

PSY 330 Positive Psychology ~ Reese
HAPPINESS: Compassion and Loving Kindness Meditations
6 Reflections over 5 weeks submitted in the OA-3 Journal

OA_Comppassion & Loving Kindness Exercise & Reflections (120 pts): This Ongoing Assignment (OA) should be performed daily over a 5-week period. There are five categories of compassionate meditation. At the end of every week you will write and submit a brief Reflection upon the appropriate category of compassionate meditation and submit it through the Bb Journal. At the end of the 5 weeks after the final Reflection, write a substantive Reflection on the entire process and any changes that may have occurred in your attitudes or behaviors. **All 6 of the Reflections should be pasted into the same Journal and submitted by the Due Date.** (6 reflections worth 20 pts ea.) Make sure they are Labeled.

Points will be deducted for journal submissions that are not timely.

REMINDER: Number each of the 5 weekly Reflections and note the Final Reflection (or label it #6).

HAPPINESS: Compassion and Loving Kindness Meditations Exercise

Do you want to be much more joyful than you could have imagined? Developing the skill of *compassion* may be the most powerful way you can do that. Let's talk about this skill and you can decide if it is something you want to cultivate.

Compassion means to be able to understand how someone is feeling, and to want to relieve suffering. You see there are two parts. First, you have to be able to *empathize* with another person. Second, you *cultivate the wish to help*.

How do we know that compassion makes us happier? We have to thank Dr. Rich Davidson, professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. In his wide-ranging research, he discovered the happiness center in the brain is over your left eye. Happy people show it with high levels of energy in the left prefrontal lobe of their brain. On the other hand, people who are constantly worrying, fretting, and unhappy have higher energy levels in the right prefrontal lobe. Both sides are important. You should be cautious and thoughtful, and the right lobe helps you with that. And you should also rejoice and be glad, and the left accomplishes that.

Brains are like muscles. What we exercise, we get more of. We now know that to be at your best, you have to have about 3 times as much positivity as negativity. But you might not have been raised that way, so you may have to exercise positivity to accomplish that.

Buddhists have studied compassion for 2,500 years, and they know a great deal about that. They have deep knowledge on what they call *lovingkindness* meditation, mental exercises that raise compassion. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, compassion is also central. The word "compassion" occurs forty-one times in the King James version of the bible. A different word, *agape* (charity or love) is used for the same concept, especially in I Corinthians 13. In modern bible translations, the word appears 145 times, such as "blessed are the *compassionate* for they shall have *compassion*." (Matt 5:7). The word *merciful* in King James is better translated as *compassionate*.

The Buddhists have worked out wonderful compassion exercises. But I am not a Buddhist and haven't studied it. So I use my meditation tool, autogenic training. The idea is to repeat a phrase in your mind three times, notice the result, and then repeat another phrase. For example, I might repeat "My right arm feels heavy." Then I notice a relaxed, heavy feeling coming into my arm.

You can get a handout, *Autogenic Training* to learn this method. Master the first two sets, heaviness and warmth, before you do these exercises. [NOTE: Students in Bob's Positive Psychology course have completed 3 wks of Autogenic Training prior to this exercise]

You should think of five categories of people you will develop compassion towards.

1. **Yourself**
2. **Family members**
3. **Close friends**
4. **Acquaintances - people you know but not well**
5. **Finally: enemies**

Work on the first three for several weeks before working on the last two.

Oddly enough, some people balk at focusing first on themselves. I understand that, depending on how you were raised, you may have discomfort with that idea. But consider, **you cannot give to me what you yourself do not have. If you don't feel deep kindness and appreciation towards yourself, how can you feel it with me?** The Buddhists have taught this is a key foundation, and Jesus, quoting the Old Testament, said we must love our neighbor as we love ourselves, suggesting the latter must come first. (*If you struggle with number one – please continue working on it throughout the exercise, as it is a major component of knowing ‘Who you AM!’ Remember: To thrive and flourish in life you must be able to love, respect, and have compassion for yourself!- Bob*)

Phrases you can use: “I feel kind and tender toward (say and think of a *target*, such as myself, my spouse, my child) . . . I feel warm and sensitive toward (target) . . . I feel love and warmth toward (target) . . . I wish all good for (target) . . . I feel patient and helpful toward (target) . . .” **You could write your own phrases**, but these illustrate the feelings you want to cultivate.

Felt Sense & Feelazation: As with the Autogenic Training you did prior to this exercise, work to feel the positive emotions – love, compassion, gratitude, kindness, etc. – in your body. We have practiced this in our in-class meditations. When you can feel the positive emotion – anchor it and name it so you can recall it.

Practice this every day. Dr. Johnson suggests during the lunch hour; I prefer bed-time. Regardless of the time, set aside fifteen to twenty minutes to practice this. Be sure to not go to sleep, but stay reasonably alert and focused. (*Feel free to make an audio file for each of the five categories. Some students have even added the new category while including the past category/categories. Consider this if you are having a problem with a particular category.*)

Another part of this might be to perform acts of service and kindness towards others. Read to children in the hospital, fix up the home of a widow or single mother, find employment for those out of work, and so forth. There are many opportunities to volunteer. Turn your intent into acts.

NOTE for Enemies: Many people struggle with how to frame compassion for their enemies. Try this: I have been practicing a compassionate release for those that have wronged me. I pronounce the person's name then the pain they caused me and as I do I wipe my hand over my heart and my head and shoulders. I say: I am breaking the bonds that bind us. I do not have the desire to hold this hurt, sorrow, anger or pain any longer. As I wipe my hand across myself / I cancel any bonds that may be holding us together. I am free. I am not to judge you for the actions that you did. Every time I do say this I feel free and more peaceful." You may also want to "hold a space" for their healing. [This is actually compassion to yourself, yet it allows you to release feelings of ill will.]

We will also discuss in the Forgiveness class how to “Hold a Space for Healing” which may be helpful for this portion of the exercise. - Bob