

Love, Compassion, Joy, Equanimity

The Brahma Viharas – Suttas, Stories, Practices, Hidden Gems



by
Leigh Brasington

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Dedication

For all who love or are loved or who need love,
For all who are suffering or who help those suffering,
For all who are rejoicing,
May all find equanimity.

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Abbreviations and Notes

AN – Aṅguttara Nikāya (book.sutta)

Dhp – Dhammapada (verse)

DPD – [Digital Pāli Dictionary](#)

DN – Dīgha Nikāya (sutta.verse)

Iti – Itivuttaka (verse)

MN – Majjhima Nikāya (sutta.verse)

PED – Pāli-English Dictionary from the Pāli Text Society

Pm – Paramattha-mañjusa

SN – Saṃyutta Nikāya (book.sutta)

Snp – Suttanipāta (book.sutta)

Ud – Udāna (book.sutta)

Vsm – Visuddhimagga (**The Path of Purification** by Buddhaghosa, translated by the Ven. Nāṇamoli, BPS 1956 +)



All the internet URLs mentioned in this book can be found at <https://leighb.com/bv/links.htm>.

Most of the suttas mentioned can be found at [Sutta Central](https://leighb.com/suttacentral.htm) via <https://leighb.com/suttacentral.htm>.

Preface

Back around 2009, I was involved in a discussion about how far Brahma Vihara practice can take you on the spiritual path. To full awakening? Only as far as the Brahma realms? Maybe only as far as the state of non-returner? All I had for my sutta research at that time was my [Original Sutta Database](#) – which was (and still is) incomplete. But I searched for all the suttas I could find on the 4 Brahma Viharas and found 9 suttas that indicated (maybe!) that Brahma Vihara practice can take you to full awakening. And I also found 5 suttas that indicated (maybe!) that Brahma Vihara practice can only take you as far as rebirth in the Brahma realms. I knew there were more suttas that discussed the Brahma Viharas, but since I had no easy way to find them, I just left the discussion unresolved as far as I was concerned.

Fast forward to 2024 and while talking with Gil Fronsdal, he mentioned that it would be great to have a database of all of Bhikkhu Sujato's sutta translations from Sutta Central. That way we would have a complete digital database of suttas with consistent translations. I thought that was a brilliant suggestion and said I could do it. And so I did.

[Sujato's Sutta Database](#), like my Original one, was built using my Tibetan wordprocessor and database program – The [Unicode Document Processor](#). It not only works in Tibetan and English and most of the other languages of the world, it also supports romanized Sanskrit and hence romanized Pāli. It's a great database engine for sutta databases – and if it ever needs a new feature, I can just add it. For those who want to use the database, note that it only works on Windows (and on Linux/Unix using WINE).

I began searching Sujato's Sutta Database for various topics I was interested in. In doing so, I quickly realized I could easily build webpage indexes of any interesting topic, person, or place and share them with the world at large. One of the first of the indexes I created for my [Index of Sutta Indexes](#) was for the Brahma Viharas. In so doing I found 38 suttas that mention all four Brahma Viharas. Furthermore, I also built indexes for each of the 4 Brahma Viharas individually. Here's what I found:

[Brahma Viharas - All](#) – 38 Sutta Links

[Brahma Viharas - All \(with a summary of each sutta\)](#) – 38 Sutta Links

[Mettā](#) – 86 Sutta Links

[Karunā](#) – 53 Suttas

[Muditā](#) – 41 Sutta Links

[Muditā, but not all four Brahma Viharas](#) – 3 Suttas

[Upekkhā](#) – 228 Sutta Links

Before using any of the above links, it is imperative that you read the [Disclaimer](#) – which will also explain the difference between “Suttas” and “Sutta Links!”

When I was invited to teach a weekend course at the [Barre Center for Buddhist Studies](#), I decided it would now be possible for me to teach a course entitled “What do the Suttas

Actually Say about the Brahma Viharas?” This book is the outcome of the research for and teaching of that course. I've expanded my notes for that course by a factor of three by including much more material on the Brahma Viharas individually and as a group. There are a whole bunch of chapters, but most of them are quite short. That should make it easier for you to use this book as reference material if you so desire. I hope you find something here that is interesting, or helpful, or both.

Introduction

My teacher, [Ven. Ayya Khema](#), said that she thought the Buddha felt the only four emotions worth having were *Mettā*, *Karuṇā*, *Muditā*, and *Upekkhā* – the Four Brahma Viharas. These positive mind states contrast with the “not-negative” states frequently mentioned in the suttas. For example, Right Intention (*sammāsaṅkappo*) is defined as “renunciation (or rejection of sensual pleasure), non-ill-will, and harmlessness (not harming or non-cruelty).” Right Action (*sammākammanto*) is refraining from killing living creatures or stealing or sexual misconduct. Right Speech (*sammāvācā*) is refraining from lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and talking nonsense. All of these are “not-negative.” The positive antidotes to the negative states are practicing the Brahma Viharas, as we will see in multiple places as we dive into the suttas on the Brahma Viharas.

In order to discover what the suttas actually have to say about the Four Brahma Viharas, we are first going to take a look at the phrase “Brahma Vihara.” Then we'll look in detail at a sutta where the Buddha gives instructions on how to practice the Four Brahma Viharas. However (spoiler alert!), the instructions don't describe exactly what each of the Four Brahma Viharas actually entails.

Next we will then look at each of the Four Brahma Viharas in detail. This will include definitions of the Pāli words, common translations, near and far enemies, and my preferred translation. There will also be links to articles and books (where available) on each Brahma Vihara. There also are discussions of each Brahma Vihara in some detail as well as instructions on practicing each of them both during meditation and in daily life. And for each Brahma Vihara we will look at the suttas where that Brahma Vihara is mentioned in order to glean a better understanding of what each of these mind states actually does entail.

Having studied each of the Four Brahma Viharas individually, we will finally be able to look at all 38 suttas where the Four Brahma Viharas are taught as a practice. Then, with an eye towards the context, we will be able to understand what the suttas actually say about the Brahma Viharas and what results can flow from Brahma Vihara practice.



The sutta translations are mostly from [SuttaCentral.org](#), though I have occasionally used the SuttaCentral translation as a base for my own translation of some of the words and phrases. I also have removed the gender specific “he/his,” for which I have substituted “one/one's” – the Pali is simply 3rd person singular and literally could be “he,” “she” or “one.” Since this book is written for a general audience, not a male monastic one, and given the centuries of misogynist patriarchy in Buddhism, I am unwilling to write in a way that gives any credence to that particular misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings. I have also used “they” and “their” as singular gender neutral pronouns when necessary in order to avoid silliness like “s/he” or “he/she.”

The Pāli word *manas* is usually translated as “mind,” but sometimes it shows up as “heart.” The Pāli *citta* is variously translated as either “mind” or “heart” or “heart-mind.” Pāli, like many Asian languages, does not distinguish between thoughts and emotions like we do in English, so the choice by the translator of either “mind” or “heart” is aimed at capturing a distinction in English that was not obviously made in the Pāli. And sometimes I have used “heart-mind” where I think using either “mind” or “heart” would miss out of the full range of what is being taught.

If a sutta has [Late] or [Early], etc. by it, this is from Govind Chandra Pande, **Studies in the Origins of Buddhism**, Motilal Banarsidass (1974), ISBN-10: 8120810163, ISBN-13: 978-8120810167. In his book he goes thru all the suttas in the first 4 Nikāyas and rates them as Early, Late, Composite, or Unknown (the largest group). If there is nothing in brackets, Pande rates them as Unknown. A rating with braces like {Early} is my rating based on other scholars' work.

So now let's dive into [The Four Brahma Viharas](#).

The Four Brahma Viharas

The Four Brahma Viharas are

Mettā

Karuṇā

Muditā

Upekkhā

The actual Pāli word that we are referring to with “Brahma Vihara” is *brahmavihāra* – one word, not two. It is a compound of the words *brahma* and *vihāra*. In the West, this Pāli word has morphed into “Brahma Vihara” (with the *ā* converted to a plain *a*). Throughout this book, unless referring to Pāli, I will use “Brahma Vihara” since that is probably more familiar to most readers of this work.

Brahma means “divine” – “an inhabitant of the higher heavens” according to one definition in the PED. *Vihāra* means “abode” according to one definition in the PED.

In the [DPD](#) we find a definition where *brahma* means “divine; holy” [$\sqrt{\text{brah}} + \text{ma}$]. *Vihāra* in the [DPD](#) is “dwelling; residence.”

Thus, we can translate this phrase as “The Four Divine Abodes” or “The Four Divine Dwellings” or even “The Four Divine Abidings.”

Brahma is also the name of the creator god in Brahmanism, but in general the Buddha is not referencing this specific deity. In “Brahma Vihara” (and other uses like in [AN 4.190](#)) the word “Brahma” can best be translated as “divine” or “divinity,” but it doesn’t refer to a divine being; it refers to a spiritually advanced state.

There are 38 Suttas (or groups of Suttas) that contain all four of the Brahma Vihara states: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/bv-all.htm>. But in 36 of these suttas, the phrase Brahma Vihara (*brahmavihāro*) does not appear – only the 4 emotional states that correspond to the 4 Brahma Viharas are mentioned.

The two suttas that tie together the practices of *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* with the phrase Brahma Vihara (*brahmavihāra*) are [MN 83](#) and [AN 5.192](#), both of which we will discuss later in this book.

The phrase *brahmametaṃ vihāraṃ* (lit. brahma / this / dwelling) appears near the end of the *Mettā* Sutta at [Snp 1.8](#). Both *mettā* and *brahmavihāraṃ* appear in [Thag 14.1](#). And *brahmavihāro* does appear in 3 suttas, but none of those 3 references are related to the Four Brahma Viharas mentioned above, see <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/divinemeditation.htm>.

In the next chapter, we will discuss a sutta that lays out how to practice *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*.

Resources

– Books:

[Boundless Heart: The Buddha's Path of Kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity](#) by Christina Feldman, Shambhala (2017), ISBN-10: 161180373X, ISBN-13: 978-1611803730

[Your Heart Was Made for This: Contemplative Practices for Meeting a World in Crisis with Courage, Integrity, and Love](#) by Oren Jay Sofer, Shambhala (2023), ISBN-10: 1645472000, ISBN-13: 978-1645472001

[Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation](#) by Bhikkhu Analayo, Windhorse Publications (Nov 2015), ISBN-10: 9781909314559, ISBN-13: 978-1909314559

[The Four Immeasurables: Practices to Open the Heart](#), by B. Alan Wallace (Author), Zara Houshmand (Editor), Snow Lion (2010), ISBN-10: 155939353X, ISBN-13: 978-1559393539

– On the Internet:

[The Four Sublime States](#) by Nyanaponika Thera, Générique (1999)

[The Four Highest Emotions](#), Ayya Khema on cultivating loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, Lion's Roar, (23 April 2025)

Access to Insight Search for "Brahma Vihara":

[https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=brahma+vihara&sa=Search)

[cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=brahma+vihara&sa=Search](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=brahma+vihara&sa=Search)

A Horn Blower – SN 42.8

The Buddha asks the chief Asibandhakaputta, a Jain, how Mahāvīra, the Jain leader, teaches his followers. He replies that you go to a rebirth depending on what you usually do. But the Buddha points out that even a killer only spends a small amount of time actually killing. The Buddha’s approach is to point out that actions have results, and to encourage the abandoning of bad actions and the adoption of good actions.

SN 42.8 A Horn Blower – *Sankhadhamasutta*

[The first part of this sutta is the discussion of bad karma and its results. Then the Buddha teaches the following:]

A Tathāgata arises in the world, a worthy one, perfectly enlightened, endowed with clear knowledge and conduct, accomplished, a knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of men to be tamed, teacher of gods and men, awakened, and exalted. In many ways he criticizes and denounces killing living creatures, saying: ‘Stop killing living creatures!’ He criticizes and denounces stealing ... sexual misconduct ... lying, saying: ‘Stop lying!’

And there is a disciple who is devoted to that teacher. Then they reflect: ‘In many ways the Buddha criticizes and denounces killing living creatures, saying: “Stop killing living creatures!” But I have killed living creatures to a certain extent. That’s not right, it’s not good, and I feel remorseful because of it. But I can’t undo what I have done.’ Reflecting like this, they give up killing living creatures, and in the future they don’t kill living creatures. That’s how to give up this bad action and get past it.

‘In many ways the Buddha criticizes and denounces stealing ...’

‘In many ways the Buddha criticizes and denounces sexual misconduct ...’

‘In many ways the Buddha criticizes and denounces lying, saying: “Stop lying!” But I have lied to a certain extent. That’s not right, it’s not good, and I feel remorseful because of it. But I can’t undo what I have done.’ Reflecting like this, they give up lying, and in the future they refrain from lying. That’s how to give up this bad action and get past it.

They give up killing living creatures. They give up stealing. They give up sexual misconduct. They give up lying. They give up divisive speech. They give up harsh speech. They give up talking nonsense. They give up covetousness. They give up ill will and malevolence. They give up wrong view and have right view.

That noble disciple is rid of desire, rid of ill will, unconfused, aware, and mindful. They abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *mettā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, they abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *mettā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Just as a mighty trumpeter^[1] makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *mettā*. In the same way, when the heart's release by *mettā* has been developed and cultivated like this, any limited actions one has done don't remain or persist there.

Then that noble disciple is rid of desire, rid of ill will, unconfused, aware, and mindful. They abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *karuṇā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, they abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *karuṇā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *karuṇā*. In the same way, when the heart's release by *karuṇā* has been developed and cultivated like this, any limited actions one has done don't remain or persist there.

Then that noble disciple is rid of desire, rid of ill will, unconfused, aware, and mindful. They abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *muditā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, they abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *muditā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *muditā*. In the same way, when the heart's release by *muditā* has been developed and cultivated like this, any limited actions one has done don't remain or persist there.

Then that noble disciple is rid of desire, rid of ill will, unconfused, aware, and mindful. They abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *upekkhā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, they abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *upekkhā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *upekkhā*. In the same way, when the heart's release by *upekkhā* has been developed and cultivated like this, any limited actions one has done don't remain or persist there.

RESULT: In [SN 42.8](#) practicing the four Brahma Viharas leads to “any limited karma one has done doesn't remaining or persisting there.” The phrase “any limited actions one has done don't remain or persist there” is rather unclear. The Pāḷi is *pamāṇakatam* (limited; lit. made

measured) *kammaṃ* (action; deed) *na taṃ* (not that) *tatrāvasissati* (remains there; is left over there), *na taṃ* (not that) *tatrāvatiṭṭhati* (lingers there; persists there; remains there; lit. stands down there). So a more literal translation would be “any measured karma is not left over there, nor persists there.” This would seem to indicate that practicing the four Brahma Viharas is a way to overcome “bad karma.” Now I do not think this means that the results (*vipakka*) of bad karma are eliminated! But I do think it means that practicing the four Brahma Viharas will reprogram your mind so that any tendency towards “bad karma” (unwholesome actions) will be overcome and thereby eliminate future unwholesome actions. Here we find our first result of Brahma Vihara practice.

The practice described in this sutta for all four of the Brahma Viharas is to “abide pervading” the whole world – all things that have shape or life, not one is passed by or left aside – with a mind of deep-felt *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*. These are the same practice instructions given in the other 37 suttas that contain all four Brahma Viharas where practice instructions are given in detail. In order to do this practice, you have to know what each of the 4 states is like, what a deep-felt sense of each of them is. So now our exploration of the Brahma Viharas turns to exploring each of these states individually.

For more on the practice of “abiding pervading,” see [Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation](#) by Bhikkhu Analayo, Windhorse Publications (Nov 2015), ISBN-10: 9781909314559, ISBN-13: 978-1909314559. See also the youtube guided meditation [Metta and Brahmavihara meditation](#) by Bhikkhu Analayo and the first two videos in the youtube playlist [Brahmavihāras and Emptiness](#) with Bhikkhu Analayo.

1. Conch shells have been used as communication trumpets for thousands of years. See, for example, <https://gizmodo.com/6700-year-old-shell-trumpets-were-prehistoric-communication-tools-study-suggests-2000692576> [Back]

Mettā

Common Translations:

Loving-Kindness, Loving Friendliness, Love, Friendliness, Benevolence, Goodwill, Amity, Sympathy

PED:

mettā (fem.) [abstract from mitra=mitta, compare Vedic maitraṇ. According to Asl. 192 (compare. Expos. 258) derived from mid to love, to be fat: "mejjati mettā siniyhatī ti attho"]^[2]
Love, amity, sympathy, friendliness, active interest in others. There are var[ious].
def[inition]s & expl[anation]s of mettā.

DPD:

mettā - fem. goodwill (towards); friendliness (to); benevolence (for) [$\sqrt{\text{mitt}} + *ā$]
root – $\sqrt{\text{mitt}} \times 1$ a (be friendly)

Far Enemy:^[3]

Ill-will or Hatred

Near Enemy:

Attachment, Sentimentality, Clinginess, Conditional Love

My Translation:

Unconditional^[4] Love

Unconditional Love means the love is given with no strings attached. This is the same as the Greek word “Agape” (ἀγάπη) – in contrast to “Eros” (erotic love), “Philia” (brotherly love), or “Philautia” (self-love), as it embraces a profound (sometimes even sacrificial) love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstance.

“Love” seems to be a difficult word in Western culture. Numerous times I have encountered someone who definitely does not like “love” as a translation of *mettā* – seemingly because the word is “too syrupy” or “too loaded” or just “problematic.” Indeed “love” gets used in many ways in English that actually mean “like” or “really like.” Of course, it is way beyond my power to rescue “love” from its ongoing trivialization. But I am going to use it as my translation of *mettā* in what follows. You should remember that what I (and the Buddha!) are talking about is unconditional love – equivalent to “Agape” (ἀγάπη). I hope this becomes clear in the next few chapters.

But if you'd prefer a different translation, the opposite of *mettā* is its far enemy which is ill-will or hatred. Since “goodwill” is the opposite of “ill-will” – that will certainly work. Both “ill-will” and “hatred” are antonyms of “friendliness,” so that would also work. “Loving friendliness” is a nice combination which will work. The common translation “loving-

kindness” works. But I feel all of these are weak compared to “unconditional love.” Let's see what the suttas have to say what *mettā* is.

Up next is the [The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8](#). It's very nice that we have a sutta that gives such a great explanation of exactly what is meant by *mettā* – and how to practice it. The translation is mine – I wanted one that was closer to the literal meaning of the Pāli words and phrases. In addition to my translation, which can also be found at <https://leighb.com/mettasuttalnb.htm>, there are 24 translations of the Metta Sutta side-by-side at <https://leighb.com/mettasuttas.htm>. There are also multiple translations at Sutta Central <https://suttacentral.net/snp1.8>.

Mettā occurs in 86+ Suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/metta.htm>

Resources

– Books:

[The Path to Peace: A Buddhist Guide to Cultivating Loving-Kindness](#), Ayya Khema, Shambhala (2022), ISBN-10: 1611809509, ISBN-13: 978-1611809503

[Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness](#) by Sharon Salzberg, Shambhala (1995), ISBN-10: 1611808200, ISBN-13: 978-1611808209

[Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta](#) by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, Wisdom Publications (2017), ISBN-10: 1614292493, ISBN-13: 978-1614292494

[Living Kindness: Metta Practice for the Whole of Our Lives](#) by Kevin Griffin, Shambhala (2022), ISBN-10: 164547125X, ISBN-13: 978-1645471257

[Awakening Loving-Kindness](#) by Pema Chodron, Shambhala (2017), ISBN-10: 1611805252, ISBN-13: 978-1611805253

– On the Internet:

[The Four Sublime States and the Practice of Loving Kindness \(Metta\)](#) by Nyanaponika Thera and Ñāṇamoli Thera, BPS Pariyatti Editions (2021), ISBN-10: 1681723859, ISBN-13: 978-1681723853

[Loving-Kindness \(Metta\)](#), Lion’s Roar – many articles on *mettā* linked from this page.

Access to Insight Search for "Loving Kindness":

[https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=loving+kindness&sa=Search)

[cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=loving+kindness&sa=Search](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=loving+kindness&sa=Search)

2. The red text in brackets after a PED headword for a definition is the Sanskrit root information. DPD root information is given with the √ symbol. [\[Back\]](#)

3. The far enemy for each of the Brahma Viharas is found in [MN 62](#): The Longer Advice to Rāhula. [\[Back\]](#)

4. This has nothing to do with the mistranslation of *asaṅkhata* as “the unconditioned.” That very bad translation leads to making an object out of *nibbāna*. But there are no articles (“a,” “an,” “the”) in Pāli, so “the” is wrong. “*Asaṅkhata*” is the negative of the past participle of *saṅkhāroti* (lit. making together) – *saṅkhāra* is the noun derived from this verb. “*Asaṅkhata*” literally means (*a*) without (*saṅkhata*) concocted or fabricated, so “without fabricated” or “without concocted.” [\[Back\]](#)

The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8

This is what is to be done
by one who is skilled in wholesomeness,
and who seeks the state of peace:

Be able, straight, and upright,
easy to speak to,
mild, flexible, and humble,
contented and low maintenance,
not overly busy and living lightly,
calm, and wise, and unassuming,
not greedy with one's supporters.
One would not do the slightest thing
that wise people would criticize.

May all be at ease and safe,
may all beings be happy!

Whatever living beings there are,
moving or stationary, omitting none,
whatever long or large,
medium, short or small,
seen or just unseen,
living far away or near,
those born and to-be-born,
may all beings be happy!

One would not defraud another,
or despise any being anywhere.
One would not wish suffering on another
because of anger or ill-will.

As a mother would protect with her life
her own child, her only child,
so too, for all beings
one would cultivate a boundless heart.

With love for the whole world,
one would cultivate a boundless heart,
above, below, and across,
unrestricted and friendly, without hostility.

Whether standing, walking, seated,
or lying down, or free from drowsiness,
one should sustain this mindfulness.
This, they say, is divine abiding here.

*Avoiding views,
virtuous, and endowed with insight,
one would dispel greed for sense desires,
never again returning to a womb.*

– Translated by Leigh Brasington

In the Mettā Sutta practicing *mettā* leads to the state of non-returner, if not full liberation (both result in not returning to a womb). Though you've probably noticed that this result is in the last verse, which is in italics. I'll explain this shortly.

The next chapter is a literal translation of the Mettā Sutta in the middle column, my translation in the left column, and the more familiar Saṅgha of Amaravati translation in the right column. This gives you a chance to compare what the sutta actually says, vs. how it gets translated. The problem is that a page this wide may be very difficult to read if your digital device or book is small. Never fear, the page is also available at <https://leighb.com/mettasuttaliteral.htm> and also as an [image](#) that may be more easily resized.

The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8: Literal Translation

[If the table below is too wide for your screen, use this [image](#).]

Literal Translation

Translation by Leigh Brasington

Translation by the Saṅgha of Amaravati

143. **Karaṇīyam atthakusalena**

is to be done / skilled in wholesomeness

yaṃ taṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca:

whatever / that / peaceful / state / in order to realize

Sakko ujū ca sūjū ca

able / straight / and / upright / and

suvacocassa mudu anātimānī.

ease to speak to state / mild, flexible / who is humble

This is what is to be done
by one who is skilled in
wholesomeness,
and who seeks^[5] the state of peace:
Be able, straight, and upright,
easy to speak to,
mild, flexible, and humble,

This is what should be done
By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:
Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech.
Humble and not conceited,

144. **Santussako ca subharo ca**

who is satisfied, content / and / low maintenance / and

appakicco ca sallahukavuttī,

with few duties / and / living lightly

Santindriyo ca nipako ca

calm / and / wise / and

appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho.

unassuming / among supporters / not greedy

contented and low maintenance,
not overly busy and living lightly,
calm, and wise, and unassuming,
not greedy with one's supporters.

Contented and easily satisfied.
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful,
Not proud and demanding in nature.

145. **Na ca khuddaṃ samācare kiñci**
not / and / small / would act, would do / anything
yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ.
whatever / wise person / another / would criticize
Sukhino vā khemino hontu
happy / and / safe / may they be
sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.
all / beings / may they be / happy

One would not do the slightest thing
that wise people would criticize.
May all be at ease and safe,
May all beings be happy!

Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.

146. **Ye keci pāṇa bhūtatthi**
whatever / anything / living being / there are
tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā
moving / or / stationary / as well as / without exception
Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā
long / or / whatever / large / or
majjhamā rassakāṇukathulā,
medium / short / tiny and substantial

Whatever living beings there are,
moving or stationary, omitting none,
whatever long or large,
medium, short or small,

Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty,
medium, short or small,

147. **Diṭṭhā vā yeva addiṭṭhā**
seen / or / just / unseen
ye va dūre vasanti avidūre,
whatever / or / far away / lives / near
Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā,—
born / or / who is seeking birth / as well as
sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.
all / beings / may they be / happy

seen or just unseen,
living far away or near,
those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be happy!

The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be at ease!

148. Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha
not / other / another / defraud
nātimaññetha katthaci na kañci,
let one not despise / anywhere / not / anyone
Byārosanā paṭighasaññā
causing anger / aversion; dislike; ill-will
nāññamaññassa dukkham iccheyya.
not one to another / suffering (for) / would desire

One would not defraud another,
or despise any being anywhere.
One would not wish suffering on
another
because of anger or ill-will.

Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.

149. Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ
mother / as / her own / child
āyusā ekaputtāṃ anurakkhe,
life / only child / would protect
Evampi sabbabhūtesū
so too / all beings
mānasā bhāvaye aparimāṇāṃ.
heart, mind / would cultivate / boundless

As a mother would protect with her life
her own child, her only child,
so too, for all beings
one would cultivate a boundless heart.

Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings:

150. Mettāṃ ca sabbalokasmiṃ

love / and / for the whole world
mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimānaṃ
heart, mind / would cultivate / boundless
Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyaṃ ca
above / below / and / across / and
asambādhaṃ averaṃ asapattaṃ.
unrestricted / friendly / without hostility

With love for the whole world,
one would cultivate a boundless heart,
above, below, and across,
unrestricted and friendly, without
hostility.

Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.

151. **Tiṭṭhaṃ caraṃ nisinno vā**
standing / walking / sitting / or
sayāno vā yāvatassa vigatamiddho,
lying down / or / as long as / without drowsiness
Etaṃ satiṃ adhiṭṭheyya,
this / mindfulness / would fix attention (on)
brahmametaṃ vihāraṃ idhamāhu.
brahma / this / dwelling / here / they say

Whether standing, walking, seated,
or lying down free from drowsiness,
one should sustain this mindfulness.
This, they say, is divine abiding here.

Whether standing or walking, seated
or lying down free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.

152. **Diṭṭhiṃ ca anupagamma**
view / and / avoiding
sīlavā dassanena sampanno
virtuous / with insight / accomplished (in)
Kāmesu vineyya gedhaṃ
sense desire / would dispel / greed (for)
nahi jātu gabbhaseyyaṃ punaretīti.
not / ever / conception in a womb / comes again (to)

Avoiding views,

By not holding to fixed views,

*virtuous, and endowed with insight,
one would dispel greed for sense
desires,
never again returning to a womb.*^[6]

The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.

– Translation via [DPD](#) & [PED](#) by Leigh Brasington
with help from Claralynn Nunamaker

– Translation by Leigh Brasington

– Translation by the Saṅgha of Amaravati

5. See [Gombrich](#), page 7, for the details for why “seeks” and not “knows.” [\[Back\]](#)

6. The last verse appears to be a later addition. See [Sujato](#), 1st paragraph, last sentence. Also the phrase *jātu gabbhaseyyaṃ punaretī* ("returns to a womb again") does not occur in any other suttas. [\[Back\]](#)

The next chapter is my verse by verse commentary of the Mettā Sutta. By the end of that chapter, hopefully you will have a good understanding of what *mettā* is and how to practice it.

The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8: My Commentary

143. **Karaṇīyam atthakusalena**

is to be done / skilled in wholesomeness

yaṃ taṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca:

whatever / that / peaceful / state / in order to realize

This is what is to be done

by one who is skilled in wholesomeness,

and who seeks the state of peace:

The prerequisite is to be skilled in wholesomeness. This can be accomplished by keeping the precepts. The sutta indicates what follows are instructions for one “who seeks the state of peace.” The word “seeks” is quite different from “knows” found in numerous translations. Of the 24 translations at <https://leighb.com/mettasuttas.htm>, 15 have something like “seeks,” “wishes to attain,” etc.; 5 have something like “knows”; and the other 4 are a bit unclear on what they are saying. So what's going on here?

Gombrich, 1998, pg 7 writes:

It was in fact, if my memory serves me, Prof. Norman who first pointed out to me the solution to this puzzle. The Pali word which he has translated “having attained” is an absolutive, a grammatical form which usually has the meaning “having done” (where “done” stands for any verb); but in Pali the infinitive, which is most commonly used to express purpose, can be used as an absolutive. So here that same semantic assimilation would be operating in reverse, and the introductory verse is saying what one has to do in order to attain nirvana.

The “state of peace” is Nibbana, the goal of the Buddha's teachings, the end of dukkha. If someone already knew this state of peace, then the rest of the sutta would be redundant! – they would have already done what needs to be done. Kudos to Richard Gombrich for elucidating this strange Pāli construction that seems to trip up so many translators.

Sakko ujū ca sūjū ca

able / straight / and / upright / and

suvacocassa mudu anātimānī.

ease to speak to state / mild, flexible / who is humble

144. **Santussako ca subhāro ca**

who is satisfied, content / and / low maintenance / and

appakicco ca sallahukavuttī,

with few duties / and / living lightly

Santindriyo ca nipako ca

calm / and / wise / and

appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho.

unassuming / among supporters / not greedy

Be able, straight, and upright,
easy to speak to,
mild, flexible, and humble,
contented and low maintenance,
not overly busy and living lightly,
calm, and wise, and unassuming,
not greedy with one's supporters.

To quote Ven. Ayya Khema in her book [The Path to Peace](#) on page 11:

The sutta then mentions 15 conditions which are wholesome, are creating peacefulness within, and lead one to loving kindness. These fifteen conditions come first, and the loving of others comes afterwards. So obviously, since his teachings are always graduated, and always cause and effect, these are the things that we need to practice.

These 15 conditions are

1. Be able,
2. straight,
3. and upright;
4. easy to speak to;
5. mild,
6. flexible,
7. and humble;
8. contented
9. and low maintenance;
10. not overly busy
11. and living lightly;
12. calm,
13. and wise,
14. and unassuming;
15. not greedy with one's supporters.

Ayya Khema has done a magnificent job of describing what the 15 conditions entail, both in a series of 3 dhamma talks ([talk1](#), [talk2](#), [talk3](#)) and in her book [The Path to Peace](#), which contains a transcription of those 3 talks (plus more). I won't say anything more about these 15 conditions here – just read Ayya's book or listen to her talks!

145. Na ca khuddaṃ samācare kiñci

not / and / small / would act, would do / anything

yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ.

whatever / wise person / another / would criticize

Sukhino vā khemino hontu

happy / and / safe / may they be
sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā.
 all / beings / may they be / happy

One would not do the slightest thing
 that wise people would criticize.
 May all be at ease and safe,
 May all beings be happy!

The bottom line of ethical behavior is that “One would not do the slightest thing that wise people would criticize.” Think about things you have done that were, er, questionable. Would you have done them if you knew that what you did was going to be known by wise people – who would speak out about what you did? The Buddha said that *hiri* and *ottappa* are the guardians of the world (Iti 42). *Hiri* is moral shame, an innate sense of shame over moral transgression; *ottappa* is moral dread, fear of the results of wrongdoing.^[7] *Hiri* is “I wouldn't do that because I have a sense of right and wrong;” *ottappa* is “I won't do that because I might get into trouble.” So practicing *hiri* and *ottappa* keeps you from doing anything the wise would criticize.

Then we come to the heart of the Mettā Sutta: May all be at ease and safe, May all beings be happy! Notice it's “all beings.” Not “the beings I like.” Not “the beings I agree with.” It's all beings – without any conditions. This is why I want to translate *mettā* as “unconditional love.”

146. Ye keci pāṇa bhūtatthi

whatever / anything / living being / there are
tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā
 moving / or / stationary / as well as / without exception

Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā

long / or / whatever / large / or
majjhamā rassakāṇukathulā,
 medium / short / tiny and substantial

147. Diṭṭhā vā yeva addiṭṭhā

seen / or / just / unseen
ye va dūre vasanti avidūre,
 whatever / or / far away / lives / near
Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā,—
 born / or / who is seeking birth / as well as
sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā.
 all / beings / may they be / happy

Whatever living beings there are,
 moving or stationary, omitting none,

whatever long or large,
 medium, short or small,
 seen or just unseen,
 living far away or near,
 those born and to-be-born,
 May all beings be happy!

Now to emphasize “all beings,” the sutta gives a list of possible beings: moving or still; big, medium or small; seen or not; near or far; born or to be born. The practice is to wish that all beings be happy! It does not matter that this will likely never happen. It's the wish, rather than any outcome of the wish, that is operative here. Basically the challenge is to open your heart wide enough so that no one is excluded from the wish that all beings be happy!

This does not mean that you don't have boundaries. Boundaries are definitely necessary. This also does not mean that if someone is gaining happiness from doing unwholesome activities, you are wishing them that happiness. The practice of doing *mettā* using phrases is not found in the suttas, but is taught from phrases found in the Visuddhimagga. However Ayya Khema taught a much more useful set of *mettā* phrases – that do work for sending *mettā* to people doing unwholesome activities:

- May you be free from enmity.
 - May you be free from hurtfulness.
 - May you be free of troubles of mind and body.
 - May you be able to protect your happiness.
- You certainly can wish that unskillful people be free of enmity/hate.
 - You certainly can wish that unskillful people be free of hurtfulness.
 - If those unskillful people were free of their troubles of mind, then maybe they would not be acting unskillfully – and maybe it's their troubles of body driving their troubles of mind, so it would be better if they are free of those as well.
 - And the only happiness anyone can actually protect is happiness gained from wholesome activities. So wishing that that all beings be happy, when applied to unskillful people, is actually wishing that they find a better, wholesome source of happiness – one that can be protected.

148. Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha

not / other / another / defraud

nātimaññetha katthaci naṃ kañci,

let one not despise / anywhere / not / anyone

Byārosanā paṭighasaññā

causing anger / aversion; dislike; ill-will

nāññamaññassa dukkham iccheyya.

not one to another / suffering (for) / would desire

One would not defraud another,
or despise any being anywhere.
One would not wish suffering on another
because of anger or ill-will.

This is pretty clear. Fraud is taking what is not given – breaking the second precept.
Despising someone is actually the opposite of the longer version of the first precept:

Having abandoned the destruction of life, one abstains from the destruction of life. One has laid down the rod and weapon and dwells conscientious, full of kindness, sympathetic for the welfare of all living beings.^[8]

Despising anyone is the opposite of the second half of the first precept, as is wishing dukkha on someone because of your anger or ill-will.

149. Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ

mother / as / her own / child

āyusā ekaputtam anurakkhe,

life / only child / would protect

Evampi sabbabhūtesū

so too / all beings

mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimānaṃ.

with such a heart / cultivates / boundless

As a mother would protect with her life
her own child, her only child,
so too, for all beings
one would cultivate a boundless heart.

“Greater love has no one than they lay down their life for their friends,” says Jesus in John 15:13. This sutta takes it even further – for all beings you should protect them with your life; with a protection as strong as a mother's for her only child. This is how strong your boundless heart should be for all beings.

150. Mettaṃ ca sabbalokasmiṃ

love / and / for the whole world

mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimānaṃ

heart, mind / would cultivate / boundless

Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyaṇ ca

above / below / and / across / and

asambādhaṃ averaṃ asapattaṃ.

unrestricted / friendly / without hostility

With love for the whole world,
one would cultivate a boundless heart,
above, below, and across,
unrestricted and friendly, without hostility.

Here we find the only occurrence of the word *mettā* in this sutta and we find the practice of *mettā* given here to be the same as what we found in the [A Horn Blower – SN 42.8](#): cultivate a boundless heart above, below, and across, unrestricted and friendly, without hostility – for the whole world.

One thing that is not readily apparent in our busy lives is the interconnected nature of the whole world. The teachings on Dependent Origination^[9] point out that everything arises dependent on other things. It's not that everything is connected to everything else; it's that everything is connected to other things that are also connected to other things, until we have a unitary structure – like a net. Each node of a net is not connected to every other node, but each node is connected to enough other nodes that are connected to still other nodes, such that the net becomes a unitary structure.

This is the nature of the whole world – you are not separate from the whole world, you are just a piece of something so much larger than yourself and all your concerns. *Mettā* practice is acting in harmony with this interconnectedness. Your left and right hands are not connected. But they are interconnected via the rest of your body. If something happens to your left hand, your right hand immediately reaches out to soothe that hurt. It's much harder to see, but this is the nature of you and the rest of the world. So why wouldn't you love all the good people, places and things – and wish healing for all the people, places and things that are suffering, even the ones suffering because of their own selfish delusions. This is the nature of *mettā*.

