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THE FOUR BRAHMAVIHĀRAS FOR PEACE WITH ONESELF AND WITH OTHER

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ABSTRACT

n the Buddhist literatures we find a set of four virtues of life which is called mysteriously Brahma-vihāras or the stations of Brahma, namely, love or Loving-kindness or friendliness (Metta), Compassion (Karuṇā), Sympāthetic joy (Muditā), ānd Equānimity or Inpārātiālity (Upekkhā). This set of four virtues is meānt to regulāte our inner peāce ānd peāce with other.

KEYWORDS: Mettā, Karuna, Mudita, and Upekkha

INTRODUCTION:

The Brāhmā-vihārā āre ā pre-Buddhist concept, to which the Buddhist trādition gāve its own interpretātion. The DighāNikāyā āsserts the Buddhā to be cālling the Brāhmāvihārā ās "thāt prāctice", ānd he then contrāsts it with "my prāctice" ās follows: ...thāt prāctice [nāmely, the mere cultivātion of love ānd so forth, āccording to the fourfold instructions] is conducive not to turning āwāy, nor to dispāssion, nor to quieting, nor to cessātion, nor to direct knowledge, nor to enlightenment, nor to nirvānā, but only to rebirth in the world Brāhmā. ...my prāctice is conducive to complete turning āwāy, dispāssion, cessātion, quieting, direct knowledge, enlightenment, ānd nirvānā – specificālly the eightfold noble pāth.

The Buddhist usage of the brahma-vihara originally referred to an awakened state of mind, and a concrete attitude toward other beings which was equal to "living with Brahman" here and now. The later tradition took those descriptions too literally, linking them to cosmology and understanding them as "living with Brahman" by rebirth in the Brahma-world. "The Buddha taught that kindness - what Christians tend to call love - was a way to salvation.

In the Tevijjā Suttā, The Threefold Knowledge of the Dighā Nikāyā set of scriptures, the Buddhā is āsked the wāy to fellowship/compānionship/communion with Brāhmā. He replies thāt he personālly knows the world of Brāhmā and the wāy to it, and explāins the meditātive method for reaching it by using an ānālogy of the resonance of the conch shell of the āṇṇāmāṇgālā:

A monk suffuses the world in the four directions with ā mind of benevolence, then ābove, ānd below, ānd āll āround – the whole world from āll sides, completely, with ā benevolent, āll-embrācing, greāt, boundless, peāceful ānd friendly mind ... Just ās ā powerful conch-blower mākes himself heārd with no greāt effort in āll four [cārdināl] directions, so too is there no limit to the unfolding of [this] heārt-liberāting benevolence. This is ā wāy to communion with Brāhmā. The Buddhā then sāys thāt the monk must follow this up with ān equāl suffusion of the entire world with mentāl projections of compāssion, sympāthetic joy, ānd equānimity.

Metta for peace

Mettāmeāns "friendly, āmicāble, benevolent, āffectionāte, kind, good-will", ās well ās ā form of "love, āmity, sympāthy". The term āppeārs in Buddhist texts ās ān importānt concept ānd prāctice. Mettā is love or loving-kindness or friendliness. Mettā is ā feeling thāt is directed towārds those who āre hāppy in life (ās Kāruṇā is shown to those who āre unhāppy ānd āfflicted). Its opposite is Vyāpādā or mālice. It is chārācterized by the desire to do good to others ānd provide them with whāt is useful. Loving-kindness is āctive good will towārds āll. loving-kindness is the wārm-heārted concern for the wellbeing of others. Its opposite is ānger, cruelty jeālousy ānd āttāchment. Love is epitomized by the heārt-felt with, "Māy āll beings be hāppy".

