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## 60.2 Mindfulness and lovingkindness

Versatility and harmony in early Buddhist mental cultivation  
A brief study by TAN Beng Sin (Piya Tan) ©2021, 2023

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 WHY TWIN PRACTICES?

##### 1.1.1 Body and mind

**1.1.1.1** In this essay, I will discuss how **lovingkindness** (*mettā*) or the Buddhist conception of whole-some love fits into the scheme of meditation and mindfulness in early Buddhism. This study comprises the following 5 sections with a conclusion:

- 1 calm and insight (*samatha, vipassanā*) in relation to the conscious body;
- 2 lovingkindness as *vipassana*;
- 3 is lovingkindness or any other divine abode a path?
- 4 the original lovingkindness cultivation in the suttas;
- 5 the divine abodes and the cultivation of moral concern;
- 6 conclusion.

An important aspect of lovingkindness which we will not discuss here is that of its role in limiting karma (*pamāna, katta kamma*). This has been discussed in the translation of **the Karaja, kāya Brahma, -vihāra Sutta** (A 10.208).<sup>1</sup>

**1.1.1.2** While both the breath meditation and **the cultivation of lovingkindness** (*mettā bhāvanā*) are often recommended in the suttas, lovingkindness is often taught to non-Buddhists or new converts, especially those who have previous theistic beliefs. Although lovingkindness is often mentioned by itself, it is the first of the well known tetrad known as the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), that is, lovingkindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).<sup>2</sup>

This tetrad of practices and emotions are called “divine abodes” (*brahma, vihāra*) because instead of worshipping God or a supreme deity, it is better to cultivate those qualities that characterize such a deity, that is, to live in Godliness or godliness by cultivating these divine abodes for oneself and towards others. The divine abodes are a beautiful invitation to God-believers, god-believers and the faith-inclined to *work for what they pray for*, that is, to show these good qualities in their daily lives.

The 4 divine abodes are also called **immeasurables** (*appamāṇa* or *appamañña*) because we should cultivate them for the benefit of everyone, even everything. It is an inclusive embrace of full acceptance of others as extensions of ourselves: we *are* the world.<sup>3</sup> They are also “immeasurable” or “boundless” in the sense that they are embodied as spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa mittatā*) which pervades the whole of Buddhist training.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See SD 2.10 (1 f); also SD 3.9 (7.2.3).

<sup>2</sup> See **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 58.5.

<sup>3</sup> On extended minds, see SD 60.1f (4.4.8.2).

<sup>4</sup> On spiritual friendship as the *whole* of the spiritual life (*brahma, cariya*), ie, Dharma-spirited life (monastic or lay), see **Kalyāṇa, mitta Appamāda S** (S 3.18, 10/1:88), SD 34.2; **Upaḍḍha S** (S 45.2/5:3), SD 34.9; (**Kalyāṇa, mittatā**) **Sariputta S** (S 45.3/5:3), SD 34.10; SD 34.1 (3.2.1.1).

That spiritual friendship is the whole of the holy life means that all the 3 trainings—moral training, concentration training and wisdom training—are rooted in and characterized by the divine abodes. This means that the divine abodes are the basis for the moral life, that is, being habitually wholesome and wise: this is the theme of the present study (SD 60.2).

Secondly, it means that the divine abodes, especially lovingkindness, are a catalyst and support whenever we face distraction or difficulties in our meditation.

And thirdly, it means that wisdom always entails compassion, which is the second of the divine abodes; but in practice wisdom, especially awakened wisdom (of the Buddha and the arhats), is the effective embodiment or living activity of the 4 divine abodes, the twin wonders of wisdom and compassion in action.

### **1.1.2 The 2 wings of a flying bird**

**1.1.2.1** The suttas do not see *samatha* and *vipassanā* as 2 kinds of meditation, as taught and practised by ethnic Buddhist groups and those who follow or study these groups. In early Buddhism, *samatha* refers to the process and result of calming the mind, clearing it of distractions, especially the 5 mental hindrances: *attachment to sensual pleasures, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt*. When the hindrances are overcome, dhyana (*jhāna*) is attained.

What really happens when the hindrances are overcome? Psychologically it means that the mind is free from having to process any sense-data from the 5 physical senses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body). In other words, the mind is completely free from being held back by the body and being caught up with processing sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches. The mind is simply by itself: it is free and happy, and it is naturally radiant (in a psychological sense), free from being clouded up by sense-activities and the accompanying thoughts.

In such a free state, the mind, with proper guidance, goes on to minimize thinking to just being aware of itself, like in a lucid dream. It is only aware of what is going on, which is wholesomely calming: this is called **the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana**. Then, even these rudimentary thoughts settle down, and there is only zest and joy (*pīti, sukha*) due to full concentration: this is **the 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana**. In due course, the exuberant zest settles down, and there is great equanimity, inner peace: this is **the 3<sup>rd</sup> dhyana**; finally, even the joy is resolved into a radiant peace, an inner equanimity that can be described as being “more joyful” than joy itself (this is a bit of meditation lingo): this is **the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana**.

**1.1.2.2** Once we have mastered the dhyana practice just mentioned [1.1.2.1], we are ready for the next stage. This is when, upon emerging from dhyana (even just the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana), we direct the calm and clear mind to Dharma practice. Usually this would be to reflect on **impermanence**, such as how the beautiful mental states have all passed away. This direct experience of true reality can only be explained poetically or metaphorically here.

It is like we have climbed a hill or a mountain for the first time, and upon reaching the peak, we can finally see the whole panorama of the valley, trees and landscape before us right to the horizon. Or we have been looking at some amazing painting like the Mona Lisa or some favourite painting of ours in books or social media. Then one day we visit the Louvre or the National Gallery preserving the original work. We can only totally lose ourselves gazing speechless and timeless into the painting.

We may get some poetic idea of dhyana when we read William Wordsworth’s *Daffodils* (“I wandered lonely as a cloud ...”) (1804). For the laity, especially a sensual or family person, who has not attained the path or done deep meditation, the closest they could probably imagine of dhyanic bliss is sexual **ecstasy**—but imagine ecstasy without the body (that is, the body is fully absorbed into the mind)—the mind, as it were is freed from all the physical senses; it is a purely *mental* experience. Dhyanic bliss, on

the other hand, has been called “**enstasy**”—a totally blissful state, neither within nor without—hence far more profound than any worldly ecstasy.<sup>5</sup>

**1.1.2.3** On the other hand, we may have an intellectual person (like a scholar) who may have a deep theoretical understanding of Buddhism, even of dhyana, but lacks any experience or deep feeling for Buddhism or for meditation. One may then *think* one understands Buddhism or such a dhyana experience very well, even in an “exegetically responsible” manner—as Mills puts it [7.2.4.2]—even quoting the suttas with technical accuracy.

Yet, when one finally gets into dhyana, one happily realizes it to be a profound experience so very different from and very much more than all that one has *known or thought* about it: now one feels it for the first time. In simple terms, this is when we have cultivated *samatha* with which we attained *samāhi*, even dhyana. Then, emerging with a profoundly calm and clear mind, we go on to see directly (*vipassati*) into true reality, such as the impermanence of the breath or of the mind, and have a direct experience (*vipassanā*) of what we have learned in *theory*: now we experience it in practice, in real life.<sup>6</sup>

**1.1.2.4** Alternatively, we may have become a scholarly expert in our academic field of Buddhism. We have made disciplined and dignified arguments about profound Buddhist teachings and experiences, only to be refuted by other scholars. Suddenly, or slowly, we realize that Buddhism is not our cup of tea or crock of gold at the rainbow’s end. We then renounce Buddhism for greener pastures of a wealthier religion. For, man, it seems, cannot live by faith alone.

When an academic scholar is deeply committed to Buddhism as personal faith and practice, and his scholarship is responsible, critical and experiential, we often learn new and helpful perspectives of seeing even practising Buddhism. After all, we would profoundly benefit and enjoy music, for example, from a great musician, who is a composer, a performer as well as a teacher and lover of music.

In other words, the academic scholar’s profession is not Buddhism but scholarship. His work is likely to reflect his study of Buddhism as “literature” or “religion” within academic rules and convention. Even the best of such works does not measure up to the sutta of Dharma teaching for those who practise the Dharma. Even during meditation, more so as we delve deeper into Dharma, we learn to renounce the Dharma as theory and teaching for a higher realization—as we are reminded by the parable of the raft in the Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22)<sup>7</sup>—what more so as a secular and private truth of academic learning.

**1.1.2.5** One important way to understand how *samatha* and *vipassana* work *together* is that they are the “**twin ways**” (rather than “two paths”) of our meditative progress: we experience both the body (sights, sounds, smells, taste and touches) and the mind (feelings, thoughts and emotions). “**The body**” is such a flood and flurry of physical experiences that there are always sense-objects demanding our attention.

In other words, the moment we “know” a **bodily experience**—a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste or a touch—it is already over in the sense that the body (*rūpa*) is first “conscious” of it (that is, we “sense” it)

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<sup>5</sup> On ecstasy and enstasy, see SD 60.1f (4.2.3). On mental correlates of dhyana, see M R **Hagerty**, J Isaacs, L Brasington, L Shupe, E E Fetz & S C Cramer, “Case study of ecstatic meditation: fMRI and EEG evidence of self-stimulating a reward system,” *Neural Plasticity* art ID 653572 **2013** pp13. [[Hindawi](#)]. Brief survey: N Webb, “The neurobiology of bliss—sacred and profane,” *Scientific American* 12 July **2011**. See also Piya Tan, “Orgasm, ecstasy, enstasy and renunciation,” R645 *Revisioning Buddhism* 251, 2020: <http://dharmafarer.org>. L B Smith, “The distinctive relationship between sexual ecstasy and spiritual ecstasy for heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered clergy of the Church of England: integrating transpersonal awareness with an interpretative phenomenological analysis,” PhD thesis Liverpool John Moores Univ, **2018**. All ext links 7 Oct 2023.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion, see ***Samatha & Vipassanā***, SD 41.1.

<sup>7</sup> For the parable of the raft, see ***Alagaddûpama S*** (M 22,12-14/1:134,30-135,26), SD 3.13.

(*vijānāti*), and then we feel it (*vedayati*) in the mind. When we follow it further, we perceive it (*sañjānāti*); that is, we relate it to a memory (*sati*) of a past experience: we perceive it as being *pleasant, unpleasant or neutral*.

At this point, when we are mindful, our **samatha** training will habituate us to take the feeling just as it is, “letting it come, letting it go.” In other words, we stop the cognitive process here: we do not go on to project (*abhisankharoti*) formations of liking, disliking or ignoring our experience: this “stopping” is what samatha does. Then our mind becomes *calm and clear*; or, if we are meditating, we direct our attention to the meditation-object. When we habitually do this, we learn to be more mentally focused, and in due course attain samadhi (concentration), even dhyana (*jhāna*) when we are fully free from the sense-activities.

For most non-meditators or distracted meditators, we tend to be curious about the feelings that are *pleasant* or that are *unpleasant*. We react to them as we have done in the past: we show *greed* or *lust* to the thought of the pleasant, or show *hatred* or *anger* to the thought of the unpleasant. Notice the word “the thought.” We are reacting to the thought of it; the feeling is already gone but we keep holding on to it in our memory. This is delusion; we have fallen for something that is not there. This process is karmically potent: we form karma as a result; hence, it is called “formations” (*saṅkhārā*).

**1.1.2.6** Often we unmindfully follow our thoughts and get caught up with running after the pleasant, hating the unpleasant, and ignoring what seems neither. The first habituates us to be lustful, the second makes us hateful, and the third feeds our ignorance. All this works unconsciously: we have become puppets and robots at the command of our **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*) of lust, aversion and ignorance.

In fact, if we are still unawakened (which is where we are right now), it is still not too late to correct the situation. We **review** our thoughts behind our habitual actions in the manner we have done under the samatha practice [1.1.2.4]. We begin to understand how we are tricked by our delusion and ignorance. By telling ourself about *the true nature* of the sense-objects—the pleasant, the unpleasant and the neutral—we understand how they trick us. This is our **insight knowledge**, which is still rudimentary but will become a great mental tool and source of happiness as we become more skilled in mind-mastering.

We can now see how **samatha** works at “stopping” our reactive habits towards unwholesome sense-objects, and how **vipassanā** works at “seeing” through the tricks of our perception of the past (memory) and the future (desire and hope). We stay in the present and notice how events just move on before us, and live joyfully with this understanding. Now we can see how samatha and vipassana work together to keep our mind calm and clear.

## 1.2 IT’S ALL IN THE MIND

### 1.2.1 Sensing and minding

So far we have examined the working of samatha-vipassanā on the sense-objects, but these are the workings of the 5 physical senses. We will now examine what “works” these senses: it is **the mind**. In other words, it is the mind (our intentions and thoughts) that is behind the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching (feeling); it is the mind that is behind the memory and the intentions of desiring, hating or ignoring the sense-experiences.

Hence, the “sense-experiences” do not happen by themselves; they are regarded as different “sense” experiences due to their “door” or sense-faculty for convenience. The real action occurs in “the

mind—a network of mental factors with which we cognize things through *feeling, perception, volition (intention), sense-contact* and *attention*.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2.2 The conscious body

Thus the body and the mind function intimately together: they are called “the conscious body” (*sa-viññāṇaka, kāya*).<sup>9</sup> Through *samatha*, we work with the body (the sense-experiences) and through *vipassanā* we see how the mind works on these senses and as thoughts. We need both *samatha* and *vipassanā* to train and tame our mind-body existence.

Hence, sometimes poetically *samatha* is said to be “meditation” (*jhāna*) and *vipassana* “wisdom” (*paññā*), as in this famous Dhammapada verse:

There is no (true) meditation without wisdom;      there is no (true) wisdom without meditation.  
In whom there are both meditation and wisdom,      he is indeed in nirvana’s presence.

(Dh 372)

The essence of this Dhammapada verse can be visualized as the 2 wings of a flying bird: both wings need to flap in harmony for the bird to fly properly.<sup>10</sup>

In the next section, we will see how even *samatha*—as in lovingkindness (*mettā*) meditation—can be used to cultivate insight (*vipassanā*).

## 2 Lovingkindness as *vipassanā*

### 2.1 AJAHN SUMEDHO

#### 2.1.1 Forest tradition teaching style

**2.1.1.1** I first met **Ajahn Sumedho**<sup>11</sup> in the early 1970s when he visited Wat Srales, Bangkok, where I was undergoing monastic training. I recall him inviting me to sit before him in a quiet corner of the Abbot’s residence, and gave me a 2-hour personal talk on the Vinaya. Although I do not recall the exact words of his teaching, I still feel the peace of that moment as I sat before him. Looking back, I feel as if those 2 hours were but a moment in my mind like a window into this garden of profound peace even now.

**2.1.1.2** As a rule, the monks of **the Thai forest tradition** have a very similar teaching style reflective of their simple and austere reclusive lifestyle. Their meditation practice is simple and gentle, very different from the more structured modern *Vipassanā* of the Burmese tradition or the technically elegant treatises of the scholars and scholar monks.

The forest meditation includes the *buddho* mantra (a kind of *buddhānussati*, “Buddha recollection”), breath meditation, walking meditation, clear awareness (*sampajañña*), “listening” to thoughts and an

<sup>8</sup> These are respectively *vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa, manasikāra* (S 12.2,12/2:3; cf M 9,26/1:50).

<sup>9</sup> On the conscious body see SD 60.1d (2).

<sup>10</sup> This famous imagery actually describes the life of a true renunciant: D 2,66/1:71 = M 51,15/1:346 = 112,14/-3:35 = A 4.198,10/2:209 f. See also SD 60.1b (7.4).

<sup>11</sup> On Ajahn Sumedho: SD 60.1b (5.12.2).

inner vigilance (*jāgara*). Essentially, we should be mindful, don't hang on to anything; let it come, let it go; and surrender to the way things are—this is inner renunciation in practice.

All these methods are explained in simple yet practical language by Sumedho compiled into a book entitled, *The Path to the Deathless* (1985), which was revised as *Mindfulness: the path to the deathless* (1994). In what follows, I will present Sumedho's teachings on **lovingkindness** from the chapter entitled "Kindness (*mettā*)," from the latest revised edition (2014:53-57).<sup>12</sup>

### **2.1.2 Comments on Sumedho's teachings**

In what follows, I will outline or paraphrase 15 points of Sumedho's teachings, followed by my own commentaries and reflections on Sumedho's teachings in connection with the theme of SD 60.2, "mindfulness and lovingkindness." If you are only interested in his teachings on meditation as practice, you only need to read sections (1)-(12), that is, those with the numbers in the round brackets.

The "**Comments**" section serves as my "commentary" on Sumedho's teachings, considered not as a scholarly treatise or essay, but as a personal experience which he is sharing with us. These experiences are teaching us how to cultivate lovingkindness by personal example. In other words, Sumedho himself practises what he teaches.

## **2.2 LOVINGKINDNESS IN PRACTICE**

### **2.2.1 "Love" and "like"**

#### **2.2.1.1 LOVINGKINDNESS (BASED ON SUMEDHO'S TEACHINGS)**

(1) In English the word "**love**" often refers to something that I like. For example, "I love sticky rice," "I love sweet mango." We mean we really like them. It is being attached to something such as food which we really enjoy eating. We don't really "*love*" it; love is here not the same as attachment. *Mettā* is not love in that sense; it is not attachment. Thus, to love your enemy doesn't mean you *like* your enemy (as in the way you like food). If somebody wants to kill you and you say, "I like them," that's silly! But we can love them, meaning that we can refrain from unpleasant thoughts and vindictiveness, from any desire to hurt them or annihilate them.

