



Florida Community of Mindfulness

Meditations for Cultivating Loving Kindness & Compassion

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Overview

As our teacher Fred has taught in many FCM retreats, many of us live with the mistaken belief that our path to personal happiness and fulfillment is achieved by gratifying our desires and needs. We become preoccupied with our own wants, preferences and comfort and these become the prime motivating/energizing forces in our life. What we fail to see is that this very egocentricity and self-cherishing is the major source of our suffering.

Buddhist teachings that offer a radically different path to happiness and well-being: a life motivated by altruistic love and compassion in which kindness and concern for the welfare of others inspire our actions and become our way of being in the world. Our teacher Fred has offered many talks which are recorded and are available on the FCM website. The basic guided meditations that Fred and senior members of FCM offer at retreats and in other venues are presented in this document.

An overview of the meditations by broad classification is provided below. It may be helpful to review and practice these meditations in order, as each one supports the subsequent meditations. A short example is then provided for most of these types of meditations in the following pages. We encourage you to search YouTube and other sources for many excellent recordings of these meditations online.

May all beings benefit from our practices of loving kindness and compassion!

Meditations for Arousing Aspiration

We begin by recognizing how fortunate we are to have been supported by so many in this lifetime, generating gratitude and an aspiration to support others by living an altruistic life. Cultivating a strong aspiration and reflecting on it every day will create the larger container that will help override our habitual reactions to life.

1. Reflect on all beings who have supported you in this lifetime, including: parents, grandparents, other family members, teachers, mentors, friends, work colleagues, spiritual teachers and friends. Cultivate gratitude, realizing that we wouldn't be where we are today without their support.
2. Reflect on the most important benefactors in your life, those who have been most inspirational and helpful, whether known to us personally or not. Select one very inspirational benefactor, perhaps a spiritual teacher or other very significant being in your life who exemplifies those qualities of kindness, compassion and wisdom that you wish to nurture in yourself, and reflect on all the wonderful qualities of this person. Recognize that the seeds of these qualities are within your heart also, and let this benefactor be a constant presence who inspires you to nourish those seeds.

3. Reflect on your personal aspiration for your spiritual life. For example, do you wish to be more compassionate, kinder, open, harmonious in relationships, generous, helpful to others? How might you live in alignment with this aspiration?

Meditations for Cultivating an Open Heart to All Beings

We may find it easy to experience loving kindness and compassion for those individuals we like, but difficult for those we who we don't like or feel indifferent to. These meditations are intended to help us open our hearts to all beings, without discrimination.

1. Equalization: recognizing that exactly like us, all other beings wish to be happy and to avoid suffering. **(A)**
2. Equanimity: having an equally open heart for all types of beings, including those we like, those we don't like, and those we are indifferent to, by seeing how artificial these three categories are – how much our categorization depends on how those beings treat *me*, and how individuals may move from one category to another during our lives. **(B)**
3. Interconnection: realizing that all beings are interconnected and could in fact be viewed as having been our mother (or child) at some point in time. We can also reflect on the interconnection of all life that sustains our planet. **(C)** Touching the Earth is a lovely practice from the Plum Village tradition that we can use to contemplate what has been transmitted to us by our blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. **<http://plumvillage.org/key-practice-texts/the-five-earth-touchings/>**
4. Empathy: to offer compassion to another being, we first need to truly notice and feel their suffering. Empathy is our capacity to resonate with the feelings of another. When we have an aspiration to be of benefit to others, empathy is the catalyst that is needed to generate compassion to a specific person.

Empathy may arise naturally, e.g. the feeling of happiness that arises within us in the presence of another smiling joyfully, or the resonance we feel in the presence of someone who is obviously suffering.

