WEEK 7: KINDNESS IN ACTION

Loving-kindness dissolves barriers of egocentricity, greed, resentment, jealousy, and hatred, creating a feeling of more space and freedom in the mind and heart. By bringing deeper levels of love and compassion into our lives, this long-time practice involves cultivating compassion and love for yourself and then expanding those feelings out to others, eventually to all of life itself. If you’re like most people, this can feel challenging because it does not feel important, you tend to not focus care and compassion toward yourself, or it does not sound useful or effective. We have to begin where we are. We live in a culture of being extraordinarily hard on ourselves. Some would argue that our self-hating patterns are epidemic.

The practice can simply mean wishing yourself well and acknowledging a longing to be happier and at peace. Then as you are able, you can extend wellness, happiness, and peace to others. Or in turn, if you notice difficulty, frustration, and negativity or cynicism, you can begin imagining that you are taking on these challenges as a way to give relief to others; that you’re willing to take on painful experiences so that perhaps other people won’t have to.

Exercise 1: Loving Kindness Meditation

(Audio Files: “Loving-Kindness Meditation” from The Mindfulness Solution; “Offering Loving-Kindness to Oneself,” “Compassionate Being,” & “Connecting with the Suffering of Others” from Sitting Together)

1. Begin with 5 to 10 minutes of sitting meditation, bringing mindfulness to the body and the breath and allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go with awareness and nonjudgment.
2. Now feel into your own life qualities of compassion, mercy, and love. You may often be critical or judgmental with yourself. Notice the discomfort, awkwardness, or resistance arising within. Allow yourself to feel what you feel while also doing your best to contact the qualities of loving kindness, generosity, and understanding.
3. Bring these qualities of love into your own body and mind, recognizing and acknowledging a sense of being imperfectly perfect or perfectly imperfect. Acknowledge how you are stuck and struggling in your life and open to the possibility of experiencing loving-kindness toward yourself.
4. Take a moment to open to and experience the following phrases, letting them sink in as best you can:
   - May I be happy
   - May I be healthy
   - May I be safe
   - May I be at peace
5. Now expand the field to one or more of your loves ones, including family, friends, or community:
   - May my loved ones be happy
   - May my loved ones be healthy
   - May my loved ones be safe
   - May my loved ones be at peace
6. Now gradually extend the field of love and kindness to one or more neutral people, strangers, or acquaintances. Begin to see that each person you come across throughout the day struggles with worry, with sickness, with heartache, with loss, and with insecurity, just like you. Know that each person is doing the best they know how to discover contentment, stability, and security, just like you:
   - May my acquaintances be happy
   - May my acquaintances be healthy
   - May my acquaintances be safe
   - May my acquaintances be at peace
7. Now consider extending feelings of openness and generosity to those you have a difficult time with, those who might have caused you harm or pain, those whom you might consider enemies. It may seem...
challenging or even impossible to extend such feelings to this group of people. With the understanding that resentments and bitterness have toxic effects on your own health and well-being, perhaps begin by extending loving-kindness and compassion to yourself. Then you might reflect on forgiveness and realize that conflict and unkindness usually have their roots in fear and ignorance. Recognize that those you find difficult - even though they may not know how - also want to find happiness and peace in their lives, just like you. Consider that these so-called enemies wish to be free from suffering and struggle, just like you:

- May my enemies be happy
- May my enemies be healthy
- May my enemies be safe
- May my enemies be at peace

Lastly, take some time now to remember those less fortunate than ourselves, those who are in the midst of physical or emotional pain. Imagine these people facing various challenges experiencing peace and healing in their lives. Now extend this healing energy to all living beings, allowing it to touch those dealing with illness and disease, those tormented my mental anguish, those without home or shelter, those who are hungry and thirsty, those victimized by war or natural disaster. Extend now your feelings care and generosity to anyone who is feeling anxiety, stress, isolation, alienation, overwhelm, rage, or hopelessness. Expand your intentions of peace and calm to those overcome by addiction and violence. Gradually allow this loving-kindness to become boundless like the sky or the ocean, contacting all living things, great and small, in all directions:

- May all beings be happy
- May all beings be healthy
- May all beings be safe
- May all being be at peace

DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING. SIT THERE.

