Divine Abiding: Equanimity

Noirin Sheahan · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Noirin Sheahan · 45:48

So far in this retreat we have been discussing Vipassana meditation, especially as described in the Satipatthana Sutta. For the next few days I want to talk about another approach to meditation described by the Buddha. This is termed Brahma-Vihara practice. The term Brahma-Vihara can be translated as a sublime state or, more poetically, as a heavenly abode.

Here is a passage from the Buddha's teaching on the Brahma-Vihara:

Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with loving kindness. Likewise the second, the third and the fourth direction. So above, below and around. He dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with loving kindness—abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.

Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with compassion, likewise the second, and so on as before.

The next verse repeats this for a heart filled with appreciative joy, and the final verse repeats it for a heart filled with equanimity. So in this form of meditation we are not simply observing our experience but deliberately filling our hearts with kindness or compassion or joy or equanimity and radiating these throughout the world.

Some teachers argue that there is no need to practice Brahma-Vihara because Vipassana naturally cultivates these sublime states. In support of this approach, there is the fact that the Satipatthana Sutta does not include a contemplation of the Brahma-Vihara. So this form of meditation is not a necessary component of the direct path to enlightenment. Other teachers put great emphasis on cultivating goodwill and the other sublime states as the attitude needed in order to practice Vipassana. In support of this, there are many teachings the Buddha gives on the importance of goodwill, and I'll mention some of these over the coming days.

So how can we bring these views together? Very often the attempt to fill the heart with loving kindness will show us how difficult this is. And so we have to cope with frustration, perhaps a sense of failure, confusion or anger, and other ways the hindrances show up when we find our wishes are being thwarted. When this happens, I find great relief in the fact that Brahma-Vihara meditation isn't included in the Satipatthana Sutta. I feel perfectly justified in relaxing any effort to generate goodwill. Instead, I sit back and let Vipassana acknowledge and explore these negative reactions.

But I've come to value reflections on goodwill and the other Brahma-Vihara as a way of softening my

Vipassana practice. The two approaches complement each other well. The more often we make the effort to cultivate the Brahma-Vihara, the more often this new habit will be expressed quite naturally in Vipassana. Thus the observer is often watching goodwill, compassion, mudita or equanimity being cultivated quite naturally and without any deliberate effort in this direction. Vipassana becomes a relaxed kind of Brahma-Vihara practice.

In formal Brahma-Vihara practice there is the extra effort to bring about wholesome states of mind, but running parallel with this is the observation of whatever emotions are coming up. Then the effort can be softened or stepped up so as not to be overwhelmed by the negative states. Thus the two practices support and complement one another.

Coming back to whether or not we need to practice the Brahma-Vihara in addition to Vipassana, I follow the approach taken by Bhante and other teachers and think of Vipassana as my main practice, but augment this with short stretches of Brahma-Vihara practice, just as we do at night here on retreat. In daily life, the main emphasis is on putting the Brahma-Vihara into action, this effort being supported by mindfulness and continually tailored to suit the particular situation.

The Brahma-Vihara describe the enlightened heart's relationship to others: goodwill, or metta; compassion, the Pali term being karuna; appreciative joy, or mudita in Pali; and equanimity, or upekkha. For this talk I'll use the Pali term metta since that is so widely understood, and also mudita instead of appreciative joy, as that's a bit of a mouthful in English. But I'll just use the English words for compassion and equanimity.

The Brahma-Vihara are the orientations of mind and heart needed to respond appropriately to the ups and downs of human relationships. If we can summon these states at will, we can always be in perfect harmony with others and with whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

As a basis, we have metta, or goodwill. We want all beings to be happy and well. This is the default. Goodwill applies in all situations. If we find a friend in any sort of difficulty, goodwill takes on the shade of compassion. We empathise and wish their suffering will end. On the other hand, we can find them bouncing with good news. Goodwill takes on the hue of mudita. We are delighted for them. If they get involved in another relationship and don't have much time for us, goodwill takes on the form of equanimity. We respect their boundaries and their independence and wish them well in their new life.

The first three have the effect of opening our hearts to others, while the latter provides the balance required to prevent a slide into over-attachment, dependency and other dangers of close relationships.

I'll be saying more about each of the Brahma-Vihara later and over the coming days, but first I want to go over the formal meditation practice, which is identical for all four. Here again is the Buddha's description:

He dwells pervading the entire world, everywhere and equally, with his heart filled with loving kindness—abundant, grown great, measureless, free of enmity and free from distress.