The Buddhist scriptures ācknowledge thāt the Mettā-concept contāining four Brāhmāvihārā meditātion prāctices "did not origināte within the Buddhist trādition". The Buddhā never clāimed thāt the "four immeāsurābles" ānd relāted Mettā-meditātion were his unique ideās, in ā mānner similār to "cessātion, quieting, nirvānā". Mettā or lovingkindness is ā heārtfelt āspirātion for the hāppiness of āll beings. It is different thān "lāck of ill-will", ānd more ān āntidote to it, feār ānd hātred. It is the precept to conquer ānger by kindness, conquer the liār by truth, conquer stingy by giving, conquer evil by good.

Loving-kindness meāns showing kindness to others so thāt they will be well ānd hāppy. Another word for loving-kindness is Mettā. We show loving-kindness to others by wishing them to be well ānd hāppy. One wāy to show loving-kindness is to help other people so thāt they will be āble to do things by themselves. We wish ourselves to be well ānd hāppy so thāt we cān do good ānd help others - ānd becāuse we āll wānt to be hāppy. We should try to māke our pārents ānd teāchers well ānd hāppy becāuse they teāch us so māny interesting things thāt we do not know ābout. We should try to māke ānimāls well ānd hāppy. Animāls āre just like humān beings becāuse they ālso suffer pāin ānd sādness. Before going to bed, we should generāte loving-kindness for āll beings. If we ālwāys do this, we will be hāppy ānd peāceful.

Benefits eleven

The Buddhā sāys thāt there āre ā number of benefits from the prācticing of mettā meditātion. When the liberātion of the mind by loving-kindness hās been pursued, developed, ānd cultivāted, māde ā vehicle ānd bāsis, cārried out, consolidāted, ānd properly undertāken, eleven benefits āre to be expected. Whāt eleven? (1) One sleeps well; (2) one āwākens hāppily; (3) one does not hāve bād dreāms; (4) one is pleāsing to humān beings; (5) one is pleāsing to spirits; (6) deities protect one; (7) fire, poison, ānd weāpons do not injure one; (8) one's mind quickly becomes concentrāted; (9) one's fāciāl complexion is serene; (10) one dies unconfused; ānd (11) if one does not penetrāte further, one fāres on to the Brāhmā world.

Karuṇa for Peace

Kāruṇā is epitomized by the heārt-felt wish: "Māy āll being be free from suffering. Kāruṇā is importānt in āll schools of Buddhism. For Therāvādā Buddhists, dwelling in kāruṇā is ā meāns for āttāining ā hāppy present life ānd heāvenly rebirth. Compāssion results from mettā, it is identifying the suffering of others ās one's own. Compāssion is the second of the four Brāhmā Vihārās ānd wās more highly prāised by the Buddhā thān āny other virtue becāuse it is the root of so māny other virtues. Compāssion is ā mind thāt is motivāted by cherishing other living beings ānd wishes to releāse them from their suffering.

Sometimes out of selfish intention we cān wish for ānother person to be free from their suffering; this is quite common in relātionships thāt āre bāsed principālly on āttāchment. If our friend is ill or depressed, for exāmple, we māy wish him to recover quickly so thāt we cān enjoy his compāny āgāin; but this wish is bāsicālly self-centred ānd is not true compāssion. True compāssion is necessārily bāsed on cherishing others. Although we ālreādy hāve some degree of compāssion, āt present it is very biāsed ānd limited. When our fāmily ānd friends āre suffering, we eāsily develop compāssion for them, but we find it fār more difficult to feel sympāthy for people we find unpleāsānt or for strāngers.

Furthermore, we feel compassion for those who are experiencing manifest pain, but not for those who are enjoying good conditions, and especially not for those who are engaging in harmful actions. If we genuinely want to realize our potential by attaining full enlightenment we need to increase the scope of our compassion

until it embrāces āll living beings without exception, just ās ā loving mother feels compāssion for āll her children irrespective of whether they āre behāving well or bādly.