(2) Even though you might not like them—they are miserable, wretched people—you can still be **kind**, generous and charitable towards them. If some drunk came into this room who was foul and disgusting, ugly and diseased, and there was nothing one could be attracted to in him—to say, "I like this man" would be ridiculous. But one could *love* him, not dwell in aversion, not be caught up in reactions to his unpleasantness. That's what we mean by *mettā*.

#### **2.2.1.2 COMMENTS**

The practice described here is about **lovingkindness** (*mettā*) but the section title is simply "kindness," which is one of the terms Sumedho uses for *mettā*. Addressing English-speaking readers, Sumedho then uses "**love**" for *mettā*, and distinguishes it from "like," which has worldly connotations of bias for what is pleasurable, "dislike" for what is not pleasurable and so on. Not to cause any confusion over terms, Sumedho, as a rule, uses *metta* throughout his teaching.

Notice at this stage there is no mention of focusing the mind to gain concentration. Sumedho's teachings only refer to the difference between "love" and "like"; that *mettā* is unconditional love: we do

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<sup>12</sup> Sucitto (ed), *Mindfulness: the path to the deathless. The meditation teachings of Ajahn Sumedho* [1985]. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Hemel Hempstead (UK): Amaravati Publications, 2014.



not say “unconditional like”! The drift of this section is simply that of keeping the mind positive and wholesome by not getting caught up with the negative idea of *liking* rather than loving. Hence, this is an insight teaching (*vipassanā*).

### **2.2.2 Thoughts and feelings**

#### **2.2.2.1 SUMEDHO’S TEACHING ON LOVINGKINDNESS**

(3) Sometimes there are things one doesn’t like about oneself, but *mettā* means not being caught up in the thoughts we have, the attitudes, the problems, **the feelings** of the mind. So it becomes an immediate practice of being very mindful. To be mindful means to have *mettā* towards the fear, or the anger, or the jealousy in your mind.

(4) *Mettā* means not creating problems around existing conditions, allowing them to fade away, to cease. For example, when fear comes up in your mind, you can have *mettā* for **the fear**—meaning that you don’t build up aversion to it, you can just accept its presence and allow it to cease.

(5) You can also minimise **the fear** by recognising that it is the same kind of fear that everyone has, that animals have. It’s not my fear, it’s not a person’s, it’s an impersonal fear. We begin to have compassion for other beings when we understand the suffering involved in reacting to fear in our own lives—the pain, the physical pain of being kicked, when somebody kicks you.

(6) That kind of pain is exactly the same kind of pain that a dog feels when he’s being kicked, so you can have *mettā* for the **pain**, meaning a kindness and a patience of not dwelling in aversion. We can work with *mettā* internally, with all our emotional problems: you think, “I want to get rid of it, it’s terrible.” That’s a lack of *mettā* for yourself, isn’t it?

#### **2.2.2.2 COMMENTS**

Lovingkindness is not directed to only people, but also to mental states (thoughts, feelings, etc), especially negative ones, such as fear and pain (3). In (5) we see the teaching on **nonself** (*anattā*): “It’s not *my* fear ... [it’s] an impersonal fear” (emphases added), and it’s a universal feeling, found even in animals. Nonself is the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last of the 3 characteristics of true reality. Hence, we see here the practice of *vipassanā* through lovingkindness.

### **2.2.3 Conditioning: negative and positive**

#### **2.2.3.1 SUMEDHO’S TEACHING ON LOVINGKINDNESS**

(7) Recognise **the desire-to-get-rid-of!** Don’t dwell in aversion for existing emotional conditions. You don’t have to pretend to feel approval of your faults. You don’t think, “I like my faults.” Some people are foolish enough to say, “My faults make me interesting. I’m a fascinating personality because of my weaknesses.”

(8) *Mettā* is **not conditioning yourself to believe** that you like something that you actually don’t like at all; it is just not dwelling in aversion. It’s easy to feel *mettā* towards something you like—pretty little children, good looking people, pleasant mannered people, little puppies, beautiful flowers—we can feel *mettā* for ourselves when we’re feeling good: “I am feeling happy with myself now.”

(9) When things are **going well** it's easy to feel kindness towards that which is good and pretty and beautiful. At this point we can get lost. *Mettā* isn't just good wishes, lovely sentiments, high-minded thoughts, it's always very practical. If you're being very idealistic, and you hate someone, then you feel, "I shouldn't hate anyone. Buddhists should have *mettā* for all living beings. I should love everybody. If I'm a good Buddhist then I should like everybody." All that comes from impractical idealism.

Have *mettā* for the aversion you feel, for the pettiness of the mind, the jealousy, envy—meaning peacefully co-existing, not creating problems, not making it difficult nor creating problems out of the difficulties that arise in life, within our minds and bodies.

### 2.2.3.2 COMMENTS

This section teaches us to look deep into how we think and feel, for example, to note how we have the wish to "get rid" of a habit or an idea, but this is not something easy to do (7). In other words, it is not about *believing* in anything; rather, it is about "co-existing" with the negative thought that we may have (8). We show lovingkindness to our way of thinking (9). In other words, we go down to the root of thought and clean it, as it were.

How does a wholesome thought "co-existing" with a negative one clean it? It's like a good wise friend who influences another to give up the latter's wrong ways. When we direct a good thought often enough to a bad one, it weakens the latter from lack of dominance. They both, after all, arise in the same mind: our mindfulness and awareness guard the mind against unwholesomeness and makes it wholesome. This is a part of *vipassanā* practice.

## 2.2.4 Negative emotions

### 2.2.4.1 SUMEDHO'S TEACHING ON LOVINGKINDNESS

(10) "In London, I used to get very upset when travelling on the underground. I used to **hate** it, those horrible underground stations with ghastly advertising posters and great crowds of people on those dingy, grotty trains which roared along the tunnels. I used to feel a total lack of *mettā*.

I used to feel so averse to it all, then I decided to practise being patient and kind while travelling on the London Underground. Then I began to really enjoy it, rather than dwelling in resentment. I began to feel kindly towards the people there. The aversion and the complaining all disappeared—totally."<sup>13</sup>

(11) "When you feel **aversion** towards somebody, you can notice the tendency to start adding to it, 'He did this and he did that, and he's this way and he shouldn't be that way.' Then when you really like somebody, 'He can do this and he can do that. He's good and kind.' But if someone says, 'That person's really bad!' you feel angry. If you hate somebody and someone else praises him, you also feel angry. You don't want to hear how good your enemy is."

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<sup>13</sup> Matt Jenkins (one of my proofreaders) confirms this: "I remember getting the Circle Line in to school as a teenager, and every morning the train would stop for a few minutes outside South Kensington station waiting for a free platform. In summer, it was glorious—we were in a Victorian cutting, sharply angled walls of red brick on both sides, half-colonised by ferny plants, the sun shafting down illuminating the motes in the air. I loved it. And every morning, when this happened, a businessman who was always on this same train as me would get up, as if the train had stopped in the station, go to the door and really ostentatiously sigh, tut, and look around for moral support. For me, I had been given a gift—two minutes in a London [train] where everything is urgency and pushing. There was nothing to be done, I could not get the train into the station any quicker, a pause had been enforced on me so I might as well enjoy it. For him, the pause was to be resisted, the urgency clung to. I did not understand it, I cannot imagine that the urgency was something he enjoyed. But it's that man I thought of when I read Sumedho's comments." Thanks, Matt, for sharing this instructive vignette. 25 Dec 2023

(12) “When you are full of **anger**, you can’t imagine that someone you hate may have some virtuous qualities; even if they do have some good qualities, you can never remember any of them. You can only remember all the bad things. When you like somebody, even his faults can be endearing—‘harmless little faults.’”

#### 2.2.4.2 COMMENTS

In (10), Sumedho says that he “decided to practise” being patient and kind to what he is seeing around him instead of feeling negative about it. This is where we intervene when we notice a negative thought process, and replace it with a positive one. Psychologically, this is the practice of “thought displacement” (*añña nimitta*) [5.4.1.6].

In (11) + (12), Sumedho tells us that when we have aversion or anger, it is likely to cloud our thinking. This negative emotion will spill into how we see others and how we view the actions of others, especially what they have done “wrong.” We need to recognize this, so that it ends right there. The details are given in the next section.

### 2.2.5 The nature of faults

#### 2.2.5.1 SUMEDHO’S TEACHING ON LOVINGKINDNESS

(13) So recognise this in your own experience; observe the force of **like and dislike**. Practising patience and kindness is a very useful and effective instrument for dealing with all the petty trivia which the mind builds up around unpleasant experiences. *Mettā* is also a very useful method for those who have discriminative, very critical minds. They can see only the faults in everything, but they never look at themselves, they only see what’s “out there.”

(14) It is now very common to always be **complaining** about the weather or the government. Personal arrogance gives rise to these really nasty comments about everything; or you start talking about someone who isn’t there, ripping them apart, quite intelligently, and quite objectively.

You are so analytical, you know exactly what that person needs, what they should do and what they should not do, and why they’re this way and that. Very impressive to have such a sharp, critical mind and know what they ought to do. You are, of course, saying, “Really, I’m much better than they are.”

(15) But with *mettā*, you are **not blinding yourself** to the faults and flaws in everything. You are just peacefully co-existing with them. You are not demanding that it be otherwise. So *mettā* sometimes needs to overlook what’s wrong with yourself and everyone else – it doesn’t mean that you don’t notice those things, it means that you don’t develop problems around them. You stop that kind of indulgence by being kind and patient—peacefully co-existing.

#### 2.2.5.2 COMMENTS

Lovingkindness is described as “the practice of patience and kindness” even to oneself. That is to recognize our own actions for what they are, and so accepting them (like how we accept a dear friend even when that friend does something wrong). Hence, lovingkindness is neither pretending that faults do not exist nor accepting those faults as “all right.” Rather we know those faults are unhelpful, even bad, but we see them with lovingkindness. We accept them as they are and let them go. So we peacefully co-exist with others. These are all *vipassana* teachings in a social context.

### 3 The divine abodes as a path?

#### 3.1 THE DIVINE ABODES AND AWAKENING

##### 3.1.1 Texts in context

**3.1.1.1** Early Buddhism recognizes various types of **liberation** (*vimutti*) or approaches to awakening. Not all of these equal *the liberation from all defilements* that comes with the attainment of arhathood.<sup>14</sup> The meditative cultivation of **the divine abodes** leads to liberation of mind (*ceto, vimutti*), an expression meaning that this is a merely temporary state. Otherwise, to denote *supreme liberation* from all defilements, it is qualified with the expression “unsurpassed” (*akuppa*, literally, “unshakeable”) or else in combination with “liberation by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutti*).

**3.1.1.2** The cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*) or immeasurables (*appamañña*) has often been thought as originally being an independent path to awakening. The main reason for this seems to be that **the (Karaja, kāya) Brahma, vihāra Sutta** (A 10.208) (5) shows the practice of the divine abodes as **a liberation of the mind** (*ceto, vimutti*) to have an effect on one’s karma.<sup>15</sup> This seems to be confirmed by **Dhammapada 368**, which says: (6)

<i>metta, vihārī yo bhikkhu</i>	A monk who dwells with <i>mettā</i>
<i>pasanno buddha, sāsane</i>	who has faith in the Buddha’s teaching,
<i>adhigacche padaṃ santam</i>	will reach the place of peace,
<i>sāṅkhārūpasamaṃ sukhaṃ</i>	the happiness that is the stilling of formations. <sup>16</sup> (Dh 368)

Dh 368 indicates that a monk (ie, a meditator) who practises lovingkindness with faith in the Buddha’s teaching will gain awakening.<sup>17</sup> Both **the (Karaja, kāya) Brahma, vihāra Sutta** (A 10.208) and its

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed survey of different types of *vimutti*, see Anālayo, “*Vimutti*,” *Ency Bsm*, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> A 10.208/5:300,7 (SD 2.10). On the Sutta, M Wiltshire (*Ascetic Figures before and in Early Buddhism*, 1990: 268) says “we see here that *mettā* eliminates in the present body kamma which would otherwise come to fruition in a future existence”; cf Maithrimurthi, *Wohllullen, Mitleid, Freude und Gleichmut*, 1999:73-78.

<sup>16</sup> **Mahāvastu** (Senart 1897:421,18) has a very similar verse, followed by 3 verses that differ only in taking up the other 3 abodes similarly treated. A parallel in **Udānavarga** (Uv) 32.21 (Bernhard 1965:437) comes with 2 similar verses dealing with the same abode and having faith in the Buddha, but differing in the results they mention for such practice. Thus Uv 32.22, eg, indicates that such a monk will not regress and draws close to nirvāṇa (*abhavyaḥ parihāṇāya, nirvāṇayaiva so’ntike*). A parallel in **Gāndhārī Dharmapada** (GDh) 70 (Brough 1962/2001:128) also comes with a similar verse, GDh 69, suggesting that the monk, similarly described, shakes off evil (*duṇḍi pavaka dharma*). A parallel in **Patna Dharmapada** 59 (Cone 1989:119) continues after 4 *padas* similar to Dh 368 with *dr̥ṣṭe va dhamme nibbāṇam, yogacchemam anuttaram*, thus clearly confirming that the preceding refers to full awakening. Roth, “Text of the Patna Dharmapada” (1980:102), however thinks that this part belongs to the next verse: Roth “Particular features of the language of the Ārya-Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins and their importance for early Buddhist tradition,” in (ed) H Bechert, *Die Sprache der ältesten buddhistischen Überlieferung. Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Dritte Folge, Nr 117, Göttingen, 1980:78-135.

<sup>17</sup> Wiltshire op cit 1990:269 interprets **Dh 368** to imply “that *metta-vihāra* leads not to anāgamin status but to *nibbāna* itself, since elsewhere in the Nikāyas *santipada* is a synonym for *nibbāna*”; cf M Maithrimurthi, 1999:69.

parallels in Dh 368<sup>18</sup> (5) point to karma influencing the next rebirth only. In other words, the passages refer to a temporary suspension of karma, not its final and total removal.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.1.2 “Systematic reading”

**3.1.2.1** When examining a single verse, such as **Dh 368** (6), scholars advise that we should make a “**systematic**” reading of it. This means that we should read it in the context of the suttas or passages related to it.<sup>20</sup> If we wish to properly understand what the text properly means or refers to (in the early Buddhist teachings), such a single passage or passages need to be read in conjunction with other passages that are related to the present context.<sup>21</sup>

For example, on an unsystematic reading, taking **Dh 368** on its own, we may indeed conclude that dwelling with lovingkindness and having faith in the Buddha’s teaching is *all* that is needed to gain awakening, thus: [3.1.1.1]

A monk who dwells with <i>mettā</i>	who has faith in the Buddha’s teaching,	
will reach the place of peace,	the happiness that is the stilling of formations.	(Dh 368)

**3.1.2.2** When we do a “unsystematic” or *isolated* reading of this passage in connection with another closely similar **Dhammapada** verse, we may conclude that being delighted and having faith in the Buddha’s teaching is all that is needed to gain awakening, thus:

<i>pāmojja, bahulo bhikkhu</i>	A monk who has great delight,
<i>pasanno buddha, sāsane</i>	who has faith in the Buddha’s teaching.

<sup>18</sup> For a tr and study of the parallels MĀ 15 and a sutta qu in Śamathadeva’s *Abhidharmakośopāyikaṭīkā* see **Anālayo**, “Karma and Liberation—the Karajakāya-sutta (AN 10.208) in the light of its parallels,” in *Pāsādīkadānaṃ*, 2009, and **G Martini**, “The ‘Discourse on Accumulated Actions’ in Śamathadeva’s *Abhidharmakośopāyikā*,” *Indian International J of Buddhist Studies* 13 2012:49-79, respectively.

<sup>19</sup> For more detailed discussions, see Giuliana **Martini**, “Meditative Dynamics of the Early Buddhist appamāṇas,” *Canadian J of Buddhist Studies* 7 2011:137-180, and **Dhammadinnā**, “Semantics of wholesomeness: purification of intention and the soteriological function of the immeasurables (appamāṇas) in early Buddhist thought,” in (ed) K-p Chuang, *Buddhist Meditative Traditions: Their Origin and Development*, Taipei 2014: 51-129. In this connection, we should refer to **D 13/1:251,5**, where the parable of the mighty conch-blower whose sound is heard in all directions illustrates how *mettā* that develops as a boundless radiation in all directions cannot be overruled by other more limited karma [4.1.2]. Note that in this parable the conch-blower is not able to silence any other sound forever. This parable illustrates a temporary suppression. The conch-blower imagery does not convey the idea that the *mettā* overcomes all limited *karma* forever, but so long as there is *mettā* (and the other abodes), other limited types of karma will not remain, just as when the conch is blown, other sounds will not be heard.

