

The *Brahmaviharas* or Four Divine Abodes

In meditation, there are two basic methods: (1) practices that develop the 'head' aspects (such as analysis and concentration); and (2) practices that open the 'heart'. Both head and heart skills are needed. Gaining skill in both techniques allows one to work more effectively in different circumstances.

For this reason, the four divine abodes (*brahmaviharas*), or boundless states, complement well the mindfulness of breathing technique (which is a core practice of Buddhist meditation). The boundless states (referred to in the Pali Canon) are:

- *Metta*: goodwill – desire for the welfare and happiness of all beings (opposite: ill will).
- *Karuna*: compassion – empathy with the suffering of others and the desire to remove the suffering (opposite: cruelty).
- *Mudita*: appreciative joy – joy produced by others' success and good fortune (opposite: envy, discontent, aversion).
- *Upekkha*: equanimity – impartiality towards living beings (opposite: attachment and resentment).

(For the above four points, kind permission was granted by the Noble Path Buddhist Education Fellowship. The source was Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi's Lectures at Chuang Yen Monastery. <http://www.noblepath.org/index.html>)

The *brahmaviharas* or the divine abodes may be expressed as follows:

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.
May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
May all beings never be separated from the supreme joy
that is beyond all sorrow.
May all beings abide in equanimity free from attachment and aversion.

These four sublime expressions of love:

- Are the essential nature and radiance of the enlightened heart.
- Provide the answer to all situations we may encounter in our lives.
- Purify the heart and generate positive energy that is beyond measure.
- Transform our delusion, greed, self-centeredness, and negativity.
- Heal the afflictions of anger, hatred, loneliness, sorrow, and unhealthy attachments.

Let these four divine abodes (qualities of love):

- Saturate our minds thoroughly and become our inseparable companions whereby we are mindful of them in all our daily activities.
- Help to fulfil what the Buddha tells us: "Cherish all living beings with a boundless heart, radiating kindness over the entire world."
- Abide in us so that we remain in this loving state of being at all times – a state which the Buddha calls the "sublime abiding" (divine abode).

Source: The above bulleted points are used with permission from Neil Cohen at Naljor Prison Dharma Service, PO Box 1177, Mount Shasta CA 96067.
<http://www.naljorprisondharmaservice.org/pdf/FourThoughts.htm>

Why Extend GOODWILL Toward Everyone?

(OR, Why Should I Wish Anyone Ill Will?

Why Should I Not Wish Anyone Goodwill?)

1. In not wishing goodwill toward others, I am content, or just as happy, to allow them to continue suffering. Is this what I intentionally want? No.
2. We are all inter-connected in this universe. If I extend ill will toward others, sooner or later, I will be harming and suffering myself – it will come back to me. Is this what I want? No.
3. If I continue to extend ill will toward others, I am programming or conditioning my mind in a deleterious and harmful manner. These negative seeds will sprout and multiply (the law of harvest states that "we reap what we sow" and also "we reap far more than we sow"). Is this what I want to inflict on myself? No.
4. Thoughts involve energy – my ill-will is going to hurt the other person, even at a subtle, sub-conscious level. Every thought or feeling – whether positive or negative – is a tiny pulse of energy which flows out into the universe, and that pulse of energy will reach the person I am thinking about. Positive energy can help the person; negative energy can harm the person. Would I wish to be hurt in that way? No. Then, why should I inflict hurt in this manner on anyone else?
5. The conclusion is that to extend ill will toward anyone else is harmful not only to the other person, but also very harmful toward my own self. It is never a good investment of mental energy! Do I want to continue harbouring ill will? No.

Why Extend COMPASSION Toward Everyone?

(OR, Why Would I Withhold Compassion from Anyone?
Why Should I Not Forgive Someone?)

1. Don't I realize that all humans are imperfect and will act in unskillful ways at times?
2. Have I not at times hurt myself and others through my words, actions, and even thoughts (both knowingly and unknowingly) out of my own ignorance, confusion, anger, fear, and pain?
3. Likewise, have not others at times also hurt themselves and others through their words, actions, and even thoughts (both knowingly and unknowingly) out of their own ignorance, confusion, anger, fear, and pain?
4. Therefore, deeply knowing and realizing how we have all acted unskillfully at times, cannot I not but have compassion for all others?
5. Having heartfelt compassion for all others, can I not also extend forgiveness toward all?

Why Extend EMPATHETIC JOY Toward Everyone?

(OR, Why Would I Withhold Extending Empathetic Joy toward Anyone?
Why Should I Feel Jealous and Envious?)

1. Have I not at times experienced the pure joys of life – the generosity and kindness of others, the pleasure of achievement, the triumphant overcoming of obstacles, and the warmth and love of others?
2. Have I not wished for such joys to continue and even increase?
3. Likewise, have not others at times also experienced the joys of life – the generosity and kindness of others, the happiness of achievement, the successful overcoming of obstacles, and the warmth and love of others?
4. Have they also not wished for such joys to continue and even increase?
5. Therefore, why would I withhold extending empathetic joy toward anyone – and instead feel jealous and envious?

Why Extend EQUANIMITY Toward Everyone?

(OR, Why Would I Dislike Anyone?

Why Should I Like Some and Dislike Others?)

1. We humans are all living on this one planet, seeking happiness (or freedom from suffering).
2. I desire to be accepted by others; therefore, why shouldn't I extend acceptance toward others, and instead dislike them?
3. Where is there room for dislike or liking which puts down the one and elevates the other?
4. Accept that all human beings have shortcomings. Is this a reason for disliking some, and liking others instead?
5. Realize and accept that some people are more skilled in pursuing true happiness than others – but this is not a reason to denigrate some.

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