



The Buddha gave the world two incomparable gifts. The first was the insight that we can change our own emotions. While it may seem that emotions “just happen,” the Buddha taught that in fact we create and shape our own emotional lives — albeit unconsciously, on the whole — and that we are responsible for our own emotional responses. As the first lines of a famous Buddhist text say,

Our experiences are preceded by the heart, led by the heart, and created by the heart. If we speak or act with an impure heart, suffering follows even as a cartwheel follows the hoof of the ox.

Our experiences are preceded by the heart, led by the heart, and created by the heart. If we speak or act with a pure heart, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs.

These verses point to the possibility of us making choices in the way we respond to life's situations, and this is the first teaching of the heart's wisdom: *You cannot choose what happens to you in life, but you can learn to choose how you respond emotionally to those events.* Between the stimulus of perceiving any given situation and the response with which we act through body, speech, and mind, there is a gap in which we can make choices about our responses. If we respond with mindfulness, compassion, and insight we can change the whole nature of our experience, reducing the amount of frustration we experience in life, and instead create greater degrees of wellbeing and happiness for ourselves and others. The key to living well is to educate the heart, and to bring about the unfolding of the heart's wisdom.

The second gift that the Buddha bequeathed to us is a set of practical tools for effecting emotional change. These tools comprise various meditation techniques that help us to purify the mind so that we can live in happiness, fulfillment, and contentment. Four of those meditation practices directly address the need to purify the heart, and help us to cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimous love. Together these meditation practices are known as the Divine Abidings (*Brahmaviharas*) or the Immeasurables (*aparimanas*).

Let's start with a few practical points. First, in these meditations you'll be calling to mind a number of people and wishing them well. In order to avoid indecision it's a good idea to think about who these people will be before you start the meditation practice. Second, you don't have to use the same people in every meditation, although there's nothing wrong with doing so if you think that's appropriate. Third and last, you might want to visit www.wildmind.org to read about how to develop a meditation posture or whether they like us and to read more background on the first of these practices, the Development of Loving-kindness.

Developing Loving-kindness

In the *Metta Bhavana* or Development of Loving-kindness practice we cultivate an attitude of care and love for, in turn:

1. Ourselves
2. A good friend
3. A "neutral person"
4. A person with whom we experience difficulty
5. All sentient beings

Metta, or loving-kindness, is an attitude of wanting others to be happy. This wanting others to be happy is not conditional on what other people do, or whether they like us, or whether we like them. All too often in daily life we wish people well when they do things that we like and wish them to suffer unhappiness (or at least wish to deny them happiness) when they act in ways contrary to our wishes. Genuine loving-kindness comes without strings. We don't demand that people agree with us, or help us, or like us, or be like us. Loving-kindness simply starts with an awareness that all beings want to be happy and free from suffering.

The traditional method for cultivating loving-kindness is to drop phrases evoking loving-kindness repeatedly into the heart, letting the heart's wisdom respond naturally to the words that we're saying. The phrases used in the guided meditation on this CD are:

"May you be well. May you be happy. May you be free from suffering."

It's not essential to stick with the phrases outlined here. If you want to come up with phrases of your own that are more evocative for you, that's fine. But whichever phrases we use, we begin the meditation by becoming mindful of the body, mind, and heart, and then slowly begin dropping our chosen phrases, one by one, into the heart. And we continue to do this, with patience, noticing when the mind has wandered and choosing to come back to the practice over and over again.

In time we find that the heart has a natural sensitivity to the attitude of loving-kindness that is at the heart of these phrases. Every thought that passes through the mind has some effect on our emotions. And as the steady drip of water will eventually fill a vase, so do these words begin to affect how we feel, filling the heart with a sense of caring and kindness. The heart has its own intelligence and finds ways to let love emerge. It starts to feel lighter, warmer, brighter. We don't have to — nor can we — make a deliberate effort of will to change our emotions. It's enough to keep our awareness gently focused on the heart while continuing to repeat the phrases. It can help too to imagine a sense of openness and warmth around the heart, and to recall times when we have felt particularly expansive and loving.

