

## **Loving-Kindness Meditation**

### **Description and Effects**

Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) is a meditative practice used to cultivate feelings of compassion and loving-kindness; it is a practice used primarily in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

Research on LKM has increased since 2000 to include treatment for depression, increase empathy, and enhance relationships. LKM's positive effects on research subjects have included reductions in anger, anxiety, fear, helplessness, emotional pain, and judgments; and increases in happiness, well-being, compassion, openness, and self-efficacy.

Meditation in general has proven to be effective in helping people self-regulate stress, anxiety, chronic pain, and various illnesses, but Loving-Kindness Meditation is specific to directing feelings of compassion towards themselves and another in an open-hearted and focused manner. This practice, explained below, could prove significantly beneficial in the treatment of infidelity.

In research by Pruitt and McCollum, participants reported that traits of acceptance and compassion developed through the practice of loving kindness related to "an understanding of the shared humanity of people". Consequently, individuals may be able to connect with their partners in a more genuine way and empathize with their partners' struggles.

Moreover, in the practice of LKM, the seed of compassion that is planted allows one to be less critical of themselves; this is important because the practice emphasizes that, before we can extend feelings of loving-kindness and compassion towards others, we must also extend that feeling toward ourselves.

According to participants who were asked to practice LKM in a study examining meditation practices on intimate relationships, it was easier for them to extend acceptance or compassion to others when they first offered it to themselves.

Additionally, participants reported four primary meditation traits that developed as a result of the practice; these included awareness, disidentification from

emotions and thoughts, acceptance, and compassion and loving-kindness. With the development of these traits, participants found they were more willing to be present in a moment of difficult emotions; consequently, this change in their relationship with their emotions enabled them to approach external situations differently.

LKM also provided participants with an understanding that people have reasons for their behavior. Likewise, they also reported being less reactive and more aware of their emotional vulnerabilities. In practicing LKM, the counselor is asking each client to intentionally direct feelings of warmth and caring toward themselves so that they may experience compassion for themselves and, as a result, extend that compassion towards each other.

Encouraging positive feelings by practicing LKM, in and out of session, may help reduce critical thoughts or self-judgments. When one is compassionate and loving towards the self, one can become more forgiving others' faults and ultimately, in the case of infidelity, forgive the transgression against their marriage.

*Source: Loving Kindness Meditation and Couples Therapy: Healing After an Infidelity - Laura Cunningham and Yuleisy Cardoso*

## **Instructions for Loving-Kindness Meditation**

You can do loving-kindness meditation anywhere, anytime. If you want to go deeply into it and examine difficult feelings you might want to practice it in a quiet environment where you can concentrate. This particular meditation that you are about to listen to is about 22-minutes long, so keep that in mind when you are choosing a time and place.

First, you choose the subject of your meditation. It is best to start with someone for whom it is very easy for you to feel unconditional loving-kindness, such as a child or a pet. After you practice this meditation for easy subjects, you can choose people toward whom it may be more challenging for you to open your heart—friends with whom you have some slight disagreement, family members with

whom you have history, or coworkers who tend to get on your nerves. Later, once you have the hang of it, you can try sending loving-kindness to people you find very troubling. While this last kind of practice is challenging, it can also be the most transformative.

Once you have chosen a subject, call them to mind and follow the prompts from the audio. You can pause after each prompt to cultivate the right feeling. Try to make it as sincere and unconditional as possible. It may help to remind yourself that when people are acting in harmful ways, it is generally because they are suffering, at some level, from fear and anxiety.

At some point it is essential to do loving-kindness meditation for yourself. This may be easy or difficult, but you will probably find that loving-kindness for others comes more readily once you have cultivated the ability to feel it for yourself.

Best of luck!