

I. Introduction: The Brahma Viharas

- A. Let's sit a few minutes
- B. Let's introduce ourselves
- C. The **brahmavihāras** are four states of being and four systematic meditation practices meant to cultivate them.
 - 1. Metta [friendliness, loving-kindness or goodwill](#)
 - 2. Karuna [compassion](#)
 - 3. Mudita [empathetic joy](#)
 - 4. Upekkha [equanimity](#)

We have this explanation of the set and their inter-relations from Thanissaro Bhikkhu¹:

1. “**Metta** is the wish for true happiness, a wish you can direct to yourself or to others.
 - This Goodwill was the underlying motivation that led the Buddha to search for awakening and to teach the path to awakening to others after he had found it.
 - The next two emotions in the list are essentially applications of goodwill.
2. **Compassion**(*karuna*) is what goodwill feels when it encounters suffering: It wants the suffering to stop.
3. **Empathetic joy** (*mudita*) is what goodwill feels when it encounters happiness: It wants the happiness to continue.

¹ American born, Oberlin educated, thai forest monk.

4. **Equanimity** (*upekkha*) is a different emotion, in that it acts as an aid to and a check on the other three.

- When you encounter suffering that you can't stop no matter how hard you try, you need equanimity to avoid creating additional suffering and to channel your energies to areas where you *can* be of help.
- In this way, equanimity isn't cold-hearted or indifferent. It simply makes your goodwill more focused and effective.²

D. That's what they are, but why do we do them? What do they do?

1. According to the *Metta Sutta*, Gautama Buddha held that cultivation of the BVs has the power to cause the practitioner to be reborn into a "**Brahmā** realm" (Pāli: *Brahmaloka, as I understand it (George?)*,
 - i. a realm of great contentment and subtlety of perception, i.e. there is little affliction³ and great interestingness
 - ii. (as Pascal teaches it wholesome engagement is always available)⁴).
2. The BVs are also known as the **four immeasurables** because, as I have heard the Dalai Lama teach, the amount of satisfaction that can be attained from each is boundless⁵ as is their range of application.

² Thanissaro Bhikkhu Head & Heart Together

Bringing Wisdom to the Brahma-viharas

<http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/headandheart.html>

³ The afflictive emotions are craving, fear and distortion

⁴ There is no identity between the Buddhist Brahmās and the Hindu conception of brahman as an all-encompassing divine force.

⁵ Nyanaponika Thera: the detailed instructions given in the Buddhist scriptures for the practice of these four meditations are clearly intended to unfold gradually the boundlessness of the sublime states. They systematically break down all barriers restricting their application to particular individuals or places.

- From Thanissaro Bhikkhu: “Making these attitudes limitless requires work.
- b. It's easy to feel goodwill, compassion, and empathetic joy for people you like and love, but there are bound to be people you dislike — often for very good reasons.
- c. Similarly, there are many people for whom it's easy to feel equanimity: people you don't know or don't really care about.
- d. But it's hard to feel equanimity when people you love are suffering.
- e. If you want to develop the brahma-viharas, you have to include all ... people within the scope of your awareness so that you can apply the proper attitude no matter where or when.
- f. **This is where your heart needs the help of your head.** --

- Note the range and
 - the mutual support of heart and head.
 - Your heart wants happiness,
 - your head, understanding cause and effect can lead you away from reactivity towards some upekkha in order to attain it.
 - Marks of Buddhism –
 - different from western thinking which
 - puts heart and head in opposition?
 - Doesn't seem to promote the range of application at as unconditionally: compare democracy?
 - **Other questions/comments?**
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E. What are the other utilities of the Brahma Viharas?

- The Buddha saw these practices as **protecting** the heart and mind⁶
 - they are powerful **antidotes** to the “afflictive” mental states such as
 - craving, fear, anger, and confusion/delusion.
- To give you a sense of the feeling and effect of the BVs, here is the story about the origin of Metta or friendliness practice.
 - Buddha had sent the sangha to meditate in a forest occupied by wood sprites. The wood sprites were perturbed by the presence of the odd beings and frightened them off.

The monks asked Buddha if they could practice somewhere else. B said to the monks ‘go back but I will teach you the antidote for your fear’. He taught them the metta practice – to wish the sprites well, as we will do below. The sprites liked the meditative energy and so they welcomed the monks into their forest.

- But it’s not at all meant to be a “sappy” kind of friendliness.
 - When Sharon was studying in Bodhgaya she visited Calcutta. There was unrest and she needed to leave.
 - All she could find was one questionable rickshaw. The driver took her through windy back streets where she

⁶ Thanisarro: “May all beings be happy. May they be able to look after themselves with ease.” That way they can have the happiness of independence and self reliance.

Another set of metta phrases is in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*. They state: For people to find true happiness, they have to understand the causes for happiness and act on them. They also have to understand that true happiness is harmless.

Translation metta ← Mitta = friend in Sanskrit

was grabbed by a large inebriated man who tried to snatch her.