Take a moment and reflect on a family member, friend, work colleague, or anyone who comes to mind. Imagine for yourself what it would be like to walk in that person's shoes for a day? Imagine what it's like to be that person with their unique characteristics – physical, mental, and emotional. Imagine what it is like to have that person's history of disappointments and losses as well as her or his history of adventures and successes. Take a few moments to try this out with a friend, a foe, or a stranger. What reactions do you experience in your body, your heart, or your mind when you reflect and connect in this way? Can you sense a bond of humanity that you share with others?

When I practice loving-kindness meditation, I sometimes experience contrary feelings, such as anger and sadness. I feel like I'm not doing it right and get frustrated with myself. Know that it's quite common to have this kind of reaction. Actually, loving-kindness meditation can stir up difficult thoughts, emotions, and memories, and feelings of resistance and resentment can arise. By becoming aware of and acknowledging these reactions, you can include them as part of your practice as aspects of your experience to notice, to observe, and to understand. As you come to appreciate your challenges and obstacles, you can extend this attitude toward others and the difficulties you experience there. As you acknowledge whatever emotions are there - anger, sadness, confusion, or fear - you will gradually integrate them into your experience of openness, freedom, and peace.

Loving Kindness in Daily Life.

Informally throughout the day, you can extend loving kindness to yourself and to various people you encounter and think about. You could be waiting in line at the store or sitting in traffic; you could pause for a moment as you are sitting at your desk or in class; you could be having a conversation with a friend or co-worker; you could be walking down the street passing strangers or having dinner with a group of friends or loved ones. Every so often, anytime or any place, see what it is like to engage loving-kindness meditation for yourself and for others, even for a few minutes. Notice what it feels like to open and extend your heart and how it might change how you think and feel about yourself, about others, and about things in general.
“Anything can be achieved in small, deliberate steps. But there are times you need the courage to take a great leap; you can’t cross a chasm in two small jumps.”
(David Lloyd George)

Exercise 2: The Self-Compassion Break
This exercise evokes the 3 components of self-compassion: **mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness.** When you notice that you’re under stress, see if you can find the stress in your body. Where do you feel it the most? Make gentle contact with the stress as it arises in your body.

Then say to yourself:

1. “**This is a moment of suffering.**”

That’s mindfulness. Find language that speaks authentically to you, such as:

- This is stress.
- This hurts.
- Ouch!

Then say to yourself:

2. “**Suffering is a part of life.**”

That’s common humanity. Other options include:

- Other people feel this way.
- I’m not alone.
- We all struggle in our lives.

Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands on your chest. Ask yourself, “What do I need to hear right now?” The question and the answer are an expression of self-kindness.

Say to yourself:

3. “**May I be kind to myself.**”

Or…

- May I give myself the compassion that I need
- May I accept myself as I am
- May I learn to accept myself as I am
- May I forgive myself.
- May I be strong.
- May I be safe
- May I be peaceful
- May we live in peace

Altogether, we’re learning to cultivate kind, connected presence in the midst of stress.
Exercise 3: My Typical Activities

Now we will shift into how we can take our attitude of openness, acceptance, and care into our day-to-day activities as we relate to other people, our world, and ourselves. Take a few moments to bring to mind what you do during a typical week. Then in the space below, write down 10 of the activities that make up your life at home, work, school, etc, being specific about the kind of activity that you engage in (e.g., “taking a shower,” “talking to co-workers,” “emailing,” “doing the laundry”).

