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Brahma, vihāra: The divine abodes

Theme: The practical cultivation of divinity in man

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Man, one harmonious Soul of many a soul
 Whose nature is its own divine control
 Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea.
 (Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 4.400-402. 1820)

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1 Significance of the divine abodes**1.1 THE TERM BRAHMA, VIHĀRA****1.1.1 Brahmā and brahma**

1.1.1.1 The Pali term for “divine abodes” is *brahma, vihāra*.¹ The first element, *brahma*, comes from the root √BRH, “to make big or strong.”² In early Buddhism, this has nothing to do with any theistic principle but refers to the greatness or power of mental cultivation.³

Here, *brahma* is an adjective meaning “of or like Brahmā (the supreme God)” of the ancient Indian pantheon, and from whose mouth, the brahmins claimed, they originated. The Buddha accepts this popular and important term, but rejects its sectarian and triumphalist senses. In the early Buddhist texts, *brahma* (adj) refers to the supreme good, reflected in its most common commentarial gloss as “excellent, supreme, perfect” (*seṭṭha*).⁴ [1.1.1.2]

Vihāra is a noun from the verb *viharati*, “to dwell, reside (in a place).” Here, it is used in a figurative sense, meaning “dwelling” as habitual way of life. Specifically, it refers to our practice of the 4 divine abodes in our daily life, both as meditations and personal actions. [1.1.2]

¹ See eg **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.1.11(6)/3:223 f). For discussion, see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8), SD 38.3 (7).

² See PED: brahant.

³ On etym, see Osthoff, *Bezenberger's Beiträge* 24, 1901:142 f (= Mir. bricht charm, spell: Oicel. bragr poetry). See <http://www.readanybook.com/ebook/beitra-ge-zur-kunde-der-indogermanischen-sprachen-477148>

⁴ Glosses on *brahma-* (compounds) as *seṭṭha*, “foremost, excellent,” eg *~jāla*, “the perfect net” (in which all views are caught) (D 1,148/1:46), SD 25; *~cakka*, “the perfect wheel,” DA 2:26 (D 1:69) (also glossed as *uttama*, “highest, greatest”); *~cariya*, “the holy life,” DA 3:708 (D 2:271) = SA 1:307 (S 1:307) = 352 (S 1:234) = ThaA 2:265 (Tha 631); *~bhūta*, “become Brahma,” MA 3:405 (M 2:146) = SnA 2:455 (Sn 563) = ThaA 3:49 (Tha 831) = J 5:202 (J 526); *~patti* “attaining the Brahma state,” SA 1:265 (S 1:181); *~patha*, “supreme path,” ThaA 3:9 (Tha 689). For other occurrences, search CSCD using “brahma*”.

1.1.1.2 Here is a dictionary definition of *brahma* based on the Pali-English Dictionary (PED):⁵

I *brahman* (neut) [cf Vedic *brāhman* (neut), prayer; nom sg *brāhma*]

1 the supreme good; as a Buddhist term used in a sense different from the brahminical (except in contrast with brahmins); a state like that of Brahmā (or Brahman) A 2:184 *brahma-p.patta* attained to Brahmā. Often in compounds: *brahma-*: see PED.

2 Vedic text, mystic formula, prayer (DA 1:244 *brahmaṃ aṇatī ti brāhmaṇo*).

II *Brahmā* [cf Vedic *brahmān* (m), one who prays or chants hymns; nom sg *Brahmā*]

1 the god Brahmā, chief of the brahmas, especially one who regards himself as the creator of the universe: *vasavattī issaro kattā nimmātā*, D 1:18, 3:30, also called *mahā, brahmā* D 1:235 f, 244 f, 3:30; It 15; Vism 578; DhA 2:60.

Names (of separate deities): ~ *saham, pati* V 1:5; D 2:157; S 1:136 f; Vism 201; KhpA 171; SnA 56; ~ *sanaṅ, kumāra* D 2:226, 3:97; *baka* S 1:142, M 1:327. The duration of his life is given as being 1 *kappa*, aeon or world-cycle (Kvu 207, 208). **Grammatical occurrences:** Nominative *brahmā* Brahmā (subject) V 1:5; D 2:46; J 6:486; Miln 224; Vism 2 *brahmānaṃ atibrahmā*, “the Brahmā above the Brahmas,” epithet of the Buddha; SnA 229 ~ *mahānubhāvo*; accusative *brahmānaṃ* Brahma (object) D 2:37; genitive & ablative *brahmano* D 2:209; Vism 205; SnA 177; instrumental *brahmanā* D 1:252, 2:239; Dh 105, 230; Vism 48, 405; DhA 2:60; vocative *brahme* “O Brahmā” S 1:138.

2 a brahma (god), a happy and blameless celestial being, an inhabitant of the higher heavens: *brahma, loka*; usually of the 1st dhyana, rebirth there results from great merit. Nom sg *brahmā*: *baka* ~, the Brahmā Baka, S 1:142, M 1:327; A 4:83; PvA 138 ~ *devatā*. Nom pl *brahmāno* Miln 13, 18 where J 6:486 has *mahā, brahmā*; DhA 195. Gen & abl sg *brahmuno* S 1:142, 155. Gen pl *brahmānaṃ* Vism 2; Mahbv 151. Instr *brahmunā* D 3:147, 150 & *brahmanā* PvA 98. Voc sg *brahme* M 1:328.

pacceka~ an individual brahma S 1:149, of the Brahmā Tudu; cf *pacceka, buddha*. *sa, brahmaka* (adj) including the brahma gods V 1:11; D 1:62; A 2:70; DA 1:174.

III *brahma* (adj & n) [cf brahmā II:2; Vedic *brahma* & Skt *brāhma*]

1 holy, pious, brahmanical; (m) a holy person, a brahmin; (adj) J 2:14 ~ *vaṇṇa = seṭṭha vaṇṇa*, excellent colour, Comy; KhpA 151 ~ *cariyaṃ = brahmaṃ cariyaṃ*; (m) acc *brahmaṃ* Sn 285; voc *brahme* (frequent) Sn 1065 = *brahmā ti seṭṭhavaacanāṃ*, SnA 592; J 2:346, 4:288, 6:524, 532; Pv 1:12, 9 = *brāhmaṇa*, PvA 66.

2 divine, as incorporating the highest & best qualities, sublime, ideal, best, very great (esp in compounds): A 1:132 *brahmā ti mātā, pitaro* etc, 182, 4:76.

3 holy, sacred, divinely inspired (of the rites, charms, hymns etc) D 1:96 *brahme mante adhiyivā*; Pv 2:6, 13 *mantāṃ brahma, cintitāṃ = brāhmaṇānaṃ atthāya brahmaṇā cintitāṃ*, PvA 97, 98.

1.1.2 vihāra

1.1.2.1 The word *vihāra* (the noun from the verb *viharati*, “he lives (at), resides (in), dwells (in), sojourns (at)” (SnA 136), and has the following senses:

(1) Noun or adjective.

(a) spending one’s time (sojourning or walking about, staying in a place, living: *eka*~ “living alone” (S 2:282 f); *jaṅghā*~ “walking or wandering on foot” (PvA 73); *divā*~ “day-residence, passing the day” (Sn 679).

(b) place of living, stay, abode (in general): *jala*~ “living in the water” (VvA 50); for *concrete* meaning, see (3a) below.

(2) Applied senses.

state of life, condition, mode of life (in this meaning almost identical with that of *vāsa*² (PED), eg *ariya, vāsa*, noble or best condition (S 5:326); *dibba*~ divine condition (of heart) (Miln 225); *phāsu*~ (living in) comfort (A 3:119, 132); *brahma*~ divine abode (S 5:326; SnA 136; Vism 10/295 f; cf *dibba*~, *brahma*~, *ariya*~ (D 3:220; SnA 136, 4 as *divya, brahma, ariya, vihāra*) [4.6]; *cha satata*~ six steady states (of life) (D 3:250, 281 = A 2:198); *jhāna*~ abiding in dhyana (S 2:273, 3:235); ~ *m kappeti* to live one’s life (A 3:294); *sukho vihāro*, etc (Comys: *sukha*~) (living in) happiness (D 1:196×2, 197; S 3:8, 9, 5:321, 322×3, 326; A 1:43, 2:23, 3:131 f, 4:111 f, 230 f, 5:10 f).

(3) Concrete meaning:

(a) a habitation for a Buddhist mendicant, an abode in the forest (*arañña*~), or a hut, a monk’s dwelling, habitation or lodging (V 3:207 f; D 2:7; A 3:51, Sn 391; PvA 22, 79, 142); a single room (A 3:299 *sakaṃ*

⁵ §1.1.1.2 and most of §1.1.2 are technical, mainly for the scholars and researchers. If you like, you may safely skip these sections, and continue with §1.1.3 onwards.

viharam, his own lodging); ~*dāna* gift of a (monastic) residence (D 1:145-147 passim); *dūra*~ a remote lodging or shelter (for a monk) (Sn 220); *yathā, vihāram* each to his apartment (A 3:299×2, 4:290); Vism 4.1-20/118-122 list nature of ~ in terms of meditation: may be taken as (c).

(b) place for gathering of monks, meeting place; place for rest or recreation (in garden or park) DA 1:133.

(c) (later) a larger building for housing monks, an organized monastery, a built-up vihara (V 1:58, 3:47; J I.126; Miln 212; Vism 292; DhA 119); ~*pāla* the guard of the monastery (S 1:185), ~*cārikā* visit to the monastery DhA 1:49; ~*pokkharanī* monastery lake (DhA 1:416; Mahvs 19, 77; PvA 12, 20, 54, 67, 141, 151 & passim).

Note: The name of the modern Indian state of Bihar is derived from *vihāra*, which used to abound there.

1.1.2.2 The term **brahma, vihāra** thus refers to *the state of Brahmā*, or more often, in meditation, to *our internal state of Brahmā-like qualities, the divine abodes*, that is, lovingkindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). They are also known as “immeasurables” (*appamāṇā* or *appamaññā*) because they should be cultivated unconditionally and profusely so that they can reach out to immeasurable beings everywhere.⁶

1.1.2.3 It is useful to understand that the Buddha and the early Buddhists deliberately accepted the term *brahma, vihāra* (and related terms prefixed with *brahma-*)⁷ as an antithesis to the brahminical views. A key reason for this is simply that of facility or skillful means—what I call “**natural adaptation**.”⁸ It is easier for those unfamiliar with a new teaching (Buddhism) to understand the Buddha’s teachings through the skillful means of familiar terms that are redefined in Buddhist terms.⁹

1.1.2.4 Secondly, the brahminical indoctrination of the masses has to be neutralized, and exposed for what it really is; mostly casuistry and tartuffism to win the loyalty of the masses and accumulate wealth through religious exploitation. More vital, however, is the healing of the minds of the masses that have been conditioned by theistic notions, dogmatic views and blind faith.

The best way to heal those sick in mind and spirit is to speak in terms of the very ideas and conduct that have imprisoned them so that they are clearly defined and refuted. In this way, the masses, seeing them for what they really are, are liberated through the ability and freedom to think wisely for themselves and to evolve on the path of self-awakening.¹⁰

1.1.3 Lovingkindness and lovingkind

1.1.3.1 “Lovingkindness” is today commonly accepted as the translation for *mettā* (n). Even those who have a preference for their own renditions, will have no difficulty understanding this word and relating it to *mettā*. The usage of “lovingkindness” here is advantageous as it is a sort of neologism and rarely used outside of religious contexts. Once we are used to associating “lovingkindness” with *mettā*, the word serves its purpose. Words are how we use them.

1.1.3.2 Both the Oxford English Dictionary and the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary spell it hyphenated as “loving-kindness.”¹¹ “**Lovingkindness**” is a neologism, and I recommend that we use it as the English translation for *mettā*, of which it well describes. Lovingkindness—as *mettā*—includes a wholesome friendliness, and much more, an unconditional acceptance of self and others.¹²

1.1.3.3 Out of necessity, we should also render the adjective, *metta*, as “**lovingkind**.” *Metta*, of course, means “full of or filled with lovingkindness,” but this is quite a mouthful. “Lovingkind” also naturally evokes a sense of “being loving and kind” to those unfamiliar with the word. Hence, the word “lovingkind”

⁶ DhA 192-197; Vism 263-270. For a description of the immeasurables or divine abodes with similes, see **Te, vijja S** (D 13.76-79/1:251), SD 1.8. On the divine abodes with the elements, see **Vuṭṭha Vass’āvāsa S** (A 9.11.4/4:375 f), SD 28.21. On how the divine abodes limit karma, see **Brahma, vihāra S** (A 10.206/5:299), SD 2.10.

⁷ See prec n.

⁸ On natural adaptation, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

⁹ On the Buddha’s skillful means of using brahminical terms, see **Upāya**, SD 30.8; see also **Why the Buddha hesitated**, SD 12.1 (6). On demythologization, see **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31) @ SD 4.1 (2).

¹⁰ For a detailed study, see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

¹¹ This is prob because the documented usages recorded by OED mostly spelt as two words, “loving kindness.” OED records its oldest usage as in 1535 by Coverdale, in his tr of Psalm 25.6 (a book of the Christian Bible).

¹² Further see SD 26.11 (3.3.1.5).

has the benefits of brevity and facility. The more we use this word, the more natural and beautiful it sounds to our ear.

1.2 THE GOD-IDEA: THE PROBLEMS AND A FEW SOLUTIONS

1.2.1 Pathological persistence of the God-idea

1.2.1.1 In prehistoric times and cultures, man's view of nature and the beyond ranged from animism (the sacred or God is in natural events and physical things) to pantheism (the sacred or God is everywhere). As man evolved and became more civilized, so did the idea of a *sole* God (monotheism), or a *single* God, almighty amongst others or other deities (polytheism and henotheism). The God-idea is still evolving today, where it is also assuming as many varieties as there are the thousands of sects, groups and individuals who define their own God-ideas.

1.2.1.2 God is generally conceived or believed to be the supernatural creator and overseer of the universe. Theologians have tried to attribute various qualities to the many different God-ideas. The most common of such qualities include omniscience (unlimited knowledge), omnipotence (unlimited power), omnipresence (being present everywhere or in different places at the same time), omnibenevolence (perfectly good) and eternal existence. As these are matters of faith, needs and imagination, the possibilities of such ideas are as many as there are their believers, even if they contradict one another, as they often do.

1.2.1.3 A universal attempt by such theologians and believers is to conceive God as a “necessary” being and that he is the “greatest conceivable existent.”¹³ In other words, these are simply attempts at defining something into existence (such as *defining* how a unicorn looks like, but also *believing* that they actually exist). It is important to know that *we cannot define anything into existence*. If we *believe* what we have defined or constructed to be true merely as belief (without any reliable evidence or verification); then, it is a delusion.

1.2.1.4 The human need for some sort of God-idea is based on our pervasive ignorance of the true nature of things, especially life and death. We crave for life, and in so craving, we **fear** death. So we seek some sort of self-preservation. One of the key ideas invented by man for self-preservation is that of *an abiding soul*: since our bodies are impermanent, surely, we think, there must be something that survives and lives on forever, that is, an immortal soul. There are still various uncertainties in life, the weather, our personal fortunes, the safety and survival of our tribe or community, our health and so on: we desire self-protection. The God-idea serves to answer such needs for personal security.

1.2.1.5 Another universal notion underlying the God-idea is that of **power**. The God-idea empowers the believer, it seems, so that whoever constructs such an idea, or defines God's being, commands great power and is able to control others. Such is the doctrine of **the “divine right of kings”** or the divine-right theory of kingship. It asserts that a monarch is subject to no earthly authority, deriving the right to rule directly from God's will.

This also means that the king is not subject to the will of the people, or any other institution on earth (in the case of the Protestant kings, such as the Tudors of England, not even the Church). Even if the king were unjust, only God could judge him. The doctrine implies that any attempt to depose the king or to restrict his powers goes against the will of God and constitutes a sacrilegious act.¹⁴

1.2.1.6 Theologians sometimes try to argue that the God-idea is vital in promoting goodness in society, making it more orderly. One key problem here is what kind of God should this be, and the God of which religion, and, also, who is to decide when one has wronged against God, and so on.

¹³ R G Swinburne, “God” in T Honderich (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995:342 f.

¹⁴ This doctrine originated in the mediaeval view that God had given earthly power to the king, just as God had given spiritual power and authority to the church, centering on the pope. The main proponent of the doctrine was the French jurist and political philosopher, Jean Bodin (1530-1596), who based it on his interpretation of Roman law. With the rise of nation-states and the Protestant Reformation, the doctrine of divine right justified the king's absolute power and authority in both political and spiritual matters. The doctrine reached its height in James I of England (1603-1625, also known as James VI of Scotland, 1567-1625). Louis XIV of France (1643-1715) also strongly promoted the idea. It was abandoned in England during the Glorious Revolution (1688-89). The American and French Revolutions of the late 18th century further weakened the doctrine's appeal, and by the early 20th century, it had been virtually abandoned.

Furthermore, more often than not, we see the powerful, misguided and mentally troubled using the God-idea to further their own agenda or delusion. Throughout history, more wars, destruction, violence and exploitation have occurred in the name of God and religion than otherwise.

The whole idea of *European colonialism* was based on the view that it was a *white* God who gave the white man¹⁵ the right and duty to convert the “heathen” world to God, whether the natives liked it or not.¹⁶ Such a triumphalist and exploitative notion still exists in religious evangelism even today.¹⁷

1.2.2 Godliness is within us

1.2.2.1 The persistent quest for a God-idea is a symptom of profound ignorance, pervasive craving and pathological sense of lack amongst certain people. This ignorance is rooted in our merely relying on the physical senses so that we live in a virtual world of what we sense. We are persistently looking for answers outside of ourselves. Since we do not really understand how our minds work, we identify our existence, or find meaning in life, by collecting what our senses present us. More often than not, we only try to make “sense” of things, without really feeling or living them.

1.2.2.2 Buddhist training begins with the understanding that we have a body, that is, our 5 physical senses, which, if properly trained, will bring us personal satisfaction and peace. Humans have the capacity for language and communication, that is, speech, which, if properly used, can sustain a functional society, a healthy community, one that is conducive for mental development and artistic creativity and beauty.