Stage One. We begin with cultivating loving-kindness towards ourselves. It's said that if we don't appreciate ourselves then we can't really appreciate others. And it does seem to be true that we find intolerable in others those characteristics that we cannot tolerate in ourselves. For many people the first stage is the hardest, but it's important that we do it, and learn to be comfortable wishing ourselves well. **Stage Two.** In moving on to wishing a friend well, we are connecting with the metta that we already have for that person. In order to keep the practice simple, we should pick someone that we're not sexually attracted to and that is of roughly the same age as ourselves. **Stage Three.** Cultivating an attitude of loving-kindness towards a neutral person — someone we don't have much of an emotional connection with — is where we begin to challenge

our normal emotional responses, and this continues in the following stage, (**Stage Four**) where we cultivate loving-kindness for someone with whom we have difficulty.

We learn an important aspect of the heart's wisdom by cultivating loving-kindness for a friend, a neutral person, and a person we find difficult, which is that *we can cultivate loving-kindness for a person regardless of whether we like them, dislike them, or have no feelings towards them at all.*

Stage Five. In the final stage of the practice we cultivate loving-kindness for all sentient beings — all beings that are capable of experiencing suffering. The essence of this stage is to cultivate a sense of expansive loving-kindness. We don't have to (and can't) picture all sentient beings, but we can cultivate a heart that radiates loving-kindness. We've probably all had the experience at one time or another of being in a really good mood, where we're able to cope with anything that happens with good grace, where we're friendly and helpful towards people we don't know, and where even dealing with people we normally find difficult doesn't dent our basic positivity. That is ultimately the state that we're cultivating. To use an image, it's as if the heart becomes like a blazing fire that throws its heat out in all directions. The fire sends its warmth and light towards all who approach it, whether friend, neutral person, or someone we don't get on with. The heart too can be like this.

As well as using phrases it can help to visualize. We can use imaginative imagery to help us contact and bring forth the natural loving-kindness that exists in the heart. We can imagine the heart radiating light. We can imagine the heart opening like a flower, vulnerable, tender, open, and beautiful. We can imagine giving gifts to the friend, neutral person, and the person with whom we have difficulty. Remembering a time we experienced peace, love, and happiness can help us to contact loving-kindness for ourselves, and this loving-kindness, once aroused, can then be radiated towards others.

Developing Compassion

When our loving-kindness meets suffering it undergoes a kind of transmutation — an alchemical change from one form to another. It becomes compassion, or *karuna*.

In the Compassion (or *Karuna Bhavana*) practice there are six stages, in which we cultivate loving-kindness for:

1. Ourselves
2. A suffering person
3. A good friend
4. A "neutral person"
5. A person we experience difficulty with
6. All sentient beings

If you back up a little you'll notice I said that in the compassion meditation practice we cultivate *loving-kindness* rather than *compassion*. This is because compassion is not something we directly

cultivate. Instead we cultivate loving-kindness and then allow that loving-kindness to meet suffering. It's from that meeting that compassion arises.

First Stage. So we begin in the normal way by cultivating loving-kindness for ourselves. We can use the same loving-kindness phrases we dropped into the heart in the Metta meditation: *May I be well. May I be happy. May I be free from suffering.* And we can use imagery, as before. **Second Stage.** But in the second stage we call to mind someone who is suffering. We don't have to think of someone who's in extreme suffering, someone who's on their deathbed or who has a painful illness. *Everyone* suffers. This is a wisdom that we can cultivate. *We all suffer.* This is something the heart can learn. Not getting what we want is suffering. Being stuck with things in our lives that we don't want is suffering. Hatred is suffering. Craving is suffering. Fear is suffering. Confusion and doubt are suffering. And of course illness, old age, bereavement, and death are suffering. So we can call to mind just about anyone, as long as we are aware that this person has some specific source of suffering in his or her life right now. It may in fact be best, when we're first learning this practice, to set aside for now people who are in extreme suffering. It may be that we'd be taking on too much and that we should practice contemplating more workaday sufferings to begin with. We can come back to those other people later.