Typical Activity 1

Typical Activity 2

Typical Activity 3

Typical Activity 4

Typical Activity 5

Typical Activity 6

Typical Activity 7

Typical Activity 8

Typical Activity 9

Typical Activity 10

For each of these activities, ask yourself the following three questions:

1. Does this activity lift my mood, give me energy, nourish me, or increase my sense of being alive? If yes, then put a “+” next to that activity.
2. Does this activity dampen my mood, drain me of energy, or decrease my vitality? If yes, then put a “−” next to the activity.
3. Does this activity feel neutral? If yes, then leave the space blank next to the activity.

THE MESSAGE: What you do has an important effect on how you feel and how you experience your life in general. Through mindfulness practice, you can turn many routine activities into a simple yet powerful way to enhance well-being, stabilize mood, and experience our lives as vital and meaningful.

Activities That Help: Enjoyment and Growth

When people are feeling overwhelmed with feelings of nervousness, fatigue, frustration, and sadness, there are two types of activities that are particularly effective in stabilizing the mind and mood:

- **Enjoyment**: These are activities that give a sense of pleasure, calm, or soothing – like calling a friend to chat, taking a leisurely bath, or going for a walk.
- **Growth**: These are activities that provide a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, interest, or control – activities like making art, learning an instrument, mowing the lawn, trying something new, or doing something you are afraid of doing.
PLEASE NOTE: Even when you are struggling with strong feelings of depression, anger, or anxiety, you can take advantage of these life-enriching activities and bring greater stability and groundedness to your experience of mind and mood. This may not feel pleasurable in and of itself, but it is a crucial step in breaking the cycle of reacting to strong emotion with shutting down, acting out, or going numb.

**Exercise 3: My List of Enjoyment Activities**
Reflect on your own experience and formulate below a list of 10 activities that you do that provide a sense of pleasure, leisure, and relaxation.

Enjoyment Activity 1 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 2 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 3 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 4 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 5 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 6 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 7 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 8 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 9 _________________________________________________________________________
Enjoyment Activity 10 _________________________________________________________________________

**Exercise 4: My List of Growth Activities**
Reflect on your own experience and formulate below a list of 10 activities that you do that provide a sense of achievement, competence, skillfulness, and challenge.

Growth Activity 1 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 2 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 3 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 4 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 5 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 6 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 7 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 8 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 9 _________________________________________________________________________
Growth Activity 10 _________________________________________________________________________
“If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine. It is lethal.”
(Paulo Coelho)

Exercise 5: Building Activities into Everyday Life
As you begin the process of using activity to respond skillfully and sensitively to challenging experiences of thoughts, emotions, and feelings, please consider the following suggestions or reminders to help guide you when you feel confused, lost, depleted, or discouraged. This is a process of continual bravery, openness, and dedication as you embark on a life of greater presence and wakefulness.

1. **Identify Obstacles** – Reflect on the various challenges that you run into when you consider the various activities you would like to engage in. These could be practical obstacles like time or money, emotional obstacles like fear or uncertainty, or mental obstacles like distraction or negative thinking. List your prominent obstacles here:

   - Example: “I never finish anything I start.”
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________

2. **Intention is Key** – Much of this practice is dependent on not waiting until you feel like doing something or until you feel ready to start. This is about setting an intention or aspiration to live your daily life by certain activities and values. And to simply do it. These do not have to be grand, momentous acts. This is about setting a commitment based on where we are in this moment – and following through on that commitment. Perhaps start your day or start a meditation practice with an intention or aspiration and notice how this impacts your experience as you move forward. Take a few moments to list examples of your intentions here:

   - Example: Developing more self-confidence
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
   - ______________________________________
3. **The Action is in the Action** – We can talk, think, and plan as much as we want. But change only comes with action; changing what we actually do and how we spend our time. The commitment here is not to anything but the action. It is not to any outcomes or consequences. Do we have control over the actual outcomes of our choices? What matters is the act of making choices.

4. **Feelings are not the Measure of Effectiveness** – This is not about feeling good. You may actually feel initially worse while you are going against your usual patterns of behavior, aligning with your values and taking action on your goals.