An ideal society, especially a spiritual community, is, first and foremost, characterized by its members’ mutually and unconditionally accepting one another: this is **lovingkindness**.¹⁸ Instead of projecting a dissociative devotion or blind euphoria to a God-idea,¹⁹ it is fully cultivated within our hearts and shone outwards to touch and embrace all beings.

1.2.2.3 As Dharma-spirited persons, we are moved by the pain and lack in others, and our **compassion** naturally works to remove such lacks and pains. Those who champion a compassionate God are likely to feel a desperate or deep need for emotional support, that they are never strong in themselves. One important reason for this sense of apparent dependence syndrome is their inability to accept or respect differences in others, to which they react with fear.

1.2.2.4 **Gladness**, on the other hand, is our natural rejoicing in the happiness of others, free from any need of praying for their souls or converting them, but truly working to free them from their suffering and ignorance so that they are truly happy.

¹⁵ If we look more closely at Renaissance art, esp human portraits, we might see a remarkable resemblance between how Cesare Borgia is popularly depicted and modern portrait depictions of Jesus Christ. French writer, Alexandre Dumas, was one of those who apparently held such a view: see http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cesare_Borgia.

¹⁶ One of the powerful roots of western colonialism (1500s-mid-1900s) lies in Catholic’s initiative in dividing the countries outside of Europe amongst themselves. To please the kings of Spain and of Portugal, pope Alexander VI (the “Borgia pope”) issued a number of papal bulls, which led to the signing of a number of treaties, the main one being the **Treaty of Tordesillas** (now in Valladolid province, Spain, on 7 June 1494, and authenticated at Setubal, Portugal). It divided the newly discovered lands outside Europe between Portugal and Spain along a meridian 370 leagues [2,193 km, 1,362 statute mi, or 1,184 naut mi], west of the Cape Verde islands (off the west coast of Africa). This line of demarcation was about halfway between the Cape Verde Islands (already Portuguese) and the islands discovered by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage (claimed for Spain), named in the treaty as Cipangu and Antilia (Cuba and Hispaniola). Not to be bested, the Protestants, too, later launched their own colonial efforts, at first by way of trade (mercantilist policies) to enrich and strengthen their own countries, but these soon became opportunities to conquer much of Africa, the Americas, and Asia.

¹⁷ See Reflection, **God is love—and more** (R63), in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009:28-30 (4.3).

¹⁸ On the spelling of “lovingkindness,” see (1.1.3).

¹⁹ **William James** stated that with euphoria, “the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to hold our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God” (see Rhodri Hayward, “euphoria,” in (eds) C Blakemore & S Jennett, *The Oxford Companion to the Body*, 2001. Effectively, this is a emotional surrender, resulting in a passivity where other people or things do not really matter, except the object of faith.

1.2.2.5 Finally, we go on to cultivate **equanimity**, the capacity for accepting people and things just as they are, even when they do not respond to our best efforts, or, indeed, they might even backslide. No matter how much effort we put in to save and succour others, there will always be those we are unable to reach or touch. With a mirror-like mind, we wholeheartedly accept the situation for the moment. For, this too will pass.

1.2.2.6 The point then is clear. The Buddha teaches us not to worship God or guru or anyone or anything.²⁰ To worship is to merely relegate ourselves to a helpless and dependent status. Instead, we have the capacity to cultivate the godly [Godly] qualities of lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity.²¹ Godliness is not a person, but qualities we can cultivate; it is not something to be worshipped for the sake of self-assurance, but it is our own inclusive being of accepting others as we would accept ourselves, and working together joyfully, appreciatively, even equanimously, in spiritual growth.²²

1.3 A PRE-BUDDHIST SYSTEM BUDDHICIZED?

1.3.1 Stories of the past

1.3.1.1 That the divine abodes are an ancient practice is evident from, for example, **the Makhā,deva Sutta** (M 83), which relates how an ancient king of Mithila, Makhā,deva (a direct descendent of Mahā Sammata, “the great elect”),²³ cultivates the divine abodes and is reborn in the brahma world.²⁴ However, such a pre-Buddhist cultivation of the abodes can only bring one rebirth in the brahma-world, but not spiritual liberation.

1.3.1.2 Another well known canonical account of an ancient cultivation of the divine abodes is found in **the Mahā Govinda Sutta** (D 19). Mahā Govinda (that is, Joti,pāla), the royal purohit to rajah Disampati, it is said, goes into a four-month retreat, cultivating the 4 divine abodes, so that Brahmā Sanañ,kumārā himself appears to him. The Buddha was Mahā Govinda (Jotipāla) in that life.²⁵ In the same Sutta, too, the Buddha is recorded as declaring to the heavenly minstrel (*gandhabba*), Pañca,sikha, that such a holy life (based on the 4 divine abodes in themselves), does not lead to nirvana, but only rebirth in the brahma world.²⁶

However, as scholars have observed, although the suttas say that the divine abodes were “pre-Buddhist,” they apparently occur only in *the stories of the ancient past*, that is, they occur many (even countless) lives ago. There is no mention of the divine abodes (as we know them) in the pre-Buddhist brahminical texts. Any such mention in post-Buddhist works is probably borrowed from the Buddhists.²⁷

1.3.1.3 **Buddhaghosa**, in fact, says that “at that time” (that is, up to the Buddha’s time), the overcoming of the mental hindrances and the divine abodes were unknown to the non-Buddhists (SA 3:171).²⁸ This is, in fact, confirmed by **the Metta Saha,gata Sutta** (S 46.54) [1.3.3].²⁹ Interestingly, we see no records of the practice of the divine abodes in the non-Buddhist texts up to the Buddha’s time. One possible explanation is that such records were only of ritual and religious aspects, and such meditations were done by forest ascetics who kept neither oral nor written records. We could thus surmise that the divine abodes are not

²⁰ See (**Pañcaka**) **Iṭṭha S** (A 5.43/3:47-49), SD 47.2: also SD 2.1 (3) & SD 12.4 (2); also **Asi,bandhaka,putta S** (S 42.6/4:311-314), SD 39.9.

²¹ See eg **Te,vijja S** (D 13,31-35/1:247 f + 76-81/1:250-251), SD 1.8.

²² See Reflection, **The temple of God in within us**, in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009:41 f (4.9).

²³ The first elected king in Buddhist mythology: see **Aggañña S** (D 27.21/3:93), SD 2.19.

²⁴ M 83/2:75-83 (SD 60.8).

²⁵ D 19/2:220-252 (SD 63.4). Comys add that in this Sutta, the holy life (*brahma,cariya*) is said to be the 4 illimitables (*appamañña*), ie, the divine abodes (DA 1:178; MA 2:42; ItA 1:109).

²⁶ D 19,61/2:252 (SD 63.4); ItA 1:108.

²⁷ Eg Yoga Śūtras of Patañjali (2nd cent BCE) and the 2nd-cen Jain writer Umāsvāti: see Winternitz 1936:53; Werner 1994:27; Miller 1996:9.

²⁸ *Tiṭṭhiyānañ hi samaye pañca,nīvaraṇa-p,pahānaṃ vā mettādi,brahma,vihāra,bhāvanā vā n’atthi* (SA 3:171).

However, his statement on the 5 hindrances might be far-fetched, as we do have sutta accounts, such as **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26), where the deep meditative states are said to arise as a result of the overcoming of the hindrances (M 26,15-16/1:163-167).

²⁹ However, cf Aronson 1984:20-24.

unique to the Buddha's teaching. Even then, it is the way that the Buddha teaches them that makes them unique. This is what we now will further examine.

1.3.2 Heaven is within us

1.3.2.1 **The Te, vijja Sutta** (D 13) is an important record of why the Buddha rejects the brahmins' claim that they were the only way to God and to heaven. Firstly, charges the Buddha, *none* of these brahmins (or anyone else) has really *seen or met* God. The best "evidence" we have are pious stories which cannot be verified. Secondly, while the brahmins claim to be God's spokesmen here, "born from God's mouth,"³⁰ they are wealthy and luxurious unlike God, and they have sex and enjoy sensual pleasures, while God does not. In other words, they do not at all reflect the qualities they claim that God has.³¹

1.3.2.2 While the Buddha unequivocally rejects the hypocrisy and hubris of the brahmins, he goes on to teach that **true godliness** is *within* everyone of us. The Buddha has liberated God, as it were: he is no more imprisoned in the heavens of the brahmins or the theologians, but freely lives in the hearts of all beings. The Buddha brings God right down to earth by declaring that godliness [Godliness] can be cultivated in our own hearts.

The Buddha rejects all *beliefs* in an eternal or all-powerful deity, and the empty promises by preachers and priests of heaven (which they themselves have neither seen nor reached). The Buddha instead teaches us to cultivate these godly qualities of lovingkindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*), so that we personally experience godliness and heaven right here and now.

1.3.2.3 Heaven is not an after-death place where only the chosen or faithful might go according to the fiat or whim of some priest or preacher. It is right here where we are, when our hearts are consistently filled with lovingkindness, that we empower ourselves and those around us to be truly happy. To show lovingkindness is to accept others as they are, like allowing good seeds to grow, giving them all the wholesome conditions so that they will blossom into fruitful and shade-giving trees.

1.3.3 Heaven is liberating

1.3.3.1 **The Mettā Saha, gata Sutta** (S 46.54), called Halidda, vasana Sutta by Buddhaghosa (Vism 4.49), gives us valuable information on the vital difference between the pre-Buddhist practice of the divine abodes, as practised, for example, by the wanderers, and the their cultivation as taught by the Buddha. When the wanderers claim that the Buddha is teaching the same meditation as theirs, the Buddha explains to the monks that the pre-Buddhist (and non-Buddhist) practice does not lead to "freedom of mind" [8.3].

1.3.3.2 The Buddha then details how the mind is freed by each of the 4 divine abodes, that is, through the 7 awakening factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*) of mindfulness, dharma-investigation, effort, zest, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.³² This is a more elaborate model for explaining the attainment of dhyana or full mental absorption.³³

1.3.3.3 Another important document in this connection is **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), which recounts the Bodhisattva's meditation tutelage under the two teachers:³⁴ Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāma, -putta (son of Rāma).³⁵ Under Ālāra, the Bodhisattva learns to meditate up to the base of nothingness (*ākiñ-*

³⁰ Rgveda 10.90.12 (Puruṣa, śūkta); D 27,3 f/3:81 = M 93,5/2:148.

³¹ D 13/1:235-252 @ SD 1.8.

³² Viz *sati sambojjhaṅga*, *dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga*, *virīya sambojjhaṅga*, *pīti sambojjhaṅga*, *passaddhi sambojjhaṅga*, *samādhi sambojjhaṅga*, and *upekkhā sambojjhaṅga* (S 46.54, 12-15/5:118-121), SD 10.11. See also **(Bojjhaṅga) Sila S** (S 46.3/5:67-70) & SD 10.15 esp (4).

³³ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5).

³⁴ See esp **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26, 15-18/1:163-167), SD 1.11 (details of the 2 teachers). Other texts recording the Buddha's quest for dhyana are found in: **Mahā Siha, nāda S** (M 12, 44-61/1:77-82), SD 1.13 (details of self-mortification); **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36, 20-31-44/1:242-249), SD 1.12 (self-mortification); **Bhaya Bherava S** (M 4/1:16-24), SD 44.2 (overcoming fear in solitary practice).

³⁵ Rāma (father of Uddaka Rāma, putta), is one of the 8 wise brahmin augurs who, on the 5th day of the Bodhisattva's birth, is invited by Suddhodana to foretell Bodhisattva's future, viz, Rāma, Dhaja, Lakkhaṇa, Mantī, Koṇḍañña (youngest of these eight, but the eldest of the 5 monks), Bhoja, Suyāma, and Sudatta (J 1:55 f).

caññ'āyatana), while from Uddaka, Rāma's son, he learns to attain to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n'eva, saññā, nā, saññāyatana*).³⁶

1.3.3.4 However, these two meditations, sophisticated as they may be, are pre-Buddhist methods steeped in the soul-view, the *ātman* of the Upanishads. As such, the Bodhisattva does not attain the final breakthrough into nirvana, that is, until he totally abandons the soul-view, the fetter that holds humans back to this world and cyclic life. The divine abodes, as taught and practised by Buddhists, are liberating because they break down the barriers between “I” and “thou,” self and other. There is only boundless and unconditional love, compassion, joy and peace.³⁷

2 The divine abodes as a set

2.1 DEFINITIONS OF THE DIVINE ABODES.

2.1.1 Divine qualities internalized

2.1.1.1 The 4 divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*) are a set of very ancient meditations going back perhaps even before the Buddha's time, but which the Buddha successfully adopted and adapted as a skillful means or a bridge for the theistic brahmins and others. The Buddha's method is that of internalizing the godly qualities of Brahmā, so that it becomes effectively a non-theistic personal experience.

2.1.1.2 As a Buddhist practice, the divine abodes—lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity—are the most popular of the “calmness” (*samatha*) practice, that is, a meditation for inducing as profound mental stillness, which, if properly cultivated, can lead on to dhyana.³⁸ From **the Dhamma, saṅga-****nī** and its commentary, **the Attha, sālinī**, we can deduce that, on the worldly level (*lokiya*), each of the 4 abodes can be present in any of our daily activities.³⁹

2.1.1.3 The divine abodes are said to be “perfect, divine” (*brahma*) because they are the best or highest of emotions, and because of their faultless nature. As positive emotions, they are the best ways to relate to others. Just as the High Gods (*brahmā*) are fearless, even so, these emotions infuse such godliness in us. There are called “immeasurable” (*appamāṇā* or *appamaññā*) because they should be cultivated unconditionally and they can reach out to immeasurable beings everywhere.⁴⁰

2.1.2 Primacy of lovingkindness

2.1.2.1 Of the 4 abodes, the first, the cultivation of lovingkindness (*mettā, bhāvanā*), is especially essential as a basis for Buddhist practice. It is the foundation for any self-perception and for any wholesome dealing with others, as the elders Nandiya and Kimbila (addressing the Buddha) declare in **the Cūḷa Go-****siṅga Sutta** (M 31): “This is how, bhante, we are living in concord, with mutual joy, without disputing, mixing like milk and water, seeing each other with kindly eyes.”⁴¹

2.1.2.2 **Why is lovingkindness alone spoken of so distinctly?** Because, says Buddhaghosa, it is the foundation of all the 4 divine abodes; and also on account of *its fulfilling all of the wholesome states*, beginning with giving.⁴² Lovingkindness (*mettā*), or unconditional love or all-inclusive acceptance, is the root of these divine qualities in the sense that we must start with cultivating lovingkindness successfully before proceeding to the other levels of divine abodes.

³⁶ See **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33/1b (2.2 & 3).

³⁷ See **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59/3:66-68 = V 1:13 f) & SD 1.2 (1.2).

³⁸ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

³⁹ Dhs 1; Dhs:R §250 nn; DhsA 128-130, 132 f. For Buddhaghosa's comy, see DhsA 192-197.

⁴⁰ DhsA 192-197; Vism 263-270. For a description of the immeasurable or divine abodes with similes, see **Tevijja S** (D 13.76-79/1:251), SD 1.8. On the divine abodes with the elements, see **Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa S** (A 9.11.4/4:375 f), SD 28.21. On how the divine abodes limit karma, see **Brahma, vihāra S** (A 10.206/5:299), SD 2.10.

⁴¹ *Evaṃ kho mayāṃ, bhante, samaggā sammodamānā avivadamānā khīr'odakī, bhūtā aññam aññam piya, cakkhūhi sampassantā viharāmā ti* (M 31, 6+7/1:206 f), SD 44.11. The same remark is made by rajah Pasenadi in **Dhamma, cetiya S** (M 89, 11/2:120 f), SD 64.10. Also at **Bahu, vedanīya S** (M 59, 5/1:398), **Upakkilesa S** (M 128, 11+ 12/3:156×4); **Pañcak'aṅga S** (S 4.20/4:229); **Parisa Vg** (A 2.5.2/1:70), **Parisā S** (A 393.3+4+5/1:243×3), **Bhaṇḍa S** (A 3.122/-1:275+276), **Samaya S** (A 5.54, 11/3:67), **Anāgata Bhaya S 2** (A 5.78, 5/3:104); **Nm** 11:132; V 1:351×4.

⁴² Vism 9.124/325. On the primacy of lovingkindness, see further **Mettā Bhāvanā S** (It 1.3.7), SD 30.7 (1.2.1.2).

2.1.2.3 Lovingkindness, in other words, is always present in each of the other three abodes. It is the presence of lovingkindness in compassion, in gladness, and in equanimity, that makes each of them “divine” or “perfect” (*brahma*), that is, unconditional and all inclusive. Lovingkindness should be present in our actions if they are to be meritorious, and if they are to be the basis for mental cultivation.

2.1.2.4 A related but equally vital point is that lovingkindness empowers and motivates us to live a moral life. It is generally true to say that if we are truly good (not indulging in unwholesome acts of body, speech and mind), we are likely to be happy.⁴³

Conversely, it is even more true that when we are happy (such as when we constantly cultivating lovingkindness), we would be happy and emotionally comfortable (*sukha*) no matter what. Furthermore, we would understand the meaning and purpose of keeping to the 5 precepts, so that we unconditionally accept others. Ideally, this entails respecting the life, general happiness, common freedom, universal truth and mental health of every other being.⁴⁴

2.1.3 Some practical details

2.1.3.1 SIMILARITY OF THE DIVINE ABODES

(1) The elder Upatissa, in his **Vimutti,magga** (on which Buddhaghosa based his *Visuddhi,magga*), remarks, “[I]t should be understood that the 4 immeasurables are of one nature though their signs are different. Thus owing to the suppression of tribulation, owing to the object which comprises beings, owing to the wish to benefit, they fulfill one characteristic.”⁴⁵ In simple terms, the 4 divine abodes share one common characteristic in that they are directed to all beings with the desire for their benefit.

(2) This universal pervasion of goodwill is clearly evident in the stock passages that define **the divine abodes**, thus:⁴⁶

1. ... a monk,⁴⁷ with a heart of **lovingkindness**, dwells suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself, he dwells suffusing all the world with lovingkindness that is vast, grown great [exalted],⁴⁸ immeasurable, without hate,⁴⁹ without ill-will.⁵⁰

⁴³ See Mills 2004:34-41 (§2.2).