So we call to mind someone who is suffering and we wish them well. We let our loving-kindness meet an awareness of that person's pain, distress, or dissatisfaction. We don't try to wallow: "Oh, the suffering, how awful it is!" Nor to we feel a sense of superiority ("I'm okay, but poor you, you're not"). Superiority breeds pity, not compassion. Everyone suffers, and so we cultivate loving-kindness with an empathetic awareness that just as we suffer, so too is this other person suffering. And just as we wish to escape suffering, so does this other person.

Now we might think at first that contemplating another's suffering would be to take on a burden; that it would be "heavy" and depressing to dwell on the fact that another person is in pain, but in fact that's not usually the case. What we find is that we actually feel more alive, more connected, and more fulfilled as we connect more fully with this person. There's something very meaningful about being connected with another person through recognizing our mutual tendency to experience pain and frustration. We are, after all, social animals, and in isolation we are not complete. We are creatures who need and desire to be connected to others, and this meditation practice can help us to appreciate and strengthen our own connectedness. This is another wisdom that we can learn: *in sharing another's suffering we find ourselves becoming more fulfilled.*

In the **Third Stage** we call to mind a friend in the same way we did in the loving-kindness meditation, and we wish them well. But this time we wish them well with an awareness that the friend suffers. Similarly in the **Fourth Stage** and the **Fifth Stage** we call to mind a neutral person and a person with whom we experience conflict, and we wish them well while being aware of their sufferings.

Now the knowledge that everyone suffers can be a revelation. We often forget that others do in fact suffer. Rather than experiencing others as they are, we often experience only our reactions to them. And we confuse these two things. If we are bored with the neutral person we think they're uninteresting. If we're frustrated with the person we find difficult then we think they're a difficult and awkward person.

Often we don't penetrate beyond our own projections and see the pain that lies within the other person — the unmet needs, the unfulfilled longings, the disappointments, the sorrow of life not being quite right, the fear of rejection. Once we begin to acknowledge this inner world we find that the heart starts to soften. We judge less. We forgive more. We understand. And in the **Sixth Stage** of the meditation we call to mind more and more living beings, human and animal, and wish them well while being aware that *we all suffer*. Those we love or who love us suffer. Those we don't know or normally don't care about suffer. Those who dislike us or whom we dislike suffer too. *We all suffer*. It's hard to recognize all this and still feel angry or impatient with others.

Once we've been practicing this meditation for a while, we may start to find that the first stage — cultivating loving-kindness for ourselves — develops new dimensions. We may find that we become more mindful of our own sufferings. So what does it mean to be more mindful of our own sufferings? It doesn't mean that we're suffering more or becoming more miserable. On the contrary, we may begin to realize that much of the time we don't acknowledge our suffering, but instead repress it or indulge in it. Indulging in our suffering means that we get caught up in depressive rumination in which we tell ourselves over and over again how miserable we are, what a hard time we're having, what an unfair place this world is. Rather than simply acknowledging our suffering we multiply it by reiterating it again and again.

We can repress our suffering in many ways, but one of the commonest is to move quickly on to another emotion. We have a brief surge of inner pain and then we immediately look for someone or something to blame and we become angry. We lose sight of the initial pain, and in fact we become very good at avoiding it. Another form of repression involves us trying to "fix" our pain. Often repression of suffering is accompanied by a sense of shame, as if suffering is a sign of failure. And we want to avoid that sense of failure by cheering ourselves up, by applying some antidote to "cure" the suffering.

When we develop a mindful attitude to our own suffering we become content to just sit with our discomfort, allowing it to be there. We have empathy for ourselves, and recognize suffering as an important part of who we are, an important part of being human. So we even welcome our suffering, in the same way as we would welcome in a friend who is in pain. Just as, at our best, we'd sit down and patiently try to find out what's going on with our friend (not prying, but giving him or her gentle encouragement to open up), so with our own suffering we're prepared to wait and see what unmet need has led to the arising of pain. And just as we don't judge a friend for being in distress, we don't judge our pain as a sign of failure. Instead our pain becomes a teacher, pointing out to us what needs are not currently being met in our lives. So here's another wisdom to come out of these practices: *approached with mindfulness pain becomes a skilled teacher, pointing out with exquisite clarity what's wrong with our approach to life.*

Developing Empathetic Joy

In the next meditation too there is an alchemical transformation of loving-kindness. Here we allow our loving-kindness to meet others' happiness, and to be transmuted into joy. But it's not just ordinary pleasure or happiness, which can sometimes exist in a kind of blithe unawareness of others. It's empathetic joy, or *mudita*, where we allow our own heart to resonate with the happiness that others feel.