5. **Be Clear About Your Values** – The following self-statements can be an effective method of coping with stressful situations and you’re overwhelmed with negative thoughts and feelings. Say the following statements to yourself, filling in the blanks as best you can:
   - “Okay. Right now this is where I am, and this is what is happening: ________________________________________________________
     ________________________________________________________.
   - The situation I have to deal with is ________________________________________________________.
   - The emotions I am having are ____________________, ________________, and ____________________.
   - The thoughts I am having right now are ___________________________________________,
     _____________________________________, and ____________________________________.
   - The sensations I am having in my body right now are ______________________
     _____________________________________, and ____________________________________.
   - In my life, what I value and hold important is ________________________________________________________.
   - The kind of person I want to be in my life is ________________________________________________________.
The actions I can take to deal effectively in this moment are:

_________________________________________________________________________,
_________________________________________________________________________, and
_________________________________________________________________________.

“To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong.”

(Joseph Pearce)

6. **Be Honest About Your Life** – The following is a list of various common values that people hold. In the second column, take some time to rate how much the specific value matters to you in your life. Then in the third column, take some time to rate how much time and effort you have put into that particular value in your life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUES</th>
<th>How much does this value matter to you? How important is it in your life? Rate from 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely)</th>
<th>In the last two weeks, how much time have you spent doing things for this value? Rate from 1 (no time) to 10 (all my time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage/Intimate Relationships/Dating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships/Social Relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career/Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Training/Personal Growth &amp; Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation/Leisure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality/Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/Citizenship/Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Physical Self-care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“He who has a why can bear almost any how.”
(Friedrich Nietzsche)

7. **Build Activities into your Routine** – The last crucial step in the process is creating goals for ourselves that are realistic, manageable, specific, and sensitive to our needs and abilities.
   
   o **How am I practicing living a full and rich life today, according to what I value, according to what is enjoyable, according to what allows growth?**
      
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  

   o **What can I change TODAY?**
      
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  

   o **What can I change THIS WEEKEND?**
      
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  

   o **What can I change NEXT WEEK?**
      
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
      _______________________________________________________  
o What can I change THIS MONTH? THIS SEASON? THIS YEAR?

________________________
________________________
________________________

Two Scenarios of Self-Care

SCENARIO 1
“Last night I got home, and as I stepped through the door into my empty apartment a wave of sadness and weariness swept over me. I could feel my mood sinking fast. Then I recalled that activity is a way to get rid of depressive feelings. I thought of my list of pleasure and mastery activities and chose listening to my favorite music as the one most likely to shift my mood. I put on the music and settled down. But, as I listened, I found myself wondering, ‘Is it working? Is the sadness going away yet?’ and I found myself focusing on my mood rather than the music. I had to keep forcing my attention back to the music—but then I was irritated with myself and frustrated that the music wasn’t working. In the end, I just had to call it quits - if anything I felt worse rather than better, and that left me with a sense of dissatisfaction that lasted the whole evening. I was glad to get to bed and blank it all out.”

SCENARIO 2
“Last night I got home, and as I stepped through the door into my empty apartment a wave of sadness and weariness swept over me. I could feel my mood sinking fast. Then I recalled that activity is a way to stabilize my mood and to look after myself. I thought of my list of pleasure and mastery activities and asked myself, ‘How can I best take care of myself right now?’ I chose listening to my favorite music as a way to treat myself kindly, to ‘give myself a break,’ and to be good to myself in that moment. I put on the music, made myself physically comfortable, and settled down to listen. My mind drifted away from time to time, but as best as I could, I was gentle with myself and my experience. I could feel the relief in my mind and body as they seemed to sense they were getting some ‘quality attention’ for once. Thoughts of other ways that I could take it easy on myself came to mind. When the music stopped, I noticed the sadness and weariness had lifted a little. I puttered about the rest of the evening, quite pleasantly, until it was time for bed.”

