

# Buddhism for Teens



**50 Mindfulness Activities, Meditations, and  
Stories to Cultivate Calm and Awareness**

CANDRADASA



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## CHAPTER 1

# Your Best Emotional Life

**H**uman beings are magical creatures. We have amazing bodies of so many different kinds. We have super-developed brains, finely tuned senses—and they all work together. We can just think of someone we love who’s far away, and our skin prickles, our heart beats faster—it’s like they’re right there with us.

Our bodies, minds, and hearts are affected by *everything*. And sometimes it’s emotionally overwhelming! Social media, school pressures, bullying, bad news in the world, worries about the future of our planet—every day we are pulled in a million directions by thoughts, feelings, pictures, words: our own and other people’s. How can we even cope, taking in so much information? How can we work with anxiety and learn to live well?

The good news is these aren’t new problems. In this chapter we’ll explore some helpful strategies Buddhism has come up with. Time to live your best emotional life.



## STORY

# Finding Your Way in the Dark of the Night

The prince was unhappy. Not Disney-prince unhappy because no true love had turned up. Just discontented. *Something* was nagging at him.

He knew, on the face of it, there wasn't much to be unhappy about: he was a rich kid, the son of a king. But whoever you are, sadness happens, and it's hard to live with.

His father saw this and smelled trouble. So he spoiled the prince, kept him away from any hint of normal life and everyday troubles. It didn't work. The prince got even more unhappy. He knew he wasn't seeing the real world. He felt strongly that the truth of life was out there, if he could only find it . . .

Eventually, the prince slipped out of the palace in disguise one day. And what a day that was. Walking the streets of the city, seeing people living their lives, often struggling, sometimes poor, in pain, sick, dying, even dead. It was almost impossible to take in for someone who, the story says, had only ever seen the inside of the palace and its gardens. When he snuck back home that evening, he was reeling.

One intriguing thing stayed with him, though: He'd met a spiritual wanderer on the road. This was the most peaceful-looking person he'd ever seen. Wearing a simple robe, half rags, really, dyed by the red earth, and carrying a bowl to ask for a little food from passersby. You'd think he'd be miserable! But on the contrary, his face was calm and his manner composed. It blew the prince's mind. This beggar had nothing, yet seemed happy. Whereas he, a prince, had everything, but felt totally wretched.

The prince made up his mind: He would go on a quest to learn the meaning of existence and the way to genuine happiness. But first he'd need to escape the palace and his parents. So he hatched a plan.

In the darkest part of the night, he slipped past the guards and rode out silently on horseback. He knew he'd soon be missed and they'd come looking for him—he had to disappear. Once clear of the

city, he stopped and sent his horse back toward the palace. Then, taking his sword, he cut off his princely hair, determined to make himself unrecognizable.

At the edge of the forest, he met a homeless man. The prince asked if he'd like to swap clothes: his rich robes for the man's muddy rags, very like the ones he'd seen on the wanderer. The man was delighted to trade.

And now the prince really was like a different person, at least on the outside. Messed up, but a little happier.

He took one last look at the way he'd come, and headed deeper down the forest path.

## Think Points

One day, we all have to leave home and start out on our own. Wherever we go, we can't avoid suffering. But we can learn to notice what we feel and how it's affecting us. This can help us understand ourselves and make better decisions.

- I. The prince decides to leave the palace to figure himself out. How do you take space for your emotional life: at home, in school, with friends?
- II. What would your own mythic quest look like?

## ACTIVITY

# The Story of You

Throughout this book, everything you do will flow from a sense of who you are and, just as importantly, the kind of person you want to be in relationship with others.

Time to explore who you are—and your potential!

Different people learn in different ways. Feel free to answer these questions by:

- Writing things down
- Making drawings
- Talking them over with a friend
- Doing a selfie video interview
- Recording your audio thoughts

This applies to any activity you encounter in this book. Find what works best for you. It's your time, your energy, your life!

I'd suggest keeping your answers offline for now, though: no need to share this part.