<sup>20</sup> The term “**systematic**” reading is explained by **PARK Jungnook** (*How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, Sheffield: Equinox, 2012) thus: “by a ‘systematic’ reading I mean one which provides a consistent understanding of the text, consistent not merely within itself but within a wider textual context” (74). Park adds: “I regard a ‘systematic’ reading as an honest effort to understand the whole context of a text or its doctrinal system, proscribing minority ... from appropriating the true voice of the whole text.” (78)

<sup>21</sup> **Bodhi**, “Musīla and Nārada revisited: seeking the key to interpretation,” in (edd) Blackburn & Samuels, *Approaching the Dhamma, Buddhist Texts and Practice in South and Southeast Asia*, Pariyatti, 2003, explains in relation to the Pāli suttas that “not only are the texts themselves composed in a clipped laconic style that mocks our thirst for conceptual completeness, but their meaning often seems to rest upon a deep underlying groundwork of interconnected ideas that is nowhere stated baldly in a way that might guide interpretation ... the *nikāyas* embed the basic principles of doctrine in a multitude of short, often elusive discourses that draw upon and allude to the underlying system without explicitly spelling it out. To determine the principles one has to extract them piecemeal, by considering in juxtaposition a wide assortment of texts.” (47)

*adhigacche padarā santarā*                      will reach the place of peace,  
*sāṅkhārūpasamarā sukharā*                      the happiness that is the stilling of formations. (Dh 381)

This Dhammapada verse (Dh 381) differs from the other one (Dh 368) only in the first line, in referring to “having great delight [joy].” On following the same mode of interpretation, one may conclude that even divine-abode practice is not needed. All that is required to reach awakening, it seems, is only delight and faith; but we know that this is unlikely considering the early Buddhist teachings as a whole.

**3.1.2.3** It is likely that an “unsystematic reading” of such passages will fail to reflect the true spirit of early Buddhism. A proper interpretation of these verses is that it poetically points to showing our faith and joy in the Dharma, that is, a positive attitude towards Dharma training.<sup>22</sup>

We must thus conclude that these 2 verses by themselves do not support the notion that the divine abodes were recognized in early Buddhist thought as an independent path to awakening. Analayo adds that “this notion is to my mind as unconvincing as the hypothesis that the *jhānas* in general constituted an independent path to the final goal.” (2015d:17)

## 3.2 THE POTENTIAL OF DIVINE ABODE PRACTICE

### 3.2.1 The divine abodes and non-returning

**3.2.1.1** Although the divine abodes do not constitute an independent path to full awakening in early Buddhism, this does not mean that they do not play a significant role in the progress to awakening. This is in fact the theme of both of the Dhammapada verses we mentioned [3.1.2]. **Dh 368** clearly highlights that “dwelling in lovingkindness,” that is cultivating *mettā*, can help us progress on the path of awakening.

**The (Karaja,kāya) Brahma,vihāra Sutta** (A 10.208) and its Madhyama Āgama parallel are even more explicit about this: they present a noble disciple’s practice of the divine abodes as particularly helpful for attaining non-returning.<sup>23</sup>

**3.2.1.2** A similarly significant statement is found in the well known **Karaṇīya Metta Sutta** (Sn 1.8 = Khp 9). This Sutta closes by stating that when one cultivates lovingkindness:

*diṭṭhiñ ca anupagamma*                      And not falling into views,  
*silavā dassanena sampanno*                      virtuous, accomplished in insight,  
*kāmesu vineyya gedharā*                      having discarded greed for sense-pleasures—  
*na hi jātu gabbha,seyyam punā-r-etī ti*                      one will not return to lie in a womb. (Sn 152)

The first 2 lines seem to allude to the overcoming of the first 3 fetters (*samyojana*) of self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), attachment to rituals and vows (*śīla-b,bata parāmāsa*) and doubt (*vicikicchā*): this

<sup>22</sup> See Anālayo, “Exemplary qualities of a monastic, the Saṃyukta-āgama counterpart to the Mahāgopālaka-sutta and the need of balancing inner development with concern for others,” *Sri Lanka International J of Buddhist Studies* 1 2010d:23 n35, where 3 Chinese parallels to **Dh 368** in fact clearly mention the need for calm and insight; cf T210 (T4.572a11) and T212 (T4.764c27): 比丘為慈，愛敬佛教，深入止觀，滅行乃安， and similarly in T213 (T4.796b1): 苾芻為慈，愛敬於佛教，深入妙止觀，滅穢行乃安。

<sup>23</sup> **A 10.208/5:300,12** (SD 2.10) explains that a noble disciple (*ariya,sāvaka*) who develops *mettā* (and the other abodes) in this way will progress to non-returning, similarly stated in MĀ 15 (T1.438a22); on the slightly differing phrasing in Tib version, but which still speaks of a noble disciple, see discussion in Martini 2012:68 f n58.

refers to **the streamwinner**. The last 2 lines then can only allude to **the non-returner**, one who has overcome both sensual desire and its opposite, *ill will*; and will not return to (be reborn in) the sense-world. This is, in fact, confirmed by the Commentary (KhpA 251,22).<sup>24</sup>

In other words, **the Karaja, kāya Brahma, vihāra Sutta** (A 10.208) and its parallels as well as **the Karaṇīya Metta Sutta** (Sn 1.8 = Khp 9) may be stating that *mettā* is able to help in our progress from stream-winning to non-returning. Due to the frequent occurrence of teachings on *mettā* in the suttas, it is not surprising that it is so. We will examine this further below [5].

### **3.2.2 Lovingkindness and the mental fetters**

**3.2.2.1** The liberating potential of lovingkindness in this respect [3.2.1] would then be closely related to **the mental fetters** (*saṃyojana*) that the streamwinner must overcome if they are to progress and gain non-returning. More specifically, lovingkindness helps in the overcoming and uprooting of the twin defilements of sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*) and ill will (*vyāpāda*).

These defilements are significantly weakened with the attaining of **once-returning** and uprooted by **non-returning**. **The (Tika) Sikkhā Sutta 1** (A 3.85) and **the (Sekha) Uddesa Sutta 2** (A 3.86), and their Saṃyukta Āgama parallels<sup>25</sup> further show that to progress from streamwinning to non-returning requires in particular fulfilling the training in concentration (based on being accomplished in moral virtue and with some deep level of wisdom).

To progress from streamwinning to non-returning, we must fulfill the training in concentration by mastering the dhyanas, with which *sensual desire* and *ill will* are uprooted. The reason is clear and simple: in order to be free from sensual desire which is sense-based, we need to be well acquainted with transcorporeal bliss—that of the dhyanas. When we have overcome sensual desire, its opposite, *ill will* is also uprooted.

This process of gaining the dhyanas can indeed be accomplished with the help of lovingkindness. Lovingkindness cultivation is thus one of the ways for fulfilling the training in concentration. The experience of inner happiness and peace of deep concentration is able to free us from the sensual pleasures when we are still under the power of our physical senses.

**3.2.2.2** Lovingkindness helps in attaining deep meditation concentration, which in turn is needed for overcoming and uprooting **anger and hatred**, since lovingkindness is, by its very nature, opposed to them. This transformative potential of lovingkindness is widely confirmed by contemporary psycholog-

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<sup>24</sup> Sn 1.8/142-152 (SD 38.3). W H Walters (“New light on enlightenment: a convergence of recent scholarship and emerging neuroscience?” *J of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 3 2012) is wrong in concluding that the parable of the mother caring for her only child (**Sn 149b**) “apparently, is how one may achieve enlightenment” (2012: 162). The closing verse **Sn 152** should be read with the lovingkindness cultivator “having understood” *abhisamecca* (**Sn 143b**; a durative verb meaning), ie, “with the understanding” of the nature of nirvana. The last verse (Sn 152) refers to the streamwinner who is capable of attaining non-returning. Thus—as Analayo notes (2015d)—“when Crosby 2008:8 concludes that ‘*mettā*, according to this text, is salvific’ [cf Maithrimurthi 1999:65-67 and Gombrich 2009:87] then this is correct only as long as such cultivation is undertaken by a virtuous person and based on the transcendence of views and the vision attained with stream-entry, leading through the removal of sensuality to non-return [sic]. The stanza does not present *mettā* as leading to realization all by itself, without being combined with these other aspects of the path.” (Analayo 2015d: n94, citing Crosby, “Gendered symbols in Theravada Buddhism: missed positives in the representation of the female,” *Hsuan Chuang J of Buddhist Studies* 9 2008:8; Maithrimurthi, *Wohllwollen, Mitleid, Freude und Gleichmut*, 1999:65-67, and Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, 2009:87.)

<sup>25</sup> A 3.85/1:232,12 (SD 3.3(2)) and A 3.86/1:233,22 (SD 80.13) with their parallels SĀ 820 (T2.210c1) and SĀ 821 (T2.210c27). Cf **(Tika) Sikkhā S 3** (A 3.87,4/1:235), SD 80.14.

ical study and research, which has empirically shown various benefits of lovingkindness cultivation.<sup>26</sup> Studies have shown, for example, that the cultivation of lovingkindness is often effective in reducing, even removing, anger and psychological distress,<sup>27</sup> as well as the negative symptoms of schizophrenia,<sup>28</sup> and to increase positive emotions and pro-social behaviour.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, undoubtedly, to engage in the practice of **lovingkindness** or any of the other divine abodes, especially compassion, benefits human vis-à-vis adversities and suffering. Very significantly for Buddhist practitioners, lovingkindness is a great help for the path of awakening. Although lovingkindness in itself is not a path to awakening, it offers (as we have noted above) great support for the path of awakening.

## 4 Verbalization or pervasion?

### **4.1 DIFFICULTIES WITH LOVINGKINDNESS CULTIVATION**

#### **4.1.1 Difficulties with verbalization and visualization**

**4.1.1.1** We are often taught the lovingkindness meditation by way of directing our intentions or feelings toward selected people or subjects (including our pets and “beings”), beginning with oneself, then to a dear friend, followed by a neutral person, after that a difficult person (such as an enemy), and finally, “breaking the barriers,” to all beings.<sup>30</sup> This method is, as a rule, done with verbalizing or “sub-verbalizing,” mentally expressing the positive attitude, sometimes with some visualization.

Various modern meditation researchers learned that meditators often had **difficulties with this popular structured method** of cultivating lovingkindness or any of the other 3 immeasurables (compassion, gladness or equanimity).<sup>31</sup> A study by Barnhofer et al (2010) found that meditators with habitual brooding tended to respond better to instructions in the breath meditation and therefore are not taught

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<sup>26</sup> For a survey, see S G **Hofmann** et al, “Loving-kindness and compassion meditation: potential for psychological interventions,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 31 **2011**:1126-1132.; B **Alba**, “Loving-kindness meditation: a field study,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 14,2 2013. [[ResearchGate](#)] 7 Oct 2023.

<sup>27</sup> J W Carson, F J Keefe, T R Lynch & K M Carson, “Lovingkindness Meditation for Chronic Low Back Pain,” *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 23.3 2005:287-304.

<sup>28</sup> D P **Johnson**, D L Penn, B L Fredrickson, P S Meyer, A M Kring, and M Brantley, “Loving-kindness meditation to enhance recovery from negative symptoms of schizophrenia,” *J of Clinical Psychology* 65,5 **2009**:499-509. D P **Johnson**, D.L. Penn, B L Fredrickson, A M Kring, P S Meyer, L I Catalino, & M Brantley, “A pilot study of loving kindness meditation for the negative symptoms of schizophrenia,” *Schizophrenia Research* 129 **2011**: 137-140.

<sup>29</sup> B L **Fredrickson**, M A Cohn, K A Coffey, J Pek, & S M Finkel, “Open hearts build lives: positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources,” *J of Personality and Social Psychology* 95,5 **2008**:1045-1062. C A **Hutcherson**, E M Seppala, & J J Gross, “Loving-kindness meditation increases social connectedness,” *Emotion* 8,5 **2008**:720-724. Notably in a study of *mettā* as a buffer for social stress R W **Law** (2011) found that exposure to even very brief sessions of *mettā* can actually have negative effects for those who are in a negative mood (*An Analogue Study of Loving-Kindness Meditation as a Buffer against Social Stress*, PhD thesis, Tucson: Univ of Arizona, **2011**) [[ProQuest](#)] 7 Oct 2023. Law explains that “engaging in LKM [lovingkindness meditation] may bring attention to whatever feelings the participant is having in the moment. If the participant enters into [an] LKM session in a negative mood (or not in a positive mood), these negative (or non-positive) feelings would become more salient during the meditation. While these negative (or non-positive) feelings may dissipate in a longer meditation session, they may actually become accentuated in the short run in a brief meditation session.” (Law 2011:112)

<sup>30</sup> See eg S Salzberg, *Loving-kindness: the revolutionary art of happiness*, Boston: Shambala, 1995.

<sup>31</sup> X Zeng, R Wang, V Y L Chan, T P S Oei, & F Y K Leung, “The development of the difficulties during meditation involving immeasurable attitudes scale,” *Mindfulness* 10 2019:812-823.



the cultivation of lovingkindness.<sup>32</sup> Lumma et al (2015), too, reported the meditators' preference for the breath meditation over lovingkindness, probably because of the high degree of cognitive effort involved in expressing positive thoughts.<sup>33</sup>

Boellinghaus et al (2013) reported that meditators found it challenging to intellectually engage with the concept and task of the LKM (lovingkindness meditation) while cognitively connecting with it. Some participants felt that the meditation was too structured or abstract, as it was "taking away from how I was feeling and it was just kind of trying to think certain thoughts about [it], you know, it was really cognitive, really brainy, and I couldn't connect with it."<sup>34</sup>

**4.1.1.2** Meditators find difficulties not only with the stereotyped verbalizing ("May I be well ... happy ... ) but with the visualization, too. Galante et al (2016) reported that a participant, who had received instructions in lovingkindness meditation that combined the standard approach with some degree of visualization, remarked:

I'm finding it really hard to summon up a feeling when I visualise people. I do not feel any different, and I do not have the same feeling that I would if I saw them for real.<sup>35</sup> (1)

Other meditators even reported feelings of sadness—which is the contrary to the purpose of cultivation of lovingkindness:

Visualising a loved one was ... difficult. Most of my loved ones live far away since I started uni[versity], so that exercise was sadly rather upsetting for me as I ended up feeling longing rather than love. (2) (Galante et al 2016 id)

In case (1), the meditator had difficulty evoking lovingkindness in the absence of the subject. He said that he "did not feel any different," meaning that he was unable to show or feel love for anyone in their absence. It is likely that lovingkindness meditation was not suitable for him at this stage. Perhaps he should be instructed to do some breath meditation first. When he has attained some level of focus or peace, he should then cultivate lovingkindness. Yet, there might be other reasons for the meditator's inability to evoke lovingkindness.

In case (2) the meditator actually *missed* the loved one he had started thinking about! He could be told to only direct his lovingkindness to loved ones at a later stage when his lovingkindness was strong enough. Or, if he was attached to those loved ones, he should avoid using them as his meditation subjects until he has built up his mental focus with the lovingkindness, or with breath meditation.

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<sup>32</sup> T Barnhofer, T Chittka, H Nightingale, C Visser, & C Crane, "State effects of two forms of meditation on pre-frontal EEG asymmetry in previously depressed individuals," *Mindfulness* 1 2010:21-27.

<sup>33</sup> A L Lumma, B E Kok, & T Singer, "Is meditation always relaxing? Investigating heart rate, heart rate variability, experienced effort and likeability during training of three types of meditation," *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 97,1 2015:38-45.

<sup>34</sup> I Boellinghaus, F W Jones, & J Hutton, "Cultivating self-care and compassion in psychological therapists in training: the experience of practicing loving-kindness meditation," *Training and Education in Professional Psychology* 7,4 2013:271.

<sup>35</sup> J Galante, M J Bekkers, C Mitchell, & J Gallacher, "Lovingkindness meditation effects on well-being and altruism: a mixed methods online RCT," *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* 8,3 2016:338 (Word version p21). [[ResearchGate](#)] [[msWord](#)] 24 Sep 2023.

There is a 3<sup>rd</sup> case worth mentioning, reported to me by Matt Jenkins:

I remember a meditation teacher who was originally from Thailand saying that they had noted cultural differences in some of the difficulties new practitioners experienced with metta meditation. Those they had taught back home struggled with expressing metta for their ‘enemies’ while those in the West had no problem there but really struggled expressing metta for themselves. He conceptualised this in terms of ‘guilt cultures vs shame cultures’—in the West we hate ourselves because *we blame ourselves for our humiliations*, elsewhere *people blame others for humiliating them*. I’ve never been persuaded of that heuristic, but find the barrier itself interesting—it certainly reflects my experience of learning to meditate with lovingkindness.

(Matt Jenkins, personal communication, 25 Dec 2023) [4.1.1.3 n]

In fact, most experienced teachers would stress on the importance of practising *both* breath meditation and lovingkindness meditation. One of them should be easier for the meditator, and this would be the basis for their focus. Once they have attained some focus, they could go on to cultivate the other meditation with which they have difficulty. Anyway, the point remains that they may still have difficulty with lovingkindness for various reasons.

**4.1.1.3 The Visuddhi,magga** advises against the “faults regarding persons” (*puggala,dosa*) in loving-kindness meditation. These 4 kinds of people should not be used as the first subject, that is, as a “dear person”: someone who is unloved, unloving or unpleasant (*appiya*), a dearly loved friend (*atippiya sahāyaka*), a neutral person (*majjhatta*) and a hostile person (*veri,puggala*). (Vism 9.4-7)

Buddhaghosa (the Visuddhi,magga’s compiler) explains that it would tire us to have an unloved person as the first subject (that is, to see them as a “dear” person). Similarly, to have a neutral person as the first subject would also be tiring. It will be very difficult for us to show lovingkindness to either of these people at the start. So too putting a dearly beloved in the “neutral” stage will be tiring, too, since it will be difficult to think of a loved one as being a neutral person.