This is a very exalted state he is describing, which can inspire us deeply. But there is a danger.

We might let our imagination be transported to a heavenly realm in a delusive way, clinging to a notion of heavenly bliss which has me as the source of all, as I liberally bestow my good wishes on all around.

To make the practice more real and grounded, we usually start with wishing well to real individuals. These are the various categories of people we think of in our regular metta practice: ourselves, a benefactor, close family and friends, and so on. We start with whoever most easily stirs our friendly feelings.

For many people, this is someone you think of as a benefactor. This could be a parent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, or grandparent. It could be a teacher or a friend. It could be a favourite pet. Or you could focus on a public figure you admire—Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi. It could be an author or poet whose work you love. Or you could use a spiritual figure: the Buddha, Kuan Yin, Jesus, Mary, or any of the saints.

You can use different benefactors for different Brahma Viharas. For example, the person who best evokes mudita might not be the person who best evokes compassion. For mudita, you would want to be thinking of someone who has something to celebrate, while compassion is most easily stirred when we think of someone going through a tough time.

Then there is the often tricky business of offering ourselves good wishes. Sometimes we think of this as selfish, but this is a misunderstanding. Selfishness means clinging tightly to whatever we desire. In Brahma Vihara practice, we are generous with our good wishes. We are giving without expectation of return. So too, we wish ourselves well without building that into an expectation of what form the future will take for us. It's like the marriage vows: for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer. We are developing an attitude of unconditional support for ourselves in all circumstances. This is not selfish; it is the essential psychological basis for living a good life.

Often we feel we don't deserve any good wishes, that we only deserve to be miserable. What's needed here is self-forgiveness. We can remind ourselves that whatever wrongs we've done, they've happened in the past. They don't have to shape our future. We can't become the good person we feel we ought to be unless we are willing to believe in our potential for goodness and encourage ourselves in that direction. Paradoxically, the times we feel most unworthy of good wishes are the times we most deeply need them.

At other times we might feel all buoyed up and confident about wishing others well, but feel that it's a waste of time wishing ourselves well. We're fine; we don't need any good wishes. What's actually going on is that we're denying our vulnerability. We're running on willpower, suppressing any suggestions of neediness or frailty. What's needed here is a combination of self-compassion for the underlying feelings and mudita for the streak of self-confidence that is keeping us going.

All in all, the self can be the hardest of all categories for Brahma Vihara practice.

When we come to the category of close friends, it's best to choose someone with whom we have a warm relationship but don't feel a romantic or sexual attraction. The problem with those attractions is that they easily stir strong emotions that swamp our simple goodwill. I say "simple" because it needs to be a pure giving without expectation of return. It's a straightforward good wish like, "I hope all goes well for you."

If we feel romantically or sexually attracted, we're very likely to want the person to think only about us. We're not that interested in the rest of their lives. So our good wishes become a kind of net we're trapping them inside. Though our minds might be saying, "May you be happy," our heart is secretly whispering, "May you love and adore me, because I have your best interests at heart and no one will ever love you as I do." Though we may be able to sustain this focus for a long time, all we are doing really is strengthening the bonds of attachment, not of goodwill.

This is one of the toughest aspects of Brahma Vihara practice: to keep our goodwill simple and pure, with no strings attached. The particular divine state that helps us with this is equanimity, and I'll talk more about that later this evening.

For the moment, let's leave this category of close friend by saying that if you sense a pure, more disinterested attitude of metta has established itself in your mind, then at that point you could start to include those for whom you feel romantic or sexual love. You'll then be able to feel the shift towards possessiveness and know the danger.

The difficult person category presents a different challenge. This time the emotions being stirred up are of the aversive type: anger, condemnation, irritation, fear, hatred. It's best not to start with our worst enemy, but to practice on someone who we find irritating for some reason. It could be easier to start with equanimity-style good wishes, such as "May you not harm yourself or others," before switching to metta-style wishes like "May you be happy."

When we've gone through the various categories of people, we then start radiating spatially, as the Buddha suggests. Again, to keep this grounded in reality, we usually start with our immediate surroundings—like all of us under the same roof.

Then we gradually widen the circle to our neighbourhood, country, continent, and the whole world before encompassing all beings in all directions.

Each Brahmavihara is associated with what are termed its near or subtle enemies and its far or direct enemies. The far enemy is the polar opposite of the divine abode—hatred, cruelty, and so on. The near enemy can easily be mistaken for the truly divine abiding: attachment being mistaken for metta, pity for compassion. Much of the challenge in Brahmavihara practice involves learning to recognize and work around these enemies, as well as all the usual hindrances—wandering mind, aversion, sleepiness.