Sometimes empathy does not naturally arise. We may not even notice that the other is suffering, instead perhaps just seeing this person in a narrow and one dimensional light, perhaps as a “jerk” or other negative label. In these situations, doing meditations on empathy by putting oneself into the shoes of the other can generate understanding and open our hearts to the causes and conditions that are creating the behavior of this person. Compassion will naturally arise when empathy arises. **(D)**

Meditations for Generating Loving Kindness (Metta)

The practice of loving kindness/metta develops a quality of heart, one that can be expressed in many beautiful ways in the daily unfolding of life. When we practice metta for ourselves, we soften and open our hearts so that we can be loving and accepting for ourselves and then extend that same loving kindness to others. When we practice metta for loved ones, we strengthen the aspiration for extending loving kindness to this person, helping us to respond more lovingly and skillfully to this person in all types of situations. When we practice with a “neutral” person, ie one we feel indifferent to, we can enrich our encounters with all beings, knowing that this one or that one wants happiness just like me. When we practice metta for difficult beings in our life, we can cultivate understanding and kindness, helping to open our hearts to these difficult ones in real life encounters, bringing new possibilities for relationships.

While in the practice of metta we gently repeat phrases that are meaningful in terms of what we wish for ourselves and others. It is important to do this practice slowly, really letting our wish for the other’s happiness to resonate in our hearts. At the same time, we do not need to try to “manufacture” feelings of love that don’t naturally arise; simply offer the wishes with a sincere intention for the other’s happiness. (E)

Meditations for Generating Loving Kindness and Compassion: Tonglen

In order to be present to the suffering of the world, we need to learn how to transform it within ourselves so that we are no longer swept away by it. Although being able to touch another’s suffering is an essential element of compassion, we must cultivate both the desire to free others of their suffering and the ability to transform that suffering in order for true compassion to arise.

In Tonglen practice, we learn how to be present to the suffering of the world by willingly breathing it in and transforming it within ourselves. We learn to send out the energy needed to help others transform their suffering while cutting through our egocentric tendencies which keep us from truly being there for others. (F)

Seeing Difficult People as Essential for the Path

Without difficult people in our lives, how would we practice? How can we generate patience and understanding, among other qualities, without encountering challenging beings? We should be grateful to have these teachers in our lives. (G)

A - Equalization Meditation

Begin by reflecting on your own wish to be happy and to avoid pain suffering. Really feel this deeply within your heart.

Bring someone you know to mind, and reflect on the following:

- This person has a body and a mind, just like me.
- This person has feelings, emotions, and thoughts, just like me.
- This person has, at some point in his or her life, been sad, disappointed, angry, hurt, or confused, just like me.
- This person has, in his or her life, experienced physical and emotional pain and suffering, just like me.
- This person may have different unpleasant situations or sufferings that he or she wants to be free from, but you are alike in wanting to avoid suffering. One may suffer from losing a job, another from a break-up in a relationship, another from being lonely, another from poor health. No matter what their sufferings, they are the same as you in wanting to be free from them.
- This person wishes to be healthy and loved, and to have fulfilling relationships, just like me.
- This person wishes to be happy, just like me.
- There is no reason that my happiness or wish to avoid suffering is any more or less important than this person's. We are the same.

Do this reflection with several people you know, including both some you like as well as some you may dislike, as well as strangers. As you add more and more people, you will better experience the universal truth that we all equally want happiness and want to avoid suffering.

This practice can also be done as you stand in line at the grocery store, at the airport, or any other place where we encounter beings.

B - Equanimity Meditation

Visualize in front of you three people: first, someone you are very fond of, who makes you happy just thinking of them. Next to him or her, imagine someone you dislike, who the mere thought of makes you unhappy. Finally, next to that person, visualize someone you don't know and are indifferent to.

Bring forward the image of the person you are fond of. Examine why you feel close to this individual and enjoy their company. Is it really because of the individual, or is it because they say things you like to hear, do nice things for you, or treat you well? In other words, is your fondness of this person really about them, or is it about you and your preferences?

Consider your past and future relationship with this person. Perhaps at one point you did not know this person, and if you had seen them on the street you wouldn't have paid them a second thought. Then, perhaps they became an acquaintance and eventually you became quite fond of them. Or, perhaps at one point you disliked this person, but then with changing circumstances, you grew to care for them. Then imagine how you could eventually drift away from this person and become indifferent to them. Likewise, consider what type of circumstances or actions could turn your friendly relationship into one of animosity.