⁴⁴ These are the “5 values” which the 5 precepts entail: see SD 1.5 (2).

⁴⁵ (Tr from Chin) Ehara, Soma & Kheminda, Kandy, 1961; Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1977:194.

⁴⁶ This whole section on the 4 divine abodes is stock: see table of refs (2.1.3.2).

⁴⁷ “A monk” (*bhikkhu*) here refers to any meditator. Even a lay person, properly meditating, attains the state of monkhood (*bhikkhu, bhāva*): **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3A) +n, SD 13.3; SD 13.1 (3.1.1.5); SD 16.7 (1.1.1.2). For similes, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13,76-79/1:251), SD 1.8; see also: **D 2**:185, 250, **3**:49, 78, 223; **M 1**:38, 283, 297, 335×2, 351, 369, **2**:76, 77, 78, 81, 195, 207, **3**:146; **S 4**:296, 322, 351, 352×2, **5**:115, 116, 117, 118; **A 1**:183, 192, **2**:172, 175, 184, **3**:225, **4**:390, **5**:299, 343, 344. Note that in **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97) Sāriputta teaches the divine abodes to the layman Dhānañjāni (addressing him directly) (M 97,32.2), SD 4.9, and that in (**Nānā,kaṛaṇa**) **Mettā S 1** (A 4.125), the subject of each of the stock passages on the 4 divine abodes is “a certain person” (*ekacco puggalo*) (A 4.125,2 etc), SD33.9.

⁴⁸ The mind “grown great” (*maha-g.gatā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4), SD 24.14 (4).

⁴⁹ The recurrence of his phrase and the foll—“without hate, without ill will”—attests to the fact that lovingkindness is the basis for all the other three abodes, ie, they are actually a refinement of lovingkindness applied on deeper and broader levels.

⁵⁰ *So mettā,sahagatena cetasā ekam disaṃ pharivā viharati. Tathā dutiyam. Tathā tatiyam. Tathā catuttham. Iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabb’attatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokam mettā,sahagatena cetasā vipulena maha-g,gatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjena pharivā viharati.* **D 13**,76-79/1:251×4, **17**,2.4/2:186, **19**,46/2:242, **59**,2/2:250, 25.17/-3:50×2, 26.28/3:78×2, **33**,1.11(6)/3:224×2; **M 7**,13/1:38×2, **40**,9/1:283×2, **43**,31/1:297×2, **50**,14-15/1:335×4, **52**,8-/1:351×2, **55**,6-11/1:369, **55**,6/1:370, **83**,5-10/2:76×2, 17-19/2:77×2, 78×2, 82×2, **97**,32-35/2:195×2, **99**,24-27/2:207, 208, **127**.7/3:146×2; **S 41**.7/4:296×2, **42**.8.17/4:322×2, **42**.13.4.1/4:351, **42**.13/4:352×2, 354, 355×2, 356 f, **46**.54/-5:115, 16×4, 117-121; **A 3**.63.6/1:183×2, **3**.65.15/1:192×2, **3**.66.13/1:196, **4**.125/2:129×2, **4**.126/2:129+130, **4**.190.4/-2:184, **5**.192.3/3:225×2, **9**.18.10/4:390, **10**.208/5:299+300, **11**.17/5:344+345; **Nc:Be** 248, 304; **Pm 5**.20/2:39; **Vbh** (ch on *Appamañña*) 272×4, 273×2, 274×2, 275×2, 276×2, 282×4; **Vism 9**.44/308 (foll by comy).

2. Further, with a heart of **compassion**, he dwells suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself, he dwells suffusing all the world with compassion that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.
 3. Further, with a heart of **gladness**, he dwells suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself, he dwells suffusing all the world with gladness that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.
 4. Further, with a heart of **equanimity**, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself, he dwells suffusing all the world with equanimity that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.
- (Tevijja Sutta, D 13,76-79), SD 1.8

(3) This famous **pericope** is found in the following suttas and texts [for sutta themes, see 2.4.2]:

	<u>Sutta no, section / vol:page</u>	
Te,vijja Sutta	D 13,76-79	SD 1.8
Mahā Sudassana Sutta	D 17,2.4	SD 36.12
Mahā Govinda Sutta	D 19,59	SD 63.4
Udumbarika Sīha,nāda Sutta	D 25,17+18.4+19.4	SD 1.4
Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta	D 26,28+31	SD 36.10
Saṅgīti Sutta	D 33,1.11(6)	
Vatthūpama Sutta	M 7,13-16	SD 28.12
Cūḷa Assa,pura Sutta	M 40,9-12	SD 41.8
Mahā Vedalla Sutta	M 43,31	SD 30.2
Māra Tajjaniya Sutta	M 50,14-15	SD 36.4
Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta	M 52,8-11 = A 11.17	SD 41.2
(Majjhima) Jīvaka Sutta	M 55,6/1:369	SD 43.4
Makhā,deva Sutta	M 83,5-10 + 17-19	SD 60.8
(Majjhima) Dhānañjāni Sutta	M 97,32-35	SD 4.9
(Brahma,vihāra) Subha Sutta	M 99,24-27	SD 38.6,
(Ceto,vimutti) Anuruddha Sutta	M 127,4-7	SD 54.10, SD 13.1(3.7.3)
Gārava Sutta	S 6.2	SD 12.3 (1.2.3)
Go,datta Sutta	S 41.7,5	SD 60.4
Pāṭaliya Sutta	S 42.13/4:351	SD 65.1
Saṅkha,dhama Sutta	S 42.8	SD 57.9
Mettā Sahagata Sutta	S 46.54,5-6	SD 10.11
Venāga,pura Sutta	A 3.63,6	SD 21.1
Kesa,puttiya Sutta	A 3.65,15	SD 35.4a
Sāḷha Sutta	A 3.66,14	SD 43.6
(Nānā,karaṇa) Mettā Sutta 1	A 4.125	SD 33.9
(Nānā,karaṇa) Mettā Sutta 2	A 4.126	SD 33.10
(Saṅgha) Uposatha Sutta	A 4.190,4	SD 15.10b
Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta	A 9.11,4	SD 28.2a
Doṇa Brāhmaṇa Sutta	A 5.192,3.5	SD 36.14
Nav'aṅ'uposatha Sutta	A 9.18,10	SD 60.7
(Karaja,kāya) Brahma,vihāra Sutta	A 10.208,1-3	SD 2.10 (2)

Dasama Gaha,pati Sutta	A 11.17,5-6	SD 41.2;
Paṭisambhidā,magga	Pm 2.5,20	
Vibhaṅga	Vbh 13/272-276 ⁵¹	Vism 9.44/308,4 (quote)

Now let us examine the key phrases in these stock passages.

2.1.3.2 DIRECTIONS OF LOVINGKINDNESS

(1) The well known stock passage or pericope for the directing of lovingkindness (and each of the other 3 divine abodes) is given as follows:

... a monk,⁵² a with heart of **lovingkindness**,⁵³
dwells suffusing one quarter;
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;
thus⁵⁴ above, below, across, everywhere,
and to everyone as well as to himself,
suffusing all the world with a heart of lovingkindness.

*bhikkhu mettā,sahagatena
ekam disam pharivā viharati,
tathā dutiyam, tathā tatiyam, tathā catuttham,
iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi
sabb'attatāya
sabbāvantaṃ lokam mettā,sahagatena cetasā
pharivā.*

The Karaṇīya Metta Sutta (Sn 150ac = Khp 9.8ac) states the same idea in verse, as:

“... to all the world ... above, below and across” (*sabba,lokasmim ... uddham adho ca tiriyaṃ ca*).⁵⁵

The Khuddaka Pāṭha commentary on the Sutta gives the following explanation for the locational terms:⁵⁶

above	(<i>uddha</i>)	the beings of formless realms.	
below ⁵⁷	(<i>adho</i>)	the beings of the sense-worlds (including our world).	
across	(<i>tiriya</i>)	the beings of the form-realms.	(KhpA 248)

(2) Note that lovingkindness (and similarly for compassion, gladness and equanimity) is cultivated in **4 directions** without specifying them. In fact, the Commentaries say that it can be any of the 6 directions (*disa*) or a direction in between (*vidisā*)⁵⁸ or whichever quarter that we first direct the divine abode.⁵⁹

Traditionally in the cultivation of lovingkindness (and of the divine abodes) the first direction we would radiate it would be the front (*pubba*). The Buddha is said to sit facing the east (*puratthābhimukha*)

⁵¹ This is the Vbh “sutta explanation” (*sutta,niddesa*). The Abhidhamma explanation (*abhidhamma,niddesa*) is at Vbh 276-282. For comy, see Vbh 282-284.

⁵² “Monk” (*bhikkhu*) here refers to any meditator. Even a lay person, properly meditating, attains the state of monkhood (*bhikkhu,bhāva*): **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3A) +n, SD 13.3; SD 13.1 (3.1.1.5); SD 16.7 (1.1.1.2). Note that in **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97) Sāriputta teaches the divine abodes to the layman Dhānañjāni (addressing him directly) (M 97,32.2), SD 4.9, and that in (**Nānā,karaṇa**) **Mettā S 1** (A 4.125), the subject of each of the stock passages on the 4 divine abodes is “a certain person” (*ekacco puggalo*) (A 4.125,2 etc), SD33.9.

⁵³ On similes for the divine abodes, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13,76-79/1:251), SD 1.8; see also: **D 2**:185, 250, **3**:49, 78, 223; **M 1**:38, 283, 297, 335×2, 351, 369, **2**:76, 77, 78, 81, 195, 207, **3**:146; **S 4**:296, 322, 351, 352×2, **5**:115, 116, 117, 118; **A 1**:183, 192, **2**:172, 175, 184, **3**:225, **4**:390, **5**:299, 343, 344.

⁵⁴ “Thus,” *iti* (indecl), alt “in this manner.” The word *iti* here expands on the previous statement, elaborating on it..

⁵⁵ Khp 9 = Sn 1.8 (SD 38.3).

⁵⁶ On the directions of the divine abodes and those of **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31), see SD 4.1 (1.2.2+1.2.3).

⁵⁷ In practical terms, “across” (*tiriya*) means the 4 quarters (beginning with the east, “the front”) and the directions in between.

⁵⁸ **Ekam disan'ti puratthimam vā disam pacchimam vā disam uttaram vā disam dakkhiṇam vā disam uddham vā adho vā tiriyaṃ vā vidisam vā.** (VbhA 273)

⁵⁹ **Ekam disan'ti ekissā disāya. Paṭhama,pariggahitaṃ sattaṃ upādāya eka,disā,pariyāpanna,satta,pharaṇa,vasena vuttam.** (NcA 118) = PmA 3:554 = VbhA 377).

under the Bodhi tree during his awakening (J 1:71), and apparently does so habitually.⁶⁰ There are two possible reasons for this.

Firstly is that, sitting facing east in the open, one catches the light and warmth of the rising sun. Secondly, significant buildings are, as a rule, built orientated to the east.⁶¹ The suttas often describe the Buddha sitting in, say, a meeting-hall, he would sit against the west wall facing the east (as note above).

However, in meditation, if it is not possible or convenient to sit facing the east (especially in the open), we can sit facing any direction. When we cultivate lovingkindness or any of the abodes, we will naturally radiate it first to the front quarter, and then clockwise to the other quarters, the nadir, the zenith, and finally to ourself.

(3) Now, the Commentaries take the three other directions—**above**, **below** and **across**—as respectively signifying the formless realms, the sense-worlds and the form-realms [2.1.3.2(1)]. When we are unawakened or are unable to attain the dhyanas and attainments, it would be difficult, even impossible, for us to visualize the form-realms, what more the formless realms. Furthermore, we should not intellectualize such states—think about them in a speculative manner—especially during meditation, as we would be distracted from our practice.

(4) However, one easy way to include these realms in our lovingkindness meditation is to regard them as “devas” or heavenly beings of the form-realm and the formless realm. Then again, such beings dwelling quite happily—many, if not most of them often embody the 4 divine abodes themselves. We can still radiate our lovingkindness or any of the other three abodes to such beings, understanding that we are actually ridding ourselves of all negative emotions and dwelling in those abodes. Bearing them in mind helps us in this process.

2.1.3.3 “TO EVERYONE AS WELL TO HIMSELF.” We need to look closely at all the four stock passages above, which are here conflated for easier reading of the underscored phrase:

With a heart of **<lovingkindness, | compassion, | gladness, | equanimity,>** he dwells suffusing one quarter; so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth. Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to himself, he dwells suffusing the whole world with lovingkindness that is vast, exalted, boundless, without hate, without ill will. [2.1.3.1]

The highlighted phrase, “**to everyone as well as to himself**” (*sabb’attatāya*) is sometimes missed by some translators. The phrase *sabb’attatāya* is resolved as *sabba* (“all”) and *attā* (“self”). It makes good sense that we must not leave ourselves out of the cultivation. For, we cannot pervade the universe (meaning both the world of beings and our own awareness of that world) if we do not have that quality ourselves.⁶² [3.3.1.3]

2.1.3.4 “VAST, ... EXALTED, ... BOUNDLESS.” Each of the sutta definitions of the 4 divine abodes [2.1], describes itself as being “vast, exalted, boundless, without hate, without ill will.” We will now briefly examine these key terms (underlined). More fully, the phrase reads “**a mind ... vast, exalted, boundless, free from hate, free from ill will**” (*cetasā vipulena maha-g, gatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjhena*).

This phrase describes a meditator who is *fully focused*. The word “**vast**” or “bountiful” (*vipula*) means that he has attained samadhi or full concentration, and as such is “**exalted**” or “great” (*maha-g, gata*), that is, free (at least temporarily) of all the mental hindrances,⁶³ and thereby attained dhyana [7.4].

Only such a mind can truly be “**boundless**” or “measureless” (*appamāṇa*) because, at least momentarily, going beyond conceit, the meditator *does not measure anyone but sees all beings as they really are*,

⁶⁰ This is when Ajāta, sattu first sees him but is unable to recognize him (D 2,11) SD 8.10. At various places, the Buddha is recorded as habitually sitting facing the east: in the new assembly hall of the Sakyas of Kapila, vatthu, **Sekha S** (M 53.4), SD 21.14 & **Avassuta Pariyāya S** (S 35.243); in the Ubbhāṭaka assembly hall of the Mallas, **Saṅgīti S** (D 3:206); in the rest-house at Pāṭali, gāma, **Pāṭali, gāmiya S** (U 8.6) = **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16,1.22 = V 6.28.3/1:227), SD 9. Also at DA 1:9; KhpA 95; VA 1:11. See also **Pañca, dīpikā ThīAp** 9.11/2:520.

⁶¹ Indeed, the word “orient” or “orientate” (v) itself originally means to face the east = the orient.

⁶² On how this practice can lead to spiritual freedom, see **Brahma, vihāra S** (A 10.208/5:299), SD 2.10.

⁶³ See **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

without regarding anyone as a stranger or an enemy, or harbouring any negative thought, so that he is “free from hate, free from ill will” (*averena avyāpajjhena*).

2.1.3.5 WITHOUT HATE, WITHOUT ILL WILL.” Note that each of the four passages mention the same phrase, “**without hate, without ill will,**” showing the presence of lovingkindness. Then, after each definition, there follows this refrain from **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13):

Just as a mighty conch-blower, Vāsetṭha, might with little difficulty make a proclamation to the 4 quarters, so by this cultivation [meditation], Vāsetṭha, by this freedom of the mind through loving-kindness, any karma done in a limited way neither remains nor persists there.

This, Vāsetṭha, is the way to fellowship with Brahmā [God]. (D 13,76-79/1:250 f), SD 1.8

The refrain, using the parable of the conch-blower, gives us a good idea of how our lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity should pervade the world. Another common image used by meditation teachers is that of a radiant white lotus shining in the centre of our heart, with its light brightening up both our body and mind, as well as the surroundings and beyond. We will look closer at these refrain keywords [3, 8].

2.1.3.5 DIFFERENCES OF THE DIVINE ABODES. How different are each of the 4 divine abodes? Their difference lies only in how each abode is directed towards a specific kind of person or situation. Loving-kindness is directed to all beings alike, whatever their separate conditions might be. All beings are accepted just as they are. Compassion is a kind of “top-down” regard for other beings, when they facing pains, misfortunes or difficulties. Gladness is a “upward-regarding” rejoicing or gladness in the goodness and happiness of others, especially when they are in a better situation than we are. And finally, equanimity is an *on-looking* reflection on beings as they really are, faring according to their karma.

On a higher level of understanding, this unconditional regard for self and others are a temporary remedy for conceit, at least while we are dwelling in the abode, say, being suffused with lovingkindness, towards the measuring of others. If we lack lovingkindness, especially when we are spurred on by greed, we tend to measure ourselves against in terms of *having* (wealth, possessions, influence) and *being* (beauty, status, power). The purpose of the divine abodes, in a way, is to close such false gaps and delusive dichotomy of self and other, so that we regard others as we would accept ourselves.⁶⁴

2.2 A MOMENT'S PRACTICE

2.2.1 Finger-snap and cow's udder. A set of three very short discourses known as **the Cūl'accharā Sutta** (A 1.6.3-5) presents the Buddha as declaring that if even for just the moment of a finger-snap,⁶⁵ a monk (that is, a meditator) associates himself with (*āsevati*), cultivates (*bhāveti*), or mentally attends to (*manasikaroti*) a thought of lovingkindness, he is called a monk. “His meditation is not in vain. He acts in accordance with the Teacher's teaching. He follows his advice. He does not eat the country's alms in vain.⁶⁶ How much more so if he were to often cultivate it!”⁶⁷

The Okkha Sutta (S 20.4) similarly says that even if we were to give a hundred pots of food, morning, noon and evening, even better it is to cultivate a heart of lovingkindness, in the morning, at noon, or in the evening, for merely the moment it takes “to pull the udder-teat.” This is the way we should “cultivate the freedom of mind by lovingkindness, often cultivate it, make a habit of it, make it our basic practice, keep it constant, build it up, fully undertake it.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Conceit (*māna*) is a tricky latent tendency (*anusaya*) that can only be fully uprooted at the level of arhathood. See *Anusaya*, SD 31.3 (4).