1. What are your good qualities? Perhaps you have a quick mind and can usually figure stuff out for yourself. Maybe you're a generous friend or a good listener. Or you're talented at music or sports. Don't be shy or humble—go big, as many as you like, cover the walls of your room with your majesty. (JK, don't write all over your walls! Unless your parents are *that* cool.)
2. What qualities would you like to develop? It's fine to dream a little here, but it's also good to be realistic (you probably won't learn to be invisible or suddenly develop the ability to fly!).

3. What do you think those new qualities would add to your life? Why did you choose them? Maybe you feel they would make you a better person. Perhaps they are qualities you admire in someone else.
4. What are two or three aspects of your personality you'd like to let go of? These can be things that hold you back; things you struggle with or that hurt your confidence. Like always comparing yourself to other people in school. Or snapping at your sister or brother. Being specific helps keep things real and in perspective. It's important not to beat yourself up. Everyone has their weaknesses. It's what you do with them that matters. Deciding to try and let them go can be a relief. If it helps, write them on paper and throw them in the trash!

When you're done and happy with the *Story of You*, file it away for now. Come back to it at the end of the book, then do it again and see what's changed. What do you think might change?

## GETTING READY TO MEDITATE

First things first: Buddhism and meditation go hand in hand. The Buddha recommended meditation for some very practical reasons. Just sitting and spending time with our thoughts and feelings can help us calm our minds, get clear about what's going on emotionally, and allow us to experience the world in new ways. In my experience, it can also be really enjoyable and restful. That's why the most important support for meditation is to be relaxed and comfortable. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Decide how long you want to meditate. Maybe start with 10 minutes (you can use a timer to help).
- You don't need to sit with your legs crossed. A chair is fine, as long as you make sure your spine is well supported. If you use a wheelchair, that can be a great meditation seat.

- If you need to meditate lying down, I'd suggest keeping your eyes open so you're less likely to fall asleep.
  - If you like sitting on cushions, make sure your knees are well supported and your back is upright without being tense. Sit high enough to be able to rock gently back and forward on your seat. Try to get comfortable without slumping or arching your back.
  - Rest your hands on your lap and relax your shoulders.
  - If at any time you feel physically uncomfortable, it's okay to move.
  - You don't need to empty your mind of thoughts. Thoughts are natural! When you meditate, your mind will sometimes get quieter on its own.
  - Everyone falls asleep sometimes in meditation. Don't sweat it. You might just be tired. Get some rest and try again. Or keep your eyes open.
- Great! Now you're ready to practice.





## Love Like the Sun

### Learning Kindness

Kindness is something you can learn to develop equally toward all living things and to the earth itself: forests, animals, people, etc. Without kindness, living in harmony with others is impossible.

The Buddha used to say that when you practice kindness, eventually it shines out so strongly from you that it's like the warmth of the sun. Imagine having that effect on people! Imagine how it would be to live with that kind of warmth in your heart.

Of course, a lot of the time we live with the opposite of kindness: people being mean, countries at war, our own reactions to friends or family members when conflicts happen. And sometimes we're not kind to ourselves. Natural feelings come up—disappointment, anxiety, heartbreak, fear—and we get really down on ourselves.

Luckily, we have some very ancient meditations that can help.

### Cultivating Kindness

1. All meditation starts with relaxation. Get settled, breathe deeply, and relax your whole body as much as you can.
2. Begin by wishing the best for *yourself*, however else you are feeling. If it helps, you can repeat a simple phrase inside:
 

*“May I be well, may I be happy, may I find what I need today.”*

You can also picture a time in your mind when you felt good. Or try imagining yourself happy in the week ahead. The trick is to let any goodwill in your experience just be there, even if it's faint. No need to push other feelings away: They are real, too. If you get tense in your body, it's okay to stop, breathe, relax, and start over.
3. Imagine a good friend of yours. Now do the same thing toward them: *“May they be well, may they be happy . . .”*

4. This bit's interesting: Imagine someone you see around but don't know well. Try bringing them to mind in the same way, wishing them the best.
5. And here's a challenge: Imagine someone you find difficult or don't like. Maybe in class, or maybe even in your family! Try and set aside your feelings of conflict for a moment or two. See if you can find a way to wish them well, too.
6. To finish, hold in mind yourself and everyone who featured in your meditation today. Sit easy, relax, and enjoy the effects of spending time with a sense of goodwill and kindness.