Sometimes in life we experience envy, where we're wishing to deny happiness to others. We think of happiness as existing in a fixed quantity in the world, so that if someone else has it we're being deprived. But that's not what happiness is like. Here we're cultivating the wisdom of rejoicing in others' happiness and wellbeing. And we do this by using a slightly different phrase in the meditation practice.

"May you be well. May you live in joy. May your happiness grow and deepen."

And there are, as in the compassion meditation, six stages:

1. Ourselves
2. A happy, ethical person
3. A friend
4. A neutral person
5. A person we experience conflict with
6. All sentient beings.

And as with compassion, we're not deliberately cultivating empathetic joy. We instead merely cultivate loving-kindness while being aware of the joy and happiness that others feel. This is a very appreciative practice. We don't just become aware of the happiness others experience, but we cultivate an awareness and appreciation of the positive qualities that gave rise to that happiness. Real happiness comes from qualities such as honesty, friendliness, integrity, honesty, and forbearance. The buzz of pleasure we get when we exert our power over others and the elation we get through having been selfish aren't true happiness because they're feelings without a foundation. When we coerce others we may feel an intoxicating rush of potency, but then we'll experience the anxiety that we may lose our power, that others may get revenge or find a way to thwart our plans. When we experience elation as a result of getting something we've craved, we inevitably experience disappointment later, when the next "new thing" comes along or when the thrill of the new has faded.

So this is part of the heart's wisdom — that *happiness arises from goodness*. And in this practice we acknowledge the goodness and happiness that manifests in our own being and in other beings.

Stage One. So the first stage is the same as in the previous practices: we cultivate loving-kindness towards ourselves. It would be fitting in this stage to appreciate our own positive qualities, and as we consider those qualities we repeat, "May I be well. May I live in joy. May my happiness grow and deepen." We wish ourselves both happiness and the causes of happiness. **Stage Two.** In the next stage we call to mind someone we consider to be happy as a result of possessing positive qualities. This is a person who we think of as being basically happy. We wish them well as we bear in mind their good qualities, and we wish that those good qualities grow. You might want to name some of those qualities.

And so you could say something like, "I appreciate your kindness" or "I appreciate your patience." In time our metta will turn into a deep sense of appreciation. **Stage Three.** Moving into the third stage of the practice we call to mind a good friend, and particularly call to mind whatever is positive about the friend's life: their good qualities, their good fortune, and the happiness that

they experience. We're calling to mind what we most love and appreciate about them. **Stage Four.** With the neutral person you may not know much about them. However you may have seen them exhibiting positive qualities like kindness or patience. But even if you know nothing about this person you can still wish them well and hope that they experience happiness and manifest the causes of happiness. **Stage Five.** It can be hard to think about a person's good qualities when we're in conflict with them, but that's all the more reason to do it! Often if we look closely we'll realize that we've overlooked positive qualities because we don't want to see them. Sometimes this can make it difficult for us to wish this person well. But if consider that our troubles with this person are a result of actions of theirs that we believe to be unethical, then we wish not only that they be happy but that they have the causes of happiness. And the causes of happiness are ethically positive qualities and actions. In **Stage Six** we once again direct our loving-kindness outwards into the world, embracing all beings. Although the news we hear every day dwells on people's cruelty to each other, the world is actually held together because of trust, love, and respect. Those qualities are statistically far more common than the criminal behavior that fills our newspapers. Appreciating the prevalence of those qualities helps us to recognize and value them, and in doing so we become happier ourselves.

Developing Equanimity

Equanimity is the most difficult of the *Brahmaviharas* to understand, let alone practice. Equanimity, or *upekkha*, means "even-mindedness." There are two principle levels of understanding of what equanimity is, both of which feature in the *Brahmaviharas* meditations.