⁶⁵ “Even for just the moment of a finger-snap,” *accharā, saṅghāta, mattam*. Also in **Velāma S** (A 9.20/4:395 f), SD 16.6 (§5b).

⁶⁶ Comy say that there are 4 ways in which a monks use his alms: (1) an immoral monk uses them (undeservedly) like a thief; (2) a virtuous ordinary person who does not reflect on them is like a debtor; (3) a trainee (*sekhā*, ie one of the 7 saints, short of the arhat-become) uses them as an inheritance; (4) an arhat uses them as a proper owner. (MA 5:32, 205; SA 2:199)

⁶⁷ A 1.6.3-5/1:10 f (SD 2.13)

⁶⁸ S 20.4/2:264 (SD 2.14).

2.2.2 A spiritual friend. Some people have tried doing lovingkindness meditation by themselves without any teacher. They might even attain a deep calm, even bliss. But without some level of wisdom, we might fear these wonderful feelings, or simply do not know the value of such states. This is where a meditation teacher as a spiritual friend helps to clarify and strengthen our faith and effort in the practice.

Although we can, in theory, learn meditation from a book, sooner or later, we should find a proper teacher, someone experienced and compassionate, to guide and inspire us. Such a teacher will ensure that we are doing the meditation rightly and effectively. After all, lovingkindness is about wholesome networking with unconditional love. The teacher is like an “old flame” with whom we light our own candle, and then we shine on our own, lighting up the lives of others as we go along.⁶⁹

2.2.3 Happy sleep. The Buddha reminds us that cultivating lovingkindness *even for a moment* is to practise his teaching. For, all good things start with a single thought. Even if we have no time to sit in meditation, there is one moment in our life we should never neglect in keeping it positive—that is *the moment just before falling asleep*.

As we comfortably lie down at the end of the day, we should clear up our mind of the past and renounce the world for the night. We should tell ourselves all those happy thoughts we love or need: “May I be well! May I be happy! May I be at peace with myself.” and similarly to those who are near or dear to us. We then fall asleep happily, and wake up happily: this will change our lives for good. This is an important practical meaning of the very first blessing of lovingkindness practice, that is, to sleep happily (*sukhaṃ supati*).⁷⁰

2.3 THE DIVINE ABODES AS THE VALUE OF LIFE

2.3.1 Family qualities. In the field of human conflict, those who die for us we call “fallen heroes.” Those who defend us and the values that we cherish, and continue to do so are called true “living heroes.” **Buddhaghosa** gives a famous parable of the 4 persons and the bandit.

Once, a monk was sitting with someone dear, a neutral person, and a hostile person. A bandit comes along and demands only one of them for a human sacrifice. If the monk says, “Take me,” he lacks self-love; if he says, “Take this or that person,” he lacks other-love. But, he says, “Let no one die,” and he convinces the bandit not to kill anyone. He has the greatest love of all.

In fact, it is harder to live for those we truly love and things we truly cherish. The Buddha does not die for us: the Buddha *lives* for us. No greater love has a man than this, that he lives for us, teaching us that we have the capacity and power to free ourselves from suffering.⁷¹

2.3.2 Social emotions

2.3.2.1 The divine abodes should not only be meditative practices, but should also pervade every moment of our waking lives: “**While standing, moving, sitting, | or lying down, as long as one is not drowsy, one should keep to this mindfulness.**”⁷² We should cultivate the divine abodes in all our four postures, especially in relation to others.

2.3.2.2 In the presence of others, we need to accept them as they *are*, that is, we must carefully listen to *what* they are saying, *how* they are saying it, and what they are *not* saying, so that we can fully understand and appreciate them, even when they are negative. Indeed, our **lovingkindness** can heal such negativity, or at least mitigate the situation. We should not only listen with the ears, but also with our hearts.

2.3.2.3 When the person we are with is negative, we need to crank up our lovingkindness to an even higher level, as it were. We need to show our **compassion**, that is, an unconditional acceptance of this difficult situation, even if we think the person does not deserve it. If we put ourselves in the other person’s shoes, we would surely feel that we are at least well heard, so that the difficulty is already on the mend.

⁶⁹ See **Spiritual friendship: Stories of kindness**, SD 8.1.

⁷⁰ See **Aṭṭha Mettānisamsa S** (A 8.1), SD 30.6; (**Ekā,dasa**) **Mettānisamsa Sutta** (A 11.16), SD 2.15: also PmA 2:129; Miln 198; Araka J, J 169/2:61.

⁷¹ Vism 9.40-41/307 & 9.108/321. This reflection in the last para is inspired by **Spiritual friendship: Stories of kindness**, SD 8.1. See also “Unconditional love,” in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009:22-25 (4.1).

⁷² *Tiṭṭhaṃ caraṃ nisinno vā | sayāno vā yāvata’assa vigata,middho | etaṃ satim adhiṭṭheyya* (Sn 151 = Khp 9.8/8), SD 38.3. *Vigata,middho*, lit “free from drowsiness.”

2.3.2.4 In our social relationships, we often see others doing *better* than us or having *more* than we have. Again, if we play a vicarious role, looking from the other side, we probably realize that the person has put in some effort, or that circumstances are such that he is able to enjoy those benefits. We should at least accept the reality of the situation, if we are ever to rise above it. With **gladness** we easily connect with others, rejoicing in the joys of others.

2.3.2.5 Finally, we do not always, if ever, have full control of the situation, especially with people, so that despite everything good that we have done, there will always be those who are still not pleased with us, or that some things simply remain the same, or even worsen. The wheel of life keeps turning—we might be able to keep it on a certain happy course, but there is only so much we can do. In fact, there is only so much we *need* to do. Having done what needs to be done, we have to let the spinning wheel spin on its momentum.

We can only look on with **equanimity**, as people move on with their own karma, and the world turns on its own conditions. The world stands in suffering (*dukkhe loko patitthito*)—that is its nature.⁷³ We can each only step out of our own world, leaving behind the suffering. For others, we can only do so much. But we keep looking on, and keep doing so much. This is so much more than not doing anything at all. Yet, there are moments when we must simply step back, so that the good we have done and the good in others are given the time they need to effect themselves.

2.3.3 Leadership qualities. Just as Mahā Brahmā is the leader of his heavenly host, his qualities are also those of a leader, the benchmarks of good leadership. A good leader must, firstly, accept his followers and charges just as they are. He has to know them just as he would know himself, wishing and working for their welfare as he would for himself. He may even see those under him as his own offspring, just as a good king would love his subjects and nation. This is his **lovingkindness**.

When those in his charge are in any kind of difficulty, or still in need of training, the good leader shows them every **compassion** to ensure that they benefit from the help and lessons given to them. Although a leader may be firm and disciplined in his dealings with others, he is willing and able to forgive others even when they do not deserve it. A good leader knows that people can change for the better with his leadership.

A true leader rejoices in the goodness and success of his charges. He freely shows his **gladness** when and where it is due. Although the teacher is himself the best example for his followers, he is wise in praising others who set good examples, too. In other words, he places **quality** above personality, with neither fear nor favour with regards to anyone.

Finally, but not the least, he accepts *failure* just as magnanimously as he rejoices in *success*. He does his best to teach and inspire others. However, he wisely knows his limits and those of his charges. As such, he never gives up on them. Knowing the strengths of his charges both as individuals and as a group, he accordingly works with them. In this way, he is able to inspire camaraderie and esprit de corps in them, so that even in the face of great difficulties, they are able to help and work with one another—or simply move on. This is his **equanimity**.

2.3.4. Professional standards. Although the divine abodes are meditative practices and states, they are also useful as the standards for wholesome *professionalism* and for a healthy *social relationship*. The 4 divine abodes are the criteria of **a true professional, the qualities of professionalism**. First, as professionals, we must not only be really *good* in our work, but we must also *love* it, and we must have a positive attitude towards our clients. We need to listen to them *unconditionally*, so that we fully understand their needs and can respond to them effectively.

Secondly, even when they are being difficult, we must *compassionately* examine their complaints or dissatisfaction, and respond positively. This is a wise understanding of the saying, “the customer is always right.” Thirdly, when our clients respond well or are satisfied, we, too, are *glad*, appreciatively joyful. At the end of the day, despite our every effort, we satisfy some, dissatisfy others—this is all part of the professional process. We look on *equanimously*, so that we can professionally access the situation as a whole and learn how to work better and be happier at it at the end of the day.⁷⁴

⁷³ **Pihita S** (S 218*/1.68/1:40).

⁷⁴ See “Truly professional,” in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys 2: Healing words*, 2011:115-117 (ch 40).

2.4 BENEFITS OF PRACTISING THE DIVINE ABODES

2.4.1 The basic text (or the locus classicus) for lovingkindness (and, by extension, all the 4 divine abodes) is **the Karaṇīya Metta Sutta** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8).⁷⁵ For more advanced methods, see **the Mettā Saha,gata** (or **Halidda,vasana**) **Sutta** (S 46.54).

2.4.2 For the benefits of the practice of the 4 divine abodes, see the following suttas and their commentarial notes [for passage references, see 2.1.3.1(3)]:

Te,vijja Sutta	the divine abodes with similes	D 13	SD 1.8
Mahā Sudassana Sutta	Mahā Sudassanā cultivates the abodes	D 17	SD 36.12
Mahā Govinda Sutta	Mahā Govinda cultivates the abodes	D 19	SD 63.4
Udumbarika Sīha,nāda Sutta	Wanderers are taught the abodes	D 25	SD 1.4
Cakka,vatti Sīha.nāda Sutta	the “wealth of a monastic”	D 26	SD 36.10
Saṅgīti Sutta	the immeasurables (<i>appamañña</i>)	D 33)	
Vatthūpama Sutta	“inner baptism,” not a ritual cleansing	M 7	SD 28.12
Cūḷa Assa,pura Sutta	as the bases for renunciation, inner peace	M 40	SD 41.8
Mahā Vedalla Sutta	the immeasurable liberation of mind ⁷⁶	M 43	SD 30.2
Māra Tajjanīya Sutta	keeps Māra’s power away from the mind	M 50	SD 36.4
Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta = A 11.17	insight into them brings awakening ⁷⁷	M 52	SD 41.2
(Majjhima) Jīvaka Sutta	Buddha and monks cultivate them to devotees; the Buddha as Brahmā (God)	M 55	SD 43.4
Makhā,deva Sutta	King Makhā,deva renounces the world and cultivates them to life’s end	M 83	SD 60.8
(Majjhima) Dhānañjāni Sutta	Sāriputta teaches the dying Dhānañjāni, who dies and is reborn in Brahma world	M 97	SD 4.9
(Brahma,vihāra) Subha Sutta	the path to companionship with Brahmā	M 99	SD 38.6
(Ceto,vimutti) Anuruddha Sutta	“the immeasurable liberation of mind” and “the exalted liberation of mind”	M 127	SD 13.1(3.7.3) SD 54.10 (full) SD 12.3 (1.2.3)
Gārava Sutta	how respect relates to divine abodes	S 6.2	
Go,datta Sutta	Citta the houselord explains to the monk Go,datta that their proper cultivation	S 41.7	SD 60.4
Saṅkha,dhama Sutta	moral virtue is the basis for the abodes	S 42.8	SD 57.9 ff
Pāṭaliya Sutta	they help overcome doubt; hence, they are called “Dharma samadhi” ⁷⁸	S 42.13	SD 65.1
Mettā Sahagata Sutta ⁷⁹	how they differ from outside systems	S 46.54	SD 10.11
Venāga,pura Sutta	Buddha’s clear and radiant complexion arises from “couch” that is the abodes	A 3.63	SD 21.1
Kesa,puttiya Sutta	the abodes gives 4 self-assurances whether karma and rebirth true or not	A 3.65	SD 35.4a
Sāḷha Sutta	the monk Nandaka tells Sāḷha that the abodes bring focus for examining and rid defilements to “become perfect” ⁸⁰	A 3.66	SD 43.6
(Nānā,karaṇa) Mettā Sutta 1	bring rebirth amongst the brahmas	A 4.125	SD 33.9

⁷⁵ Khp 9/8 f = Sn1.8/143-152/25 f @ SD 38.3.

⁷⁶ *Appamaññā ceto,vimutti*.

⁷⁷ That is, after attaining dhyana, and emerging from it, reflecting on it as being impermanent, brings arhathood, if not non-return.

⁷⁸ Comy, however, gives different interpretations of this term: see SD 65.1.

⁷⁹ Also known as **Halidda,vasana S** (S 46.54/5:115-121), SD 10.11.

⁸⁰ “Become perfect,” *brahma,bhūta*. PED: “divine being, most excellent being, said of the Buddha” (D 3:84; M 1:111, 3:195, 224; S 4:94; A 5:226; It 57); said of arhats (A 2:206; S 3:83).

(Nānā, karaṇa) Mettā Sutta 2	bring about rebirth in the Pure Abodes	A 4.126	SD 33.10
(Saṅgha) Uposatha Sutta	one who has “attained to Godliness”	A 4.190	SD 15.10b
Vuṭṭha Vass’āvāsa Sutta	the 4 divine abodes with the 4 elements	A 9.11	SD 28.2a
Doṇa Brāhmaṇa Sutta	Buddha tells Doṇa that abodes make one “equal with brahma” (<i>brahma, sama</i>)	A 5.192	SD 36.14
Nav’aṅg’uposatha Sutta	Cultivating the abodes on an uposatha day is to live like arhats	A 9.18	SD 60.7
(Karaṇa, kāya) Brahma, vihāra S	how <i>mettā</i> limits the effects of karma	A 10.208	SD 2.10 (2)
Dasama Gaha, pati Sutta = M 52	insight into them brings awakening	A 11.17	(SD 41.2)
Paṭisambhidā, magga	freedom truly focused on the beautiful ⁸¹	Pm 5.20	
Vibhaṅga	the “immeasurables” (<i>appamañña</i>).	Vbh 13/272-285	

2.4.3 The Tevijja Sutta (D 13) is unique in that it is the only one of the first 13 suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya (Sīla-k, khandha Vagga) where the teaching does *not* lead up to arhathood. It closes with the cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*).⁸²

3 Lovingkindness in practice

3.1 WORDINGS AND STRATEGY

3.1.1 The usual wordings used in most cultivations of lovingkindness⁸³ (*mettā, bhāvanā*) are based on this pericope found in three suttas of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, thus:

He is one with a mind free of ill will, a mind without any bad thought, thinking,⁸⁴

May these beings be free from hate;	<i>ime sattā averā hontu</i>
may they be free from suffering; ⁸⁵	<i>avyāpajjā (hontu),</i>
may they be free from trouble; ⁸⁶	<i>anīghā (hontu)</i>
may they continue to be happy!”	<i>sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu</i>

(A 10.176, 10.200, 10.207)⁸⁷

These sentences can be subverbally (mentally) repeated as such, or a couple of them could be repeated in a proper way so as to *feel* the lovingkindness [7.3]. We can also use other related wordings as needed, for example, “May I be well. May I be happy. May I be safe. I accept myself just as I am. I forgive myself completely.”

3.1.2 The full sequence for the cultivation of lovingkindness, then, is as follows:

- (1) To self: “May I be free from anger.
May I be free from hate.
May I be free from suffering.
May I be free from trouble [difficulties].
May I continue to be happy.”

⁸¹ *Subhan’t’eva adhimutto hoti ti vimokkha.*

⁸² On Gombrich’s remarks here, and Bodhi’s response, see 1997:294 & SD 1.8(1).

⁸³ On the meaning and scope of *mettā*, see **Spiritual friendship**, SD 34.1 (2.5)

⁸⁴ *Avyāpanna, citto hoti appaduṭṭha, mana, saṅkappo.*

⁸⁵ “Be free from suffering,” *avyāpajjhā* (also *avyāpajja*; v1 *avyābajjha*): (1) not to be injured or harmed; harmless or non-injuring; free from suffering (*niddukkha*, ItA ad It 16,5*): M 1:90,1; A 3:285,17 = 5:329,25, 5:210,14; J 6:287,7*; M 2:115,22-23; see CPD ¹a-vyāpajja; (2) freedom from suffering: U 10,20* = V 1:3,28*; J 6:286,20*; S 4:371,29; A 4:246,8; Dhs 33, 36, 313, 1056; Vbh 169,29.

⁸⁶ “Be free from bad,” *anīgha*, resolved as *an + īgha*, instead of *a + nigha* (affliction, trouble, woe). The ideas connoted by *a-nigha* overlap with the preceding “free from hate, free from suffering”.

⁸⁷ The whole pericope: *avyāpanna, citto hoti appaduṭṭha, mana, saṅkappo: ime sattā averā hontu avyāpajjā, anīghā sukhī attānaṃ pariharantū ti. Cunda Kammāra, putta S* (A 10.176.10/5:267): this is Be reading; Ce Ee Se has only: *ime sattā averā avyāpajjā, anīghā sukhī attānaṃ pariharantū ti; Niraya Sagga S 1* (A 10.200/5:285), **Saṅcetanika S 1** (A 10.207/5:296) = A 10.206. Cf A 2:3, 228, 253.

- (2) To someone dear.
- (3) To someone neutral.
- (4) To someone hostile or negative [4.2].
- [5] To all beings.

The stage of directing lovingkindness “to all beings” can be further expanded *locationally* or *geographically*:

- (5) To everyone in the room or the vicinity.
- (6) To everyone in the whole house or building.
- (7) To everyone in the neighbourhood.
- (8) To everyone in the whole country.
- (9) To everyone in the countries or region nearby.
- (10) To everyone throughout the world.
- (11) To all beings throughout the universe (that is, breaking the barriers) [7.2.2].