## STORY

### The Three Friends

They were inseparable. The Three Friends. That's what they were called. Well, they had names: Ani, Nandi, and Kimbi. But everyone just spoke of "the Three Friends," as if they formed a super-exclusive club. Always together. Keeping themselves to themselves.

On this day, one of them heard that the Stranger was around. Now, the Three Friends knew about the Stranger and were psyched at the thought of meeting someone famed for living a radical life. These days she walked the length of the country just meeting people, talking to them—then moving on. Always leaving a bit of stardust behind.

So, they found her and invited her to where they were hanging out.

The Stranger had heard of the Three Friends, too. She was curious and asked them three questions to see what they were about. First, she asked if they had eaten, and if they were all doing okay.

"Thanks!" Ani said, "We're all good."

Then, the Stranger asked if they actually got along well with each other. Maybe she'd heard they were a clique. Maybe she just wondered why they didn't socialize more.

"Sure, we get on!" Ani replied. "We mix so well it's enough just to be together. Besides, no one else ever comes to see us, though they'd be welcome. We look out for each other. We're like one person, basically."

The Stranger nodded and asked her final question: "How do you manage to get along so well? Don't you get on each other's nerves sometimes?"

Ani thought about that. "Well, it's like this: When I see Nandi and Kimbi need something, I make it my job to provide it, if I can. They see what I need and do the same for me and for each other. Maybe that sounds corny, but really it's not that complicated!"

The Stranger laughed. "I get it!" she said. "That kind of friendship is the whole of life, in the end. Everything else is just details. You three have figured it out. No wonder you're famous: the Three Friends!"

They laughed and talked some more, then she went on her way, smiling into the cool evening.

## Think Points

How seriously do you take your friendships? Maybe too seriously sometimes? It can be intense! The path of friendship the Stranger and the Three Friends follow is one of commitment, but it's not clingy. They know how to communicate considerately, with honesty and kindness. They give each other space but also keep each other in mind. A sense of ease and trust flows from there.

People can drift apart or even betray each other's trust. You might behave that way, too, one day. Dealing with the kind of pain that results is tough. But if you make your own commitment, it's like powerful magic against too much sadness. It's also kind of like joy.

- I. What do you value most about yourself as a friend?
- II. What do you like about your closest friends?
- III. What famous person would you choose as a friend? Why?

## ACTIVITY

# Square Breathing

Let's explore our experience in the simplest way imaginable: with our breath. If you are breathing, you are alive. If you are alive, you are probably feeling things:

- Confident feelings
- Jealous feelings
- Feeling responsible
- Feeling mad
- Falling in love!
- Falling out of love!
- Proud feelings
- Anxious feelings
- Feelings of excitement

With all these feelings and more, it's amazing we get anything done! And sometimes, even if this is what makes us alive, it's all too much. Then we need to calm ourselves down.

To help with that, here's something you can do anytime, anywhere, without anyone even knowing. Breathing exercises like this are way older than Buddhism. I like to think of the first human beings doing something like it, sitting around a fire, watching the stars overhead.

## Drawing the Breath

Like square dancing, square breathing is fun when done standing up outdoors. However, sitting or standing indoors is great, too. Closing your eyes can help you focus and shut out any distractions. But if you're feeling sleepy or self-conscious, you can do it with your eyes open.

1. To start, take a few deep breaths. Get a feel for your body in space: all the air around you, all the space you occupy. Feel your feet on the ground. It's solid. It's holding you up. You can trust gravity.
2. Now we're going to explore breathing in a set pattern that can calm our body and mind. To help, we'll imagine drawing a square, like this:
  - i. Breathe in slowly, counting to four: 1-2-3-4. As you draw in your breath, imagine drawing up the left side of a square with your finger.
  - ii. Hold your breath for the same count of four. Imagine drawing the top of the square.
  - iii. Breathe out for four and—you guessed it—draw down the right side of the square.
  - iv. Hold your breath again for four, completing your square at the bottom.

