



## Spiritual Practice Week 6 Theme: Kindness Practice Gratitude - Kindness

### 3 Wondering Questions:

- 1) *What does it mean to be kind to others?*
- 2) *What does it mean to be kind to yourself?*
- 3) *Can kindness become a habit?*

*Reverend Emily Meyer, Director of [The Ministry Lab](http://www.uccmn.org), invites you to wonder through contemplation and movement. Please note, this content is also available as an audio recording on the website: [www.uccmn.org](http://www.uccmn.org).*

### Tips for this week's Spiritual Practice:

\*You may listen or read.

\*There is no “wrong” way to participate: whatever is appropriate for you in your context is “right”. \*Non-judgmentalism is key: be kind and forgiving to yourself and others. This is called a “practice” because it is never “perfect”.

\*If safety and health protocols allow, let this be an excuse to get out of the house, away from screens, and into the out-of-doors.

\*In this practice, each “directive” is followed by silence, during which you are invited to “take as long as you like...” Recorded silences last 15-30 seconds. To stretch the silences, push pause on your player; push play when you are ready to proceed. There is no “proper” length to this: what is right for you and/or any Littles who may be practicing with you, is right.

\*That being said, don't be afraid to stretch the silences a bit further over time: extended time can help deepen our connection with the Divine and has the delightful side-effects of developing patience, non-judgmentalism, creativity, compassion, and attention spans!

\*This practice concludes with an invitation to journal and reflect. Both are highly beneficial and are highly recommended. You may want to bring paper and writing/drawing materials with you so reflection can follow as part of the practice. If this is not possible, you might return home in mindfulness and journal and reflect there.

\*If circumstances prevent all forms of reflection, please be kind to yourself and others by moving slowly from the practice back into “normal” life: the jump from silence to normal-volume life can be jarring.

\*Take your time. Be kind....

\*This practice includes four yoga poses. Do only what is comfortable for you. If a pose feels too challenging, you may revert to an earlier pose, or simply sit or stand with your hands at your heart chakra (the middle of the chest).





\*You may want to have a large towel or yoga mat to practice and sit on, especially if going outside.

**Work out the Wiggles:** If you're going outside, go ahead and step out the door, but before you leave your front porch or sidewalk, let's work out the wiggles to help our bodies, minds, hearts and souls get ready.

Yoga helps us strengthen and stretch our body, mind and soul, all at the same time. One thing yoga teaches us is that we have different places in our body where we store different types of energy, or energy that helps us in different ways. Sometimes, these energy centers, or [chakras](#), are open and flowing freely. Sometimes they get clogged up or interrupted.

Today, we'll work out our wiggles as we encourage the energy in our body to flow freely through all seven of our chakras.

To help get our energy flowing, let's bend forward and touch the ground. Now, squat down like a frog - like we did last week. But instead of a jumping jack, this week we're going to put our hands on the ground and just bring our backside up in the air, so we're in a forward bend, again.

Let's do that a bunch of times: bend forward and touch the ground. Squat down, like a frog, with your arms between your legs. Then, if you can, keep your hands on the ground while you straighten your legs and come back to a forward bend. Then squat right back down, like a frog, arms between your legs, hands between your feet, and straighten back up into a forward bend.

Do this several times, as quickly as you can: keep your hands on the ground, squat down like a frog; then straighten back up into a forward bend, while keeping your hands on the ground. Repeat several times!

When you have worked out all the wiggles, take a few moments to walk to the safe space where you will practice today. Don't forget to bring a yoga mat or large towel with you, if you like.

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**Stretch:** Since our practice today is full of stretching, we won't stretch right now, but take a moment to place your mat or your towel on the ground.

Take a couple of deep breaths and let yourself be present, right here and now.

**Name Your Intent:** Today, we are going to use two short phrases to remind





ourselves what this time is about. Naming what we are doing - and why - can help our body, heart, mind and soul know that this is different from just “playing outside” and remind us to stay focused.

Naming our intent also helps us remember what it is! Our intent today is to PRACTICE KINDNESS: kindness is where our love for God reaches out into love for ourselves and the world.

Yoga teaches that our heart chakra is the energy center of compassion, connecting our spiritual and physical ideals with one another. Let’s put our hands into what is called “Prayer Pose”, with the palms of our hands together and the tips of our thumbs on our heart - not our physical heart, but the chakra, which lies in the middle of our chest - as we say these words and breathe:

*Breathe in:* Open...

*Breathe out:* ....my heart.

**Practice:** Our first yoga pose is called Mountain Pose. Let your feet be next to one another and firmly planted on the ground. Stand up nice and tall, with your shoulders rolled up and back and down. Let your head rest comfortably and level on your neck.

Place your hands behind your back and lace your fingers together, with your palms touching. Roll your shoulders back, lifting your heart. Let your feet be firmly on the ground, and press your knuckles downward as you lift your chest.

Remain in this pose for a few deep breaths.

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Gently release your hands and bring them into Prayer Pose with the palms together. Let the tips of your thumbs rest gently on your heart chakra.

