

Inclusive Mode: Meditation 6

Preparing for Meditation 6: Extending Love to Others

With repeated practice of meditation 2, deepening our receptivity to love and compassion, we notice two further things important for our lives with others: (1) When the mind is totally identified with one protective part of yourself, your perception of others is automatically reductive, and your capacities of love and compassion are much impeded. For example, in a moment when the mind is totally identified with a part of yourself that is focused on managing things, others in that moment are reduced just to objects of management. Or if your mind is completely identified with a part of you that is angry at another person, the other is perceived in that moment as only an object of anger—just bad. (2) When the mind unblends from that part of yourself, by holding that part in compassionate awareness (as in meditations 2, 3, and 4 above), your perception of others starts to open, so you can sense more of their humanity and potential—e.g. sensing them now not just as objects of management or anger, but as full human beings who have dignity, potential and who wish to be well and happy as you do. With this opening of perception, your capacities of care, love and compassion become less impeded, so you can be more compassionately present to them.

To engage the inclusive mode of meditation 6, you begin in the receptive mode (step 2 below), and let its holding environment of love, acceptance and compassion, which embraces all parts of yourself, extend naturally to others, as if they were all parts of your greater self. We let that help us commune with the others—to sense them as more than our reductive thoughts of them in their dignity and positive capacity, and to wish them deeply well. “Communing” here means a preverbal sense of closeness to another, sensing the other as a subject, a full person and life beyond superficial impressions and judgments, possessed of great worth and potential. It is to relate to others as what the philosopher Martin Buber called I-Thou, rather than I-it.

You can begin including others starting with one person or being that you'd like to include in this way. Then you gradually expand to others, as instructed. As the practice becomes familiar through repetition, it can naturally extend itself more and more inclusively, also to those you for whom you have had aversion, and ultimately to all beings.

Meditation 6: Extending Love to Others

1) Abdominal breathing Sit in a relaxed way, with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Come down from the thinking mind into the body, feeling the body as a whole, and letting its weightiness help the mind settle deeply. Let the breath flow naturally, while breathing from the abdomen. Let the feeling of the abdomen, moving with the breath, draw you into that feeling more and more, breath by breath.

2) Reconnecting with love: Now bring to mind your field of care: your caring moment, or benefactor or spiritual field, and experience it as present to you now--not as just a memory or abstraction, but as happening right now, right here. You are being seen and held in deep care, compassion, acceptance and warmth beyond judgements. Relax into this experience, steeping in its loving energy, feeling its tender qualities, and letting them spaciouly infuse your whole being. Accept this loving energy and its qualities into your whole body and mind—into every part of your body, into every layer of feeling and emotion. Every part of you loved in its very being.

Let any feelings, thoughts or senses of self that arise be included in the loving energy, spaciousness and deep acceptance of this field of care. Let all such thoughts and feelings find their own place in this compassionate space, in their own time, by letting them all be.

3) Including others: Now think of someone dear to you that you'd like to include in this field of care, and let them also be included

in this spacious field of loving energy, acceptance and warmth. Let these loving energies help you sense beyond superficial impressions of them to commune with them in their deep dignity and worth and wish them deeply well.

After some time, let further people or beings come to mind that you would also like to include in this spacious field of loving energy, acceptance and warmth, and let them be included. Let these loving qualities help you sense them in their deep dignity, in the depth of their being, and wish them deeply well. (If your mind becomes tired or tight at any point, you can take a short break, rest your heart and mind, and begin afresh).

After some time, if you wish, you can also include someone that feels like a stranger to you, or that you are less fond of, and let this loving holding environment help you sense them in their deep dignity, in the depth of their being, and wish them well. (If a part of you is having trouble with this, or starts to draw your attention away, just settle back into your field of care and become compassionately aware of that part of you in a fully allowing, spacious way. If it settles, you can return to the extending practice).

Finally, if you wish, you can let the vast underlying capacity of love and compassion from your basic awareness extend much more fully to include all beings, human, animal, all creatures, or just imagine that is happening. Let that help you sense them all in their deep dignity and worth and wish them all well.