The first kind of equanimity is concerned with being accepting and non-judgmental towards our own experience. When difficult experiences arise, we simply accept that they are present. We don't judge them as being bad and we don't rush to fix them or get rid of them. We simply note that they are present. And it's the same with neutral and pleasant experiences. We treat all experiences as being not good or bad, but in an even-minded way see them simply as different kinds of experiences. In this way our emotions don't run out of control because we don't react to our experience with either grasping or aversion.

This aspect of equanimity — acceptance of our experience — is very important in all of the *Brahmaviharas* meditations. In the loving-kindness practice, for example, we commonly experience a sense of discomfort when we call to mind the person with whom we have difficulties, pleasant feelings when we contemplate the friend, and neutral feelings (boredom) with the neutral person. Now the heart's untrained response to these feelings is to react with aversion to unpleasant feelings, craving towards pleasant ones, and confusion (often leading to craving or aversion) with neutral ones. Equanimity, on the other hand, just allows pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings to exist without trying to cling to them or push them away. So this is the first way in which equanimity is important in these four meditations, and it applies equally to all four practices. In developing equanimity we are developing the wisdom of *not reacting to our experience*.

While the first of the two forms of equanimity applies to how we respond to our own feelings, the second applies to how we respond to happiness and suffering in others. Since the defining characteristic of equanimity is that it accepts without judgment, without either clinging to or

pushing away our experience, we should look at some of the ways that it's possible for judgment, clinging, and aversion to sneak into the *Brahmaviharas* meditations.

Approval and resentment. When we contemplate happiness and suffering in others there is a tendency for approval and resentment to arise. Sometimes we find ourselves disapproving of those who suffer. We think of them as being to blame for their own suffering (especially mental suffering) and we think that they just need to pull themselves together. We assume that we have all the answers. Sometimes we find ourselves thinking that people who are suffering are special in some way — that suffering confers a special status. Sometimes we're resentful that others are happy or think that they shouldn't be happy (perhaps because we regard them as bad people). We can get upset because we think that someone who isn't happy should be. All of these attitudes end up causing us suffering, as aversion and clinging always do.

Resisting the inevitability of suffering. A more general form of resentment and aversion is where we resist the very existence of suffering. Here, we're not experiencing resentment towards *people* who are suffering, but we are experiencing resentment towards *suffering itself*. It's easy to slip into a mindset where we think suffering should not exist. This is quite natural, because suffering after all is deeply unpleasant and because we do wish that others be free from suffering. But suffering is inevitable. With our own children, for example, our first wish is that they do not suffer. But of course they do. And so our next wish is that they develop the strength of character, the equanimity, the patience, to bear with their suffering as long as it may exist. We can even come to recognize that not all suffering is inherently bad. Again we can see this with our children: there is suffering and pain associated with illness which is quite accidental and which we wish they could avoid, and then there is the suffering and pain which is associated with their development – for example, the frustration of learning to walk or of learning to communicate – which is an inherent part of learning to be an independent human being. That kind of suffering cannot and should not be avoided.

Needing to recognize when things are out of our control. A famous saying runs, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.” This saying beautifully expresses an important aspect of equanimity, which is the recognition that we cannot fix all the world's problems. We can wish that all beings be well, and we can wish that all beings be free from suffering, but suffering will still exist and we have to learn to be comfortable with the discomfort of that knowledge.

As in the development of loving-kindness practice, there are five stages:

1. Ourselves
2. A neutral person
3. A friend
4. A person we experience conflict with
5. All sentient beings.

Stage One. As with the other practices in this series we start by cultivating loving kindness towards ourselves. So we are not directly cultivating equanimity, but are cultivating loving kindness. And as we do this we remain accepting of whatever our experience happens to be. If we

have painful feelings we simply accept them without becoming despondent. If we have pleasant feelings we accept those without becoming elated. We don't judge our experience as being good or bad. We neither cling to it nor push it away. We simply accept it as it is. And we recognize that all of our experiences are impermanent. They arise and they fall. They come to be and they pass. Recognizing this is a major part of the cultivation of equanimity.