While Vipassana asks us to turn attention directly on the hindrance, Brahmavihara practice asks us to try to minimize their disturbance. For example, if we get uncomfortable, we don't try to sit it out as we might

in Vipassana. We just make ourselves more comfortable. Similarly, we switch back to the least challenging category whenever we get swamped by an enemy. In a sense, we dodge around the challenges and look for the line of least resistance, trusting that perseverance will eventually establish the good habit as our new default.

Let's explore the difference between Brahmavihara and Vipassana meditation practices a little further. In Vipassana, the ultimate aim is to cultivate wisdom. We're following the Buddha's quest to find a way to live happily in a world that includes the decay and death of all we love. We're looking for an escape from stress and suffering. So in Vipassana we look directly at whatever takes our attention in order to see its transient, unsatisfactory nature—and that it's not within our power to control. It is not me or mine. This way of seeing gradually undercuts our habitual attachments. As wisdom deepens, the heart is purified of greed and hatred. In a natural, unforced way, the Brahmaviharas are strengthened. Vipassana also gives us glimpses of what might not be transitory or unsatisfactory. We're learning to escape moment by moment from the limitations of being bound up in the world. To the extent that we have loosened the bonds of attachment and aversion, we are free. And freedom, we find, allows a natural friendliness to emerge whenever we think of ourselves or others.

In Brahmavihara practice we are taking a different tack. We are letting our current level of wisdom be expressed in the form of good wishes for ourselves and others.

Think of a lake from which a river flows to the sea. The lake represents wisdom and the river represents goodwill. In Vipassana, the lake is being filled with streams from the mountains. The lake is open, receptive. It doesn't matter whether the streams bring down muck and rocks from the mountains as well. The water lets them all pour in, and that's all that matters. In the clear open space of the lake, the rocks do their rocky thing and sink to the bottom. The muck floats around for a while, releases some of its water, before the solid particles filter down into the bed.

In Brahmavihara meditation, the lake is overflowing its boundaries and pouring itself into the river. At the boundary of the lake and the river there is a bank of rock and muck. At times the lake waters are high and overflow this bank effortlessly. This is when goodwill emerges naturally and easily without any opposing emotions. At other times the bank is showing through, but the lake waters are powerful enough to be sweeping through the muck and rocks in their way. This is when we are putting effort into our Brahmavihara practice, refusing to let ourselves be overcome by whatever emotions are emerging. We're breaking down the banks separating the lake of wisdom from the river of goodwill.

After a while the water level drops to where the bank is more entrenched and firm. The lake waters have to be patient and find little chinks in the bank through which they seep to keep a trickle of river flowing. This is where we're working very sensitively with our emotions in Brahmavihara practice. We're dodging around the tight knots of aversion or desire, loosening them a chink here and there. Although it's hard work, we're eating away at the foundations of the solid bank separating the lake from the

river—separating our wisdom from its natural expression of goodwill.

When the lake can't get any flow at all through the bank, it has to wait till it fills up again from the mountain streams. This is when we decide to take a Vipassana break in our metta practice, to get some clear space around whatever emotions have been thrown up.

In Vipassana, we are receptive and open, exploring everything without judgment. Anything goes. In Brahmavihara practice, we're on a mission. We're putting all our energy into goodwill. We're not interested in the shape and texture of what gets in our way. We're only interested in finding a way around it.

Let's look for a moment at some of these rocks that can block up the channel between the lake and the river. Our minds keep wandering, or we fall asleep, or the enemies keep showing up. The temptation is to compound the problem by thinking, "I'm such a rotten person, I can't even wish my best friend well." This is a dead end. We're unwittingly undermining our goodwill by self-criticism. The teaching on anicca can help here, which says that there is nothing permanent or substantial in what we normally think of as our individual being. Our feelings, emotions—

shift and change with circumstances. So the wandering mind, the emotions of the various enemies that emerge—none of these are mine. None of them constitute me. They come and go depending on conditions.

So instead of blaming yourself, think about the conditions and whether anything could be changed. Would it help to look at a flower, a candle flame, an image? Does goodwill flow more easily when there is a chant playing in the background? Maybe it helps to lie down. Can a gesture help, like putting a hand on your heart? Don't be afraid to experiment. This is another form of metta practice—learning to be kind to ourselves during the frustrations that show up in Brahma-Vihara challenges.