3.1.3 It is vital that we do not merely recite the words, as they could become rote without feeling. The proper way is to mindfully verbalize or subverbalise⁸⁸ the words a couple of times. Then be mentally silent and feel it in our body and mind accordingly, or radiate the feeling to the intended subject or area. [3.3.3]

When radiating lovingkindness over a larger area, it might help to visualize a **radiant white lotus** (or a favourite flower, white or a light colour is best) in the centre of our hearts, radiating its light, brightening our body and mind, and shining outwards brightening up the whole room and everyone in it. Then we visualize our lovingkindness as the bright light of the sun shining or the soft light of the full moon shining all over the world. [3.3.1.4]

3.2 THE SUBJECTS OF LOVINGKINDNESS

3.2.1 Ourselves

3.2.1.1 There are two basic subjects or focuses in the cultivation of the divine abodes, that is, self and others. The word “others” comprises those dear to us, the neutral, and the hostile. The dead should never be the subject of our cultivation of the abodes.⁸⁹

3.2.1.2 In the cultivation of lovingkindness, it is usually easy to begin with ourselves. For those who find it difficult to do this, self-directed cultivation should be done at the very last stage, just before closing the practice, as stated in this well known pericope:

With a heart of **lovingkindness**, he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth. Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to himself, he dwells suffusing the whole world with lovingkindness that is vast, exalted, boundless, without hate, without ill will. (D 13,76/1:250), SD 1.8

3.2.1.3 When we have reached a healthier level of self-acceptance, we can gently follow the traditional sequence of subjects, but still closing with ourselves as the last subject. This is to keep the lovingkindness, as it were, alive all the time within us, using it whenever we need to.⁹⁰

3.2.2 The others

3.2.2.1 Buddhaghosa further instructs us not to use one of the opposite sex as the subject of our abode cultivation. The reason is clear: in the early stages of cultivation, the lovingkindness might not be strong enough, and attachment or lust may arise on this account. However, sexuality is such a complicated affair,

⁸⁸ To “verbalize” here means to say it out just loud enough for us to hear it ourselves, while to “subverbalize” is to say it mentally.

⁸⁹ If we wish to dedicate merits to a deceased person (ie if his consciousness still lingers around or is a preta), then it should be done when we have done our meditation. In a cultivation of lovingkindness, we should not think of the dead, as this could lead to speculations, sadness, fear, or some other negative emotions. Lovingkindness may be directed to the dead right at the end of the practice. On dedicating merit to the dead (ie the pretas), see (**Saddha**) **Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.77/5:269-273), SD 1.6a & **Tirokuḍḍa S** (Khp 7/6 = Pv 1.5/4 f), SD 2.7.

⁹⁰ For other details, see Vism 9.77-83/314 f.

so that it is safer to restate this advice: *we should not direct our lovingkindness to others, especially those romantically close, too early in our practice.*

3.2.2.2 Even such subjects as parents and close relatives are best left to one of the later stages, when our **lovingkindness** is strong enough. If, however, we also have difficulties in cultivating lovingkindness towards any humans, then we could try directing it to other beings, such as our pets or animals that we know and love.⁹¹

3.2.2.3 In an extreme situation (where we might not even like animals), then, we could use inanimate objects, such as plants, as the subject (visualize ourselves lovingly working with them and so on). If all these do no work, then it would be wise to go back to a comfortable earlier stage, or begin with a more suitable meditation, especially the breath meditation.⁹²

3.2.3 The negative subject

3.2.3.1 When we are beginners, we may sometimes find it difficult, even disastrous, to direct lovingkindness to someone we do not like, especially someone who has hurt or harmed us in some way. If the memory is still painful, it is best to avoid such a subject, and to focus on building up the lovingkindness with wholesome subjects until we are really positive in a naturally sustained way.

3.2.3.2 It is important to understand here that we are not “wanting” the negative person *out there* to prosper in any way, but rather to find closure to the pain or wound *within*. An open wound smarts, and is easily infected and festers. If there is no wound in our hand, we might safely carry even poison in it (Dh 124). Focus on forgiving ourselves, if it helps: “I’m OK. I accept myself just as I am.” [3.4]

3.2.3.3 Another helpful point to note is that we are cultivating lovingkindness to a negative *memory* of an *event*, not a person. We are working to close our emotional wound, healing *ourselves* [3.2.3.2]. The person has now changed, or might even have died. Even if he seems to prosper, like everyone else, he has his own problems, even now. Hence, it is a dead event, a memory coffin, that we are carrying around. We must leave it buried in the past where it belongs. Otherwise, our hurt or fear would prevent us from truly living and enjoying the present. Now is the time to emerge from the tight cocoon of painful old memories to fly freely in the open air of lovingkindness.

3.2.3.4 Trying to send our lovingkindness to someone who has hurt or violated us is, of course, very difficult. In that case, we should not think of such a person in the earlier stages of our practice. If an unhappy memory of what that person has done comes to mind, we should at once deflect it by directing our lovingkindness to a happier subject, or revert to an earlier stage of our lovingkindness, or switch to the breath meditation.

We can try to filter away that thought—that’s what it really is, only *a thought*—by labelling it, thus: “Thinking ... thinking” After noting thus a couple of times, we should just be silent to let the mind process it: a gentle inner smile helps the process. Then, switch to a more suitable meditation, as we have just mentioned.

3.2.3.5 In a worst-case scenario, we should simply stop the meditation, and do a “**cleansing breath**,” that is, to take a full deep breath (into our belly and chest), hold our breath as long as we can to let all the negative emotions gravitate into our breath, as it were. Then, as if silently whistling, let all the breath out completely, emptying *ourselves* like a released balloon. Then, at once go back to normal breathing. Do this only a couple of times at the most to avoid tiring *ourselves*.⁹³

3.2.4 Negative situations

3.2.4.1 Often enough, some unhappy incidents or perceptions might simply pop up in our meditation. Or, we could be troubled by a nagging discomfort or pain. Or, by someone shuffling, or snoring, or talking. We should at once, or at a suitable time, direct our lovingkindness to these situations and perceptions. Or, we could simply **smile** in our hearts at them. This is a mental strategy in pleasantly allowing ourselves to let go of those distractions.

⁹¹ See “Animals go to heaven,” in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009:225-227 (16.1).

⁹² On practical aspects of the breath meditation, see **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118) @ SD 7.13 (4).

⁹³ If anger still persists, see **Āghāta Paṭivinaya S** (A 5.161/3:185 f), SD 12.23 & Vism 9.14-39/298-306.

3.2.4.2 Another helpful strategy of overcoming distractions from other people (such as someone making a distracting noise, or whose handphone suddenly went off) is to put ourselves in their place. We know that we have created this distraction unintentionally, or we should not be doing this, but somehow it has happened. So, we fully forgive ourselves; we fully forgive them.

Or, we could simply smile at our faculties, congratulating them at how clearly sensitive they are! It's really good to have our senses in good working order. Once our lovingkindness is well grounded, we would not be troubled by such distractions at all.

3.3 LOVINGKINDNESS AS ENGAGEMENT

3.3.1 Directions of practice

3.3.1.1 VERBAL ENGAGEMENT. The 4 divine abodes should be cultivated in two *directions*, as it were, that is, vertically and horizontally. Vertically, each abode is to be cultivated in ourself, towards ourself. Initially, we can do this in two ways: by *subverbalizing* and by *visualizing*. The most common way to begin cultivating lovingkindness is to **verbalize** or subverbalize the lovingkindness, as mentioned above [3.1]. *Verbalizing* (the words can be heard) should only be done at the beginning or when we feel very distracted (and when there's no one around). Once we feel calm enough, we should go on to *subverbalize* the lovingkindness.

The subverbalizing of lovingkindness must be done mindfully a couple of times, followed by a profoundly silent moment to *feel* it in our body and mind. After saying, "May I be happy," a couple of times, we remain silent, and feel happy in body and mind, that is, our whole being. We can go on doing this for as long as we feel like. And then go on to another sentence, and so on. Using just two or three happy sentences should suffice.

We should then go on to direct lovingkindness in this way for everyone: the dear person, the neutral person (or everyone in the room or nearby), and the hostile person (which is optional, if this is difficult) [3.2.3]. When we feel a good sense of thought-free peace or bliss, simply feel and enjoy it for as long as it takes. When we notice any hint of its subsiding or any distraction arising, we can either simply *smile* in our heart at the feeling, either at the peace or at the in-coming distraction. Otherwise, go back to the subverbalizing.

Other than the first stage of lovingkindness (directing it to ourself), we can direct it to more than one subject or alternate them, if we like or are able to. Generally, when subverbalizing, it is easier to direct our lovingkindness to *one* subject at a time, or perhaps a few, if we find visualizing easy enough. Beyond that, when sending lovingkindness to *a group of subjects*, it is easier to visualize them, that is, to first subverbalize the lovingkindness and then visualize the subjects. When we are better at our practice, then we may even be able to at once visualize the subjects with lovingkindness without any subverbalizing, or with a minimum of it. [3.3.2]

3.3.1.2 VISUALIZATION. At any of these stages—whether directing lovingkindness to ourself or to any other individual—we should vary our method as necessary. If we find our subverbalizing is becoming somewhat routine, or just before that happens, we should go on to visualize the lovingkindness.

Visualizing lovingkindness means we recall some really happy event or activity as if it were occurring right now. For example, we recall, as a child, enjoying ourselves on a swing, joyfully feeling the breeze, or, as a student, receiving a prize, or winning a competition, or enjoying ourselves at a family or friends' gathering. Or, we could recall how we are attending to our favourite pet (still living), or joyfully tending to our plants.

Visualizing *nature*, too, is very helpful for most people. We could visualize the gentle lapping of waves on the seas-shore on a bright peaceful day, or sitting in a beautiful mountain valley, feeling its spaciousness extending right to the horizon, or a clear moonless night sky glittering with a million stars. Visualize as if it is happening right here, right now, in our meditation.

3.3.1.3 "HOLDING" THE ABODE. It is important *not* to be lost in words, thoughts or details, and *not* to be lost in the visualization, too. They are simply a skillful means to *feel* lovingkindness. Once we feel the

peace or joy arising in us, then, gently let go of the verbalizing or visualizing, and fully focus on the feeling itself.⁹⁴

Once we can feel a sense of joy or peace, we need to “hold” it, that is, simply focusing on it, letting it grow and pervade our whole being (body and mind). At the slightest hint of any distraction, we should “smile” it away. Or, we can filter the distraction away by simply labelling it as what it is, such as “Sound ... sound ...” or “Thinking ... thinking ...” and so on. [3.2.3.4]

If we continue to lose our focus, then, it would help to go back to an earlier stage that we can manage. Or, we can even switch to, say, the breath meditation, to regain mental stillness and focus. The idea is never to “push” the meditation too hard: it should be a gentle, almost effortless, arising of lovingkindness. Just feel the presence of the lovingkindness, let everything else go, and let the lovingkindness grow.⁹⁵ [7.3.5]

3.3.1.4 HORIZONTAL RADIATION. The suttas next instruct us to extend our lovingkindness “**above, below, across, everywhere**” (*uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi*). All this has been explained earlier, but it is good to refresh ourselves with reading it again [2.1.3.2].

Here, we shall only examine the “**horizontal radiation**” of lovingkindness. This stage follows from our cultivating lovingkindness within and to ourselves. Then, we go on to “direct” our lovingkindness to a “dear person or persons.” Then, we direct our lovingkindness to everyone in the room, nearby or the neighbourhood. If we cannot visualize them, then we should simply “feel” their presence, have a sense of connection with them, or use their names.

Again, it is vital, first, to subverbalize or feel the lovingkindness, and then silently “send” it to the subjects. One effective way to extend our lovingkindness *spatially* (such as our neighbourhood), as we have noted, is visualize ourselves or our lovingkindness as coming from a radiant open lotus in our hearts [3.1.3]. Or, we could visualize ourselves as the radiant sun or bright moon, shining our light upon others (especially when directing lovingkindness to the whole world).

While we are extending our lovingkindness spatially to the neighbourhood, the whole country, the neighbouring countries or regions, the whole world, and, in due course, the whole universe, we should, if we are inclined to, also visualize certain significant individuals, such as family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and people we know. Sometimes, even those we do not know, but are familiar faces, might appear to us: we direct our lovingkindness to them all the same.

3.3.1.5 ENDING THE SESSION. In the cultivation of lovingkindness, we begin with ourselves and close the practice with ourselves, too [2.1.3.3]. It is naturally easy to begin directing lovingkindness to ourselves, as we generally like ourselves best.⁹⁶ For those of us who, for some reason, dislike ourselves, then we need to focus on the practice closing, when we should be able to allow some level of self-acceptance when we have had some success with lovingkindness earlier on.⁹⁷ [3.4]

If we have been visualizing the radiant white lotus [2.1.3.4; 3.1.3], then we should close by visualizing all this radiance returning into the lotus in our hearts, keeping our minds and bodies radiant with lovingkindness. This light of lovingkindness is cleansing, purifying and healing our minds and bodies. Visualize our whole being, radiant with lovingkindness.

3.3.1.6 This is especially helpful and healing when we are ill or having some hurt or pain somewhere on or in our bodies. Direct the lovingkindness to that area, visualize it healing itself. In fact, during moments of illness, when we have a lot of time to meditate, this is a good way of expediting our healing process. In the early stages of our health problem or illness, we might even slow it down or altogether heal ourselves with such lovingkindness.

Generally, we should close our lovingkindness session with visualizing how the radiant white lotus is closing its petals, but still radiant, always radiant: *the lovingkindness is always there in our hearts when we*

⁹⁴ Further on visualizing in lovingkindness, see **Love**, SD 38.4 (7.4.1).

⁹⁵ On “not pushing oneself” in meditation, see **Cetanā’karaṇīya S** (A 11.2), SD 33.3b.

⁹⁶ See eg **(Piya) Mallikā S** (S 3.8/1:75 = U 5.1/47), SD 38.7.

⁹⁷ See “What if we keep on making the same mistake?” in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys 2: Healing Words*, 2011:158-160 (ch 56).

need it. Lovingkindness should not merely be a meditation, but it should pervade every moment of our lives in our every action.⁹⁸

3.4 Overcoming self-hate

3.4.1 Self-hate, low self-esteem and related negative perceptions may arise in us at some points in our lives. For some of us, however, such difficulties are bad enough to prevent us from actually cultivating lovingkindness to ourselves. The disadvantages of such a negative self-perception range from being self-destructive (even suicidal)⁹⁹ to persistently hurting those whom we love or who love us. In other words, we are unhappy on account of such a misperception or that it is a symptom of an underlying unhappiness.

Either way, we must first understand and accept all this as a *misperception*. We were not born with low self-esteem, self-hate or self-related problems. In the course of our lives, various people and situations *have conditioned* us to feel this way. If we have enough presence of mind, we could examine these conditions, drag them out of the hiding-places in the depths of our unconscious or latent tendencies, expose them for what they are, and set them free with lovingkindness.¹⁰⁰

3.4.2 Self-love is the immediate antidote for self-hate, and it begins with accepting oneself just as we are, warts and all. If we do not accept ourselves, no one really will. We would then be a mere shell hardened by self-hate and hollowed up by self-pity, waiting to be filled by a power-figure, father-figure or false guru, inflating our self-bubble until it bursts.¹⁰¹

3.4.3 One immediate wholesome step is, just before falling asleep, to simply say, “I’m really OK. I accept myself as I am.” Repeat this over and over—fully feeling it—until we fall asleep. Sleep happily. This is the beginning of self-acceptance.¹⁰² Once we feel ready, go on to the full cultivation of lovingkindness.

3.4.4 When our lovingkindness is strong enough, we go on to let go of all the other thoughts to focus on the meditation sign, that is, the pure feeling of joy of peace itself—that is, as it were for all the four people: self, the dear one, the neutral person, and the hostile. We are on the way to breaking the barriers. [7.2.2]

It is wise to remember that we should never begin this cultivation with someone we are physically attracted to, nor with a dead person [3.2.1]. The reason is clear: strong negative emotions are likely to arise and lead us astray. This also applies to all the other three divine abodes.

4 Compassion in practice

4.1 THE FIRST SUBJECT OF COMPASSION. In the cultivation of **compassion** (*karuṇā, bhāvanā*), the first subject should *someone unfortunate or having some difficulty*. (Note that this is different from a “hostile or negative person,” who is placed last in this cultivation.) In this connection, **the Vibhaṅga** says:

And how does a monk dwell pervading one direct with his heart filled with compassion?

Just as he would feel compassion on seeing a person who is miserable, of bad ways, so he pervades all beings with compassion.¹⁰³ (Vbh 273)

We must add that this starting-point for compassion can also be a non-human, such as a hurt animal, or nature that is badly violated by humans, or even a natural disaster. In such cases, we visualize the miserable state of those affected, such as the undernourished, emaciated, whose limbs are badly hurt or lost, sitting in a shelter with a begging-bowl, flies all over their faces, with maggot-infested wounds, moaning in pain, and so on.

⁹⁸ See Reflections, **Lovingkindness is simply healing**, in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009:26 f (4.2) & **Your mind: use it or lose it**, in *Revisioning Buddhism*, 2011:35-37 (ch 11).

⁹⁹ See Reflection, **So you want to kill yourself?** in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009:17-19 (2.4).

¹⁰⁰ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

¹⁰¹ See Reflection, **Emotional independence or emotional alienation**, in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys 2: Healing Words*, 2011: 153-156 (ch 54).

¹⁰² See Reflections, **Ill will and mental cultivation**, in Piya Tan, *Revisioning Buddhism*, 2011:40-42 (ch 13) & “What if we keep on making the same mistake?” in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys 2: Healing Words*, 2011:158-160 (ch 56).

¹⁰³ *Kathaṅ ca bhikkhu karuṇā, sahaḡatena cetasā ekaṁ disaṁ pharitvā viharati? Seyyathā’pi nāma ekaṁ puggalaṁ duggataṁ durūpetāṁ disvā karuṇāyeyya, evaṁ eva sabbe satte karuṇāya pharati.*

If we are unable to find such a negative person or situation, then, we can cultivate compassion towards a current bad-doer, who, even though is happy now, would sooner or later be like someone who is caught and punished for his crime, or face the painful karmic results of his own actions, or being reborn in one of the subhuman realms.¹⁰⁴

In special situations, such as when we are upset with a loved one, we could reflect that even such a beloved has gone through significant difficulties in the past, and would surely face some sort of difficulties in the future. Right now, we direct our compassion to them unconditionally, and wishing them to be free from their sufferings and disadvantages.

4.2 THE REMAINING SUBJECTS FOR COMPASSION. Having aroused our compassion for someone suffering or unfortunate, we then go on to direct our compassion to a dear person (as noted above) [4.1], then to a neutral person (such as those around us, towards whom we have no special feeling), and then a hostile person.

