

HOME IS HERE

*Practicing Antiracism
with the
Engaged Eightfold Path*

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North Atlantic Books

Huichin, unceded Ohlone land
aka Berkeley, California

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motivation to alleviate or end suffering—one’s own and that of others. Metta and karuna are Pali words. Both of these heart-mind qualities are part of the four Brahma Viharas, or the four Divine Abodes. In Pali, *Brahma* means “supreme,” “celestial,” or “divine.” *Vihara* means “dwelling,” “abiding,” or “home.” Other standard translations of Brahma Viharas are “Immeasurables” or “Divine Dwellings,” which the Buddha taught as easeful states.

The other two viharas, which we will discuss later in the book, are *mudita* (joy with or for others, or “inclusive joy”) and *upekkha* (equanimity, also sometimes understood as balance).

PRACTICE PAUSE

Metta and Karuna Meditation

While each of the four Brahma Viharas have their own individual practices, I would like to offer metta and karuna together as they are the second and third wholesome qualities of Skillful Motivation. I’ll delineate which phrases typically go with which vihara below.

The progression of the Brahma Viharas is a way for us to practice expanding the sense of wholeness—from self to close friend or benefactor, then to a neutral person, a challenging person, and then to all beings. This is a set of practices that asks you to know wholeness for yourself and then to send it out to others in increments that open you up to a larger and larger sense of wholeness. When the Brahma Viharas are used as cultivation practices, strengthening your confidence in their qualities and your sincerity as you offer them to the other categories is key. Thus, it’s important to make sure you’re fully at ease so you can move your body or change your visualization at any time. Additionally, you can tweak the phrases to reflect your sincere intentions.

- Begin by finding an easeful position in the body. For some, lying down or putting their hand on their heart supports this.

- First, visualize yourself in any way that can receive these phrases.
- Silently repeat the following phrases to yourself, or any variation that resonates with you:

Metta:

- May I be filled with kindness.
- Let me connect with a sense of wellness whenever I need it.
- May peace and ease be accessible to me here and now.
- May I be happy.

Karuna:

- May I connect to safety and strength whenever it's needed. (Can be a metta phrase also.)
- Let me be able to bring mercy and tenderness to my pains and sorrows.
- May I be able to forgive myself for past mistakes.
- Let me be patient with myself and with others.
- May I be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Nontraditional:

- Let me know that these qualities are shared by all as a connection to the wholeness of our interconnected life.
- On your next inhale, let yourself *connect to* (remember) any one or more of these phrases and qualities; let them absorb into you.
- On the exhale, let yourself *feel* their impact. Have your shoulders gone down? Is there a sense of ease in breathing or just being with yourself or things as they are?

What is wholeness in me? How do I know wholeness? By practicing in this way, we learn to develop our confidence in these qualities of wholeness. We experience a strengthening of our belief that they're true and possible; when we know this, we're more upright with these qualities. We experience firsthand that these qualities are in us. When we develop our confidence in

having these qualities, our confidence grows, knowing that they really are qualities that others can also access and develop in themselves.

- Once you feel settled with these kind and compassionate qualities toward yourself, the next part of the meditation is to extend any or all of these phrases to others. One by one, offer the phrases to the following categories: close friend or benefactor, neutral person, challenging person, and then all beings.
- On an inhale, first feel the qualities in you before you offer it to the person of that category with the exhale. (For some, “radiating” the quality out to a category may feel more genuine if “offering” feels off in any way.)
- Remember, if at any time there’s tension in the body, or if a phrase doesn’t feel fully sincere, relax your body, or just tweak the phrase or visualization.
- Always try to end with *feeling the results* of your practice, especially in your body, as settledness or as presence.

I encourage you to memorize the phrases as they are or in your own words. Focusing on three or four phrases at a time can make this more manageable. When they come easily to you, the focus can be on connecting with their qualities and not about remembering or saying the phrases correctly.

In Buddhism, practicing to connect to and offer the Brahma Viharas is not just a matter of doing “affirmation” phrases. This is a practice of sowing seeds in our field of awareness or as new grooves in our motivations, strengthening the present and future trajectory of our thinking to positive and skillful qualities. We’re also expanding our sense of these qualities to include others. Imagine if all of us knew and acted with confidence from such motivations! The net would certainly be strengthened.



We have to have this sense of openness to know what is present, what we've inherited, and what is important to us. We also have to have awareness that there is always going to be not-knowing. Therefore, we have to have the resilience to meet conditions in which things don't go as planned and that things can fall apart, and yet we have the capacity to find centeredness, to not be overwhelmed, and to trust our experience of wholeness as ourselves, as others, and as life conditions right here and right now, as-it-is.

PRACTICE PAUSE

Equanimity/Resilience Meditation for One and All

Remember that *upekkha* is one of the four Brahma Viharas. It is usually translated as "equanimity." Very specifically, *upekkha* here means the equanimity that comes through a deep understanding of karma, or cause and effect, or action and result. As such, I have been trying out *upekkha* as resilience. See how this works for you:

- Begin by settling into your posture. Sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, rock your body a little bit side to side, just enough so you feel really truly settled where you are.
- Take deep breaths, as many as you need.
- Now visualize yourself in any way that can receive the following phrases.
- Say these phrases silently to yourself:
 - I am the nature of flexibility as I meet the comings and goings of my life.
 - Joys and sorrows are a natural part of my life, and I am open and able to receive.

- Let me access clarity of heart and mind to meet the conditions of my life as they are.
- May I know that resilience is of my nature all the days of my life.
- On the inhale, connect with how you know that these phrases are true and possible.
- Just let these phrases in, let yourself know them; let them permeate, fully received.
- Feel the results of these phrases on your body: perhaps as a breeze, as a ray of light, as coming through your pores; whatever works for you.
- Now, visualize all beings, not leaving anyone out, and offer them the following phrases:
 - May all beings access flexibility within the comings and goings of their lives.
 - May every one of us be able to harmonize our joys and sorrows as they come and go.
 - Let clarity of heart and mind be our guide in every situation, in service of nonharming.
 - May the realization that our strength rests in resilience be possible for every one of us, all the days of our lives.
- On the inhale, let yourself connect to how you know these qualities are true and possible.
- On the exhale, feel these truths inside, then extend them outside. And then let yourself feel them coming back to you, like resonance, back and forth, supporting us all.

In Zen we say that the question is more important than the answer. Therefore, much of our practice is to be able to ask questions—not from invalidation, but from a sense of openness. Is this what I believe? Is