*If at any point you feel a little dizzy, don't worry. You'll likely get used to it, but it's best just to pause until you feel fine.*
3. Try the whole square again a few more times. In—Hold—Out—Hold. In—Hold—Out—Hold. Notice how you feel as you do it.
4. When you're done, write down a list of your top 10 feelings—the ones you feel or notice most in your own life. Organize them any way you like: *best to worst, home or school, day or night, whatever works.*



## Seeing Other People with Compassion

The best way I know of thinking about compassion is this: When someone is sad or having a hard time, to feel compassion is to *shake with them*. That's the original meaning of the Buddhist word that usually gets translated as "compassion": you *tremble with* people.

When we come across someone who is hurting, we can often tell and want to check if they're okay. And when we are hurting, we often want someone to know. Sadly, that doesn't always happen. So, when we are alone with our hurt, it's helpful to be able to develop compassion for ourselves as well as empathy for other people.

Even if we can't just shake it off, we can always *shake with*.

### Developing Compassion

1. This meditation builds on developing kindness and goodwill for ourselves. If we can't try and love ourselves, it will be harder to try and love other people. So, however you are feeling, start by relaxing and wishing good things for yourself:

*"May I be well, may I be happy, may I find what I need today."*

2. When you're feeling in touch with warmth and wellness, bring to mind a friend who is having a hard time. Remember, compassion is when your sense of kindness and goodwill meets with—*shakes with*—someone's unhappiness. You can't take their pain away, but you can wish them well with your whole being, shining on them like a small sun.

Take it gently with this. It's strong! There's a knack to it: Breathe easy, and try to stay nice and relaxed as you sit. Let your heart respond.

3. You can't do this wrong. Notice what's going on for you. Maybe you feel sad in response. Maybe you get a bit tense thinking about your friend's difficulties, and your mind wanders. Whatever happens is fine. Just breathe, smile warmly at yourself in your mind, and turn back to your friend. Keep encouraging your sense of kindness and encouragement to flow naturally toward them.
4. At any time, be free to expand this sense of connection in your imagination, as widely as you like. Turn the warmth toward anyone who is struggling or suffering (even people you find difficult). Let yourself feel what you feel and respond with kindness and encouragement.  
Then, when you're ready, gently draw your meditation to a close, breathing easy . . .

## STORY

### My Enemy, My Teacher

"OMG! He's taking *who?* *That* guy? You have got to be kidding me."

The students were huddled together, whispering. The sky was blue, the air fresh and bright. Yet here they were, hanging around the yard like a small thundercloud, buzzing angrily, getting ready to rain.

"We should totally complain. We'll say we're not going if *he's* going. He's so *annoying!*"

They were Atisha's students. Atisha, who'd just been asked to go and teach Buddhism in another country. Atisha, who was taking them, his beloved students, along for the adventure. He was the rock star! They were his entourage! So why was he bringing that super irritating, not-even-funny, local kid?

Of course, Atisha didn't think of himself as a celebrity. And he certainly wasn't taking them to bask in his glory. But they hadn't gotten

that yet. So they chattered away for a while longer, getting deep into all the drama, then decided to go and see him.

Atisha listened. Then he was silent. By the time he spoke, they were fidgeting like chickens pecking at the ground. Only, in the silence, they were pecking at their own minds.

Atisha knew the kid they objected to. He lived nearby and worked around the school on weekends. It was true: He could be very irritating. Always making mean jokes. Always arguing about obvious things. Always looking for attention. It was painful to watch. And that had really struck him: Even he—“famous” Atisha, who everybody had such faith in—had moments when he wanted the boy to just stop, just to shut up. Ah . . .

That’s when he’d thought of it: *I should invite this kid to come. I will teach him, and he, I think, will teach me something, too.*

Now he spoke to the nervous students. His voice was rich and low, but not angry. His words were heartfelt, which surprised them all.

“Haven’t you heard anything I’ve been telling you? We can’t pick and choose who we are kind to. I don’t want to be surrounded by people who are only along for the ride. I want to learn patience, and I want to be with friends who can learn it, too! Without patience, we might as well give up. It’s the best tool we have for making things right in this world. I’ve a feeling this boy could be the making of our journey.”