151. Tiṭṭhaṃ caraṃ nisinno vā
standing / walking / sitting / or
sayāno vā yāvatassa vigatamiddho,
lying down / or / as long as / without drowsiness
Etaṃ satim adhiṭṭheyya,
this / mindfulness / would fix attention (on)
brahmametaṃ vihāraṃ idhamāhu.
brahma / this / dwelling / here / they say

Whether standing, walking, seated,
or lying down, or free from drowsiness,
one should sustain this mindfulness.
This, they say, is divine abiding here.

No matter what posture you are in, as long as you are not sleepy, you should sustain this mindfulness. The word *sati*, which we usually translate as “mindfulness” can also mean

“presence; recollection; awareness; keeping in mind” (DPD). So basically, pay attention to what's going on here and now, and remember to keep sending out *mettā* to all beings.

This is a Brahma Vihara. This is a Divine Dwelling. This is “Heaven.”

I think the sutta originally ended here. The following verse adds nothing to what is to be done by one who seeks the state of peace. And this is such a beautiful ending! All that had gone before this verse is the instructions on how to find the state of peace. This verse wraps it all up by say we should practice these instruction full time – unless we are going to sleep.

These first nine verses have nothing specifically Buddhist in them, in fact these nine verses are universal ones on how you should live in the world. No matter what someone's belief system^[10] is, these nine verse fit – if that belief system is wholesome.

152. **Diṭṭhiñ ca anupagamma**

view / and / avoiding

sīlavā dassanena sampanno

virtuous / with insight / accomplished (in)

Kāmesu vineyya gedhaṃ

sense desire / would dispel / greed (for)

nahi jātu gabbhaseyyaṃ punaretīti.

not / ever / conception in a womb / comes again (to)

*Avoiding views,
virtuous, and endowed with insight,
one would dispel greed for sense desires,
never again returning to a womb.*

But this 10th verse is here – and makes the sutta very Buddhist. I put it in italics because I think this was added later to make the preceding nine verses specifically Buddhist. As Bhikkhu Sujato says, “Verse 10 is in a different metre and appears to be a later addition, describing in a highly compressed form the development of insight for attaining first stream-entry, then non-return.”^[11] Also the phrase *jātu gabbhaseyyaṃ punaretī* (“returns to a womb again”) does not occur in any other suttas. Yes, verse 10 is good orthodox Buddhism, but I think it spoils what is actually a universal hymn of love.

Of course there are multiple other commentaries on the Mettā Sutta besides mine:

Andrew Olendzki has a verse-by-verse commentary: [verse 1](#) [verse 2](#) [verse 3](#) [verse 4](#) [verse 5](#) [verse 6](#) [verse 7](#) [verse 8](#) [verse 9](#) [verse 10](#);

Bhikkhu Sujato has a commentary entitled [a new reading of the Mettasutta that will change everything](#).

There is also an interesting article entitled [Dating the Metta Sutta](#) that attempts to determine when this sutta was composed.

The next chapter is not from the suttas – it's an absolutely beautiful Dhamma talk by Ayya Khema on *mettā*.

7. Bodhi, (1998) [\[Back\]](#)

8. [DN 2.43](#) - in The Small Section on Moral Discipline [\[Back\]](#)

9. See Brasington, (2021), especially PART 3 [\[Back\]](#)

10. As my friend reminded me, “You can't have a Belief System without B S.” [\[Back\]](#)

11. [a new reading of the Mettasutta that will change everything](#), 1st paragraph; [\[Back\]](#)
see also Warder (1970), p. 228, n. 1.

Unconditional Love: “Mettā” – A Dhamma talk by Ven. Ayya Khema

The four supreme emotions are an essential part of spiritual practice because they are the means to purify our inner reactions. The first one is named “metta” in Pali and is usually translated as “lovingkindness.” I'm not that convinced that that's the best translation; it's correct, there's nothing wrong with it, but it doesn't have the impact that the word “love” has, so I'm going to use the word “love” as a translation for “metta,” and try to show you what the word “love” and the emotion of love actually is all about.

It's not what we have been seeing in the movies and on television for these past decades: where “they lived happily ever after” – or not; where it concerns one special person that has appeared by accident, or just fell out of the sky, or whatever kind of fanciful ideas the filmmaker happened to have. That's what has been designated as love, in our society. And people have believed it. They haven't really tried to look behind it. Some people might not have been very fortunate at it – I would say most people haven't – because that isn't what love is all about.

What has been lacking has been a determined effort to see that such fanciful ideas are actually not love at all. The Buddha calls this type of emotion “the near enemy of love.” The far enemy of love is hate – anybody can tell you that, and that's not very difficult to understand. But the near enemy of love is attachment. And that's what all this business in our fairy tales is all about. The fairy tales, which most people, at one stage in their lives, would like to make reality. After we find out that the fairy tale does not lend itself to reality, then we have several options. We can become angry; some people do. We can try again; most people do – a third or fourth time. And we can become totally disillusioned and want nothing to do with this kind of emotion because it's only disappointing. We try to close ourselves up so that it doesn't come near us. But underneath all that, there's still that valiant hope: somebody's going to come around and prove it's possible. Well, needless to say, it's all nonsense. And needless to say, it doesn't work. I mean, everybody knows that by now. And yet, underlying that knowing that it isn't working, there's still that little bit of hoping: “Maybe I can do better next time. I've learned all those lessons already.” It's a totally wrong approach to the whole thing, and that's why it doesn't work. It's a mistake in thinking, and it's a mistaken viewpoint of our emotional makeup.

So we'll have a look at it and see what the Buddha actually meant when he talked about love. He talked about it on many occasions, and this emotion underlies all his teaching. He was enlightened at the age of thirty-five, which means there was nothing left that he had to do. Yet he taught every single day of his life until he was on his deathbed at the age of eighty. Why? For the simple reason that he had so much love and compassion for the suffering that everybody experiences that he wanted to share his understanding which can alleviate and eliminate all that suffering. So underlying the teaching is always love as the foundation, whether he talked about it or not. We'll have a look at what he actually explained it to be.

Instead of “lovingkindness,” we can call it “unconditional love,” which is probably a more succinct statement of what it is all about. When we have a look at the kind of emotion that we already have discussed – which is always connected with attachment – we can see quite easily that, if this is really love, we are diminished by it. Because what we're doing is looking at only one, two, three people – and that's the whole extent of love. There are six billion of us, so why diminish ourselves to one, two, or three? And not only that, the whole problem lies in the fact that because it is attachment, we've got to *keep* those one, two, or three in order to experience any kind of love. We are afraid to lose them: to lose them through death, through change of mind, to leaving home, to whatever change happens. And that fear discolors our love to the point where it can no longer be pure, because it is hanging on.

Now fear is always connected to hate. It doesn't mean that we hate those people, those one, two, or three, or four, or five, or how many there happen to be in the house, it means that we hate the idea that we could be losing them. So there's never that kind of open-hearted giving, without any demand behind it that a certain person is also there to receive it. Therefore it's always dependent, and as long as we are dependent, we're not free. This kind of love is doomed from the beginning and we all know that. We can change that kind of attachment to something else, but most people do not have that ability. Some people do, they manage; but it's a rare case.

Actually, love is something entirely different. Just like intelligence is a quality of the mind, so love is a quality of the heart. We don't just have intelligence when we have to solve a difficult mathematical equation; we don't just have intelligence when we have to make logical connections; the mind remains intelligent whether we do that or not. It's the same with love. The loving quality of the heart remains with us whether there's anybody in front of us that we can actually extend that love to or not. That quality of the heart needs to be cultivated.

The intelligence of the mind is cultivated in our society from the time we can understand what our parents are saying. Certainly in all our learning institutions, from kindergarten on upward through university and post-graduate studies, it's always the quality of the mind that is being cultivated. It's highly prized, usually gets paid quite well, and also has a certain possibility for fame and acclaim. Very few if any institutions in the world teach the quality of the heart: love. We've got to learn it by ourselves. Very few people can even demonstrate it, never mind teach it. We don't have kindergarten for it, nor do we have high school, graduate or post-graduate studies in love. This type of training is not available at any price. And yet, it has made people very famous – but it doesn't pay in the coin of the realm. So that's probably the rub. But once we have seen that materiality and all of the worldly things that we concern ourselves with actually cannot be fulfilling, then it stands to reason that we have to look elsewhere. And this is one of the directions in which we *must* look.

We all have the loving quality within us. There's no doubt about it. Nobody is exempt. But we've done all sorts of things to it. I've mentioned a few already. We were disappointed that the one we picked out didn't love us back, so we decided we're not going love anybody. Or, somebody that we thought was trustworthy betrayed that trust, so we decide we're not going to love. That decision is made in the mind; it's not made in the heart – all decisions are made

in the mind. But when that decision is made in the mind, we are able to close up our heart, and when we do that, we're only half alive. Why do that to ourselves? We're making ourselves dependent again on the good will and the lovingness of other people. There's only one thing to depend on: upon our own goodness and our own lovingness. We've got enough work to do to get that going, never mind what others do. We're constantly – through our reactions – buying into the actions and thoughts and deeds of other people. What for? There's no need for that; we've got enough to do with ourselves.

By buying into other people's thoughts and speech and actions, we also do not leave enough room for introspection. We're too busy looking at what others are doing to us which is totally irrelevant. They can only do it to us if we allow them to do it to us. If we don't allow it, what can they possibly do? If somebody gets angry at us and we feel upset by that, we've allowed that person to enter into our own being. If we see that the anger belongs to the other person, all we need is compassion for that person's anger. That's all that's necessary.

If we really want to know what love is all about, we need to recognize that love is not dependent upon another person being lovable. If we want to find somebody who is totally and utterly lovable, we have to find an arahant, an enlightened person. And since we ourselves are not enlightened, we wouldn't recognize such a person. We can only recognize what we know about ourselves. That's all. When somebody comes into the room who is quite angry – doesn't say anything, is just angry – we recognize that immediately because we've been angry ourselves. But if somebody comes into the room, doesn't say anything (or might even say something), and is fully enlightened, we wouldn't have a clue. How would we know? They don't wear badges; they don't have any halos or anything. So a fully and totally lovable person is not really within our realm. Are we ourselves totally and completely lovable? So, to look for that is a lost cause, and also it makes life very difficult because we're looking for something outside of ourselves before we are willing to extend love.

To look for people who would like to be loved by us is also silly, because love is the kind of emotion which connects people with each other, and there's no one exempt. Everybody would like to have a loving relationship with another person. But what we're mostly looking for is somebody who loves us, and that's the most absurd thing in the world to do, because that love belongs to the other person. The only reason we like it so much is because it proves something. It proves that we are actually lovable, all indications to the contrary. And since that is the best ego-support we can find, that's what we're looking for. It's totally useless on the spiritual path, and if we're looking for that, we may be disappointed, we may not find anybody. That's the first thing that may happen. We may actually find somebody, but what good will that do us? The love is in the other person's heart. We may deign to return it of course, but then again we're dependent upon the fact that the other person keeps on loving. And then if the other person decides that they don't want to keep on loving, then all of a sudden that's a tragedy: we're no longer lovable.

That's the whole business of the one-to-one relationship in a nutshell. I mean, we all know that it doesn't work, but why don't we change our approach to the whole matter? Well, the reason for that is of course quite simple. We really need a spiritual genius like the Buddha to

show us the way. There are very few people in the world who have that kind of ability to find the way by themselves. There are always some, but very, very few. Most of us need to be shown the way.

If we stop looking for somebody to love us, we can immediately turn that around and just start looking for people to love. And since there are so many people everywhere, there's no shortage at all; they're constantly available. Every one of us has constant daily contact with other people. This is our constant daily learning situation. It's not too difficult to have a sort of friendly feeling toward those people that are halfway acceptable. But that's not quite enough if we really want to cultivate this heart quality which then becomes like a safety zone within us. Fear is a human condition, but it's greatly alleviated if we find within us the certitude that we're going to be loving no matter what happens. This is such a basis for safety, where fear is so much diminished, that our whole inner being changes. Every person we meet is a challenge: a challenge to love. But particularly those who are unpleasant are the greatest challenge. If we want to actually work on this cultivation of the heart, this is where we have that opportunity.

Now mind you, it doesn't always work. Obviously. It does work for an arahant. The word arahant actually also means a saint, so obviously that's a bit far removed from our daily activities. But we can try, and this is the challenge that we are facing in our daily lives. Those people whom we find difficult, who are obstructing our path, who are against us are the ones for whom we need to find a way to open our hearts and love them in spite of all those difficulties. Now it's obvious that there can come a moment when we are convinced that we can't do it – on the contrary, we're becoming more and more negative. We can give in then, but not by blaming the other person. We can give in and give up and say, “I'm not developed enough. I can't handle this. I've got to try another way.” We must try for a long time, but it is not an absolute that we have to make it work with every person. But it is an absolute that we must **try** with every person. Now with those people that are close to us, it sometimes is even more difficult because we know them better, and they're around so much to disturb us. And seeing that we are looking for scapegoats, the nearest one is the obvious one. This makes life very difficult.

There is another way of tackling this by looking at our own faults and difficulties and realizing that only the ones we have ourselves are the ones we see in another. Our surroundings, our environment, is like a mirror. We wouldn't know what the other person has unless we know it ourselves already. Now there is a possibility that we have actually practiced long enough to have overcome some of those difficulties in ourselves. Then these same ones which we see in another person no longer bother us because we haven't got them anymore. All we need is a bit of compassion that the other person is still working at it (or maybe not working at it). But as long as those traits in another person are very bothersome to us, we can be quite sure we've got them ourselves.

We can be very grateful that we are given this learning opportunity to see ourselves as others see us. It's terribly difficult to see ourselves clearly, because the mirror image is only in other people. But it's very useful to see that, and then use that understanding about the other person,

or the things we don't like about the other person, to check out ourselves. “Do I do that too? Do I talk like that? Do I act like that?” We should try to find these same things within. There's no blame involved. If we start blaming ourselves or others for all the things that we do wrong, we'll never stop blaming. It's a totally useless activity, because for any negativity that we have and heap blame on top of, it means we've then got two negativities. What we would like is to get rid of negativity. So instead of blaming we look at it, accept it, and change it.

The more we have this loving feeling for ourselves of contentment and satisfaction about all our endeavors in our own heart, the easier it is to love others. The love has to come from our heart. So if there is no love for ourselves, no understanding for our own difficulties, how can we love another? We always think we do, but it is the kind of love that demands something. It wants something back. Maybe it doesn't even want love back, but it wants something back. It wants the right kind of attitude from the other person, the right kind of behavior, the right kind of being together – there's some demand being made. As long as we're demanding something – be it ever so subtle – so long our love cannot be pure. Love can only be pure if it's given without any payment. Very often in one-to-one relationships we also have this absurdity of trying to figure out whether the other person loves us as much as we love them. In other words, we put it on a little scale and see whether it evens out, and if ours is a little heavier, we'll take a little bit off so it's even. [laughter]

These are the absurdities that human nature is prone to, and it's not necessary because it makes life far more difficult than it has to be. The Buddha said as the first noble truth that there's dukkha. There **is** difficulty. It wasn't meant to be without any difficulty. Because dukkha is our best teacher. In fact, it's our only teacher. All other teachers, if you tell them, “I've had enough, I'm going home,” they say, “Well, if that's the case, sorry you're leaving, but have a good trip.” But if you say that to dukkha, you say, “Look, I've had enough, I'm going home,” dukkha says, “That's fine, but I'm coming along.” [laughter] So it's the one teacher that you can be quite sure of, totally reliable, always there. In our relationships with other people, we experience a lot of dukkha at times. Sometimes they're quite all right, but other times there's a lot of dukkha. And if there has been enough dukkha we become so accustomed to it, that our whole inner being reacts to it and we don't even try anything new anymore. That is, of course, a great mistake – on the spiritual path we do have to try something new. In fact, the spiritual path takes quite a lot of courage because it means chucking the old without knowing what the new one is actually like. If we don't have that courage, we can't go on such a path, because the old stuff needs to be chucked out the window as quickly as possible – or more likely, put in the garbage can.

Our work on the purification of our heart lies in our daily encounters with anyone, particularly human beings. It's not so difficult to love a little bird that has by mistake strayed into our room and we're trying to get him out again, poor little bird, nice little bird. But somebody who has strayed in our room and wants to sit there and talk while we're sleepy, well, there needs to be a little more determination to love that one. It's human beings that we need to work with. All of us have that opportunity constantly, and there's no excuse not to do it, because this is actually what our life is all about. It's an adult education class. We've asked the question already: “What am I supposed to do with my life?” Well, it's very simple: this is

an adult education class. That's all life is all about. Now, if we were going to school still, we would have exams, wouldn't we? In school they were usually kind enough to tell us when the exam would be, and they usually also told us what the exam topic was, so we could at least bone up on it and try to learn as much about it as possible. Well, we've got exams in daily life all the time, but nobody tells the date nor the topic, so we've got to be constantly ready. And just as in school, if we don't pass the exams, we going to be put back and have to do the class over again. Daily life is the same – if we don't pass the exam, we get the whole thing over again. Next time it might be called Mary instead of Pauline, or John instead of Tom – whatever it may be, but it's the same lesson over again. So instead of being unprepared when all these exams come about, the best thing to do is to use our daily lives as an adult education class and see what we can learn from each encounter.

Now in order to do that, we have to practice mindfulness. Without that, nothing happens. Mindfulness is the attention to ourselves that gives us a clue to what's going on within. If we practice it, it will become habitual. Then we will always know what's going on within. And we will always know whether it's helpful or whether it's unwholesome. And we will always be able to change it if necessary.

This is one important aspect of love, but another is to understand that love is the basis, the foundation for a peaceful life. We always think (if we at all think about it) that peace is the absence of war, that nobody's shooting. Well, obviously that's one kind of peace. But that isn't what we really want. That's not really what we're looking for. What we want is inner peace, and that has nothing to do with a shooting war. They're always shooting somewhere, I'm quite sure. They haven't stopped shooting since the Second World War ended. Recently they were shooting in Yugoslavia, not so far away from my center in Germany. There's always somebody shooting. They might be shooting at us. What is it? It doesn't matter. It's that inner peacefulness that makes all the difference. It's that inner experience that we live in. We don't live in those outer experiences; they're just triggers.

One of the formulas that's important to have and to remember, and maybe hang over your bed or somewhere you can see it is: Don't Blame the Trigger. Out there, they're all triggers. What this cultivation of this unconditional love means is that within us we have acquired a peaceful zone. We have acquired a zone without pollution. We have acquired a feeling of safety and security, which will be with us no matter what happens. But that's the result; the work toward that goes on day after day, moment after moment.

At the same time, we also need to realize that we only have this one moment. The past is gone, irrevocably gone. We can learn from it. We can see some of the things that we might have done differently, and could do differently now, but that's all. The future is a hope and a prayer. It never exists. When it exists, it's called the present. Tomorrow never comes; when it comes, it's called today. And if you have been labeling during your meditations, you will find that a lot of the labels are called “future.” It's an escape mechanism. The present isn't nice enough, so I'll do something in the future. It's the same escape mechanism that we have in the movies and the television and the novels – we've got that down to a fine art. But it doesn't help us because that escape mechanism is only momentary. When we've thought of the future

and the thought is finished, because it's very impermanent, we've got to start all over again. If we cultivate the loving quality in our heart (and we all have that quality and we can all cultivate it), then we can be very happily in the present. And when we are happily in the present, then we can also happily meditate, because we can only meditate in the present. We cannot watch a breath that is gone, nor can we watch a breath that's yet to come. We can only watch the breath that is now. Digital clocks are actually a wonderful mechanism to show us how each moment goes by. One little blip and it's gone. And another blip, and another blip. And yet, it's only now that we can live. The future is a thought process and so is the past, but the experience is now, this moment. It's the only experience we will ever have. If we think of the future, we're thinking of it now. So anything that will help us to create an experiential life is of the greatest value. The best experiential life that we can create for ourselves is the loving quality in the heart.

If we find it easy to love others, we also find it easy to have faith and confidence. And finding it easy to have faith and confidence also makes it easy to meditate. If we find it difficult to be loving, then those things are difficult for us. But on the other hand, if we have a great deal of hate, it's so painful that we know **we've got to do something.** So these are the two sides of the coin. Some people who have more love than others find it easier to fall into the meditative path. But because there is always that which can be loved, and unless one has practiced very long, what one loves, one wants to have – so there is greed attached. And because that promises happiness, people who have a lot of greed often find it difficult to practice. Those people who have a lot of hate in them find it more difficult to fall into the meditation, but because it hurts inside, they are **determined** to do something about it. So each side has its advantage and disadvantage. The one who has a lot of dislike and resentment and disquiet knows that there is something that can be done, and will, in many cases, practice so diligently that it does really change. That diligent practice has to be connected, though, to the inner understanding, that what happens within – all of our resentments, all of our dislikes, all of our negations, all of our resistances – are just mind-made obstacles. They have no reality to them other than what we give them.

If there's any person in your life whom you don't like or whom you have difficulty with, just put that person in front of your mental eye for a moment. Now just imagine for a moment whether the person sitting next to you has any difficulty with that person. [laughter] None whatsoever! Couldn't care less! So it's a mind-made obstacle without any basis in truth. And when we can remember that, we will see that we're only hurting ourselves, we're hurting nobody else. We're making life very difficult for ourselves. The whole world does that. Everybody makes life difficult for him- or herself. There doesn't seem to be any rational answer why we do that. But why do we make life so difficult for ourselves? It seems we constantly want to prove something that's unprovable. Very often we want to prove that we're right. Very often we want to prove that we know better. Sometimes we want to prove that we have real discrimination of who's lovable and who isn't. Why do we want to prove anything? What's there to prove? Don't we just want to be happy? With all that proving, we're never going to be happy, because there's always going to be somebody who's going to disprove it.

So what we can do is remember that the spiritual path means letting go. Letting go of what? Primarily, most importantly, of all views and opinions. The less of those we have within us, the easier it is to practice, the easier it is to meditate, and the easier it is to love. Because if I have views and opinions – and we all have them, of course – about other people, they're most likely going to be on both sides: positive and negative. And then our love cannot be pure.

Love in the heart is the purest quality that we can possibly think of, and it is that which connects us not only to other people, but it connects us to the whole of existence. It connects us to all that is around us: to nature, to the other realms, such as the animals, it connects us to everything in a totality where there is no barrier or bondage. That is the beginning of freedom. Without that, we'll never be free. We have that Statue of Liberty standing in New York, but if we'd really like to be free, the freedom is inside us. We can have it. It's available, but it's work. We've got to work at it, every single day. It's very interesting to work at it while we're in a meditation course, where people like and dislike each other without anybody saying anything. It's a very interesting phenomena; it happens always. Investigate it in yourself. Can I start loving without any kind of viewpoint or opinion, just feeling that warm connection, that embracing, caring feeling, that feeling of likeness, that feeling of being together in the same boat at the same time? We all share that togetherness – we share so much which we never think about – and if we don't love each other, we're rocking the boat, and is it ever being rocked! We share the same air to breathe. We can't live without that. We share the same earth that we walk on and use to grow our food – even though it gets all mixed up in packages, it's still grown somewhere first. We share the same dukkha of wanting to be somebody, and particularly of wanting to be. We share the same dukkha of decay, disease and death. We're sharing everything... except love.

St. Theresa de Avila, who was one of the great mystics of Christianity in the Middle Ages, told her nuns: “Less thinking, more loving.” And it's been repeated by so many spiritual leaders. But nobody listens. Yet it's part of the Path; this is why we do the loving-kindness meditation, which is one of the Buddha's methods for spiritual growth. Methodology helps us, but it doesn't do the whole thing. Love is a feeling within us that we can cultivate and develop to where we see ourselves as just being part of everything else that goes on. If I don't love everything else that goes on, obviously I can't love this part either, so what am I doing? I'm living in hate, or in indifference. If I can't love everything else that's going on around me, people and nature and whatever, I'm also lost in this unloving feeling. That's the way most of the people in the world live: lost in an unloving feeling.

Now we deliberately start every lovingkindness meditation with ourselves. Many people find it difficult to love themselves – sometimes because they know themselves too well. [laughter] Which means that they're judging. We don't have to judge ourselves, we can just love ourselves. Judging ourselves and loving ourselves do not have to be in the same breath. We can first love this manifestation of universal existence which we call “Me.” And then, if we really want to make some changes, we can find out what needs to be changed, but we don't have to mix up those two, we don't have to mix up our bad qualities with our love for ourselves. They don't have anything to do with each other. But because we do mix those two things together in ourselves, we do that with everybody else, too. They're quite nice, but...

they've got all these other qualities which aren't that nice. Or we can see that they're ok, but only if they are just doing something that we're also doing, going along with our ideas. This is totally unnecessary. This is a totally different track – the mind's track, that's where the mind comes into its own. That's when we are discriminating between that which we find useful and helpful, and that which we don't. But the heart has nothing to do with that. The heart just has to love; it doesn't have to discriminate. And when we can see the difference between the usual judgments and just loving – not discriminating – we have taken a very important step.

Another important step is seeing, not only that we share everything, but also that our own difficulties need to be treated with compassion. Not with the idea, “I should have known better, I could do better, or somebody else has done it to me.” Just compassion. Compassion is a very important entry into love. The two are very connected, and they're also interchangeable. The far enemy of compassion, of course, is cruelty, but the near enemy is pity. We're not sorry for ourselves or for others. We need to have empathy, not pity. “Com” is “with,” “passion” = “feeling,” with feeling. Empathy. Being sorry for ourselves or being sorry for others just aggravates the dukkha, making more dukkha out of it. So compassion for ourselves goes hand in hand with love for ourselves. Some people find it difficult to get at their feelings, not because they haven't got them – everybody's got them, but because they've put a wall, a barrier, sometimes an iron safe around them. People do this for many different reasons, but mostly because there has been a situation in life which has not worked out the way it should have done. Every situation in life which doesn't work out the way it should have done is nothing but another learning experience.

That's what this adult education class is all about, nothing else. That's what we're here for. That's how we use this precious human rebirth, with all the dukkha it entails, but also all the sukha. Sukha is obviously the opposite of dukkha, it's the pleasure. This adult education class is where we can learn to deal with both dukkha and sukha on a totally different level, where we don't have a judgmental attitude. We weren't brought here into this life to be engaged as judge and jury. Nobody gave us that job. It's self-appointed. [laughter] And this self-appointment is not even pleasurable – doesn't pay anything in the first place – and it only makes difficulty. But we can drop all this judge and jury business; at least try. In the beginning, one does it a little. It's much easier to love.

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Now we return to looking at more suttas that mention *mettā*.

Ways to Practice Mettā

As we saw when we were looking at the [A Horn Blower – SN 42.8](#), the Buddha says to “abide pervading each of the directions with a mind imbued with *mettā*.” But most people need something a little more specific to work with, at least when they are starting this practice.

The way that *mettā* is usually taught in the West is by using phrases. This method is not found in the suttas; the suttas mostly teach the pervading method. Thankfully we have the [The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8](#) that provides a few more suggestions, but even working with what's there may need something more specific to get started. This is where the phrases taught in the Visuddhimagga come in. Even if this method is not from the suttas, it works for many people.

Using phrases, *mettā* is practiced by silently repeating several phrases directed initially at oneself, and then successively to a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, a difficult person and to all beings. However some people find it difficult to give *mettā* to themselves. In this case, you should start with someone you can easily give *mettā* to (a benefactor, a friend) – and come back to yourself later in the sequence or at the end of it. Practicing *mettā* for yourself is discussed more in the following chapter: [More About Mettā](#).

Back to the phrases, they usually go something like:

- May I/you/all beings be happy.
- May I/you/all beings be healthy.
- May I/you/all beings be safe.
- May I/you/all beings be peaceful.

Four phrases seems to be the sweet spot as far as number of phrases go. And the 4 words that follow the 4 instances of “be” above should be chosen by you such that you feel they are a good set for expressing love/good-will/friendliness. It's very important to keep your phrases simple – no “and” as part of any phrases – just simple 4 words per phrase like “May you be [single-word].” (Okay, 5 words when it's “all beings.”)

Silently say the phrase multiple times for each of the categories mentioned above. If the feeling comes, great! If the feeling doesn't arise, no matter, just keep working with the phrases. The feeling will eventually follow.

As was mentioned in [The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8: My Commentary](#), Ayya Khema had some different phrases – that can work much better for difficult people:

- May you be free from enmity.
- May you be free from hurtfulness.
- May you be free of troubles of mind and body.

- May you be able to protect your happiness.^[12]

It's fine to switch to these phrases for someone who is difficult if your usual phrases don't feel right.

Phrases work well for someone who is auditory. But for someone who is visual, doing *mettā* via visualizations may work best. Ayya Khema has a host of Guided *Mettā* Visualizations. Transcripts of a number of them can be found at <https://leighb.com/metta.htm>, one of which is available in the next chapter: [A Vessel of Peace](#). There are also transcripts in her excellent book [The Path to Peace](#). Recordings of her guided visualizations can be found at <https://leighb.com/ayyakhemadhamaseed.htm#38>. The recording works quite well for starting your meditation period with *mettā* practice.^[13]

I have a 2 minute guided *mettā* at <https://leighb.com/DoYouLikeToBeHappy.mp3> that seems to work well for people who are having trouble doing *mettā* practice.

Finally, if you can just generate a feeling of *mettā*, then you can just pervade yourself, your benefactors, friends and family, neutral people you know, difficult people, and all beings in all directions with your felt sense of *mettā*.



Of course, all of the above are ways to practice *mettā* meditation. What about practicing *mettā* in real life? The whole reason for practicing *mettā* meditation is so you have that skill at hand as you go about your life. This is where some of the alternate translations to “love” may come in handy.

Can you be friendly to everyone you encounter? That can be challenging at times! But in all the non-challenging times, can you be friendly? Or actually, can you be friendly and still feel safe? It's a crazy world out there – and we definitely need our boundaries. If it doesn't feel safe to be friendly, can you interact without animosity, hostility, rancor, hate, or ill-will? Can you be a peacemaker rather than cause division?

The ideal would be that whenever you have an interaction with anyone, after the interaction has concluded, both you and those you interacted with feel good about themselves. But this is the ideal – I know the real world is not like that. But can you interact in ways that don't make you or anyone else feel worse about themselves?

Sharon Salzberg tells a story of being in Calcutta and getting into a rickshaw to go the train station:

The rickshaw man took us by shortcuts, through dark streets and down back alleys. At one point, suddenly out of nowhere, an extremely big man approached the rickshaw driver and stopped him. Then he looked at me, grabbed me, and tried to pull me off the rickshaw. I looked around the streets for help. There were a lot of people everywhere, as there often are in India, but I did not see a single friendly face.

I thought, “Oh my God, this guy is going to drag me off and rape me. Then he is going to kill me and nobody is going to help me!” My friend who was sitting with me in the rickshaw managed to push the drunken man away and urged the rickshaw driver to go on. So we escaped and got to the station.

I was very shaken and upset when we arrived in Bodh Gaya. I told Munindra, one of my meditation teachers, what had happened. He looked at me and said, “Oh Sharon, with all the lovingkindness in your heart, you should have taken your umbrella and hit that man over the head with it!”^[14]

Yes, sometimes we are called upon to administer negative feedback – can you do so with “all the *mettā* in your heart?”

Of course, all of the above is about *mettā* in real life while interacting with others. What about *mettā* for yourself in real life? See the next chapter.

12. Ayya Khema's German version is as follows: [\[Back\]](#)

- Möge ich frei sein von Feindseligkeit,
- möge ich keinem Wesen Leid zufügen,
- möge ich frei sein von Schmerzen in Geist und Körper,
- möge ich fähig sein, mein eigenes Glück zu behüten.

which in English could also be translated as:

- May I be free from hostility,
- may I cause no harm to any being,
- may I be free from pain in mind and body,
- may I be able to protect my own happiness.

13. These *mettā* meditation recordings can also be accessed via the URLs [\[Back\]](#)
<https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/334/talk/7961>

...

<https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/334/talk/7990>

by just changing the last 4 digit number to any value between 7961 and 7990.

There are also two recordings containing multiple guided *mettā* meditations:

<https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/334/talk/8011> and

<https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/334/talk/8012>.

14. From Salzberg (1995), quoted at https://inquiringmind.com/article/1102_20_ingram-reviews-salzberg/ [\[Back\]](#)

A Vessel of Peace

A guided meditation by [Ven. Ayya Khema](#)

Please put your attention on the breath for a few moments.

Imagine yourself to be an empty vessel in body and mind. Fill that empty vessel with peace and let the peacefulness flow through your whole body. Let it enter your mind taking up every nook and cranny, so that you feel yourself to be only peace. Then surround yourself with a golden mantle, which consists of love and feel yourself completely embraced by it, soft and yielding, warm and protective.

Now pour the peace that fills you into the person nearest you, and then take the golden mantle of love and surround that person with it.

Use yourself as a vessel that contains only peace and pour it all into every person here. Make the golden mantle large enough to embrace everyone with warmth and care.

Now pour the peace into your parents and surround them with the golden mantle of love.

Give the gift of peace to those, who are nearest and dearest to you. Embrace them with your love, protective caring, warm and secure.

Let all your good friends share the peace that is within you. Let them have part in it and surround them with the golden mantle of love - shining and clear, supportive and concerned.

Think of all the people who are part of your life. Those whom you see here and there, whether you speak to them or not. Share yourself with them. Pour peace into their hearts and give them your love.

If there is anyone in your life whom you find difficult or towards whom you are quite indifferent, give that person your gift of peacefulness. Embrace him or her with your love. Let there be no difference in your love for different people.

Now start pouring out peace to people near and far. The more you have in your heart, the more you can give. Let it go far and wide, wherever you think it is needed and wanted. Touch people's hearts with the peace you are sharing with them, with the love you are extending to them. Across the whole country and across the oceans, surrounding the whole globe and all its inhabitants, let peace and love flow from your heart.

Put your attention back on yourself. Feel yourself filled with peace and embraced and surrounded by love, fully at ease, completely secure.

May all beings have love and peace in their hearts.

More About Mettā

Mettā means loving someone just because they're someone; no reason needed at all other than they are a being that can be loved. In Pāḷi we find a large number of words that get translated at times as “love”: *mettā*, *piya*, *rata*, *adosa*, *anukampā*, *averena*, multiple words ending in *-muditā*, and even more. Like Greek, Pāḷi is rich in words for expressing shades of meaning for what, in English, we use just the words “love” and “like.”

You probably overuse the word for love. You might say, “I love spinach salad.” No, you don't. You might like it a lot but you don't love it. Sometimes I see a car, and on the back of it, there's a bumper sticker that says, “I ♥ my new Ford.” You don't love your car! You might be attached to your car. You might like it a lot, but it's not love.

What's meant by *mettā* is wishing the very best for someone just because they are a someone. It doesn't have any requirements on it. They don't have to do anything nice for you. They're just a being. Of course, this means that given the fact that you too are a being, you should be sending this unconditional love, this wish for the very best, to yourself as well.

Occasionally there is a misunderstanding of the teachings on *anattā* – that any form of self-referencing must be bad. The Buddha taught on two “levels,” usually called the relative and the absolute. The teachings on not-self are from the absolute viewpoint. The Brahma Viharas teachings, including *mettā*, are from the relative viewpoint – where there are plenty of conventional selves, including our own. Conflating a relative Brahma Vihara teaching with an absolute view can leave one stuck in a negative self-view, which is quite unhelpful. Brahma Vihara practices lay the grounding work necessary for the arising of deeper insights that can arise later from practices done from the absolute perspective.

Practicing metta for yourself is very important. Ayya Khema said that at the start of every meditation period, you should do some *mettā* for yourself, as well as *mettā* for others. Too many people in Western culture find it difficult to love themselves, which is a very sad state of affairs. It's just an old program that developed sometime in childhood as a way of coping with stressful situations. Things weren't going in a way that felt was safe or appropriate or whatever. Rather than acknowledge that the people who were supposed to be taking care of you were acting incompetently, you took it on: “It's my fault.” You were three years old; you didn't know diddly-squat about anything. It felt safer to think you were bad than to acknowledge that you had incompetent caregivers. But now you don't need to be doing some mental contortion that a three-year-old came up with – you're a lot wiser than that.

But letting go of this little program that you're running is difficult. There's an epidemic of low self-esteem in the West. It's far too prevalent! I remember once at a Thursday night meditation group I regularly attended, the leader asked people, “How many of you in the room have low self-esteem?” Over 90% of the people raised their hands. And, “How many of you have high self-esteem?” About three people raised their hands. There were 50, 60 people in the room. Low self-esteem is a virus, not a medical virus, a computer virus. It got in before

you had any anti-virus protection, and now it's very difficult to eradicate. You need to work at it.

You can't go out and buy antivirus protection for your brain that's going to eradicate this. You have to work at it persistently. You have to recognize that you are indeed deserving of love, deserving of happiness, deserving of all the best that the world could possibly give you – not because of what you have or haven't done, no, just because you are a living being.