One of the conditions that undermines goodwill is fear of failure. The term "divine abode" can set up high expectations that in themselves bring up the fear of failure. We forget that what we are doing is a practice aimed in the direction of divinity. I suffered from that problem for many years until I accepted that working tenderly with fear of failure was in fact a fully acceptable Brahma-Vihara practice. Metta took on the shade of compassion as I turned toward the fear and found some way of expressing support. The very simple gesture of stroking the back of my hand helped enormously. Although I was feeling small and incompetent, the Brahma-Vihara was being expressed as willingness to accept and work with that. An image of petting a scared puppy also helped.

Remember, we don't have to feel friendly, compassionate, joyful, or equanimous to practice the Brahma-Vihara. As the saying goes, it's the thought that counts—or at times the gesture, like stroking the back of our hands. This simple gesture gradually reassured me that my own goodwill was genuine and reliable and that I didn't have to feel inadequate. Brahma-Vihara practice became much easier when I knew I could turn fear of failure into a practice of compassion.

So far we've been looking at the formal practice, but of course relating to others is a huge component of daily life. We need to let our Brahma-Vihara practice on the cushion find its way into everyday situations. Again, the default is metta. We can make friendly good wishes in all situations. Watching or listening to the news is usually an opportunity for metta to shade toward compassion. If we're stuck in a crowd of cheering football supporters, we can wish that their happiness will continue, even through gritted teeth. This is metta in the shade of mudita. If a friend refuses to listen to our advice, we can remember that they are free to choose their own path in life and wish them well with whatever they choose to do. This is metta in the shade of equanimity.

We can also monitor our mood and respond appropriately. In all situations, we can wish ourselves well. When our mood turns sour, we can take a moment to acknowledge and comfort ourselves as best we can. This is a practice of self-compassion. When we do anything well or someone compliments us, we can take a moment for mudita. If we find ourselves worrying unduly about someone, we can remind ourselves that they have their own lives to live and that they have all the resources they need within themselves for perfect happiness. This is the practice of equanimity.

We can also bring our activities into our practice. As we're switching on the television, we can wish that this will help us feel more connected with the world or help us relax and let go of the stresses of the day. If we're taking a snack, we can wish that this might uplift us and give us the energy and joy we need to carry on. As we're going to meet a friend, we can wish that the encounter will help us both feel happy. Before we go into a meeting, we can wish that the business will benefit all concerned with our work. Whether we are cooking, teaching, repairing machines, emailing, or visiting a friend, all of these can be dedicated to our own and others' welfare.

That has given a general introduction to Brahma-Vihara practice. For the rest of this talk and over the next evenings, we will look more closely at each of the four divine abodes.

I want to start with what's usually left to last: equanimity. The reason I'm starting here is because it's the Brahma-Vihara most closely associated with vipassana. Also, it helps with overcoming the enemies of the other Brahma-Viharas. We've already met with equanimity in the factors of enlightenment. In our wild geese analogy, equanimity was the bird with the wide open wingspan, steadying the rest of the flock through the ups and downs of the journey. When we're looking at Brahma-Vihara, we're seeing how that steadiness can come to our aid and be expressed in our relationships with others.

In everyday language, equanimity is described as mental and emotional stability and composure, even under duress. Equanimity is born of wisdom. It is the imperturbable balance of mind that follows from insight into the true nature of reality. When we understand that letting go of reactivity to pleasure and pain brings peace, we will no longer be so foolish as to react angrily to disappointments or excitedly to life's enticements.

In the face of interpersonal relationships, equanimity sustains us through the loss of loved ones,

rejections, insults, seduction, and so on. With equanimity, we can acknowledge evil and danger and take appropriate care without blaming whoever is presenting the threat. Similarly, equanimity lets us enjoy all the benefits of knowing intelligent, delightful people without idolizing them or clinging to them in a needy way, fearful of rejection.

Equanimity is often confused with tranquility, which is a felt sense of calm and peace. But equanimity itself is rooted in wisdom, not in feeling. With equanimity, we might feel angry, upset, confused—but we will not act from these feelings. We will bear with them, knowing that just bearing these feelings is the path to deeper wisdom, and therefore deeper happiness and peace.

Equanimity develops as we learn to let go. Consider any of the major steps in life: a child's first day at school, graduation, twenty-first birthday, marriage. In all these, a new phase of life opens while the previous one is lost. Often the grief of loss goes unacknowledged in all the excitement, and so the father still nags his fifty-year-old son about spending too much money, and the sixty-year-old daughter worries whether her mum will like the dress she plans to wear for her retirement party.