- At the last minute her friend threw the man off and got the driver running again.
- When she returned to Bodhgaya and told her teacher, Mahendra he said to her
 - “Oh Sharon, with all the metta in your heart you should have taken your umbrella and smacked that man over the head.”
 - It was a classical instruction to wish him well while keeping herself safe.

2. The Brahma Viharas have further usefulness:

- They are also absorption practices, steadying the heart and mind.
- According to Nyanaponika Thera⁷ here is how this works: as the meditations are practiced over time one extends the range by choosing objects which are increasingly difficult: self, dear one, neutral person, difficult person and then finally all beings.
- When the practitioner reaches the stage in which practice can be equally applied to that range of beings, ones concentration will have reached “access concentration”. – a pleasant and engaging concentration. Can be calming and/or energizing, but it’s not necessarily balanced btwn the two.

⁷ German born 20th C. Sri Lanan monk and co-founder of the Buddhist Publication Society.

- From there the mind state called the first Jhana⁸ can then be reached. This has much greater stillness and focus. There are 8 jhanas, w different characteristics, but with increasing stillness and absorption.
- And then, after progressing through the Jhanas, with a tranquil and steady heart and mind, we can successfully go on to insight practice.
 - a. That is, traditionally vipassana was not practiced until one had done preliminary steadying practices (Paramitas, Brahma Viharas, and Jhana), allowing a concentrated and undistorted investigation.
- It is this investigation which leads to liberation, the undistorted experience of reality and the accompanying compassion.

So Nyanaponika Thera writes that the ultimate aim of the Brahma Viharas is to produce a heart and

⁸ Jhana is a meditative state of profound stillness and concentration in which the mind becomes fully immersed and absorbed in the chosen object of attention. It is the cornerstone in the development of [Right Concentration](#). rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. It permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal.

The classical image is: "Just as if a skilled bathman... would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder — saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without — would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal..." From access to insight. But Tina Rasmussen describes it as less an experience of the body and more of absorption of mind. And of less fascination on one's experience. If done at death skill, you can choose your rebirth.

mind that can move towards liberation⁹. But he adds that the Brahma Viharas are not just for the cushion.

As Sylvia Boorstein says “practicing in the hall helps with practice in the supermarket. And practicing in the supermarket helps with practice in the hall.”

- Questions?/Discussion

II. The Four Brahma Viharas

1. What I would like to do now is describe each one and do a short sitting. That will help us work through each at length in our next meetings.

- Upekkha
 - Define
 - a. It's often translated as equanimity,
 - i. but it means heart's ease
 - b. it doesn't mean resignation, detachment or remove as the English word equanimity may imply
 - i. these confusable-for states are called the near and far enemies. We will talk about

⁹ Nyanaponika Thera writes: “ The ultimate aim of attaining these Brahma-vihara-jhanas is to produce a state of mind that can serve as a firm basis for the liberating insight into the true nature of all phenomena, as being impermanent, liable to suffering and unsubstantial. A mind that has achieved meditative absorption induced by the sublime states will be pure, tranquil, firm, collected and free of coarse selfishness. It will thus be well prepared for the final work of deliverance which can be completed only by insight [through Vipassanna].

them in future meetings, but for a quick example: indifference is a near enemy of upekkha.

ii. because indifference contains aversion and remove doesn't work

c. **Questions, of course?**

- U is listed last, but it helps to do it first because it makes the next three accessible.

1. It opens the heart

2. And as above, it helps to guard against doubt and to direct meditative effort to where it is most effective

- A word on effort: At the outset you are trying to figure out how to strengthen these states, not who is most needy, because that is not helpful until later, when one experiences all beings as the object.

- As Sharon relates HHDL, and the tulkus can do this. – but we have lifetimes to get there. No hurry.

- Let's try it:

- Upekkha meditation:

- **Description:**

- Try to feel the truth of the statements that I will give you, if it's too hard to be w them just now, being able to feel the truth of just that – just that it's too difficult is complete success,
- Let me describe the exercise:
 - You choose an object that is the right “weight” for you right now
 - Then you consider:
 1. Things are as they are for you regardless of my good wishes
 2. That is regardless of my good wishes, I can't control your actions (thoughts or words)
 3. No matter how much I wish you well I can't change you unless you wish it.
 4. May your heart be at ease w the truth of your life.
 - **that is, may you be at ease even when things are not to your liking and you can't change it.**
- Let's do it (Instructions):
 1. Take your time and choose an object
 1. **Self**
 2. **Dear one/benefactor**
 3. **Neutral**
 4. **Difficult**
 5. **All**

2. Try to feel the truth of the statements you are about to hear, if it's too hard be w any one of them just now, being able to be comfortable w the truth of just that – just that it's too difficult is success,

3. Consider:

1. Things are as they are for you regardless of my good wishes
2. That is regardless of my good wishes, I can't control your actions (thoughts or words)
3. No matter how much I wish you well I can't change you unless you wish it.
4. May your heart be at ease w the truth of your life.