When we put a hostile person in the first stage, we are likely to feel anger or hatred. On the other hand, putting someone of the opposite sex (*liṅga,visabhāga*) is likely to arouse lust in those attracted to them. The Visuddhi,magga, in its section of reflecting on a corpse, gives the same advice, defining *visa-bhāga* to mean the “opposite” sex (Vism 6.14). Psychologically, however, it makes good sense that we understand *visabhāga* (“different, opposing, opposite, unusual, uncommon”) to mean the sex that arouses lust in us. In other words, we should avoid taking as the first subject anyone whom we find sexually attractive. The reason for this is very clear: we are likely to arouse lust instead of lovingkindness.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, we should avoid putting anyone we have emotional issues with—such as parents, relatives, friends, or a sick person—as the first subject of our lovingkindness meditation. Among Asians, as a rule, it is not advisable to put a parent, especially the mother, as the first subject. This is likely to instead conjure up overwhelming feelings of pity, sadness, worry or anger depending on one’s relationship with her. Of course, this similarly applies to a father in a similar situation. In the case of a sick person or any such

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<sup>36</sup> Matt Jenkins’ feedback: “Going back to my earlier comment [4.1.1.2]: The meditation teacher did actually shift to starting with a hated or disliked person when dealing with some Western groups of meditators. Their thought was a practical one—if it’s easier for them to wish lovingkindness on a foe, that is [as] an introduction to loving-kindness which they can then extend to themselves. | (After all, however reflexively I am resistant to wishing myself well, I can at least acknowledge that my faults are not as severe as those of, say, the late Henry Kissinger, so if I can manage to wish him well it’s a double standard to refuse the same for myself.)” 25 Dec 2023

difficult person, we should only direct our lovingkindness to them when we are sufficiently focused with lovingkindness, or better, cultivate compassion<sup>37</sup> [4.2.1.2], to be able to do it effectively.

**4.1.1.4** It is important here to remember **the primacy of lovingkindness** amongst the 4 immeasurables.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that there is really *only one key positive emotion*, that is, **lovingkindness** (*mettā*), that is, the *essential* divine abode [SD 38.5 (2.1.2)]. This is the basis for compassion (*karuṇā*), which is the basis for gladness (*muditā*), which is the basis for equanimity (*upekkhā*). When we have habitually mastered lovingkindness, we can then more effectively direct compassion to the subject. We build up the positive emotions cumulatively, *pari passu*, one after the other.<sup>39</sup>

#### **4.1.2 Radiation of lovingkindness**

**4.1.2.1** Considering the growing frequency of difficulties [eg 4.1.1.2] with lovingkindness meditation as taught and practised today, it's time that we re-examine the standard instructions for lovingkindness meditation and bring to them new perspectives. To begin with, the idea of using the verbal formulas to cultivate lovingkindness to specific individuals—starting with oneself and proceeding to a dear friend, then a neutral person, followed by a hostile person—is *not* found in the early Buddhist texts.<sup>40</sup>

In the suttas, called “the early Buddhist texts” (EBTs), compiled between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE,<sup>41</sup> the cultivation of the 4 immeasurables (*appamāṇa* or *appamañña*) or divine abodes (*brahma-vihāra*) by way of radiating them in all directions. **The (Brahma, vihāra) Subha Sutta** (M 99), records the well known metaphor of **a mighty conch-blower** who “with little difficulty makes a proclamation to the 4 quarters,”<sup>42</sup> even so:

[one,] with a heart<sup>43</sup> 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,  
he dwells suffusing all the world with lovingkindness  
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

*mettā, sahaḡatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati  
tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ  
iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbatthatāya  
sabbāvantarṃ lokarṃ mettā, sahaḡatena cetasā  
vipulena maha-g, gatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjhena pharitvā viharati.*<sup>44</sup>

(M 99,24-27/2:207 f), SD 38.6

<sup>37</sup> To cultivate, one needs to start off with some lovingkindness, and then progress to compassion cultivation: SD 38.5 (4).

<sup>38</sup> A parallel situation is found in the primacy of the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana, see SD 8.4 (5.1.1.6, 12.2). The 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana is, in turn, the basis for all the following 4 formless dhyanas: SD 8.4 (12.3).

<sup>39</sup> See eg **Tevijja S** (D 13,76-79), SD 1.8.

<sup>40</sup> Analayo, “Immeasurable meditations and mindfulness,” *Mindfulness* 10 2029:2620-2628. Analayo further refers to his “Compassion in the Āgamas and Nikāyas,” *Dharma Drum Journal of Buddhist Studies* 16 2015:1-30.

<sup>41</sup> **Analayo**, “The historical value of the Pali discourses,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 55 **2012e**:223-253. **Sujato & Brahmali**, *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts*, Perth, Australia, 2015: ch 3. [OCBS].

<sup>42</sup> *Saṅkha, dhama*, M 99,24-27/2:207 f = S 42.8/4:322.

<sup>43</sup> “Heart,” *citta*.

<sup>44</sup> M 99,24-27/2:207 f (SD 38.6).

**4.1.2.2** In the ancient India, blowing a **conch-shell** was a regular means of communication over distances and for important rituals. Hence, it was employed in warfare, too, for communicating strategic moves, since its pervasive sound could be heard above the battle din. Even today, the conch is blown during certain ceremonies, especially at the start of Hindu *pūjā* or ritual worship.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, the blowing of a conch requires skill and strength. One has to breathe into the abdomen and thorax. The lips need to be properly puckered to create the vibratory force to sound the conch. Different kinds of conch sounds are made by adjusting the lips and tongue. The conch sound is then pervasive and resonant. The spread and beauty of the conch-sound is thus an apt illustration for the radiation of lovingkindness in all directions.<sup>46</sup>

The cultivation of lovingkindness and of compassion—these 2 are popular with psychology specialists and researchers—thus needs both strength and skill. The key idea of the conch metaphor is the immeasurable or boundless pervasion in all directions by the sound of the conch. The same pervasive nature of the mental radiation of the 4 divine abodes are thus made in an “immeasurable” or “boundless” manner in the 6 quarters (east, south, west, north, below and above). The key characteristic of the mental radiation of lovingkindness and the other 3 divine abodes is their immeasurability and boundlessness.

**4.1.2.3 The (Majjhima) Dhānañjāni Sutta** (M 97) has the “divine abode” pericope (on lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity), but without the conch-blower parable. The Sutta relates how the elder Sāriputta attends to the brahmin Dhānañjāni on his deathbed, one who clearly has not received the teaching on the divine abodes before. The Sutta also tells us that this brahmin has at an earlier time been engaging in immoral conduct.

Clearly then the brahmin is not a meditator but, compassionately guided by an arhat (Sāriputta), he is able to meditate to reach sufficient mental focus so that, upon dying (and despite his terminal pains), is reborn in a brahma heaven. The practice of the divine abodes literally brings the brahmin Dhānañjāni to the divine abiding (*brahma, vihāra*) of the brahmas (high gods).

Given that according to **the (Majjhima) Dhānañjāni Sutta** (M 97) the brahmin is able to cultivate the brahmavihāras sufficiently well to be reborn as a brahma, it follows that he must have been able to successfully execute Sāriputta’s instructions on radiating the abodes, despite his dying state and lack of meditative expertise. From all this, we may rightly conclude that it is possible to benefit from the practice of the immeasurables by radiating lovingkindness and the other divine abodes without the need of attaining dhyana, as in Dhānañjāni’s case.

**4.1.2.4** From the parable of the conch-blower [4.1.2.2] and the account of Dhānañjāni’s rebirth [4.1.2.3], it is clear that the stock passage on the divine abodes [4.1.2.1] does not mention any *subject* of such radiation, that is, no one is mentioned as the “recipient” to whom the positive emotion is directed. Rather, the emphasis is on *the personal experience* of **the boundless radiation** itself.

The boundless radiation of the positive emotion takes the intentions and feelings of lovingkindness and the other divine abodes as both its *object and content*. The attention is not in any external person, being or state (or their internalized images) but in the subtler experience of the immeasurable state

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<sup>45</sup> The conch is the shell of the giant sea-snail, *Turbinella pyrum*, abundantly found in the Indian Ocean. The **conch** is blown thrice before a *pūjā*, and also during such occasions as honouring the earth deity (*bhūmi pūjā*) (as ground-breaking ritual), and during marriage, house-warming and *upanayana* (brahminical thread ritual) marking passage into adulthood. It is also used for pouring the “dedication water” (*dakḥiṇ’odaka*) during marriage and dedication of merits.

<sup>46</sup> On cultivating the divine abodes *directionally*, see SD 38.5 (2.1.3.2).

(*appamāna*) itself, that is, the intention rooted in lovingkindness, compassion, gladness or equanimity itself. One’s heart or mind is then said to be “boundless” or “immeasurable” (*appamāṇa*).<sup>47</sup>

### 4.1.3 The subjects of radiation

**4.1.3.1** Although the stock passage on cultivating the divine abodes only mentions a pervasive radiation of each abode extending in all directions [4.1.2.1], we can also see more specific instructions on the subjects of the cultivation described elsewhere, such as in **the Karaṇīya Metta Sutta** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8) or simply the Metta Sutta (attesting to its popularity in being included in the Khuddaka, pāṭha, the first book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, and which is meant to be learnt by novices and the laity). The fact that the Metta Sutta is also included in **the Sutta Nipāta**, perhaps the oldest of the sutta collections, suggests that it is probably an ancient text.

**The Metta Sutta** (Sn 1.8), composed in verse, in fact lists categories of beings that can be the subjects of our lovingkindness, thus:

4	<i>Ye keci pāṇa, bhūt’atthi tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā dīgha vā ye mahantā vā majjhimā rassakā aṇuka, thūlā</i>	Whatever living beings there are— be they <u>moving or still</u> , <sup>48</sup> without any exception: be they <u>long</u> , or be they <u>large</u> , <u>medium, short, fine or gross</u> ;	<b>Sn 146</b>
5	<i>diṭṭhā vā ye vā addiṭṭhā ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhit’attā</i>	be they <u>seen or unseen</u> ; those dwelling <u>far or near</u> ; those already <u>born</u> or those <u>seeking birth</u> — may all beings be happy at heart!	<b>Sn 147</b> (Khp 9,4 f = Sn 1.8,4-5c), SD 38.3

The method laid out here—which makes use of categories of beings (as differing from the “directional” method of the better known text)—may serve as a simpler way for meditators who need some palpable visualization. The beings are listed in pairs—“moving/still,” “seen/unseen,” “far/near,” “already born/seeking birth”—or in triads—“long/large/medium,” “short/fine/gross.” We pervade them all, indeed, the whole world, with boundless radiation of lovingkindness (Sn 148 f). However, notice that these are merely “categories,” without explicitly stating any kind of beings, or in terms of individual humans.

A careful study of **the Metta Sutta** will show that it not only *opens* with instructions in moral training (Sn 142-145b) but also *closes* with the mention of being “virtuous” (*sīlavā*) (Sn 152b). This shows that the whole Sutta is a training for the path rooted in moral virtue (*sīla*) as the basis for concentration (*samādhi*), and with both as the bases for liberating wisdom (*paññā*). In other words, moral virtue and lovingkindness promote one another, and this co-operation promotes insight or vision (*dassana*, or right view), that is, wisdom. In short, this is **virtue ethics** [5.1.1.1].

**4.1.3.2** Another interesting sutta development of the radiation of lovingkindness involves the famous parable of the saw, that is, **the Kakacūpama Sutta** (M 21), which says:

<sup>47</sup> See Dhammadinna, “Semantics of wholesomeness: purification of intention and the soteriological function of the immeasurables (*appamāṇas*) in early Buddhist thought,” in (ed) K-p Chuang, *Buddhist Meditative Traditions: their origin and development*, Taiwan: Dharma Drum Publishing Corp, 2014:90.

<sup>48</sup> **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9,4b = Sn 146b) + SD 38.3 (5.3); **Nālaka S** (Sn 704b), SD 49.18; SD 12.4 (6.7.2). Foll PED, *tasa* is metaphorically used of people who are in *fear and trembling*, as distinguished from *thāvara*, one *self-possessed and stable being* (= arhat, KhpA 245). Traditional translators tend to tr *tasā vā thāvarā vā* as “the frail or the firm” or such like, and interpret it as referring to those who still have craving (*tasā*) and the arhats (*thāvarā*) respectively, in keeping with Comy (KhpA 245).

Bhikshus, even if low-down thieves were to cut you up from limb to limb with a **double-handled saw**, if you were ever to defile your mind with anger, you are thereby not a doer of my teaching.

Therein, bhikshus, you should train yourselves in this way:

*‘Our hearts will not be perverted in any way, nor shall we utter any bad speech, but **we shall dwell with a heart of lovingkindness, moved by goodness, without a hating heart.***

And we will dwell pervading that person with a heart of lovingkindness.

And based on that, we will dwell pervading the whole world with a heart of lovingkindness, *vast, grown great, boundless, free from hate, free from ill will.*’ [§11.4]

This is how you, bhikshus, should train yourselves.

(M 21), SD 38.1

In the study of such a difficult text, we should carry out the advice of **the Neyy’attha Nī’t’attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5 f).<sup>49</sup> First, we should examine whether the Buddha is talking on the ultimate Dharma level (referring to true reality) or using some conventional teaching to point to such a reality. Clearly, the parable of the saw refers to a conventional teaching. This teaching is directly addressed to the monk, Phagguna, who lusts after some nuns, and angrily resents anyone who speaks ill of the nuns (and the nuns, too, would angrily react against those who disapprove of Phagguna).

On account of Phagguna’s strong lust, the Buddha has to speak emphatically in a hyperbolic manner to shake Phagguna out of his infatuation. Firstly, he is taught to overcome *lust* by cultivating lovingkindness. Since lust is life-affirming, the Buddha resorts to a skillful means of using an imagery that denies life: vicious bandits who enjoy murdering their victims by dismembering them with a double-handed saw! This imagery is not from real life (we have no other mention of this horrific act other than in the parable).<sup>50</sup> This is actually a hint of hellish sufferings which are the karmic fruits of a monk who breaks his vows and falls into lust.<sup>51</sup>

## 4.2 RECIPIENTS OF LOVINGKINDNESS

### 4.2.1 A living being as meditation subject

**4.2.1.1** Although the emphasis in the cultivation of lovingkindness is that of universal pervasion, that is, radiating lovingkindness towards “all beings,” there is an early Buddhist text, **the Mettā Bhāvanā Sutta** (It 27), where we can show lovingkindness to “even a single living being” (*ekam pi pāṇam*). The Sutta’s key verse says:

*ekam pi ce pāṇam aduṭṭha,citto  
mettāyati kusalī tena hoti  
sabbe’va pāṇe manasā’nukampī  
pahūtam ariyo pakaroti puññaṃ*

If one has a hate-free mind for even a single living being,  
one shows lovingkindness: one is thereby wholesome.  
One has a mind of compassion towards all life;  
the noble one creates abundant merit.

(It 27,11/1.3.7/21), SD 30.7

The Sutta highlights lovingkindness as a source of “abundant merit” (*pahūtam puññaṃ*): any other way of making merit does not amount to even a “16<sup>th</sup> part” (*sojasim*; an iota) of this hate-free mind towards a single living being (It 27,13b). *Mettā* and merits cannot be measured; so this is another sutta

<sup>49</sup> A 2.3.5+6/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

<sup>50</sup> On the Buddha admonishing Phagguna, see SD 38.1 (1.2).

<sup>51</sup> For a scholarly view on the parable of the saw—that the radiation of *mettā* to the vicious bandits is an interpolation—see Analayo op cit 2019a:2623.

hyperbole to highlight that showing lovingkindness to even a single person or being clears our mind of unwholesomeness here and now; what more when we make a habit of cultivating lovingkindness.

**4.2.1.2 The Vibhaṅga** (“analysis”), the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of the Pali Abhidhamma, has its chapter 13, the “analysis of the immeasurables” (*appamañña, vibhaṅga*), open by making a similar remark. While **the Mettā Bhāvanā Sutta** (It 27,11) speaks of lovingkindness in terms of merit-making, **the Vibhaṅga** passage explains how mentally seeing a dearly beloved, one then radiates that lovingkindness to all beings in one direction (to begin with):

And how does a monk dwell pervading one direction with a mind imbued with **lovingkindness**?

Just as one may have lovingkindness upon seeing one person (*ekam puggalaṃ*) that is dear and pleasant (*piyaṃ manāpaṃ*), in the same way, one radiates *lovingkindness* to all beings.

*kathaṃ ca bhikkhu mettā, sahatena cetasā ekam disaṃ pharivā viharati?*  
*seyyathā pi nāma ekam puggalaṃ piyaṃ manāpaṃ disvā mettāyeyya, evam eva sabbe*  
*satte mettāya pharati* (Vbh 272)

Although this Vibhaṅga passage speaks of evoking lovingkindness by “seeing” a single person, it still does not say that such an individual be taken as *the meditation subject*. The dear and pleasant person is held up only as the starting-point of lovingkindness cultivation.

The Vibhaṅga goes on to explain the starting-point of **the cultivation of compassion** (*karuṇā, bhavaṇā*) as follows:

And how does a monk dwell pervading one direction with a mind imbued with **compassion**?