Notice your breath. As you inhale, think a word of kindness to yourself: direct a word of gratitude to your own heart. With each exhale, imagine gratitude and kindness swirling around and surrounding you in a giant hug.

Continue to stand in Mountain Pose, with your hands in Prayer Pose.

Breathe in a word of gratitude and kindness for yourself. Breathe out a prayer of gratitude and kindness that totally envelopes you.

*Take as long as you like... [from 1-5 or more minutes].*

...

I invite you now to bend forward at the waist, placing both hands on the ground, as you are able. Step one foot, then the other, back a couple of feet. Lower your knees to the ground, so you are on all fours.

Come up to kneeling, with your knees slightly apart. Reach back, into a slight back bend, placing your fists on your lower back for support.

If you prefer, remain here, with your head tilted back slightly, in a small back-bend.

If it is accessible to you, you might also reach back to place your hands on your heels, in Camel's Pose. Remain in this posture for as long as you like, with your heart opening to the sky.

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When you are ready, gently return your fists to the lumbar area and slowly come back to kneeling. Sit on your feet, with your hands in Prayer Pose, thumb tips at your heart chakra.

Notice your breath. As you inhale, think a word of kindness for a friend or family





member. As you exhale, imagine that feeling of gratitude flowing from your heart to theirs.

Continue to kneel with your hands in Prayer Pose.

Breathe in a word of gratitude and kindness for a loved one. Breathe out, sending that prayer of gratitude and kindness to their heart.

*Take as long as you like... [from 1-5 or more minutes].*

...

I invite you now to lean forward and place both hands on the ground, so you are on all fours. Think of extending your spine, then gently arch your back, moving into Cow Pose.

Let your head tip just slightly back, completing the arch of your back as your heart stretches outward.

Breathe.

Remain in this posture for as long as you like.

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When you are ready, lean back into kneeling, roll back off your feet, and let your feet come out in front of you. Come to sitting cross-legged, with your hands in Prayer Pose, thumb tips resting gently on your heart chakra.

Notice your breath. As you inhale, think a word of kindness for the world. As you exhale, imagine that feeling of gratitude flowing from your heart out into the world.

Continue to sit with your hands in Prayer Pose.

Breathe in a word of gratitude and kindness for the world. Breathe out, sending that





prayer of gratitude and kindness into the world.

*Take as long as you like... [from 1-5 or more minutes].*

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I invite you now to lower yourself onto your mat or towel. Lie on your stomach.

As we move into “Cobra”: place your palms on the ground beneath your shoulders and gently push your head and shoulders off the ground. Let your heart lead you as you arch your back. Keep your hips on the ground. You do not need to straighten your arms, but keep them close to your body. Tilt your head back only slightly, to complete the curve of your back.

Remain in Cobra for a few deep breaths.

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When you are ready, gently lower yourself back to the ground. Place your hands on top of one another and turn your head to the left.

Gently roll over and lie on your back. Place your hands, palms up, on the ground to either side of your body.

As you rest in this position, notice your breath. As you inhale, think a word of kindness for creation. As you exhale, imagine that feeling of gratitude flowing from your heart directly into the wind and sky, the earth and all of nature.

Continue to lie with your heart and hands open to the world.

Breathe in a word of gratitude and kindness for creation. Breathe out, sending that prayer of gratitude and kindness out into nature.

*Take as long as you like... [from 1-5 or more minutes].*





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**Rest:** I invite you to wiggle your toes and fingers; gently roll onto your side, curl your knees up a bit...

Take a few deep breaths: in and out...

When you are ready, push yourself up into a seated position.

Again, take a few deep breaths...

And rest for a moment.

*Take as long as you like... [from 10-30 seconds or more].*

**Reflect:** It can be really helpful and fun to reflect a little bit on your practice. You can do this by writing in a journal, drawing a picture, doodling, or talking with someone who practiced with you.

Today, you may find drawing especially enjoyable: you might draw your heart chakra - what it looks like, to you; or you might draw the face or faces of people to whom you would like to show kindness; or a part of creation for which you are most grateful.

You might also journal by making a word cloud of the words of kindness and gratitude you shared with yourself, your friend or family member, the world, and nature.

When you have finished drawing and/or writing, you might enjoy sharing what you experienced with someone who shared the practice with you. If you need help getting the conversation going, you might share where you felt or experienced God as you opened your heart chakra. You might also reflect on this week's Wondering Questions:

What does it mean to be kind to others?

What does it mean to be kind to yourself?

Can kindness become a habit?





*Take as long as you like to journal and reflect... [from 1-5 minutes or more].*

*Some people like to keep all of their writing or drawing in one book or place. After many days, weeks or even years, looking back over these writings and drawings helps people see where God has been in their lives and in the world, and helps them notice God in new ways. It's a way to write or draw your own personal story of God.*

**Bless:** *You might end your writing/drawing/chatting time by taking a final deep breath in, letting it out slowly, and saying a single word or phrase of closure or blessing, like "Amen"; "Blessed Be"; "Thank you"; or "We walk in peace"; etc.*

*Then, walk yourself home or into the rest of your day!*