- Questions/Discussion

- **Metta**

- Definition
- This is translated as friendliness, but often called lovingkindness. Thanissaro Bhikkhu translates it as goodwill. I've also heard it used simply as being comfortable.
- It is said (and I find) it *protects* from inner and outer harm because it results in feeling friendly toward yourself no matter what besets

- Let's try it and see what aspect(s) feel right
- **Questions?**
- **Metta practice**
 - How to do it? instructions:
 - Pick an object¹⁰
 - Self (really good at the outset for building protection before going on)
 - Dear one/benefactor
 - Neutral
 - Difficult (very strengthening)
 - All (very strengthening)
 - They are listed in the order which will build range of experience
 - Pick one which will be a fun experiment
 - you can always change
 - so don't be afraid to explore choices.
 - Now let's generate metta towards them thru:¹¹

¹⁰Thanissaro Bhikkhu in *Heart And Mind*: So if you're using visualization as part of your goodwill practice, don't visualize people simply as smiling, surrounded willy-nilly by wealth and sensual pleasures. Visualize them acting, speaking, and thinking skillfully. If they're currently acting on unskillful intentions, visualize them changing their ways. Then act to realize those visualizations if you can.

- ¹¹ recall it is not an invitation for them to do harm:
 - Quite the opposite, it's a wish for them to calm down. So it can make you less ill at ease w aggressors.

- The wishes:
 1. May you be **safe** (Paramitas)
 2. May you be **happy** (Jhana)
 3. May your heart be at **ease** w the **truth** of your life. (Vipassana)

- **Mudita**
 1. **Definition:** Empathetic joy (*mudita*) is what the metta infused heart feels when it encounters happiness: It wants the happiness to continue.
 2. The **practice** of *Mudita*, or empathetic joy works as follows:
 - When we focus on the happiness of others our happiness increases.
 - Imagine someone (dear one, Neutral, difficult, all) smiling or laughing. What happens to your face?
 - **How do you feel?**
 - Take in your good feelings and send them out to that being.
 - Try sending out the following:
 - i. may your happiness continue,
 - ii. may your happiness grow

- if the wishes don't ring true, just be w that,
 - Then you are doing eq.
 - So either way you win

3. Think of a second being and repeat:

- Imagine someone smiling or laughing. What happens to your face?
- How do you feel?
- Take in your good feelings and send them out to that being.
- Send out the following:
 - i. may your happiness continue,
 - ii. may your happiness grow
- How do you feel?

4. Discussion

○ Karuna

1. Description

1. Compassion is a good translation. As Thanissaro Bhikkhu says, it occurs when a heart with goodwill encounters pain¹².
2. What it does is it changes us from trying to push away the unwanted (which doesn't work) to opening to it comfortably.
 - more on this next time, but studying Tibetan monks we see that they develop the ability to wish to act to help suffering¹³ and so can feel at ease when they encounter those in distress.

¹² Put in masking experiment for long form

¹³ This the action component which SB, Napon Thera & Thanissaro Bhikkhu point out as one of the feats devd. Change of action and change of heart.

3. This is protective and so freeing:

- the world is full of unexpected events. A heart and mind practiced in compassion will be very comfortable¹⁴.

4. With practice, compassion will be felt equally for all, the teachings stress not to get caught in the notion of who deserves compassion –

- Deserve isn't the point, the good effect on yourself and others from your feelings and karuna-infused actions is

2. Practice

1. Pick an object other than self

- Try to extend the range, play w this, but allow it to be doable.

2. Let's try the Tibetan version

- It's called tonglen (sending and receiving)
- Take some time to feel the results of the Metta and Mudita practice practices you just did.

- – As Sharon says is it a “gathering [concentration]” of good feeling?

- Choose an object for whom you feel some compassion – as Mathieu Daniel says, a wish for their heart to be moved from the present state into peace.

- See them in your mind's eye

¹⁴ Put in PC story of only getting your room just the way you like mean(colors, lighting, music, even ordering in) instead of doing C practice, you end up not being able to go out. Not very robust.

- With your in-breath feel their state.
 - As your breath reaches your heart pause and feel your happiness. Let it pervade the feelings you have just breathed in.
 - Breath this out to them.
 - Repeat w same or easier object.
- Does tonglen change the object? Is it somehow magical? Here is what the Dalai Lama says:
 - “Whether this meditation really helps or not, it gives me peace of mind. Then I can be more effective and the benefit is immense”

III. Discussion: What the Brahma Viharas do

1. The Brahma Viharas protect the heart and mind by secluding them from craving, fear, anger and greed
2. They also open the range of your heart and mind and steady your concentration and so set you up for the path of liberation
 - An important aspect of this is their immeasurable aspect, the range for which they are done: all beings equally, self and others.
3. **Questions and Comments**