Although it is possible to put a hostile person in the first stage of the cultivation of compassion, this is not easy if our compassion is weak (unlike, say, the Buddha or the arhats). However, this is a good place for such a person if he has fallen into great difficulties. We might be able to direct compassion to such a subject by reflecting that it is not worth being hateful towards anyone, even a hostile person, or someone who has hurt us, because even such a person has to face misfortune and suffering in due course.

When our compassion is strong, we go on to let go of all the other thoughts to focus on the meditation sign, that is, the pure feeling itself—breaking all barriers, as it were, embracing all the four kinds of people: the dear one, the neutral person, the hostile, and ourselves. We are on the way to breaking the barriers. [7.2.2]

4.3 FORGIVING THOSE WHO HAVE HURT US. It is not easy, often impossible to, cultivate compassion—real compassion—by itself. We must always begin with *lovingkindness*; it is the foundation of compassion. Indeed, compassion is lovingkindness in action, especially when shown to others who do not deserve it, and happily given. Then, we are able to see, even accept, that person as we see and accept ourself.

In an important sense, compassion is something we do for ourself with lovingkindness. We accept the fact that we have been hurt, but we do not identify with that hurt. We see it simply as pain, and no one likes pain. So we are no different from others, even the one who has hurt us. Clearly, the person who has hurt us did so when he was truly unhappy: happy people do not want to hurt others or do bad deeds.

If we feel a lingering memory of the pain caused by that person, we should reflect thus: “You cannot hurt me any more because I now understand you and wish you well. Since I know you, you will have no hold on me. You no more trap me in my past. You are now free from my past, I set you free. I am happy with my present, and worthy of my future.”

5 Gladness in practice

5.1 THE FIRST SUBJECT OF GLADNESS. Gladness or appreciative joy (*muditā*) is like a mother’s happiness at her child’s accomplishments.¹⁰⁵ It is a wholesome rejoicing in the success and happiness of others, especially when they deserve it. The rare English word, “compersion” can be used here. Its opposite is roughly the German word, *schadenfreude*, “delighting in other’s misfortune,” and which probably came from the Greek epicaricacy.¹⁰⁶

It should be here noted here that although we have some sort of mental list of those who are dear, neutral or hostile to us, these are, at best, our current perceptions, subject to various conditions beyond our

¹⁰⁴ For other details, see Vism 9.77-83/314 f. The subhuman realms are those of the asuras, the animals, the pretas, and the hell-beings: see **Pañca, gati S** (A 9.68), SD 2.20.

¹⁰⁵ Vimm:ESK 191; Vism 9.108//321.

¹⁰⁶ In *Nicomachean Ethics* (1108M-10), **Aristotle** gives a set of 3 terms in this connection: *epikhairekakia* (Gk ἐπιχαίρεκακία) (taking pleasure in another’s ill fortune) or “epicaricacy” is the opposite of *phthonos* (φθόνος) (a painful response to another’s good fortune, deserved or not), and *nemesis* (νέμεσις) (a painful response to another’s undeserved good fortune) is the mean. The German *schadenfreude* is close to *epikhairekakia*, both roughly the opp of *muditā*. See David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, Univ of Toronto, 2006.

control. For example, even someone dear to us might face suffering or difficulties. This is when we should put this person first in the cultivation of compassion [4.2].

In the cultivation of gladness, it is easiest to start with a dear person who is, for some reason, very happy. It is this new situation that makes him the best subject for the *first* stage of gladness. We should not begin this cultivation with someone we are physically attracted to, nor with a dead person [3.2.1]. Even if a dear friend is not happy now, we could recall his past happiness and use that memory as the subject of this first stage, knowing that he will be happy again in time.

5.2 THE REMAINING SUBJECTS FOR GLADNESS. After directing gladness to the dear person, we go on successively to a neutral person, and then a hostile person. Should resentment arise towards the hostile person, we should revert to cultivating lovingkindness [3.2]. This strategic withdrawal helps us to re-energize ourself with positive emotion so that we can centre ourselves in stillness again. Then, without any haste, we rebuild our gladness.

When we are able to let go of all the other thoughts, with the gladness fully strengthened, we are then focused on the meditation sign, that is, the pure feeling itself. The gladness is then strong enough for all the four kinds of people or subjects: the dear one, the neutral person, the hostile, and ourselves. We are on the way to breaking the barriers and attaining dhyana. [7.2.2]

6 Equanimity in practice

6.1 THE FIRST SUBJECT OF EQUANIMITY

6.1.1 The divine abode of equanimity can only be properly and fully cultivated when we have attained at least the third dhyana. In other words, only when we are feeling zest and joy, can we really go on to keep a mind that is stable and unattached to other thoughts and external circumstances.

Hence, we should first be thoroughly familiar with the first three dhyanas. Having developed each dhyana, we emerge, reflecting on its shortcomings, especially its grossness.¹⁰⁷ Then, we should go on to reflect on the special benefit of equanimity—that it is profoundly blissful and peaceful.

6.1.2 However, there is a subtle difference between the equanimity as a divine abode, especially as a social emotion, that is, in waking practice, and the equanimity of the 3rd dhyana. In dhyanic terms, both kinds of equanimity are identical. However, as an engaging social emotion, it is best understood as an “on-looking awareness” or “on-looking lovingkindness” [7.1.9.3]. This is when lovingkindness, despite being unable to do anything as before, continues to watch the situation, just as a mother carefully watches a grown-up offspring (in Buddhaghosa’s parable of the 4 sons. [7.2.1.3])

6.2 THE REMAINING SUBJECTS FOR EQUANIMITY. Then, we extend the equanimity successively to a person who is normally neutral, followed by a dear one, a close friend and finally ourself.¹⁰⁸ Next, we regard with equanimity both the neutral person and the dear person, so breaking the barriers [7.2.2]. After that, we work on removing the barriers between the neutral person and the close friend. Then, the barriers between the neutral person and ourself are removed.

Having removed the barriers separating all the four kinds of people, we go on to cultivate the meditation sign. The cultivating of equanimity and the breaking of the barriers work to clear away the final vestiges of discriminating thought, so that our mind is truly calm and clear, and ready to see only the sign of equanimity. If we do this properly, we will attain the fourth dhyana.¹⁰⁹

7 Refining the divine abodes

7.1 NEAR AND FAR ENEMIES

¹⁰⁷ On how to let go of the dhyana-factors successively, see (**Pañcāla, caṇḍa**) **Sambādha S** (A 9.42/4:449-451) & SD 33.2 (1.3). See also **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (7) (What happens when we attain dhyana?)

¹⁰⁸ Note that for this stage, the sequence is as follows: a “neutral person” (*majjhata, puggala*), a “dear one” (*piya, -puggala*), a “close friend” (*soṇḍa, sahāya*), and lastly the self (*attā*) (Vism 9.89/317). A “dear one” here refers to someone we love (like a spouse, partner, a girl-friend, boy-friend, or soul-mate), while a “close friend” is someone close on a platonic basis.

¹⁰⁹ See **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (Fig 8.1).

7.1.1 Textual reference. Buddhaghosa, in his *Visuddhi, magga*, discusses the finer aspects of the divine abodes in terms of “near enemies” (*āsanna, paccatthika*) and “far enemies” (*dūra, paccatthika*).¹¹⁰ Here are the relevant excerpts from **the Visuddhi, magga**, which are also found in **the Attha, sālinī** (Dhamma, saṅga-ṇī Commentary):

98. And here each one has two enemies, one near and one far.

The divine abode of **lovingkindness [319]** has **lust** (*rāga*) as its near enemy,¹¹¹ since both alike see good qualities. Lust behaves like **an enemy** who lurks *close by* a man, and easily finds an opportunity. So lovingkindness should be well protected from lust.

Ill will (*vyāpāda*) is its far enemy. As it is different from lust, it is like an enemy dwelling in the mountains. So lovingkindness must be cultivated away from any danger from that. For, it is not possible to cultivate lovingkindness and feel anger at the same time.¹¹²

99. The divine abode of **compassion** has **grief** (*domanassa*) based on household life as its near enemy, since both alike see failure. Such grief has been described, beginning with these words (in **the Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta**, M 137), thus:

“From regarding a non-reception of *visual forms* as not receiving what are cognizable by *the eye* that are wished for, desired, agreeable, gratifying, and associated with worldliness; or, when one recalls what was formerly received that has passed, ceased, changed—**grief** [displeasure] arises. A grief such as this is called a grief of the household life. ... etc.”¹¹³

Cruelty (*vihimsā*) is its far enemy. It is different from grief. So compassion must be cultivated away from any danger from that. For, it is not possible to cultivate compassion and be cruel to living beings at the same time.

100. The divine abode of **gladness** has **joy** (*somanassa*) based on the household life as its near enemy, since both alike see success. Such joy been described, beginning with these words (in **the Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta**, M 137), thus:

“From regarding a reception of *visual forms* as a reception cognizable by *the eye* that are wished for, desired, agreeable, gratifying, and associated with worldliness; or, when one recalls what was formerly received that has passed, ceased, changed—**joy** arises. A joy such as this is called a joy of the household life. ... etc.”¹¹⁴

And **aversion** (*arati*) is its far enemy. It is different from joy. So gladness should be cultivated away from any danger from that. For, it is not possible to cultivate gladness and be discontented with remote dwellings and higher wholesome states at the same time.

101. The divine abode of **equanimity** has **ignorant indifference** (*aññāṇ’upekkhā*) based on the household life as its near enemy, since both alike ignore faults and virtues. Such ignorant indifference has been described, beginning with these words (in **the Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta**, M 137), thus:

“On seeing a visible object with the eye equanimity arises in the foolish infatuated ordinary man, in the untaught ordinary man who has not conquered his limitations, who has not conquered future [kamma] results, who is unperceiving of danger. Such equanimity as this does not surmount the visible object. Such **equanimity** as this is called equanimity of the household life.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Vism 9.98-101/318-320.

¹¹¹ “Since it is able to corrupt owing to its similarity, like an enemy with the face of a friend, **lust is the near enemy of lovingkindness**” (*tasmā mitta, mukha, sapatto viya tulyākārena dūsanato rāgo mettāya āsanna, paccatthiko*, VismṬ: Ee 309: Be 1:380). VismṬ = Param’attha, mañjūsā.

¹¹² **Saṅgīti S** (D 22): the 6 elements of escape (from suffering) (*nissaraṇīyā, dhātu*) (D 33,2.2(17)/3:247 f).

¹¹³ M 137,12/3:218 (SD 29.5).

¹¹⁴ M 137.10/3:217 (SD 29.5).

¹¹⁵ M 137,14/3:219 (SD 29.5).

Lust and aversion (*rāga, paṭigha*) are its far enemies. They are different from ignorance. Therefore, equanimity must be cultivated away from any danger from that. [320] For, it is not possible to look on with equanimity and be lustful or resentful¹¹⁶ at the same time.

(Vism 9.98-101/318-320 = DhsA 193 f)

In summary, we have these near and far enemies of the 4 divine abodes, thus:

	<u>Near enemy</u>		<u>Far enemy</u>	
Lovingkindness	lust	<i>rāga</i>	ill will	<i>vyāpāda</i>
Compassion	grief	<i>domanassa</i>	cruelty	<i>vihimsā</i>
Gladness	household joy	<i>gehasita somanassa</i>	aversion	<i>arati</i>
Equanimity	ignorant indifference	<i>aññāṇ'upekkhā</i>	lust and aversion	<i>rāga, paṭigha</i>

7.1.2 Near enemy of lovingkindness. When the divine abodes are not properly cultivated, our emotions as listed here might remain or even grow. “Near enemy” (*āsanna, paccatthika*) refers to an emotion that appears to resemble the abode of lovingkindness, but in reality is not a wholesome feeling. For example, *lusting* after someone and showing lovingkindness both have a sense of liking someone, but **lust** has a powerful sense of selfishness and attachment, while lovingkindness is only true with unconditional selflessness. It is not always easy to distinguish between the two, and, so, it is easy to mistake lust for lovingkindness.

7.1.3 Far enemy of lovingkindness. Ill will is the “far enemy” (*dūra, paccatthika*) of lovingkindness, meaning that they are contrary to one another. They are incompatible and cannot really exist in a person at the same time. We simply cannot have lovingkindness for someone and hate him at the same time. We have to ensure that this negative emotion does not arise during our practice. But if it does arise, then, we must examine and review the conditions that have brought it about, and correct them.

7.1.4 Near enemy of compassion. Grief is the “near enemy” of compassion, which means that it is easy to mistake grief for compassion. Grief is a sense of loss and helplessness. It also manifests itself as pity, being sad at another’s suffering or deprivation. All this suggests that we are unable to really uplift the subject from his suffering or difficulty. Compassion, on the other hand, is a feeling informed by wisdom.

We see a blind man heading towards ditch, and seeing the danger, we at once warn him or guide him to a safe path. Or, we know that someone or a group of people are needlessly heart-sick and suffering because they do not know the Buddha’s teachings on suffering and the mind. So we make every effort to educate them on the nature of the mind and teach them meditation.

7.1.5 Far enemy of compassion. Cruelty is clearly the “far enemy” of compassion, because it is its direct opposite. They are incompatible: a cruel person is clearly not compassionate. In actual cultivation of compassion, the far enemy is unlikely to arise as the practice is already founded on lovingkindness. However, when externally or socially expressed, such conflicting emotions might arise, especially when we are faced with difficulties.

7.1.6 Near enemy of gladness. Household joy or **worldly delight** is the “near enemy” of gladness, because one can easily be mistaken for the other. For example, someone we like or someone famous (such as an exotic guru) does a service, we at once applaud it, but the reality is that we have a deep bias for the person or hope to gain some favour from him.

7.1.7 Far enemy of gladness. Or, we might show **aversion** towards someone we do not like or a humble lay Buddhist worker with neither religious nor academic titles. We might even think that the person we

¹¹⁶ “Be resentful,” *paṭihaññissati*, which Ñānamoli notes as: “*Paṭihaññati*, ‘to be resentful’: not in PED; the verb has been needed to correspond to ‘resentment’ (*paṭigha*), as the verb ‘to be inflamed with greed’ (*rajjati*) corresponds with ‘greed’ (*rāga*).” (Vism:Ñ n15: 4th ed 346, 5th ed 791f). *Paṭihaññati* is actually given by PED & PTC under *paṭihanati* (to strike against, ward off, keep away, destroy, M 1:273), as its passive form (It 103; J 1:7; DhsA 72). Both Childers (DPL) & Andersen (*Pali Glossary* 1901) der it from *paṭihanti*, but is syn with *paṭihanati*. Buddhadatta (*Concise Pali Dict*) has *paṭihaññati*: “to be struck against, to be afflicted.”

do not like is really incapable of anything good or great at all. In fact, this is a feeling of bias or cynicism. This problem is likely to be more common amongst richer Buddhist patrons who tend to support “well-attained” priests, titled gurus, or lineage lamas, used to the royal religious life.

7.1.8 Near enemy of equanimity

7.1.8.1 **Equanimity** is the most difficult and tricky of the divine abodes, because its “near enemy,” **ignorant indifference**, can be easily mistaken for a noble emotion, a divine abode. Equanimity as ignorant indifference manifests itself in a religious person when he takes the sacred teachings literally so that he feels justified in not responding kindly or generously to those who seek his help or are suffering.

7.1.8.2 A common Buddhist fault of ignorance indifference arises when we attribute the misfortune of others summarily to “karma.” Such a fatalistic person is likely to be cold or indifferent to the poor and needy, or those undergoing pain, lack or loss. In psychodynamic psychology, this is called rationalization or intellectualization.¹¹⁷

7.1.8.3 **“Rationalization”** is a logical or moral justification of an action or attitude who is unaware of his unconscious biases of greed, hate, delusion or fear. For example, a person attributes the misfortunes or disadvantages of others to “bad karma,” on account of his own fear of facing those problems himself, or perhaps he is himself going through those problems and, on account of ill will (a negative memory of his own pains), rationalizes them, and becomes apathetic to those who need help and healing.

7.1.8.4 **“Intellectualization,”** as a psychological term refers to the use of the intellect to defend or rationalize an instinctual impulse, or the use of excessive abstract thinking to block out disturbing emotions or conflicts. This is similar to rationalization [7.1.8.2], except that here there is a sustained play of technical jargon, especially religious teachings and technicality. In short, thinking is used to avoid feeling.¹¹⁸

For example, when we are working in a competitive business and trying to earn more money than others, we may not see any moral lapse or disciplinary offence in monastics using money, having back accounts, or enjoying worldly lives. We think that they have a right to personal income and pleasures as they wish, since they are “professionals” in their own way, or that they are highly attained, and so “know what they are doing.” So, we are apathetic to the insidious issues and problems that such clerical misconduct entails.

7.1.9 The far enemies of equanimity

7.1.9.1 Equanimity has two “far enemies,” that is, **lust** and **aversion**. They are, respectively, the “pulling” aspect of false equanimity, and its related “pushing” aspect. They are called “far enemies,” because unlike the “near enemy” of equanimity—ignorant indifference—these far enemies are motivated by lust and aversion, the powerful forces of *pulling* or approving what we like or to which we are drawn, and of *pushing* away, the disapproving or rejecting of what we dislike.

7.1.9.2 A well known example in religion is guru devotion or idolization of teachers or power figures. When we are devoted to a particular teacher, especially to the exclusion of others, we are likely to approve of his every word and action, and even rationalize or intellectualize his wrong doings¹¹⁹ [7.1.8].

Our indifference to the guru’s wrongs is the result of our powerful attraction, that is, infatuation or lust, for the teacher. Our indifference to the fact that others are harmed or disadvantaged on account of the guru’s character may be rooted in our hate or rejection of these people whom we see as not being grateful, loyal and loving to our beloved and perfect guru. Hence, they deserve “bad karma” has befallen them.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Technically, **rationalization** is here not really a “defence mechanism” in the psychological sense, but only a way of making or denying the symptoms of a defence. Even then, it is bad enough since it shows that the person is emotionally crippled and unable to have any positive feeling towards others. **Intellectualization**, on the other hand, is clearly a defence mechanism, if it is an unconscious reaction by way of one’s avoidance of what is seen as a threat to the ego or self. On **defence mechanisms**, see **Khaluṅka S** (A 8.14) + SD 7.14 ↑SD 24.10b (2).