4) Releasing: Now, let this field of loving spaciousness and acceptance help your mind to relax, settle back a bit inwardly, release all its frameworks of worry and concern, and become naturally wide open like space. Whatever thoughts and feelings arise, just let them unwind and release within this sky-like openness of awareness, by letting everything be.

Processing Meditation 6:

Extending love This practice helps us experience ourselves as an extension of the field of care in which we are held. We hold as we are held, love as we are loved, know as we are known.

By practicing this inclusive meditation in our days, with whoever is around and whoever we become aware of (including the daily news), it becomes increasingly inclusive.

In step 3 above, if you have difficulty seeing another person as more than a reductive impression (“but she’s just a stranger,” or “just dislikable”), then your mind is identified with a part of you that is only seeing through that narrow lens. Notice that part of you, that sense of self, and settle back into your field of care from step 2, letting that part of you and its feelings be included in that compassionate space. When that part begins to feel safer and more at ease, notice your lens on the other person begin to open, so you can sense them in their fuller life and dignity, with more ability to wish them well. This practice introduces a new degree of freedom to choose whether to continue to relate to our reductive impressions of others, or to the actual persons beyond those impressions. We experience what it is like to relate to the dignity and worth of others more than to our own limiting thoughts of them as just “strangers” or “dislikable ones” (or even as just “my friends”).

We familiarize with the practice by doing it each morning in a meditation session (however brief) and then repeatedly reconnecting with it many times throughout the day — noticing whoever is around us, or whoever we think of, communing and wishing well as instructed.

The process of unblending from limiting parts of ourself and reunifying with the openness and clarity of our larger awareness, which further unfolds with repeated practice, helps us sense more possibilities in each situation beyond any one lens upon it, with greater space in the mind for innovation, creative responsiveness, and humor (“skillful means”). We can find greater freedom to take up various roles or parts of ourselves as needed, but now

without being so fully identified with them. There is greater space in the mind to be who or what is needed in the situation.

The three modes of SCT meditation bring out a power of love, compassion and awareness that can take us increasingly beyond in-group bias, by cutting through our habits of reductive labeling and extending care more inclusively to others in our days (see Meditation 8 for more on this).

Many people in caring roles, service and activism seek a power of care and compassion that can help them avoid empathic distress and compassion fatigue. Empathic distress occurs when we empathize with others who are suffering and our attention turns inward upon ourselves, so we get caught up in the pain of our own empathy. Compassion fatigue occurs when the caring motivation that brought us into our work with others shuts down, often because of repeated experience of empathic distress, secondary trauma or inefficacy in our work. And these difficulties are exacerbated when administrators and co-workers, who are subject to the same difficulties, co-create work environments that feel uncaring, unsupportive or overly demanding. This inclusive mode meditation helps us avoid empathic distress because the outward directedness of its loving energy keeps our caring attention on others, while any part of us that struggles with love for others is embraced in the compassionate healing qualities that are evoked by our field of care. Meditations 7, 8 and 9 below further empower our ability to avoid empathic distress. We are inoculated from “compassion fatigue” by learning how to access a replenishing secure base of love, compassion and wisdom in the meditation, and how to reconnect with its energies and qualities often in our days through repeated practice.

Authentic love confirms people in their deep dignity and worth, while also confronting harmful behaviors. Extending love inclusively does not involve accepting anyone’s harmful thoughts or actions. It puts us in touch with their fuller humanity, dignity, and potential. By learning to connect to that dignity and potential in them, we can challenge people’s harmful ways of thinking and

acting on behalf of that potential, on their behalf, not just on behalf of others whom their actions may harm.

In daily life: After establishing a strong secure base through much practice of meditations 2, 4, and/or 5, you could take up meditation 6, extending love, as a main practice. Do meditation 6 first thing in the morning, however briefly, and reconnect with it many times throughout the day. To reconnect with it briefly many times daily strengthens the neural pathways that support the capacity to be present to others in this caring way, more sustainably and inclusively.

Pre-blessing your day: When you do the meditation in the morning, you can think of all the places you will go, and all the beings you will be near (even when commuting), and include them all in step 4 of the morning meditation. Then to arrive at any of those places, of itself, can evoke the practice of communing and wishing them well. It is as if your morning meditation pre-blesses your day, so when you arrive anywhere, you receive its blessing.