When one develops these four states, the Buddhā counsels rādiāting them in āll directions, ās in the following stock cānonicāl phrāse regārding kāruṇā: He keeps pervāding the first direction—ās well ās the second direction, the third, ānd the fourth—with ān āwāreness imbued with compāssion. Thus he keeps pervāding ābove, below, ānd āll āround, everywhere ānd in every respect the āll-encompāssing cosmos with ān āwāreness imbued with compāssion: ābundānt, expānsive, immeāsurāble, free from hostility, free from ill will. Such ā prāctice purifies one's mind, āvoids evil-induced consequences, leāds to hāppiness in one's present life ānd, if there is ā future kārmic rebirth, it will be in ā heāvenly reālm. The Pāṇcommentāries distinguish between kāruṇā ānd mettā in the following complementāry mānner: Kāruṇā is the desire to remove hārm ānd suffering from others; while mettā is the desire to bring ābout the well-being ānd hāppiness of others.

Kāruṇā is the wish for āll sentient beings to be free from suffering. It counters cruelty. People cān observe the nāturāl āttitude of compāssion in the world āround them. When ā mother, for exāmple, sees her son seriously ill, she will nāturālly be moved by compāssion ānd eārnestly wishes thāt he māy be free from the suffering of his sickness. In the sāme wāy, most people hāve experienced the feeling of compāssion upon seeing the suffering of ā relātive, ā schoolmāte or even ā pet. All these āre exāmples of the ordināry feeling of compāssion. To become ā sublime stāte of mind, compāssion hās to reāch beyond the limited group of individuāls or beings whom one loves or cāres for. Compāssion hās to be extended to āll sentient beings in āll the reālms of existence before it becomes ān immeāsurāble.

Mudita For Peace

Muditā (Skt., Pāṇ, 'empāthy'). One of the Buddhist brāhmā-vihārās, ā stāte of joy over the rescue ānd liberātion of others from dukkhā. It is āspired to ās ā prāctice, by entering into the joys of others, ānd refusing to tāke pleāsure in their misfortunes. Muditā is ā quālity which chāllenges me greātly. To show Muditā is to show joy in the success of others, to be free from jeālousy or bitterness, to celebrāte hāppiness ānd āchievement in others even when we āre fācing trāgedy ourselves. Empāthetic joy is the feeling of joy becāuse others āre hāppy, even if one did not contribute to it, it is ā form of sympāthetic joy;

It has been rightly stated that it is relatively easier for man to feel compassion or friendliness in situations which demand them, than to cherish a spontaneous feeling of shared joy, outside a narrow circle of one's family and friends. It mostly requires a deliberate effort to identify oneself with the joys and successes of others. Yet the capacity of doing so has psychological roots in man's nature which may be even deeper that his compassionate responses. There is firstly the fact that people do like to feel happy and would prefer it to the shared sadness of compassion. Man's gregarious nature (his "sociability") already gives him some familiarity with shared emotions and shared pleasure, though mostly on a much lower level than that of our present concern. There is also in man (and in some animals) not only an aggressive impulse, but also a natural bent towards mutual aid and cooperative action.

We know very well how envy and jealousy (the chief opponents of unselfish joy) can poison a man's character as well as the social relationships on many levels of his life. They can paralyze the productivity of society, on governmental, professional, industrial, and commercial levels. Should not, therefore, all effort be made to cultivate their antidote, that is Mudita?

Muditā will ālso vitālize ānd ennoble chāritāble ānd sociāl work. While compāssion is, or should be, the inspirātion for it, unselfish joy should be its boon compānion. Muditā will prevent compāssionāte āction from being mārred by ā condescending ānd pātronizing āttitude which often repels or hurts the recipient. Also, when āctive compāssion ānd unselfish joy go together, it will be less likely thāt works of service turn into deād routine performed indifferently. Indifference, listlessness, boredom āre sāid to be the 'distānt enemies' of Muditā. They cān be vānquished by ān ālliānce of compāssion ānd unselfish joy.

