

Brahmaviharas Study Session

May 29, 2021

Study Materials

Study Session Outline

- Review of historical development
- What are the Brahmaviharas
- Current practices
- Discussion topics (from Thanissaro)
- Incorporating in the path

Source Texts

- Pali Cannon- throughout Sutta Nikaya
 - (Note:
 - Metta Sutta is in the Suttanipata, not one of the four core texts (transl. Bhikkhu Bodhi).
 - Treatise on Lovingkindness is in the Patisambhidamagga, also not one of the four core texts (transl. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, pu. Pali Text Society))
- Visudhimagga (Path of Purification, transl. Bhikkhu Nanamoli)

Contemporary Texts and Commentaries

- Sharon Salzberg – Lovingkindness – The Revolutionary Art of Happiness
- Christina Feldman – Boundless Heart
- Sayadaw U Pandita – The State of Mind Called Beautiful
- Bikkhu Analayo – Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation
- Thanissaro – The Sublime Attitudes

Summary

		Far Enemy/ Antidote For	Near Enemy	Benefit/ Purpose
Metta	Goodwill/kindness/ lovingkindness	Anger/Hate	Greed/Lust	Patience/Ward off ill will
Karuna	Compassion	Cruelty	Grief/ Righteous Anger	Ward off cruelty
Upeka	Sympathetic Joy	Jealousy/Aversion	Home-life joy	Cultivating joy
Mudita	Equanimity	Greed/Resentment	Unknowing	All beings responsible for their own karma

Discussion Topics (From Thanissaro)

- Mettā means love or lovingkindness
- The practice of the brahmavihāras is a form of prayer
- Mettā is best expressed by acts of uncritical tenderness
- The brahmavihāras are part of the innate nature of the human heart
- Other people deserve our mettā, either because of their own innate goodness or because we are all one
- The brahmavihāras are purely heart qualities, needing no input from the analytical mind
- The brahmavihāras are, in themselves, a complete path to awakening.

Sutta Extracts

Metta Sutta (from Sutanipata, Khp 9)

[Gil Fronsdal translation]

To reach the state of peace
One skilled in the good
Should be
Capable and upright,
Straightforward and easy to speak to,
Gentle and not proud,
Contented and easily supported,
Living lightly and with few duties,
Wise and with senses calmed,
Not arrogant and without greed for supporters,
And should not do the least thing that the wise would criticize.

[One should reflect:]

“May all be happy and secure;
May all beings be happy at heart.
All living beings, whether weak or strong,
Tall, large, medium, or short,
Tiny or big,
Seen or unseen,
Near or distant,
Born or to be born,
May they all be happy.
Let no one deceive another
Or despise anyone anywhere;
Let no one through anger or aversion
Wish for others to suffer.”
As a mother would risk her own life
To protect her child, her only child,
So toward all beings should one
Cultivate a boundless heart.
With loving-kindness for the whole world should one
Cultivate a boundless heart,
Above, below, and all around
Without obstruction, without hate and without ill-will.
Standing or walking, sitting or lying down,
Whenever one is awake,
May one stay with this recollection.
This is called a sublime abiding, here and now.

One who is virtuous, endowed with vision,
Not taken by views,
And having overcome all greed for sensual pleasure
Will not be reborn again.

[Thanissaro Bikkhu translation]

This is to be done by one skilled in aims
who wants to break through to the state of peace:
Be capable, upright, & straightforward,
easy to instruct, gentle, & not conceited,
content & easy to support,
with few duties, living lightly,
with peaceful faculties, astute,
modest, & no greed for supporters.
Do not do the slightest thing
that the wise would later censure.
Think: Happy, at rest,
may all beings be happy at heart.
Whatever beings there may be—
weak or strong, without exception,
long, large,
middling, short,
subtle, blatant,
seen & unseen,
near & far,
born & seeking birth:
May all beings be happy at heart.
Let no one deceive another
or despise anyone anywhere,
or through anger or irritation
wish for another to suffer.
As a mother would risk her life
to protect her child, her only child,
even so should one cultivate a limitless heart
with regard to all beings.
With goodwill for the entire cosmos,
cultivate a limitless heart:
above, below, & all around,
unobstructed, without hostility or hate.
Whether standing, walking,
sitting, or lying down,
as long as one is alert,
one should be determined on this mindfulness.

