

4 Brahmaviharas (Divine Abodes): Loving-kindness, Compassion, Appreciative Joy, Equanimity

11 benefits of Loving-kindness practice:

“People who practice *metta*
sleep peacefully,
wake peacefully,
have peaceful dreams,
people love them,
devas love them,
devas will protect them,
fire, poisons & weapons cannot harm them,
their minds are concentrated,
their faces serene,
they die peacefully,
and when they die they are reborn in the *brahma* realms.” (AN 11.15)

Two traditional methods of practice:

1. Pervading the 6 directions with a mind imbued with each feeling.
(This method is described in the Pali suttas.)
2. Cultivation of concentration using phrases & categories of beings.
(This method is described in the *Visuddhimagga* commentary.)

Method 1: “Pervading”

Metta (Loving-kindness, friendliness)

“Here a bhikkhu abides pervading one quarter [direction] with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Karuna (Compassion)

“He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all encompassing world with a mind imbued with compassion, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Mudita (Sympathetic/Empathic/Appreciative Joy)

“He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with appreciative joy, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all encompassing world with a mind imbued with appreciative joy, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

Upekkha (Equanimity)

“He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all encompassing world with a mind imbued with appreciative joy, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.
“This is called the immeasurable deliverance of mind.”

Anuruddha Sutta (MN 127)

Method 2: “Phrases”

Metta

May you be safe [from harm of all kinds, inner & outer].

May you be happy [& peaceful].

May you be strong [in body & mind].

May you live in the ease of well-being.

Karuna

I care about your suffering.

May your suffering decrease.

Mudita

May your joy continue & increase.

Upekkha

You (all beings) are the owner(s) of your (their) actions [*kamma/karma*] heir to your actions, born of your actions, related to your actions, abide supported by your actions. Whatever action you do, for good or for ill, of that you will be the heir.

Practice:

Visualize the chosen person(s),
invoke the feeling toward them,
think the phrases, slowly, with intention,
directing your wish for well-being toward the person.

(Phrases can be altered to better generate the feeling for you.)

Simple sequence of beneficiaries:

1. Benefactor (someone easy to wish well for)
2. Self (traditionally first, but for many of us not so easy to love)
3. Dear Friend / Family (one or as many as you like)
4. Neutral Person (anyone you can visualize)
5. Difficult Person (start with minor difficult people & go from there!)
6. All Beings (visualized outward in 10 directions)

Traditional categories of “all beings”: all beings... breathing things... creatures... persons... those with personalities, women... men... noble & non-noble ones... deities... humans... those in states of loss. (Vm 9.50-52)

You can also improvise them: near/far, large/small, flying/swimming/walking, young/old, human/non-human, oppressed, children, elders...)

The feeling is most important. Return to an easier category in the sequence if you find the feeling difficult to maintain.

The practice can be done with an emotional healing emphasis or a concentration (*samādhi*) focus. For healing, really let the wish for well-being and the relationships open your heart. For *samādhi*, emphasize continuity of attention and relaxed non-distraction.

Further reading:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel006.html>

Pali Canon texts & commentary: [accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org)

Talks (audio) by contemporary teachers: [dharmaseed.org](http://www.dharmaseed.org)