Next, bring forward the image of the person whom you dislike. Examine why you truly dislike this person. Is it because of who they truly are that you dislike them? Or, is it because they say things you don't like, do things you don't approve of, or treat you poorly? Perhaps there are people who don't look at this person with animosity. Could it be that the reason you dislike this person has more to do with you and your preferences than the actual person themselves?

Consider your past and future relationship with this person. Was there always animosity, or was this person once someone you would have regarded with indifference or perhaps even enjoyed having around? Consider the circumstances that changed the nature of this relationship. Then, imagine how further changing of circumstances could once again shift the relationship to one of indifference, or perhaps even one of friendship.

Lastly, bring forward the image of the person with whom you are unfamiliar or about whom you have no definite opinion. In the same way, consider your past and future relationship with this person. Perhaps at one point in your life, you were very close to this person or maybe you disliked them strongly. However, over time you may have drifted away and not thought about this person one way or the other. Also, consider how you could easily get to know this person and develop a loving attitude for them. Perhaps they decide to join a community you are part of for example. Also consider how circumstances could easily turn this relationship of indifference to one of animosity. In addition, examine why you see this person with indifference in the first place. Is it really because of who this person is, or is it because they have not done anything that pleases you, not done anything for you, not said things that you like to hear?

When we see people, we see them in terms of these three categories: friends, enemies and strangers. However, none of them exist in this way inherently or permanently. How we view people is greatly distorted by our own ego, and our relationship to them is ultimately unstable and constantly shifting with changing circumstances. If we consider who these people really are, they are all sentient beings. They are all exactly the same in that they wish to be happy and free from suffering. Thus, there is really no reason to discriminate between them with attachment, aversion and indifference. You must meditate on this and come to this conclusion over and over again. Eventually, you will develop a true equanimity toward all beings.

C - Interconnection Meditation

(1) Interconnection with All Beings

Reflect on all that your mother, father, or some other benefactor or friend has done for you in this life. Reflect on all they did for you, for example your mother in carrying you in the womb, giving birth to you, and raising you as a helpless baby, helping you when you could not care for yourself. Reflect on the problems they went through in order to help and care for you in this way.

Reflect on how you have benefitted from their kindness and generate the desire to repay that kindness.

Generate the wish that they be happy, safe, free of suffering, and send them loving and kind thoughts and feelings in a personal way.

Reflect on the kindness of mothers, fathers, benefactors and friends throughout the world. Consider how so many people go out of their way to care for and help others and the trouble that it puts them through.

Generate the wish that all mothers, fathers, benefactors, friends and all beings be happy, safe, free of suffering, and send them loving and kind thoughts and feelings as well.

Then imagine that your mother, father, benefactor or friend is somewhere suffering great emotional or physical pain. Cultivate the desire to free them of that suffering, and reflect on how to turn away from their suffering would be the epitome of ingratitude.

Reflect on how we react when we hear of, or see someone we don't know suffering greatly. Then imagine that we find out that that person is actually our mother, father, benefactor, or friend. Then how would we react?

Reflect on how although each person may not be our friend or relative right now, they certainly are someone else's friend, relative, or benefactor who will suffer greatly when they hear the news of their misfortune. Also reflect that had things gone differently in our life, that suffering being could very well have been our friend, relative, or benefactor.

Cultivate the desire to free all beings who are all potentially our mother, father, relative, friend, or benefactor of their myriad sufferings.

(2) Interconnection with All Life

Reflect on how life on this planet is endlessly interconnected. Trees provide materials for houses. Plants provide materials for clothes. Both plants and animals provide life for other living beings. Life is supported by myriad of living things on earth.

Consider how everything you have in this life is provided by others, from the cars we drive, the highways we drive on, the food we eat, the shelter we have, to our schools, hospitals, stores and more. Look around you and notice how everything is provided by others, and how interrelated all of the planet is.