Just as one may have compassion upon seeing one person that is miserable, suffering from one’s own misconduct (*duggataṃ durūpetam*), in the same way, one radiates *compassion* to all beings.

*kathaṃ ca bhikkhu karuṇā, sahatena cetasā ekam disaṃ pharivā viharati?*  
*seyyathā pi nāma ekam puggalaṃ duggataṃ durūpetam disvā karuṇāyeyya, evam eva sabbe*  
*satte karuṇāya pharati* (Vbh 273)

It should be noted then that while in lovingkindness cultivation, we as a rule start with a dear person (or ourself if that is easier), but in compassion cultivation, we start with someone who is suffering some negative situation. Then, we should remember that we must begin with lovingkindness cultivation before we can do compassion. Once we have mastered lovingkindness, we may need only a relatively short time to get into a state of lovingkindness as the basis for cultivating compassion.<sup>52</sup> [4.2.1.3]

## **4.2.2 Specific persons as meditation subjects**

**4.2.2.1** The idea of taking individuals as the subjects of lovingkindness or of compassion is explained in detail by Buddhaghosa in his **Visuddhimagga** (5<sup>th</sup>-century Theravāda meditation manual). He, however, does not rely on the suttas for this. Instead, he quotes from an Abhidhamma work, **the Vibhaṅga**, 2 passages on lovingkindness (Vbh 272) and on compassion (Vbh 273) mentioned above [4.2.1.2]. Buddhaghosa takes these Vibhaṅga passages literally, and thus encouraged the person-oriented methods in

<sup>52</sup> On compassion cultivation, see SD 38.5 (4).

his Visuddhimagga. His commentary provided the template for the way that lovingkindness and compassion are generally taught and practised today.

Buddhaghosa probably had no choice but to bow to the Theravāda orthodoxy of the Mahāvihāra in highlighting the Abhidhamma.<sup>53</sup> Another reason for Buddhaghosa's promotion of the person-based method was probably because of sectarian competition or borrowing of sources. On this account, Anala-yo concludes: "This goes to show that the above passage in the Vibhaṅga is best understood as exemplifying a general trend rather than being the one instance responsible for this development." (2019a:2624)

**4.2.2.2** In fact, a similar person-based approach to the cultivations of the immeasurables is found in Sarvāstivāda.<sup>54</sup> **The Abhidharma,kośa,bhāṣya** (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries), Vasubandhu's Sarvāstivāda exegesis, tries to simplify the method of radiating the immeasurables for those who have difficulties doing them. He prescribes that, in such a case, one should divide the subjects into 3 categories: friends (3 kinds), a neutral person (1 kind), and hostile persons (3 kinds).<sup>55</sup> **The 3 kinds** of friends and hostile persons are divided into *inferior, middling, and superior*. We thus have as subjects for these cultivations: a very dear friend, a good friend, a distant friend, a neutral person, a slightly hostile person, a hostile person, and a very hostile person.

**4.2.2.3** These categories of subjects differ from those of **the Visuddhimagga**, which presents only 4 subjects: *oneself, a friend, a neutral person, and a hostile person*. The idea of progressing from a friend to a neutral person and then to a hostile person is common to both traditions. The Abhidharma,kośa,-bhāṣya method expands on this common idea by introducing categorization of friends and the hostile persons into 3 levels each. The Visuddhi,magga method merely adds a 4<sup>th</sup> subject to the common set of 3 subjects, that is, oneself. The suttas do not have any such categorizations.

### **4.2.3 Loving oneself**

**4.2.3.1** The practice of directing lovingkindness to oneself probably originated from an interesting Pali term used in the stock passage for the radiation of the immeasurables. The term is a variant reading found in different editions of the Pāli suttas: the term occurs either as **sabbatthatāya** or as **sabbattatāya**. The difference is only in a single letter, which is either an aspirated *-th-* or an unaspirated *-t-*, that is, *-attha-* or as *-atta-* right in the middle of the above 2 words.

The different spellings give different meanings to the term. The first term, *sabbatthatāya* means "in every way" (*sabbattha*) while the other reading, *sabbattatāya*, which is the reading accepted by the Visuddhimagga (Vism 308), gives the sense "to all as to oneself" (*sabba + attā*). Here is the passage where this interesting variation in reading occurs: [the full Pali is at 4.1.2.1]

[one,] with a heart<sup>56</sup> 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,

<sup>53</sup> For a similar situation for Buddhaghosa's not acknowledging Upatissa's Vimutti,magga (prob belonging to the more liberal Theravāda tradition of the rival Abhayagiri monastery). See SD 60.1d (1.2.7.3).

<sup>54</sup> K L Dhammajoti, "The apramāṇa meditation in the Sarvāstivāda, with special reference to maitrī-bhāvanā," J of the Centre for Buddhist Studies 8 2010:165-186. **Sarvāsti,vāda** (Skt, "the doctrine that all exists") was one of the most influential of the mainstream (ie, non-Mahāyāna) schools of Indian Buddhism, having separated from the main body of the Elders (*thera*; Skt *sthavira*) around mid-3<sup>rd</sup> cent BCE. It was named after its doctrine that all conditioned factors (*dharma*) continue to exist (*sarvam asti*) throughout all 3 time-periods of past, present and future.

<sup>55</sup> Abhk 8.31d (Abhk:Pr 1269).

<sup>56</sup> "Heart," *citta*.



he dwells suffusing all the world with lovingkindness  
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

The highlighted lines read in Pali as follows: *iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbatthatāya | sab-bāvantaṃ lokam mettā, sahatena cetasā*. In the stock passage of the immeasurable radiation (the above excerpt is that of lovingkindness), the variant reading mentioned occurs between *sabbadhi*, “everywhere,” and *sabbāvantaṃ lokam*, “all the world.” This register of synonyms and near-synonyms occurs very often in the Pāli, handed down in the oral tradition. Thus it is very likely that the variant reading mentioned has a meaning closely similar to what precedes and what follows it; that is to say, meaning “in every way.” Moreover, the alternative rendition “to all as well as to oneself” (*sabb’attatāya*) is not found anywhere in the Pāli suttas.<sup>57</sup>

This apparent silence does not mean that we do not pervade ourself with lovingkindness. The point is that in cultivating lovingkindness, our mind naturally also pervades itself with lovingkindness. Some teachers must have started adding “to all as well as to oneself” to ensure that their students do have or feel lovingkindness, too. This may be taken as a case of “popularizing” or “vernacularizing” the teaching.

**4.2.3.2** Analayo, in a comparative study of parallels to Pāli descriptions of the immeasurable radiation, confirms the fact that the original reading is simply “in every way.”<sup>58</sup> That the Visuddhi, magga opts for the variant, “to all as well as to oneself,” may have compelled the inclusion of oneself in the practice, or at least supported the notion that the practice should be directed toward *oneself* as a phase or stage of the practice.

In terms of practical cultivation of lovingkindness or of compassion, we are likely to notice that we do not have to direct either of these positive emotions to ourself. To repeat the vital point: In cultivating lovingkindness or compassion, we will be immersed in it ourself anyway. It is simply unlikely that in generating such a wholesome state we would not ourself be pervaded by it, too.

We can thus rightly conclude that the idea of including oneself would have arisen only when the cultivation is directed to other individuals as the subject. Using this approach, we would naturally be inclined to include oneself among the subjects.

#### **4.2.4 Flexibility and versatility**

**4.2.4.1** We had earlier on mentioned difficulties with verbalization and visualization faced by meditators cultivating lovingkindness during studies conducted by psychology researchers [4.1.1]. In such cases, clearly holding in mind or visualizing of various subjects (including oneself) was used. In other words, the current method of directing immeasurable lovingkindness to *oneself, a dear friend, a neutral person, and then a hostile person* does not work for many people. This is where using the original method taught in the suttas [4.1.2] is more likely to benefit such meditators.

This is not to say that the “individuals” method promoted by the Visuddhi, magga is wrong, despite being non-canonical. For such a development to have occurred in the Buddhist meditation tradition showed that meditators up to Buddhaghosa’s time at least must have had difficulties using the sutta method of cultivating the immeasurables. For such people, the immeasurable cultivation using “individuals” must have worked or at least been easier to practise.

<sup>57</sup> Analayo 2019a:2624. M Maithrimurthi, *Wohllwollen, Mitleid, Freude und Gleichmut, Eine ideengeschichtliche Untersuchung der vier apramāṇas in der buddhistischen Ethik und Spiritualität von den Anfängen bis hin zum frühen Yogācāra*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999.

<sup>58</sup> Analayo, “Compassion in the Āgamas and Nikāyas,” *Dharma Drum J of Buddhist Studies* 16 2015f:1-31, see 16-22.

Considering religious history, we must, of course, understand that sectarian rivalries do factor in such a development, and there were bitter sectarian rivalries during Buddhaghosa's time between the Mahāvihāra and the Abhayagiri, for example. The idea of having a meditation method or variant practice that was known to have been initiated by the Mahāvihāra, or promoted by it, would enhance its prestige and attract greater influence and support from others. Such developments were not unique to Sri Lanka Buddhism, since it often happened in other Buddhist communities, too.<sup>59</sup>

**4.2.4.2** From all the evidence we have studied above, it is clear that the cultivation of lovingkindness by way of taking 4 individuals as meditation subjects, proceeding from oneself to a friend, a neutral person, and then a hostile person, is a later innovation. This is not saying that there is anything wrong with it—except for difficulties individual meditators may have with any of the stages. The popularity of these meditation practices today testifies to their practical value. Still, it means that this is *not* the only way to cultivate lovingkindness.<sup>60</sup>

With the rise in popularity in Buddhist meditation, we will have to address different difficulties that different meditators face for the meditation they are doing. We need to be flexible in promoting meditation, especially outside of the Buddhist context. In promoting **the sutta method** we have the advantage of versatility in not only promoting the early Buddhist method, but have a range of alternative methods that will in due course inspire meditators to take up the Buddhist life or at least be influenced and guided by early Buddhist values.

#### **4.2.5 Mindfully boundless mind**

**4.2.5.1** Boellinghaus et al (2013) reported an interesting incident when a meditator was doing the standard cultivation following the Visuddhimagga method. The meditator gave a very insightful feedback on how the experience differed significantly from mindfulness practice:

I was feeling like I was trying to create something, or cultivate something, so being quite active ... and that, to me, seemed to be ... pulling in the opposite direction to doing the mindfulness.  
(Boellinghaus et al 2013:271)

The meditator's feedback is said to be insightful because it reflected what was missing from the cultivation. A proper cultivation of lovingkindness and of compassion as boundless radiation would arouse in us a state that is very close to what is experienced in the practice of **mindfulness** (*sati*).

**4.2.5.2** The similarity between the cultivation of lovingkindness and of compassion and the practice of mindfulness in early Buddhist tradition becomes particularly evident in some depictions of **mindfulness of the body**.<sup>61</sup> In such descriptions, mindfulness rooted in the presence of the body remains at the same time openly receptive to whatever may happen at any of the 5 sense-doors.

**The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), for example, uses the very same meditation language of the "immeasurable" state of mind that describes lovingkindness and the other 3 immeasurables to describe the resulting state of such a mindfulness practice:

<sup>59</sup> There were numerous such sectarian rivalries and doctrinal developments such as the rise of koan and huatou in Chinese Buddhism [SD 40b (5.1.3)], nationalist Zen in Japanese Buddhism [SD 60.1c (19.3)] and "path" Buddhism in the Myanmar tradition [SD 60.1f (6.4, 6.6)].

<sup>60</sup> Only lovingkindness is mentioned because the sequence of subjects in the other 3 divine abodes—compassion, gladness and equanimity—are different: SD 38.5 (4-6).

<sup>61</sup> Analayo, "Open monitoring and mindfulness," *Mindfulness* 10 2019a:1437-1442.

“On seeing a form ... on hearing a sound ... on smelling a smell ... on tasting a taste ... on feeling a touch ... on knowing a mind-object, one does not lust after it if it is pleasurable. One does not dislike it if it is unpleasurable.”

One dwells with mindfulness of the body established, and with an immeasurable mind.  
*upaṭṭhita, kāya.sati ca viharati appamāṇa, cetaso.* (M 38,40/1:270), SD 7.10

In this way, the cultivation of lovingkindness and of compassion shares an immeasurable mind as in the practice of the mindfulness of the body (that is, sense-restraint). In both cases, the mind opens up and frees itself from unwholesomeness (at least for the moment).

## 5 The divine abodes and the cultivation of moral concern

### 5.1 MORALITY, CALMNESS, INSIGHT

#### 5.1.1 Instructive debate on the twin practices

**5.1.1.1** We have seen how **mindfulness of the body**, by way of sense-restraint, can open up the mind to immeasurability or boundlessness (that is, not limited or held back by greed, hate or delusion), and so become free of these unwholesome roots at least for that moment. Let us now take a step back and ask: How far can meditation empower us to guard our body from committing any unwholesome karma, that is, keeping us from killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, falling into wrong livelihood, and avoiding wrong speech; and to cultivate the wholesome for our spiritual growth? In other words, how can meditation help us become morally good people? At least one concerned scholar, **Damien Keown**,<sup>62</sup> has given this some serious thought in his book, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (1992), where he speaks of Buddhist morality as a type of “virtue ethics.”

**Virtue ethics** or aretaic ethics is an approach to ethics that treats virtue as central. Virtue ethics is usually contrasted with two other major approaches in ethics, consequentialism and deontology, which make the goodness of outcomes of an action (consequentialism) and the concept of moral duty (deontology) central. While virtue ethics does not necessarily deny the importance to ethics of goodness of states of affairs or of moral duties, it emphasizes virtue, and sometimes other concepts, like *eudaimonia* (Greek, “good spirit,” ie, true happiness or welfare), to an extent that other ethics theories do not.

In virtue ethics, a **virtue** is a disposition to *think, feel, and act* well or wholesomely in some domain of life. Similarly, a vice is a disposition to think, feel, and act poorly or badly. Virtues are not everyday habits; they are character traits, in the sense that they are central to someone’s personality and what they are like as a person. A virtue is a trait that promotes or exhibits human excellence in the person who exhibits it, and a vice is one that impedes human excellence in the person who exhibits it.<sup>63</sup>

**5.1.1.2** “**Virtue ethics**” best describes early Buddhist ethics as the basis for its soteriological goal, awakening, resulting from “not doing evil, doing good, purifying the mind” (**Dh 183**). However, much of the monastic Vinaya, comprising mostly of conventional or prescribed (*paññatti*) ethical rules and sangha

<sup>62</sup> **Damien Keown** (born 1951) is a British scholar and authority on Buddhist bioethics. He is Professor Emeritus in the Dept of History at Goldsmiths, Univ of London. Keown earned a BA in religious studies from the Univ of Lancaster in 1977 and a PhD from the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Univ of Oxford, in 1986. [[h-net](#)]

<sup>63</sup> **D Keown**, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, **1992**; this is a revision of his Oxford Univ diss (1986). Julia Annas, “Virtue and duty: negotiating between different ethical traditions,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 49,4 2015:609. On virtue ethics, see [[SEP 2022](#)] [[IEP](#)] 7 Oct 2023.

acts, prescribing duties and responsibilities of monastics:<sup>64</sup> these are based on deontological ethics. Although the 5 precepts for lay Buddhists are based on natural morality,<sup>65</sup> their observance is often seen to result in good karmic fruits (*kusala,kamma*); hence this is based on consequential ethics.

Monastic rules and lay precepts, however, are “provisional” arrangements or “moral training” (*sīla,-sikkhā*), that is the basis for mental or concentration training (*samādhi,sikkhā*), both of which are the bases for wisdom training (*paññā,sikkhā*) which leads to awakening. The stages of the path of awakening comprise the gradual removal of **mental fetters** (*samyojana*),<sup>66</sup> which progressively frees one from self-centred vices (making one a streamwinner and a once-returner), from dependence on sense-based vices (making one a non-returner), and from rebirth and suffering (making one an arhat). The moral basis for this is best described as aretaic, that is, moral virtue.

**5.1.1.3** Early Buddhist meditation, as any informed Buddhist knows, has 2 key aspects, that is, **calmness** (*samatha*) and **insight** (*vipassanā*). Basically, *samatha* refers to calming mind to clear it from hindrances. The calm and clear mind, having emerged samadhi is directed to observe true reality: this process is called *vipassanā*. There are however cases where people naturally have a clear and analytical mind that picks up *vipassanā*, insight into true reality, but they lack *samatha*, and have to learn to be calm.

It is well known that **lovingkindness** is able to help bring calmness to meditators, as we have been discussing. On the other hand, when we are able to take charge of our senses, that is, to see our experiences for what they are—impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself—we will be able to calm and clear the mind so that it becomes immeasurable (*appamāṇa*) as in lovingkindness meditation.