If you think otherwise, you need to recognize that you are thinking otherwise and say to yourself, “That's Not True.” In English, this works really well. That's Not True is TNT. So you blow up this untrue thought with TNT. If you have a thought that is somehow that you're unworthy, you need to say to yourself, “That's Not True.” Recognize it – this is mindfulness. And then you need to counter it. If you think, “I always mess up,” then you need to think, “That's Not True.” Then you need to find a counterexample to the untrue thought. For example, “Yes, that last project, I actually did a very good job,” or whatever. Find something that's the opposite of the untrue thought. Or even better, find several examples that are the opposite of it. Practice escaping from the virus of low self-esteem by recognizing it, saying it's not true, and coming up with a counterexample to prove to yourself it's not true. *Mettā* for yourself is the inoculation – this is why you practice *mettā* for yourself at the start of every period of meditation. TNT is the medicine when the virus attacks.

Mettā is a very powerful practice; it's quite transformative. You need to practice it for yourself. If the magic fairy ever comes along and says she'll grant me one wish of something (short of liberation) to give my students, my wish won't be for them to be able to reach the jhānas, or experience this or that insight, it will be that they all can easily love themselves. The fact that this is such a widespread difficulty is damning evidence of the failure of Western Civilization at a very basic level.

There's a bit more on my website about The Low Self Esteem Virus at <https://leighb.com/lowselfesteem.htm>.



It's probably fairly easy, at least sometimes, to practice *mettā* for the people you're close to. It can sometimes be easiest to practice it for the people you don't know very well. You don't know any of the things they're doing that you don't approve of; there's just somebody there. So if you have trouble working with wishing the very best for people, try doing it for people you don't know well:

- A neighbor that you see, you don't even really know them. Maybe you know their name, but you don't really know anything about them.
- Some co-worker that you know a bit, but they're not doing things that mess up your job. They're just one of those people.
- Or someone you see in the grocery store, or someone you see in a restaurant you frequent.

When I was a computer programmer, I sometimes worked late. At 7 o'clock the janitors came. I didn't know these people. They just showed up, I'd say hello to them, they'd empty my wastebasket and disappear. But they turned out to be really wonderful people to do *mettā* for. I started practicing *mettā* for them and then when I would see them, I was genuinely happy to see them and our interactions increased. It was very nice. Eventually I got to know them – the *mettā* pulled me out of my computer and back into the real world.

Practicing *mettā* for difficult people is actually quite powerful. It's not that you need to wish that all of their dreams come true – in fact that is probably counter productive. If they're difficult people, they probably have some dreams that it would be best if they didn't come true. Acknowledge that. What you can wish for them is that they actually see the difficulties they're causing and that they learn to act in ways that actually benefit people, as opposed to causing difficulties. It's hard, but it's possible to work on this.

But by all means, work on sending *mettā* to yourself. You deserve as much happiness as is possible to experience.

The Benefits of Mettā – AN 8.1 and AN 11.15

AN 8.1 – *Mettāsutta*

“You can expect eight benefits when the heart’s release by love has been cultivated, developed, and practiced, made a vehicle and a basis, kept up, consolidated, and properly implemented. What eight?

You sleep at ease.

You wake happily.

You don’t have bad dreams.

Humans love you.

Non-humans love you.

Deities protect you.

You can’t be harmed by fire, poison, or blade.

If you don’t reach any higher, you’ll be reborn in a realm of divinity.

A mindful one who develops limitless love weakens the fetters, seeing the ending of attachments.

Loving just one creature with a hateless heart makes you a true person. Sympathetic for all creatures, a noble one creates abundant merit.

The royal potentates conquered this land and traveled around sponsoring sacrifices—horse sacrifice, human sacrifice, the sacrifices of the ‘casting of the yoke-pin’, the ‘royal soma drinking’, and the ‘unimpeded’.

These are not worth a sixteenth part of the mind developed with love, as all the constellations of stars aren’t worth a sixteenth part of the moon’s light.

Don’t kill or cause others to kill, don’t conquer or encourage others to conquer, with love for all sentient beings, you’ll have no enmity for anyone.”

AN 11.15 – *Mettāsutta*

“You can expect eleven benefits when the heart’s release by *mettā* has been cultivated, developed, and practiced, made a vehicle and a basis, kept up, consolidated, and properly implemented:

You sleep at ease.

You wake happily.

You don’t have bad dreams.

Humans love you.

Non-humans love you.

Deities protect you.

You can't be harmed by fire, poison, or blade.

Your mind quickly enters concentration.

Your face is clear and bright.

You don't feel lost when you die.

If you don't penetrate any higher, you'll be reborn in a divine realm.”

The underlined lines above are what was added to AN 8.1 to make AN 11.15.

Mettā in More Suttas Without All Four Brahma Viharas

[All of the following are quotes from the suttas; my comments are in brackets like this.]

DN 8: The Lion’s Roar to the Naked Ascetic Kassapa – *Mahāsīhanādasutta*

“One who develops a heart of *mettā*, free of enmity and ill will, realizes the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life, and lives having realized it with their own insight due to the ending of defilements.”

DN 12: With Lohicca – *Lohiccasutta*

“Is someone who creates difficulties for others acting kindly or unkindly?”

“Unkindly, sir.”

“But does an unkind person have *mettā* in their heart or hostility?”

“Hostility, sir.”

“And when the heart is full of hostility, is there right view or wrong view?”

“Wrong view, worthy Gotama.”

MN 4: Fear and Dread – *Bhayabheravasutta*

“Before my awakening—when I was still unawakened but intent on awakening—I too thought, ‘Remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest are challenging. It’s hard to maintain seclusion and hard to find joy in solitude. The forests seem to rob the mind of a mendicant who isn’t immersed in *samādhi*.’ Then I thought, ‘There are ascetics and brahmins full of ill will, with malicious intentions who frequent remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest. Those ascetics and brahmins summon unskillful fear and dread due to the defilement of being hateful and having bad intention. But I don’t frequent remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest with hate and bad intentions. I have a heart full of *mettā*.’ Seeing this heart full of *mettā* in myself, I felt even more unruffled about staying in the forest.”

MN 9: Right View – *Sammādiṭṭhisutta*

“And what is the skillful? Avoiding killing living creatures, stealing, and sexual misconduct; avoiding speech that’s false, divisive, harsh, or nonsensical; contentment, good will, and right view. This is called the skillful.

And what is the root of the skillful? Contentment, *mettā*, and Understanding. This is called the root of the skillful.”

MN 21: The Simile of the Saw – *Kakacūpamasutta*

“if anyone criticizes..., if someone strikes....

‘My mind will not degenerate. I will blurt out no bad words. I will remain full of sympathy, with a heart of *mettā* and no secret hate.’”

MN 93: With Assalāyana – *Assalāyanasutta*

MN 96: With Esukārī – *Esukārīsutta*

“For all four castes/classes are capable of developing a heart of *mettā*, free of enmity and ill will.”

MN 128: Corruptions – *Upakkilesasutta***Dhp 5**

“Never is hatred laid to rest by hate, it’s laid to rest by love: this is an ancient teaching.”
Averena ca sammanti: – Averena = kindness; friendliness; lit. not hatred [na + √vīr + *a]
 [This famous quote doesn't actually contain the word *mettā*; it literally says, “Hate is laid to rest by non-hatred.”]

SN 10.4: With Mañibhadda – *Mañibhaddasutta*

“It’s always auspicious for the mindful; the mindful prosper in happiness. Each new day is better for the mindful, but they’re not freed from enmity. But someone whose mind delights in harmlessness, all day and all night, with *mettā* for all living creatures—they have no enmity for anyone.”

SN 20.3: Families – *Kulasutta***SN 20.4: Rice Pots** – *Okkhāsutta***SN 20.5: A Spear** – *Sattisutta*

“You should train like this: ‘We will develop the heart’s release by *mettā*. We’ll cultivate it, make it our vehicle and our basis, keep it up, consolidate it, and properly implement it.’ That’s how you should train.”

SN 46.51: Nourishing – *Āhārasutta*

“What starves the arising of ill will, or, when it has arisen, starves its increase and growth? There is the heart’s release by *mettā*. Frequent rational application of mind to that starves the arising of ill will, or, when it has arisen, starves its increase and growth.”

SN 46.62: Love – *Mettāsutta*

“When *mettā* is developed and cultivated it’s very fruitful and beneficial. When *mettā* is developed and cultivated it leads to great benefit. When *mettā* is developed and cultivated it leads to great sanctuary from the yoke. When *mettā* is developed and cultivated it leads to great inspiration. When *mettā* is developed and cultivated it leads to dwelling in great ease.”

SN 47.19: At Sedaka – *Sedakasutta*

“How do you look after others by looking after yourself? By development, cultivation, and practice of meditation. And how do you look after yourself by looking after others? By acceptance, harmlessness, *mettā*, and sympathy.”

[*khantiyā, avihimsāya, mettacittatāya, anudayatāya*]

AN 1.17

“I do not see a single thing that prevents ill will from arising, or, when it has arisen, abandons it like the heart’s release by *mettā*. When you apply the mind rationally on the heart’s release by *mettā*, ill will does not arise, or, if it has already arisen, it’s given up.”

AN 1.53**AN 1.54****AN 1.55**

“If, monastics, a monastic cultivates/develops/focuses a mind of *mettā* even as long as a

finger-snap, they're called a monastic who does not lack absorption, who follows the Teacher's instructions, who responds to advice, and who does not eat the country's alms in vain. How much more so those who make much of it!"

AN 1.261

"The foremost of my laywomen who dwell in *mettā* is *Sāmāvati*."

AN 1.398

"If one develops the heart's release by *mettā*, even as long as a finger-snap they are called one who does not lack *mettā*. ... How much more so those who make much of it!"

AN 1.508

"They develop the faculty of faith together with *mettā*."

AN 3.68: Followers of Other Religions – *Aññatitthiyasutta*

"If they ask, 'What is the cause, what is the reason why hate doesn't arise, or if it's already arisen it's given up?' You should say: 'The heart's release by *mettā*.' When you apply the mind rationally on the heart's release by *mettā*, hate doesn't arise, or if it's already arisen it's given up. This is the cause, this is the reason why hate doesn't arise, or if it's already arisen it's given up.'"

AN 3.69: Unskillful Roots – *Akusalamūlasutta*

"*Mettā* is a root of the skillful. When a loving person chooses to act by way of body, speech, or mind, that too is skillful. When a loving person, not overcome by hate, doesn't cause another to suffer under a false pretext—by execution or imprisonment or confiscation or condemnation or banishment—thinking 'I'm powerful, I want power', that too is skillful. And so these many skillful things are produced in them, born, sourced, originated, and conditioned by *mettā*."

AN 4.67: The Snake King – *Ahirājasutta*

"I love the footless creatures,

Apādahehi me mettāṃ,

the two-footed I love,

mettāṃ dvipādahehi me;

I love the four-footed,

Catuppadehi me mettāṃ,

the many-footed I love.

mettāṃ bahuppadehi me."

[This sutta is about practicing *mettā* to prevent harm by snakes and other creatures.]

AN 5.124: A Carer (2nd) – *Dutiyaupaṭṭhākasutta*

"A carer with five qualities is competent to care for a patient. What five? They're able to prepare medicine. They know what is suitable and unsuitable, so they remove what is unsuitable and supply what is suitable. They care for the sick out of *mettā*, not for the sake of material benefits. They're not disgusted to remove feces, urine, vomit, or spit. They're able to

AN 9.20: About Velāma – *Velāmasutta*

“It would be more fruitful to undertake the training rules—not to kill living creatures, steal, commit sexual misconduct, lie, or consume intoxicants—than to go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha with a confident heart. It would be more fruitful to develop a heart of *mettā*—even just as long as it takes to pull a cow’s udder—than to undertake the training rules. It would be more fruitful to develop the perception of impermanence—even for as long as a finger-snap—than to do all of these things, including developing a heart of *mettā* for as long as it takes to pull a cow’s udder.”

AN 10.30: Kosala (2nd) – *Dutiyakosalasutta*

Then King Pasenadi entered the Buddha’s dwelling. He bowed with his head at the Buddha’s feet, caressing them and covering them with kisses, and pronounced his name: “Sir, I am Pasenadi, king of Kosala! I am Pasenadi, king of Kosala!”

“But great king, for what reason do you act with such utmost deference for this body, conveying your manifest *mettā*?”

“Because of my gratitude and thanks for the Buddha;
 he is ethical, possessing ethical conduct that is mature, noble, and skillful;
 he lives in the wilderness, frequenting remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest;
 he is content with any kind of robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicines and supplies for the sick;
 he is worthy of offerings dedicated to the gods, worthy of hospitality, worthy of a religious, donation, worthy of greeting with joined palms, and is the supreme field of merit for the world;
 he talks about self-effacement that helps open the heart: about fewness of wishes, contentment, seclusion, aloofness, arousing energy, ethics, concentration, wisdom, freedom, and the knowledge and vision of freedom;
 he enters the four absorptions when he wants, without trouble or difficulty;
 he has realized the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life, and lives having realized it with his own insight due to the ending of defilements.”

AN 10.44: At Kusinārā – *Kusinārasutta*

“establish your heart in *mettā* for your spiritual companions first.”
 [if one wants to accuse another]

Dhp 368

“One who dwells in *mettā*,
 devoted to the Buddha’s teaching,
 would realize the peaceful state,
 the blissful stilling of fabrications.”
 [“dwells in *mettā*” is *mettāvihārī*, lit. “*mettā* dwelling”]

Iti 22: The Benefits of Love – *Mettasutta*

“One should practice only good deeds, whose happy outcome stretches ahead. Giving and

moral conduct, developing a mind of *mettā*: having developed these three things yielding happiness, that astute one is reborn in a happy, pleasing world.”

Iti 27: The Meditation on Love – *Mettābhāvanāsutta*

“Of all the grounds for making worldly merit, none are worth a sixteenth part of the heart’s release by *mettā*. Surpassing them, the heart’s release by *mettā* shines and glows and radiates.

A mindful one who develops
limitless *mettā*
weakens the fetters,
seeing the ending of attachments.

Mettā for just one creature with a hateless heart
makes you a good person.
Sympathetic for all creatures,
a noble one creates abundant merit.

The royal potentates conquered this land
and traveled around sponsoring sacrifices—
horse sacrifice, human sacrifice,
the sacrifices of the ‘casting of the yoke-pin’,
the ‘royal soma drinking’, and the ‘unimpeded’.

These are not worth a sixteenth part
of the mind developed with *mettā*,
as starlight cannot rival the moon.

Don’t kill or cause others to kill,
don’t conquer or encourage others to conquer,
with *mettā* for all living creatures—
you’ll have no enmity for anyone.”

Iti 60: Grounds for Making Merit – *Puññakiriyavatthusutta*

“One should practice only good deeds,
whose happy outcome stretches ahead.
Giving and moral conduct,
developing a mind of *mettā*:

having developed these
three things yielding happiness,
that astute one is reborn
in a happy, pleasing world.”

Iti 93: Fire – *Aggisutta*

“But as to those committed day and night
to the teaching of the Buddha:

they extinguish the fire of greed,
always perceiving the not-beautiful;

while those supreme persons
extinguish the fire of hate with *mettā*;
and the fire of delusion with the wisdom
that leads to penetration.”

Snp 2.1: Gems – *Ratanasutta*

“So pay heed, all you [celestial] beings,
have *mettā* for humankind,
who day and night bring offerings;
please protect them diligently.”

Snp 3.5: With Māgha – *Māghasutta*

“One free of greed, rid of anger,
developing a heart of limitless *mettā*,
spreads that limitlessness in every direction,
ever diligent day and night.”

Snp 4.16: With Sāriputta – *Sāriputtasutta*

“In one's search for awakening—as accords with the teaching—
...one should touch creatures firm or frail with *mettā*.”

Thag 3.7: Vāraṇa – *Vāraṇattheragāthā*

“Someone with a mind of *mettā*,
sympathetic for all creatures:
a person like that
brims with much merit.”

Thag 14.1: Revata of the Acacia Wood – *Khadiravaniyarevatattheragāthā*

“I'm friend and comrade to all,
sympathetic for all beings!
I develop a mind of *mettā*,
always delighting in harmlessness.”

Thag 17.1: Phussa – *Phussattheragāthā*

“Be easy to admonish,
courteous in speech,
and respect one another.

Have hearts of *mettā* and *karuṇā*,
and please do keep your precepts.
Be energetic, resolute,
and always staunchly vigorous.”

Karuṇā

Common Translations:
Compassion, Mercy

PED:

karuṇā (fem.) [compare Vedic *karuṇa* neuter (holy) action; Sk. *karuṇā*, from. *kr*. As adj. *karuṇa*]

Compassion, Pity^[15]

DPD:

karuṇā - fem. compassion; sympathy; kindness (towards unfortunate beings); lit. action

Far Enemy:

Cruelty

Near Enemy:

Pity

My Translation:

Compassion. But “Kindness” works well in many circumstances and is also the opposite of the far enemy of cruelty. You can practice Kindness towards anyone, whether or not they are suffering. Kindness is always an option.

The root of *karuṇā* (करुणा) – *ka* क – is the same as the root of *karma* (कर्म), meaning action. Like *karma*, *karuṇā* has an active component underlying its very meaning.^[16] *Karuṇā* is the action that someone who is practicing *mettā* undertakes when they go out with a heart full of love and encounter someone who's suffering. The action hopefully succeeds, but if the person is practicing real compassion, whether it succeeds or not, they do what they can and then they let it go. If there isn't suffering happening, they act with kindness.

For *karuṇā*, the far enemy – the opposite – is cruelty, making even more *dukkha*. This much is pretty obvious no matter how you translate *karuṇā*.

The near enemy of compassion is pity. Pity is wanting to alleviate someone's suffering so that you don't have to feel bad they are suffering. Or wanting to alleviate their suffering so that, if you can fix them, then maybe that won't happen to you. Or wanting to alleviate their suffering, so you won't have to look at that kind of suffering. Or wanting to alleviate their suffering so you can be a hero. This near enemy contains some sort of self-reference in the wanting to alleviate the suffering. Pure compassion is wanting to alleviate the suffering just because there is suffering.

One of the difficult things about practicing compassion is attachment to the results. You want to alleviate this person's suffering, and if you're attached to the results and you can't alleviate

the suffering, then you're going to suffer as well. Compassion is doing whatever you can to alleviate the dukkha and not being attached to the results. You do your best, and if it works, great. If it doesn't work, well, you did your best. You just have to accept the fact that there's some suffering that you cannot alleviate.

If we translate *karuṇā* as “kindness,” then the near enemy of kindness in the face of suffering would, again, be pity – since kindness in the face of suffering IS compassion. The near enemy of kindness in other circumstances would be acting phony, pretending to be kind, maybe even acting kindly, but with an ulterior motive. It's that pesky self jumping in there again and coloring noble deeds with selfishness.

Another important word is *Anukampā* – sometimes translated as “sympathy” or “compassion.” A much better translation, suggested by Gil Fronsdal, is “care.” Again, you can practice *Anukampā* towards anyone, whether or not they are suffering. See <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/2024/09/to-care/> for more on this beautiful word. But *Anukampā* is not one of the Brahma Viharas.

Another less well-known word is *Anuddayā* which is translated as “compassion (for); sympathy (for).”

Karuṇā, *Anukampā*, and *Anuddayā* do occasionally all show up together in the same sutta, as we will see in the next chapter.

Karuṇā occurs in 53+ Suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/karuna.htm>

Anukampā occurs in 179+ Suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/anukampa.htm>

Unfortunately, there is no sutta comparable to the Mettā Sutta that fully explains what *karuṇā* entails. Thus next we are going to look at [Karuṇā in All Suttas Without All Four Brahma Viharas](#). Since “compassion” is pretty much universally the translation of *karuṇā*, I will go ahead and use “compassion” in the translations rather than “*karuṇā*.”

Resources

– Books:

[Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World](#) by Christina Feldman, Rodmell Press (2003), ISBN-10: 1930485115, ISBN-13: 978-1930485112

[The Compassion Book: Teachings for Awakening the Heart](#) by Pema Chodron, Shambhala (2017), ISBN-10: 1611804205, ISBN-13: 978-1611804201

[Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself](#) by Kristin Neff, William Morrow Paperbacks (2015), ISBN-10: 0061733520, ISBN-13: 978-0061733529

– On the Internet:

[The Nature of Compassion](#) by Sharon Salzberg, excerpted from a talk given at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies on July 27, 1994.

[Compassion \(Karuna\)](#), Lion's Roar – many articles on *karuṇā* linked from this page.

[Awakening Self-Compassion](#) by Jack Kornfield, May 9, 2021.

[Research on Buddhist Conceptions of Compassion: An Annotated Bibliography](#), By Jennifer Goetz, June 1, 2004.

Access to Insight Search for "Compassion":

[https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=compassion&sa=Search)

[cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=compassion&sa=Search](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=compassion&sa=Search)

15. Strikeouts in PED definitions are mine – I feel they are more definitions of the near enemy than of the word itself. [[Back](#)]

16. From <https://inthewordsofbuddha.wordpress.com/tag/karuna/> [[Back](#)]

Karuṇā in All Suttas Without All Four Brahma Viharas

DN 14: The Great Discourse on the Lineage – *Mahāpadānasutta*

Buddha Vipassī surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha, out of his compassion for sentient beings.

...

The monks are to teach for the welfare and happiness of the people, out of compassion for the world. [Late]

DN 20: The Great Congregation – *Mahāsamayasutta*

Many devas come to see the Buddha including a host of the Devas of Love and Compassion. [Late]

[All of the following are quotes from the suttas; my comments are in brackets like this.]

MN 26: The Noble Quest – *Pāsarāsisutta* [Early]

MN 85: With Prince Bodhi – *Bodhirājakumārasutta*

SN 6.1: The Appeal of Brahma – *Brahmayācanasutta* [Late]

“I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha, because of my compassion for sentient beings. And I saw sentient beings with little dust in their eyes, and some with much dust in their eyes; with keen faculties and with weak faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach. ... I saw sentient beings with little dust in their eyes, and some with much dust in their eyes.”

MN 86: With Aṅgulimāla – *Aṅgulimālasutta*

“[Aṅgulimāla] venerated the Holy One’s feet, and asked him for the going forth right away.

Then the Buddha, the compassionate great seer,
the teacher of the world with its gods,
said to him, 'Come, monk!'
And with that he became a monk.”

SN 16.3: Like the Moon – *Candūpamāsutta*

“they teach others because of the natural excellence of the teaching, out of compassion, kindness, and care.”

[*kāruṇṇāṃ / anuddayaṃ / anukampaṃ*]

[compassion / kindness / care]

[more in next chapter]

SN 46.63: Compassion – *Karuṇāsutta*

“When compassion is developed and cultivated it’s very fruitful and beneficial.
And how is compassion developed and cultivated so it's very fruitful and beneficial?
Here one cultivates the seven factors of awakening, accompanied by the perception/concept

of compassion, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release.”

AN 5.161: Getting Rid of Resentment (1st) – Paṭhamaāghātapāṭivīnayasutta

“You should develop love for a person you resent.

You should develop compassion for a person you resent.

You should develop equanimity for a person you resent.

You should disregard a person you resent, paying no attention to them.

You should focus on the ownership of karma regarding that individual: ‘This venerable is the owner of their karma and heir to their karma. Karma is their womb, their relative, and their refuge. They shall be the heir of whatever karma they do, whether good or bad.’ That’s how to get rid of resentment for that individual.”

AN 5.162: Getting Rid of Resentment (2nd) – Dutīyāāghātapāṭivīnayasutta

“You should ignore that person’s impure behavior and think of them with nothing but compassion, kindness, and care: ‘Oh, may this person give up bad conduct so they’re not reborn in a bad place.’”

[*kāruṇṇam / anuddayam / anukampam*]

[compassion / kindness / care]

AN 5.166: Cessation – Nirodhasutta

“How can you just watch while someone is being harassed? Don’t you have any compassion for someone who is being harassed?”

AN 6.54: About Dhammika – Dhammikasutta

“These six famous teachers,
harmless ones of the past,
free of putrefaction-stench, compassionate,
gone beyond the fetter of sensuality.”

Snp 5.6: The Questions of Dhotaka – Dhotakamāṇavapucchā

“Teach me out of compassion, ...”

Thag 16.8: Aṅgulimāla – Aṅgulimālattheragāthā

“Then the Buddha, the compassionate great seer,
the teacher of the world with its gods,
said to him, ‘Come, monk!’
And with that he became a monk.”

Thag 17.1: Phussa – Phussattheragāthā

“Have hearts of love and compassion,
and please do keep your precepts.”

Thag 19.1: Tālapuṭa – Tālapuṭattheragāthā

“the great sage of compassion”

Like the Moon – SN 16.3

This sutta describes the attitude to have when teaching the Dhamma to lay people.

SN 16.3: Like the Moon – *Candūpamāsutta*

At Savatthī. “Bhikkhus, you should approach families like the moon – drawing back the body and mind, always acting like newcomers, without impudence towards families. Just as a man looking down an old well, a precipice, or a steep riverbank would draw back the body and mind, so too, bhikkhus, should you approach families.

...

One teaches the Dhamma to others with the thought: ‘The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise. Oh, may they listen to the Dhamma from me! Having listened, may they understand the Dhamma! Having understood, may they practice accordingly!’ Thus one teaches the Dhamma to others because of the intrinsic excellence of the Dhamma; one teaches the Dhamma to others from compassion and sympathy, out of tender concern.^[17] Such a one’s teaching of the Dhamma is pure.”

17. *Kāruṅṅaṃ paṭicca anudayaṃ paṭicca anukampaṃ upādāya*. I generally translate both *karuṅā* (of which *kāruṅṅaṃ* is a cognate) and *anukampā* as “compassion.” This is usually successful as the two seldom occur together, but the present passage is a rare exception; thus I use “tender concern” as a makeshift for *anukampā*. Spk glosses *anudaya* with *rakkhaṇabhāva* (the protective state) and *anukampā* with *muducittatā* (tender-heartedness), and says that both terms are synonymous with *kāruṅṅaṃ*. – Bhikkhu Bodhi [[Back](#)]

I translate this as “one teaches the Dhamma to others out of compassion, kindness, and care.”
– Leigh Brasington

The Banyan Deer: A Jātaka Tale

The Jātaka tales are part of the Pali Canon. They're official; although, they are not suttas. They are 753 stories about, supposedly, the Buddha's previous lives. Our Buddha, in the time of a previous Buddha named Dipaṅkara, made a vow to eventually become a Buddha. In order for that to happen, one has to be reborn again and again and again and again. During those lifetimes, one must purify their karma – principally thru acts of great compassion.

These Jātaka tales are some of the many, many lifetimes that our Buddha supposedly spent before he incarnated in the human realm two and a half thousand years ago. It appears that actually the Jātaka tales were traditional Indian folk tales that were co-opted by the Buddhists as teaching materials, and they are quite an effective teaching method. This is one of the many Jātaka tales from the Pāḷi Canon.^[18]



Once upon a time, the Buddha was born as a banyan deer. A banyan deer is a type of deer that has so many antlers, it looks like a banyan tree that's been turned upside down. When he grew to adulthood, he became the leader of the herd. He led the herd deep into the forest where they lived peacefully for many years.

But things have a way of changing, and in the human realm, a new king came to power. This new king felt it was very important to be prepared for war. He felt that the best way to be prepared for war was to go hunting. He loved nothing more than getting up at first light, mounting up, and riding across the fields and through the forest, shooting game. He would shoot rabbits, and deer, and lions, and tigers, and anything he could find. He felt it kept him fit for war.

The king really liked doing this, but some of his subjects had a problem with his obsession with hunting. The members of his court were used to a more genteel life. They didn't really like getting up at first light and spending the day on horseback. The townfolk weren't too pleased either, because of course in order to hunt properly, you had to have someone go out and beat the bushes to scare up the animals so that they could be shot. Sometimes as a merchant would start to open his shop, the king's men would arrive and tell him, “You're going out and beating the bushes today for the king's hunting party.” This was definitely bad for the business's bottom line.

But the people who really disliked the hunting the most were the farmers. Nothing could ruin a crop worse than having the king and all of his courtiers come trampling across the fields, destroying everything in sight. There was much grumbling – out of earshot of the king, of course.

It was the farmers that came up with the plan, and they told the townspeople, and the townspeople told one of the ministers they felt they could trust. Eventually, one of the

ministers approached the king: “Your Majesty, this hunting is very good for keeping us fit for war, but it seems to be causing problems. The hunt, when it goes across a farmer's land, sometimes tramples his crops. Since we go hunting very frequently, it may cause a famine. And that, Your Majesty, would be very bad for the kingdom. We have a plan, though, so that you can continue hunting, and none of the farmers' fields will get trampled. What we will do, Your Majesty, if we have your permission, is we'll build a giant stockade, a huge fence, out by the great wood, and then we'll trap a bunch of animals and put them in the stockade, and then when you want to hunt, you won't need to go across any farmer's fields or anything. You'll just simply mount up the steps to the top of the stockade and then you can shoot with your bow the animals that are inside. You still get to practice. There's still wild game for your table, but the farmer's fields don't get trampled, and there's no danger of a famine.”

Well, the king at first, of course, was very reluctant to do this. It wasn't like a real hunt. But he did realize that causing a famine might not go over too well in his kingdom. Very reluctantly, he agreed to the plan. So the townspeople and the farmers cleared some land and built a giant stockade. Then they went deep into the great wood and they found two herd of deer and drove them into the stockade. One of the herd of deer was headed by our future Buddha, the Banyan Deer.

When they had the deer safely in the stockade, and could see that the walls were so high the deer were unable to jump out, and everything was good, they sent for the king. He rode out to the stockade and mounted up the steps. When he got to the top, he thought, “Well, this isn't too bad.” With his bow, he could shoot an arrow that just barely would reach the far wall. It would be a challenge.

And there were two magnificent herd of deer. He quickly spotted the leaders of the herds. He said, “The leaders of these two herds are magnificent beasts indeed. They are under my protection. No one should harm them.”

Then he took his bow and his arrows, and he began shooting. It was five minutes of sheer terror. Some of the deer were killed by the arrows; others were injured by the arrows. Still more deer were injured by their fellows' hooves as they tried to escape the arrows. The king, of course, didn't notice anything except how good his shooting was. After the five minutes, he said, “That looks like enough for dinner.” He then rode back to the palace.

Every few days, the king would ride out, and the five minutes of terror would be repeated. The Banyan Deer tried everything he could think of to escape the stockade, but it was built too strong and too high. Finally, he went to the leader of the other herd and said, “Brother, I don't see a way we can get out of here – not at the moment. But we are injuring ourselves when the king comes to collect his dinner. I don't know how to stop that, but I think we can reduce the injuries. What we would do is draw lots. Whoever gets the short straw must go and present themselves to the king for dinner. First we will draw from one herd, then the next day from the other herd. This will not stop the killing, but at least it will minimize the injuries.” The leader of the other herd felt that indeed this was better than the current situation, so he agreed.

The next day when the king came to hunt, there was one deer standing trembling right below his platform, with all the other deer gathered in the distance. The king understood immediately. He said, “These are magnificent animals indeed. It appears they have chosen one of their number by lot. Shoot the deer that waits below, leave the others alone.” He put down his bow and arrows and left. A member of his court dispatched the deer below.

Each day, a deer would be drawn by lot to come and present themselves to the king. But the king ceased coming; he would just send someone from the court. This went on for about two weeks until the short straw was drawn in the other herd by a pregnant doe. She went running to the leader of that herd and said, “It's not fair that two should die. Please, let me give birth to my fawn and wean it, and then I will take my turn.” But the leader of her herd said, “You know the rules. I can't ask anyone else to take your place.”

In desperation, she went running to the Banyan Deer and explained her plight. And the Banyan Deer thought, “Yes, indeed, it's not fair that two should die.” So he said, “Yes, you are correct. You are free to go.” In great joy, she ran back to her herd. But now the Banyan Deer had a problem. Somebody from the court was going to be coming to collect dinner. He couldn't very well ask any member of his herd to go and stand below the platform. After all, it wasn't even their turn.

When the courtiers arrived to collect their dinner, they were quite startled to see the Banyan Deer standing there. They had a problem. The king had said, “Shoot the deer that waits below,” but he had also said that the leaders of the herds were under his protection and were not to be harmed. There was nothing to do but send for the king.

When the king received the message that read, “Your majesty please come to the stockade – an astonishing sight awaits you,” he mounted up and rode like the wind. When he arrived at the stockade he bounded up two steps at a time and was quite astonished to see the Banyan Deer waiting below. “Banyan Deer, what are you doing here, you know you are under my protection!”

The Banyan Deer looked up and said, “Today the lot fell to a pregnant doe. It's not fair that two should die. Therefore, as leader, I have taken her place. I have my duty, you have yours. Shoot!”

Well, the king was totally shocked. Being king meant he got to do all the good stuff. It never occurred to him that he might have to do something difficult, even deadly, for one of his subjects. He looked at the Banyan Deer. The Banyan Deer was correct – it was not fair that two should die. And the Banyan Deer had made a very amazing and wise choice. “Banyan Deer, in deep appreciation of what you have taught me today, you are free to leave.”

The Banyan Deer looked up at him and said, “That won't do any good. You'll just shoot someone else. No, I have my duty. You have yours. Shoot.”

The king was completely startled. As king, at times he sentenced someone to death, and then occasionally he would commute the sentence. Never before had anyone said, “Oh no, I'd

rather die, go ahead and chop my head off.” But here, this is what the Banyan Deer was saying. But again, the Banyan Deer had a point. If he let the Banyan Deer go, he would just shoot somebody else. “Banyan Deer, you are wise indeed. I appreciate your wisdom and all that you have taught me. You and your entire herd are free to go. Are you now satisfied?”

The Banyan Deer looked up, “That won't do any good, you'll just shoot someone from the other herd. In fact the burden will fall twice as hard on them. No, I have my duty. You have yours. Shoot.”

The king was speechless. Finally after thinking about it and realizing that the Banyan Deer was once again indeed correct, he said, “Okay, Banyan Deer, you and your herd and the other herd are all free to go. Now are you happy?”

“If you send us out of here, you'll just go out and shoot other animals. The killing goes on. No, I have my duty. You have yours. Shoot.”

The king had to admit that once again the Banyan Deer had a point. “All right. Okay, look. You can go. Your herd can go. The other herd can go. And we won't shoot any more animals. Now are you happy?”

“Who will speak for the birds of the air? Even now your men are out entrapping them in snares and shooting them with arrows. No, I have my duty. You have yours. Shoot.”

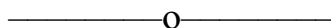
“All right, look, we'll let you all go. We won't shoot any animals. We won't shoot any birds. Now are you happy?”

“Who will speak for the silent ones, the fish in the rivers and the lakes of your kingdom? Right now your men are out with hooks and nets and spears, killing them. No, I have my duty. You have yours. Shoot.”

The king turned to the members of his court. He said, “This is my royal proclamation. From this day forth, no one in my kingdom should harm any wild creature. No animals, no birds, no fish. He turned back to the Banyan Deer. Now are you happy?”

The Banyan Deer looked up at him and said, “Yes!” He had saved them all! He leaped high into the air. The gates of the stockade were thrown open. The two herd of deer escaped deep, deep into the forest.

The king had the stockade torn down. On the spot where the Banyan Deer had leaped high into the air, he had a stone cairn built, and he had a plaque placed on that cairn. On the plaque, there was a deer with many antlers leaping high into the air. Written around the outside were the words, “Never Cease to Care.”



I like this story because it illustrates all four of the Brahma Viharas: *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*

and *upekkhā*. We've discussed *mettā* and *karuṇā*; we will discuss *muditā* and *upekkhā* in upcoming chapters. I like to think of these four Brahma Viharas as a diamond. *Mettā* is at the top; it's an emotion, an attitude. Then with metta in your heart, you go out into the world and meet people who are suffering, having an unpleasant time. *Karuṇā* is an action, so you act to alleviate that suffering, if you are able to. Also you meet people who are not suffering and you act kindly in your interactions with them. You meet people who are rejoicing, who are having a pleasant time. *Muditā* is also an action, so you rejoice along with anyone who's rejoicing (as long as their joy is not gained by unwholesome means). At the bottom of the diamond is *upekkhā*, upon which the other three are balanced. Thus, you respond to both the suffering and rejoicing with an equanimous mind.



The Banyan Deer was willing to lay down his life for another – the pregnant doe. As mentioned earlier, “Greater love has no one than they lay down their life for their friends.” The Banyan Deer took this to an even higher level – a deer from the other herd. This is *mettā*.

The Jātaka Tales are stories that primarily demonstrate *karuṇā* – compassion – so that's why I have slotted this story here. All of the Banyan Deer's actions were motivated by compassion – unlimited compassion for all living beings. When the Banyan Deer is free to go and he declines, that's compassion. That's recognizing that there's still suffering and that there's something more that can be done about it. So he keeps declining until he alleviates all of the suffering.

