

# **The Four Brahma Viharas**

## **Metta Sutta**

### **Metta Meditation**

#### **The Four Divine Abidings \***

- Loving-Kindness / Metta
- Compassion / Karuna
- Sympathetic joy / Mudita
- Equanimity / Upekkha

\* Or the Four Brahma Viharas

These states of mind are called Brahma or God-like, the highest states. They are called Viharas or abodes or abidings, because they should become the mind's constant dwelling-places where we feel "at home". Our minds should become saturated by them, our inseparable companions, and we should be mindful of them in all our common activities.

#### **Loving-Kindness / Metta**

The desire for all sentient beings, unconditionally and without exception, to be well and happy.

#### **Compassion / Karuna**

The desire for all sentient beings, unconditionally and without exception, to be free from suffering.

## Sympathetic joy / Mudita

To be happy and rejoice at the virtue, happiness and success of others.

## Equanimity / Upekkha

To accept and be unaffected by the  
8 Worldly Conditions :

Gain and loss

Honour and disgrace

Praise and blame

Pleasure and pain

These are interlinked and provide mutual support for each other :

Metta guards karuna against partiality, and prevents upekkha falling into indifference.

Karuna reminds metta and mudita that there is still suffering, and prevents complacency and petty happiness.

Mudita prevents metta being overwhelmed by suffering, and softens upekkha.

Upekkha is the guiding force and restraining power for the other three states to retain their balance and wisdom.

## Metta Sutta

A group of monks had gone deep into the forest for intensive meditation, for their 3 month rains retreat. The tree spirits initially welcomed the monks as they thought that they would stay for only a few days. Unhappy with this situation, the spirits then frightened the monks with dreadful noises and stenches to chase them away.

Unable to concentrate on their meditation and with many falling ill, the monks then went back to the Buddha to seek his advice. The Buddha then taught them the Metta Sutta to radiate loving-kindness to the spirits. As a result of this goodwill, the spirits welcome the monks back and protected them throughout their retreat.

The Metta Sutta can be divided into two aspects :

- The moral conduct necessary for the successful practice of metta.
- The method of practice of metta meditation.

### **Moral conduct :**

He who is skilled in his good and who wishes to attain that state of calm should act thus :

He should be able, upright, perfectly upright; obedient, gentle and humble.

Contented, easily supportable, with few duties, of light livelihood.

Controlled in senses, discreet, not impudent; not be greedily attached to families.

He should not commit any slight wrong such that other wise men may censure him.

### **Method of practice :**

May all beings be happy and secure; may their hearts be wholesome!

Whatsoever living beings there be :

Weak or strong, omitting none, long, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen.

Those dwelling far or near;  
those who are born and those who are to be born –  
May all beings, without exception, be happy minded!

Let none deceive another, nor despise any person  
whatsoever in any place.

In anger or ill-will, let none wish harm to another.

Just as a mother would protect her only child, at the risk of  
her own life; even so let him cultivate a boundless heart  
towards all beings.

Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world :  
Above, below and across, without any obstruction, without  
any hatred, without any enmity.

Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as he is  
awake, he should develop his mindfulness.

This, they say, is the Highest Conduct here.

Not falling into Error; virtuous, and endowed with insight; he  
discards attachment to sensuous desires.

Of a truth, he does not come again – for conception in a  
womb.

### **Specific methods of practice :**

Projecting metta to specific individuals or groups. This can  
be done by the visualization of their being well and happy.

Start with oneself first, then to family, close relations, friends,  
colleagues, people in your area, the country, the world, all  
beings in the universe, etc.

Radiating metta to the different types of beings in turn. For  
example, males, females, animals, suffering beings,  
heavenly beings, visible, invisible, etc.

Alternatively, radiate to beings in all the different directions  
by turn. For example, all beings in the front, the right, the  
back, the left, downwards, upwards, near and far, etc.

## Metta Sutta

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Contented, easily supportable,  
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### The 15 Virtues

1. able
2. upright
3. perfectly upright
4. obedient
5. gentle
6. humble
7. contented
8. easily supportable
9. with few duties
10. of light livelihood.
11. controlled in senses
12. discreet
13. not impudent
14. not be greedily attached to families
15. not commit any slight wrong such that other wise men may censure him