In reading the two scenarios above, consider how the same behavior of listening to music can be used as a means of escaping and avoiding what is unpleasant and uncomfortable OR as a means of caring for oneself, treating oneself gently, and allowing some space for oneself to simply be in the moment. These are very different intentions that can lead to very different outcomes in our experience. In SCENARIO 1, using music with the aim of getting rid of one’s negative mood seemed to only fuel more aversion and unpleasant feelings. In SCENARIO 2, using the music to take care of oneself allowed insight, healing, and enjoyment to take place.

When you feel low in spirit, depleted and discouraged, or overwhelmed with frustration or fear, take the time to ask yourself simply: “How can I best take care of myself right now?”

Exercise 5: Three-Minute Breathing Space - The Door to Mindful Action
This time as you come to the end of a breathing space exercise, after having reconnected to an expanded awareness of thoughts and feelings as they arise in the body, see if it is possible to engage in pleasure or mastery activities as an act of kindness to yourself. Ask yourself, “What do I need for myself right now? How can I best take care of myself right now?”

o Do something for Enjoyment. Choose an activity on your list that offers a sense of enjoyment, delight, cheerfulness, awe, or wonder.

o Do something for Growth. Choose an activity from your list that provides a sense of achievement, learning, focus, and challenge. Remember to break down larger tasks into smaller steps that are realistic,
manageable, and sensitive to your time, energy, and ability in the moment. Take the time to really appreciate your efforts whenever you complete any step of the task at hand.

- **Act with mindfulness and kindness.** As best you can, focus your attention on just what you are doing in the moment, paying particular attention to how you are feeling in your body and to how you are breathing. Notice when you are becoming frustrated, impatient, or critical with yourself, and bring yourself back to an intention of giving yourself a break, taking care of what you need, and resting in the moment of simply doing.

- **Keep an open mind.** Perform your action as an experiment. Let go of the tendency to prejudge how the activity will go or how you will feel afterwards. Simply allow yourself to see what happens and remain open as to how this will benefit you.

- **Try something new.** Consider a range of activities and don’t limit yourself to the familiar or the favorite. Trying new behaviors can be both interesting and invigorating. Experiment with taking an attitude of exploration and inquisitiveness. This allows experience to remain fresh and awake.

- **Don’t expect miracles.** Carry out what you’ve planned as best as you can. Putting extra pressure on yourself by expecting things to alter dramatically can lead to unnecessary frustration and disappointment. These activities are beneficial in building an overall sense of enjoyment, vitality, growth, focus, and choice.

- **Just do it.** Please don’t wait until you want to do activities or until you feel ready for them. There is tremendous energy, spontaneity, and possibility in just doing activities without second-guessing or overanalyzing.

Even a slight shift in stability and centeredness is often enough to let us “start again” from a different place. Then we may not go down the same old grooves, but we can allow life to unfold in new and fresh ways. Getting the mind and body active can often reverse the fatigue and inertia of feeling down, overwhelmed, or irritated.

**Daily Practice:** Practice each of these exercises for 6 out of the next 7 days.

1. Sitting Meditation
2. My Typical Activities
3. My List of Enjoyment Activities
4. My List of Growth Activities
5. Building Activities into Everyday Life
6. Three-Minute Breathing Space - The Door to Mindful Action

**“Staying Present”** (Joseph Goldstein, Meditation Teacher and Author):

Remember to use your body as a way to awareness. It can be as simple as staying mindful of your posture. You are probably sitting as you read this. **What are the sensations in your body at this moment?** When you finish reading and stand, feel the movements of standing, of walking to the next activity, of how you lie down at the end of the day. **Be in your body as you move, as you reach for something, as you turn.** It is as simple as that.

Just patiently practice feeling what is there - and the body is always there - until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements you make. **If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do.** Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. **Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it?**

Is it very simple. **Practice again and again bringing your attention back to your body.** This basic effort, which, paradoxically, is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. **Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day.**

**“The Top 5 Regrets of the Dying”**
(Bronnie Ware, Nurse in Palliative Care)

1. I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
2. I wish I hadn’t worked so hard.
3. I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings.
4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.