For the Banyan Deer to manage to stand there telling the king, “I have my duty. You have yours. Shoot.” he had to be totally grounded in an equanimous mind – *upekkhā*. Otherwise he would not have been able to pull off such an audacious act of compassion.

And when the Banyan Deer leapt high into the air, he was definitely rejoicing – *muditā* – joy both for all those he had saved, as well as for his own good fortune.

I first encountered the story of the Banyan Deer in the book **The Hungry Tigress: Buddhist Legends and Jataka Tales** by Rafe Martin. It's a very nice collection, definitely recommended. But the version above is my retelling of the story with my own tweaks.

18. Some of the Jātaka tales were further co-opted by a Greek named Aesop that you might have heard of – Aesop's Fables. A number of these stories come from Jātaka tales. Remember that Alexander the Great went to the east when he was “invading and conquering the world” and eventually got quite close to India. Some of the Greeks that he left behind in what is today Afghanistan converted to Buddhism. Thus there was a lot of trade between Greece and India. And what travels with traders? Stories, of course. They didn't have any books to take along, or TVs or iPhones or anything like we have today, but they had stories. Eventually some of these Jātaka tales made their way to Greece, and Aesop recorded them. Not all of his tales are Jātaka tales, but some of them are. [[Back](#)]

Ways to Practice Karuṇā

The way *karuṇā* meditation is usually taught in the West is also, like *mettā*, by repeating phrases – or perhaps the single phrase, “May I/you/they be free from suffering.” When using phrase(s), *karuṇā* is practiced by silently repeating one or more phrases, directed initially to someone you know who is currently suffering. Then, after some time, you again move on to the same list of categories as with *mettā*: oneself, a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, a difficult person and to all beings.

There are many possible suggestions if you want to use more than one phrase:

May all beings be free from loss,
 may all beings be free from ill-repute,
 may all beings be free from blame,
 may all beings be free from suffering;
 may all beings be free from hatred,
 may all beings be free from oppression,
 may all beings be free from trouble,
 may they take care of themselves and be happy.^[19]

May all beings be free from illness.
 May all beings be free from war.
 May all beings be free from oppression.
 May all beings be free from violence.
 May all beings be free from poverty.
 May all beings be free from depression.
 May all beings be free from hatred.
 May all beings be free from cruelty.^[20]

There is a very nice guided meditation on [Compassion: A Guided Meditation by Ven. Ayya Khema](#), in the next chapter. If you find it helpful, you could guide yourself based on her instructions. Jack Kornfield also has nice instructions for [Meditation on Compassion](#). There are also a huge number of [guided meditations on compassion](#) recorded on the internet.

Again, if you can just generate a feeling of *karuṇā* without any aid, then you can just pervade someone you know who is suffering, yourself, your benefactors, friends and family, neutral people you know, difficult people, and all beings in all directions with your felt sense of *karuṇā*.



Of course all of the above are ways to practice compassion meditation. What about practicing compassion in real life? The whole reason for practicing compassion meditation is so you have this skill at hand. We are bound to run into suffering as we go about our lives – after all

the first Noble Truth is “Dukkha happens!” Some of that dukkha will happen to you, some will happen to others, some will be shared dukkha. Our job is to respond to dukkha as best we can to alleviate that dukkha.

As was mentioned in [The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8: My Commentary](#), we live in a vastly interconnected world. If we truly understand this, on the deepest level, it's not “their suffering;” it's all our suffering. From Shantideva's **Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra** (Guide to Bodhisattva's Way of Life):

If anyone is protected from any suffering,
it is regarded as his own.
The suffering by the foot is not that of the hand,
so why is it protected by the hand? [99]

This verse argues that the idea you should only care about your own suffering is wrong. It uses the analogy of the body to suggest that just as the different parts of your body (hand and foot) are interconnected and act to alleviate pain in any single part (because they belong to the same continuum), so too, all beings should be seen as part of a single, interconnected whole. Therefore, you should naturally work to alleviate the suffering of others as if it were your own.

And similarly from Shantideva,

We love our hands and other limbs,
as members of the body;
then why not love other living beings,
as members of the universe? [114]

So the first thing to do when practicing compassion in real life is to recognize suffering – all suffering. Then do the best you can to alleviate that suffering. Sometimes you succeed – wonderful. Sometimes you can't alleviate that suffering – but you did your best. Sometimes there is just nothing you can do. It's very important to not let “attachment to results” prevent you from acting. At the same time, don't let attachment generate suffering *in you* if you don't succeed. Just do the right thing; don't be attached to results.

Some of the suffering you will encounter will undoubtedly be your own suffering, of course. Do what you can to alleviate it; sometimes that means reaching out for help. We all encounter things that are too big for us to handle on our own. Sometimes the help we need is physical; often it's non-physical – it's emotional, advice, a reality check, etc. As the Buddha says in [DN 31](#), “a true friend is one who stands by you in need.”

Unfortunately some of the suffering we encounter is self-generated. Sometimes our response to some event that didn't turn out how we had hoped is to attack ourselves: “I'm stupid, I don't deserve that good thing, I always screw up, etc., etc., etc.” NO! This is not helpful. This is adding more suffering on top of suffering. One way to respond – in the moment – is the TNT

(That's Not True) practice discussed in [More About Mettā](#). A long term response is to practice “self-compassion,” which is discussed in the next chapter.

May your work at alleviating suffering be fruitful!

19. [Yogāvacara’s manual](#) (p. 73) [\[Back\]](#)

20. More suggestions from [Dhamma Wheel](#) website. [\[Back\]](#)

Self-Compassion

Around 2003 the phrase “self-compassion” entered the lexicon due to the work of American psychologist Dr. Kristin Neff. She defined self-compassion as being composed of three main elements – self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

Self-compassion simply involves doing a U-turn and giving yourself the same compassion you’d naturally show a friend when *you’re* the one struggling or feeling badly about yourself. It means being supportive when you’re facing a life challenge, feel inadequate, or make a mistake. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a “stiff upper lip” mentality or getting carried away by your negative thoughts and emotions, you stop to tell yourself “this is really difficult right now,” how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?

Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with your failings – after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?^[21]

This fits right in with the Buddha's instructions to send compassion “to all as to oneself.” For people who have a habit of being hard on themselves, this work is very helpful. The [Self-Compassion Institute website](#) has much more information, and many people have found Dr. Kristin Neff's book [Self-Compassion](#) helpful.

One additional suggestion for practicing self-compassion is to treat yourself like your GPS behaves. If you miss your turn, your GPS doesn't berate you, call you a fool, or do anything negative; it just recalculates and carries on. This is the attitude we all need to have when we make a mistake! With an attitude like this, it makes it much easier to learn from our mistakes – which is the other important action to take at the time of a mistake.

21. from “What is Self-Compassion?” at <https://self-compassion.org/what-is-self-compassion/> [Back]

Compassion: A Guided Meditation by Ven. Ayya Khema

Will you please put the attention on the breath for just a few moments.

Look into your heart and see whether there is any anger, envy, dislike, rejection, worry, pride, ill will. If you find any of these or anything else that causes unhappiness and restlessness let these feelings and emotions float away like black clouds that are being dispersed by the wind. They are nothing but black clouds in the purity of your heart. Let them float away.

And take another look into your heart and see the wide-open expanse, the space which is now ready to be filled with the warmth of love and the care of compassion. There's nothing to obstruct, all you have to do is fill it with that warmth, that huge open space in your heart. Put compassion in it for yourself, for the difficulties you have had and are having, for the difficulty of being a human being—have empathy with yourself, brace yourself with compassion, fill yourself with the warmth of love.

And put your attention on the person sitting nearest you and realize that this person has exactly as much dukkha as you have yourself. Give that person the gift of compassion, of empathy, of embracing that person with a compassionate heart filling him or her with it and surrounding him or her with the warmth of love.

Now think of your parents, whether they're still alive or not, and whether you know it or not, they have or have had exactly the same dukkha as you yourself have experienced or are experiencing; nobody is immune. So the compassion in your heart reaches out to them, fills them with your empathy, with your understanding, with your acceptance, and surrounds them with love.

And now we'll think of those people who are nearest and dearest to us that we might be living with and we might actually know their dukkha and instead of reacting to it, we feel with them, we feel compassionate care, wanting to help but mainly giving them the gift of loving compassion and we don't expect to get the same in return.

And we think of our friends and acquaintances and relatives, anyone that comes to mind and we might know the dukkha they're having or have had and if we don't we can be sure everybody has it, it may not be great tragedy, it's just the craving that is within all of us. And if we know it in ourselves, we can have that feeling of togetherness, of caring, of embracing, and reach out to these people with a heart full of love and compassion.

And we think of those people who are with us in our everyday life, our neighbors, people at work, people in the offices and the shops which we frequent, anyone that comes to mind that is part of our daily living and even though we may not know their personal lives we can be sure that complete peace, complete happiness is escaping them because we know ourselves, and so we embrace them with the compassion and the love that comes from understanding and feeling that we're in it together.

And we think of a difficult person in our life or more than one if we have them or if they're not personally difficult for us, then those people with whom we disagree about their thoughts and actions, or if we don't find anyone difficult then anyone who finds us difficult. And we realize the dukkha that each person carries within because of our unrelieved craving, because of our way of thinking, and we can see quite clearly that the difficult person has exactly the same dukkha that we have—compassion, empathy, understanding, and acceptance arises and we can embrace that difficult person, put our arms around him or her and let him or her know that we understand and feel with them.

We open our heart as far and wide as we can and the compassion and the love can flow out of it to people near and far, first to all those who are assembled here. Everyone having their own personal dukkha but actually it's universal, and so is compassion, our manifestation of togetherness, our showing of our understanding and acceptance and care and concern. And then we go further afield. Let our heart reach out to all the people that are around here. Everyone we have seen or those that we just know about or assume that they are here. And then we go still further afield to the people in the surrounding houses who are dealing with the same dukkha we are, and all that can help is love and compassion. And then further afield to the cities, to the towns, the villages, people all over the country whether we know them or not, have seen them, have heard of them, we know they're there and we also know that dukkha is part of existence. And having met up with our own and having found compassion in our heart for ourselves, that compassion can reach out far and wide. It's the only good foundation on which we can live together. And we can feel that this expands our horizon, it gives us a chance to lose some of our egocentricity and take as many people into our heart as possible.

We put our attention back on ourselves and we recognize the joy that comes from loving, from giving, from manifesting our togetherness with others, and seeing this joy within us we can resolve to continue to open our heart so that this joy remains with us. We have compassion for ourselves for all our difficulties rather than sadness about them or dislike. And we have love for ourselves rather than guilt or blame and with those too in our heart, so many of the other emotions will find more room there.

May people everywhere make love and compassion grow in their heart.

[Webpage transcript of this guided meditation](#)
Information about [Ven. Ayya Khema](#)

Muditā

“Shared pain is half the pain, and shared joy is twice the joy.” – German proverb

Common Translations:

Sympathetic Joy, Empathetic Joy, Appreciative Joy, Rejoicing

PED:

muditā (fem.) [abstract from mudu, for the usual mudutā, which in Pāli is only used in ordinary sense, whilst muditā is in pregnant sense. Its semantic relation to mudita (past participle of mud) has led to an etym[ology] relation in the same sense in the opinion of Pāli Commentators and the feeling of the Buddhist teachers. That is why Childers also derives it from mud, as does Bdhgh. – BSk. after the Pali: muditā Divy 483]

Soft-heartedness, Kindliness, Sympathy

DPD:

mudita - pp. happy; glad; lit. became soft [$\sqrt{\text{mud}} + \text{ita}$]

muditā - fem. happiness (for); appreciation; sympathetic joy [$\sqrt{\text{mud}} + \text{ita} + \bar{a}$]

Far Enemies:

Envy, Jealousy; Schadenfreude; Discontent

Near Enemy:

Identification

My Translation:

Appreciative Joy

English (and some other languages) don't actually have a single word that means what *muditā* means. We know all about Envy, Jealousy, Schadenfreude, etc. But what's the opposite of these? Merriam-Webster gives “sympathy” and “kindness” as opposites for “envy,”^[22] but these are already in use for *karuṇā* and have very little actually to do with *muditā*. Their choices for the opposite for “jealousy” – “tolerant,” “undemanding,” “permissive,” “trusting,” “understanding,” “trustful”^[23]– are even further from *muditā*. The opposite of “Schadenfreude” is “Freudenfreude,” which Google translates as “Joyful joy” – that's not going to work either. And since “Freudenfreude” is almost totally unknown in the English speaking world, it's not going to work untranslated either. There is a short article about Freudenfreude in the New York Times from Nov 2022:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/25/well/mind/schadenfreude-freudenfreude.html>.

In 1878, Friedrich Nietzsche coined the word “Mitfreude” which is to be used to describe the feeling of joy in the success of others. Coming from the German language, where ‘mit’ translates to ‘with,’ and ‘freude’ to ‘joy,’ mitfreude is a shared joy that encourages empathy, unity, and a more wholesome society. In its simplest form, mitfreude is feeling joy in

another's joy.^[24] This is indeed *muditā* – but “Mitfreude” is an unknown word among English speakers and not really an “official” German word.

Then there's the far enemy of *muditā* as “discontent.” The opposite of “discontent” is obviously “content.” But being content is not going to get us anywhere near the actual meaning of *muditā*.

The closest I've found in English is the not-very-well-known “[compersion](#).” It was apparently coined in 1990–95 by the members of Kerista, a now-defunct polyamorous community in San Francisco; it's of unclear origin. It means “a feeling of happiness caused by another person's happiness, especially by seeing one's romantic or sexual partner interacting positively with another one of their partners.” “Compersion” seems to be rather “loaded,” as well as little known, and thus not a very useful translation of *muditā*.^[25]

Thus we seem to be stuck with neologisms like Sympathetic Joy, Empathetic Joy, and Appreciative Joy. Bhikkhu Sujato translates *muditā* as “Rejoicing.” He's avoided a neologism, it's a good choice, but comes with a need to explain exactly what it means – just like all of the neologisms. Furthermore most of the neologisms, as well as “rejoicing,” “Freudenfreude,” “Mitfreude,” and “compersion” fail to capture the fact that you can practice [Muditā for Yourself? Yes, Definitely!](#) This is why I like “Appreciative Joy” – *muditā*, like all of the Brahma Viharas, is done “to all, as to oneself.” Appreciate your own good fortune as well as other people's.

It's a stark realization that among English speakers, the concept of rejoicing at someone else's good fortune is simply not a commonly considered concept. But there is hope! “Mudita” itself seems to be beginning to catch on in some U.S. sports – defined there as “'Mudita' is simple: it's finding vicarious joy through the success of others. That kind of mentality is the heartbeat of any great team.”^[26]

If a person who's practicing *mettā*, unconditional love, encounters someone who is rejoicing, then they rejoice along with them. They're happy that there's happiness out there. Supposedly the Dalai Lama said, “If you really want to be happy, you can be happy for what happens good to you. But if you really, really want to be happy, there are billions of people out there. A lot of them are happy. Be happy they're happy. You get a lot more happiness. Why be stuck on just your happiness?” [I have not been able to find the source of this quote – but it is spot on, even if it turns out to be just another fake Dalai Lama quote.]

But we often get stuck in the far enemy, which is envy. Someone else is happy, and for some reason we think, “if they're happy, then I can't be happy” – that there's a limited amount of happiness available and they have some and I can't have any. This is foolishness; there's plenty of happiness out there. Or maybe we feel envious when we encounter other people's happiness: “What's wrong with me; why don't I have that kind of happiness?”

I very distinctly remember the first time *muditā* spontaneously arose in me – and I recognized it. I was single and stopped at a red light. A couple crossed on foot in front of my car – and they were very obviously in love (or at least in lust). And I was just spontaneously happy for

them. I didn't think, "Why don't I have a girlfriend?!?" No, I just had pure appreciation, pure *muditā* for that couple's happiness. And I recognized it: "Oh, that's what they mean when they talk about *muditā*." Having recognized it, it became much easier to practice it in all sorts of circumstances.

The near enemy of *muditā* is joy that's tinged with identification. For example: Your child comes home from school and has very good marks, and you're quite happy for your child, right? But suppose the neighbor's child come home from school with even better marks. Are you even happier? Or was there some attachment in there?

The other example of the near enemy occurs with sports. Usually it's a bunch of adults playing a child's game and they win! This is why you're happy! No, you've identified with them – they are from your town, your country, they have a cool looking uniform, or some other such nonsense. You don't know these people! You're not really happy for them – most your happiness is coming from your identification with the team. You picked the winner! Yay!! Really? This is definitely not *muditā*. Sorry, it's the near enemy. But do enjoy your happiness – just don't limit yourself to the near enemy.

During the 2010 Vancouver, Canada, Winter Olympics I was teaching a retreat in Washington State, and there were a number of Canadians on the retreat. The hockey final came and it was the Americans versus the Canadians, but the students didn't know this. However many of the Canadians knew when the final was going to be happening, and during their interviews, they would ask who was going to be in the final.

Now I wasn't identified with any of the hockey teams. I could really enjoy the fact that the Canadians were hosting the Olympics, and it made a much better story for the Canadian team to win than the American team. After all, hockey is THE Canadian sport. Because I was not caught in identification, I could really appreciate what happened – the Canadian team won in very dramatic fashion.

Had I been caught up in identification with the American team, then I would have been feeling bad because "my" team lost. But instead, I could really appreciate what unfolded. This escape from identification is what *muditā* is about – appreciating someone else's happiness, just because there's happiness in the world.

Muditā occurs in 41 Suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/mudita.htm>

Muditā occurs by itself in only 3 Suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/muditaonly.htm>

Unfortunately, there is no sutta comparable to the Mettā Sutta that fully explains what *muditā* entails. So next we are going to look at [Muditā in All Suttas Without All Four Brahma Viharas](#).

Resources

– Books:

[Mudita: The Buddha's Teaching on Unselfish Joy - Four Essays \(Wheel Book 170\)](#) by Nyanaponika Thera, Natasha Jackson, C.F. Knight, and L.R. Oates, Buddhist Publication Society (1983)

[Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to True Happiness](#), by James Baraz and Shoshana Alexander, Parallax Press (November 15, 2012), ISBN-10: 1937006220, ISBN-13: 978-1937006228 [though not specifically on *muditā*, this book will certainly be helpful in awakening *muditā* for yourself]

Also see the Resources under [The Four Brahma Viharas](#); those books will have at least a chapter on *muditā*.

– On the Internet:

[How to Multiply Joy in Your Life](#) by Christiane Wolf, Lion's Roar (30 May 2023)

Access to Insight Search for "mudita": https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=mudita&sa=Search

[Mitfreude](#) by Kaustubh Holla, Nov, 2024

22. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/envy> [Back]

23. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/jealous> [Back]

24. Mitfreude: <https://medium.com/@KaustubhHolla/mitfreude-4f27b53bfe87> [Back]

25. A friend with whom I had been discussing *muditā* later asked ChatGPT about compersion and parenting. Here's what ChatGPT had to say: [Back]

Compersion is joy without identification in creating it. Compersion in parenting is the positive feeling a parent has when their child forms meaningful, joyful connections with other people. It can include several situations:

- A child bonding with another caregiver. A parent may feel satisfaction—not jealousy—when a child delights in time with another parent, stepparent, grandparent, or trusted adult.
- A child thriving socially. Seeing a child build friendships, enjoy teachers, or develop strong relationships outside the home can create a sense of warmth.
- Shared affection. Compersion applies when a parent feels uplifted rather than displaced when their child seeks comfort or companionship from others.

The concept highlights a shift away from territorial or possessive feelings toward a broader view of a child's wellbeing: their emotional world expanding is beneficial, not threatening. In parenting discussions, compersion is used to articulate the healthy, supportive stance of welcoming a child's growing network of relationships.

This is actually a good example of what *muditā* means. But I'm still going to translate it as “appreciative joy.”

26. **Alabama basketball's 'mudita' is shining through a little used transfer guard** – <https://bamahammer.com/alabama-basketball-s-mudita-is-shining-through-a-little-used-transfer-guard-jalil-bethea> [Back]

Muditā in All Suttas Without All Four Brahma Viharas

[The following are quotes from the suttas; my comments are in brackets like this.]

SN 46.64: Rejoicing – *Muditāsutta*

When *muditā* is developed and cultivated it's very fruitful and beneficial.

And how is *muditā* developed and cultivated so it's very fruitful and beneficial?

Here one cultivates the seven factors of awakening, accompanied by the perception/concept of *muditā*, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release.

AN 3.95: Assemblies – *Parisāsutta*

In the same way, when people are in harmony, appreciating each other, without quarreling, blending like milk and water, and regarding each other with kindly eyes, they brim with much merit. At that time the people live in a Brahma Vihara, that is, the heart's release by *muditā*.

When they are joyful (*pamuditassa*), *pīti* arises, from *pīti* – tranquility, from tranquility – *sukha*, from *sukha* – *samādhi*.^[27]

AN 6.113: Discontent – *Aratisutta*

Bhikkhus, there are these three things. What three? (1) discontent, (2) harmfulness, and (3) conduct contrary to the Dhamma. These are three things. Three [other] things are to be developed for abandoning these three things. What three? (4) *Muditā* is to be developed for abandoning discontent. (5) Harmlessness is to be developed for abandoning harmfulness. (6) Conduct in accordance with the Dhamma is to be developed for abandoning conduct contrary to the Dhamma. These three things are to be developed for abandoning the former three things.

[There are Pāli words that include *mudita* (note no long ā; it's different word from *muditā*) as part of them]:

Snp 3.11: About Nālaka – *Nālakasutta*

The seer Asita in his daily meditation saw the bright-clad gods of the host of Thirty and their lord Sakka joyfully celebrating, waving streamers in exuberant exaltation.

Seeing the gods rejoicing (*muditamane*), elated, he paid respects and said this there:

“Why is the community of gods in such excellent spirits?

Why take up streamers and whirl them about?

...”

“The being intent on awakening, a peerless gem,
has been born in the human realm
for the sake of welfare and happiness,
in Lumbinī, a village in the Sakyan land.
That’s why we’re so happy, in such excellent spirits.
...”

[end of sutta quotes]

muditamane - with gladdened mind; having a happy heart; elated
mudita - happy; glad (note no long ā)
mane - having such a mind

More example words:

pamudita - pleased; delighted; happy

pamuditassa - pleased; delighted; happy

muditassa - happy; glad; lit. became soft

sammudita - pleased; delighted; happy (with) [*sam* + √*mud* + *ita*]

ālayasammudita - pleased with attachment; happy with clinging

anupasamasammudita - happy with excitement; not pleased with calm [anupasama + sammudita]

bhavasammudita - pleased with being; enjoying existence; happy to be

dhammasammudita - pleased with mental phenomena; enjoying thinking

kāmasammudita - pleased with sensual pleasure; delighted with sensual desire

mānasammudita - pleased with pride; happy with conceit [*māna* + *sammudita*]

taṇhāsammuditaassa - finding joy in craving

upādānasammudita - happy with grasping; pleased with clinging [*upādāna* + *sammudita*]

rūpasammudita - pleased with forms; enjoying sights; happy with shapes; happy with material form; pleased with materiality

vedanāsammudita - happy with feeling; pleased with felt sensation [*vedanā* + *sammudita*]

saññāsammudita - happy with perception; pleased with felt perception

saṅkhārāsammudita - happy with fabrications; pleased with felt concoctions

Here are two suttas that contain a number of examples of some of the words above:

SN 44.6: With Sāriputta and Koṭṭhita (4th) – *Catutthasāriputtakotṭhikasutta*

AN 4.128: Incredible Things About a Tathāgata (2nd) – *Dutiyatathāgataacchariyasutta*

(To see the examples of these words in Pāli, use the information at

<https://leighb.com/paliinsuttas.htm> to make the Pāli visible.)

So how do the suttas actually define *muditā*? In addition to the 3 suttas above where the word “*muditā*” appears, it also appears 38 times in the 38 suttas containing all four Brahma Viharas, and always the same as the following, whenever any practice details are given:

One abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *muditā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and

everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *muditā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *muditā*. This too is a path to company with Brahma.

(Frequently though, the “mighty trumpeter” simile is omitted).

So on this page we have almost every instance I could find of “*muditā*” in the suttas – the 3 suttas at the top and the oft repeated pervading practice. The few remaining instances of *muditā* are in suttas where the other three Brahma Viharas are also mentioned, but none of those suttas give any help with defining *muditā*. The common translations of “Sympathetic Joy, Empathetic Joy, Appreciative Joy, Rejoicing” don't exactly jump out from the uses we see here. The closest we get is from [AN 3.95](#) above with the stock phrase “when people are in harmony, appreciating each other, without quarreling, blending like milk and water, and regarding each other with kindly eyes, they brim with much merit.”^[28]

To do the research for this book, I used [Sujato's Sutta Database](#) (which I created from the [Sutta Central website](#)) and I did not include the more mythological collections in the Khuddaka Nikāya such as the Vimānavatthu ([Stories About Heavenly Mansions](#)). In that collection there is [Vv 4.6: Monastery Mansion – Vihāravimānavatthu](#). In that sutta (yes, these are considered suttas!) a Devata says to Anuruddha Bhante:

Bhante, in the human world I had a friend who lived in the city of Savatthi. She built a great monastery for the community of monks. I was extremely happy about that. I sincerely rejoiced in her gift and the merit that she gained. The sight of that monastery was pleasing to my eyes.

As a result of truly rejoicing in my friend's meritorious deed, this wonderful divine mansion has appeared for me.

This sounds exactly like *muditā*! But the Pāli words translated as “rejoiced/rejoicing” are *ahamānumodim* and *suddhanumodanāya* - there is no *muditā* to be found. But looking up the [definition of anumodanā in the DPD](#) we find

anumodanā: fem. rejoicing in the merit (of); appreciating; giving thanks; lit. being happy beside [anu + √mud + *anā]

This surely sounds a lot like *muditā*! And both *muditā* and *anumodanā* have √mud which is √mud root. √mud (be soft, be happy)

So perhaps this mythological sutta is the actual source for our current understanding of *muditā*? I don't really know – this is just where my research has led me.

And no matter what the source of our current understanding of *muditā* is, it is a very important mind-state to practice. My best translation of what it entails is “appreciative joy.”

27. This sentence is the Jhāna Summary, which appears in 32 suttas:

<https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/jhanasummary.htm>. Often in the Jhāna Summary, the jhānas arise dependent on the abandoning of the hindrances. But here they arise dependent on *muditā*. For much more on the Jhāna Summary, see **Right Concentration** chapter 16: The Jhāna Summary [\[Back\]](#)

28. The sub-phrase “blending like milk and water” appears in 11 suttas, but this is the only one where “*muditā*” also appears. See <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/LikeMilkAndWater.htm>. [\[Back\]](#)

Muditā for Yourself? Yes, Definitely!

(This and the following chapter were co-written with [Jill Shepherd](#) back in 2009 as a result of conversations we had about *muditā*.)

Of the four Brahma Viharas, the one that gets the most attention these days is *mettā* (unconditional love, loving-kindness). Although the argument could be made, that with the growth of Mahayana Buddhism and its emphasis on compassion, *karuṇā* might be more widely taught today. *Upekkhā* (equanimity) was and still is taught frequently – even outside the context of the Brahma Viharas since it is one of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, one of the jhanic factors, and one of the Sixteen Insight Knowledges. But *muditā* seems rather neglected. However it is a very important – and often misunderstood – practice.

There is no easy way to translate *muditā* into English, perhaps because it's not normally part of our mind-set! It is often translated as “sympathetic joy,” “empathetic joy,” or “altruistic joy.” These translations all agree on the “joy” part and agree in the “otherness” aspect as well. *Muditā* is often explained as “joy at the good fortune of others.” Its far enemy is often said to be “envy,” which again points at the “otherness” aspect. So is *muditā* practice always done for others and not for yourself? This is the way it is traditionally taught today. However *muditā* implies joy shared, but in order to share, you have to be connected to your own joy. A close look at the ancient texts reveals that *muditā* practice was not originally done just for others.

Etymology of *Muditā*

Beginning etymologically, we want to start with the Sanskrit or Pali word “*mudita*” and see where that leads. The Sanskrit root “*mud*” means “to be merry” or to rejoice or to be happy. An old Vedic word “*moda*” means “joy,” and in Pali the word “*mudita*” is the past participle of the verb “*modati*” which means to be happy or to rejoice. However, the word “*muditā*” (spelled with that last “a” long, as a feminine noun) is also derived from a different word – “*mudu*” – that means soft, tender, or mild, from which we get the sense of being soft-hearted. [29] There is certainly no “only otherness” implied etymologically.

Muditā in the Suttas

Brahma Vihara practice in the suttas is taught over and over with a set formula. The practice is the same for all four of these emotions. Here is Bhikkhus Ñanamoli and Bodhi's translation of the Buddha's instruction for the Brahma Viharas (with only *muditā* given in full):

...*mettā*...

...*karuṇā*...

Here one dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *muditā*, likewise the second quarter, likewise the third quarter, likewise the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with *muditā*, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will.

...*upekkhā*...^[30]

It seems very clear that the Buddha felt you could and should do *muditā* for yourself!

There is another precedent in the suttas for appreciating one's good qualities – the teaching of the Six Recollections at [AN 11.13](#). This sutta doesn't contain the word *muditā*, but it certainly makes the point that appreciating one's good qualities is important:

“One thing – when developed & pursued – leads solely to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Nibbāna. Which one thing? Recollection of virtue ... you recollect your own virtues: '[They are] untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, conducive to concentration.' At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting virtue, their mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. Their mind heads straight, based on virtue. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of virtue while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.”^[31]

This appreciation of one's good qualities is specifically a practice for lay people: “...busy at work, ... your home crowded with children...” It's clear that the Buddha wanted both his monastic and lay followers to appreciate their good qualities.

***Muditā* in the Visuddhimagga**

Almost a millennium later, Buddhaghosa writes about *muditā* practice in the Visuddhimagga^[32] in Chapter IX on the Divine Abidings, paragraphs 84-87. He says that one begins *muditā* practice with a dear friend, then moves on to send *muditā* to a neutral person and a hostile (difficult) person. Then he writes “One should break down the barriers by means of mental impartiality towards the four that is, towards these three and oneself.”

Ven. Ñānamoli translates *muditā* as “gladness” in the Visuddhimagga. Under Meanings in paragraph 92 he writes “Those endowed with it [*muditā*] are glad, or itself is glad, or it is the mere act of being glad, thus it is gladness.” Nothing here about it being exclusively for others.

Again in paragraph 100, *muditā* has “joy based on the home life as its near enemy” – this kind of joy certainly would be most likely to be generated in reference to oneself. It has aversion (not envy!) as its far enemy. And paragraph 108 states that *muditā* is the way to purity for one who has much aversion.

Even in the Visuddhimagga there doesn't seem to be the usual emphasis on “joy at the good fortune of others” that is found today. So where did the notion of not practicing *muditā* for yourself come from? A hint is given in paragraph 95 of Chapter IX, where the Visuddhimagga says “*Muditā* is characterized as gladdening (produced by others' success)¹².” Footnote 12 reads “So Pm. 309.” We can assume the parenthetical phrase was inserted by the translator – it's doubtful Buddhaghosa worked with parenthesis since he was writing in a language that was originally oral. The “Pm.” in the footnote refers to the Paramattha-mañjusa, the later Visuddhimagga Commentary, so perhaps this is the origin of the seemingly mistaken notion that you don't practice *muditā* for yourself. Certainly this seems to be the concept of *muditā* by the time the Pm. was composed.

[Ways to Practice Muditā](#) for yourself (and others) are covered in the next chapter.

29. Andrew Olendzki – private communication. [\[Back\]](#)

30. e.g. Samyutta Nikaya, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, page 1344; see also [\[Back\]](#)

e.g. Majjhima Nikaya, translated by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, page 394

31. [AN 11.13](#) translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, but with my tweaks [\[Back\]](#)

32. Visuddhimagga ~ Buddhaghosa, translated by Ven. Ñānamoli as The Path Of Purification, Colombo: R. Semage (1956) [\[Back\]](#)

Ways to Practice *Muditā*

The way *muditā* meditation is usually taught in the West is also, like *mettā* and *karuṇā*, by repeating phrases – or perhaps a single phrase like, “May your good fortune continue; may it increase.” When using phrase(s), *muditā* is practiced by silently repeating one or more phrases, directed initially at someone you know who is having good fortune. Then, after some time, you again move on to the same list of categories as with *mettā* and *karuṇā*: oneself, a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, a difficult person and to all beings. If the being you are practicing *muditā* for does not currently have obvious good fortune, you may want to use something like, “May you experience good fortune,” or “May your life be filled with joy.”

When practicing *muditā* for yourself, you might want to be more specific and inventive with your phrase(s):

- I appreciate having [person] in my life.
- I feel lucky to have met [person].
- I really appreciate [fortunate thing].
- It's so neat I got to experience [fortunate thing].

***Muditā* as Healing Practice**

When the practice of *muditā* for self is offered, people comment on how healing it feels to be “given permission” to focus on what’s good for a change. There are a number of ways that *muditā* produces this healing feeling. Among them are the following:

- *Muditā* is an antidote to self-aversion and sense of lack.

It's easy upon hearing about hindrances, defilements, root poisons, etc. to then unconsciously focus too much on your deficiencies. *Muditā* practice balances this tendency to focus on lack and brings you back to the Middle Way: the capacity to be with the whole of your experience including what’s positive as well as negative.

- *Muditā* is an antidote to Schadenfreude – the tendency to rejoice at others' misfortunes. If you are in contact with your own joys, there is less likely to be a sense of lack and hence no tendency to try to build yourself up by reveling in others' misfortunes.

- *Muditā* is an antidote to seeing joy as a limited commodity.

Practicing it can overcome the view that joy is a “thing” in short supply, that if others get it, I’ll miss out. Often we unconsciously develop a poverty mentality around joy, as if it is a limited resource and there’s not enough of it to go around. We might tend to think of it as being a commodity, like ice-cream, and if the kid standing next to us gets a double helping, then we get scared that we might miss out on our share. Instead, we can start to experience it as an energy that can be generated and increased, so there’s more to go around. Others also

benefit from our own self-joy – it’s much easier to be around someone who’s in a positive frame of mind rather than a negative one.

Joy is a mental activity – joy is neurotransmitters lighting up a neurological pathway in your own system. This is also what happens with the feelings of love and compassion and hate and fear. These feelings may be triggered by what’s out there in your world of experience. But those neurological pathways are always present in your system – the positive ones just need lighting up. The most common way they get lit up is by external sensory input. What can be learned is to light up these neurological pathways without depending on external sensory input. Joy can never be in short supply since it is a neurological pathway in the nervous system. What we want to do in the case of *muditā* is learn to light it up, both in response to our own good fortune and in response to learning of the good fortune of others.

Possible Obstacles to Practicing *Muditā* for Yourself

It may seem strange or even wrong to wish yourself good fortune. Possible obstacles include:

- Fear of happiness/vulnerability

If the word “joy” is a stretch, try thinking of it as “appreciation” instead. Sometimes even that can be hard. Maybe you’ve unconsciously developed a fear of feeling joy. If we feel something good, it can make us vulnerable because we can lose that good feeling. Without even knowing it, maybe we stopped letting ourselves feel any happiness; that way, we won’t be hurt when it inevitably ends. But the “middle way” here is to develop ease with EVERY aspect of our experience, including what’s positive as well as what’s negative. So practicing *muditā* is a way of training ourselves to be with happiness just as much as with suffering.

- Fear of developing conceit

Muditā actually goes in the opposite direction; it lessens the distinction between self and other, removes boundaries – your delight is my delight, *mi casa es su casa* (divine dwelling!).

- Misunderstanding of *anattā* – that any form of self-referencing must be bad
- The Buddha taught on two “levels,” usually called the relative and the absolute. The teachings on not-self are from the absolute viewpoint; the Brahma Viharas teachings, including *muditā*, are from the relative viewpoint – where there are plenty of conventional selves, including our own. Conflating a relative Brahma Vihara teaching with an absolute view can keep us stuck in a negative self-view, which is quite unhelpful.

Practicing *Muditā* for Yourself

So given that the Buddha clearly indicates that you do *muditā* practice for yourself, that even the Visuddhimagga confirms this, and that *muditā* practice has easily recognizable positive benefits, how should you go about practicing *muditā* for yourself? The instructions would be quite similar as for practicing *muditā* for others:

- Sit in a comfortable upright posture.

- You might settle yourself with attention on the breath for a few breaths (or even for a few minutes).
- Then reflect on some good fortune you have had or are currently having. Let the feeling of joy arise. Let your attention settle into the joy, stoking it when necessary by more remembering of your own good fortune.
- If you become distracted, simply bring your attention back to the feeling of joy if it is still present, or again remember some aspect of your own good fortune.
- As always when doing *muditā* practice, beware of becoming exuberant. If this starts to happen, put your attention back on the breath until you generate enough calm to resume the *muditā* practice.
- Also beware of any feelings of superiority – “I have this good fortune; therefore, I'm superior.” Not only is this an invalid conclusion, it is completely losing sight of reality.