And so he was. But that’s another story.

## Think Points

We can find important lessons in the unlikeliest of ways and places. When you start being curious about your own reactions to things, you can learn a lot about how you might change! It's all good data about you.

- I. How might you learn patience and kindness from someone you find difficult?
- II. When you think of people you don't like, do you think they want the same things you do?
- III. How do you feel when you see people disagreeing online or around the dinner table?

### ACTIVITY

## Ethical People Watching

This is another outdoor activity to try, but it's fine if you need to be indoors instead. The main thing is to be able to see lots of people. Don't worry, no public interaction is required. Look out the window onto a busy street. Or hang out at the mall, sitting on a bench. I guess you could even do this exercise online, watching a live video feed of a busy Tokyo or New York City street!

We're going to do some ethical people watching. First, some ground rules:

- Let's not stare at anyone or make them uncomfortable
- Definitely no photographing
- No shouting out to anyone

- Being around crowds can be intense for some. If you feel overwhelmed, just close your eyes and breathe the way we did in the square breathing exercise (page 11). Then, take a break.

Ready? Time to be curious about the ways you take in other people.

1. Sit a distance from the folks you're observing. As they pass, just notice them. If it's crowded, you can let your eyes drift easily from face to face. If individuals walk by, imagine them like clouds floating past you in a blue sky. Just notice them, taking in their faces as they go.
2. Notice their different ages: young kids, old people, babies, people the same age as your parents, other teens. Notice how you feel about faces of different ages.
3. Now, notice any thoughts you have about people who pass by. No need to give yourself a hard time for being judgmental—it's natural. But try to notice, and check in with how you are feeling if you get caught up in a story about anyone you see.
4. Think about where individuals might be coming from, where they are going. Imagine their lives: *going home for dinner, walking the dog, meeting friends.*
5. Finally, take a few minutes and try silently wishing everyone well, coming and going. Just as before in the meditation: "*May they be well, may they be happy, may they find what they need today.*"

At home, try writing down or recording your impressions of the people you saw. You can start to get a sense of any patterns in the way your mind works emotionally around other people. Look for the same kinds of patterns coming up throughout the day at home and in school. Check your notes a week or two later and see if it brings up any new insights for you.

## Sharing the Joy

In this meditation, we're going to build outward as we did before, from ourselves to others. This time, our emotional attention won't be meeting suffering; it will be meeting joy.

Most of us know what happiness feels like. But what is joy? Is there a difference? Well, like suffering, joy can be a tricky idea to get your head around. So, rather than talk any more about it, let's see if we can get a feel for it instead.

### Meditating on Joy

1. Try to relax your body. Start by wishing for good things in your own life. However you're doing today, tell yourself, "*May I be well, may I be happy, may I find what I need.*" This can be your secret superpower. You can always come back to it, anytime.
2. Bring to mind someone you know who is usually positive and cheerful. It can be one of your friends or someone you really look up to. Whoever you choose, it's not that they're never sad; they just deal with stuff well and are good to be around.
  - How does it feel when you think of them?
  - Imagine them experiencing real, deep happiness and contentment in their life.
  - Let your appreciation flow toward them in your mind.
3. Now, bring to mind someone you see around but don't really know. See if you can imagine them the same way: well and happy, feeling fulfilled in their life.



4. As you meditate like this, notice what's going on for you: in your body, in your mind, in your heart. Don't worry if you find this harder than you expected. Maybe you just feel sad or anxious today. Your meditation still counts! Keep in touch with a sense of wanting kindness for yourself, however you feel right now.

Make sure you are breathing nice and easy. If any tension has crept back into your body, it's always good to relax your shoulders, face, and hands.

5. Try expanding any sense you have of positivity, happiness, and joy: to friends, family, and even people you don't like.

Imagine happiness bubbling up around the world: babies being born, families together, friends hanging out, lovers meeting, people feeling good and doing what they find fulfilling.

Let yourself feel your responses, whatever they are. Spend a few more minutes connecting with joy in the world.