This is called a Brahmā abiding
here & now.
Not taken with views,
but virtuous & consummate in vision,
having subdued desire for sensual pleasures,
one never again
will lie in the womb.

Boundless Radiation

Dhiga Nikaya #13:

The Buddha said this:

“It’s when a Realized One arises in the world, perfected, a fully awakened Buddha ... That’s how a mendicant is accomplished in ethics. ... Seeing that the hindrances have been given up in them, joy springs up. Being joyful, rapture springs up. When the mind is full of rapture, the body becomes tranquil. When the body is tranquil, they feel bliss. And when blissful, the mind becomes immersed.

They meditate spreading a heart full of love [aka lovingkindness] 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 directions. In the same way, when the heart’s release by love has been developed and cultivated like this, any limited deeds they’ve done don’t remain or persist there. This is a path to companionship with Brahmā.

Furthermore, a mendicant meditates spreading a heart full of compassion ...

They meditate spreading a heart full of rejoicing ...

They meditate 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, they spread a heart full of equanimity 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 directions. In the same way, when the heart’s release by equanimity has been developed and cultivated like this, any limited deeds they’ve done don’t remain or persist there. This too is a path to companionship with Brahmā.

Alternative version (AN IV.125):

“Monks, there are these four types of individuals to be found existing in the world. Which four?

“There is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction—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. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there—fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that—then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the devas of Brahma’s retinue. The devas of Brahma’s retinue, monks, have a life-span of an eon. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.

“Again, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there—fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that—then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the Abhassara devas. The Abhassara devas, monks, have a life-span of two eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.

“Again, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with appreciation. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with appreciation: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there—fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that—then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the Subhakinha devas. The Subhakinha devas, monks, have a life-span of four eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.

“Again, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there—fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that—then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the Vehapphala devas. The Vehapphala devas, monks, have a life-span of 500 eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.

“These are four types of individuals to be found existing in the world.”

Other Sutta Extracts

AN 10:176

“And how is one made pure in three ways by mental action?”

[1] There is the case where a certain person is not covetous. He doesn’t covet the belongings of others, thinking, ‘O, that what belongs to others would be mine!’

[2] He bears no ill will and is not corrupt in the resolves of his heart. [He thinks,] ‘May these beings be free from animosity, free from oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease!’

[3] He has right view and is not warped in the way he sees things: ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is how one is made pure in three ways by mental action.”

AN 6:13

“This is the escape from ill will: goodwill as an awareness-release....

“This is the escape from viciousness: compassion as an awareness-release.

...

“This is the escape from resentment: empathetic joy as an awarenessrelease.’

“This is the escape from passion: equanimity as an awarenessrelease.”

—

AN 5:161

“When you give birth to hatred for an individual, you should develop goodwill for that individual... you should develop compassion for that individual... you should develop equanimity toward that individual...you should pay him no mind & pay him no attention... you should direct your thoughts to the fact of his being the product of his actions: ‘This venerable one is the doer of his actions, heir of his actions, born of his actions, related by his actions, and has his actions as his arbitrator. Whatever action he does, for good or for evil, to that will he fall heir.’ Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.” —

AN 11.16 below (substantially the same in Patisambhidamagga (Bk 12 of Khuddaka Nikaya) Treatise XIV)

Eleven Advantages from Metta practice

"Monks, eleven advantages are to be expected from the release (deliverance) of heart by familiarizing oneself with thoughts of loving-kindness (metta), by the cultivation of loving-kindness, by constantly increasing these thoughts, by regarding loving-kindness as a vehicle (of expression), and also as something to be treasured, by living in conformity with these thoughts, by putting these ideas into practice, and by establishing them. What are the eleven?

1. "He sleeps in comfort. 2. He awakes in comfort. 3. He sees no evil dreams. 4. He is dear to human beings. 5. He is dear to non-human beings. 6. Devas (gods) protect him. 7. Fire, poison, and sword cannot touch him. 8. His mind can concentrate quickly. 9. His countenance is serene. 10. He dies without being confused in mind. 11. If he fails to attain arahantship (the highest sanctity) here and now, he will be reborn in the brahma-world.