If you practice *muditā* using a phrase or phrases, simply substitute “I” & “my” for “you” & “your” and proceed as you do when saying the phrases for others. For example, “May you continue to enjoy your good fortune” becomes, “May I continue to enjoy my good fortune.”

Sample *Muditā* Meditation Phrases

Original

- I appreciate your good qualities
- I rejoice in your good fortune
- May your joy continue; may it grow
- May your good fortune lead to Liberation.

For Yourself

- I appreciate my good qualities
- I rejoice in my good fortune
- May my joy continue; may it grow
- May my good fortune lead to Liberation.

Exercise 1 – Appreciation of self

Please start by thinking about yourself for a few minutes. What do you appreciate about yourself? What are your good qualities? What are your strengths? Every human being is a mixture of positive and negative qualities. Everybody has some aspect of themselves that can be appreciated. So please make a list of a half a dozen of those positive qualities. As you're doing it, see if you can notice how this feels in the mind and body.

Exercise 2 – Appreciation of one's good fortune

Begin by tuning in to what might be going well in your life right now. Can you remember any time over the last week when you may have felt happiness? It doesn't have to be in relation to anything big. Often the simplest things are the easiest to appreciate: putting on a clean pair of socks; seeing the stars on a clear, dark night; watching a chipmunk rushing to store away its food ...

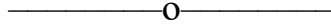
Practicing in these ways often can generate a lot of gratitude as well as joy.

Conclusion

The practice of *muditā* for oneself is actually very important here in the West given the rampant epidemic of low self-esteem. Joy for one's own good fortune will help to counteract

the self-aversion that low self-esteem often generates – remember, “*Muditā* is the way to purity for one who has much aversion.” So self-*muditā* can help deal with self-aversion.

Muditā for yourself is a really important practice. Use your good fortune to generate this very wholesome mind-state. And start thinking of *muditā* as “appreciative joy” – you can appreciate your own good fortune as well as that of others.



Of course much of the above are ways to practice *muditā* meditation. What about practicing *muditā* in real life? The whole reason for practicing *muditā* meditation is so you have this skill at hand. We are bound to run into joyful experiences – our own and those of others – as we go about our lives.

The first thing about appreciative joy is that the only joy that should be appreciated is joy that is the result of wholesome actions. Joy that is obtained by unwholesome actions is tainted by the unwholesomeness – and that unwholesomeness is going to have unpleasant results somewhere along the line. This is the meaning of unwholesome actions – actions have consequences, actions that generate dukkha consequences are unwholesome. These are therefore not something to be celebrated.

When something good occurs for you, just take time to appreciate it. Don't take it for granted, don't feel you didn't deserve it, just appreciate it. And express your appreciation to any external circumstances that enabled it. As an advanced practice, notice how long the joy lasts; recognizing its impermanent nature may enable you to be more fully with the experience and thereby appreciate it even more.

When something good occurs for someone else, notice that you can share their joy. It in no way diminishes their joy, it may even bring them more joy that you are appreciating their happiness. If you really want to have a more joyful life, tap into all the joy you encounter; let it light up your life as well.

More About Joy

In the chapter [Muditā in All Suttas Without All Four Brahmas Viharas](#), we found *Muditā* appearing as part of multiple words meaning “pleased; delighted; happy,” or we could say “joyful.” *Muditā* is not the only word we find the Buddha using that can be translated as “joy.” The following are some other very important words found in the suttas that teach how important a joyful mind is on the spiritual path.

Pāmojja is often translated as “gladness” or “worldly joy.” [DPD](#) translates it as “joy; happiness; gladness; lit. actively happy state.” It is referenced in 63 suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/pamojja.htm>.

In the context of the Jhānas, *pāmojja* is often found preceding the occurrence of *pīti* and appears as a condition for the onset of the first jhāna. In the [Gradual Training](#) (e.g. [DN 2.69-73](#)) *pāmojja* is said to arise with the abandoning of each of the five hindrances: “one becomes glad and experiences joy” – “*tatonidānaṃ labhetha pāmojjaṃ, adhigaccheyya somanassaṃ.*” And a bit later (e.g. [DN 2.76](#)): “When one sees that these five hindrances have been abandoned within oneself, gladness arises” – “*Tassime pañca nīvaraṇe pahīne attani samanupassato pāmojjaṃ jāyati.*” This is the beginning of the Jhāna Summary^[33] found in 32 suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/jhanasummary.htm>. Not all instances of the Jhāna Summary start with *pāmojja*; we found above in [AN 3.95](#) an example of it starting with *pamuditassa*. But the vast majority of the Jhāna Summaries do start with *pāmojja*.

Pāmojja is used in other contexts besides the Jhāna Summary in about 30 additional suttas. A variant of *pāmojja* is *pamudā*, which [DPD](#) translates as “pleasure; gladness; happiness (about); lit. actively happy.”

Pīti is often mistranslated as “joy.” Much more accurate translations found in [DPD](#) “delight; heartfelt joy; pleasure; feeling of love; lit. lovely feeling.” In the context of the first jhāna, my preferred translation is “glee,” though you also find it translated as “rapture,” “euphoria,” “ecstasy,” or “delight” in the context of the jhānas. *Pīti* has both a physical component and a mental component – although in the first jhāna, it is the physical component that predominates. *Pīti* calms down, slipping into the background in the second jhāna, and fading totally away by the third jhāna. *Pīti* occurs in 229 sutta links: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/piti.htm>, with 151 of those links related to first or second jhāna.

Sukha is often translated as “happiness” or “joy” or “bliss.” [DPD](#) translates it as “ease; comfort; happiness; pleasure; contentment.” If *pīti* is “excited joy,” then *sukha* is “comfortable joy” or “contented joy.” *Sukha* is one of the factors of each of the first three jhānas. However, it moves from “background happiness” to “foreground happiness” to “contentment” as one progresses thru the first, second and third jhānas. *Sukha* occurs in 226 sutta links: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/sukha.htm>, with 153 of those links related to first or second or third jhāna.^[34] In other suttas, we find we find the following phrases about the awakened ones, with *sukha* translated as “bliss”:

AN 3.66 “experiencing bliss”

AN 4.62 “the bliss of blamelessness”

AN 4.198 “dwells hungerless, quenched and cooled, experiencing bliss”

AN 5.30 “bliss of peace, bliss of enlightenment”

AN 5.180, AN 6.42, AN 8.85 “the unsurpassed bliss of liberation”

AN 10.26 “bliss, the attainment of the goal, the peace of the heart”

Among other *Pāli* words related to “joy” are the following:

- *ānanda*: masc. happiness; joy
- *anumodanā*: fem. rejoicing in the merit (of); appreciating; giving thanks; lit. being happy beside
- *attamanatā*: fem. pleasure; delight; satisfaction; fulfillment; lit. own mind state
- *nandi* fem. pleasure; enjoyment; relish; delight
- *sampasāda*: masc. pleasure; happiness; joy
- *somanassa* nt. (mental) pleasure; happiness; gladness; joy; positive state of mind; lit. good mind state
- *udagga* adj. joyful; elated; enraptured; exulted; lit. up point

With this many different words expressing “joy” – 11 in this chapter and 4 more in [Muditā in All Suttas Without All Four Brahmas Viharas](#) – and with these words appearing in hundreds of suttas, clearly joy is an essential component of the spiritual path.

33. For much more on the Jhāna Summary, see [Right Concentration](#) chapter 16: The Jhāna Summary. [\[Back\]](#)

34. For much more on on *pīti* and *sukha*, see the chapters on the first, second, and third jhānas in [Right Concentration](#). [\[Back\]](#)

Upekkhā

Common Translations:

Equanimity, Even Mindedness

PED:

upekkhā & *upekhā* (fem.) [from *upa* + *īkṣ*, compare BSk. *upekṣā* Divy 483; Jtm 211. On spelling *upekhā* for *upekkhā* see Müller Pāḷi. Grammar 16]

“looking on”, hedonic neutrality or indifference,^[35] zero point between joy & sorrow; disinterestedness, neutral feeling, equanimity. Sometimes equivalent to *adukkham-asukha* (without *dukkha* – without *sukha*).

DPD:

upekkhā - fem. looking on; mental poise; mental balance; equanimity; equipoise; non-reactivity; composure

[*upa* + √*ikkh* + *ā*] = near, upon + see. So literally “looking on”

Far Enemy:

Upset, Freaked Out, Panicked, Over Exuberant; Repulsion

Near Enemy:

Apathy, Indifference

My Translation:

Equanimity

“Equanimity” is the common translation of *upekkhā*, and it's a very good one. “Our hearts can feel so much: from exquisite sweetness to the most devastating anguish. Equanimity helps us navigate this expanse without losing our bearings. Born of wisdom, equanimity is a resilient, nonreactive inner balance that lives in our bones as a felt understanding.”^[36] Equanimity is what enables you to deal with any circumstance without falling into either panic at one extreme, or over exuberance at the opposite extreme. The literal meaning of *upekkhā* is “looking on” which implies also being fully engaged with what is happening.

IF—

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
 If you can meet with triumph and disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn out tools;
 If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";
 If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch;
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
 If all men count with you, but none too much;
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run—
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

— Rudyard Kipling

No, I don't like the male chauvinist phrasing at the end either. But the rest of the poem does capture what *upekkhā* actually means. The “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”^[37] are bound to come your way – along with their opposites. The Buddha called these the “[eight worldly winds](#)”:

Loss and Gain,
 Pleasure and Pain,
 Praise and Blame,
 Fame and Ill-fame;
 These qualities among humankind are
 impermanent, transient, and perishable.

An intelligent and mindful person
 knows these things,
 sees that they're perishable.
 Desirable things don't disturb their mind,
 nor are they repelled by the undesirable.

Both favoring and opposing are cleared and disappeared, they are no more. Knowing the stainless, sorrowless state, having gone beyond becoming, one understands rightly.

— **AN 8.6: Worldly Conditions (2nd)** – *Dutiyalokadhammasutta*

Although the word *upekkhā* does not appear in this sutta, when “desirable things don’t disturb their mind, and they are not repelled by the undesirable,” one has arrived at *upekkhā*. In the much later teaching known as the **Progress of Insight** in the Visuddhimagga, the Knowledge of Equanimity about Formations is a state of unshakeable *upekkhā*. One in this state can see something attractive, know it is attractive, and not be attracted; one can see something disgusting, know it is disgusting, and not be disgusted. This is the highest form of equanimity short of full awakening, which includes an unshakeable equanimity – no craving, no clinging, no getting upset (see **SN 36.31** in the next chapter).

Additionally "in the commentaries of the Atthasālinī and the Visuddhimagga, Bhikkhu Buddhaghosa defines equanimity in ten different ways. These ten kinds of equanimity are: a) six-factored equanimity, b) equanimity as a brahma-vihāra, c) equanimity as an enlightenment factor, d) equanimity of energy, e) equanimity about formations, f) equanimity as a feeling, g) equanimity about insight, h) equanimity as specific neutrality, i) equanimity of jhāna, j) equanimity of purification."^[38]

Upekkhā occurs in 228+ Suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/upekkha.htm>, but this includes any reference to *upekkhā*, whether as a Brahma Vihara, Jhāna factor, one of the 7 Factors of Awakening, or some other reference.

Since “equanimity” is pretty much universally the translation of *upekkhā*, I will go ahead and use “equanimity” in the translations in the next chapter, rather than “*upekkhā*.”

Resources

– Books:

(I could not find any books I know to recommend, but there are a large number of books on this topic. Also see the Resources under **The Four Brahma Viharas**; those books will have at least a chapter on *upekkhā*.)

– On the Internet:

Equanimity, from a talk by Gil Fronsdal, 29 May, 2004

How to Foster Equanimity: Sit Like a Mountain, by Sharon Salzberg, Lion’s Roar (28 August 2015)

[Finding Your Roots in the Storm](#), Oren Jay Sofer, 19 Sept, 2025

[Cultivating Equanimity](#) by Narayan Liebenson, BCBS Insight Journal, Spring 1999

[How Equanimity Powers Love](#), By Kaira Jewel Lingo, Lion's Roar

Access to Insight Search for "upekkha": https://www.accesstoinsight.org/search_results.html?cx=006639875531220445029%3A2z3mhfokk-u&ie=UTF-8&q=upekkha&sa=Search

35. Strikeouts in PED definitions are mine – I feel they are more definitions of the near enemy than of the word itself. [\[Back\]](#)

36. Sofer (2023), pg 136 [\[Back\]](#)

37. [Hamlet, Act III, Scene I](#) [To be, or not to be] [\[Back\]](#)

38. Anne Murphy, ColomboArts Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Volume II, Issue 2, <https://colomboarts.cmb.ac.lk/?p=278> [\[Back\]](#)

Upekkhā in Some Suttas Without All Four Brahma Viharas

***Upekkhā* appears often in the description of the 3rd and 4th Jhānas (118+ Suttas):**

“Further, with the fading away of rapture, one dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiences happiness with the body. Thus one enters and dwells in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare: ‘One dwells happily with equanimity and mindfulness.’

Further, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and grief, one enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is neither pleasant nor painful and contains mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.”

***Upekkhā* is often listed as one of the 7 Factors of Awakening (126+ Suttas).** Sometimes more information is given:

DN 22, MN 10: The 4 Establishments of Mindfulness – *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*:

“When one has the awakening factor of equanimity in them, they understand: ‘I have the awakening factor of equanimity in me.’ When they don’t have the awakening factor of equanimity in them, they understand: ‘I don’t have the awakening factor of equanimity in me.’ They understand how the awakening factor of equanimity that has not arisen comes to arise; and how the awakening factor of equanimity that has arisen becomes fulfilled by development.”

***Upekkhā* is discussed in some suttas as other than 3rd/4th Jhāna or one of the 7 Factors of Awakening:**

Upekkhā shows up in multiple lists beside the 7 Factors of Awakening:

DN 33: Chanting together – *Saṅgītisutta* [Late]

SN 48.31: The Pleasure Faculty – *Uppatipāṭikasutta*

SN 48.40: Irregular Order – *Paṭhamakusalasutta*

“Five faculties: pleasure, pain, happiness, sadness, and equanimity.”

SN 36.22: The Explanation of the Hundred and Eight – *Aṭṭhasatasutta*

“What are the five feelings? The faculties of pleasure, pain, happiness, sadness, and equanimity.”

MN 115: Many Elements – *Bahudhātukasutta*

“There are these six elements: the elements of pleasure, pain, happiness, sadness, equanimity,

and ignorance.”

[All of the following are quotes from the suttas; my comments are in brackets like this.]

DN 21: Sakka’s Questions – *Sakkapañhasutta*

For what reason do I declare there are two kinds of equanimity? Well, should you know of an equanimity: ‘When I cultivate this kind of equanimity, unskillful qualities grow, and skillful qualities decline.’ You should not cultivate that kind of equanimity. Whereas, should you know of an equanimity: ‘When I cultivate this kind of equanimity, unskillful qualities decline, and skillful qualities grow.’ You should cultivate that kind of equanimity. And that which is free of *vitakka* and *vicāra* is better than that which still involves *vitakka* and *vicāra*. That’s why I said there are two kinds of equanimity.

[“*vitakka* and *vicāra*” are best translated as “thinking and examining.”]

[the “wrong” kind of equanimity sounds like the near enemy of equanimity.]

MN 28: The Longer Simile of the Elephant’s Footprint – *Mahāhatthipadopamasutta*

[Late]

‘[Now if dukkha arises] my energy shall be roused up and unflagging, my mindfulness established and lucid, my body tranquil and undisturbed, and my mind immersed in samādhi and unified. For this is how the instructions of the Buddhas are followed.’ If, while recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on the skillful becomes stabilized in them, they’re happy with that. At this point, much has been done by that person.

MN 54: With Potaliya the Householder – *Potaliyasutta*

‘The Buddha said that sensual pleasures give little gratification and much suffering and distress, and they are all the more full of drawbacks.’ Having truly seen this with right understanding, one shuns equanimity based on diversity and develops only the equanimity based on unity, where all kinds of grasping to the worldly pleasures of the flesh cease without anything left over.

MN 101: At Devadaha – *Devadahasutta*

And how is exertion and striving fruitful? It’s when one doesn’t bring suffering upon themselves; and one doesn’t forsake legitimate pleasure, but they’re not besotted with that pleasure. They understand: ‘When I actively strive, I become dispassionate towards this source of suffering. But when I develop equanimity, I become dispassionate towards this other source of suffering.’ So they either actively strive or develop equanimity as appropriate. Through active striving they become dispassionate towards that specific source of suffering,

and so that suffering is worn away. Through developing equanimity they become dispassionate towards that other source of suffering, and so that suffering is worn away.

MN 103: Is This What You Think Of Me? – *Kintisutta* [Late]

Suppose you think this: ‘I will be troubled and the other individual will be hurt, for they’re irritable and acrimonious. And they hold fast to their views, refusing to let go. I cannot draw them away from the unskillful and establish them in the skillful.’ Don’t underestimate the value of equanimity regarding such an individual.

MN 106: Conducive to the Imperturbable – *Āneñjasappāyasutta*

One who practices like this: ‘It might not be, and it might not be mine. It will not be, and it will not be mine. I am giving up what exists, what has come to be.’ In this way one gains equanimity. one doesn’t approve, welcome, or keep clinging to that equanimity. So their consciousness doesn’t have that as support and fuel for grasping. One free of grasping becomes awakened.

MN 118: Mindfulness of Breathing – *Ānāpānassatisutta*

SN 54.10: With Kimbila – *Kimilasutta*

SN 54.13: With Ānanda (1st) – *Paṭhamaānandasutta*

Whenever one practices breathing while observing impermanence, or observing fading away, or observing cessation, or observing letting go—at that time one meditates observing phenomena—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of covetousness and displeasure for the world. Having seen with wisdom the giving up of covetousness and displeasure, one watches over closely with equanimity.

[observing impermanence, observing fading away, observing cessation, and observing letting go are steps 13, 14, 15 and 16 of the 16 Steps of Mindfulness of Breathing]

MN 137: The Analysis of the Six Sense Fields – *Salāyatanavibhaṅgasutta*

[This sutta discusses the relation of the six sense fields to emotional and cognitive processes.]

[see next chapter]

MN 138: A Summary Recital and its Analysis – *Uddesavibhaṅgasutta*

When consciousness follows after that equanimity [of the 3rd or 4th Jhāna]—tied, attached, and fettered to gratification in that bliss with equanimity—the mind is said to be stuck internally.

When consciousness does not follow after that equanimity [of the 3rd or 4th Jhāna]—not tied, attached, and fettered to gratification in that bliss with equanimity—the mind is said to be not stuck internally.

MN 152: The Development of the Faculties – *Indriyabhāvanāsutta* [Early - possibly]

“And how, Ānanda, is there the supreme development of the faculties in the training of the Noble One? When one sees a sight with their eyes [sound with their ears... odor with their nose... flavor with their tongue... touch with their body... mind-object with their mind], in them arises what is agreeable, what is disagreeable, and what is both agreeable and disagreeable. One understands: ‘What is agreeable, what is disagreeable, and what is both agreeable and disagreeable have arisen in me. That’s conditioned, crude, and dependently originated. But this is peaceful and sublime, namely equanimity.’ Then the agreeable, the disagreeable, and the both agreeable and disagreeable that arose in them cease, and equanimity becomes stabilized. It’s like how a person with clear eyes might open their eyes then shut them; or might shut their eyes then open them. Such is the speed, the swiftness, the ease with which anything agreeable, disagreeable, and both agreeable and disagreeable that arose in them cease, and equanimity becomes stabilized. In the training of the Noble One this is called the supreme development of the faculties regarding [objects] known by the eye/ear/nose/tongue/body/mind.”

SN 35.94: Untamed, Unguarded – *Adantaaguttasutta*

Don’t be intoxicated by a pleasant touch,
and don’t tremble at a painful touch.
Look with equanimity at the duality
of pleasant and painful contacts,
without favoring or opposing anything.

SN 36.31: Not of the Flesh – *Nirāmisasutta*

And what is equanimity even more spiritual than that not of the flesh [equanimity of 4th Jhāna]? When one who has ended the defilements reviews their mind free from greed, hate, and delusion, equanimity arises. This is called equanimity even more spiritual than that not of the flesh.

SN 56.34: Clothes – *Celasutta*

“Bhikkhus, if one’s clothes or head were ablaze, what should be done about it?”

“Venerable sir, if one’s clothes or head were ablaze, to extinguish one’s blazing clothes or head one should arouse extraordinary desire, make an extraordinary effort, stir up zeal and

enthusiasm, be unremitting, and exercise mindfulness and clear comprehension.”

“Bhikkhus, one might look on equanimously at one’s blazing clothes or head, paying no attention to them, but so long as one has not made the breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths as they really are, in order to make the breakthrough one should arouse extraordinary desire, make an extraordinary effort, stir up zeal and enthusiasm, be unremitting, and exercise mindfulness and clear comprehension. What four? The noble truth of dukkha ... its origin ... its cessation ... the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.

“Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is dukkha.’ ... its origin ... its cessation ... An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.’”

AN 2.72, AN 2.75

“There are these two kinds of happiness. What two? Happiness with pleasure and happiness with equanimity. These are the two kinds of happiness. The better of these two kinds of happiness is happiness with equanimity.”

[these suttas, along with the description of the third jhāna ('One dwells happily with equanimity and mindfulness.') indicate that *upekkhā* is not always emotionally neutral – there definitely can be happy equanimity]

AN 3.27: You Should be Disgusted – *Jigucchitabbasutta*

Who is the individual you should regard with equanimity, and not associate with, accompany, or attend? It’s an individual who is irritable and bad-tempered. Even when lightly criticized they lose their temper, becoming annoyed, hostile, and hard-hearted, and they display annoyance, hate, and bitterness. ... You should regard such an individual with equanimity, and you shouldn’t associate with, accompany, or attend them. Why is that? Thinking, ‘They might abuse or insult me, or do me harm.’ That’s why you should regard such an individual with equanimity, and you shouldn’t associate with, accompany, or attend them.

AN 3.102: Basis – *Nimittasutta*

One committed to the higher mind should focus on three bases from time to time: the basis of concentration (*samādhi*), the basis of exertion (*paggaha*), and the basis of equanimity (*upekkhā*).

If one dedicated to the higher mind focuses solely on the basis of *samādhi*, it’s likely their mind will incline to laziness. If one focuses solely on the basis of exertion, it’s likely their mind will incline to restlessness. If one focuses solely on the basis of equanimity, it’s likely their mind won’t properly become immersed in *samādhi* for the ending of defilements.

But when one dedicated to the higher mind focuses from time to time on the basis of *samādhi*, the basis of exertion, and the basis of equanimity, their mind becomes pliable, workable, and radiant, not brittle, and has become rightly immersed in *samādhi* for the ending of defilements.

AN 6.85: Peace – *Sītibhāvasutta*

One with six qualities can realize supreme peace. What six? It's when one keeps their mind in check when they should. They exert their mind when they should. They encourage the mind when they should. They watch over the mind with equanimity when they should. They have excellent convictions. They delight in nibbana. One with these six qualities can realize supreme peace.

Snp 1.3: The Rhinoceros Horn – *Khaggavisāṇasutta* {Early}

When you've put pleasure and pain behind you,
and former happiness and sadness,
and gained equanimity serene and pure,
live alone like a horned rhino.

[some scholars think this could be a very early reference to the 4th jhāna since the first 3 lines above closely match the standard description of the 4th jhāna]

Snp 4.16: With Sāriputta – *Sāriputtasutta*

Eyes downcast, not footloose,
devoted to absorption (*jhāna*), one would be very wakeful.
Grounded in equanimity, serene,
one should cut off worrisome habits of thought.

The Analysis of the Six Sense Fields – MN 137

[This sutta discusses the relation of the six sense fields to emotional and cognitive processes.]

MN 137: The Analysis of the Six Sense Fields – *Salāyatanavibhaṅgasutta*

“Seeing a sight with the eye, one is preoccupied with a sight that’s a basis for happiness or sadness or equanimity. Hearing a sound with the ear ... Smelling an odor with the nose ... Tasting a flavor with the tongue ... Feeling a touch with the body ... Becoming conscious of a mind-object with the mind

...

And in this context what are the six kinds of worldly equanimity? When seeing a sight with the eye, equanimity arises for the unlearned ordinary person—a foolish ordinary person who has not overcome their limitations and the results of karma and is blind to the drawbacks. Such equanimity does not transcend the sight. That’s why it’s called worldly equanimity. When hearing a sound with the ear ... When smelling an odor with the nose ... When tasting a flavor with the tongue ... When feeling a touch with the body ... When knowing a mind-object with the mind, equanimity arises for the unlearned ordinary person—a foolish ordinary person who has not overcome their limitations and the results of karma and is blind to the drawbacks. Such equanimity does not transcend the mind-object. That’s why it’s called worldly equanimity. These are the six kinds of worldly equanimity.

And in this context what are the six kinds of renunciate equanimity? When you’ve understood the impermanence of sights—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—equanimity arises as you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those sights are impermanent, dukkha, and perishable. Such equanimity transcends the sight. That’s why it’s called renunciate equanimity. When you’ve understood the impermanence of sounds ... smells ... tastes ... touches ... mind-objects—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—equanimity arises as you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those mind-objects are impermanent, dukkha, and perishable. Such equanimity transcends the mind-object. That’s why it’s called renunciate equanimity. These are the six kinds of renunciate equanimity.

...

Therein, by relying on the six kinds of renunciate equanimity, give up the six kinds of worldly equanimity. Therein, by relying on the six kinds of renunciate equanimity, give up the six kinds of renunciate happiness.

There is equanimity that is diversified, based on diversity, and equanimity that is unified, based on unity.

And what is equanimity based on diversity? There is equanimity towards sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. This is equanimity based on diversity.

And what is equanimity based on unity? There is equanimity based on the dimensions of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. This is equanimity based on unity.

Therein, relying on equanimity based on unity, give up equanimity based on diversity. That's how it is given up.

Relying on *atammayatā*, give up equanimity based on unity. That's how it is given up. 'Therein, relying on this, give up that.'

A literal analysis of the word *atammayatā* gives us: *a* (not), *tam* (that), *maya* (to make, create, fabricate, or produce), and *tā* (the state of being or suffix “-ness”). Thus, *atammayatā* is “the state of not being made up by, or made up from, that (thing or condition).” The most common translations seem to be “non-identification” or “determined.” But from the contexts above and the literal meaning, these are rather poor choices. *Atammayatā* is the quality of experience prior to, or without, subject/object duality. Since *atammayatā* is the state of not being made up by/from that (thing or condition), it can be simply translated as “non-concocting/non-fashioning any state.” It's the state of experiencing the world raw – prior to conceptualizing sensory input – as discussed in the chapters **Snp 5.1 - Ajita** and **Experiencing the World Raw** in my book **On The Way To The Far Shore**.

The process of passing beyond equanimity based on diversity – infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception – and arriving at a non-dual state (*atammayatā*) is very similar to what is found in **MN 121**: The Shorter Discourse on Emptiness – *Cūlasuññātasutta*, where the Buddha teaches passing beyond these 4 Immaterial State to the signless concentration of mind (*animitta cetosamādhī*).

Ways to Practice Upekkhā

Upekkhā meditation is about you wishing yourself and others to meet their lives with an equanimous mind. The way *upekkhā* meditation is usually taught in the West is also, like *mettā*, *karuṇā*, and *muditā*, by repeating phrases – or perhaps a single phrase like, “May you see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity.” When using phrase(s), *upekkhā* is practiced by silently repeating one or more phrases directed to the same list of categories as previously: oneself, a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, a difficult person and to all beings.

There is a long list of possible equanimity phrases at <https://leighb.com/bv/eqphrases.htm>. Other suggested phrases I found are:

- This is how it is for me right now.
- May I be at peace with things just as they are.
- Everyone has their own path.
- I care about you and know you must make your own choices.^[39]
- You are the owner/heir to your own karma.
- Your outcome depends on your actions and not my wishes.
- No matter how I might wish things to be otherwise, things are as they are.
- Although I wish only the best for you, I also know that your happiness and unhappiness depends upon your actions, not my wishes for you.
- Whether I understand it or not, things are unfolding according to a lawful nature.^[40]
- All things are impermanent;
- They arise and pass away due to causes and conditions;
- They are not me or mine.
- Things are as they are.
- May I hold the vicissitudes of life with equanimity, peace, and balance.
- May I be balanced and peaceful.
- May I be equanimous.^[41]

Choose from these, or make up your own phrases that truly resonate with you. Just be sure to keep your phrases simple and not have more than 4 of them.

Again, if you can just generate a feeling of *upekkhā* without any aid, then you can just pervade yourself, your benefactors, friends and family, neutral people you know, difficult people, and all beings in all directions with your felt sense of *upekkhā*. However I personally found this to be the most challenging of all the Brahma Viharas when I attempted to get the feeling going so that I could feel I was doing the pervading with real “juice.” At one point, I worked with first pervading a feeling of peace to whomever was my object, then I found it easier to immediately follow that up by pervading a heartfelt sense of equanimity.

Of course all of the above are ways to practice equanimity meditation. What about practicing equanimity in real life? The whole reason for practicing equanimity meditation is so you have this skill at hand. We are all going to encounter the [8 Worldly Winds](#) – how can we navigate these without being blown off course?

One suggestion is to do something you enjoy and stay equanimous while doing it. In order to pull this off, you are first going to have to be mindful while doing the enjoyable thing. The first time I can remember working on this was in early 1989. I had just returned to San Francisco after a year long mostly overseas trip, capped off by seven weeks at a retreat center. The San Francisco 49ers were in the Super Bowl – and they won! I went with my friends to Market Street to be part of the celebration, high-fiving strangers and enjoying the atmosphere. Now, when I had done the same thing in 1982 and 1985, there was no mindfulness, let alone equanimity. But with the momentum of those seven weeks at [Dhamma Dena Retreat Center](#), I was able to stay mindful – and surprisingly also be equanimous. I enjoyed the experience; I didn't get lost in it.

As for learning equanimity in daily life, I would not suggest starting with a wild celebration. Go to the beach and watch the sunset. Don't take a camera and try to capture it! Just be fully with the impermanent spectacle. Engage with anything else you know of that is pleasant and impermanent. Be fully present, fully enjoying that pleasantness, and not the least disturbed by its known impermanence.

Given the First Noble Truth, you are also going to encounter situations that are not pleasant. Can you be fully present while dealing with the unpleasant situation? Can you avoid getting swept away by impatience or frustration? My teacher Ayya Khema often said, “Dukkha is our best teacher.” I didn't get it when I first heard it. But we do learn much more in challenging situations than we do when everything is sailing along smoothly. Equanimity certainly helps with that learning.

Ayya Khema also said that equanimity is the highest of all emotions. It's something worth practicing – it makes everything easier to enjoy and/or deal with.

39. Sofer (2023) pg 144 [\[Back\]](#)

40. from <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/equanimity-quotes/> [\[Back\]](#)

41. suggested by Cecilia Richards, personal communication [\[Back\]](#)

Suttas with All Four Brahma Viharas

Now that we hopefully have a good understanding of what is meant by the words *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*, we can look at all the remaining suttas that mention all four of the Brahma Viharas. We will examine some of these suttas in detail, and others in a way that just highlights the teaching in them on the four Brahma Viharas.

Most of these suttas teach the practice we found in [A Horn Blower – SN 42.8](#) of pervading all the directions with each of the four Brahma Viharas. However, discovering the contexts in which this practice is given is helpful. A few of these 38 suttas teach all four Brahma Viharas in a shorter, but usually interesting way.

There are 38 Suttas (or groups of Suttas) that contain all four Brahma Viharas:
<https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/bv-all.htm>.

There is also a version of this index that contains summaries of all 38 Suttas (or groups):
<https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/bv-all2.htm>

The Longer Advice to Rāhula – MN 62

Since we have been discussing the far enemy for each of the Brahma Viharas, we can start our exploration of the remaining suttas that contain all four Brahma Viharas with the sutta from which the far enemies are originally derived.

MN 62: The Longer Advice to Rāhula – *Mahārāhulovādasutta*

The Buddha advises Rahula to meditate like the 5 elements, on the 4 Brahma Viharas, on the not-beautiful and on impermanence; then practice the 16 steps of mindfulness of breathing. Meditating on each Brahma Vihara overcomes its 'far enemy' (although the phrase 'far enemy' is not used). This sutta is the canonical basis for the later teachings on the far enemy of each of the Brahma Viharas:

“Meditate on *mettā*, for when you meditate on *mettā*, any ill-will/hatred (*byāpādo*) will be given up.”

byāpādo = dislike; ill-will; hatred; hostility; enmity; malevolence (towards);

lit. going wrong [vi + ā + √pad + *a]

“Meditate on *karuṇā*, for when you meditate on *karuṇā*, any cruelty/viciousness (*vihesā*) will be given up.”

vihesā = harm; cruelty; viciousness; brutality;

[vi + √his + *ā]

“Meditate on *muditā*, for when you meditate on *muditā*, any discontent/dissatisfaction (*arati*) will be given up.”

arati = dissatisfaction; dislike; discontent; aversion; boredom, listlessness;

lit. non-delight [na + √ram + ti]

“Meditate on *upekkhā*, for when you meditate on *upekkhā*, any repulsion/irritation (*paṭigho*) will be given up.”

paṭigho = aversion; repulsion; resistance; irritation; conflict;

lit. striking against [pati + √ghaṭ + a]

[Composite]

RESULT: In [MN 62](#), practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas overcomes ill-will, cruelty, discontent, and repulsion.

Tevijja Sutta – DN 13

The following sutta is the longest sutta in which the four Brahma Viharas are taught. It's actually a fun sutta with a number of creative similes demonstrating that the teachings of the local brahmins are “unfounded.”^[42]

DN 13: The Three Knowledges – *Tevijjasutta*

The Brahmin Students Discuss What is the Correct Path to the Company of Brahma

Thus I have heard. Once the Buddha was wandering in the land of the Kosalans together with a large Saṅgha of five hundred bhikkhus when he arrived at a village of the Kosalan brahmins named Manasākaṭa.^[43] He stayed in a mango grove on a bank of the river Aciravatī to the north of Manasākaṭa.

Now at that time several very well-known well-to-do brahmins were residing in Manasākaṭa. They included the brahmins Caṅkī, Tārukkha, Pokkharasāti, Jānussoṇi, Todeyya, and others.

Then as the students Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja were going for a walk they began a discussion regarding what is the path and what is not the path.

Vāsetṭha said this: “This is the only straight path, the direct route that delivers one who practices it to the company of Brahma; namely, that explained by the brahmin Pokkharasāti.”

Bhāradvāja said this: “This is the only straight path, the direct route that delivers one who practices it to the company of Brahma; namely, that explained by the brahmin Tārukkha.”

But neither was able to persuade the other. So Vāsetṭha said to Bhāradvāja, “Bhāradvāja, the ascetic Gotama—a Sakyan, gone forth from a Sakyan family—is staying in a mango grove on a bank of the river Aciravatī to the north of Manasākaṭa. Come, let’s go to see him and ask him about this matter. As he answers, so we’ll remember it.”

The Students Visit the Buddha

So they went to the Buddha and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, they sat down to one side and Vāsetṭha told him of their conversation, adding: “In this matter we have a dispute, a disagreement, a difference of opinion.”

“So, Vāsetṭha, it seems that you say that the straight path is that explained by Pokkharasāti, while Bhāradvāja says that the straight path is that explained by Tārukkha. But what exactly is your disagreement about?”

“About what is the path and what is not the path, Ven. Gotama. Even though brahmins describe different paths—the Adhvaryu brahmins, the Taittirīya brahmins, the Chāndogya brahmins, the Cāndrāyaṇa brahmins, and the Bahvṛca brahmins—all of them still lead someone who practices them to the company of Brahma.

“It’s like a village or town that has many different roads nearby, yet all of them meet at that village. In the same way, even though brahmins describe different paths—the Adhvaryu brahmins, the Taittirīya brahmins, the Chāndogya brahmins, the Cāndrāyaṇa brahmins, and the Bahvṛca brahmins—all of them still lead someone who practices them to the company of Brahma.”

None of the Bramins Have Seen Brahma

“Do you say, ‘they lead someone’, Vāseṭṭha?”

“I do, Ven. Gotama.”

“Do you say, ‘they lead someone’, Vāseṭṭha?”

“I do, Ven. Gotama.”

“Do you say, ‘they lead someone’, Vāseṭṭha?”

“I do, Ven. Gotama.”