Equanimity allows the sorrow within each milestone to be acknowledged. Our grip on our old parent-child roles loosens. The child finds parenting skills within themselves. The parent discovers their own childlike joys. Each sees the other in a new light—with more gratitude and respect, and less expectation.

Just as we need to let go of parent-child roles and demands, each relationship in life requires us to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. Our best friend moves abroad. Our sister dies. Our spouse asks for a divorce. These are harsh examples, but in minor ways the bonds of friendship are tested every day. Equanimity provides the spaciousness of heart and mind needed to accommodate all the hurts, misunderstandings, and disappointments inherent in human relationships.

Equanimity also keeps us calm throughout the ups and downs of our internal life. It gives us a wider perspective on our needs, fears, ambitions, and dislikes. We can feel our moods going down without shrinking into despair. And if we wake up soaring with confidence, we are delighted—but we don't zoom into ambitious plans and firm commitments, assuming this is the real me and that we'll never have a moment's misery for the rest of our lives.

The analogy of space is a good way of picturing equanimity. Space doesn't react when daggers and bullets fly through it. Neither does it curl up around sweet cakes, hoarding them against the intruders. Space accommodates pleasant and unpleasant, good and evil.

The far, or direct, enemy of equanimity is reactivity. If equanimity is like space, reactivity is a hard surface that things collide into, exploding on impact. We want things to fit in with the expectations and patterns we feel safe with. When this doesn't happen, the external world hits our wall of reactivity. This hurts. Shrapnel flies all around and others get hurt too, often setting off a chain reaction.

We build walls of reactivity in an attempt to shut out people who push our buttons. We dismiss, ignore, or belittle their approaches. They resent this and poke at us again and again in retaliation. With every hurt we reinforce the walls. We're tense even when they are miles away, because the thought of them isn't miles away. We carry our enemies around with us.

Likewise, when we idolize someone, we unwittingly build walls of reactivity around them. Every word they say, every move they make impacts us deeply. This ends up stifling the relationship. Neither party can breathe freely.

The near, or subtle, enemy of equanimity is indifference. We mistake indifference for equanimity because we don't feel any way disturbed by others. They can be in a rotten temper, but we are able to shrug it off. What they say doesn't matter to us. We barely notice them.

Indifference is actually another wall we build in an effort to shield ourselves from the potential for hurt in human relationships. Although things pass us by without impact, others feel our indifference as coldness and rejection. We can't empathize with people who are bereaved or having a relationship break up. We wonder why they can't just forget it and get on with life. And when a major calamity strikes us, we can't relate to our own confusion and upset. We keep all the emotional turmoil hidden with denial. We can't reach out for help because we don't even know we need any help. Indifference, in its quiet way, can be just as destructive as anger—both for ourselves and for our relationships.

The classic phrase used to develop equanimity is: *All beings are owners of their karma.* An understanding of the law of karma forms the basis for wise relationship.

Ultimately, happiness is a habit of mind, the fruit of good karma—meaning speech, actions, and thoughts motivated by kindness and wisdom. The Brahma-Viharas cultivate happiness, while speech, thought, and deeds motivated by ill-will, greed, and delusion cultivate unhappiness. An angry retort or spiteful remark can give us a temporary feeling of power, but the long-term price is a damaged relationship and a guilty conscience. Happiness rests on a clear conscience and universal goodwill.

The aim of repeating the phrase "all beings are owners of their karma" is to give us a wise perspective, to see that happiness is each person's own responsibility. But *kamasaka* is a very loaded phrase. It could help to break it down. "May I accept the fruits of karma" helps us bear with difficulties, and we can wish the same for others. On the positive side, we could wish "may I sow only good karma for the future" to help us develop new habits leading to happiness, and we can wish the same for others.

If the whole notion of karma seems foreign or confusing, here are a few alternative suggestions. "May we each find our own paths to peace"—I find this helps especially when I'm anxiously worrying about a friend. Perhaps they are, in my view, taking a wrong turn. They have ignored my perfectly reasonable and wise advice and are going to do things their own way. Damn them! To counter the mix of anger, indignation, and anxiety, I repeat, "May we each find our own paths to peace," until I can smile at my

deluded insistence that I know the way out of everyone's troubles.