D - Empathy Meditation

Bring to mind someone whom you care dearly for. Allow yourself to be aware that this person has a life that may extend far beyond your experience of him or her, a story that runs just as deep as your, that is filled with their own hopes, dreams, fears and struggles.

Picture this person going through their life cycle, imagining what they might have faced and felt at each stage:

- As a newborn, born into a confusion world that they didn't understand, totally reliant on others for life
- As a toddler, learning to move about the world, influenced by their family, other caretakers, and environment.
- As a child, entering school, making friends, perhaps experiencing rejection
- As an adolescent, struggling to define themselves and to fit in with peers, perhaps experiencing being left out. What might their relationships with their families and others looked like? How might these have shaped them?
- As a young adult, with hopes and dreams, striving to take their place in the world. Again, what types of relationships might they have had with others and how might this have affected this person?
- Moving through adulthood, establishing priorities, settling into a rhythm of life, experiencing successes and upheavals, and moving on
- As an elder, observing their physical strength beginning to fade even as their wisdom grows
- On their deathbed, looking back on their life, and closing their eyes

This person, born with a pure mind, just like you, wants to be happy and not to suffer.

Allow yourself to be filled with the kind wish that he or she may have a life filled with happiness and peace, that his or her life may be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Repeat the meditation for someone with whom you are unfamiliar or about whom you have no definite opinion.

Lastly, bring to mind someone that you have a difficult relationship with. You might first do this meditation with someone that annoys or irritates you, perhaps graduating over time to those who are very difficult, even using, e.g., national political figures, those who might be harming many people, and such. As you bring this person to mind, do so with an aspiration to better understand this person so that compassion might be cultivated.

E - Loving Kindness Meditation

Begin by bringing to mind the image of a person or perhaps a pet that you feel unconditional love for. If possible, let your heart be warmed for several minutes by thinking of this being. Then release the image, simply noticing any feeling of warmth that may be there.

Imagine you are sitting in front of yourself.

- Looking into your own eyes, send yourself wishes of loving kindness:
 - *May I be safe*, free of danger and violence. May I be protected, with a sense of refuge.
 - *May I be happy*, in touch with my own loveliness, not fearful but trusting, loving. May I be free of any sadness, anxiety, anger, and depression.
 - *May I be healthy*, free from pain
 - *May I live with ease*, and may I accept all elements of my life – relationships, family matters, livelihood and more –with grace and ease.

Bring to mind someone you know or have known in your life, someone who you had a loving and kind relationship with, such as a parent, spouse, child, other family member, or close friend.

- Imagine this loved one sitting in front of you, and look into his or her eyes.
- Send this person wishes of loving kindness:
 - *May you be safe*, free of danger and violence. May you be protected, with a sense of refuge.
 - *May you be happy*, in touch with your own loveliness, not fearful but trusting, loving. May you be free of any sadness, anxiety, anger, and depression.
 - *May you be healthy*, free from pain
 - *May you live with ease*, and may all elements of your life – relationships, family matters, livelihood and more – be accepted with grace and ease by you.

Repeat this meditation for someone you don't know well and who you are neutral or indifferent to. As you bring this person to mind, remember that just like you, they equally want to be happy and not have suffering. You are connected with this person as you are with all beings.

Repeat this meditation for someone you have a difficult relationship with. As you bring this person to mind, remember that they also want to be happy and avoid suffering, and that they have their own causes and conditions that have brought them to this point in life. They have suffered and may see life and situations very difficult as a result of their past experiences. Wish this person genuine loving kindness; may they be free of suffering and not continue to cause suffering for themselves and others.

Finally, extend loving kindness to all beings in the world. You may also want to pick specific groups at different times, such as refugees, abused children, the poor, those in

war zones, even extending loving kindness to those who perpetuate crimes against victims. May all beings be happy and have the causes of happiness, and may all beings be free of suffering and the causes of suffering.