6. When you're ready, bring your meditation to a close and let go of any effort you've been making. Rest easy wherever you are, and allow the effects of this meditation to soak in.

## STORY

### Eight or Eighty?

Once there was a queen who, like that young prince we met earlier, had everything she could ever want: all the money, all the jewels, all the *everyone* doing whatever she ordered. But this queen was bored. She had lost interest in all her usual pastimes, the news, what was going on with her friends. Boredom wasn't supposed to happen. Not to her.

At breakfast, someone mentioned that a famous Buddhist wanderer had just arrived in the city. The queen became excited at the

idea of maybe hearing some new ideas from this teacher. Buddhism was supposed to be super cool. She'd heard of meditation. She'd heard of Buddhists living happily in mountain caves eating only nettles. She'd even heard of nuns and monks who were amazing at kung fu! She had to meet this person, who would surely reveal what to do to get rid of boredom.

Later that day, the wanderer stood in the great hall of the palace. The painted ceilings were so high that they looked like a window into another world, a magical realm. Everything was gold or silver or made of smooth, precious stone. The wanderer thought it was beautiful. "One day," she figured, "the foxes will make their home here, and weeds will sprout out of every corner."

Just as she was daydreaming about trees growing up around the marble pillars, a guard came and summoned her before the queen. It was a long walk! Endless corridors. But finally she reached the many steps that led up to the queen's throne. She stopped there and bowed.

The queen didn't invite her up. Instead, she called down:

"Greetings, traveler. I wish to ask you some questions about Buddhism."

"Of course, Your Majesty."

"What is the ultimate meaning of life?"

The wanderer raised her eyes.

"Life is *vast*. It's certainly not about being powerful—or holy."

The queen frowned and said, "I thought you were a Buddhist! Who is this facing me?"

The teacher shrugged: "I don't know."

The queen was flabbergasted! Then she asked:

"Well, tell me this at least: What is the secret of Buddhist wisdom?"

The wanderer thought for a second, then answered clear as a bell:

"Cease to do evil, learn to do good, purify your heart."

The queen was shocked. "Is that it? Even a child of eight can understand *that!*"

The wanderer bowed again and replied: "Yes, but even a person of eighty cannot put it into practice."

## Think Points

It's not enough just to learn about ideas—in Buddhism or anything else. To really understand something, you need to get ahold of the emotional spirit of the ideas, too. That's what meditation is for: to let ideas go deep and maybe change your life for the better. When it works, it's kind of like magic.

- I. What do you usually do when you're bored? Does it help?
- II. Why might the wanderer say she doesn't know who she is?
- III. If you could ask one question to someone you thought knew everything, what would you ask?

### ACTIVITY

## Multiplayer Positivity

In my Buddhist team at work, we sometimes do this thing together we call “Rejoicing in Merits.” It's basically just a fancy name for spending time together and saying what it is we like, admire, appreciate, and even love about each other.

Now, that may sound weird to you. Or it may sound awesome. Or scary! I know I can still feel pretty awkward about doing it: I don't usually like being the center of attention or having people be very direct with me about emotions. But the thing is, this activity has really helped me over the years. It teaches me a lot about how to love myself, and how to be positive with other people.

Here's a different take on it. After a few rounds, I guarantee you'll have heard a lot of good things about yourself. And who couldn't use that sometimes?

1. Gather three or more friends or family members. This works best with four or more people, but I'm sure you can improvise even if there's two or 10 of you!

Some people prefer sitting in a room where everyone can have more personal space. Others are happy to sit around a table together.

2. Give a large piece of paper to each person. Have them write their name and fold the paper in two, with their name on the outside.

When that's done, everyone passes their paper to the person to their left.

3. Have everyone write down something they like, admire, or love about the person named on the piece of paper they're holding. When everyone has done this, they should refold the paper and pass it on to the next person.
4. At the end, everyone's paper comes back to them, and they read it quietly to themselves. Then, if all are comfortable with it, mix up the papers and get everyone to read someone else's praises out loud.
5. You can go around twice or even three times if you're feeling inspired!

