

## **The development of loving kindness**

The aim of this practice is to live with more and more kind loving awareness of others and of ourselves. So switch off your telephone and resolve not to answer the door, find a way to sit that is both comfortable and relaxed, and give some time for your mind to unwind. Exactly how much time will vary on different days. After a little while bring more and more of your attention to your body and its sensations, your thoughts and emotions.

1. In the first stage, turn your attention towards yourself, and look to nurture a sentiment or a memory that is kind and loving by nature, or an aspiration for your well-being, or maybe just give yourself time to experience yourself more fully. You may need to reflect for a little while on how best to do this, or maybe things will develop spontaneously.
2. In the second stage, choose a good friend to develop these sentiments of love and kindness towards. You can imagine your friend right by your side and feel their presence, and ponder what they look like when they are most happy and what would make them feel like that.
3. In the third stage, choose a neutral person, like the postman, and now try to find ways to bring greater warmth, kindness and interest between you. You may just want to develop a greater awareness of them, what are their passions, loves, with whom are they intimate with?
4. In the fourth stage, choose someone who is difficult, for whatever reason. Look also to acknowledge what is good in them, despite your differences. You could imagine what their friends would love about them and who they are kind to, or reflect when you have been at fault with regard to them, or maybe just give yourself the space to look at things more calmly.
5. In the fifth stage, begin by bringing to mind again the people in the first four stages of the practice. Look to develop a love and kindness for them equally (not forgetting yourself) and then expand that tender awareness outwards, firstly to the people around your neighbourhood, in your town, your country, your continent, and finally in the world as a whole, and to all the plants and animals, all life whatsoever.

After the end of the meditation, take a little time to gently come out of the practice. Bring your awareness again to your body, listen to the sounds around you, gently open your eyes. Take pleasure in living with a more tender heart that you yourself have cultivated.

(It helps to develop a rhythm to your practice, a regular time, a special place, with any little rituals like lighting a stick of incense. For meditation to be most effective, it is recommended to practise every day. Do not try to do too much, 20 or 25 minutes a session should be enough. That would be 4 or 5 minutes a stage, which you can keep track of if you place a watch or a small clock in front of you).