“Well, of the brahmins who are proficient in the three Vedas, Vāseṭṭha, is there even a single one who has seen Brahma with their own eyes?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“Well, has even a single one of their teachers seen Brahma with their own eyes?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“Well, has even a single one of their teachers’ teachers seen Brahma with their own eyes?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“Well, has anyone back to the seventh generation of teachers seen Brahma with their own eyes?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“Well, what of the ancient seers of the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas, namely Atṭhaka, Vāmaka, Vāmadeva, Vessāmitta, Yamadaggi, Aṅgīrasa, Bhāradvāja, Vāseṭṭha, Kassapa, and Bhagu? They were the authors and propagators of the hymns. Their hymnal was sung and propagated and compiled in ancient times; and these days, brahmins continue to sing and chant it, chanting what was chanted and teaching what was taught. Did they say: ‘We know and see where Brahma is or what way he lies’?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“So it seems that none of those brahmins have seen Brahma with their own eyes, and not even the ancient seers claimed to know where he is. Yet the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas say: ‘We teach the path to the company of that which we neither know nor see. This is the only straight path, the direct route that delivers one who practices it to the company of Brahma.’

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? This being so, doesn’t their statement turn out to be unfounded?”

“Clearly that’s the case, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāsetṭha. For it is impossible that they should teach the path to that which they neither know nor see.”

The Simile of the Line of Blind Men

“Suppose there was a queue of blind men, each holding the one in front: the first one does not see, the middle one does not see, and the last one does not see. In the same way, it seems to me that the brahmins’ statement turns out to be comparable to a queue of blind men: the first one does not see, the middle one does not see, and the last one does not see. Their statement turns out to be a joke—mere words, vacuous and hollow.

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? Do the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas see the sun and moon^[44] just as other folk do? And do they pray to them and exalt them, following their course from where they rise to where they set with joined palms held in worship?”

“Yes, Ven. Gotama.”

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? Though this is so, are the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas able to teach the path to the company of the sun and moon, saying: ‘This is the only straight path, the direct route that delivers one who practices it to the company of the sun and moon’?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“So it seems that even though the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas see the sun and moon, they are not able to teach the path to the company of the sun and moon.

“But it seems that even though they have not seen Brahma with their own eyes, they still claim to teach the path to the company of that which they neither know nor see.

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? This being so, doesn’t their statement turn out to be unfounded?”

“Clearly that’s the case, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāseṭṭha. For it is impossible that they should teach the path to that which they neither know nor see.”

The Simile of the Most Beautiful Lady in the Land

“Suppose a man were to say, ‘Whoever the most beautiful lady in the land is, it is her that I want, her that I desire!’

“They’d say to him, ‘Worthy man, that most beautiful lady in the land who you desire—do you know whether she’s an aristocrat, a brahmin, a peasant, or a menial?’ Asked this, he’d say, ‘No.’

“They’d say to him, ‘Worthy man, that most beautiful lady in the land who you desire—do you know her name or clan? Whether she’s tall or short or medium? Whether her skin is black, brown, or tawny? What village, town, or city she comes from?’

“Asked this, he’d say, ‘No.’

“They’d say to him, ‘Worthy man, do you desire someone who you’ve never even known or seen?’

“Asked this, he’d say, ‘Yes.’

“What do you think, Vāseṭṭha? This being so, doesn’t that man’s statement turn out to be unfounded?”

“Clearly that’s the case, Ven. Gotama.”

“In the same way, doesn’t the statement of those brahmins turn out to be unfounded?”

“Clearly that’s the case, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāseṭṭha. For it is impossible that they should teach the path to that which they neither know nor see.”

The Simile of the Staircase

“Suppose a man were to build a staircase at the crossroads for climbing up to a stilt longhouse.

“They’d say to him, ‘Worthy man, that stilt longhouse that you’re building a staircase for—do you know whether it’s to the north, south, east, or west? Or whether it’s tall or short or medium?’

“Asked this, he’d say, ‘No.’

“They’d say to him, ‘Worthy man, are you building a staircase for a longhouse that you’ve never even known or seen?’

“Asked this, he’d say, ‘Yes.’

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? This being so, doesn’t that man’s statement turn out to be unfounded?”

“Clearly that’s the case, Ven. Gotama.”

“In the same way, doesn’t the statement of those brahmins turn out to be unfounded?”

“Clearly that’s the case, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāsetṭha. For it is impossible that they should teach the path to that which they neither know nor see.”

The Similes of the River Aciravatī

“Suppose the river Aciravatī was full to the brim so a crow could drink from it. Then along comes a person who wants to cross over to the far shore. Standing on the near shore, they’d call out to the far shore, ‘Come here, far shore! Come here, far shore!’

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? Would the far shore of the Aciravatī river come over to the near shore because of that man’s call, request, desire, or expectation?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“In the same way, Vāsetṭha, the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas proceed having given up those things that make one a true brahmin, and having undertaken those things that make one not a true brahmin. Yet they say: ‘We call upon Indra! We call upon Soma! We call upon Varuṇā! We call upon Īsāna! We call upon the Progenitor! We call upon Brahma! We call upon Mahiddhi! We call upon Yama!’

“So long as they proceed in this way it’s impossible that they will, when the body breaks up, after death, be reborn in the company of Brahma.

“Suppose the river Aciravatī was full to the brim so a crow could drink from it. Then along comes a person who wants to cross over to the far shore. But while still on the near shore, their arms are tied tightly behind their back with a strong chain.

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? Could that person cross over to the far shore?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“In the same way, the five kinds of sensual stimulation are called ‘chains’ and ‘fetters’ in the training of the Noble One. What five? Sights known by the eye, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. Sounds known by the ear ... Smells known by the nose ... Tastes known by the tongue ... Touches known by the body, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing.

“These are the five kinds of sensual stimulation that are called ‘chains’ and ‘fetters’ in the training of the Noble One. The brahmins proficient in the three Vedas enjoy these five kinds of sensual stimulation tied, infatuated, attached, blind to the drawbacks, and not understanding the escape. So long as they enjoy them it’s impossible that they will, when the body breaks up, after death, be reborn in the company of Brahma.

“Suppose the river Aciravatī was full to the brim so a crow could drink from it. Then along comes a person who wants to cross over to the far shore. But they’d lie down wrapped in cloth from head to foot.

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? Could that person cross over to the far shore?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“In the same way, the five hindrances (lit. blockings; coverings) are called ‘obstacles’ and ‘hindrances’ and ‘encasings’ and ‘shrouds’ in the training of the Noble One. What five? The hindrances of sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. These five hindrances are called ‘obstacles’ and ‘hindrances’ and ‘encasings’ and ‘shrouds’ in the training of the Noble One.

“The brahmins proficient in the three Vedas are obstructed, hindered, encased, and shrouded by these five hindrances. So long as they are so obstructed it’s impossible that they will, when the body breaks up, after death, be reborn in the company of Brahma.”

Encumbered With Possessions

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? Have you heard that the brahmins who are elderly and senior, the teachers of teachers, say whether Brahma is encumbered with possessions or not?”

“That he is not, Ven. Gotama.”

“Is his heart full of enmity or not?”

“It is not.”

“Is his heart full of ill will or not?”

“It is not.”

“Is his heart corrupted or not?”

“It is not.”

“Does he wield power or not?”

“He does.”

“What do you think, Vāsetṭha? Are the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas encumbered with possessions or not?”

“They are.”

“Are their hearts full of enmity or not?”

“They are.”

“Are their hearts full of ill will or not?”

“They are.”

“Are their hearts corrupted or not?”

“They are.”

“Do they wield power or not?”

“They do not.”

“So it seems that the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas are encumbered with possessions, but Brahma is not. But would brahmins who are encumbered with possessions come together and converge with Brahma, who isn’t encumbered with possessions?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāsetṭha! It’s impossible that the brahmins who are encumbered with possessions will, when the body breaks up, after death, be reborn in the company of Brahma, who isn’t encumbered with possessions.

“And it seems that the brahmins have enmity, ill will, corruption, and do not wield power, while Brahma is the opposite in all these things. But would brahmins who are opposite to Brahma in all things come together and converge with him?”

“No, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāsetṭha! It’s impossible that such brahmins will, when the body breaks up, after death, be reborn in the company of Brahma.

“But here the brahmins proficient in the three Vedas sink down where they have sat, only to drift apart, while imagining they’re crossing over to drier ground.”

The Students Request the Buddha to Teach Them the Path to Brahma

When he said this, Vāsetṭha said to the Buddha, “I have heard, Ven. Gotama, that you know the path to company with Brahma.”

“What do you think, Vāseṭṭha? Is the village of Manasākāṭa nearby?”

“Yes it is.”

“What do you think, Vāseṭṭha? Suppose a person was born and raised in Manasākāṭa. And as soon as they left the town some people asked them for the road to Manasākāṭa. Would they be slow or hesitant to answer?”

“No, Ven. Gotama. Why is that? Because they were born and raised in Manasākāṭa. They’re well acquainted with all the roads to the village.”

“Still, it’s possible they might be slow or hesitant to answer. But a Tathāgata is never slow or hesitant when questioned about the realm of Brahma or the practice that leads to the realm of Brahma. I understand Brahma, the realm of Brahma, and the practice that leads to the realm of Brahma, practicing in accordance with which one is reborn in the realm of Brahma.”

When he said this, Vāseṭṭha said to the Buddha, “I have heard, Ven. Gotama, that you teach the path to company with Brahma. Please teach us that path and elevate this generation of brahmins.”

“Well then, Vāseṭṭha, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak.”

“Yes, Ven. sir,” replied Vāseṭṭha.

Teaching the Path to Brahma – Preliminaries^[45]

“Herein a Tathagata arises in the world. He teaches the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, possessing meaning and phrasing; he reveals the holy life that is fully complete and purified.

“A householder, or a householder’s child, or one born into some other family, hears the Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, they gain faith in the Tathagata. Endowed with such faith, they reflect: ‘The household life is crowded, a path of dust. Going forth is like the open air. It is not easy for one dwelling at home to lead the perfectly complete, perfectly purified holy life, bright as a polished conch. Let me then shave off my hair and beard, put on saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness.’

“After some time they abandon their accumulation of wealth, be it large or small; they abandon their circle of relatives, be it large or small; they shave off hair and beard, put on saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness.

“When one has thus gone forth, one lives restrained by the restraint of the Pātimokkha,^[46] possessed of proper behavior and resort. Having taken up the rules of training, one trains oneself in them, seeing danger in the slightest faults. One comes to be endowed with wholesome bodily and verbal action, one’s livelihood is purified, and one is possessed of moral discipline. One guards the doors of his sense faculties, is endowed with mindfulness

and clear comprehension, and is content with little. Endowed with these, one sits down, crosses the legs, holds the body erect, and sets up mindfulness before them.

“When one sees that the five hindrances are unabandoned within oneself, one regards that as a debt, as a sickness, as confinement in prison, as slavery, as a desert road.

“But when one sees that these five hindrances have been abandoned within oneself, one regards that as freedom from debt, as good health, as release from prison, as freedom from slavery, as a place of safety.

“When one sees that these five hindrances have been abandoned within himself, gladness arises. When one is gladdened, rapture arises. When one's mind is filled with rapture, one's body becomes tranquil; tranquil in body, one experiences happiness; being happy, one's mind becomes concentrated.”

Teaching the Path to Brahma – The Four Brahma Viharas

“One abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *mettā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *mettā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

“Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *mettā*. This is a path to company with Brahma.

“One abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *karuṇā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *karuṇā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

“Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *karuṇā*. This too is a path to company with Brahma.

“One abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *muditā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *muditā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

“Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *muditā*. This too is a path to company with Brahma.

“One abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *upekkhā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *upekkhā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

“Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that is passed by or left aside, but all are regarded with mind set free, through deep-felt *upekkhā*. This too is a path to company with Brahma.”

Conclusion

“What do you think, Vāseṭṭha? When a practitioner meditates like this, are they encumbered with possessions or not?”

“They are not.”

“Is their heart full of enmity or not?”

“It is not.”

“Is their heart full of ill will or not?”

“It is not.”

“Is their heart corrupted or not?”

“It is not.”

“Do they wield power or not?”

“They do.”

“So it seems that that practitioner is not encumbered with possessions, and neither is Brahma. Would a practitioner who is not encumbered with possessions come together and converge with Brahma, who isn’t encumbered with possessions?”

“Yes, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāseṭṭha! It’s quite possible that a practitioner who is not encumbered with possessions will, when the body breaks up, after death, be reborn in the company of Brahma, who isn’t encumbered with possessions.

“And it seems that that practitioner has no enmity, ill will, corruption, and does wield power, while Brahma is the same in all these things. Would a practitioner who is the same as Brahma in all things come together and converge with him?”

“Yes, Ven. Gotama.”

“Good, Vāseṭṭha! It’s quite possible that that practitioner will, when the body breaks up, after death, be reborn in the company of Brahma.”

When he had spoken, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja said to him, “Excellent, Ven. Gotama! Excellent! As if one were righting the overturned, or revealing the hidden, or pointing out the path to the lost, or lighting a lamp in the dark so people with clear eyes can see what’s there, Ven. Gotama has made the teaching clear in many ways. We go for refuge to the Ven. Gotama, to the teaching, and to the monastic sangha. From this day forth, may the Ven. Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge for life.”

Vāseṭṭha appears with Bhāradvāja in 5 Suttas:

<https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/VasetthaBharadvaja.htm>

RESULT: In DN 13 practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas after keeping the precepts, guarding the senses, being mindful, being content with little, overcoming the hindrances, and practicing the *jhānas* leads to rebirth in the Brahma Realm – according to this sutta given to lay people.

[Early]

42. The word I'm translating as “unfounded” is *appāṭihīrakatam*. DPD defines it as “adj. groundless; unfounded; unsound; worthless; not very impressive; lit. not made to be carried back [*appāṭihīra* + *kata*].” Maurice Walshe translates it as "stupid"; T. W. Rhys Davids translates it as "foolish"; Bhikkhu Sujato translates it as "no demonstrable basis"; Thanissaro Bhikkhu translates it as "unconvincing." [Back]

43. Manasākata is mentioned only in this sutta. [Back]

44. Remember, at the time of the Buddha, the sun and the moon were considered gods in India. [Back]

45. The Preliminaries are from the Gradual Training found in approximately 30 suttas. [Back]
See this web page: <https://leighb.com/gtchart.htm>
and my free-to-download book on the Gradual Training: <https://leighb.com/gt>

46. The Pātimokkha is the precepts for monks and nuns. [Back]

Eight Translations of the Mettā Practice

The translation of the four practices in the previous sutta in the section **Teaching the Path to Brahma – The Four Brahma Viharas** is only one of many ways you can find these practices translated (of course). What's in the previous sutta is my amalgamation of multiple translations. Below you will find eight translations of the *mettā* practice copied verbatim from various suttas translated by eight different translators. I always find examining multiple translations quite helpful in understanding what the Pāḷi is actually saying.

‘Then, with his heart filled with loving-kindness, he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth. Thus he dwells suffusing the whole world, upwards, downwards, across, everywhere, always with a heart filled with loving-kindness, abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will.

‘Just as if a mighty trumpeter were with little difficulty to make a proclamation to the four quarters, so by this meditation by this liberation of the heart through loving-kindness he leaves nothing untouched, nothing unaffected in the sensuous sphere. This is the way to union with Brahma.

Walshe, Maurice O'C. DN 13 - The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya (The Teachings of the Buddha) (p. 194). Wisdom Publications. Kindle Edition.

He lets his mind pervade one quarter of the world with thoughts of Love, and so the second, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and everywhere, does he continue to pervade with heart of Love, far-reaching, grown great, and beyond measure.

Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard without difficulty in all the four directions; even so of all things that have shape or life, there is not one that he passes by or leaves aside, but regards them all with mind set free, through deep-felt Love.

T.W. Rhys Davids. DN 13 - https://suttacentral.net/dn13/en/tw_rhysdavids

They meditate spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, they spread a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

Suppose there was a powerful horn blower. They'd easily make themselves heard in the four quarters. In the same way, when the heart's release by love has been developed like this, any

limited deeds they've done don't remain or persist there. This is a path to company with Divinity.

Bhikkhu Sujato. DN 13 - <https://suttacentral.net/dn13/en/sujato>

“He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Nanamoli, Bhikkhu; Bodhi, Bhikkhu. MN 7 - The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya (The Teachings of the Buddha) (p. 118). Wisdom Publications. Kindle Edition.

<https://suttacentral.net/mn7/en/bodhi>

He keeps pervading the first direction [the east] — as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth — with an awareness imbued with good will. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu. AN 3.65 - <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>

He lives having pervaded, with the thought of amity, one quarter; likewise the second; likewise the third; likewise the fourth; so above, below, and across; he dwells, having pervaded because of the existence in it of all living beings, everywhere, the entire world, with the great, exalted, boundless thought of amity that is free of hate or malice.

Soma Thera. AN 3.65 - <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.soma.html>

“He dwells having pervaded one direction with a mind endowed with loving-kindness – likewise the second, the third, and the fourth. So above, below, around, and everywhere, to all as to himself, he dwells having pervaded the entire world with a mind endowed with loving-kindness – abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, and without aversion.

Suddhāso Bhikkhu. MN 7 - <https://suttacentral.net/mn7/en/suddhaso>

He dwells, having suffused the first quarter with a mind of friendliness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; just so above, below, across; he dwells having suffused the whole world everywhere, in every way, with a mind of friendliness that is far-reaching, wide-spread, immeasurable, without enmity, without malevolence.

I.B. Horner. MN 7 - <https://suttacentral.net/mn7/en/horner>

“He abides, having suffused with a mind of loving-kindness one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with loving-kindness, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

Nyanaponika Thera. MN 7 - <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.007.nypo.html>

The Four Brahma Viharas – with Pāli

One abides with a mind
cetasā viharati

pervading
pharivā

a heart full of love
mettāsahagatena

to one direction,
ekam disam

and to the second,
Tathā dutiyam,

and to the third,
Tathā tatiyam,

and to the fourth,
Tathā catuttham.

In the same way above, below,
Iti uddhamadho,

across,
tiriyam,

everywhere,
sabbadhi

to all beings / all [like] oneself, (or: in every place) - maybe a textual corruption?
sabbattatāya, (or: *sabbatthatāya*) - note additional 'h' in 2nd version^[47]

one abides pervading
pharivā viharati

a heart full of love
mettāsahagatena

to the whole world
sabbāvantam lokam

abundant,
vipulena

expansive,
mahaggatena

limitless,
appamāṇena

free of enmity
averena

and ill will.
abyāpajjena.

Suppose there was
Seyyathāpi

a powerful
balavā

horn blower / trumpeter / conch blower.
saṅkhadhamo

He would easily
appakasireneva

make himself heard
viññāpeyya

in the four quarters.
catuddisā.

In the same way,
evameva kho,

when the heart's release
cetovimuttiyā

by love
mettāya

has been developed
bhāvitāya

like this,
evaṃ

any limited
pamāṇakatam

deeds one has done
kammaṃ

don't remain
na taṃ tatrāvasissati

or persist there.
na taṃ tatrāvatiṭṭhati.

This is
Ayampi kho

a path
maggo

to company
sahabyatāya

with Brahma.
brahmānaṃ.

Furthermore, a monastic meditates spreading a heart full of compassion ... “
Puna caparam bhikkhu karuṇāsahagatena cetasā ...pe...

One meditates spreading a heart full of appreciative joy ...
muditāsahagatena cetasā ...pe...

One meditates spreading a heart full of equanimity to one direction,
upekkhāsahagatena cetasā ekam disam pharitvā viharati,

and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth.
Tathā dutiyam. Tathā tatiyam. Tathā catuttham.

In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of equanimity to the whole world
Iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokam upekkhāsahagatena cetasā

—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

—*vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena pharivā viharati.*

Suppose there was a powerful horn blower. He would easily make himself heard in the four quarters.

Seyyathāpi balavā saṅkhadhamo appakasireneva catuddisā viññāpeyya;

In the same way, when the heart's release by equanimity has been developed and cultivated like this, any limited deeds one has done don't remain or persist there.

evameva kho evaṃ bhāvitāya upekkhāya cetovimuttiyā yaṃ pamāṇakatam kammaṃ na taṃ tatrāvasissati, na taṃ tatrāvatitṭhati.

This too is a path to company with Brahma.

Ayampi kho brahmānam sahyatāya maggo.

47. The following is from Bhikkhu Bodhi (personal correspondence): [\[Back\]](#)

This rendering, “to all as to himself,” comes from Bhikkhu Nyanamoli. He based it on the word explanation in the Visuddhimagga, which offers two explanations:

Sabbattatāyāti sabbesu hīnamajjhimukkaṭṭhamittasapattamajjhattādippabhedesu attatāya. “Ayaṃ parasatto”ti vibhāgaṃ akatvā attasamatāyāti vuttaṃ hoti. Atha vā sabbattatāyāti sabbena cittabhāgena īsakampi bahi avikkhipamānoti vuttaṃ hoti.

Translation:

“*Sabbattatāya*: through 'selfness' in regard to all, classified as low, middle, and superior, as friends, foes, and neutral, etc. What is meant is: through their similarity to oneself, without making the distinction, 'This one is another being.' Or else: *Sabbattatāya* means with one's whole mind, not being the least bit distracted externally.”

At present I do not agree with either of these explanations. Both, I believe, are based on a slight textual corruption. All editions now have *sabbattatāya*, which the Vism takes to be from *sabba + attā*. The first explanation is “all [like] oneself.” The second is “with one's entire mind,” where *attā* is identified with *citta*.

The correct reading should be *sabbatthatāya*. The '*ttha*' portion indicates place, as in *tattha* = there, *ettha* = here, *kattha* = where? etc. In this case, it is *sabba + ttha*. The [Digital Pāli Dictionary](#) gives: *sabbatthatā* fem. fact of being everywhere

So the line should be read: *sabbadhi sabbatthatāya* “everywhere, in every place ...”

We don't find this correct form in the standard passage on the brahmaviharas, but it occurs in the Udana, sutta no. 30, in a different context here:

“... ye hi keci bhavā sabbadhi sabbatthatāya, sabbe te bhavā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā”ti.

“Whatever states of existence there are, everywhere, in every place, they are all impermanent, dukkha, subject to change.”

The Simile of the Cloth – MN 7

This sutta indicates that Brahma Vihara practice can lead to a different result than the previous [Tevijja Sutta – DN 13](#).

MN 7: The Simile of the Cloth – *Vatthasutta*

Introduction

A cloth that was dirty and soiled, no matter what dye is applied would look poorly dyed and impure in color. Why is that? Because of the impurity of the cloth. In the same way, when the mind is corrupt, a state of misery / a bad destination (lit. going badly) is to be expected.

A cloth that was pure and clean, no matter what dye is applied would look well dyed and pure in color. Why is that? Because of the purity of the cloth. In the same way, when the mind isn't corrupt, a good destination (lit. going well) is to be expected.

What are the corruptions (*upakkilesā*) of the mind?

Covetousness and immoral greed,
ill will,
anger,
acrimony,
disdain,
contempt,
jealousy,
stinginess,
deceit,
deviousness,
obstinacy,
aggression,
conceit,
arrogance,
vanity,
and negligence are corruptions of the mind.

One who understands that these are corruptions of the mind gives them up. When one has understood these corruptions of the mind for what they are, and have given them up, one has experiential confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha.

The Jhāna Summary^[48]

When one has discarded, eliminated, released, given up, and relinquished to this extent, one finds inspiration in the meaning and the teaching, and one finds joy (*pāmojja*) connected with the teaching. When one is joyful, *pīti* springs up. When the mind is full of *pīti*, the body

becomes tranquil (*passambhati*). When the body is tranquil, one feels *sukha*. And when one feels *sukha*, the mind becomes immersed in *samādhi*.

The Four Brahma Viharas

One meditates spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

One meditates spreading a heart full of compassion to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of compassion to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

One meditates spreading a heart full of appreciative joy to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of appreciative joy to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

One meditates spreading a heart full of equanimity to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of equanimity to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

The End of the Āsavas

Knowing and seeing like this, one's mind is freed from the defilement of sensuality,
kāmāsavāpi^[49] cittaṃ vimuccati,

the defilement of becoming,
bhavāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati,

and the defilement of ignorance.
avijjāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati.

When one is freed, they know they are freed. One understands: ‘Birth is ended, the spiritual journey has been completed, what had to be done has been done, there is nothing further here.’ This is called a one who is bathed with the inner bathing.”

[The sutta ends with a further discourse in verse pointing out that physical bathing is pointless for purifying dark deeds. Instead

For the pure in heart and clean of deed,
their vows will always be fulfilled.
It's here alone that you should bathe,
brahmin, making yourself a sanctuary for all creatures.]

RESULT: In [MN 7](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to full liberation when combined with a pure mind and the *jhānas*.

[Early]

48. For much more on the Jhāna Summary, see [Right Concentration](#) chapter 16: The Jhāna Summary [\[Back\]](#)

49. Note that *kāmāsavāpi* is *kāma* + *āsava* + *api* – and similar for *bhavāsavāpi* and *avijjāsavāpi*. [\[Back\]](#)

With the Kālāmas of Kesamutta – AN 3.65

I include this sutta early in the discussion of the many suttas containing all the Brahma Viharas because it is a familiar sutta for many people. However, most people don't seem to remember that this sutta contains the Brahma Vihara practices.

AN 3.65: With the Kālāmas of Kesamutta – *Kesamuttisutta*

Introduction

The Buddha visited a town of the Kālāmas named Kesamutta. After polite greetings, the Kālāmas said to the Buddha,

“There are, sir, some ascetics and brahmins who come to Kesamutta. They explain and promote only their own doctrine, while they attack, badmouth, disparage, and smear the doctrines of others. Then some other ascetics and brahmins come to Kesamutta. They too explain and promote only their own doctrine, while they attack, badmouth, disparage, and smear the doctrines of others. So, sir, we’re doubting and uncertain: ‘I wonder who of these respected ascetics and brahmins speaks the truth, and who speaks falsehood?’”

“It is right, Kālāmas, for you to be doubting and uncertain. Please, Kālāmas, don’t go by oral transmission, don’t go by lineage, don’t go by testament, don’t go by canonical authority, don’t rely on logic, don’t rely on inference, don’t go by reasoned train of thought, don’t go by the acceptance of a view after deliberation, don’t go by the appearance of competence, and don’t think ‘The ascetic is our respected teacher.’ But when you know for yourselves: ‘These things are unskillful, blameworthy, criticized by wise people, and when you undertake them, they lead to harm and dukkha’, then you should give them up.

“And what leads to harm and dukkha? Greed, Hate, and Delusion.

“But when you know for yourselves: ‘These things are skillful, blameless, praised by wise people, and when you undertake them, they lead to welfare and happiness’, then you should acquire them and keep them.

“And what does not lead to harm and dukkha? Non-greed, absence of desire, moderation; non-hatred, kindness; wisdom, clear understanding.

“Then that noble disciple is rid of desire, rid of ill will, unconfused, aware, and mindful.

The Brahma Viharas

“One meditates pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *mettā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *mettā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

“One meditates pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *karuṇā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *karuṇā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

“One meditates pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *muditā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *muditā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

“One meditates pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *upekkhā*, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with *upekkhā*, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

The Results of Brahma Vihara Practice

“When that one has a mind that’s free of enmity and ill will, uncorrupted and purified, they’ve won four consolations in this very life.

1. ‘If there is another world, and if there is the fruit and result of good and bad deeds, it is possible that with the breakup of the body, after death, I will be reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world.
2. ‘If there is no other world, and there is no fruit and result of good and bad deeds, still right here, in this very life, I maintain myself in happiness, without enmity and ill will, free of trouble.
3. ‘Suppose evil comes to one who does evil. Then, when I have no evil intentions toward anyone, how can dukkha afflict me, since I do no evil deed?
4. ‘Suppose evil does not come to one who does evil. Then right here I see myself purified in both respects.’ This is the fourth consolation they’ve won.”

The Kālāmas are pleased and go for refuge to Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha.

RESULT: In [AN 3.65](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to being reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm, if there is another world – according to this sutta given to lay people. Whether or not doing evil leads to more evil, one is purified.

The Shorter Discourse at Assapura – MN 40

You should practice in the way that is proper for an ascetic. The label of being a spiritual practitioner doesn't come from external trappings, but from sincere inner change.

MN 40: The Shorter Discourse at Assapura – *Cūḷaassapurasutta*

The Buddha addresses the monks:

“How does a monastic practice in the way that is proper for an ascetic?”

“Any monastic who has given up covetousness, ill will, irritability, acrimony, disdain, contempt, jealousy, stinginess, deviousness, deceit, corrupt wishes, and wrong view is practicing in the way that is proper for an ascetic, I say. And that is due to giving up these stains, defects, and dregs of an ascetic, these grounds for rebirth in places of loss, to be experienced in bad places.

“Such a one sees oneself purified from all these bad, unskillful qualities. Seeing this, joy (*pāmojja*) springs up. Being joyful, rapture (*pīti*) springs up. When the mind is full of rapture, the body becomes tranquil (*passambhati*). When the body is tranquil, one feels *sukha*. And when blissful, the mind becomes immersed in *samādhi*.

“One meditates spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

“One meditates spreading a heart full of compassion ...

“One meditates spreading a heart full of appreciative joy ...

“One meditates spreading a heart full of equanimity

“In the same way, suppose someone has gone forth from the lay life to homelessness—whether from a family of aristocrats, brahmins, peasants, or workers—and has arrived at the teaching and training proclaimed by a Tathāgata. Having developed love, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity in this way they gain inner peace. Because of that inner peace they are practicing the way proper for an ascetic, I say.

“And suppose someone has gone forth from the lay life to homelessness—whether from a family of aristocrats, brahmins, peasants, or workers—and has realized the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life. They live having realized it with their own insight due to the ending of defilements. They're an ascetic because of the ending of defilements.”

RESULT: In [MN 40](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to inner peace. Additionally, if one can realize the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom, one can end the *āsavas*, thereby becoming fully awakened.

The Wealthy Citizen – MN 52

Asked by a householder to teach a path to freedom, Venerable Ānanda explains no less than eleven meditative states that may serve as doors to the deathless: the 4 Jhānas, the 4 Brahma Viharas, and 3 of the Immaterial States.

MN 52: The Wealthy Citizen – *Aṭṭhakanāgarasutta*

A wealthy merchant asks Ānanda, “Is there one thing that has been rightly explained by the Blessed One such that practicing it, a diligent, keen, and resolute monastic’s mind is freed, their *āsavas* are ended, and they arrive at the supreme sanctuary from the yoke?”

“There is, householder: when a monastic practices the first jhāna, if they reflect: ‘Even this first jhāna is fabricated and produced by intentions’ (*abhisankhatam abhisañcetaṃ*). They understand: ‘But whatever is fabricated and produced by intentions is impermanent and liable to cessation.’ Abiding in that they attain the ending of the *āsavas*. If however, they don’t attain the ending of *āsavas*, with the ending of the five lower fetters they’re reborn spontaneously, because of their passion and love for that meditation. They are awakened there and are not liable to return from that world. This is one thing that has been rightly explained by the Blessed One: practice which is diligent, keen, and resolute, frees one’s mind, *āsavas* are ended, and they arrive at the supreme sanctuary from the yoke.

“Furthermore, practicing the second jhāna, ... third jhāna, ... fourth jhāna They are awakened there and are not liable to return from that world.

“Furthermore, abiding pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with *mettā* ..., *karuṇā* ..., *muditā* ..., *upekkhā* ... Then they reflect: ‘Even this heart’s release by *mettā/karuṇā/muditā/upekkhā* is fabricated and produced by intentions.’ They understand: ‘But whatever is fabricated and produced by intentions is impermanent and liable to cessation.’ Abiding in that they attain the ending of the *āsavas*. If however, they don’t attain the ending of *āsavas*, with the ending of the five lower fetters they’re reborn spontaneously, because of their passion and love for that meditation. They are awakened there and are not liable to return from that world. This is one thing that has been rightly explained by the Blessed One: practice which is diligent, keen, and resolute, frees one’s mind, *āsavas* are ended, and they arrive at the supreme sanctuary from the yoke.

“Furthermore, by passing entirely beyond bodily sensations, by the disappearance of all sense of resistance and by non-attraction to the perception of diversity, seeing that space is limitless, one reaches and remains in Experience of Limitless Space. ... Limitless Consciousness. ... No-thingness. Then they reflect: ‘Even this attainment of the Experience of Limitless Space/Limitless Consciousness/No-thingness is fabricated and produced by intentions.’ They understand: ‘But whatever is fabricated and produced by intentions is impermanent and liable to cessation.’ Abiding in that they attain the ending of the *āsavas*. If however, they don’t attain the ending of *āsavas*, with the ending of the five lower fetters they’re reborn spontaneously, because of their passion and love for that meditation. They are

awakened there and are not liable to return from that world. This is one thing that has been rightly explained by the Blessed One: practice which is diligent, keen, and resolute, frees one's mind, *āsavas* are ended, and they arrive at the supreme sanctuary from the yoke.”

The wealthy merchant said to Ānanda, “Suppose a person was looking for the entrance to a treasure trove. And all at once they'd come across eleven entrances! In the same way, I was searching for the door to freedom from death. And all at once I found eleven doors to freedom from death for cultivation. Suppose a person had a house with eleven doors. If the house caught fire they'd be able to flee to safety through any one of those doors. In the same way, I'm able to flee to safety through any one of these eleven doors to freedom from death.”

The merchant then gives food and robes to the Saṅgha.

This same sutta appears at [AN 11.16](#).

These eleven practices should also be undertaken for the complete understanding ... complete ending ... giving up ... ending ... vanishing ... fading away ... cessation ... giving away ... letting go
of
greed ... hate ... delusion ... anger ... acrimony ... disdain ... contempt ... jealousy ... stinginess ... deceitfulness ... deviousness ... obstinacy ... aggression ... conceit ... arrogance ... vanity ... negligence. [AN 11.982](#) - 1151.

RESULT: In [MN 52](#) (and [AN 11.16](#)) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas are 4 of 11 practices that can lead to either full awakening or the state of non-returner.

With Dhanañjāni – MN 97

A corrupt tax-collector is redeemed by his encounter with Venerable Sāriputta who teaches him the 4 Brahma Viharas when he is Dying.

MN 97: With Dhanañjāni – *Dhanañjānisutta*

[The brahmin Dhanañjāni is a corrupt official in Rājagaha. Sāriputta teaches him that principled and moral conduct is better than unprincipled and immoral conduct. Some time later Dhanañjāni becomes sick, suffering, gravely ill. He requests that Sāriputta visit him. Sāriputta does visit and finds Dhanañjāni very ill.]

Sāriputta says, “Dhanañjāni, I shall teach you a path to the company of Brahma. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak.

“One meditates spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

“One meditates spreading a heart full of compassion ...

“One meditated spreading a heart full of appreciative joy ...

“One meditates spreading a heart full of equanimity”

“Well then, Ven. Sāriputta, in my name bow with your head at the Buddha’s feet. Say to him: ‘Sir, the brahmin Dhanañjāni is sick, suffering, gravely ill. He bows with his head to your feet.’” Then Sāriputta, after establishing Dhanañjāni in the inferior realm of the company of Brahma, got up from his seat and left while there was still more left to do. Not long after Sāriputta had left, Dhanañjāni passed away and was reborn in the realm of the company of Brahma.

Then Sāriputta went to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said, “Sir, the brahmin Dhanañjāni is sick, suffering, gravely ill. He bows with his head to your feet.”

“But Sāriputta, after establishing Dhanañjāni in the inferior realm of the company of Brahma, why did you get up from your seat and leave while there was still more left to do?”

“Sir, I thought: ‘These brahmins are devoted to the realm of Brahma. Why don’t I teach him a path to the company of Brahma?’”

“And Sāriputta, the brahmin Dhanañjāni has passed away and been reborn in the realm of the company of Brahma.”

RESULT: In [MN 97](#) is a rare instance of someone taking rebirth due to deathbed *kamma*. Once again practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to being reborn in a heavenly realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person. This sutta is curious because the Buddha seems to chastise Sāriputta for not teaching Dhanañjāni a deeper practice.

With Subha – MN 99

The Student Subha and the Buddha have a long discussion on various topics, ending with discussing the 4 Brahma Viharas. Working hard is not valuable in and of itself; what matters is the outcome. Just as in lay life, spiritual practice may or may not lead to fruitful results.

MN 99: With Subha – *Subhasutta*

The student Subha was residing at a certain householder’s home and said, “Householder, I have heard that Sāvattḥī does not lack for perfected ones. What ascetic or brahmin might we pay homage to today?”

“Sir, the Buddha is staying near Sāvattḥī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. You can pay homage to him.”

[Subha went to the Buddha and exchanged greetings with him and they engaged in a long discussion about who succeeds on the spiritual path, making merit, the five hindrances, and the five kinds of sensual pleasures. They also discuss *pīti* that is apart from sensual pleasures and unskillful qualities – the first and second jhānas. And they discuss the five things that the brahmins prescribe for making merit and succeeding in the skillful: being truthful, fervent, chaste, doing lots of recitation, and being very generous.] The Buddha says, “I say that joy connected with the skillful is a prerequisite of the mind for developing a mind free of enmity and ill will. I say that these five things prescribed by the brahmins for making merit are prerequisites of the mind for developing a mind free of enmity and ill will” because they lead to joy connected with the teaching.