¹¹⁸ On **intellectualization** as a defence mechanism, see (7.1.8.2) n. On **feeling** as “direct knowing,” see Reflection, **Ways of knowing**, R143, 2010: <http://dharmafarer.org>.

¹¹⁹ On the disadvantages of being devoted to a single teacher, see **Puggala-p, pasāda S** (A 5.250), SD 3.14; on the problem of **charisma**, see SD 3.14 (7).

¹²⁰ On the negative and real effects of such a situation, see **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17.

7.1.9 The abodes as social emotions

7.1.9.1 The divine abodes, then, also function in our daily lives, as positive social emotions. We should not be equanimous towards a problem or situation that can and needs to be corrected or alleviated by us. However, when we have endeavoured to sort things out, or it is beyond our power to effect any solution, then, instead of feeling devastated, we calmly and wisely accept the situation as it is, reflecting that it is not our fault that the situation is such. Perhaps, it is not the right time yet for any positive change. Or perhaps, the karmic conditions of the person is such that he is not ready for help.

7.1.9.2 In other words, equanimity, as a divine abode, is not giving up our efforts in reaching out to others wholesomely, but understanding the limits of our own abilities and powers. We need to take time-out, as it were, to stand back and look on equanimously—like a doctor, reflecting on how his patient has or has not responded to his treatments, and studying his medical records—learning from the situation and our own experience of it to discover how we can better ourselves and attain the wisdom to renew our wholesome efforts to reach out to others.

7.1.9.3 “Applied” divine abodes is best understood in terms of 4 dynamic aspects: lovingkindness is an unconditional wholesome acceptance of self and others; compassion is lovingkindness actively directed to the less fortunate for their upliftment; gladness is an appreciative lovingkindness reflecting the goodness and success of others; and equanimity is an on-looking lovingkindness, applied both to others as well as to oneself.

7.2 THE ABODES AND BEYOND

7.2.1 The full cultivation

7.2.1.1 The cultivation of the divine abodes is a set of spiritual exercises, invoking the most wholesome of emotions or feelings in us. Here, “**feeling**” means a wholesomely direct experience of life and others. With *words*, we tend to construct perceptions of others and to measure or quantify our experiences. Such tendencies can become so habitual in us that we are unable to know or “feel” people, we are incapable of celebrating the joy and good in others before us: we are living in our own virtual world of self-created ghosts, demons and shades.

7.2.1.2 If such a mentality becomes extreme, when our perceptions and projections become so real, yet so private and limited, then, we are heading for a mire of eccentricity or madness. The divine abodes are not only an assurance against freakishness or madness, but they are the best tools for cultivating our highest, even divine, qualities, that is, of joyful living of the fullest wholesome lives.

7.2.1.3 **Buddhaghosa** recommends that lovingkindness is for the purification of one who has much ill will; compassion, for one with much cruelty; gladness, for one with much aversion; and equanimity, for one with much lust. Attention, too, must be directed to all beings in four ways, that is, promoting welfare, removing suffering, rejoicing in the goodness and success of others, and a healthy unconcern. He illustrates this ongoing practice as follows:

And one abiding in the immeasurable states should practise lovingkindness and the rest like a mother with four sons, namely, a young child, a sick child, an adolescent, and one busy with his own affairs. Now, she wants the young child to grow up; she wants the sick child to get well; she wants the adolescent to long enjoy the benefits of youth, but is not at all bothered about the one busy with his own affairs. (Vism 9.108/321)

7.2.2 “Breaking the barriers”

7.2.2.1 As a positive emotion, our lovingkindness is successful when we are able to allay, even remove, our resentment for a negative person (especially someone who has hurt or harmed us). In other words, we are able, in our meditation, to regard this negative person just as we regard someone positive, a dear friend, or a neutral person. This is known as “breaking the barriers” (*sīma, sambheda*). Then, we sustain our cultivation for a while, without any barrier or limit, enjoying mental impartiality towards all the four kinds of persons, that is, self, a dear person, a neutral person, and a hostile person (Vism 9.40/307). [7.2.2]

7.2.2.2 Psychologically, what we are doing here is an internal self-cleansing, ridding oneself of any negative imprints or memories, corpses and coffins, we have been lugging along so that they haunt and hin-

der us in our quest for happiness. Now they are no more, left buried in the graves of the past forever. We are victims no more, but victors of our own hearts.¹²¹

7.2.2.3 Lovingkindness here has empowered us to give closure to past pains, so that we never negatively react any emotional provocation or problem situation. Our hands are healed of all cuts and wounds, and may even carry poison (Dh 124). We have become all anew, healed and energized with positive emotions, able to tap our creative potentials and living happily as well as benefitting others and the world. Before we go on to what happens after this [7.4], let us examine another vital aspect of lovingkindness which reflects the essence of Buddhist practice.

7.3 LOVINGKINDNESS AS RENUNCIATION

7.3.1 The stages of letting go

7.3.1.1 In practice, meditation, in its highest reality, is an exercise in renunciation. When meditation is properly done and enjoyed, it is just as noble as living a life of renunciation, certainly nobler than merely being a monastic of the cloth but lacking the Dharma spirit. In a vital way, it is mental cultivation that defines a true renunciant, desirous of spiritual awakening, and benefitting others as we move closer to nirvana.

7.3.1.2 In simple terms, meditation can be meaningfully explained in terms of “**solitude**” (*viveka*), that is, bodily solitude (*kāya,viveka*), mental solitude (*citta,viveka*) and solitude from acquisitions (*upadhi,viveka*). “Solitude” here does not mean “loneliness,” as it is a very blissful state: rather, it has a liberating sense of “**aloneness.**” In other words, we are now truly free from the crowd and from crowdedness in life.

7.3.1.3 “Bodily solitude” refers to the ideal state of physical preparation for meditation, that is, finding a proper place for meditation, and adopting the most comfortable posture that keeps our mind alert. An ideal place for meditation is defined in the suttas as “a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a gully [gorge], a hillside cave, a cemetery, a remote forest [jungle grove], the open air, a heap of straw.”¹²² A shorter list of three places, probably later, is mentioned in **Anāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118):

Here, bhikshus, a monk who has gone to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, establishes mindfulness before him.
(M 118,17/3:82)

7.3.1.4 “Mental solitude” is, strictly speaking, the attainment of dhyana¹²³ itself. More generally, it refers any state of wholesome mental concentration, especially one accompanied with calm and bliss. Technically, dhyana refers to a focused mental state of profound calm and joy, after all the 5 mental hindrances¹²⁴ have been given up.

7.3.1.5 “Solitude from the acquisitions” refers to the goal of meditation, especially arhathood or non-return. “Acquisitions” (*upadhi*) (usually plural) are the substrates of existence, essential supports of being, that is, worldly possessions as a source of rebirth. The Majjhima Commentary mentions 4 kinds of acquisitions: the aggregates (*khandh’upadhi*), defilements (*kiles’upadhi*), volitional formations (*abhisankhār’upadhi*), and the cords of sense-pleasure (*kāma,guṇ’upadhi*).¹²⁵

7.3.1.6 It is also possible to take this highest level of solitude as the “nirvana with remains” (*sōpadhisesa nibbāna*),¹²⁶ that is, full awakening here and now.¹²⁷ The “remains” are the *physical* aspects of our

¹²¹ See Reflection, **Don’t own the pain** (R122), in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys 2: Healing Words*, 2011:59-62 (ch 19) or online at [Dharmafarer.org](http://dharmafarer.org).

¹²² This stock phrase of 9 places conducive to meditation is found at D 1:72, 207, 2:242, 3:49; M 1:181, 269, 274, 346, 440, 441, 2:162, 226, 3:3, 35, 115-117; A 2:210, 3:92, 100, 4:436, 5:207; Nm 1:26, 140, 2:341; Miln 369.

¹²³ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5).

¹²⁴ The 5 mental hindrances are desire for sensual pleasures, ill will, sloth and torpor, restless and remorse, and doubt: see **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

¹²⁵ MA 2:112, 3:169, 5:60.

¹²⁶ A 9.12.4/4:379; It 2.2.7/38 f; ItA 165.

¹²⁷ “Acquisitions,” *upadhi*, substrates of existence, essentials of being, worldly possessions as a source of rebirth. Comy mentions 4 kinds of acquisitions: the aggregates (*khandh’upadhi*), defilements (*kiles’upadhi*), volitional forma-

being and related psychological aspects of clear mindfulness and great wisdom. The mental aspects rooted in karma have been liberated.

7.3.1.7 On a practical level, the first two solitudes apply. Only the first, bodily solitude, deals with the body, while the rest deals with the meditating mind. Let us examine these practical aspects of meditation further.

7.3.2 Verbalizing. In the cultivating of lovingkindness, we begin, just as in any Buddhist meditation, by finding a suitable place and sitting in a comfortable posture. However, as **the Karañña Metta Sutta** (Kho 9 = Sn 1.8) reminds us: “While standing, moving, sitting, or lying down, as long as one is not drowsy, one should keep to this mindfulness.”¹²⁸ In other words, we should keep on radiating lovingkindness every moment of our waking life, unless we are doing some other kind of meditation.

We usually begin our lovingkindness meditation by verbalizing (saying out) or subverbalizing (mentally saying) the words of lovingkindness [3.1]. As we focus on the sounds as well as the meaning of the words, our attention is directed away from distractions, returns to the meditation-object and settles down. As we become more settled, we should only subverbalize the lovingkindness, so that we now attend to the thought of lovingkindness, that is, as we gently let go of the body and speech altogether, as it were.

7.3.3 Subverbalizing. As the mind settles, we go on focusing on the *thought* of lovingkindness, letting go of the words. As already described [3.3.1.1], we mentally say (subverbalize) the lovingkindness, and then silently *feel* it in our minds and bodies. This should not be rushed, but sustained for as long as possible.

When we are more certain of the subverbalizing process, the *mind* of lovingkindness, we could, if we are inclined to, alternate this with visualizing of memories of happy events and activities [3.3.1.1]. Subverbalizing and visualizing should be done as long as we need to. We will naturally know that we should move on to the next stage when we feel that the subverbalizing (the mental words) becomes “too loud,” that is, we feel that we do not need it any more.

7.3.4 Visualizing. Once we feel this way, we are ready to let go of the mind or thought of lovingkindness. We should keep on only visualizing the lovingkindness. As already advised, in the visualizing, we should take care not to go astray with the memory or narrative details. Instead, we should stay focused on the *feeling* (a direct experience) of the visualization.

Once the lovingkind feeling is strong enough (again we will naturally feel this), then, we let go of the visualizing efforts, too. There is only the feeling of lovingkindness pervading our body and mind, or only the mind or heart. In other words, we neither hear any words nor think any thoughts, at least for some time (which if often good enough).

7.3.5 Fully feeling. Like breath meditation, lovingkindness should be cultivated without any expectation (which is really thinking). We simply sit like a fresh beautiful living flower, enjoying the bright sunlight and open air. We feel the lovingkindness directly, without a thought, without a word. In such moments, we *are* lovingkindness.¹²⁹ [3.3.1.3]

However, after some time, if there is any distraction, we only need to gently smile at it, then, let it go. Or, if we sense our focus weakening, we could *smile* at the lovingkindness or the bliss; or we could gently whisper, “Peaceful” or “Joyful” or “Happy,” or something similar, just enough to keep the mind focused. In fact, once we are fully immersed in lovingkindness, we do not need to make any more effort. It just happens, and we can only blissfully *enjoy* it until it is time for us to emerge from it.

7.3.6 Reviewing. It is important to understand that all thinking and knowing (as we understand them) stop in deep meditation. In lovingkindness meditation, too, there is this expansive, selfless, blissful, radiant

tions (*abhisankhār'upadhi*), and the cords of sense-pleasure (*kāma,gun'upadhi*) (MA 2:112, 3:169, 5:60). It is also possible to take this as the “nirvana with remains” (*sōpadhisesa nibbāna*) (A 9.12.4/4:379; It 2.2.7/38 f; ItA 165), ie, full awakening here and now. For a fuller expl, see the viveka, nissita formula, see **Viveka, nissita**, SD 20.4; see also “Introduction to the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas,” SD 13.1 §4.2c n.

¹²⁸ *Tiṭṭham caram nisinnō vā | sayāno vā yāvat'assa vigata, middho | etaṃ satim adhiṭṭheyya* (Sn 151 = Khp 9.8/8), SD 38.3.

¹²⁹ On “not pushing oneself” in meditation, see **Cetanā'karaṇīya S** (A 11.2), SD 33.3b.

calm and clarity into which we dissolve, as it were. Then, the time comes when our biological clock will tick again, as it were, bringing us back into the “real” world.¹³⁰

In fact, the *real* lovingkindness, the most effective kind, occurs *after* this profound thought-free state or dhyana. Having emerged from dhyana, we then, if we like, radiate lovingkindness to wherever or whomever we wish, including ourselves. This will be very easy and enjoyable as the bliss and clarity are so powerful, so that the mind is profoundly focused and profusely energized. Let us take a step back and examine how we get into dhyana, in the first place.

7.4 GETTING INTO DHYANA. For the divine abodes to be fully effected, as intended by the Buddha, we need to cultivate them to the level of dhyana (*jhāna*). To experience any of the divine abodes on a dhyana level, that is, as a purely mental (free of the physical senses) experience of utter immeasurability (*appamāṇa*), we need to directly feel the abode. In other words, we have to transcend the body, words and thoughts, so that there is neither sensual processing nor perception of meditator and meditation-object—there is only the divine abode, we *are* the divine abode.

If we are cultivating lovingkindness, once we are fully immersed in the feeling (*not* the thought) of lovingkindness, “we” should simply attend to the pleasant feeling, and do nothing else. However, the presence of zest and joy (*pīti, sukha*), and even joy itself, means that the first three abodes can only reach up to the third dhyana. Equanimity is the only abode that is fully felt in the fourth dhyana.¹³¹

<u>Divine abode</u>	<u>Antidote for</u>		<u>Dhyana level</u>
Lovingkindness	the hateful	}	1 st -3 rd dhyanas
Compassion	the cruel		
Gladness	the resentful		
Equanimity	the lustful	—	4 th dhyana

Once the divine abodes have been cultivated to the level of dhyana, and we have spent enough time familiarizing ourself with them, inside out, so to speak, we can go on to do one of two things, that is, either turn to wisdom training, or go on to cultivate even higher still.¹³² Here, we will mention only the wisdom training aspect, and later discuss the freedom of mind [7.2.2].

Having spent enough time in dhyana, we then emerge from it, with a mind that is utterly joyful, calm and clear,¹³³ we then direct it to reflecting on one of the 3 characteristics: impermanence, suffering, and non-self. As a rule, we should begin with the perception on impermanence (*anicca, saññā*) and be fully familiar with it, so that it, at least, becomes the basis for streamwinning.¹³⁴ [8.3]

8 Benefits of practising the 4 divine abodes

8.1 THE BENEFITS OF LOVINGKINDNESS

8.1.1 Mental focus, especially a lovingkind focus, has many benefits. There are at least two discourses listing the benefits (*ānisaṃsa*) of cultivating lovingkindness. **The (Aṭṭha) Mettānisaṃsa Sutta** (A 8.1) lists 8 benefits,¹³⁵ apparently, for those who do not meditate. **The (Ekā, dasa) Mettānisaṃsa Sutta** (A 11.16), on the other hand, gives the following list of 11 benefits for one who cultivates lovingkindness, thus:¹³⁶

- (1) One sleeps happily.

¹³⁰ On the absence of thoughts as we normally know them in dhyana, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2).

¹³¹ Vism 90.111/322. Further see Vism 112-118/322-324. On “how to attain dhyana,” see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (8.7). See also **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

¹³² See eg **Akāsānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.5/4:266) & SD 24.15.

¹³³ On “directing the mind to cultivate insight,” see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (SD 6.2).

¹³⁴ On the ease of attaining streamwinning here and now, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7 & **Laymen saints**, SD 8.6 (14).

¹³⁵ A 8.1,3/4:150 f (SD 30.6).

¹³⁶ A 11.16/5:342 f (SD 2.15). Explained at Vism 9.59-76/311-314.

- (2) One wakes happily.
- (3) One sees no bad dreams.
- (4) One is dear to humans.
- (5) One is dear to non-humans.
- (6) One is protected by devas.
- (7) Fire, poison and weapons cannot harm one.
- (8) One's mind easily concentrates.
- (9) One's countenance is serene.
- (10) One dies unconfused.
- (11) And, if he penetrates no higher, he goes to the Brahma world.

(A 11.16/5:342), SD 2.15; PmA 2:129; Miln 198; **Araka J**, J 169/2:61

8.1.2 The Visuddhi, magga¹³⁷ explains these benefits as follows:

- (1) Instead of turning over and snoring, one falls asleep like entering a state of meditation attainment.
- (2) Instead of waking up in discomfort, groaning and yawning, one wakes up without contortions, like a lotus opening.¹³⁸
- (3) One has auspicious dreams, such as worshipping at a shrine, making an offering, listening to a Dharma talk, etc.
- (4) One is popular with others and in society.
- (5) One will not be harmed by negative energies around one or fall sick due to inexplicable causes.
- (6) One will be guarded by divine beings like parents guarding a child.
- (7) One will create a positive aura or environment around oneself that would not arouse negative emotions or reactions in others.
- (8) One's mind easily concentrates due to lack of negative thoughts that drain one's energies.
- (9) One's countenance (or personality) is "like a palmyra fruit loosened from its stem" (Vism 9.74), that is, is soothing and delightful.
- (10) One passes away peacefully as if falling asleep or one does so mindfully and happily.
- (11) If one is unable to attain arhathood, then after death one arises in the brahma world (dhyanic existence) as if waking up from sleep.

Benefit (1) is the result of freeing the mind of thought just before turning in. This helps us to fall asleep quickly. In fact, it is advisable to mindfully subverbalize a few lines of lovingkindness, which helps us to fall asleep quickly and to sleep well, too. Having slept well in this way, it is likely that we would also get up in the manner of **benefit (2)**.

