

The Practice of Lovingkindness Meditation

The Four Brahma-Viharas

Metta, or lovingkindness, is the first of the four brahma-viharas. "Brahma-vihara" is a Pali term meaning "heavenly abode" or "best home." The Buddha taught that practicing these four qualities leads to "the liberation of the heart which is love." According to other teachings, the four brahma-viharas constitute an ideal state of mind, in which the practitioner feels completely at home, both within and without. They are:

- * Lovingkindness (metta): More closely translated, this means both "gentle - as in a gentle rain that falls indiscriminately on everything - and "friendship." Thus, metta (lovingkindness) refers to a steady, unconditional sense of appreciation and respect that touches both yourself and all beings.
- * Compassion (karuna): Compassion is our caring human response to suffering. The compassionate heart is non-judgmental and free of guilt, for it recognizes its own torment - as well as that of any other being - as deserving of tenderness. This ability to respond fully to our own and others' pain is the second brahma-vihara.
- * Sympathetic Joy (mudita): This is the realization that others' happiness is inseparable from our own. Thus, the practitioner rejoices in the joy of others, and is not threatened by another's success. Sympathetic joy is often said to be the most difficult of the brahma-viharas to practice consistently.
- * Equanimity (upekkha): Equanimity creates an essential ground for the other three. Equanimity is the clear understanding that change is the fabric of life. Recognizing that pain and pleasure flow endlessly through human experience, the practitioner relinquishes control over that which is inherently uncontrollable.

The Benefits of Lovingkindness Meditation

- ❖ You will sleep easily
- ❖ You will wake easily
- ❖ You will have pleasant dreams.
- ❖ People will love you.
- ❖ Devas and brahmas (celestial beings) will love you.
- ❖ Devas will protect you.
- ❖ External dangers will not harm you.
- ❖ Your face will be radiant.
- ❖ Your mind will be serene.
- ❖ You will die unconfused.
- ❖ You will be reborn in happy realms

The Practice of Lovingkindness Meditation

Traditionally, metta (lovingkindness) meditation comprises six graduated steps:

1. Reflect on your own good qualities, generating feelings of love toward yourself.
2. Direct these feelings toward a benefactor: someone who has given you unconditional love.
3. Extend your metta toward a good friend
4. Send lovingkindness to a neutral person; someone you neither strongly like nor dislike.
5. Surround someone you find difficult - who may even have harmed you - with the same feelings of love (this is not the weakness of complacency, but the strength of understanding)
6. Extend your lovingkindness to all beings, without exception.

You may find it helpful to use the following four phrases as aids in generating metta:

- ❖ May I be free from danger.
- ❖ May I have mental happiness.
- ❖ May I have physical happiness.
- ❖ May I have ease of well-being

Repeating these phrases, or variants of them that you create for yourself, is one traditional method for generating lovingkindness. When directing metta toward others, adapt the phrases accordingly: "May you be free from danger." If you find it too difficult to send metta to others, try including yourself: "May we be free from danger."