Subha then asks, “Ven. Gotama, I have heard that the ascetic Gotama teaches a path to company with Brahma. Please teach me that path.”

“Well then, student, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak.

“First, one abides pervading the first quarter with a heart full of *mettā*, and the second, and the third, and the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one pervades the whole world with a heart full of *mettā*—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

“Just as if a mighty trumpeter were with little difficulty to make a proclamation to the four quarters, so by this meditation by this liberation of the heart through *mettā* nothing is left untouched, nothing is unaffected in the sensuous sphere. This is a way to union with Brahma.

“Furthermore, one abides pervading the first quarter with a heart full of *karuṇā* ...

“One abides pervading the first quarter with heart full of *muditā* ...

“One abides pervading the first quarter with a heart full of *upekkhā* ... This too is a way to union with Brahma.”

Subha declares himself a lay follower of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. On the way back to his lodging, he encounters the brahmin Jānussoni who says as part of their conversation, “Mister Bhāradvāja praises the ascetic Gotama with high praise indeed.”

Subha replies, “Who am I to praise the ascetic Gotama? He is praised by the praised as the best among gods and humans. The five things that the brahmins prescribe for making merit and succeeding in the skillful he says are prerequisites of the mind for developing a mind free of enmity and ill will.”

Jānussoni bows in the direction of the Buddha.

The Student Subha appears in 3 Suttas: <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/studentSubha.htm>

The Brahmin Janussoni appears in 14 Suttas:

<https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/BrahminJanussoni.htm>

RESULT: In [MN 99](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to union with Brahma. Again this is sutta is given to a lay person.

Mindfulness of Breathing – MN 118

Among the many practices the monks do are Brahma Vihara practices. Most of these are just listed before the Buddha teaches mindfulness of breathing in detail.

MN 118: Mindfulness of Breathing – *Ānāpānassatisutta*

In the introduction of this famous sutta, the Buddha describes the Saṅgha of bhikkhus, including:

“In this Saṅgha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who abide devoted to the development of the **four foundations of mindfulness**—such bhikkhus are there in this Saṅgha of bhikkhus. In this Saṅgha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who abide devoted to the development of the **four right kinds of striving**...of the **four bases for spiritual power**...of the **five faculties**...of the **five powers**...of the **seven enlightenment factors**...of the **Noble Eightfold Path**—such bhikkhus are there in this Saṅgha of bhikkhus.^[50]

“In this Saṅgha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who abide devoted to the development of **loving-kindness** ...of **compassion**...of **appreciative joy**...of **equanimity**...of the **meditation on foulness**...of the **perception of impermanence**—such bhikkhus are there in this Saṅgha of bhikkhus. In this Saṅgha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who abide devoted to the development of **mindfulness of breathing**.”

Then the Buddha teaches the sixteen steps of mindfulness of breathing, how they fulfill the four foundations of mindfulness, and how the four foundations of mindfulness fulfill the seven awakening factors, which fulfill true knowledge and deliverance. The sutta closes with a nice teaching on how each of the first six of the seven awakening factors leads on to the next factor.

50. The practices in this paragraph constitute the 37 factors of awakening. [\[Back\]](#)

With Godatta – SN 41.7

Venerable Godatta asks the layman Citta whether the liberations of measurelessness, nothingness, emptiness, and signlessness are different states, or just different words for the same thing. Citta explains that they are both: they are terms for different meditation experiences, but may also be used for perfection or arahantship.

SN 41.7: With Godatta – *Godattasutta*

In what way do these things differ in both meaning and phrasing?

“One meditates spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

“One meditates spreading a heart full of compassion ...

“One meditated spreading a heart full of appreciative joy ...

“One meditates spreading a heart full of equanimity This is called the limitless release of the heart.”

What is the release of the heart through nothingness? It’s when a monastic, going totally beyond the experience of limitless consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing at all’, enters and remains in the experience of no-thingness. This is called the release of the heart through nothingness.

What is the release of the heart through emptiness? It’s when a monastic has gone to a wilderness, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut, and reflects like this: ‘This is empty of a self or what belongs to a self.’ This is called the release of the heart through emptiness.

What is the signless release of the heart? It’s when a monastic, not focusing on any signs, enters and remains in the signless concentration of the heart. This is called the signless release of the heart.

That's the way in which these things differ in both meaning and phrasing.

What’s the way in which they mean the same thing, and differ only in the phrasing?

Greed, hate, and delusion are makers of limits. Greed is something, hate is something, and delusion is something. Greed, hate, and delusion are makers of signs. One who has ended the defilements (*āsavas*) has given these up, so they are unable to arise in the future. The unshakable release of the heart is said to be the best kind of release of the heart. That unshakable release of the heart is empty of greed, hate, and delusion.

This is the way in which they mean the same thing, and differ only in the phrasing.”
[Late - probably]

RESULT: In [SN 41.7](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to the limitless release of the heart.

Full of Love – SN 46.54

Some wanderers tell some Buddhist mendicants that they, too, teach the five hindrances and the four Brahma Vihara meditations, so what is the difference? The Buddha explains the detailed connection between the Brahma Vihara meditations and the awakening factors, which taken together lead to liberation.

SN 46.54: Full of Love – *Mettāsahagatasutta*

[Upon hearing of this, the Buddha says the difference is in the destination, apex, fruit, and culmination.] “When one develops the heart’s release by *mettā* together with the awakening factors which rely on seclusion, fading away, and cessation, this ripens as letting go. They are then able to

meditate perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive,
 meditate perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive,
 perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive and the repulsive,
 meditate perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive and the unrepulsive,
 meditate staying equanimous, mindful and aware, rejecting both the repulsive and the unrepulsive.

The apex of the heart’s release by *mettā* is the beautiful, I say, for one who has not penetrated to a higher freedom.

When one develops the heart’s release by *karuṇā* together with the awakening factors both the repulsive and the unrepulsive. Or else, going totally beyond perceptions of form, by the disappearance of all sense of resistance and by non-attraction to the perception of diversity, aware that ‘space is limitless’, one enters and remains in the experience of limitless space. The apex of the heart’s release by *karuṇā* is the experience of limitless space, I say, for one who has not penetrated to a higher freedom.

When one develops the heart’s release by *muditā* together with the awakening factors both the repulsive and the unrepulsive. Or else, going totally beyond the experience of limitless space, aware that ‘consciousness is limitless’, one enters and remains in the experience of limitless consciousness. The apex of the heart’s release by *muditā* is the experience of limitless consciousness, I say, for one who has not penetrated to a higher freedom.

When one develops the heart’s release by *upekkhā* together with the awakening factors both the repulsive and the unrepulsive. Or else, going totally beyond the experience of limitless consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing at all’, one enters and remain in the experience of nothingness. The apex of the heart’s release by *upekkhā* is the experience of nothingness, I say, for one who has not penetrated to a higher freedom.”

RESULT: In [SN 46.54](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to various releases of the heart-mind – but there seems always to be a higher freedom available. Again, this is a sutta given to lay people.

This sutta is also interesting in that it correlates *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* with the first three immaterial states of limitless space, limitless consciousness, and nothingness respectively.

For more on this sutta, see “Talk 6: SN 46.54” at <https://www.thenoblesearch.com/talks>

Sabbath – AN 4.190

On the full moon night, the Buddha praises monks of great spiritual attainments in the Saṅgha: some have attained to the gods, some to Brahma, some to the Imperturbable, and some to nobility. The Buddha explains what each of these attainments entails.

AN 4.190: Sabbath – *Uposathasutta*

“There are monastics staying in this Saṅgha who have attained to the gods. There are monastics staying in this Saṅgha who have attained to Brahma. There are monastics staying in this Saṅgha who have attained to the imperturbable. There are monastics staying in this Saṅgha who have attained to nobility.

“And how has a monastic attained to the gods? Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, one enters and remains in the first jhāna, second jhāna, third jhāna, fourth jhāna. That’s how a monastic has attained to the gods.

“And how has a monastic attained to Brahma? One meditates spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, one spreads a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

“One meditates spreading a heart full of compassion ...

“One meditated spreading a heart full of appreciative joy ...

“One meditates spreading a heart full of equanimity That’s how a monastic has attained to Brahma.

“And how has a monastic attained to the imperturbable? By practicing the four immaterial states.

“And how has a monastic attained to nobility? It’s when one truly understands: ‘This is dukkha’ ... ‘This is the origin of dukkha’ ... ‘This is the cessation of dukkha’ ... ‘This is the practice that leads to the cessation of dukkha’. That’s how a monastic has attained to nobility.”

RESULT: In AN 4.190 practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to attaining to Brahma. This does not appear to be full awakening for the monastics; if taken literally, the 4 Brahma Viharas lead to rebirth in the realm of Brahma.

Elements of Escape – AN 6.13

This sutta provides antidotes for ill will, thoughts of harming, discontent, desire, signs, doubt & indecision. One can't claim to have practiced these antidotes fully if one is still afflicted by the various forms of suffering.

AN 6.13: Elements of Escape – *Nissāraṇīyasutta*

“There are these six elements of escape. What six?”

“One who says: ‘I’ve developed the heart’s release by *mettā*. I’ve cultivated it, made it my vehicle and my basis, kept it up, consolidated it, and properly implemented it. Yet somehow ill will still occupies my mind.’ They should be told, ‘Not so! Don’t say that. Don’t misrepresent the Buddha, for misrepresentation of the Buddha is not good. And the Buddha would not say that. It’s impossible, it cannot happen that the heart’s release by *mettā* has been developed and properly implemented, yet somehow ill will still occupies the mind. For it is the heart’s release by *mettā* that is the escape from ill will.’

“One who says: ‘I’ve developed the heart’s release by *karuṇā*. I’ve cultivated it, made it my vehicle and my basis, kept it up, consolidated it, and properly implemented it. Yet somehow the thought of harming still occupies my mind.’ They should be told, ‘Not so! ... For it is the heart’s release by *karuṇā* that is the escape from thoughts of harming.’

“One who says: ‘I’ve developed the heart’s release by *muditā*. I’ve cultivated it, made it my vehicle and my basis, kept it up, consolidated it, and properly implemented it. Yet somehow discontent still occupies my mind.’ They should be told, ‘Not so! ... For it is the heart’s release by *muditā* that is the escape from discontent.’

“One who says: ‘I’ve developed the heart’s release by *upekkhā*. I’ve cultivated it, made it my vehicle and my basis, kept it up, consolidated it, and properly implemented it. Yet somehow desire still occupies my mind.’ They should be told, ‘Not so! ... For it is the heart’s release by *upekkhā* that is the escape from desire.’

“One who says: ‘I’ve developed the signless release of the heart. I’ve cultivated it, made it my vehicle and my basis, kept it up, consolidated it, and properly implemented it. Yet somehow my consciousness still follows after signs.’ They should be told, ‘Not so! ... For it is the signless release of the heart that is the escape from all signs.’

“One who says: ‘I’m rid of the conceit “I am”. And I don’t regard anything as “I am this”. Yet somehow the dart of doubt and indecision still occupies my mind.’ They should be told, ‘Not so! Don’t say that. Don’t misrepresent the Buddha, for misrepresentation of the Buddha is not good. And the Buddha would not say that. It’s impossible, it cannot happen that the conceit “I am” has been done away with, and nothing is regarded as “I am this”, yet somehow the dart of doubt and indecision still occupies the mind. For it is the uprooting of the conceit “I am” that is the escape from the dart of doubt and indecision.’

“These are the six elements of escape.”

RESULT: In [AN 6.13](#) correctly practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to escape from ill will, escape from thoughts of harming, escape from discontent, and escape from desire.

This same teaching also appears in

DN 33: Chanting together – *Saṅgītisutta* [Late]

DN 34: Up to Ten – *Dasuttarasutta* [Late]

The Rhinoceros Horn – Snp 1.3

The refrain in this sutta is a subject of controversy. The text literally says, “Wander alone like a 'sword-horn,' which is the Pali term for rhinoceros. The commentary, however, insists that this term refers not to the animal but to its horn, for the Indian rhinoceros, unlike the African, has only one horn. Still, some scholars have noted that while the Indian rhinoceros is a solitary animal, rhinoceros horns don't wander, and that in other verses in the Pali canon, the phrase “wander alone like...” takes a person or an animal, not an animal part, for its object. – Thanissaro Bhikkhu^[51]

Fare singly as the one-horned rhino. If you can't find a good teacher, it's better to wander alone than to consort with fools.

Snp 1.3: The Rhinoceros Horn – *Khaggavisāṇasutta*

This very early Sutta in verse recommends living alone like a one-horned rhino. The last three verses are as follows:

In time, cultivate freedom through
mettā, karuṇā, muditā, and upekkhā.
Not upset by anything in the world,
live alone like a one-horned rhino.

Having given up greed, hate, and delusion,
having burst apart the fetters,
unafraid at the end of life,
live alone like a one-horned rhino.

They befriend you and serve you for their own sake;
these days it's hard to find friends
lacking ulterior motive.
Impure folk cleverly profit themselves—
live alone like a one-horned rhino. {Early}

RESULT: In [Snp 1.3](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to not being upset by anything in the world.

51. From the Introduction to Snp 1.3 at
<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.03.than.html> [Back]

Other Suttas that Contain All Four Brahma Viharas

Below are summaries of the remaining 22 suttas that contain all four Brahma Viharas. I have included the result of practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas only for suttas where there is a clear result given.

DN 17: King Mahāsudassana – *Mahāsudassanasutta*

An elaborate story of a past life of the Buddha as a legendary king who renounced all to practice meditation, which includes practicing the Jhānas followed by the 4 Brahma Viharas; rebirth in a Brahma realm. [Late]

[RESULT: rebirth in a Brahma realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person]

DN 19: The Great Steward – *Mahāgovindasutta*

A myth about a Steward who goes forth, and has many followers. He practices the 4 Brahma Viharas and upon his death, he is reborn in Brahma realm.

[RESULT: rebirth in a Brahma realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person]

DN 25: The Lion’s Roar at the Monastery of Lady Udumbarikā – *Udumbarikasutta*

This discourse gives an especially good example of dialog between religions. The Buddha insists that he is not interested in making anyone give up their teacher or practices, but only to help people let go of suffering. The Buddha recommends practicing the 4-fold restraint (precepts 1, 2, 4, don't crave for sense-pleasures); giving up the hindrances; practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas, the psychic powers, and insight practice; and finally achieving liberation.

[Late]

[RESULT: the 4 Brahma Viharas are part of the multiple practices given that lead to liberation]

DN 26: The Wheel-Turning Monarch – *Cakkavattisutta*

The Buddha gives a detailed account of the fall of a kingly lineage of the past, and the subsequent degeneration of society. But far in the future, another Buddha, Metteyya, will arise in a time of peace and plenty. At the end of this myth, the Buddha teaches that with practice, you will grow in lifespan (4 bases of power), beauty (ethics), happiness (4 Jhānas), wealth (4 Brahma Viharas), and power (liberation) . [Late]

[RESULT: the 4 Brahma Viharas are part of the multiple practices given that lead to liberation]

DN 33: Reciting in Concert – *Saṅgītisutta*

An extended listing of Buddhist doctrines arranged in numerical sequence. The 4 limitless states are the 4 Brahma Viharas; also the Brahma Viharas are part of 6 elements of escape.

[Late]

DN 34: Up to Ten – *Dasuttarasutta*

This is similar to the previous sutta, but with a different manner of exposition. The 6 elements of escape are: the 4 Brahma Viharas, the signless release of the heart-mind, being rid of the conceit “I am.” [Late]

MN 43: The Great Elaboration – *Mahāvedallasutta*

A series of questions and answers between Sāriputta and Mahākotṭhita, examining various subtle and abstruse aspects of the teachings. The limitless release of the heart-mind is the 4 Brahma Viharas. [Late]

[RESULT: leads to the limitless release of the heart-mind]

MN 50: The Rebuke of Māra – *Māratajjanīyasutta*

Māra, the trickster and god of death, tried to annoy Moggallāna. He not only failed but was subject to a stern sermon warning of the dangers of attacking the Buddha’s disciples. One should practice the 4 Brahma Viharas to ward off Mara. [Late]

[RESULT: the 4 Brahma Viharas ward off Mara]

MN 55: With Jīvaka on Eating Meat – *Jīvakasutta*

The Buddha’s personal doctor, Jīvaka, hears criticisms of the Buddha’s policy regarding eating meat, and asks him about it. The Buddha says that in three cases meat may not be eaten: if it’s seen, heard, or suspected that an animal was killed specifically for the monastic. Also by practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas, one eats almsfood “untied, uninfatuated, unattached, seeing the drawback, and understanding the escape.” Any greed, hate, or delusion that might give rise to cruelty, discontent, or repulsion has been given up by the Tathāgata.

[RESULT: One eats almsfood untied, uninfatuated, unattached, seeing the drawback, and understanding the escape.]

MN 83: About King Maghadeva – *Maghadevasutta*

A mythological story about a king who renounces his kingdom, goes forth, and practices the 4 Brahma Viharas. Having developed these 4 Brahma Viharas, when his body broke up, after death, he was reborn in a good place, a Brahma realm. This is one of two suttas that ties *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* to the phrase “Brahma Viharas.”

[RESULT: leads rebirth in a Brahma realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person]

MN 127: With Anuruddha – *Anuruddhasutta*

A lay person becomes confused when encouraged to develop the “limitless” and “expansive” liberations, and asks Venerable Anuruddha to explain whether they are the same or different. The limitless release of the heart-mind is the 4 Brahma Viharas.

[This is similar to the teaching we found at [With Godatta – SN 41.7](#)]

[RESULT: leads to the limitless release of the heart-mind]

SN 42.8: A Horn Blower – *Saṅkhadhamasutta*

Keep the precepts; become rid of desire, rid of ill will, unconfused, aware, and mindful; then practice the 4 Brahma Viharas (with the similes given in this sutta). When the heart’s release by each of the 4 Brahma Viharas has been developed and cultivated like this, any unwholesome karma done, doesn’t remain or persist there.

[RESULT: leads to any unwholesome karma that has been done, not remaining or persisting there]

[this sutta was discussed in detail earlier in the chapter [A Horn Blower – SN 42.8](#)]

SN 42.13: With Pāṭaliya – Pāṭaliyasutta

An early form of Pascal's wager: practicing the Brahma Viharas protects me no matter what view is correct – e.g. whether or not there is an afterlife, etc. This sutta includes the Jhāna summary as preliminary practice to Brahma Viharas.

[RESULT: practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in a heavenly realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person]

AN 1.395-401

One who practices (even a little) the Jhānas, or Brahma Viharas is one who follows the Teacher's instructions, who responds to advice, and who does not eat the country's alms in vain.

AN 1.495-574

“One develops the faculty of faith ... the faculty of energy ... the faculty of mindfulness ... the faculty of concentration ... the faculty of wisdom ... the power of faith ... the power of energy ... the power of mindfulness ... the power of concentration ... the power of wisdom together with the four Jhānas, ... together with *mettā*, ... together with *karuṇā*, ... together with *muditā*, ... together with *upekkhā*. That one is called a one who does not lack [these qualities], who follows the Teacher's instructions, who responds to advice, and who does not eat the country's alms in vain. How much more so those who make much of it!”

AN 3.63: At Venāgapura – Venāgapurasutta

The divine high and luxurious bed is practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas.

[RESULT: all postures become divine]

AN 3.66: With Sālha and His Friend – Sālhasutta

A sutta on how to navigate among different spiritual opinions. When one is rid of desire, rid of ill will, unconfused, aware, and mindful, then practice the 4 Brahma Viharas.

[RESULT: leads to welfare and happiness, and to the end of the *āsavas* – awakening]

AN 4.125: Love (1st) – Paṭhamamettāsutta

Practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas will result in rebirth in the company of the retinue of Brahma. An ordinary person dies from there and falls into the lower realms; a disciple of the Buddha passes from there into liberation.

[RESULT: rebirth in the company of the retinue of Brahma]

AN 4.126: Love (2nd) – Dutiyamettāsutta

One who practices the Brahma Viharas and contemplates the 5 khandas as *anicca & dukkha*, upon death is reborn in the company of the gods of the pure abodes.

[RESULT: rebirth in the company of the gods of the pure abodes]

AN 5.192: With the Brahmin Doṇa – Doṇabrāhmaṇasutta

The brahmin Doṇa accuses the Buddha of not respecting brahmins, so the Buddha responds by analyzing the different kinds of brahmin. Brahma Vihara practice makes one equal to Brahma; Jhāna practice makes one equal to god; further discussion follows on what makes one a brahmin. This is one of two suttas that ties *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* to the

phrase “Four Brahma Viharas.”

[RESULT: Brahma Vihara practice makes one equal to Brahma]

AN 8.63: A Teaching in Brief – *Samkhittasutta*

A monk asks for teachings before going on retreat. He is told to settle the mind and abandon unskillful mental qualities; then practice the 4 Brahma Viharas in conjunction with the 4 Jhānas and the 4 establishments of mindfulness.

[RESULT: That monk soon realized the supreme culmination of the spiritual path – liberation]

AN 10.219: The Body Born of Deeds – *Karajakāyasutta*

Practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas yields a limitless and well developed mind that would not do bad deeds; this leads to non-return unless one has penetrated to a higher freedom.

[RESULT: leads to non-return unless one has penetrated to a higher freedom]

Conclusions

Remember way back in the [Preface](#) I said that back around 2009, I was involved in a discussion about how far Brahma Vihara practice can take you on the spiritual path? Well, now we have the answer – at least as far as the suttas explain.

In 12 suttas, practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in a Brahma realm:

[DN 13](#), [DN 17](#), [DN 19](#),
[MN 83](#), [MN 97](#), [MN 99](#),
[SN 42.13](#),

[AN 3.65](#), [AN 4.125](#), [AN 4.126](#), [AN 4.190](#), [AN 5.192](#).

Interestingly, all of these suttas from DN, MN, and SN, plus AN 3.65 and AN 5.192 are given to lay people; only the three late AN 4 suttas are given to monastics.

There are 11 suttas where practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to either non-return or full awakening, either as part of a set of practices, or occasionally taking a practitioner all the way there with just Brahma Vihara practice. The majority of these discourses are given to monastics, but some are given to lay people.

In [MN 52](#), ([AN 11.16](#) – the same discourse) and [AN 10.219](#), the 4 Brahma Viharas can lead to either full awakening or the state of non-returner.

In [AN 3.66](#), Brahma Vihara practice leads to full awakening – according to this sutta given to lay people.

In 6 suttas the 4 Brahma Viharas are part of a set of practices given that lead to full awakening:

[DN 25](#), [DN 26](#), [MN 7](#), [MN 40](#), [AN 8.63](#), and [AN 10.219](#).

Additionally, verse 10 of [The Mettā Sutta – Sutta Nipata 1.8](#) indicates *mettā* practice on its own can lead to either full awakening or the state of non-returner.

There are other possible results as well documented in the suttas. In 3 suttas, practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to the limitless release of the heart-mind: [MN 43](#), [MN 127](#), and [SN 41.7](#). Whether or not the limitless release of the heart-mind is full awakening or not is open to debate. [MN 127](#) and [SN 41.7](#) seem to equate the limitless release of the heart-mind and full awakening. In other suttas, ([DN 8](#), [MN 40](#), [AN 10.30](#)), undefiled freedom of heart-mind and freedom by wisdom is full awakening. Are these the same as the limitless release of the heart-mind?

Additionally, 8 suttas describe a unique result when practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas. In [MN](#)

50, they ward off Mara. In [MN 55](#), after practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas, one eats almsfood untied, uninfatuated, unattached, seeing the drawback, and understanding the escape. In [MN 62](#), practicing the four overcomes ill-will, cruelty, discontent, and repulsion. In [SN 42.8](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to any limited karma one has done not remaining or persisting there. In [AN 3.63](#), all postures become divine. In [AN 6.13](#) correctly practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to escape from ill will, escape from thoughts of harming, escape from discontent, and escape from desire. In [Snp 1.3](#) Brahma Vihara practice leads to not being upset by anything in the world. And, in the collection [AN 11.982 - 1151](#), a whole host of ills can be overcome.

But this summary of results in no way does justice to the power of practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas. These are transformative practices. The Buddha points out in [MN 19](#) – and modern neuroscience has confirmed – that the mindstates that one habitually inhabits become stronger the more frequently you enter and abide in them. Practicing the Brahma Viharas will make you more loving and more compassionate. These mindstates will definitely enhance your interactions with other people. They will enhance your interactions with all living beings. They will enhance your internal dialogue, reducing your self-criticism and treating yourself with the love and respect you deserve.

Muditā practice will enable you to not only avoid falling into the painful state of envy, but will open up far more sources of joy in your life. And the more equanimous you can be, the less you'll be jostled when you inevitably encounter circumstances that are less than perfect.

Like all meditation practices, none of these are quick fixes. They all take dedicated practice. Ayya Khema said to start every meditation period with *mettā* practice. That's brilliant advice. Spend 90 seconds, or 5 minutes, or even longer doing *mettā* practice in whatever way seems most natural to you – and make sure as part of that practice, you send yourself some *mettā*! The most disturbing thing I encountered when I first began teaching meditation was learning how many people had trouble loving themselves. That needs to be fixed. Starting with you. If you've read this far in this book, this pretty much proves you are a lovable person. Plus sending *mettā* doesn't require that the one receiving the *mettā* actually be lovable, though it certainly helps when doing the practice. Even if you don't feel *mettā* for yourself at first, just think it – the feeling will eventually follow.

Compassion is an action. Whenever you encounter a situation where you can be helpful, be helpful – even if all you can do is express your wish that any dukkha involved be resolved. Do the right thing, don't be attached to results.

Muditā is an action. Wherever in this world you encounter rejoicing, rejoice along with those rejoicing – as long as that rejoicing is gained by wholesome means. This way, there is more joy in your life, and more joy in the world. Joy is not actually in limited supply – more joy can always be generated by appreciating the joy that already exists.

Equanimity – literally “looking on” – brings us closer to what is actually happening. One of the most important teachings from the Buddha is *yathābhūtañāṇadassana*, which can be

translated at “knowing and seeing what is actually happening.” From understanding what is happening we can be more able to act with compassion when appropriate, we can feel the joy when that is what is happening, and we can gain understanding that is necessary for deep insights – understood experiences. And with an equanimous mind, we can more easily let go of self-centeredness and thereby truly love to the absolute depths of our capacity.

I don't think it is actually all that important to know exactly what the suttas say are the results of Brahma Vihara practice. What is important is to recognize the transformative power of these four mindstates, practice them to the best of our ability, and to share them as far and wide as we can in this profoundly interconnected universe.



I hope you have found this tour thru the Brahma Vihara suttas interesting and useful. Of course, early Buddhism (i.e. Buddhism as found in the suttas^[52]) is not the only spiritual tradition teaching these sublime states. The commentaries of Theravadan Buddhism elaborate on methods of practicing the Brahma Viharas, and of course Mahayana Buddhism has elevated compassion practice to a cornerstone of its teachings.

The Buddha was not the first teacher to teach these practices – we saw that in [Full of Love – SN 46.54](#) some wanderers tell some Buddhist monastics that they, too, teach the five hindrances and the four Brahma Vihara meditations. This would imply these teachings existed in India before the Buddha came along. In other spiritual traditions, love and compassion are frequently taught – *muditā* not as much. Equanimity arises as a result of a deep commitment to any spiritual tradition's authentic spiritual practices.

So in the Appendices that follow the [Afterword: The Dancer and the King](#) (the story that is the original muse for this whole book), there is [Appendix 1: Results from the 38 Four Brahma Vihara Suttas](#) which is a table of what is found in the suttas. Following it are more appendices that contain teachings from other spiritual traditions. The selections come primarily from the Hebrew and Christian Bible – I am a Presbyterian preacher's kid, so the Bible is the other source of spiritual teachings I am most familiar with. But there is other information in these appendices as well. Read what's there in the appendices if you want, or ignore them.

May your journey on the spiritual path be filled with Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity!

52. This includes all the suttas in the *Sutta Piṭaka* (Basket of Suttas), not just the ones Pande classified as “early.” [\[Back\]](#)

Dedication of Merit

This Dedication of Merit is excerpted from Chapter 10 of Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*: A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life. The whole book is superb; I highly recommend Stephen Batchelor's translation: [A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life](#). There are also [excerpts from his book](#) on the internet. And there are complete internet translations also available, like this one: <https://wisdomcompassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Way-of-the-Bodhisattva-Bodhicaryavatara.pdf>.

By all the virtue I have now amassed
by the composition of this book, ... ,
May every being tread the path to Full Awakening.

May as many beings as there are in all places,
who are suffering pain of body or of mind,
obtain by my merits
oceans of happiness and of joy.

...

May those who suffer from cold obtain heat,
and may those who suffer from heat be cooled

...

May those dwelling in misfortune
be released from their misfortunes.

May the fear vanish which animals have
of being eaten by one another.

...

May the blind see forms,
And the deaf hear sounds.
and may pregnant women give birth,
without pain.

May the naked find clothing,
The hungry find food.
May the thirsty find water
And delicious drinks.

And may the fearful be without fear,
and those afflicted with sorrow be the obtainers of joy;
and may those distressed
be without distress, and at peace.

Let the sick be well;
let all be freed from bondage;

let the weak be strong,
and thoughts mutually affectionate.

May every region be auspicious
for those who travel on the road.
May everything prosper
which will help them obtain their goals.

And may those who voyage by sea
find fulfillment of their heart's desire.
Having peacefully arrived at shore,
may they rejoice with their kin.

May those who have fallen into a trackless waste
find themselves encountering fellow travelers,
and may they travel without fatigue
and be safe from robbers, savage beasts, and the like.

May celestial beings protect
the sleepers, the insane, the heedless,
those in danger in wild places,
and the helpless, whether young or old.

May they be freed from all disturbances,
possessing faith, wisdom, and compassion;
endowed with good appearance and conduct;
and may they have mindfulness throughout their lives.

O eternal and imperishable treasure, as vast as the sky;
those free from duality and without resort to any means—
may they be prosperous and self-sufficient in their conduct.

May beings who have little strength
become of great strength.
May those who are wretched and deformed
become endowed with beautiful form.

...

By these my merits may beings
everywhere, without exception,
having desisted from all evils,
always behave in a proper manner;

...

By means of all birds and trees,
and even by rays from the sky,
may the sound of the Dharma
be heard unceasingly by all beings.

...

May kindly spirits bring the rains on time,
and may the rain be abundant,
and the earth be rich.
May the rulers abide by the Law.

And may medicines be powerful;
may healing spells succeed;
may spirits be active in compassion.

May no being whatsoever be unhappy,
sinful, sick, forsaken, or despised;
and none whatsoever wretched or depressed.

...

As long as the existence of space
and as long as the existence of the world,
that long let my existence be devoted
to driving away the world's sorrows.

...

May the Dharma, which is the sole medicine for suffering
and the origin of every joy,
be materially supported and honored,
and endure for a very long time.

And now I bow to Mañjughoṣa
whose kindness is the wellspring of my good intent.
And to my Spiritual Friends I also bow,
Whose inspiration gave me strength to grow.

Afterword: The Dancer and the King

This story is very loosely based on the story of Dombipa, one of the Mahayana Eighty-four Mahasiddhas. I was first introduced to this tale (and many others) in the wonderful book [Legends of the Mahasiddhas](#) by Keith Dowman with illustrations by Robert Beer. But this is my tale and is, as I said, very loosely based on the story of Dombipa.

The Dancer and the King

The philosopher's stone
Transforms base metal into gold.
In the heart of the Great Jewel
Passion is transformed into pure awareness.

Once upon a time, a long time ago in India, there were two kingdoms that shared a river as their mutual border. This river was the lifeblood of both kingdoms. They used the water from the river to drink, to irrigate the rice fields, and the fish in the river were a large source of protein for the people of both kingdoms.

Now, this was wonderful when the monsoon came on time and was strong. But there were times when the monsoon came late or was weak, and there wasn't as much water in the river. Then people in both kingdoms would go hungry.

The two kingdoms had agreed to share the water equitably, so it worked quite well for a number of years. That is, until a new king came to power in the kingdom across the river. When the monsoon failed that year, it was late and very weak. The king across the river decided he was going to build a diversion channel and take as much water as he wanted.

This was not going to work. It was going to cause a famine in the kingdom on this side of the river. So after all negotiations had failed, the king of this kingdom gathered his army and they headed out to try and destroy the diversion channel. Unfortunately, the king on the other side of the river was well prepared and had his army waiting in ambush. A fight ensued. The king from this side of the river was killed. His army was chased back across the river and fled.

This meant that the kingship passed to his son who was only twenty years old. This son was rather brilliant. He gathered together the remnants of the army and devised a plan and once again, they attacked the diversion area. But as soon as the other king and his army appeared, they fled.

Well, not really – they just retreated enough so that the other king and his army would pursue them.

The other king and his army chased this new king and his small band across the river and into a canyon, a box canyon. At the far end of the box canyon, a small fort had been built and the new king and his companions rushed into the fort.

The other king and his army entered the canyon, but when they suddenly realized that it was a box canyon, there was a giant landslide covering the opening to the canyon. The other army was trapped, especially when archers appeared all along the rims of the canyon.

The new king shouted to the king from the other side of the river, “You have two choices. You can die or you can surrender. If you wish to surrender, dismount your horses, throw down your armor and your weapons. Or you will die. You will not be able to ride out of here. We have blocked the entrance and we will pick you off one by one if you try to clamber over that landslide.”

The king from the other side of the river was unsure what to do, but when his army began dismounting because they didn't want to die, he too dismounted, and they all threw down their armor and their weapons. The king from the other side complained, “But we could be attacked and killed on the way home!”

“Oh, don't worry about that. We will escort you back to where you have built the diversion channel, and stay with you until you have destroyed the diversion.” And that's exactly what happened; the river began to flow freely again. There was hunger on both sides of the river that year, but it was equitable again.

The new king turned out to be quite wise, quite adept at being the ruler of his kingdom. He instituted a number of reforms and he managed to uproot all the corruption. The next year when the monsoon came on time and with plenty of rain, both kingdoms flourished. But the kingdom on this side of the river flourished like it never had before.

This continued for four years. At that point, a troop of low-caste acrobats came to town. These acrobats were very skilled and it wasn't long before they were performing in the main square of the city below the king's palace. It was in the middle of the day when the king had a break from his royal duties. He heard the commotion below, looked out the window to see what was going on and was quite impressed with these acrobats, especially this one woman who was a dancer.

She was, well, she was enchanting, the way she moved, her beauty. The king couldn't take his eyes off her. Even when she wasn't performing, she had the king's full attention. When they had finished their performance and were passing the hat around to collect donations so that they could buy food and necessities, the king called one of his ministers over and said, “Please go find the leader of those acrobats and have him meet me in the throne room.”

The leader of the acrobats was a little surprised, but not terribly surprised. He knew they were very good and he hoped that maybe the king was going to provide them with a nice bonus. When he arrived in the throne room, the king praised the acrobats and then inquired about the dancer.

“Oh, she's my adopted daughter. She's been with us since she was a very little girl.”

The king said, “I want her to stay here with me.” Well, this was shocking.

The leader of the acrobats said, “You're of the highest caste, we're of the lowest caste. Union between our type and your type is not permitted!”

The king flipped open a chest next to the throne, reached in, grabbed a handful of jewels, walked over to the leader of the acrobats, and filled his pocket with those jewels. The troop of acrobats left town rather hurriedly shortly thereafter, minus one of their number.

The dancer was installed in the king's private quarters by his most trusted servants. You see, if word got out that the king was consorting with a woman of the lowest caste, it would not go well.

The king had many duties that afternoon. They seemed to drag on interminably. He had other things on his mind, but he did as good a job as he could.

When finally things were wrapping up at sunset, he headed back to his private quarters, and very soon he was stepping through the curtain of the room that he had indicated was where the dancer was to reside. When he entered the room, the dancer was standing at the window looking out. She didn't turn around. The king cleared his throat. The dancer glanced over her shoulder. “What do you want?”

Well, we know what the king wanted. But he was a little embarrassed to say what he wanted. He said, “You haven't changed out of your acrobat costume. Look, we have some nice clothes for you here, laying on the bed.”

The dancer whirled around. She put her hands on her hips. She said, “I don't want to be your caged bird. Union between your type and my type is not allowed. If anyone in your court finds out you're keeping me here, it will not go well for either of us. Therefore, you will have to keep me locked up here, and I don't want this. I have seen more of your kingdom than you have. I have seen more of the neighboring kingdoms than you ever will. I don't want to be your cage bird. Let me go.”

The king had never been spoken to like this ever before. He stammered and finally he blurted out, “But I'm the king. I can get you whatever you want. I mean, you want finer clothes than these? I can get them. You want jewelry? I can get you jewels. You have a special food that you like. I can get you that food. I can get you whatever you want.”