Benefit (3) also arises from the first point, because our last mental process is likely to flow into our sleep and sink into our unconscious mind, and habituate us in a positive manner. If we are creative people such dreams, and moments immediately upon getting up, can inspire us in the creative process, helping us express truth and beauty more effectively and moving others with happiness.¹³⁹

Benefits (4-7) are clearly social benefits. A heart of lovingkindness would naturally be reflected in our faces in subtle ways. Animals (such dogs and cats) normally respond positively to us on this account. There are traditional stories of how those who cultivate lovingkindness even when threatened with danger or death, safely avert them.¹⁴⁰ For those who believe in disembodied beings, we can say that, like humans, they are also attracted to lovingkindness, and mollified by it.

¹³⁷ Vism 9.59-76/311-314.

¹³⁸ This benefit is omitted in A:ÑB.

¹³⁹ On Buddhism as truth and beauty, see SD 40.1 (8.1.2); SD 46.5 (2.4.2) as aesthetics; SD 37.8 (2.3) in right livelihood. See also Piya Tan, Reflection, "No views frees," R255, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ See, eg, the stories **Uttarā Nanda, mātā**: see **Why some marriages fail** (DhA 17.3/3:308-313), SD 3.8 (4) & **Sāmā, vatī** (DhA 2.1/1:220-226). Buddhaghosa relates how a hunter's spear bounced off a cow that was simply filled with love for its calf that it is suckling (Vism 9.72/313).

Indeed, if we accept rebirth, we can say that some of our kinder forebears, on account of their goodness, and even well-loved animals (especially pets),¹⁴¹ are reborn as devas. They are likely to be our protective devas or guardian angels. Lovingkindness, when regularly and properly cultivated, gives us wholesome energy that exudes from our bodies and minds, forming an aura or force-field around us, as it were.

Benefits (8-10), which are not mentioned in **the (Aṭṭha) Mettānisaṁsa Sutta** (A 8.1), clearly arise from meditation-based lovingkindness.¹⁴² Lovingkindness is conducive to mental focus by helping us let go of distracting thoughts, especially negative ones. Such feelings make us happy, and so energize us with zest or joyful interest in our meditation.

If we habitually cultivate lovingkindness, then, it is likely to arise during our last moments, propelling us into a good rebirth. And if our lovingkind mind is calm and clear, we would even go on to reflect on our true nature so as to arouse insight as the basis for awakening as arhats or non-returners; if not, surely as streamwinners.¹⁴³

8.2 LOVINGKINDNESS LIMITS KARMA

8.2.1 Here, we will examine the underlined expressions in this refrain that follows each of the definitions of the 4 divine abodes [2.1], thus:

Just as a mighty conch-blower, Vāseṭṭha, might with little difficulty make a proclamation to the 4 quarters, so by this cultivation [meditation], Vāseṭṭha, by this freedom of the mind through loving-kindness, any karma done in a limited way neither remains nor persists there.

This, Vāseṭṭha, is the way to fellowship with Brahmā [God]. (D 13,76-79/1:250-251), SD 1.8

We will examine the second phrase first, and the first in some detail later [8.3]. The suttas [2.1.3.5] declare that when the divine abodes are properly cultivated, “any karma done in a limited way neither remains nor persists there.”¹⁴⁴

8.2.2 The Commentary on the Brahma, vihāra Sutta (A 10.208) says that here “limited karma” (*pamāṇa, -kataṁ kammaṁ*) refers to sense-sphere karma (*kāmāvacara, kamma*) (AA 5:77), and “unlimited karma” (*appamāṇa, kataṁ kammaṁ*) refers to form-sphere karma. It is called “unlimited” because it is done by transcending the limit (that is, boundlessly), for it is developed by way of specified, unspecified and directional pervasion.¹⁴⁵

8.2.3 The Commentary on the Saṅkha, dhama Sutta (S 42.8) explains that “When (simple) lovingkindness is said, this can be interpreted either as access concentration or dhyana, but when it is qualified as ‘freedom of mind’ (*ceto, vimutti*), it definitely means dhyana or meditation dhyana (*jhāna*)” (SA 3:105). The point is that if a person masters the “freedom of mind by lovingkindness,” that is, brings his meditation to the level of dhyana, the karmic potential of this dhyana-attainment will take precedence over sense-sphere karma and will generate rebirth into the form realm.¹⁴⁶

8.2.4 On a simpler level, this means that if we habitually pervade our being with lovingkindness, we are unlikely to consciously break any of the 5 precepts. When we are lovingkind or happy, we enjoy being morally virtuous. If we do break any precept, it is likely to be a result of a lapse of mindfulness, when the potential is less heavy than that of a deliberate conscious breach. Moreover, when we realize that we have broken a precept, we are likely to feel remorseful and would be diligent in correcting ourselves by being more mindful and restrained.

8.3 FREEDOM OF MIND

8.3.1 Freedom of mind through lovingkindness

¹⁴¹ See Reflection, **Animals go to heaven** (R68a) in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009:225-227 (16.1).

¹⁴² A 8.1,3/4:150 f (SD 30.6).

¹⁴³ See (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7.

¹⁴⁴ *Pamāṇa, kataṁ kammaṁ*, as in **Saṅkha, dhama S** (S 42.8/4:322) & **Brahma, vihāra S** (A 10.208/5:299), SD 2.10.

¹⁴⁵ DA 2:406; MA 3:450; cf J 2:62.

¹⁴⁶ See Vism 309-311/9.49-58; S:B 1149 n346; A:ÑB 315 n73.

8.3.1.1 In the formal cultivation of lovingkindness, when we have “**broken the barriers**” [7.2.2], we are said to have reached the peak of the practice. This fulfilment of lovingkindness can range from a feeling of profound self-acceptance, intense bliss, or best of all, dhyana, a direct and total experience of the thought-free mind. Since the mind is now completely free of any mental hindrances that weaken the mind [7.3.1], it is fully liberated, albeit momentarily, but the bliss is felt as if it were timeless.

8.3.1.2 The technical term for such a state is “**freedom of mind**” or “mental freedom” (*ceto, vimutti*), sometimes translated as “freedom by concentration,” that is, mental freedom as a result of destroying the mental hindrances. In this case, the mental freedom is gained through lovingkindness (*mettā ceto, vimutti*),¹⁴⁷ and it could be further developed to attain the other three levels.

8.3.1.3 A term closely related to “freedom of mind” is “**freedom by wisdom [insight]**” (*paññā, vimutti*). Someone who is “freed by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutta*), “may not have gained the 8 liberations (*vimokkha*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes¹⁴⁸ are destroyed.”¹⁴⁹ In simple terms, the “8 liberations” refer to the various ways that dhyana can be attained. [8.3.2.2]

8.3.1.4 All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain the 8 liberations, which include the 4 formless attainments (*samāpatti*), and the attainment of cessation (*nirodha, samāpatti*), are called freed both ways (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*), that is, freed from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood. Arhats like Sāriputta and Moggallāna are “freed both ways.”¹⁵⁰

8.3.2 The abodes and the formless bases

8.3.2.1 FREEDOM THROUGH THE ABODES. The closing section of **the Metta Saha, gata Sutta** (S 46.-54)¹⁵¹ shows how, cultivating the awakening-factors “accompanied by” (*saha, gata*) one of the divine abodes—lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity—can lead to mental freedom.¹⁵² Through each of these four practices accompanying the awakening-factors (accompanied by the respective divine abode), we can be mentally freed in one of two ways: *either* by one of the 5 perceptions, or by a dhyana (temporary freedom, *vimokkha*),¹⁵³ as here summarized:¹⁵⁴

Awakening-factor

accompanied by

		<u>(1) the 5 perceptions</u> ¹⁵⁵	<u>(2) dhyanas (ie, liberation, vimokkha)</u>
[§12] lovingkindness	<i>mettā</i>	one of the 5 perceptions	the liberation by the beautiful
[§13] compassion	<i>karuṇā</i>	”	the base of infinite space
[§14] gladness	<i>muditā</i>	”	the base of infinite consciousness
[§15] equanimity	<i>upekkhā</i>	”	the base of nothingness

¹⁴⁷ D 3:248; M 1:297, 298, 3:146; S 4:296.

¹⁴⁸ “Mental influx,” *āsava* (lit “influx, outflow”), which comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting that of views) is prob older and is found more freq in the suttas (D 3:216, 33,1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these influxes (*āsava-k, khaya*) is equivalent to arhathood. See D 3:220, 275; A 2:163, 165; A 1:146, 192, 194; cf V 2:83; Sn 594, 656. See BDict: *āsava*.

¹⁴⁹ See **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70,16/1:478) + SD 11.1 (8.3.2) on the 8 liberations.

¹⁵⁰ The differences between the 2 types of freedom are given in **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 15,2:70 f), SD 5.17, and **Kīṭāgiri S** (M 70/1:477 f), SD 11.1.

¹⁵¹ S 46.54,12-15/5:118-121, SD 10.11; called Halidda, vasana S at Vism 4.49/130.

¹⁵² See **Metta, saha, gata S** (S 46.54/5:115-121) & SD 10.11 (3).

¹⁵³ On the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*), see SD 49.5b (3).

¹⁵⁴ So noted in Upatissa’s **Vimutti, magga**: (Tr from Chin) N R M Ehara, Soma Thera & Kheminda Thera, Kandy, 1961; Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1977:195.

¹⁵⁵ On the 5 perceptions, see **Metta, saha, gata S** (S 46.54,12-15/5:119-121) & SD 10.11 (2).

The “beautiful” (*subha*) here refers to *dhyana* (*jhāna*) [7.4], while the term “beauty element, or beautiful element” (*subha, dhātu*) refers to both the dhyana and its object, namely, a dhyana arisen on the basis of lovingkindness.¹⁵⁶

8.3.2.2 THE 8 LIBERATIONS. The dhyanas mentioned above form the third, fourth, fifth and sixth of the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha, vimokkha*),¹⁵⁷ and are listed in **the Mahā Sakul’udāyi Sutta** (M 77), as follows:¹⁵⁸

The 1st liberation is that of one with physical form who sees physical forms (*rūpī rūpāni passati*).

The 2nd liberation is that of one who does not see physical form internally, but sees physical forms externally (*ajjhataṃ arūpa, saññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*).

The 3rd liberation is that of one liberated after contemplating the idea of the beautiful (*subhan-t’eva adhimutto hoti*). This is said in reference to the attainment of form dhyana (*rūpa jhāna*) by means of concentrating the mind on perfectly pure and bright colours as the *kasīna*-object. **The Paṭisambhidā, magga** says that this mental state is also produced through the cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), as a result of which all beings appear perfectly pure and glorious, and thus the mind turns to the beautiful (Pm 5.20/2:39).

These first three are said in connection with *kasīna* meditation by way of the “bases of sovereignty” or “bases for transcendence” (*abhibhāyatana*),¹⁵⁹ that is, one of the 8 stages of mastery over the senses through dhyana (*jhāna*).¹⁶⁰ The following four (4-7) are the formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*):

The 4th liberation. Through the utter transcending of the perception of physical form, the passing away of the perception of impingement [*paṭigha*, sense-contact], and non-attention to the perception of diversity, contemplating, “Space is infinite,” one enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of space.

The 5th liberation. Through the utter transcending of the infinity of space, contemplating, “Consciousness is infinite,” one enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of consciousness.

The 6th liberation. Through the utter transcending of the base of the infinity of consciousness, contemplating, “There is nothing,” one enters and dwells in the base of nothingness.

The 7th liberation. Through the utter transcending of the base of nothingness, one enters and dwells in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

The 8th liberation. Through the utter transcending of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling.

The Commentary on **the Mahā Sakuludāyi Sutta** (M 77)¹⁶¹ says that these liberations are the mind’s full (but temporary) release from the opposing states and its full (but temporary) release by delighting in the object (MA 3:255, cf 255-259).¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Pm 2:39; SA 3:172 f. The Attha, sālinī, the Commentary on the Dhamma, saṅgaṇī, however, takes “the beautiful” here as referring to dhyana attainment through a colour device (*kasīna*) [viz earth, water, fire, wind, blue, yellow, red, white, light and space] that is fully purified (DhsA 191). As **Analayo** notes, this gloss goes against the teachings of the Paṭisambhidā, magga (2009:146 f). See **Metta, saḥagata S** (S 46.54, 12/5:119), SD 10.11.

¹⁵⁷ On the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*), see SD 49.5b (3).

¹⁵⁸ M 77, 22/2:12 f; MA 3:255; the 4 dhyanas here are also listed in **Satta Dhātu S** (S 14.11/2:149-151), SD 74.14. Only the 4 dhyanas mentioned here are noted in detail. For full list of the 8 liberations, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.35/-2:70 f), SD 5.17. See also D 3:262, 228; **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306 (SD 95.11); also M 120, 37/3:103 (SD 3.4). See also **Aṭṭha Vimokkha**, SD 62.5 & Analayo 2009:141-148.

¹⁵⁹ On these bases of mastery (*abhibhāyatana*) and the dhyanas, see **Way of attaining dhyana**, SD 49.5b.

¹⁶⁰ **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16, 3.24/2:110), SD 9; **Mahā Sakul’udāyi S** (M 77, 22/2:13), SD 49.5a; **Abhibhāyatana S** (A 8.65/4:305), SD 49.5b(2.1), **Kosala S** (A 10.29/5:61), SD 16.15. **Dhamma, saṅgaṇī** apparently regard the *abhibhāyatana* as being “concerned with the mastery and facility in certain aspects of *jhāna* practice” (Gethin, 2001: 267). See Dhs 45-52 where the 8 *abhibhāyatana* (with slight variations from the Nikāya formulation) are treated as an aspect of *jhāna* that is of the form realm (*rūpāvacara*); cf DhsA 187-190. See BDict: abhibhāyatana.

¹⁶¹ M 77, 22/2:13.

8.4 EXPERIENCING NON-SELF

8.4.1 We started off this study by mentioning that it is the Buddha's discovery of non-self (*anattā*) that makes the divine abodes unique in the history of religion. Firstly, the Buddha not only rejects the notion of an almighty creator-God, but gives us the divine abodes as a viable alternative path to spiritual liberation, even awakening. In other words, God is not out there, to be worshipped or glorified, in some ethereal heaven or some theological imagination, but to be *cultivated* right here in our own being.

8.4.2 Whether we take God as a person, a being or spirit, it is the godly qualities that really matter to us, that is, love, grace, joy and peace. These are divine qualities we can cultivate as lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity. These abodes must be cultivated beyond any conception of a person, a being or a spirit. Only then they are truly boundless and unconditional.

8.4.3 As **Edward Conze** has long ago noted, “The chief purpose of Buddhism is the extinction of separate individuality, which is brought about when we cease to *identify* anything with ourselves.”¹⁶³ To identify with something is, ironically, to see a *separateness*! Concepts of “I” and “thou,” “I am that” are just as that: for measuring ourselves against others. The divine abode, however, are measureless and boundless. Hence, such theistic notions are the basis for a serious wrong view—that of self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*)—which prevents us from attaining the most basic of liberations, that of streamwinning, our first real step towards full awakening.¹⁶⁴

8.4.4 Theology is rooted in the beguiling grammar of religiosity, and attempt to define and defend God. The divine abodes teach us to rise above the petrifying grammar of religion, beyond being and having, beyond any person, first, second or third, to cultivate the divine qualities within ourselves by letting go of all bonds with worldliness, we open up our hearts to others, to the world, so that we can include all beings in our hearts. The cultivation of the divine abodes is not only an experience of the spaciousness of being, but is also a basis for the direct experience of true reality itself, that is liberating. The divine abodes are truly a viable alternative to tribalizing hold of religion.¹⁶⁵

9 CONCLUSION

9.1 Early Buddhist **human-centredness** is charitably expressed in its lovingkindness and compassion, its **life-centredness** in gladness and equanimity. Buddhism, to begin with, is *human-centred*, man (that is, men and women) comes first, in the sense any true learning must come from self-understanding. Only in accepting this human form as it is, we feel lovingkindness. We must forgive our human failure; then we learn compassion. We must rejoice in our goodness and strengths; this is gladness. Yet, life is not always what we want it to be or expect it to be: we have to accept it as it is, and so we begin to rise above our human limitations; this is equanimity.

9.2 If we are to be more than human in body, but also in mind and heart, we must show **unconditional love** for all beings. In accepting other as we accept ourselves, we become a living and learning part of whatever is before us, even away from us, but connected with us. Lovingkindness is a nurturing vision that radiates from us, brightening all others, so that we can live and live with a common and growing wisdom and happiness.

9.3 We are *not* born equal: some have better bodies, some better minds. But we are capable of bridging what separates us in our human differences, or of at least accepting them: this is our **compassion**. This is our human-centredness, the beginning of a growing awareness of a greater spiritual possibility: that of rising even above the human state to become divine; and, even beyond the divine, to liberation from what defines, or seems to define divine, human and non-human. What unites all is *life* itself, an interactive consciousness that betters itself to be free of itself—the inability or failure to do this is called suffering.

9.4 On a higher level, Buddhism is **life-centred**. It teaches us to *rejoice* in the goodness of being and its spiritual potential. To live is to learn. **Gladness** boils down to an appreciation of being, rejoicing in the good

¹⁶² See *Aṭṭha Vimokkha*, SD 62.5.

¹⁶³ E Conze, *Buddhism: Its essence and development*, Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1951:106.

¹⁶⁴ See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

¹⁶⁵ See the nature of having and being: **Love**, SD 38.4 (8).

that others are and can be. To understand life is to know ourselves, and to see ourselves in others, in all beings. If life is fully understood, it stops devouring its own uroboric tail.

9.5 Equanimity is the on-looking wisdom that accepts everyone and everything as they are. From the earliest times, living beings have struggled with nature, lived and learned with it. The more intelligent beings try to change or influence nature to their advantage, but nature always wins. Nature gives us life, and nature takes it away: this is the nature of life. Only when we accept this, we are truly at peace with ourselves.

9.6 Equanimity, in its bottom line, is to leave nature alone. We must accept nature just as we accept ourselves: this is our lovingkindness. We must be kind to nature even when nature fails to deliver what we desire: this is our compassion. We must rejoice in nature when it gives us life and beauty: this is our gladness. In the end, we need to leave nature to take its own course: this is our equanimity. Only then we have the wisdom to understand that we can only change ourself so that we are truly liberated from nature itself, like a happy mature child leaving home to find his own.

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