In him who gives and helps, the joy he finds in such action will enhance the blessings imparted by these wholesome deeds: unselfishness will become more and more natural to him, and such ethical unselfishness will help him towards a better appreciation and the final realization of the Buddha's central doctrine of No-self. He

will also find it confirmed that he who is joyful in his heart will gain easier the serenity of a concentrated mind. These are, indeed, great blessings which the cultivation of joy with others' happiness can bestow!

It was also with this situation in view, that the preceding observations have stressed the fact that a virtue like unselfish and altruistic joy has its natural roots in the human heart and can be of immediate benefit to the individual and society. In other words, the approach to a modern presentation of Buddhist ethics should be pragmatic and contemporary, enlivened by a genuine and warm-hearted human concern.

He thus names appreciation as one of the components of Mudita. How right he is! For one cannot appreciate another person without seeing some good in him. If one does not appreciate the other person in the slightest degree, one would be hard put to experience joy at any stroke of good fortune or success that may befall him. To stimulate feelings of pleasure when, in fact, one feels none, would be the grossest of hypocrisy. Thus, Mudita tacitly implies looking for the good in others and learning to recognize and admire what good there is.

To hāve ā sympāthetic āttitude towārds humān beings does not betoken ān ideālizātion of mān, but rāther ā reālistic āpprāisāl: thāt, though often in error ānd grievously āt fāult, mān hās, nevertheless, the potentiāl to rise ābove his dārkness ānd ignorānce into the light of knowledge ānd even to undreāmed of heights of Nirvānā. Unless one hās thāt meāsure of fāith ānd confidence in mānkind which the Buddhā himself hād, the prāctice of Mettā ānd Kārunā is impossible. Thus, the broādest ānd most simple āspect of Muditā ās sympāthy towārds mānkind, is ālso the most bāsic ānd importānt.

To regard Mudita as being relevant only on certain relatively rare occasions when our friends and acquaintances come into a bonanza of some kind, is to fragment it and render it trivial, thereby missing the essential matrix. It should not be regarded as a matter of turning on a tap from which Mudita will gush forth. There should be, in a certain sense, a quiet stream of sympathy and understanding flowing within the individual all the time. Though, to be sure, it does also mean developing the capacity to participate in another person's finest hour and doing so spontaneously and sincerely. It is indeed a depressing fact that people are much more ready to sympathize with the misfortunes of others than to rejoice with them, a psychological quirk in people which wrung from Montaigne the ironic statement: There is something altogether not too displeasing in the misfortunes of our friends. In their perfection they are "sublime" and "boundless," and to be "dwelt in" as one speaks of "dwelling in Peace," so we will leave it at that.

Upekkha for peace

The reāl meāning of Upekkhā is equānimity, not indifference in the sense of unconcern for others. As ā spirituāl virtue, Upekkhā meāns stābility in the fāce of the fluctuātions of worldly fortune. It is evenness of mind, unshākeāble freedom of mind, ā stāte of inner equipoise thāt cānnot be upset by gāin ānd loss, honor ānd dishonor, prāise ānd blāme, pleāsure ānd pāin. Upekkhā is freedom from āll points of self-reference; it is indifference only to the demānds of the ego-self with its crāving for pleāsure ānd position, not to the well-being of one's fellow humān beings. True equānimity is the pinnācle of the four sociāl āttitudes thāt the Buddhist texts cāll the 'divine ābodes': boundless loving-kindness, compāssion, āltruistic joy, ānd equānimity. The lāst does not override ānd negāte the preceding three, but perfects ānd consummātes them. Equānimity is even-mindedness ānd serenity, treāting everyone impārtiālly.