In this section we will examine an interesting debate on the nature and functions of Samatha and Vipassanā in the light of the 4 immeasurables: lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity. To complicate this debate—which is between scholars—we have also to be aware that modern Buddhists, especially ethnic teachers from Myanmar, who regard Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhi,magga as canonical, see Samatha and Vipassanā as different kinds of **meditation**, that is, more than being just aspects of meditation. To highlight the modern usages of the term, they have been spelt with initial capitals, that is, as Samatha and Vipassanā.<sup>67</sup>

**5.1.1.4 Ethan Mills**, originally from Augsburg College (Minneapolis, MN, US), is a specialist in Indian (including Buddhist) philosophy, currently an Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, USA. He has written a delightfully engaging paper of the debate on the roles of Samatha and Vipassanā in Buddhist soteriology, between what he calls the “Samatha-inessentialists” and the “Samatha-essentialists.” **The Samatha-inessentialist** camp—the view that Vipassanā is essential and Samatha

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<sup>64</sup> Not all Vinaya rules, however, are “conventional” (*sammuti*), since there are some that are based on “natural morality” (*pakati,sīla*), such as the first 4 “defeat” (*pārājika*) rules regarding sexual intercourse, stealing, murder, and making false claims to spiritual attainments, and related rules. These Vinaya rules are said to be “prescribed morality” (*paññatti,sīla*) since they have been promulgated by the Buddha’

<sup>65</sup> Unlike “prescribed morality” [prec], “natural morality” (*pakati,sīla*) are rules that are karmically potent and they work naturally. The best examples are those of the 5 precepts.

<sup>66</sup> The 10 fetters are: 1. personality view, 2. doubt, 3. attachment to rituals and vows; 4. sensual lust, 5. repulsion; 6. greed for form existence, 7. greed for formless existence, 8. conceit, 9. restlessness, and 10. ignorance: SD 60.1d (3.3.4.1).

<sup>67</sup> When these terms are with an author’s quotes, I have followed the original form of these 2 terms, whose usage should be understood from its context. For a thorough exegetical and philological study of the early existence of *samatha* and the peculiar early Buddhist conception of *vipassanā*, see by Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Stuttgart, 1986.

inessential in the pursuit of nirvana—is represented by the arguments of Paul J Griffiths<sup>68</sup>; **the Samatha-essentialist**—the view that both Samatha and Vipassanā are essential for the path of nirvana—is supported by the arguments of Damien Keown [5.1.1.1].

Mills' study is helpful for Buddhist students because he is sensitive to Buddhism. He includes a small part of Keown's theory, namely Keown's assertion that Samatha can cultivate moral concern. Mills admits that this is not a definitive solution to the Samatha-Vipassanā controversy. However, he supports Keown's theory of the cultivation of moral concern, which he asserts as making it "more plausible we have more reasons to accept his larger theory of the importance of both samatha and vipassanā" (Mills 2004:22).

**5.1.1.5** So far, we have been mostly quoting from scholars. Some thoughtful Buddhists may ask: "Why should we study what scholars think about Buddhism? Many of them are not Buddhists anyway. Some of them come up with bizarre views of Buddhism. Why should we trust them?" Successful scholars are often said to live in ivory towers remote from people and their concerns.

There are of course good and great scholars who love learning and teaching. In the early 1990s (as a Visiting Scholar to the University of California, Berkeley), I was fortunate to find a seat in the capacity crowd attending sociologist Robert Bellah's final lecture before retiring. As an auditor, I submitted a short essay for his class and was quite surprised that he actually marked my paper! I wrote about one of his ideas about religion, arguing that it would not apply to Buddhism in Malaysia. He noted that he "could understand" why I disagreed with his view there.

Academic lecturers and writers, trained in reputable institutions and experienced teachers, are well trained in how to study and observe Buddhism and write about it. Despite the occasional flaws with Pali terms or Dharma details, many of them are often admirably perspicacious and thorough in their critique of Buddhism. They come up with interesting new perspectives into Buddhism which even Buddhists themselves have not considered.

**5.1.1.6** Many scholars of Buddhism find Buddhism a meaningful part of their life. However, there are those who teach Buddhism but do not practise it in some meaningful way; and there are even those who merely see Buddhism as a career, a profitable product to sell. This is like teaching music, but not being a musician or not loving music! In due course, a few may even "give up" Buddhism and turn to some other religion. For many scholars, this may happen because either they have not understood Buddhism well enough (despite all their learning, even because of it) or because there is a more lucrative career in another religion—usually for both reasons. This seems to be the case with Paul Griffiths, whose work on Buddhism was all undertaken in the early part of his career and who now writes mainly on Christianity.

Another academic reality we must accept is that often even the best scholars go out of date, or they are today shown to be completely wrong in their views, despite being widely accepted in their own day and being influential for decades after that. Take the case of the Dutch linguist and orientalist, Hendrick Kern (1833-1917),<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Griffiths (1955- ) was a London-born theologian and philosopher of religion, specializing in Buddhism (esp Yogācāra) and Christianity, who had taught in the Univ of Notre Dame, Univ of Illinois (Chicago) and Univ of Chicago. He received his doctorate in Buddhist studies in 1983 from Univ of Wisconsin-Madison. After converting from Anglicanism to Catholicism, he accepted the Schmitt Chair of Catholic Studies at UIC, and largely gave up his work in Buddhist studies.

<sup>69</sup> This anecdote was quoted by J Bronkhorst, "Hendrik Kern and the body of the Buddha," given at Leiden Univ, 2008:2 & an expanded version in *Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques* 63,1 2009:7-27.

Like [the French scholar Émile] Senart, he considered the Buddha to be a solar god. However, Kern was much more astronomical in his exegesis than Senart. The twelve nidāna are the twelve months of the year. The six heretical teachers are the planets. The Buddha's first preaching takes place in midsummer, and this is why the Middle Way is its theme. Kern never hesitates in his identifications with stars, planets, and constellations.

(J W de Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America*, Tokyo, 1997:29)<sup>70</sup>

If a modern scholar were to speak or write in this manner, they are likely to be ignored, or worse, taken to task by discerning colleagues, as happened in the case of Roger Corless (1938-2007) who was reported to have given a rather cavalier presentation of Buddhism punctuated with Zen jokes. One might thus be remembered in academic history for the wrong reasons.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, often, we can learn very useful lessons from good scholars in how to express our ideas correctly, clearly and courageously. Although unbiased writing (like encyclopaedia entries) can be useful for research, it is the *insightfully biased* writings of scholars—sensitive to Buddhism, that is—that Buddhists would enjoy reading with benefits. Ethan Mills' paper (2004) is a good example. What follows is not a commentary on Keown or Mills, but an examination of how their ideas can help us understand why moral virtue and moral concern are a vital part of insight or wisdom, and how “virtue ethics” is the basis for mental development, and both the bases for reaching the path of awakening.

### **5.1.2 Scholars' views about Samatha and Vipassanā**

**5.1.2.1** Most scholars of Buddhism considered Vipassanā or insight meditation to be the more important of the twin ideas of *Samatha-Vipassanā* in modern Buddhism. They view that Samatha is not necessary for the attainment of nirvana. Such scholars include, for instance, Bodhi (J Block),<sup>72</sup> H Gunaratna, W L King, W Rahula, and A Solé-Leris.<sup>73</sup> Rahula, a modernist priest, for example, has written that the states created by Samatha are “... mind-created, mind-produced, conditioned ... . They have nothing to do with Reality, Truth, Nirvana” (Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 1959:68). These sentiments are shared by Bodhi: “The role of serenity [Samatha] is subordinated to that of insight because the latter is the crucial instrument needed to uproot the ignorance at the bottom of the samsaric bondage” (Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 2000:38). To such scholars, to reach nirvana, one must have Insight into the true reality created by Vipassanā meditation (*vipassana-bhāvanā*).<sup>74</sup> Thus, to them, Samatha is generally considered to be inessential for practice or for the path to nirvana.<sup>75</sup>

Understandably, Mills asks “If *Samatha* is inessential, why is it included in Buddhist meditation traditions?” (2004:22). The answer, apparently, for Rahula and most scholars of this group, is that Samatha techniques can sometimes help develop qualities useful in Vipassanā meditation. Nonetheless, accord-

<sup>70</sup> Further, see SD 60.1b (1.2.2).

<sup>71</sup> On the case of Jan Nattier's criticism of Roger Corless (1992), see SD 60.1d

<sup>72</sup> **Bodhi** (Jeffrey Block) (1944- ), of Jewish descent, a well known scholar of the Sinhalese order, and successful translator, by his own admission, said that he is unable to meditate due to years of suffering from an inexplicable “karmic” headache. Among his learned papers are “Two styles of insight meditation,” [[AccessToInsight](#)]. His own foundation, Buddhist Global Relief, funds projects to fight hunger and empower women across the world. His views (as a monk) of a “just war” are very controversial [[InquiringMind](#)]. See SD 60.1b (2.1.1.2).

<sup>73</sup> It is important to understand that although these scholars agree on this point, it does not mean that they all see it in the same way. It is often likely that they each also hold differing views on other aspects of Buddhist meditation, and that they may not themselves be meditators, or serious ones. Bodhi, eg, by his own admission says that he is unable to meditate due to a persistent headache. On details on these names see SD 60.1b (2.1.1.2).

<sup>74</sup> This is a comy term, not found in the Pali canon.

<sup>75</sup> See SD 60.1b (2.1.1.2).

ing to them, Samatha techniques are not as inherently valuable as Vipassanā techniques. Griffiths' views about Vipassanā fall into this category [5.1.2].

**5.1.2.2** A smaller group of scholars hold the view that Samatha and Vipassanā are of equal importance in Buddhist practice. Edward Conze<sup>76</sup> and Robert M Gimello are two examples. Conze does not claim that Samatha can lead one to nirvana without Vipassanā, but neither does he claim that Vipassanā can lead one to nirvana without Samatha.

Samatha can bring about a one-pointedness of mind and “a mind of single intent is capable of doing more effectively whatever it does, be it good or bad” (Conze 1956:19). He still considers the wisdom gained by Vipassanā to be the highest good because even when the greatest concentration is developed, insight is needed to reach nirvana. However, we can never gain this wisdom without Samatha either.

Conze sums up this idea as follows:

Trance [*jhāna*], as it is developed, approaches a condition of rapt attention to an objectless inwardness (*anarambana*); the more wisdom develops, the clearer the intuition of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). These are the two terminal points at which the world is on the verge of extinction. The combination of the two leads to final emancipation.

(Conze 1956:17, emphasis added).

**5.1.2.3** Gimello very much agrees with Conze: “While it is true that discernment [Vipassanā] is not to be attained without some degree of calming as a precondition, it is no less true that calming itself, without discernment, is of no soteric avail whatsoever” (Gimello 1978:185). Gimello, too, holds that *both* Vipassanā and Samatha are necessary for the path of awakening.

In Conze's case, although he clearly affirms that both are necessary in the quest for nirvana, he concedes that there “is even some tension between the two modes of approach” (Conze 1956:17). Griffiths develops this tension without giving a helpful solution [5.1.3], but Keown offers an interesting and important solution to this apparent tension. [5.2]

### **5.1.3 Griffiths' problematic yoking**

**5.1.3.1** Griffiths, in his book, *On Being Mindless* (1986), discusses the attainment of cessation (*nirodha, samāpatti*), which informed Buddhists basically understand to be a “living experience” of nirvana. In his book, Griffiths specifically addresses the relationship between Samatha and Vipassanā, and characterizes Samatha as enstatic and Vipassanā as analytic, thus:

Such analytical meditations are designed, then, to remove standard cognitive and perceptual habit-patterns and to replace them with new ones. Furthermore, these techniques are designed to teach the practitioner something new about the way things are, to inculcate in his consciousness a whole series of knowledges that such-and-such is the case. In contrast, the enstatic meditations are designed to reduce the contents of consciousness, to focus awareness upon a single point and ultimately to bring all mental activity to a halt.

(Griffiths 1986:13)

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<sup>76</sup> Conze deals extensively with Mahāyāna than with Theravāda, but his respect for Theravāda is evident from his remark about Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*: “he has composed one of the great spiritual classics of mankind. If I had to choose just one book to take with me on a desert island, this would be my choice—with perhaps a Horace tucked away out of sight in my pocket” (Conze, *Buddhist Meditation*, London, 1956:25).

Griffiths' view here seems to be that the 2 aspects of training (according to the suttas) or the 2 methods (according to modern ethnic Buddhism), Samatha and Vipassanā, have actually different soteriological goals in themselves. He says, "Those who follow and advocate the analytic techniques tend to perceive the basic human problem as one of ignorance, and inaccurate understanding of the way things are" (Griffiths 1986:14). Basically, he is saying: if the disease is ignorance, the cure must be knowledge.

Further, compare this with what he says about those who engage in Samatha: "In drastic contrast, the practitioners of the enstatic techniques aimed at tranquility tend to perceive the basic human error as one of attitude rather than cognition; the key Buddhist term here is 'thirst' (*taṇhā*), a term that denotes all types of passionate desire and attachment" (Griffiths 1986:14). Again, the logic works: if a certain attitude causes suffering, then we must change that attitude to one that does not cause suffering.

His logic works, but Griffiths' ideas do not apply to Buddhism in theory or in practice. Neither the suttas nor the modern ethnic Buddhists see the 2 doctrines in this way. It is Griffiths' own view. As a result of such thinking, Griffiths has himself created a tension here.

**5.1.3.2** For Griffiths then, there are two completely separate Buddhist goals, each with its own method, both jostling with one another. Understandably for Griffiths, this created a great many philosophical problems: "Throughout Buddhist history, intellectuals have attempted to reconcile thought-systems which are on the face of it, irreconcilable" (Griffiths 1986:16). Specifically, Griffiths attributes many of the problems surrounding the attainment of cessation to the tension between Samatha and Vipassanā.

For Griffiths, the attainment of cessation is merely a stage of enstatic meditation following the attainment of the 4 jhānas. He thought that, for example, the commentators Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla were thus wrong to insist that insight must be present to reach the attainment of cessation. Buddhaghosa talks about "yoking together" calm and insight in order to achieve successively higher jhānas up to the attainment of cessation (Vism 23.43).

Griffiths thinks that this yoking process is insufficiently explained and confusing given his ideas about the relations between method and soteriology. This is his main point: it is difficult at best and impossible at worst to try to yoke together the 2 methods to gain one goal when the 2 methods are themselves designed to reach radically different goals.<sup>77</sup>

## 5.2 BUDDHIST MORALITY AS VIRTUE ETHICS

### 5.2.1 The twin causes of suffering

**5.2.1.1** Keown discusses the relation between Samatha and Vipassanā in connection with ethics and psychology in his book, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (ch 3). The main idea of the Chapter is that moral virtue (*sīla*) and wisdom (*paññā*) are two complementary and equally necessary strands of Buddhist soteriology: they are after all the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> trainings, connected by "concentration" (*samādhi*) in between.

The other supporting ideas or **subtheses** of Chapter 3 of Keown's *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* can be listed as follows:

1. the mind (*citta*) is an aggregate of both rational and emotional elements (dharma);

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<sup>77</sup> On the problems of this view, see SD 60.1b (1.2).



2. the moral and the rational are fundamentally interconnected as shown in the linking of the intellectual vice of delusion (*moha*) and the moral vices of greed (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*) in a “triangle of craving (*taṇhā*)”;
3. the Buddha’s compassion is based on wisdom, and his awakening is preceded and followed by non-cognitive, non-rational, moral sentiment; the Buddha provides the case of ethical motivation.

**5.2.1.2** Keown’s **main idea** about Samatha and Vipassanā may be summarized as follows:

calmness meditation (*samatha, bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*vipassana, bhāvanā*) are equally necessary, interdependent methods of attaining awakening by ridding oneself of both moral and intellectual vices.

Thus, Keown’s theory about the relationship between Samatha and Vipassana is meant to supplement his larger theory on the equal importance of morality (*sīla*) and wisdom (*paññā*), which in turn is used to support the main argument of his book that Buddhist ethics can be best characterized as a type of **virtue ethics**.

This context is important because it shows us what Keown says for his theory about Samatha and Vipassanā to resolve the tension conjured up by Griffiths, and at the same time advance his theory that morality (*sīla*) is important throughout Buddhist training and the path.

Although Keown agrees with Griffiths that Samatha and Vipassanā have different outcomes, he disagrees about the nature of these outcomes, and this disagreement is very important:

Since progress in the religious life is made on two fronts, there exist two kinds of meditation techniques. I wish to suggest that “calming meditation” (*samatha-bhāvanā*) cultivates moral virtue and “insight meditation” (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) develops knowledge or insight.

(Keown 2001:77)

**5.2.1.3** Keown’s shift in interpretation of the different goals of Samatha and Vipassanā is subtle yet extremely important. Keown is aware of Griffiths’ difficulties and explains:

For Griffiths these facts are problematic but in terms of the thesis set out here they are not. Indeed, they are exactly as we should expect. Griffiths’s difficulty arises from the suppressed premise of his argument that the unique soteriological objective of Buddhism is knowledge (*paññā*). Any soteriological technique which does not issue in *paññā* is therefore redundant and its experience puzzling. If nibbana is defined exclusively in terms of *paññā* then Vipassanā will quite naturally appear to be essential while Samatha remains a curious anomaly.

(Keown 2001:77)

Thus, according to Keown, to gain awakening requires *both* moral virtue and wisdom, so it makes sense that there are various meditation methods to address these needs. Griffiths and those who, like him, view *paññā* as the unique goal of Buddhist meditation will of course be confused by the presence of any practice that cultivates anything else.<sup>78</sup>

**5.2.1.4** Keown explains that a mistranslation of *paññā* has encouraged this misinterpretation. He explains, “*Paññā* is essentially the knowledge of facts, but wisdom means something more than just

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<sup>78</sup> Gunaratna seems to share Griffiths’ assumption that: “Since bondage ultimately springs from ignorance (*avijjā*), the key to liberation, for Buddhism, is found in wisdom (*paññā*)” (Gunaratna, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation*, 1980:3).

knowledge [of facts]" (Keown 2001:80). To begin with, *paññā* is knowledge in the sense of knowing that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , all formations are momentary, and so on. It is the knowledge of facts about the universe. This type of knowledge is vitally important for Buddhism; the lack of it is ignorance, which is one key cause of suffering.