In **Stage Two** we move on to wish a neutral person well. We start with the neutral person because with equanimity we're dealing with issues of attachment and aversion, approval and disapproval, acceptance and non-acceptance, and those qualities exist less in our attitudes to the neutral person than they do with either the friend or the person we have difficulties with. We don't directly cultivate equanimity for the neutral person but instead wish them well while bearing certain reflections in mind. We cultivate metta with an awareness that the neutral person experiences both suffering and happiness. And we repeat, "May you be well. May you be free from suffering. May you find equanimity and peace." And as we do so we reflect that the neutral person is responsible for most of his or her own suffering and happiness. Suffering arises when the neutral person's thoughts, words, and actions are based on craving or aversion. When those thoughts, words, and actions are instead based on mindfulness, kindness, and acceptance, happiness instead arises. So we acknowledge the reality of this as we wish the neutral person well, without judgment. Ultimately we're wishing for the neutral person not just happiness and the absence of suffering, but the equanimity to be able to live with life's ups and downs in an even-minded way.

Stage Three involves doing exactly the same with a friend — bearing in mind that the friend experiences both happiness and suffering, and that those experiences primarily arise on the basis of the his or her own actions. Of course we'd rather our friend only experienced happiness and not suffering, but that's not possible, and so we cultivate an attitude of acceptance towards the ups and downs of the friend's life. We also accept that the friend's happiness is ultimately outside of our control. The friend is ultimately responsible for his or her own happiness.

In **Stage Four** we repeat these reflections for someone with whom we have difficulties. This person is sometimes happy, and sometimes experiences suffering. And this happiness and suffering arise in dependence upon conditions, which are principally the person's own actions.

And then finally in **Stage Five** we cultivate loving-kindness towards all beings, while reflecting that all

experience both happiness and suffering. Ultimately both happiness and suffering are impermanent phenomena that arise and then pass away in dependence upon conditions. The foremost of those conditions are people's own thoughts, speech, and actions. So we contemplate the arising and falling of happiness and suffering, based on these actions, without judgment.

As we contemplate all beings and wish that they be well, happy, free from suffering, and equanimous, we can imagine that we're looking out over a vast ocean where waves are rising and falling. No matter how much we may wish it otherwise, the waves will continue to rise and fall, and the challenge in the Development of Equanimity practice is for us to accept this truth. This is the ultimate liberation, to abide in a state of loving-kindness, compassionately understanding that beings suffer, joyfully knowing that they experience happiness, and insightfully knowing that

happiness and suffering are both impermanent states that rise and fall like waves on the ocean.

Equanimity brings with it a profound sense of peace, and is paradoxically both the highest form of happiness and beyond both happiness and suffering, beyond pleasure and pain. It is a profound acceptance of reality.

Equanimity is not indifference. In this practice we are not retreating to an unfeeling state where we disconnect from others. We still love. We still respond compassionately to suffering and delight in joy. The practice of equanimity includes love, compassion, and joy, combines them all, and then imbues them with insight into the impermanent nature of the world we live in. It's the wisest form of love.

These then are the *Brahmaviharas* or divine abidings. They are a progressive series of meditations, starting with loving-kindness, exploring the interaction of loving-kindness with suffering and joy, and culminating in an insightful appreciation of the impermanent nature of both the highs and the lows that occur in our lives.

Through the practice of the *Brahmaviharas* we can come to a profound sense of peace, an almost divine release from expectations, from judgment, from disappointment, and from the desire to control what is beyond our power to control. With this release arises a profound sense of calmness and a deep and enduring level of patience, a powerful sense of stillness and non-reactivity. With the help of these practices we can arrive eventually at the deep acceptance of reality that is the fullness of the heart's wisdom

The Heart's Wisdom

The *Brahmaviharas*, also known as the Divine Abidings or Immeasurables, are four Buddhist meditation practices that help us arouse the heart's wisdom.

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These four guided meditations begin with an announcement of the track title, followed by approximately 30 seconds of silence to allow you time to set up your meditation posture.

Disc One

1. Development of Loving-kindness (37:15)
2. Development of Compassion (35:44)

Disc Two

3. Development of Empathetic Joy (35:48)
4. Development of Equanimity (34:45)

These guided meditations are led by Bodhipaksa, a Buddhist teacher and author who has been practicing since 1982. You can read more about meditation at Bodhipaksa's site, www.wildmind.org.

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