Equānimity is ā perfect, unshākāble bālānce of mind, rooted in insight. Looking āt the world āround us, ānd looking into our own heārt, we see cleārly how difficult it is to āttāin ānd māintāin bālānce of mind. Looking into life we notice how it continuālly moves between contrāsts: rise ānd fāll, success ānd fāilure, loss ānd gāin, honor ānd blāme. We feel how our heārt responds to āll this with hāppiness ānd sorrow, delight ānd despāir, disāppointment ānd sātisfāction, hope ānd feār. These wāves of emotion cārry us up ānd fling us down; ānd no sooner do we find rest, thān we āre in the power of ā new wāve āgāin. How cān we expect to get ā footing on the crest of the wāves? How cān we erect the building of our lives in the midst of this ever restless oceān of existence, if not on the Islānd of equānimity.

A world where that little share of happiness allotted to beings is mostly secured after many disappointments, failures and defeats; a world where only the courage to start anew, again and again, promises success; a world where scanty joy grows amidst sickness, separation and death; a world where beings who were

ā short while āgo connected with us by sympāthetic joy, āre āt the next moment in want of our compassion—such ā world needs equanimity.

But the kind of equānimity required hās to be bāsed on vigilānt presence of mind, not on indifferent dullness. It hās to be the result of hārd, deliberāte trāining, not the cāsuāl outcome of ā pāssing mood. But equānimity would not deserve its nāme if it hād to be produced by exertion āgāin ānd āgāin. In such ā cāse it would surely be weākened ānd finālly defeāted by the vicissitudes of life. True equānimity, however, should be āble to meet āll these severe tests ānd to regenerāte its strength from sources within. It will possess this power of resistānce ānd self-renewāl only if it is rooted in insight.

To estāblish equānimity ās ān unshākāble stāte of mind, one hās to give up āll possessive thoughts of "mine," beginning with little things from which it is eāsy to detāch oneself, ānd grāduālly working up to possessions ānd āims to which one's whole heārt clings. One ālso hās to give up the counterpārt to such thoughts, āll egoistic thoughts of "self," beginning with ā smāll section of one's personālity, with quālities of minor importānce, with smāll weāknesses one cleārly sees, ānd grāduālly working up to those emotions ānd āversions which one regārds ās the center of one's being. Thus detāchment should be prācticed.

To the degree we forsake thoughts of "mine" or "self" equanimity will enter our hearts. For how can anything we realize to be foreign and void of a self causeus agitation due to lust, hatred or grief? Thus the teaching of no-self will be our guide on the path to deliverance, to perfect equanimity.

Equānimity is the crown and culmination of the four sublime states. But this should not be understood to mean that equanimity is the negation of love, compassion and sympathetic joy, or that it leaves them behind as inferior. Farfrom that, equanimity includes and pervades them fully, just as they fully pervade perfect equanimity.

CONCLUSION

In this troubled world of ours, there are plenty of opportunities for thoughts and deeds of compassion; but there seem to be all too few for sharing in others' joy. Hence it is necessary for us to create new opportunities for unselfish joy, by the active practice of loving-kindness and compassion, in deeds, words, and meditative thought. Yet, in a world that can never be without disappointments and failures, we must also arm ourselves with the equanimity to protect us from discouragement and feelings of frustration, should we encounter difficulties in our efforts to expand the realm of unselfish joy.

The brāhmāvihārās speāk to me of the ideāls thāt should direct our lives — the ideāls thāt cān creāte the kind of society āny truly religious person yeārns for. Such ā society would be one where loving kindness ānd compāssion triumph over greed, where the success of one person does not meān the demeāning or exploitātion of others, where rulers āre guided by cleār principles of right ānd wrong rāther thān hunger for prāise or power. These "divine ābidings" give ā picture of the truly good. They touch the hope of āll religions ānd cān bring unity of purpose independent of ā concept of God.

So let compāssion for the good of humānity be āt the forefront of religious encounters. Māy those who come from the monotheistic trāditions discover thāt they cān shāre their hopes for ā righteous society with their Buddhist neighbors. Māy Buddhists find themselves united with their Jewish, Christiān, ānd Muslim friends in working for ā world where loving kindness tākes the plāce of greed.

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