Brahmavihāra Instructions

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 46:01

So we'll simply review the instructions and some of the refinements that we've introduced.

Please begin by connecting to yourself once again. Just as you're sitting here, know yourself through this familiar experience. Bring to mind some things that you appreciate about yourself. In addition to all the qualities that you show in the world, remember all the ways that you've manifested beautiful qualities here during these past four weeks: your perseverance and courage, your dedicated effort, your willingness to look at whatever's in the mind and body, your care for the other yogis and empathy for them, times of spontaneous presence and being fully here, times of stillness and insight.

Even amidst the difficulty, so many beautiful qualities have been developed over these four weeks. Appreciate that it was your own wise efforts that brought those about. With deep appreciation for your dedicated work, wish yourself all the flavors of loving kindness: May I be safe from harm. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I live with ease.

From time to time, come into the heart center, letting the practice be embodied, and just notice whatever feelings are there—a flavor of metta, patience, acceptance, friendliness, warmth, or anything else.

Now move into this practice that really emphasizes the receiving of the loving kindness thoughts. Imagine that all your closest friends and family, the people you feel most affection and trust for, are sitting in front of you in a half circle. Bring them into the room one by one or as a group. Look into their faces. Notice that each one of them is smiling at you with tremendous love and care. Then they repeat as a group your metta phrases to you, sending them as expressions of their sincere and deep caring about your well-being. If there's one person you're particularly connecting with, let them come into the center focus as they say the phrases for you.

Now thank your circle of friends, let them go, and bring in your benefactor. Remember how you've looked at them through the eyes of metta, compassion, joy, and impartiality. Come back to this wish for their welfare. Stop to appreciate all the things that you really like about this person—their good qualities, the ways they've reached out and supported you. With that sense of the great goodness of their heart, send your wishes of loving kindness to them.

I'm going to suggest a slight refinement of technique in sending metta to a benefactor or anyone. You can try it out if it suits you, or simply continue as before if it doesn't feel helpful. We'll break each phrase down into four parts.

First, call up an image of your benefactor. Second, notice what you feel when you see them. What's the

immediate response of the heart? Third, have a sense that your phrase goes out directed toward the image. The image is a little in front, and the phrase travels from your heart center toward the image to reach them. Fourth, come back and rest for a moment in the heart center, the center of the chest, and see what's there. What did it feel like to offer that phrase to your benefactor? There might be a little resonance, a little echo of the metta offering.

Then again for the next phrase: image, feeling, phrase sending toward the image, feeling the echo in the heart center. Try this for a few minutes and see if it is helpful—image, feeling, phrase, heart center.

If there is some metta feeling toward your benefactor, you might play with a sense of radiating. Have a sense that the benefactor is in front of you. Rest your attention in the heart center and simply let the metta flow out toward the benefactor, quietly radiating that caring.

And then if you're ready, bringing in your good friend. Having a clear sense of their presence, perhaps seeing them or saying their name. And as you connect with them, remembering their good qualities—what is it that you like about them so much?

With that sense of your friend's goodness, then directing the phrases of loving kindness to the good friend. May you be safe from harm. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you live with ease. Keep a clear sense of your friend's presence, and feel the meaning of the words as you say them. It's not just a mantra. The power of the practice comes from the sincere intention of wishing well.

If you like, you can also try with a good friend this four-step process for each phrase: bringing up the image, feeling what you feel for them, sending the phrase toward the image, resting in the heart center to feel that echo. You might see if it helps to synchronize these four steps with the breath, so that a phrase takes one or two breaths to complete the four steps. What I find helpful is to have the phrase go toward the person on the out breath—so you're breathing the phrase toward them. You don't need to rush this process or rush the steps. Let it be a slow, gentle offering. Find your own rhythm.

If there is metta present for your friend, again play with the radiating—just resting the attention in the heart center. Then it's like opening a door so the metta can just radiate out to touch your friend, just like there's a little lantern and you open the door and the light bathes your friend.

And then bringing in your neutral person. Feel their presence, see them—maybe you know their name, maybe you don't. If it's someone on the retreat, perhaps thinking back to when you first set eyes on them, had no special feeling for them, and then having meditated on them for some time, how that shifted. Remember whatever you have intuited about the neutral person's personality, joys and sorrows, their humanness, whatever you've seen of it.

Reflect that like all beings, they just want to be happy and don't want to suffer. This is our common thread—this unites us. So appreciating their humanity and sending your phrases of well-wishing to them.

Then bringing in your difficult person, if you feel ready. If there's an openness. Feel their character. Keep them at some distance if that's more helpful—that's fine. Notice what emotions come when you bring them in: any fear, resentment, hurt, drawing back. Allow all those feelings to be there in the space of caring.

See if you can find one or two good qualities in your difficult person. How would their friends see them? Send to the difficult person the same phrases you've used for the others, knowing they too are just trying to be happy, trying not to suffer—not needing to like them or want to be with them, just seeing if there can be a real wish that they be happy, that they be peaceful. If not, just repeating the metta phrases is enough.

If the difficult person stirs up too much fear, resentment, or hurt, then just go back to someone easier—yourself, benefactor, or friend. Settle with them, renew the metta.

And then letting go of the difficult person and opening up to all the people who are in the hall right now. You probably noticed some of the faces as they came in, some of the people sitting around you. Have a sense that you can open your awareness and let it encompass all the people who are in the hall—in the front and behind, to right and to left.

As you open your attention, let some of the faces and images of those people come into your mind. This has been part of our community for the past month. We've spent time in the hall, in the dining room, walking. All of us here for the same reason: finding happiness and seeking not to suffer.

With a lot of appreciation for what everyone has done this month, extend to them your same genuine wishes for their welfare. Feel their goodness, let your care pervade the space, and also send your wishes to them: May you all be safe and protected from harm. May you all be happy and live with joy in the world.

May you be healthy and strong. And if that's not possible, may you accept your limitations with grace. In your outer life, may you live with the ease of wellbeing. And may the force of loving kindness unite us through this retreat and the next. May we always look on each other with kindly eyes, appreciating our shared love for this dharma.

And then also extending the loving kindness to those who are down the hill right now, our other dharma brothers and sisters, still following the dharma path, doing a little speaking, a little listening, thinking of all their sincere intentions and efforts over these weeks. May those efforts lead them to the deepest fruits, the deepest happiness. May they all be safe and protected from harm. May they be happy and peaceful. May they be healthy and strong. May they live with the ease of wellbeing.

And then thinking of our managers who have looked after us—Anna, Diane, Carrie, Ramona, and Beth—here because they love the dharma also. May they be safe and happy, healthy, at ease. And all the other staff who came, who you met on that morning early on, must have been about thirty of them in here. And there are some forty to fifty total, making it possible for us to be here, and the cooks who have fed us so lovingly, so carefully. May they all be safe from harm, happy, healthy, and at ease.

And then letting the sense of loving kindness radiate in all directions—around us, above and below, all the human beings across the earth in states of happiness and states of suffering. And all the creatures of the land, of the air, of the lakes and rivers and oceans. May all beings everywhere be safe and protected from harm. May they be happy and peaceful. May their bodies support them with strength. May they live with the ease of wellbeing.

And may all beings be liberated.

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