However, ignorance is not the only cause of suffering, and neither is wisdom the only cure of it:

The goal of the Eightfold Path is indeed wisdom, but wisdom is much more than *paññā*. This is why two meditative techniques are required for the eradication of the roots of evil and the attainment of the ethical and intellectual perfection which is nibbana.

(Keown 2001:80)

As Keown says elsewhere, "there exist two techniques of meditation precisely because the obstacles to awakening are themselves twofold, both moral and intellectual" (Keown 2001:79, emphases added). It is the twofold nature of the causes of the disease and the complementary twofold cure that Griffiths does not see in his interpretation.

## **5.2.2 The mind's 2 aspects**

**5.2.2.1** As for **the mind** (*citta*), Keown sees it as comprising both *vedanā* (feelings) and *saññā* (perception), which he takes to be the emotional and the rational respectively (**subthesis 1**). This is slightly different from the way we usually analyze the 5 aggregates, but to appreciate Keown's arguments, let us accept his contextual usage of these terms here to understand the rest of his theory regarding moral concern. Keown himself is aware that the emotional and the rational aspects of the mind "may be logically distinguished, but do not correspond to any real division in the structure of the human subject" (Keown 2001:67). Although these emotional and rational elements are both part of the mind, they are different processes and each has its own virtue:

The virtue of the cognitive [perceptive] aspect (*saññā*) is to understand and discriminate correctly; its vice is delusion and error. The virtue of the non-rational part of the psyche is to sense, feel, and respond affectively in an appropriate manner; its vice is to swing to the extremes of craving (*rāga*) and aversion (*dosa*).

(Keown 2001:67, emphases added)

This makes it clear that if the mind consists of 2 elements, each with their own virtues, and if the goal of meditation is to cultivate mental virtues, then there must be ways of cultivating these types of virtues. Whereas Griffiths and other Samatha-inessentialist scholars seem to feel that the development of wisdom automatically leads to the development of morality, Keown thinks that **morality** requires its own cultivation separate from the cultivation of **wisdom** (**subthesis 2**).

**5.2.2.2** Keown stresses the moral aspects of Samatha more than its enstatic (*jhana*) aspects, and in fact sees the enstatic as part of moral cultivation. He says that the "technique of Samatha meditation exists to enrich and deepen the capacity for human sympathy which exists in all to some degree and which reached its perfection in the personality of the Buddha" (Keown 2001:77).

Keown's **subthesis 3** refers to the Buddha as the moral example for all Buddhists. He puts it succinctly: "The Buddha's moral concern is found in his sympathy (*anukampā*)<sup>79</sup> for all beings" (Keown 2001:73). Since this moral sentiment is non-cognitive, Vipassanā meditation (being the realm of the cognitive) is unsuitable for this task of its development. We need a kind of meditation that deals with the non-cognitive, that is, Samatha.

Attaining dhyanas is "a specialized technique for gaining access to the non-rational, emotional dimension of the psyche. It is a means of penetrating the deeper layers of consciousness and restructuring them in accordance with virtue rather than vice." (Keown 2001:78)

### **5.2.3 How dhyana helps morality**

**5.2.3.1** Here I will simplify Keown's explanation on how dhyana (*jhāna*, by which I mean the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana and any of the other 3 form dhyanas) helps us become moral (that is good and kind) people. Firstly, when we attain the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana, lustful desire (*lobha* or *rāga*) and its opposite ill will (*dosa*) are overcome (at least temporarily). This happens because of one very important reason: we are filled with **joy**.

Even the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana is overwhelmingly supported by **joy**—"zest and joy" (*pīti, sukha*) to be exact—on account of being freed from the gravity-field of the physical senses: the zest and joy born of bodily solitude (*viveka, ja pīti, sukha*). In the 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana, this zest and joy becomes more refined with the arising of full concentration born of samadhi, *samādhi, ja pīti, sukha*.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> dhyana the mindfulness is total and refined: the mind directly experiences "with the body" (*kāyena*). In meditation lingo, this means an experience that is "total and direct, in person" (there is no more "body" of the senses, but only the "mental body"); hence, there is also a *feeling* of equanimity (like a satiated fullness after a good meal). In the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana, all sense of "self" has evaporated into total mental stillness. It's like we have done our work and can just sit back and relax with full satisfaction and total equanimity.

**5.2.3.2** Those of us who neither meditate nor meditate well, may despair here: we will never attain jhana, we can never be moral persons. This is clearly *not* the case. If we are able to feel good after taking a meal or watching a good movie, we will be able to feel a sense of calm focus with just a bit of effort in mindfulness practice or simple meditation, especially under the guidance of an experienced and happy teacher. Or, we can teach ourself to be calm and happy enough to sit with a suitable mindfulness exercise or meditation practice, for even just a few minutes, but to do it often enough, preferably regularly, supported by a joyful understanding of the suttas.

The vital lesson here is to learn to be **happy** for ourself by way of self-acceptance: this is the beginning of lovingkindness practice. When we are truly joyful in this way, we will naturally become morally good people: we will at least try our best to keep the 5 precepts. This is what Keown means by training for moral concern. He puts it succinctly thus:

The passions will not be extirpated in the course of a single Samatha session any more than a single session of Vipassanā will boost *paññā* to the point of perfect illumination; both techniques are slow and gradual but each is the most appropriate in its own sphere.

(Keown 2001:79)

This is not a McMindfulness "get enlightened-quick" session or some Zen-like "you are already enlightened" experience—it is the sure straight path of **self-effort** that goes back to the Buddha's time, and

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<sup>79</sup> Keown uses *anukampā* (usually tr as "pity" but overlaps with "compassion") for "moral concern." This will receive more treatment towards the end of his *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 1992: section 2.2.

to the path of awakening. It takes time—we must be willing to *take time away* from distractions and unwholesome conduct. We also begin to have more time and happiness as we learn to live in **the present** of true reality, freeing ourselves from the *past* and shaping our future *now*.

**5.2.3.3** The cultivation of **moral concern** is important because “the fundamental inspiration for the Buddhist moral life is concern for others ... it is a non-rational sentiment which precedes the formulation of moral objectives” (Keown 2001:74, emphasis added). From studying Keown’s teaching on *moral concern*, I am inspired to see that it is in **our nature** to show moral concern, that is, a “concern for others”: this is what we are. We are able to know this because we have evolved thus far; we have evolved thus far because we realized we are *not* alone, that we *cannot* be alone.

We have thus become what we are through our understanding that we have an “**extended mind**,” that we are a network of consciousness beings. We have become human, we have *humanity*, and civilization is possible through our accepting others, working and living with others. We are a community of minds. Even when we enjoy solitude, it is because we are able to appreciate the joy of aloneness in contrast to the necessity of togetherness. This is, in fact, the basis of moral concern.<sup>80</sup>

Without this concern for others there can be no morality; without morality there can be no wisdom; with neither morality nor wisdom, there can be no nirvana. The link between moral perfection and nirvana is vital to Keown’s thesis, because it is the fact that moral perfection can only be realized through Samatha meditation that gives us a reason to assign an essential importance to Samatha within Buddhist soteriology. To do otherwise is to go against nature. It is our nature to see that we are not alone; that there are others, and we have to accept them. To wish others well is what moral concern is about. When we have this moral concern, it means that we have learned that we are capable of self-agency, self effort.

#### **5.2.4 An internalist theory of motivation**

**5.2.4.1** The greatest advantage of Keown’s theory is that it clearly explains how it is that there are 2 seemingly independent and contradictory meditation methods within the same tradition. It provides us with a resolution to Griffiths’ unhelpful tension and gives us a reason to think that the Buddhist philosophers and practitioners throughout the ages had good reason to incorporate both Samatha and Vipassanā techniques into their lives.

Given the advantage of Keown’s theory of the twin practice, we still must ask whether Keown’s brief suggestions about how it is that Samatha cultivates moral concern gives us enough reasons to accept his thesis and discount that of Griffiths. This is clearly not the case: we still have unanswered questions. For instance, if this explanation is correct, why is there so much tension and confusion among scholars of Buddhism?

According to Mills (2004:29), Keown seems to have **an internalist theory of motivation**, meaning that his reasons for moral action are dependent—at least in part—on the moral agent’s *positive affective states* (such as lovingkindness). However, others—particularly Samatha-inessentialist scholars [5.1.1.4]—might maintain that Buddhism generally espouses an externalist theory of motivation, meaning that reasons for moral action lie entirely *outside* our affective states like the joy or lovingkindness we feel [5.2.3.3].

There are still questions we need to consider and possibly answer. If Buddhist ethical theorists do in fact generally support an externalist theory, how can Keown be right? Is there enough textual evidence for Keown’s claim to warrant making it a pan-Buddhist (or at least pan-Theravāda) theory? How exactly do Samatha techniques cultivate moral concern?

<sup>80</sup> On the extended mind, see SD 16.1e (12.7).

**5.2.4.2** The last question, according to Mills, is “the most preliminary” in the sense that we need it to fully and precisely understand what Keown’s theory is. In the following section, I will discuss the 2 possible answers Mills offers to the question: *how could Samatha techniques cultivate moral concern?* (2004:29). According to Mills, if one of these answers can be shown to be “exegetically responsible and philosophically compelling,” then Keown’s theory will be more complete than it is and can be more easily evaluated as a response to the alleged tension of Samatha and Vipassanā techniques within the Theravāda.

By “**exegetically responsible**” Mills means “that it represents the Buddhist texts in a more or less accurate way,” that is,

- (1) “the argument is grounded somehow in one or more Buddhist texts either verbatim or via analysis”;
- (2) “the argument does not patently distort or go against the core ideas of Buddhist philosophy such as the 4 noble truths, dependent arising, etc.”

In short, Keown’s theory and explanations must keep to the sutta teachings.

By “**philosophically compelling**” Mills means Keown’s arguments must have “philosophical merit,” that is to say:

- (1) they work toward solving a philosophical problem;
- (2) that they are consistent with Keown’s other claims; and
- (3) that there are compelling philosophical reasons for us to believe they are true.

In short, they are also acceptable by academic standards.

To Mills, “philosophically compelling” means that Keown’s ideas make good sense in theory, and “exegetical responsibility” means that they work in practice. This is the familiar Buddhist teaching of “theory” (*pariyatti*) and “practice” (*paṭipatti*), by which Samatha and Vipassanā interact with one another.

The purpose of all this strategy and accuracy is to show how Keown’s ideas work while Griffiths’ views are wrong. More importantly, Keown’s ideas will help us better understand how Samatha and Vipassanā work together even in our own time. Basically, Keown uses these 2 principles: the human nature argument [5.3.1] and the divine abodes argument [5.3.2] to which we shall now turn.

## 5.3 HOW SAMATHA CULTIVATES MORAL CONCERN

### 5.3.1 The human nature argument

**5.3.1.1** The first of Keown’s 2 principles, **the human nature argument**, has been basically summed up as follows by Mills [with amplifications or alternate suggestions within square brackets by me]:

- (1) Human beings in their most natural state exhibit non-cognitive [affective] moral concern.
- (2) Negative mental states such as greed (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*) cover up this otherwise natural tendency. [They prevent us from expressing our good nature.]
- (3) If humans increasingly master Samatha meditation, then these negative mental states are increasingly removed.
- (4) If these negative mental states are increasingly removed, then humans will increasingly exist in [our] natural state, ie, they will exhibit non-cognitive moral concern.

Conclusion: If humans increasingly master Samatha meditation, then humans will increasingly exist in their **natural state**, ie, they will exhibit non-cognitive [affective] moral concern. (by 3, 4)

**5.3.1.2** Note the word “**increasingly**”<sup>81</sup> in premises 3 and 4, which is meant to capture the gradual developmental nature of Buddhist meditation. Samatha, properly done, is the basis for Vipassanā —if we are to follow the sutta teachings. Mills remarks saying that “to master Samatha techniques would mean that one exists totally within human nature and completely exhibits non-cognitive moral concern” (2004:31 f). The Buddha arises as a human amongst humans—the middle state between the subhuman (animals, pretas and hellbeings) and the divine—because “humans both know enough suffering to be motivated to practice Buddhism (unlike the gods) and are capable of making the changes prescribed by the Buddha (unlike animals).” (2004:32)

**5.3.1.3** Mills then quotes **the Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 21), where “a deva tells the Buddha that he will happily seek a human existence in the next life so that he can practice the Buddha’s teachings (D 21,2.8)” (2004:32). However, we should also note that the same Sutta records Sakra (P *sakka*) as attaining the path of streamwinning, even as he listens to the Buddha teaching the Dharma (D 21,2.7.10), and later gains its fruition (D 21,2.10.4, SD 54.8). Hence, as Mills himself concedes (2004:32), all this may be helpful in encouraging humans towards moral concern, but, in itself, it does not fully support the “human nature” argument as such. *Pace* Mills, it *does* not give us premise one [5.3.1.1], because the lower gods are at least also capable of attaining streamwinning.

**5.3.1.4** Keown’s human nature argument seems very useful in explaining how it is that Samatha techniques cultivate moral concern. He even has a section entitled “The Buddhist View of Human Nature” in the chapter on moral and intellectual virtue (Keown 1992:66-68). The statement that most evokes premise 1 of this argument is: “The malfunction of *vedanā* [feeling] and *saññā* [cognition], which is *taṇhā* [craving], is the basic soteriological problem of Buddhism” (Keown 1992: 67). Simply, when our feeling and knowing are filled with craving, we will stray away from the path of awakening (even fall from the human path into the subhuman realm).<sup>82</sup>

When feeling and cognition are malfunctioning (not seeing true reality, thus acting unwholesomely), then they are aberrant from their natural state. For instance, when we say the car is malfunctioning, it means that it is not in its natural working state. The natural working state of feeling and cognition is exemplified by the awakened Buddha.

“Philosophical merit” in premise 3 dictates that we ask such questions as: Just what do we mean by “natural state”? Can “natural state” be taken to mean “the usual, normal state”? **The Visuddhi,magga** quotes **the Paṭisambhidā Commentary**, thus:

But in the world, the nature (*pakati*) of such and such beings is called their “habit (*sīla*),” of which they say “This one is of happy habit, this one is of unhappy habit, this one is of quarrelsome habit, this one is of vain habit.”<sup>83</sup> (PmA 1:210,8; Vism 1.38/14)

<sup>81</sup> Hereon I have departed from Mills’ explanation so that the passage is coherent with the explanations I am offering.

<sup>82</sup> This is discussed in some detail in SD 60.1f (5.4.9).

<sup>83</sup> *Yasmā loke tesarṃ tesarṃ sattānarṃ pakati pi sīlan ti vuccati ayaṃ sandhāyaya ayaṃ sukha,sīlo ayaṃ dukkha,-silo ayaṃ kalaha,silo ayaṃ maṇḍana,silo ti bhaṇanti*. “Interestingly, the relationship between morality and habits would probably please Keown greatly given his characterization of Buddhist ethics as related more closely to Aristotle’s Virtue Ethic than to other Western theories” (Mills 2004 fn9).

### **5.3.2 Moral conduct as habit**

**5.3.2.1** Any monastic student who has learned basic Pali will know that *pakati* and *sīla* share the same sense of “habit,” with a practical difference. While *pakati* means “a natural habit or tendency,” such as the sun rising in the east or that water will douse a wood fire, *sīla* means “a habit from practice,” such as when we are filled with lovingkindness we will also be kind. This is the simple application of the rule of conditionality or moral causation (*hetu, paccaya*), and the basic mechanism of dependent arising.<sup>84</sup>

**5.3.2.2** Another convenient concept we may use to explain this idea of “moral habit” (the combined senses of the *pakati* and *sīla* is the Mahāyāna innovative doctrine of “Buddha-nature” (*bodhi, citta*), an idea not found in the suttas for very good reasons). It basically means “the thought of enlightenment” or “the aspiration for enlightenment” (basically to become Buddha); secondarily, it means the “innately pure mind” (*prakṛtiparisuddhicitta*). It is this latter idea that is often construed as “original enlightenment” and so on; in other words, we are already “enlightened” but are not aware of it. Religiously, this is a comforting dogma but which can easily be misconstrued as a deterministic status—we do not need to do anything more: we do not even need the Buddha, we *are* Buddha! As Mills gingerly puts it, “This option, unfortunately, is not available in Theravāda.”<sup>85</sup>

**5.3.2.3** The notion that we are “already awakened” is not only a cavalier presumption, but also has a dark deterministic undertone that is simply contrary to the spirit of Buddha’s constant reminder: “But there is here something more to be done” (*atthi c’ev’ettha uttarim karaṇīyaṃ*);<sup>86</sup> in other words, we should be diligent in our training, especially in progressing to the next stage of the Buddhist path. For most of us, it is to live a life of moral or wholesome habits (*kusala sīla*).<sup>87</sup> We need to keep moving, as it were, until we reach the true and final stillness of nirvana.