Very much related to this is the phrase "May my wisdom guide me, and your wisdom guide you." It's especially useful after a disagreement. When I find myself repeating my opinions to myself over and over again, I switch to that phrase. It helps me acknowledge the wisdom of my viewpoint in a healthy way that leaves room for the very tiny possibility that the other person might have some wisdom too. In time, I again begin to smile at my arrogance and might even begin to see the other person's point of view.

When someone pushes a button and I feel myself rising up in anger, the phrase "May I not react to your behaviour" saves me from making the situation worse. It pulls attention back to myself, to what is in my long-term interest. Anger, on the other hand, pulls my attention outwards towards the other person and all that I find horrid about them at that moment. By repeating "May I not react to your behaviour," I am reminded that my primary business in life is to follow the Eightfold Path, and it saves me from making a whole lot of unnecessary bad karma.

When there isn't any particular difficulty that I'm trying to combat, the phrase "May I trust my Buddha nature" helps me generate equanimity within myself. I then extend this to others with "May you trust in your Buddha nature." All of these phrases evoke the understanding that we are each responsible for our own happiness and we each have all the resources needed for perfect happiness.

At times, very simple reassurances like "It's all okay" or "Take it easy" give us a measure of tranquility to help us through a challenge without making things worse. Later we can try some of the wisdom phrases suggested above, so as to distill the wisdom from the difficulty.

In the case of formal equanimity meditation, it often works best to start with metta for one of the easier categories and then switch to whatever phrase evokes equanimity. If you're feeling somewhat emotional or out of sorts, it may be easiest to generate equanimity in the categories we usually leave to last in the other Brahma-Viharas—for example, all beings, everyone in the world—and gradually work towards home. It's a question of experimenting to see what works best.

If grief, anger, or other forms of reactivity show up, don't be surprised. This is a natural part of the purification process. We're experiencing the dukkha of close attachment and the difficulty of letting go, of acknowledging the other as an independent being. If possible, continue with the practice, simply noting the reaction without giving it any close attention. If it gets overwhelming, switch to an easier category for a while. If the reactivity persists, try self-equanimity—for example, "May I find my own path to peace" or "It's all okay."

If your mind won't focus and keeps getting lost in thought without any strong underlying emotion, then it means the near enemy is surfacing. Switch to metta until you again sense a connection with the other person, then return to the phrases for equanimity. And if the disturbances continue to overwhelm, switch to vipassana to acknowledge whatever emotion is emerging. When the storm abates somewhat, it might

be possible to go back to wishing equanimity for yourself or others.

Finally, let's look at some opportunities to develop equanimity in daily life. If a friend lets us down, our partner takes us for granted, our child refuses to listen to advice, a phrase like "May I not be disturbed by your behaviour" prevents us from digging a pit of anger or self-pity and reminds us that we need to protect ourselves from the bad karma that would follow from reacting unskilfully.

Any parting requires equanimity if it is to be properly acknowledged. Making our small goodbyes meaningful prepares us for the major leave-takings in life. Likewise, new beginnings need equanimity. When we start a new project or relationship, we can easily get lost in a sea of false expectation. The phrase "This too will come to an end" gives us some perspective.

We can also practice equanimity in regard to our moods. "May I bear this karma willingly" could help us through the lows, while "May I enjoy this without expecting it to last"

Can help us through the highs.

We could reflect to see what things we get very uptight around—work, family, some project or hobby. To develop a sense of balance around these, we can tell ourselves "take it easy" whenever we feel ourselves going into overdrive.

We support equanimity when we let go of busyness in favour of relaxing activities—going out for walks in the open air, cups of tea, stretches, bathing, looking out the window. Whatever gives distance and perspective supports equanimity.

Vipassana practice naturally cultivates equanimity, so we should definitely find time for a daily vipassana meditation.

In summary, brahmavihāra meditation allows the wisdom we gain through vipassana to be expressed as love and care for the world. Three of the brahmavihāras—mettā, compassion, and muditā—work on our natural desire to connect with others. However, until we are fully enlightened, our love for others will be mixed up with our own needs for security.

To help disentangle the knot, we have the brahmavihāra of equanimity. This divine abode rests on the knowledge that each being is responsible for his or her own happiness. We cannot live other people's lives for them. We must keep remembering to let go of others and prioritise our own spiritual needs. This focus on our own path makes us more open and honest with others, which is in itself a very important aspect of kindness.

With equanimity, we allow more space in our close personal relationships, and we can bear to take the sufferings of the world to heart without being overwhelmed.

May our work with the brahmavihāras let our wisdom transform into loving relationships with all beings.

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