*P.S.: You can also do this via a message thread. Assign a private thread for each person to someone different in the group. For example, to send something positive about Sean, message Shanice; to send something you like about Shanice, message Suki.*

## We're All in This Together

Here's another skill to add to your collection. It's a meditation that acknowledges the mixture of both happiness and sadness we often experience. It can help us go deeper into a sense of respect for everyone, including ourselves. In the end, we're all in this together.

### Equalizing Positivity

1. As usual, we'll start by making sure we're in touch with trying to build some kindness toward ourselves. It's the strongest foundation for this or any other meditation:

*"May I be well, may I be happy, may I give myself what I need today."*

2. When you're in touch with this kindness, turn to someone in your mind who you don't really know. As before, someone who's kind of neutral in your life: not a friend; not someone you have strong feelings for either way.

See if you can turn the same warmth toward them. Take a moment to think about their life: Like you, they are happy sometimes, feel bright and ready for the day ahead. Like you, they struggle sometimes: They can be upset, feel depressed, or can't handle school or other people.

3. Now, consider the idea that both these things—having a hard time, having a good time—don't last forever. Something always changes. This person you have in mind has a life ahead of them full of the joy and sadness of being human, just like you.

Notice what feelings arise. Try not to get caught up in them or push them away. Just let them be there, as if a small rabbit crept close to you and you're being careful not to scare it off.

It's okay to take little breaks: relax in your body, breathe deeply, and come back to your reflections.

4. Now, do the same thing thinking of a good friend. Do this for a few minutes. Next, do the same thing thinking of someone you find difficult.
5. Gather together in your mind everyone so far: yourself, the person you don't really know, your friend, and the person you find difficult.

Reflect one last time on the fact that all of you are sad sometimes and happy sometimes, and that all of you really want to be well.

Try and turn your sense of warmth equally toward everyone. Let yourself feel what you feel. When you're ready, let your meditation come to an end.

## STORY

### Kindness Is Wisdom

Remember the prince who fled from the palace? We left him as he went off to search for the meaning of life. Well, this is years later. And guess what? He hasn't gotten anywhere.

Maybe that's unfair. He learned a lot about his emotions and how to work with them. But the truth of existence? Not so much.

So, there he was, standing at the edge of a river. And he was learning now about the limits of his body. You see, he'd been doing some dumb stuff. Someone told him if he fasted—stopped eating much—his senses would sharpen and he'd understand everything. His senses sharpened a little bit, for a day or so. And he certainly learned to handle some new pain. But he'd also learned that this was not worth anything on its own. After weeks of tiny amounts of food, he was exhausted and very weak.

He thought back to that first day after he had escaped the palace. He had been exhilarated then! Now, he felt as if he had run out of road.



Not knowing what to do, he sat under a nearby tree and tried to meditate, but he was too tired. So he dozed, wondering how he might find something to eat in the middle of nowhere.

Soon, a young woman came along the river path. When she wasn't at school, she took charge of a herd of fine goats, keeping alive a local tradition of shepherding that ran in her family. She milked the goats regularly, and otherwise let them roam free.

The young woman, Sujata, saw the thin, ill-looking stranger slumped against the tree trunk and stopped.

"Hey, mister. Are you okay?"

The prince half opened his eyes and looked up, trying to smile. Sujata was alarmed.

"Whoa! You are sick!"

She knelt down beside him and asked if she could check his temperature. He said yes, so she placed one cool hand on his forehead and looked for signs of any other trouble.

"When did you last eat?"

He could only nod weakly, confirming her suspicions that he was dehydrated and hungry.

"Here," she offered, helping him drink from a water bottle she had with her. "It's goat's milk. It'll help you get your strength back."

"Thank you," he croaked, reviving already. Then, she gave him a little sweet rice left over from the lunch she'd packed. It seemed as if he would be okay.

"You good? Get some rest. And whenever you like, come to the village. Look for the sign of the goat on my door! I'm Sujata, by the way."

He took her hand and thanked her. As he watched her walk off down the path, it was as if his mind cleared after a long, long fog. He smiled, then settled down with his back against the strong trunk of the tree.

## Think Points

Even when we do what we think is best, our choices don't always make us happy.