## **5.4 THE DIVINE ABODES ARGUMENT**

### **5.4.1 The immeasurables: variations and uses**

**5.4.1.1** Mills proposes the “**divine abodes argument**” (he uses the term “divine abidings”) which he characterizes as the following arguments and syllogisms (with some simplification):

- (1) If lovingkindness, compassion, gladness, and equanimity—**the immeasurables** (especially loving-kindness to begin with)—are made the subject of certain Samatha techniques, then they begin to entrench themselves in the mind.
- (2) If the immeasurables begin to entrench themselves in the mind, then they have a strong tendency to remove the main vices—namely, *lobha* (greed) and *dosa* (hatred)—from the mind.
- (3) If the immeasurables are made the subject of certain Samatha techniques, then they have a strong tendency to push the main vices out of the mind. (by 1,2)

<sup>84</sup> As the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 24 conditions (*paccaya*) in Abhidhamma, it is called “root condition”: SD 60.1e (13.21.1).

<sup>85</sup> Mills 2004: fn 10.

<sup>86</sup> (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10,1.31 + passim), SD 40a.13; **Assa, pura S** (M 39,3.5/1:271), SD 10.13; (**Gaha, pati**) **Potaliya S** (M 54,14), SD 43.8; **Sevitabbâsevitabba S** (M 114), SD 39.8 (1.1.1.8); SD 51.17 (3.4.2.5).

<sup>87</sup> **Samaṇa, maṇḍika S** (M 78/2:26), SD 18.9.

- (4) If the immeasurables neither entrench themselves in the mind nor remove their opposite vices out by means of the first techniques, then there are other more specific Samatha techniques that will eventually accomplish this.
- (5) If the immeasurables begin to entrench themselves in the mind, they cultivate **moral concern** (*anukampā*).
- (6) If the immeasurables are made the subject of certain Samatha techniques, then they cultivate moral concern. (by 1,5)

Conclusion: Certain Samatha techniques cultivate moral concern by entrenching the immeasurables in the mind (premises 1 and/or 4), removing greed and hatred out of the mind (premises 3 and/or 4), and creating affective states that foster moral concern (premise 6).

**5.4.1.2** To begin with, **the divine abodes** (*brahma, vihāra*)—lovingkindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*)—are commonly found in the key early Buddhist texts, such as **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13).<sup>88</sup> Both **the Mahā Rāhu’ovāda Sutta** (M 62) and **the Vuṭṭha Vass’-āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.11) present the immeasurables in terms of “element-like” meditations for overcoming negative emotions.<sup>89</sup> **The Visuddhi, magga** devotes a whole chapter to explaining the 4 immeasurables (ch 9), where Buddhaghosa explains that the immeasurables are called *brahma, vihāra* because “these abodes are the best in being the right practice towards beings. And just as the brahmas abide with faultless (hate-free) minds, so meditators who associate themselves with these abidings abide on an equal footing with the brahmas” (Vism 9.106).

**5.4.1.3** We shall not go into the details of how to cultivate lovingkindness, since this has been done elsewhere.<sup>90</sup> We will look at a few ways of cultivating lovingkindness mentioned in the texts. Just a couple of points before we do that.

Firstly, a reminder on how to cultivate lovingkindness the sutta way [4.1.2.1] as illustrated by the parable of the mighty conch-blower. Another metaphor will help: that of **the radiant lotus or “sun-lotus.”** Visualize a small beautiful white lotus in the centre of our heart radiating brilliantly, brighter than the sun itself. It is so radiant that our whole body and mind are radiant, too.

Then, we direct the radiance of lovingkindness **directionally**: firstly, in the front quarter. We can if we wish or subverbalize, “May all beings be well and happy!” (non-cognitively, with deep feelings). After a suitable duration, we turn clockwise to the right-hand quarter and repeat the process of radiating; then on to the back quarter; then the left-hand quarter; then the quarter above; then the quarter below. The word “across” in the sutta stock passage [4.1.2.1] technically refers to the intermediate directions, but it can also be understood as any directions or quadrant we feel need the lovingkindness, and radiate it there. Finally, brighten the whole universe with all its beings (which of course includes ourself) with lovingkindness.

The second point is about the ideal way to cultivate lovingkindness. We should first build up the cultivation until we reach **dhyana**; then emerging from dhyana, with the calm and clear mind, we radiate lovingkindness. This means that the preliminary practice can be a method other than lovingkindness: we may begin with, say, the breath meditation. (Vism 9.56)

Thirdly, when there are the difficulties with a subject of our lovingkindness cultivation, it is wise then to change the subject, or even switch to breath meditation (for the moment at least). However, if we habitually have difficulties with a subject, usually **a hostile person**, we should review whether we

<sup>88</sup> D 13,76-79 (SD 1.8), SD 51.14 (3.2.2.3). The immeasurables are also presented in **Jīvaka S** (M 55,6), SD 43.4, and **Makhā,deva S** (M 83,6), SD 60.8. For a fuller list of refs, see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5 (2.1.3.2).

<sup>89</sup> Respectively, M 62,18-21 (SD 3.110 and A 9.11,4), SD 28.2a.

<sup>90</sup> See eg **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Kh 9 = Sn 1.8), SD 38.3. On the subjects of lovingkindness radiation, see [6.1.3].



have been recalling the (perceived) wrongs they have done or projecting onto them some wrong we perceive as having been done to us. We should then go back to radiating lovingkindness to the 1<sup>st</sup> subject (the dear friend) and then direct the lovingkindness to that hostile person again (Vism 9.14).

This practice needs to be repeated until we are able to radiate lovingkindness happily to that hostile person. Then, we should review how we have done this: this is a kind of insight (*vipassanā*) perspective into our lovingkindness practice.

**5.4.1.4** There are **other techniques** toward the full cultivation of lovingkindness given, for example, in **the Visuddhi,magga**. An easy way, especially for children is the use of a suitable cameo or episode from the Jātakas, stories of the Bodhisattva's past lives. The Visuddhi,magga lists a number of Jātaka passages that can be used as the basis for our lovingkindness cultivation (Vism 9.26-35).

Then, there is the reflection that, due to the infinity of previous rebirths, everyone has been everyone's mother, brother, sister, etc, in the past (Vism 9.36). An interesting way of cultivating lovingkindness is to reflect on the deconstruction of the "angry person" into the elements (based on Vism 9.40, but here given in the 1<sup>st</sup> person) for gradual and careful reflection:

#### THE 4 ELEMENTS

What am I **angry** with?

Is it the head-hairs I am angry with? Or with the body-hairs? Or the nails? Or the teeth? Or the skin?

Am I angry with the earth element (solidity) in the head-hairs ... ?

Am I angry with the water element (fluidity, cohesiveness) ... ?

Am I angry with the fire element (heat, decay) ... ?

Am I angry with the wind element (motion) ... ?

#### THE 5 AGGREGATES

Am I angry with the person's form? It is impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself.

Am I angry with the person's feelings? They are impermanent ...

... perceptions? ... formations? ... consciousness? They are impermanent ...

#### THE 12 SENSE-BASES

Am I angry with the person's eye? It is impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself.

... the ear? ... the nose? ... the tongue? ... the body? ... the mind? ...

Am I angry with the person's sight? It is impermanent ...

... the person's sound ... smell ... taste ... touch ... thoughts ...

It should be noted here that we are not likely to get much concentration with so much mental verbalizing; in other words, this is actually **a mindfulness practice**, that is, we mindfully verbalize these instructions, or rather we are willing ourself into these lovingkind<sup>91</sup> states. These are example of conative exercises.<sup>92</sup>

**5.4.1.5** Since lovingkindness cultivation works with overcoming hatred towards a person, it is possible for us to cultivate it for **overcoming lust**, that is, some kind of sexual attachment or fixation. The same teachings can be adapted for the use of overcoming lust, for example,

<sup>91</sup> Although "lovingkind" is not attested by OED, it does record the usage of "lovingkindly" (adv) (OED 2<sup>nd</sup> ed sv loving-kindness).

<sup>92</sup> On conative awareness, see SD 60.1e (5.5).

## THE 4 ELEMENTS

What am I **lusting** for?

Is it the head-hairs I lust for? Or for the body-hairs? Or the nails? Or the teeth? Or the skin?

Am I lusting for the earth element (solidity) in the head-hairs ... ?

Am I lusting for the water element (fluidity, cohesiveness) ... ?

Am I lusting for the fire element (heat, decay) ... ?

Am I lusting for the wind element (motion) ... ?

## THE 5 AGGREGATES

Am I lusting for the person's form? It is impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself.

Am I lusting for the person's feelings? They are impermanent ...

... perceptions? ... formations? ... consciousness? They are impermanent ...

## THE 12 SENSE-BASES

Am I lusting for the person's eye? It is impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself.

... the ear? ... the nose? ... the tongue? ... the body? ... the mind? ...

Am I lusting for the person's sight? It is impermanent ...

... the person's sound ... smell ... taste ... touch ... thoughts ...

This self-therapy cultivation is best done with breath meditation as the base practice to fall back on whenever we feel distracted. However, once some stillness arises, we only need to *smile* at it (to prevent thoughts from distracting the stillness), and simply hold the stillness by doing nothing except enjoying it. This is the kind of energy—it can be lovingkindness—that we need for our moral strengthening.

**5.4.1.6** Let us now examine if and how **the directional cultivation of lovingkindness** [5.4.1.3] can be the bases for establishing both Samatha and Vipassanā. How do we use such practices to instill the mind with moral concern? Following premise 2 [5.4.1.1] we have these principles:

- It is not possible to have **lovingkindness** and feel anger at the same time (Vism 9.98).
- It is not possible to have **compassion** and be cruel to living things at the same time (Vism 9.99).
- It is not possible to have **gladness** and be discontented with solitude and spiritual qualities at the same time (Vism 9.100).
- It is not possible to look on with **equanimity** and be fired up with greed or be resentful at the same time (Vism 9.101).

According to the 7 methods of mastering the mind given in **the Vitakka Saṅṭhāna Sutta** (M 20), this is the very first method, that of “thought displacement” (*añña nimitta*), countering the unwholesome mind with a wholesome mental sign (*nimitta*).<sup>93</sup> Once we have cleared the mind of such an unwholesome state, we should guard that mind by keeping it even more deeply focused, even to the level of dhyana. This may be done with any suitable meditation we know, such as the breath meditation.

## **5.4.2 How the divine abodes arouse moral concern**

**5.4.2.1** In terms of “exegetical responsibility” [5.2.4.2]—accurately representing the suttas and teachings—**the divine abodes argument** is superior to the “human nature” argument [5.3.1]. Although we may not see clear sutta references to the human nature argument (which is a modern idea), the lat-

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<sup>93</sup> M 20,3 (SD 1.8).

ter certainly supports the divine abodes argument: that the divine abodes will touch and arouse our goodness, what is truly spiritual in us, to emulate the Buddha in his great compassion by at least habitually showing **lovingkindness** to begin with.

Keown himself uses this argument (exegetical responsibility). In fact, he specifically mentions the divine abodes in the context of his subthesis on the Buddha's moral concern. It appears, conveniently enough, in a section entitled "The Cultivation of Moral Concern" in chapter 3 of *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*:

The states or dispositions cultivated through the Divine Abidings in Samatha meditation also occur in waking consciousness in the course of daily life—they are not exclusive to meditation or to the meditator. The technique of transic meditation (*jhāna*), however, is a powerful device for accelerating their cultivation and pervasion of the psyche.

(Keown 1992:76)

Keown's statement here gains greater significance when we understand and accept that moral virtue is not a ritual "status" we gain by reciting the precepts or being empowered by some religious authority or imagining that we already have. **Moral concern** is a self-empowerment—the finest moment in our self-effort—to act lovingkindly, humbly, morally with all our humanity. We then simply make this wholesome act a **habit** (*sīla*) [5.3.1].

**5.4.2.2** Moral concern as a **habit** is when goodness—manifesting at least as love, ruth,<sup>94</sup> joy and peace—pervades our waking state, ever ready to be voiced and embodied in our actions and thoughts. This is our natural human conduct when we show a deep respect (fully accepting things as they are) for *life, happiness, freedom, truth* and *mindfulness* (the 5 values in which the 5 precepts are respectively rooted).<sup>95</sup>

Our moral concern for others (other beings and the environment) must be present, ready and active whether we are meditating or not. Our meditation is our deep and full well of moral sustenance. Dhyana is the fire (*jhāna*) that burns up our negative emotions, from whose ashes rise lovingkindness (and the other immeasurables) which fires us up with moral concern and moral action.

**5.4.2.3** The most compelling **philosophical issue** for the divine abodes argument is whether the cultivation of lovingkindness can be said to bring about moral concern (*anukampā*) when moral concern is supposed to be the *fundamental* quality of lovingkindness. On logical terms, this seems to be circular—how can lovingkindness both cause lovingkindness and be caused by it?

However, in terms of practical reality, "circular" takes on the positive sense of interdependent: moral concern *moves* lovingkindness into actions; lovingkindness, in turn, feeds and *follows* moral concern. The kinder we are, the better and wiser we are at it. This explanation is close to that found in the Pali Commentaries, as conveniently summarized by Aronson, in his *Love and Sympathy in Theravāda Buddhism* (1980), as follows:

Etymologically, "sympathy" (*anukampā*) can be understood as the condition of "being moved" (*kampa*) "in accordance with [others]," or "in response to [others]" (*anu*) ... there are definitions

<sup>94</sup> In practical terms, this is love, ruth, joy and peace. "Ruth" is a good old early Middle English word for "compassion" which should be resurrected. It survives today as "ruthless." See Skeat, *An Etymological Dict of the Eng Language*, 1888 sv ruth. "Ruthless" (*Measure for Measure* 3.2.121); "ruthful" (*Troilus and Cressida* 5.3.48). Also SD 38.5 (2.3.2.1); SD 48.1 (5.2.1.3).

<sup>95</sup> On the 5 values behind the 5 precepts, see SD 60.1d (4.1.4.0).

in the commentaries—“the preliminary level of love” (*mettāya pubba,bhāga*, DA 2:456) or “the state of having a tender mind” (*mudu,cittatā*, SA 2:169). Similarly it is said to be synonymous with “tender care” (*anuddaya*, SA 2:169) and “simple compassion (*kāruñña*, SA 2:169).”

(Aronson 1980:3, abridged quote by Keown 1992:73)<sup>96</sup>

**5.4.2.4** Further, lovingkindness or *mettā* is etymologically related to *mitta*, “friend”: lovingkindness is the act or habit of befriending others (Vism 9.92). Lovingkindness moves into action, benefitting the needs of others, that is, compassion or *karuṇā*, which Buddhaghosa explains as follows: “When there is suffering in others it makes (*karoti*) good people’s hearts to be moved (*kampana*), thus it is compassion (*karuṇā*)” (Vism 9.92). The verb *karoti* simply means “to do, act.”

The “tender mind (or heart)” (*mudu,cittatā*) and “tender care” (*anuddaya*) remind us of the well-known parable: “Just as a mother would guard her own child—her one and only child, with her own life (*mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ | āyusā eka,puttāṃ anurakkhe*), so should we cultivate a boundless heart to all beings” (Sn 149).

The phrase “the preliminary level of love” or “harbinger of lovingkindness” (*mettāya pubba,bhāga*) roots us deeply and firmly into the golden rule: “Do not do to others what you do not wish others to do to you,” or stated positively as: Do unto others what you wish them to do to you. This is stated in **the Dhammapada** as follows:

All tremble at the rod [violence];	all fear death.	
Making oneself the example,	one should neither kill nor cause to kill.	(Dh 129)

All tremble at the rod;	all love life.	
Making oneself the example,	one should neither kill nor cause to kill.	(Dh 130)

If we understand the “preliminary level of love” as the respect for life, then “simple (or basic) compassion” (*kāruñña*) is promoting the value of life: neither causing to kill (that is, preventing harm to others) and appreciating (or praising) others who are compassionate. **The Veḷu,dvāreyya Sutta** (S 55.7) puts this principle as follows: we should keep the precepts, we should encourage others to do the same, and we should speak in praise of the precepts.<sup>97</sup> In essence, this is moral concern.

## 6 Conclusion

**6.1** In this essay, we have discovered these surprisingly vital facts about lovingkindness:

1. lovingkindness helps us better understand our mind-body being;
2. lovingkindness may be cultivated as either samatha or vipassanā depending on our need and inclination;
3. lovingkindness is not a spiritual path in itself, but greatly helps in expediting progress on the path;
4. psychological researches have observed that the popular verbalized method may not work for many people, and the simple directional sutta method may work better for such people;
5. lovingkindness plays a vital role in promoting our moral training and life.

<sup>96</sup> See W G Weeraratne, “Anukampā” in Ency of Buddhism, Sri Lanka, 1967 4:742; C A F Rhys Davids, “Love (Buddhist)” in (ed) Hastings, Ency of Religion and Ethics, 1916 8:159-162.

<sup>97</sup> S 55.7,6-12 (SD 1.5).

**6.2** Since the encounter between modern psychology and Buddhism, with more non-Buddhists doing meditation, we are likely to see even more psychological developments in Buddhist meditation. There may come a time when the meditation of the psychologists will evolve into its own independent system. Meantime, we must work to inspire and help such meditators to evolve spiritually to envision, even attain, the awakening of the Buddha and the early arhats. For this reason, we must master, propagate and preserve early Buddhism so that it will be a cosmic presence in the future to benefit numerous beings.

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