

Practicing Loving Kindness Even In Times of Difficulty

When we are happy with our partner we often don't see that they also have qualities that are difficult for us. When we are unhappy with them, we often don't remember that they have qualities that we really love. And sometimes, in the busyness of our lives, we forget to notice them and wish them well entirely.

To help us remember, accept and love our loved ones as they truly are . . . keeping our hearts open rather than closing them down and activating our defensive strategies even in times of difficulty . . . I've created a practice.

(While I designed the practice to be used when considering your partner, you can use this practice with any loved one.)

Where to Start:

It is helpful to start with some kind phrases ready. In the Compassion for Couples program, we spend some time creating customized loving-kindness phrases. If you have those, please feel free to use them. If not, you can work with standard phrases such as:

- May you be happy
- May you be peaceful
- May you be healthy
- May you live with ease

Take a moment to decide on which phrases you would like to use.
(It's wise to limit them to a few simple phrases).



Then Begin the Practice:

- **Please find a comfortable position**, sitting or lying down. Letting your eyes close, fully or partially. Taking a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment.
- **Putting your hand over your heart**, or wherever it is comforting and soothing, as a reminder to bring not only awareness, but loving awareness, to your experience and to yourself.



- **After a while, feeling your breath** where you notice it most easily. Feeling your body breathe in and out, and when your attention wanders, noticing the gentle movement of your breath once again.
- **Then gently releasing your focus on the breath and finding yourself here in the room.** You might visualize yourself sitting here, or just call up a felt sense.
- **When you're ready, begin offering yourself the phrases that are most meaningful to you.** Opening your heart to these words, whispering them gently into your own ear, again and again.
- **Allowing the words in**, allowing them to fill your being, allowing them to be true, at least for this one moment.
- **Now releasing the image of yourself, and in your mind's eye, focusing your attention on your partner.** Recalling what you love about them. Recalling a time when you felt tenderness toward your partner. (pause)
- **Offering your kind and compassionate wishes for them.** Offering them to your partner like little love notes, as if you were whispering them gently into their ear... Letting yourself know how much you wish them to be true.
- **Now letting go of that image of your partner and recalling a time when you felt fairly neutral toward them.** Maybe you hardly noticed them as they stood at the kitchen sink washing the dishes, or as they headed outside to work in the yard. Notice them now. Wishing your kind wishes for this person. The one you sometimes fail to notice.
- **Whenever you notice that your mind has wandered, refreshing your aim by feeling the sensations in your body.** Coming home to your own body. And then feeling the importance of your words. Coming home to kindness.
- **Now calling to mind a time when you were not happy with your partner.** Start small, not the most horrible time, but a time of mild to moderate distress. Maybe they left their socks on the floor again. Maybe they were late coming home again...and wishing your kind wishes for this person, the one that sometimes disappoints you or irritates you. Even then, to the best of your ability, wishing for them, may you...
- **Going slowly and taking your time with this.** Returning to the sensation of the breath or to wishing your wishes for yourself whenever you need. Perhaps bringing a soothing hand to your heart as you care for both yourself and the partner who sometimes upsets you.



- **Now picturing or calling up a felt sense of each incarnation of your partner.** The times when love flows easily, the times you fail to notice them, and the times you are irritated with them. They are all aspects of this person you love.
- **See if you can extend your kind wishes to each aspect.** Perhaps imagining them in a circle that includes you, and then offering your wishes to this circle, wrapping each aspect of your partner and yourself in the warmth of your good intention... May we....
- **Finally, releasing the phrases and resting quietly in your own body.**
- **Gently opening your eyes.**

