

Love and Kindness Feel So Good

1. The core idea — why love and kindness feel so good

When you are deeply in love, moved by kindness, or acting generously, your **attention flows outward**. You are no longer focused on the story of “*me, my problems, my plans, my image.*”

At those moments:

- the *self-referential narrative* quiets,
- the **DMN activity decreases**,
- and other neural networks — those for **connection, empathy, reward, and presence** — become more active.

That internal shift — from self-referential processing to open, connected awareness — *is* the feeling of love, freedom, and joy.

The joy comes not from the external act or person, but from the **temporary suspension of ego-centric processing**.

2. What happens in the brain — stepping out of the “me loop”

(a) The Default Mode Network (DMN): the self-referential system

- As we discussed, the DMN (medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, angular gyrus, etc.) is most active when we’re **thinking about ourselves** — our identity, past, future, and comparisons.
- It’s essential for memory and self-continuity, but when overactive, it creates **rumination, anxiety, self-criticism, and egoic defensiveness**.
- So, “lower self” consciousness is often a DMN-dominated state — the mind circling around “I, me, my.”

(b) When love and kindness take over

During experiences of **love, compassion, or altruism**, functional MRI studies show:

- **Reduced DMN activity**, especially in the medial prefrontal cortex (self-referential region).
- **Increased activity** in:
 - **Anterior insula** and **anterior cingulate cortex** — regions that track empathy, connection, and emotional resonance.
 - **Ventral striatum** and **orbitofrontal cortex** — the brain’s natural reward centers (they release dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins).
 - **Temporoparietal junction (TPJ)** — where we take another’s perspective and see from outside the self.

This network shift replaces the internal narrative (“my life, my needs, my past”) with **immediate relational awareness** (“you, we, the whole”).

That state is naturally pleasurable — not because of any external event but because **your brain and consciousness are functioning harmoniously**, freed from the friction of constant self-referencing.

3. Why the joy is not about the object of love, but the *state of being*

You might notice that in the early stages of love, everything feels radiant — even ordinary surroundings. That's because **the brain is not fixated on the ego** — the energy that usually maintains your inner narrative is now flowing outward, through attention, affection, and appreciation.

- The **person you love** acts as a catalyst — they direct your attention *away from yourself*.
- The **acts of kindness** serve the same purpose — you momentarily forget yourself, and the energy that was cycling inside the DMN now flows into connection and creation.

This is why mystics and saints often say that love for others can lead to **union with the Divine**: it's the *loss of self-centered awareness*, not the external act, that reveals the higher joy.

4. Shifting energy — how attention redirects neural activity

Attention is not just a mental act — it's an *energetic and neural event*. Where attention goes, **metabolic and electrical energy** follows.

- Focusing inwardly on “me/my story” → activates DMN pathways.
- Turning attention outward (to others, to breath, to beauty, to service) → activates **salience, empathy, and reward networks** and *inhibits* the DMN.
- Turning attention upward (to inspiration, creative flow, the whole) → engages **frontoparietal control and creative networks**, integrating the brain harmoniously.

By consciously **choosing where to place your attention**, you're literally shifting the brain's energy flow and the quality of consciousness that arises.

This is what meditation, prayer, service, and even art do: they *retrain attention away from the self-loop toward presence and unity*.

5. How to apply this — daily practice of shifting from DMN to higher networks

Here's a simple 4-step method to experience that same freeing joy intentionally:

Step 1. Notice the “me loop”

Catch moments of “I, me, my” thought — “I'm worried about...”, “my future...”, “my problem...” No need to judge. Just *notice* the narrative. That awareness itself is the first step out of it.

Step 2. Shift attention outward

Direct your attention to someone or something outside you — a person, an animal, a tree, or even your breath.

Ask, “What can I appreciate or give right now?”

This shifts brain activity from DMN toward the salience and empathy networks.

Step 3. Feel the resonance

Let yourself *feel* the connection — warmth, gratitude, tenderness.

That feeling is neurochemical and energetic evidence of alignment (dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin rising).

Step 4. Stay in presence

Keep attention open — not back to “me,” not lost in thought — just *here*.
This strengthens the brain’s frontoparietal control network, which can modulate and calm the DMN over time.

Repeated daily, this becomes your new default: **presence rather than self-story**.

6. In Upanishadic terms

The Upanishads call this state “seeing the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.”
It means: when love or kindness moves through you, you glimpse your deeper nature — **Ātman beyond ego**, which is one with **Brahman**, the Whole.

In that moment, your neural and spiritual energy align:

- the DMN quiets (ego story dissolves),
- the salience and empathy networks light up (universal connection),
- consciousness expands — and what you feel as “love” is simply **freedom from self-confinement**.

7. Summary — the essence of the experience

State	Brain Mode	Experience	Spiritual Interpretation
Self-referential thought	DMN dominant	Worry, comparison, isolation	Ego-identification, “lower self”
Love & kindness	DMN quieted; salience, empathy, reward networks active	Warmth, connection, joy, flow	Glimpse of “higher self” / Ātman
Intentional attention shift	FPCN and ACC regulate DMN	Choice, clarity, freedom	Self-mastery and awakening

Final insight

Love and kindness are the **natural state of consciousness freed from self-absorption**.
They are not emotional accidents — they are the *felt experience of unity*.
When the energy bound up in the DMN’s “me loop” is released into connection, you feel joy because you’ve momentarily remembered your true nature: expansive, radiant, and not separate.