Her face softened slightly. She said, “I want my freedom.”

“Not that. Come on. Would you like some musicians to perform for you? Dancers, what would you like?”

The dancer looked down, and she thought. Finally, she looked up and she said, “I want to learn to read.”

Well, this was unheard of. Women didn't read. A woman of the lowest caste learning to read?! How was the king even going to do that? There were people in his court that knew how to read.

He knew how to read. But he couldn't ask anyone in his court to teach this woman to read because if they found out he was keeping a low-caste woman, it would go very poorly for both him and the dancer. And the king was so busy, he didn't have time to teach her to read.

The dancer looked at him. “Yeah, some all-powerful king you are.” she said scornfully. “You may leave.”

The king, left. He stepped through the curtains. He'd never been addressed in this way before, and he'd never encountered anyone like this woman before. She had, well, he wasn't sure what she had, but it was very attractive, very interesting. How on earth was he going to find somebody to teach her to read?

As I said, the king was very wise. The next morning, before breakfast, the king was downstairs in the palace kitchen. He used to do that when he was a boy. He would hang out in the kitchen before breakfast, swiping food, making jokes with the cooks. He hadn't been there in a long time, certainly not since he became king. The cooks were startled to have a visit from him. They were pleased and a little unsure of themselves at first, but he put them at ease. He started telling jokes, and it was just like old times.

The king was kind of hanging out by the door a lot. He was definitely at the door when a line of shaven-haired ascetics showed up, wearing ochre robes, and carrying begging bowls. There was a pot of food that was prepared especially to give to those who came begging at the palace door. And the king was right there.

He grabbed the pot and the ladle, and went up to the first of the monks. As he completely filled the begging bowl, he whispered to the monk, “I need to see your abbot. I will be at your monastery shortly after midday.”

The monk was a bit surprised to hear this. He nodded almost imperceptibly, keeping his eyes downcast. The king then went down the line, completely filling everyone else's begging bowl. Then the king returned to telling jokes.

The monks and a couple of nuns had no choice but to go immediately back to the monastery. They couldn't continue on alms round. They had no more room in their bowls.

The king continued to hang out and joke with the cooks for another five or ten minutes, and then he said, “We have many things to do. We must be going.”

He did indeed have many things to do. It was a busy morning. But when midday arrived and it was time for his break, he hurried to his private quarters. He changed his clothes into, not his regal look, but clothes so that he just looked like an ordinary person in his kingdom, and snuck out of the palace via one of the secret tunnels he had discovered as a boy.

He appeared in an out-of-the-way alley, and headed quickly through the city streets, out through the city gates, beyond the suburbs, into the forest. When he was about 500 bow lengths from the last outskirts of the city, he came to the monastery. There was a monk out

front, walking up and down, doing walking meditation. The king approached the monk. The monk stopped. The king said, "I have an appointment with your abbot."

The monk bowed slightly, and signaled for the king to follow him. He took the king into the monastery, and then into a small building with a nice little room. The monk pointed to a chair for the king to sit in. The king remained standing. The monk left.

About a minute later, the abbot of the monastery appeared. He was smiling and he said, "Oh, great king, it's so nice of you to come to visit us. But I suspect this is not just a social call. Is there something we can do for you?"

The king said, "A member of my household needs to learn to read."

"Why have you come to see us? You have many people in your court that could teach this fellow to read."

"It's a woman."

"Oh, a woman needs to learn to read. Interesting."

"It's a woman of the lowest caste."

"Oh, a woman of the lowest caste needs to learn to read. Very interesting."

"You're Buddhist, right? You don't believe in the caste system."

"That's correct. We know everyone is equal."

"So you could send a monk or two over who could teach this woman to read. Yes?"

The abbot shook his head, "No, no. It would be very inappropriate for a monk to be in close quarters with a woman to teach her to read. We're celibate. This is not permitted."

"But you have nuns here, right? Do they know how to read?"

"Oh, yes, of course. The nuns know how to read."

"So you could send a nun or two to the palace to teach this member of my household how to read, yes?"

"Well, we could, but you see, we have a problem. The roof of the temple is in very poor repair. It leaked terribly during the last monsoon and we have to repair it before the new monsoon comes. Only we're monks, we're not carpenters. We don't really know what we're doing and we don't have the right tools or the right materials. So, well, all of the monks are busy trying to repair the roof. And because they're busy, then the nuns have taken over their duties, and I really can't spare anyone at this time."

The king said, “But if the roof were to be repaired, then the monks would be able to resume their duties and you could spare a nun or two who could teach this member of my household to read?”

“Oh yes, but we don't know how long it's going to take for the roof to be repaired.”

“Perhaps the roof could be repaired with skilled carpenters immediately. And then you could send a nun on alms round tomorrow who could stay and teach this member of my household to read.”

“Oh yes, if there was somebody else taking over the job, we could do that.”

“Very well, said the king. Thank you very much. Your help is much appreciated.”

The king hurried back to the city, back through the gates, back through the streets, back to the entrance to his secret tunnel, and reappeared in his private quarters. He quickly changed back into his royal garments, grabbed a few bites to eat, and went to find the chief carpenter. When he found him, he said, “The abbot of the Buddhist monastery at the edge of the woods has done me a fine favor. In return, I want you to gather a team, go out there, and repair the roof of their temple – it leaked quite badly during the last monsoon. Can you start this project this afternoon?” The head carpenter was a little surprised but said that he could. The king headed off to his afternoon duties, which seemed to drag on for an interminable while.

Eventually, toward sunset, he could return to his private quarters. Very quickly, he was at the dancer's room. He stepped through the curtain. She was standing by the window looking out. He cleared his throat.

She didn't even look. She just said, “Don't you ever knock?”

The king stammered, “I found someone to teach you to read.”

The dancer turned around. She smiled. She said, “Good. When the lessons begin, you may return.” She turned back to the window.

The king, “Uh,…”

She glanced over her shoulder. “Are you still here?”

The king left. Who was this woman? What power did she have over him? I mean, he was the king. He could do anything he wanted. He didn't sleep well that night.

The next morning, before breakfast, he was in the kitchen again, joking with the cooks. One of his most trusted female servants had come with him. She was the one standing by the door when the monks and a couple of nuns showed up. The king was on the other side of the room telling this elaborate joke-story, and everybody was paying attention to the king. They didn't notice that one of the nuns didn't leave with the rest of the monastics.

The king finished his story, and hung out for a few more minutes. Then “We have much to do. We must be going.” And he left.

Getting a little ahead in the story, he did return to the kitchen from time to time, hung out with the cooks, told them funny stories, sometimes gave extra amounts of food to the monks and nuns when they came on alms round. But that day, he had many duties, and the day again seemed interminable.

At lunch, he was back in his private quarters. He was tempted to look in to see how things were going with the dancer's reading lessons, but he restrained himself. The afternoon was very tedious and very long. Finally, towards sunset, he had done what he needed to do that day and returned to his private quarters.

This time when he approached the dancer's room, he did knock. There was a cheerful, “Come in.” He stepped into the room. She was standing on her head on the other side of the room. She gracefully dropped lightly to her feet. She strolled across the room and embraced him. Well, let's just say the king and the dancer enjoyed themselves.

This became the pattern. The king had much to do during the day; the dancer had reading lessons during the day. And around sunset, well, the king and the dancer enjoyed themselves. It wasn't too long before the king inquired, “So, how are the reading lessons going?”

“Oh, very well.”

“Can you read me something?”

“Oh, yes.” She picked up a book, and opened it. “Thus have I heard...” Of course, the only books the Buddhists had were the suttas – the words of the Buddha – and other Buddhist teaching material.

This is what developed. At sunset, the king would show up. They would enjoy themselves, and then the dancer would read to the king. The dancer found what she was reading very interesting and began practicing what she was reading, with the help of her tutor-nun. Then she seduced the king into also practicing what she was reading. Sometimes they didn't even bother to enjoy themselves. They just studied what she was reading and practiced.

The king loved and trusted the dancer so much that one day he showed her a secret passage out of the palace. On her first solo foray out of the palace, of course she headed to the monastery – which she continued to visit frequently. She also frequented the market, made friends there, and brought back delicious finds for the two of them to enjoy. She was no longer a caged bird – but she chose not to fly away.

This went on for 12 years. They were 12 wonderful years for this kingdom. The monsoon always came on time. There always was plenty of water. The kingdom prospered. There was no corruption. The king seemed very happy and very wise.

But everything changes, and it was discovered that the king was consorting with a low-class woman, a woman of the lowest caste. This was a scandal, the likes of which that we in the West cannot appreciate. The rumor flashed through the palace, through the royal court, through the city. “The king is consorting with a low-caste woman.”

People were unsure what to do. Some wanted to have them both executed for such a bestial thing. But they had to admit the king had been pretty good. He had made a good life for everyone in his 16 years on the throne. The highest ranking people in the town approached the king. They said, “You have done an evil thing. You must leave and take that woman with you.” Ninety minutes later, the king and the dancer were mounted on two of the finest horses in the kingdom, leading a third pack horse behind them. They rode out of the gates of the city. They were last seen headed towards the jungle.

Now the king had been neglecting his harem, so he didn't have an heir. Thus there was a power struggle, and corruption returned. The monsoon didn't come that year until very late; it was very weak, and there was hunger. The next 12 years did not go well.

There were multiple kings, shall we say. There were kings becoming suddenly ill and dying, or ambushed, or... Sometimes the monsoon came on time, sometimes it didn't. Corruption flourished in the court. After 12 years, there was a sword fight in the throne room between two men who both wanted to be king, and they managed to injure each other badly enough so that they both died.

At this point, one of the older ministers stepped in and said, “No, this cannot go on. There have been people who in secret are wondering, 'Whatever became of that old king? He may have had strange taste in women, but you know, life was good when he was here. Maybe we should invite him back?' Is he even still alive? I mean, they went off into the jungle. I have heard your rumors. I have heard you mention this. I think it's time we sent out a search party to see if we can find the old king and see if he'll come back and be our king again, even if he does have strange taste in women.”

So they gathered together a search party, and they headed towards the jungle. Along the way, they inquired, “Did you see the king when he left?”

“Oh, yes, many years ago.”

“Which way did he go?”

“Oh, that way.” That way was always deeper into the jungle until there were no more people to inquire of. No one had seen the king or the dancer recently. The search party set up camp in the jungle and began searching.

This went on for three weeks, with nobody finding anything. The youngest member of the search party was only 15. He'd been just a toddler when the king had left. Then one day, he happened upon a clearing. In the clearing, there was a cottage, a nice little cottage with smoke coming out of the chimney. And there was a pond, a big pond – really a small lake.

Seated in front of the cottage were two people, a man and a woman, sitting cross-legged, just sitting there, not moving. The young searcher crept as close as he dared. Was this the king? He didn't really remember what the king looked like; besides, the king had been gone for 12 years. Was this the dancer? She was certainly a very beautiful woman.

At that point, the two people opened their eyes. They looked in his direction. He ducked down. The woman stood up. She took two golden goblets, walked to the edge of the lake, and then walked across the surface of the water to the middle of the lake. She held the two golden goblets in one hand, bent down and scooped up some water from the center of the lake. And up came a golden stream of nectar higher than her head. She held out the two goblets and filled both of them. She then walked back across the surface of the water to the man and handed him a goblet. They toasted each other. Then they turned and raised their glasses in the direction of the young searcher. And then they drank. The young searcher had seen enough. He quickly snuck away and rushed back to the camp.

When he told his story, everybody laughed at him. They asked him what kind of mushrooms he'd eaten that day. But he insisted on his story, and finally he said, "All right, who found anything better than this?" Well, they had to admit nobody had found anything.

So the next day, the search party, following the youngster's lead, came upon the clearing, and it was just as he had described. There was a nice little cottage with smoke coming out of the chimney, a small lake, and two people seated in front. Only they weren't cross-legged on the ground; they were seated at a large table, heavily laden with food. They both stood up and gestured for the searchers to come. The search party came and were astonished. It is the king and the dancer – and food the likes of which they hadn't seen, well, certainly in three weeks. It was a rich spread. The king and the dancer welcomed them, "Please have a seat. Enjoy." They had a fine feast while the king and dancer asked loads of questions about many people from the court and the kingdom.

And finally, the leader of the search party said, "Great king, we would like you to come back and be our king again."

The king thought about it for a moment and said, "If I come back and be your king, she will be your queen," gesturing to the dancer.

"Yes, yes, she will be our queen."

"Hmmm. But we like it here. We like what we've learned here. Being a king is a lot of work."

"Your people need you. There's been a lot of corruption. It has not gone well. Your people need you. Please come back."

The king said he would think about it. He said, "Last night there was a new moon. On the morning after the next full moon, I will return to the city and give you my answer."

It illustrates two very important points. The first is about power, temporal power, kingly power, political power, personal power. The first night that the king came to the dancer's room, he had the power to do whatever he wanted; but he was wise enough not to abuse his power. If he had abused his power, it would have never turned out like it did. It's very important to recognize the power you have and to use it wisely, and to recognize the limitations of the power that you have.

The second point is about sensual pleasures. Sometimes I hear people say something like, “Well, I'm spiritual, I don't get angry anymore.” or “I'm spiritual, I don't pursue sensual pleasures anymore.” Well, yeah, if you're fully awakened, I'll buy that.

But for most people, well, no. For everybody I've met who says one of these, they're just suppressing their anger, they're just suppressing their desire for sensual pleasures. These are indeed hindrances on the spiritual path when you're trying to meditate. The Buddha made this very clear – he spoke frequently about the five hindrances. The first hindrance is the desire for sensual gratification, and the second one is ill will and hatred.

These must be overcome in order to practice effectively. However they don't have to be fully uprooted in order to practice effectively. But they also can't run rampant. The king had sensual desire, no doubt about it, but he was able to rein in his power and not act on that desire; he was able to learn from what he wanted.

We all have sensual desires. Can you use that energy on the spiritual path? Can you use that energy in a way that improves your life and the lives of those around you? It's not about suppressing what's there; it's about using what's there wisely. The word associated most often with sense pleasures and spiritual practice is tantra. Tantra does not mean sexuality, that's a mistake.

Tantra originally referred to weaving. When you're doing a weaving, there's a thread that runs through the whole of the weaving. That's the tantra. Tantra means continuity. Can you make your life a continuity of practice? Can you take your sensual desires, and even your anger, and make them part of your continuity of practice? One possibility is including them in your mindfulness practice, instead of judging them or suppressing them. Another possibility is a return to the opening quote of the story “In the heart of the Great Jewel, Passion is transformed into pure awareness.” This line points to the spirit of “using what's there wisely.” It's about beginning to orient to, or even feel into, the possibility that the essence of craving or anger is inseparable from pure awareness, while the forms of these energies differ. Everything which arises has emptiness at its core, yet it appears in a variety of forms. Through this understanding, it is important that you not abuse either of these. You must not use your power for personal gain at the expense of anyone. And you must not pursue sensual pleasures at the expense of anyone. And “anyone” includes yourself.

The best guard against abuse in sensual matters is love, real love, *agape*, *mettā*. When the king stepped into the dancer's room that first time, it wasn't love that he had; it was lust, *eros*. But he was wise; he didn't abuse his power, he wasn't blinded by his lust. He saw in the dancer someone unlike anyone he had ever encountered before. At that point, of course, he

never imagined what their relationship would become. And because the dancer had her power, she was able to transform his lust into actual *mettā*.

When the king captured the king across the river and his army, the king could have had all of them slaughtered in revenge for the death of his father. That would have insured the kingdom across the river became a sworn enemy. But he acted with compassion. He spared all their lives, made them destroy the diversion, and insured that the king from across the river lost enough face (and internal support) so that those from across the river never again caused any trouble for his kingdom.

The king's first two visits to the kitchen definitely had an ulterior motive. But he continued to bring joy to the kitchen with his continued occasional visits.

After their exile, out of compassion, the dancer and the king returned to the kingdom to see if it was possible to help the people. But the people were blinded by their prejudice – and lost out.

Equanimity, an even mindedness, underpinned the king's actions. He was able to “look on” carefully enough to not act out of his lust. He was equanimous enough to be merciful to the captured army. He was equanimous enough to be able to trust that the dancer would not flee her cage when he showed her the secret passage. They were equanimous enough to leave their hermitage and return to the kingdom to see if they could be of help. These are examples of the Brahma Viharas in the story of the dancer and the king. We can take these as examples of ways to orient our own lives and our own hearts in the direction of these Brahma Viharas.

So what happened to the dancer and the king after they embraced and faded from view? Was that the end of them? Did they manifest in some higher realm? Did they return to the cottage in the jungle? It may be my version of the Dombipa story – but I'll let you write your own ending. Just make sure it's based in love, compassion, joy and equanimity.

May your spiritual journey be blessed!

Resources

– Books:

Legends of the Mahasiddhas by Keith Dowman with illustrations by Robert Beer, State University of New York Press (1986), ISBN-10 0887061605, ISBN-13 978-0887061608

– Internet:

A short version of the original story from **Legends of the Mahasiddhas** by Keith Dowman can be found here: <https://keithdowman.net/books/masters-of-mahamudra.html#dombipa>

Images from the original story (Fig1 & Fig 2): <https://teahouse.buddhistdoor.net/women-in-indian-tantric-buddhism-part-two/>

Dombipa, The Tiger Rider: <https://medium.com/acala-vidyaraaja-publishing/dombipa-the-tiger-rider-a-journey-beyond-caste-and-convention-7fe3a4b1a39c> – another image, but the complete story requires membership at <https://medium.com>

More images: <https://mandalas.life/2020/explaining-dombi-heruka/>

Wisdom Library on Dombipa: <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/dombipa>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Results from the 38 Four Brahma Vihara Suttas

The table below outlines the results of practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas in the 33 suttas where a result can actually be determined:

RESULT: In [DN 13](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas after keeping the precepts, guarding the senses, being content with little, overcoming the hindrances, and practicing the jhānas leads to rebirth in the Brahma Realm – according to this sutta given to lay people.

RESULT: In [DN 17](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in a Brahma realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person.

RESULT: In [DN 19](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in a Brahma realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person.

RESULT: In [DN 25](#), the 4 Brahma Viharas are part of a set of practices given that lead to liberation.

RESULT: In [DN 26](#), the 4 Brahma Viharas are part of a set of practices given that lead to liberation.

RESULT: In [MN 7](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to full liberation when combined with a pure mind and the jhānas.

RESULT: In [MN 40](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to inner peace. Additionally, if one can realize the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom, one can end the *āsavas*, thereby one becomes fully awakened.

RESULT: In [MN 43](#), practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to the limitless release of the heart-mind.

RESULT: In [MN 50](#), the 4 Brahma Viharas ward off Mara.

RESULT: In [MN 52](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas are 4 of 11 practices that can lead to either full awakening or the state of non-returner. [This is the same discourse as [AN 11.16](#)]

RESULT: In [MN 55](#), after practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas, one eats almsfood untied, uninfatuated, unattached, seeing the drawback, and understanding the escape.

RESULT: In [MN 62](#), practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas overcomes ill-will, cruelty, discontent, and repulsion.

RESULT: In [MN 83](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in a Brahma realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person.

RESULT: In [MN 97](#) is a rare instance of someone taking rebirth due to deathbed kamma. Once again practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to being reborn in a heavenly realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person.

RESULT: In [MN 99](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to union with Brahma. And again this sutta is given to a lay person.

RESULT: In [MN 127](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to the limitless release of the heart-mind.

RESULT: In [SN 41.7](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to the limitless release of the heart-mind.

RESULT: In [SN 42.8](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to any limited karma one has done not remaining or persisting there. This phrase “any limited actions one has done doesn’t remain or persist there” is rather unclear. The Pāḷi is *pamāṇakatam* (limited; lit. made measured) *kammam* (action; deed) *na tam* (not that) *tatrāvasissati* (remains there; is left over there), *na tam* (not that) *tatrāvatiṭṭhatī* (lingers there; persists there; remains there; lit. stands down there). So a more literal translation would be “any measured karma is not left over there, nor persists there.” This would seem to indicate that practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas is a way to overcome “bad karma.” Now I do not think this means that the results (*vipāka*) of bad karma are eliminated! But I do think it means that practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas will reprogram your mind so that any tendency towards “bad karma” (unwholesome actions) will be overcome and thereby eliminate future unwholesome actions.

RESULT: In [SN 42.13](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in a heavenly realm – according to this sutta given to a lay person.

RESULT: In [SN 46.54](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to various releases of the heart-mind – but there seems always to be a higher freedom available. Again, this is a sutta given to lay people.

RESULT: In [AN 3.63](#), all postures become divine.

RESULT: In [AN 3.65](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to being reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm, if there is another world – according to this sutta given to lay people. Whether or not doing evil leads to more evil, one is purified.

RESULT: In [AN 3.66](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to welfare and happiness, and to the end of the *āsavas*, awakening.

RESULT: In [AN 4.125](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in the company of the retinue of Brahma.

RESULT: In [AN 4.126](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to rebirth in the company of the gods of the pure abodes.

RESULT: In [AN 4.190](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to attaining to Brahma. This does not appear to be full awakening for the monastics; if taken literally, the 4 Brahma Viharas lead to rebirth in the realm of Brahma.

RESULT: In [AN 5.192](#) Brahma Vihara practice makes one equal to Brahma.

RESULT: In [AN 6.13](#) correctly practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to escape from ill will, escape from thoughts of harming, escape from discontent, and escape from desire.

RESULT: In [AN 8.63](#), a monk practiced the 4 Brahma Viharas in conjunction with the 4 Jhānas and the 4 establishments of mindfulness and soon realized the supreme culmination of the spiritual path – liberation.

RESULT: In [AN 10.219](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to non-return unless one has penetrated to a higher freedom.

RESULT: In [AN 11.16](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas are 4 of 11 practices that can lead to either full awakening or the state of non-returner. [This is the same discourse as [MN 52](#)]

RESULT: In [AN 11.982](#) - 1151, where the Brahma Viharas are referenced, they can lead to the complete understanding ... complete ending ... giving up ... ending ... vanishing ... fading away ... cessation ... giving away ... letting go

of

greed ... hate ... delusion ... anger ... acrimony ... disdain ... contempt ... jealousy ... stinginess ... deceitfulness ... deviousness ... obstinacy ... aggression ... conceit ... arrogance ... vanity ... negligence.

RESULT: In [Snp 1.3](#) practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas leads to not being upset by anything in the world.

The following 5 suttas do not really specify a result of practicing the 4 Brahma Viharas:

[DN 33](#) Reciting in Concert *Saṅgītisutta*

[DN 34](#) Up to Ten *Dasuttarasutta*

[MN 118](#) Mindfulness of Breathing *Ānāpānassatisutta*

[AN 1.395-401](#) “If a mendicant develops the second ... third ... or fourth abs...”

[AN 1.495-574](#) They develop the faculty of faith together with the first absorp...

Appendix 2: The Book of Ruth

1:16 Naomi said, “Return home, my [widowed] daughters[-in-law]. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?”

12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—

13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”

18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

...

2:2 Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.”

3 So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The Lord be with you!”

“The Lord bless you!” they answered.

5 Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?”

6 The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi.

7 She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.”

8 So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me.

9 Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

11 Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.

12 May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

13 “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

14 At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.”

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.

15 As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her.

16 Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

17 So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. [about 30 pounds or about 13 kilograms]

18 She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

19 Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!”

Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said.

20 “The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one

of our guardian-redeemers.”

21 Then Ruth said, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’”

22 Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.”

23 So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

3:1 One day Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for.

2 Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.

3 Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking.

4 When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

5 “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered.

6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

7 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down.

8 In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

9 “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

10 “The Lord bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.

11 And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.

12 Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I.

13 Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

15 He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then she went back to town.

16 When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her

17 and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

18 Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

...

[The other guardian-redeemer declines, saying in 4:6 “I cannot redeem it because might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.”]

...

4:13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

14 The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!

15 He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”

16 Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him.

17 The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!”

Appendix 3: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Micah, Zechariah – Love and Compassion

Proverbs 3:3-4 Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Zechariah 7:9-10 Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.

Appendix 4: Luke 10:25-37 – The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ [Deut. 6:5]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [Lev. 19:18]”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan,^[53] as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two denarii [a denarius is a day's wages] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

53. “Samaritans were the ethnic and religious enemies of the Jews. They were the half-Jew, half-Gentile offspring that came about when the Assyrians, who had conquered the northern part of Israel, forced the Jews there to intermarry with them. The Jews thought of Samaritans

as racially defiled half-bloods.” From <https://jdgrear.com/the-good-samaritan-isnt-who-you-think-he-is-2/> [Back]

This parable might have more impact today if it were entitled “The Good Palestinian.”

Appendix 5: 1 Corinthians 13 – Love

13.1 If I speak in the languages of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to be sacrificed, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

10 but when wholeness comes, what is in part disappears.

11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

14.1a Make love your aim.

Appendix 6: John, Romans, Colossians, 1 Peter, 1 John – Love

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than they lay down their life for their friends.

Romans 12:9–10 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Colossians 3:12–14 Put on then (as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved) compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

1 John 4:20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Appendix 7: Matthew 5 – The Beatitudes

Matthew 5.2 Jesus said:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Appendix 8: Matthew, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 John – Compassion

Matthew 7:12 Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.

Romans 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:13-14 Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

1 John 3:17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Appendix 9: Romans and 1 Corinthians – Muditā

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Appendix 10: Rumi and Hafez – Love

The Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz have much to say about love. Below is a small selection of their teachings.

Rumi

“I looked in temples, churches, and mosques. But I found the Divine within my heart.”

“Love rests on no foundation. It is an endless ocean, with no beginning or end.”

“Goodbyes are only for those who love with their eyes. Because for those who love with heart and soul there is no such thing as separation.”

“The only lasting beauty is the beauty of the heart.”

“This is a subtle truth: Whatever you love, you are.”

“You have within you more love than you could ever understand.”

Hafiz

“Now Hafiz is infinitely rich, but all I ever want to do is keep emptying out my emerald-filled pocket upon this tear-stained world.”

“I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the Astonishing Light of your own being!”

“Love sometimes wants to do us a great favor: hold us upside down and shake all the nonsense out.”

“We are People who need to love, because Love is the soul's life, Love is simply creation's greatest joy.”

“Time is a factory where everyone slaves away earning enough Love to break their own chains.”

Resources

– Books:

List of books by Rumi: <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/rumi>

List of books by Hafez: <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/hafez>

I recommend starting with the first book in each list.

Appendix 11: Leigh Hunt – Love

Abou Ben Adhem

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
“What writest thou?”—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”
“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, “I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.”

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

— Leigh Hunt (1838)

Appendix 12: H.H. Dalai Lama XIV – Love, Compassion, Joy

“Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive.”
— Dalai Lama XIV, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*

“Compassion can be roughly defined in terms of a state of mind that is nonviolent, nonharming, and nonaggressive. It is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility, and respect towards others.”

— Dalai Lama XIV, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*

“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

— Dalai Lama XIV, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*

“As I see it, spirituality has two dimensions. The first dimension, that of basic spiritual well-being-by which I mean inner mental and emotional strength and balance-does not depend on religion but comes from our innate human nature as beings with a natural disposition toward compassion, kindness, and caring for others. The second dimension is what may be considered religion-based spirituality, which is acquired from our upbringing and culture and is tied to particular beliefs and practices.

...

“It is by moving beyond narrow self-interest that we find meaning, purpose, and satisfaction in life.”

— Dalai Lama XIV, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*

“Joy is the reward, really, of seeking to give joy to others. When you show compassion, when you show caring, when you show love to others, do things for others, in a wonderful way you have a deep joy that you can get in no other way. You can't buy it with money. You can be the richest person on Earth, but if you care only about yourself, I can bet my bottom dollar you will not be happy and joyful. But when you are caring, compassionate, more concerned about the welfare of others than about your own, wonderfully, wonderfully, you suddenly feel a warm glow in your heart, because you have, in fact, wiped the tears from the eyes of another.”

— Dalai Lama, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*

“The goal is not just to create joy for ourselves but, as the Archbishop poetically phrased it, 'to be a reservoir of joy, an oasis of peace, a pool of serenity that can ripple out to all those around you.' As we will see, joy is in fact quite contagious. As is love, compassion, and generosity. So being more joyful is not just about having more fun. We're talking about a more empathic, more empowered, even more spiritual state of mind that is totally engaged

with the world.”

— Dalai Lama XIV, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*

“It seems that scientific research reaches deeper and deeper. But it also seems that more and more people, at least scientists, are beginning to realize that the spiritual factor is important. I say 'spiritual' without meaning any particular religion or faith, just simple warmhearted compassion, human affection, and gentleness. It is as if such warmhearted people are a bit more humble, a little bit more content. I consider spiritual values primary, and religion secondary. As I see it, the various religions strengthen these basic human qualities. As a practitioner of Buddhism, my practice of compassion and my practice of Buddhism are actually one and the same. But the practice of compassion does not require religious devotion or religious faith; it can be independent from the practice of religion. Therefore, the ultimate source of happiness for human society very much depends on the human spirit, on spiritual values. If we do not combine science and these basic human values, then scientific knowledge may sometimes create troubles, even disaster...”

— Dalai Lama XIV, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying: An Exploration of Consciousness*

“Some people think that cultivating compassion is good for others but not necessarily for themselves, but this is wrong. You are the one who benefits most directly since compassion immediately instills in you a sense of calm (nowadays medical researchers have shown in scientific studies that a calm mind is essential for good health), inner strength, and a deep confidence and satisfaction, whereas it is not certain that the object of your feeling of compassion will benefit. Love and compassion open our own inner life, reducing stress, distrust, and loneliness.”

— Dalai Lama XIV, *How to See Yourself As You Really Are*

Resources

– Books:

List of books by the H. H. Dalai Lama: <https://www.goodreads.com/search?q=dalai+lama&qid=>

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Glossary

This Glossary is also available at <https://leighb.com/bv/glossary.htm> which may be useful to avoid flipping back and forth to this page in the book.

- Abhidhamma* – the third division of the Pāli Canon, consisting of a deconstructionist, metaphysical view of the Buddha's doctrine
- abhijānamāno* – experientially understand [Ayya Khema's definition of an insight]
- adosa* – non-hatred; kindness
- anattā* – literally “not-self”; coreless, empty
- anicca* – inconstancy, ever-changing, impermanent
- anuddaya* – compassion; sympathy; lit. compassion state
- anukampā* – care; having compassion (for); taking pity (on); lit. trembling alongside
- anumodanā*: fem. rejoicing in the merit (of); appreciating; giving thanks; lit. being happy beside [anu + √mud + *anā]
- anupubbāsikkhā* – gradual (or graduated) training
- appamatta* – diligent (in); vigilant (about); careful (about); attentive (to); heedful
- appāṭihīrakatam* – adj. groundless; unfounded; unsound; worthless; not very impressive; lit. not made to be carried back [*appāṭihīra* + *kata*]
- arahant* – A worthy one, meaning fully awakened
- atamayata* – non-concocting; non-fashioning; literally: not made of this
- avera* – kindness; friendliness; lit. not hatred
- avihimsāya* – harmlessness
- avijjā* – not knowing
- ākiñcaññam* – no-thingness
- ākiñcaññāyatana* – the Base of Nothingness, aka the 7th Jhāna
- ākiñcaññasambhavam* – source of no-thingness
- āsava* – intoxicant; also translated as outflow, influx, effluent, canker, taint
- āsā* – expectation, hope, wish, longing, desire
- bhava* – becoming; existence
- bhavataṇhā* – craving for becoming
- brahmavihāro* – divine abode, divine abiding, divine dwelling
- citta* – heart/mind
- dāna* – giving, gift
- dhātu* – element, aspect
- dhamma* – The Dhamma, doctrine, phenomena, mind objects
- Dhamma* – the teaching of the Buddha and also “the way things truly are”
- dukkha* – bummer,^[54] unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering
- hiri* – moral shame, an innate sense of shame over moral transgression
- jara* – decay, decrepitude, old age
- jātim jaram* – birth and old age
- jhāna* – literally: meditation; one of four (later eight) states of concentration
- jhāyati* – to meditate

kamma, kammaṃ – action; deed

karuṇā – compassion, kindness

kathāṅkathāhi – confusion; doubt; questioning; lit. asking how?

kathāhi – talk; speech; conversation; discussion; argument; debate; lit. talk

kāya – group, heap, collection, body

khandha – one of the five aggregates: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhārā* & *viññāṇa*

khantiyā – acceptance

loka – world

manas – mind, though sometimes heart

mettā – loving-kindness, unconditional love

mogha – useless; pointless; futile; ineffective; unprofitable; vain; stupid; foolish; lit.

empty

mudita - pp. happy; glad; lit. became soft [$\sqrt{\text{mud}} + \text{ita}$]

muditā – appreciative joy

muni – wise person

nandi – delight; pleasure; enjoyment; relish

na taṃ – not that

nāma – name

nāma-rūpa – name-and-form, sometimes translated as “mind-and-body” or “mentality-and-materiality,” especially in the context of dependent origination

ñāṇa – knowledge

nibbāna – literally “not burning,” i.e., not burning with the fires of greed hate or delusion; the goal of the holy life, the realization that brings an end to *dukkha*

nibbuto – verb form of the noun *nibbāna*

nidānā – source; foundation

nivāraṇa – prevention

nīvaraṇa – hindrance

ottappa – moral dread, fear of the results of wrongdoing

paggaha – exertion

pamāṇakatam – limited; lit. made measured

pamatta – heedless, negligent

pāmojja – gladness, worldly joy

paññā – wisdom

papañca – mental proliferation

passambhati – calms down; relaxes; becomes quiet; becomes tranquil

pāra – the other side, the far shore

pārāyana – going to the far shore

paroparāni – above and beyond; high and low; superior and inferior

phassa – contact, sense-contact

pīti – glee, rapture

piya – love; friendship; friend; dear one; loved one

rata – delighted (with); devoted (to); taking pleasure (in); pleased (with); enjoying

rāja – king

rūpa – materiality, body

sabbe – all

samsāra – worldly existence, the infinitely repeating cycles of birth, dukkha, and death
samādhi – indistractability, concentration
samphapalapa – gossip or idle chatter; useless speech
saṅkhāra – concoction, fabrication, fashioned, literally: making together
saṅkhāya – reflecting; considering; appraising
saññā – conceptualization, perception, naming, identifying
sati – mindfulness, remembering to be here now; presence; recollection; awareness;
 keeping in mind
sīla – morality, ethical behavior
sukha – happiness/joy
sutta – discourse, teaching
Suttas – the second division of the Pāli Canon, consisting of discourses given by the
 Buddha or his closest disciples
tanhā – craving (literally “thirst”)
tathāgata – one arrived at suchness, a fully awakened one
tatrāvasissati – remains there; is left over there
tatrāvatitṭhatī – lingers there; persists there; remains there; lit. stands down there
 thru – through
upadhi – assets; foundation; basis; ground; substratum; support; things laid by which
 one relies on as supports
upādāna – clinging
upakkilesā – impurity; imperfection; flaw; blemish; corruption
upekkhā – equanimity; literally: gaze upon
vagga – a section or chapter of a canonical book
vedanā – the initial categorization of a sense input as pleasant, unpleasant or neither
 unpleasant or pleasant; valence
vibhavatanhā – craving for not becoming
vicāra – examining
vihara – dwelling
viññāṇa – consciousness; occasionally it means “mind” literally “divided knowing”
vipāka – result of action (*kamma*, karma)
virāga – dispassion; literally: “not-colored”
Visuddhimagga – a 5th century CE commentary on the Buddha's teachings
vitakka – thinking
yāna – going, proceeding
yathābhūtañāṇadassana – knowing and seeing things as they are, knowing and seeing
 what's actually happening

54. See the essay “*Dukkha* is A Bummer” at <https://leighb.com/bummer.htm> for a detailed exploration of why “bummer” is a good translation of dukkha. [Back]

About the Author



Leigh Brasington was born and raised in Mississippi. In 1971, he graduated from [Rhodes College](#) in Memphis with a B.A. in mathematics, with honors, Phi Beta Kappa. He then began a more than 35 year career of “[playing with computers for money.](#)” After he moved to San Francisco in 1974, he began taking extended time to [travel](#): 3 years around the world in '79-'81, a year traveling in Australia and Asia in '88, 6 months around the world in '98, plus numerous shorter trips overseas as well.

He began meditating in 1985 and eventually became the senior North American student of [Ven. Ayya Khema](#). She authorized him to teach and he began leading residential retreats in 1997. He has taught jhānas, dependent origination, and insight practices in over [one hundred and seventy residential retreats](#).

Near the end of 2008, he retired from software engineering and over the next three years, he spent twenty months in retreat at the Insight Meditation Society's [Forest Refuge](#). This was a wonderful time of deepening his understanding of the Dhamma.

He is the author of the books
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[Dependent Origination and Emptiness: Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes](#)
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On The Way To The Far Shore: Q&A with The Buddha on the Way to Awakening.**