F - Tonglen Practice (Taking & Sending)

1. Imagine someone who is suffering in some way is sitting in front of you. It is said you should begin with yourself and then you can move on to loved ones, then people you are indifferent to, and finally to people you have difficulty with. You might notice that if you have strong emotions around someone whom you have difficulty with, beginning the practice with your own suffering first is essential before doing tonglen for the other.
2. Reflect on the person's suffering and the causes of their suffering. If helpful, you can also imagine yourself in their shoes to better understand their suffering. Cultivate the wish that they be free of their suffering.
3. Then imagine that all the person's suffering collects into a similar black, smoky, tar-like. Imagine that because of your desire to free this person of their suffering, you willingly breathe it in in the form of this black, smoky, tar-like substance.
4. Next, imagine that covering your heart is a black, smoky, tar-like mass which represents all of your self-cherishing and ego-clinging tendencies. As you breathe in their suffering, because of your willingness to take on another's suffering, your ego-clinging diminishes. To visualize this, you imagine that as you breathe in their suffering as the black, smoky substance, it touches the black substance around your heart representing ego-clinging, and both substances dissipate. As they dissipate, a light from your true, open, selfless heart shines forth.
5. This light is composed of whatever antidote that the person needs to eliminate their suffering. For example, someone who is angry may need calming or patience, someone who is sad may need joy, someone worried may need confidence or a sense of ease, someone with a physical ailment may need health or strength, etc. You willingly give all of whatever antidote is needed to them, not needing to keep it for yourself. When the light shines on the other person, you notice that the black substance around them begins to dissipate as well. As this happens, they begin to suffer less.
6. You continue in this fashion, taking in the suffering of the person in front of you and sending back the antidote until your ego-clinging and their suffering have both completely dissipated. To visualize this, you continue breathing in their black, smoky substance which continues to dissipate the black, tar-like mass around your heart and send back the light which continues to dissipate the black, smoky substance around them, until finally both black substances have completely dissipated, and you are both full of light.
7. At this point you visualize that the person in front of you is at peace and completely free of suffering, while you are completely free of any ego-centricity and your heart is completely open, selfless, and spacious. Then you just rest in this feeling.

8. Once this process has been completed and you have rested in that space, you can also reflect on the fact that beings all over the world are suffering in the same way that this person in front of you has suffered. You cultivate a willingness to take on the suffering of all beings suffering in this way in order to free them of that suffering. You can then use the same visualization as before, but imagine the black smoke you breath in is coming from all the beings' suffering, and that the light goes out to all those beings as well. At the end of the process, you imagine that all beings are smiling and free of this suffering, that you are once again free of ego-centricity, and you rest there.

G - Seeing Difficult People as Essential for the Path

1. Begin by honestly considering how you might react in the face of someone doing something that you find especially infuriating. For instance, someone cutting you off in traffic, a close friend sharing your secrets with others, or someone stealing something from you.
2. If you find that your reaction would not be one of compassion, understanding, or patience, but would rather be one of anger, frustration, blaming, or resentment, ask yourself why that is. Considering that you have been practicing these meditations to cultivate compassion, and reflecting on the teachings of understanding, ask yourself why is it that you would still react in this way?
3. Consider that before somebody does something like this to you, you may feel that you are a pretty compassionate person. Perhaps typically throughout your normal day you are understanding of those around you, you do give people the benefit of the doubt, and you do consider the suffering and the causes of suffering of those in your life.
4. Then reflect how this shows you that although you may be moving in the direction of open heartedness and compassion, there are areas you are still stuck that are not clear to you until someone points them out.
5. Then consider how it is ultimately only when people do infuriating things that we can really see where we are stuck; that without difficult people, we could go a long time thinking we have truly developed compassion where we have not.
6. In addition, consider how just as a carpenter needs wood, nails, and tools to develop his or her skill, if we truly want to develop a compassionate heart, we need difficult people to practice understanding and patience with. Although it is nice to have people you like around, they ultimately do not give you the opportunity to develop these skills in a very deep way.
7. Lastly, if your true aspiration is to develop a selfless heart, imagine that the next time you encounter a difficult person, although your first reaction may still be one of anger or irritation, imagine that you follow that with a sense of gratitude, for an opportunity to develop these skills.