

Divine Abiding: Equanimity

Noirin Sheahan · Noirin's Teachings · 45:48

So far in this retreat we have been discussing Vipassanā meditation, especially as described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. For the next few days I want to talk about another approach to meditation described by the Buddha. This is termed *Brahmavihāra* practice. The term *Brahmavihāra* 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 *Brahmavihāra*: "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 *Brahmavihāra* because Vipassanā naturally cultivates these sublime states. In support of this approach there is the fact that the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* does not include a contemplation of the *Brahmavihāra*. 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 Vipassanā. 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 found a great relief in the fact that *Brahmavihāra* meditation isn't included in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. So I feel perfectly justified in relaxing any effort to generate goodwill. Instead, I sit back and let Vipassanā acknowledge and explore these negative reactions.

But I've come to value reflections on goodwill and the other *Brahmavihāra* as a way of softening my Vipassanā practice. The two approaches complement each other well. The more often we make the effort to cultivate the *Brahmavihāra*, the more often this new habit will be expressed quite naturally in

Vipassanā. Thus the observer is often watching goodwill, compassion, *mudita* or equanimity being cultivated quite naturally and without any deliberate effort in this direction. Vipassanā becomes a relaxed kind of Brahmavihāra practice.

In formal Brahmavihāra 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 Brahmavihāra in addition to Vipassanā, I follow the approach taken by Bhante and other teachers and think of Vipassanā as my main practice, but augment this with short stretches of Brahmavihāra practice, just as we do at night here on retreat. In daily life, the main emphasis is on putting the Brahmavihāra into action. This effort being supported by mindfulness and continually tailored to suit the particular situation.

The Brahmavihāra describe the enlightened heart's relationship to others. Goodwill, *mettā*. Compassion, the Pali term is *karuṇā*. Appreciative Joy, *muditā* in Pali and Equanimity, *upekkhā* in Pali. For this talk I'll use the Pali term *mettā* since that is so widely understood and also *muditā* 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 Brahmavihāra 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 *mettā*, or good will. 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 *muditā*. 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 Brahmavihāra later and over the next 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 will 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 *mettā* 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 who 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 like 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 Brahmavihāra. For example, the person who best evokes *muditā* might not be the person who best evokes compassion. For *muditā*, 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 Brahmavihāra 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 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, the *muditā* for the streak of self-confidence that is keeping us going.

All in all, the self can be the hardest of all categories for Brahmavihāra 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'm saying 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, 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 are 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 to strengthen the bonds of attachment, not of goodwill.

This is one of the toughest aspects of Brahmavihāra practice. To keep our good will 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 that a pure, more disinterested attitude of *mettā* 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 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 *mettā* 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 Brahmavihāra 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, etc. The near enemy can easily be mistaken for the truly divine abiding, attachment being mistaken for *mettā*, pity for compassion.

Much of the challenge in Brahmavihāra practice involves learning to recognize and work around these enemies as well as all the usual hindrances, wandering mind, aversion, sleepiness, etc. While Vipassanā asks us to turn attention directly on the hindrance, Brahmavihāra 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 Vipassanā. 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, and we trust that perseverance will eventually establish the good habit as our new default.

Let's explore the difference between Brahmavihāra and Vipassanā meditation practices a little further. In Vipassanā, 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 Vipassanā 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 Brahmavihāra are strengthened. It 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 Brahmavihāra 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 Vipassanā 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 filtering down into the bed.

In Brahmavihāra 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 its way. This is when we are putting an effort into our Brahmavihāra 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 through to keep a trickle of river flowing. This is where we're working very sensitively with our emotions in Brahmavihāra 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 Vipassanā break in our *mettā* practice to get some clear space around whatever emotions have been thrown up.

In Vipassanā, we are receptive and open, exploring everything without judgment. Anything goes. In Brahmavihāra 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 *anattā* 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, etc. 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 *mettā* practice, learning to be kind to ourselves during the frustrations that show up in Brahmavihāra 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-vihāra* practice. *Mettā* 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-vihāra* 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, equanimous to practice the *Brahma-vihāra*. 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-vihāra* 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. So we need to let our *Brahma-vihāra* practice on the cushion find its way into everyday

situations. Again, the default is *mettā*. We can make friendly good wishes in all situations. Watching or listening to the news is usually an opportunity for *mettā* to shade towards 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 *mettā* in the shade of *muditā*. 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 *mettā* 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 *muditā*. 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 TV, 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-vihāra* practice. For the rest of this talk and over the next evenings, we 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-vihāra* most closely associated with *vipassanā*. Also it helps with overcoming the enemies of the other *Brahma-vihāra*. 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-vihāra*, 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 idolising them or clinging to them in a needy way, fearful of rejection.

Equanimity is often confused with tranquillity, 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, 21st 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 50-year-old son about spending too much money and the 60-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 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. The 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 idolise 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 empathise 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 *kamma*. An understanding of the law of *kamma* forms the basis for wise relationship. Ultimately, happiness is a habit of mind, the fruit of good *kamma*, meaning speech, actions and thoughts motivated by kindness and wisdom. The *Brahma-vihāra* cultivate happiness, while speech, thought and deeds motivated by ill-will, greed, 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 *kamma* is to give us a wise perspective to see that happiness is each person's own responsibility. But *kammasaka* is a very loaded phrase. It could help to break it down. May I accept the fruits of *kamma* to help us bear with the difficulties and we can wish the same for others. On the positive side we could wish may I sow only good *kamma* 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 *kamma* 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. Till 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 on 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 saves me from making a whole lot of unnecessary bad *kamma*.

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, take it easy, give us a measure of tranquillity to help us through a challenge without making things worse. Later we can try some of the wisdom phrases suggested above, so as to distil the wisdom from the difficulty.

In the case of formal equanimity meditation, it often works best to start with *mettā* 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-vihāra*. 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 and 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 *mettā* 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 *vipassanā* 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 digging a pit of anger or self-pity and reminds us that we need to protect ourselves from bad *kamma*, which would follow from reacting unskillfully.

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 practise equanimity in regard to our moods. May I bear this *kamma* 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. For example, going out for walks in the open air, cups of tea, stretches, bathing, looking out the window. Whatever gives distance and perspective supports equanimity. *Vipassanā* practice naturally cultivates equanimity. So we should definitely find time for a daily *vipassanā* meditation.

In summary, *Brahma-vihāra* meditation allows the wisdom we gain through *vipassanā* to be expressed as love and care for the world. Three of the *Brahma-vihāra*, *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 *Brahma-vihāra* 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 *Brahma-vihāra* let our wisdom transform to loving relationships with all beings.

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