whole world.

Practice regularly. Love is like playing a musical instrument. The more you diligently practice, the better you will be at that skill. Meditate on this concept: Being loved in nice, quite interesting, but being loving is vital. Only when our love flows to all others will we truly be happy.