- I. Has anyone ever shown you kindness when you really didn't expect it?
- II. Who is the wisest person you know, and why?

### ACTIVITY

## Your Relationship Mandala

Have you ever heard of a *mandala*? They're kind of like maps, but ones that work in multiple dimensions and take you to a mythic place. They remind me of the "teleport maps" you sometimes find in video games: they give an overview of where you are and can help you move around in unexpected ways.

Mandalas can also just be patterns—sometimes simple, sometimes complicated. But they're always beautiful and full of meaning.

So, mandalas can be useful for mapping the patterns of our own thoughts or emotional connections. Let's make a mandala of your relationships with other people.

You can do this with just paper and a pen or pencil (use different colors if you like). You can also do it on a tablet, phone, or computer. Capture it the way that works best for you.



1. Like any world, yours needs continents. These can be actual places or groups of people in your life. Let's start with four main areas, which you can draw out as you like—any shape, any size, any color. Each will represent one of the following:
  - **Home and family** (This might be more than one continent if you have two families. Pets allowed!)
  - **School** (teachers, friends, and acquaintances)
  - **Friends** (There's bound to be overlap here; also includes romantic interests.)
  - **Heroes** (sports, arts, literature, fictional, or real)

Notice if you drew any of these in a different size or if they are all the same. If you want, resize them according to what seems most important to you.

2. Okay! Now mark your own position in the mandala however you want. Where will you represent yourself? At the edges? In the center? Somewhere else?
3. Now, add anyone you know to any of your "continents." Write their names, along with three things about them you like, admire, appreciate, or love.
4. Make arrows or pathways (like this: -----) between people and/or the different qualities in your mandala. Maybe your teacher is friends with your aunt. Maybe you look up to your dad and your favorite athlete because they're both so dedicated.

5. Look at your mandala. Can you see any patterns emerging? Would you like to add any more continents? For example, you could have one for a club, a workplace, or a single class in school.

You can redo this, trying different shapes, categories, and arrangements. You now have a first map of all your relationships—and some of your favorite qualities of your family and friends. It's helpful—and can feel good—to stand back sometimes and look at all your connections. Try bringing this out and looking at it the next time you're feeling alone.

## MEDITATION

### Being in the Blue Sky

So far, we've tried out meditations that can help us:

- Cultivate kindness and goodwill toward ourselves and others
- Develop compassion when we and anyone else we encounter is having a bad time
- Explore how we can share in other people's joy and good fortune
- Respond positively, knowing everyone has happiness and sadness in common

Here's a meditation that draws together all you've explored so far. First, some preparation:

- It's another outside meditation, standing and walking if you're able.
- If you're in a wheelchair, try this somewhere you can move around without others being in your path.

- If you're on your feet, try being on some grass, if you can.
- If you can't get outside, you can also do this at home, sitting or moving as you're able.

## Gathering

1. First, stand or sit still. Keep your eyes open for now. Really take in your surroundings: the sights, sounds, smells, and the feeling of air on your skin. As you relax your body, feel your weight on the earth. It's supporting you. Now, look at the sky. Take in the great space above you stretching to the horizon.
2. When you're ready, start to walk or wheel. Pay attention to your breath as you move. Feel your feet or wheels on the ground. If you aren't able to move through space right now, try mimicking movements by tapping out a rhythm with your hands on your thighs.
 

Let your movements be your guide. Move wherever or however you want to. Let yourself be grounded by your breathing, your steady motion. You can count your steps or arm movements if it helps you focus.
3. After a few minutes, stop somewhere you feel good about and be still. If you like, close your eyes. Picture in your mind—imagine, or feel a sense of—a great blue sky overhead and all around you. It's a beautiful, safe space. What shade of blue is it? Are there clouds or is it clear? Are you standing or floating?
4. In your mind, invite into this space anyone you like: family, friends, classmates, heroes, enemies, loves, teachers.
 

Enjoy their "presence" with you. Wish everyone well, including yourself, in whatever way seems to work, with or without words.

*"May we be well. May we be happy. May we live without fear, and with confidence. May we find what we need in the world."*

When you're ready, finish the meditation with a little bow to everyone in your imagination.





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