

Four Kinds of Sublime Dhamma Practices (Brahmacariya)

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Abstract

Four kinds of sublime *dhamma* practices in the Buddhist philosophy are loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Loving all beings just like one's own baby, feeling pity and wishing to give help for those who are in misery, feeling happy for those who are in the state of success and wealth, and seeing others without bias are the living and practicing in accordance with four kinds of sublime *dhammas* (*brahmadhamma*). These four sublime *dhamma* practices are the *dhammas* that should be accepted and practiced by all kinds of race and religions. Therefore, these four sublime *dhammas* would show the good practice and views which are the basic needs for the establishment of peaceful human society.

Keywords: *mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*

Introduction

Four kinds of sublime *dhammas* (*brahmadhammas*) in the Buddhist philosophy are loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). These four sublime *dhammas* (*brahmadhammas*) are mentioned as a kind of systematic practice only in Buddhism. Good practices such as loving mutually between people, helping each other, and compassion can be found much in people of Myanmar.

Man could not live alone. Peaceful human society that is free from defilements (*kilesās*), such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), ignorance (*moha*) etc. can be established by practicing any one of four sublimes *dhammas*, namely, loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

The word 'four sublime *dhammas* practices (*brahmacariya*)' is a kind of Myanmar word derived from *Pāḷi* language. The word *brahmacariya* is a combination of two words *brahma* and *cariya* which means the practice of noble ones, practice of pure ones, and practice of cleansed ones. On the other hand it means conduct that can be possessed and fulfilled only by those who have good and noble practice.

The word *brahmavihāra* is found in many occasions so much in the *Pāḷi* canons, commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*), and sub-commentaries (*ṭīkā*). The word *brahmavihāra* is the combination of two words *brahma* and *vihāra*. The word *brahma* means sublime and *vihāra* denotes practicing or living. Therefore the word *brahmavihāra* can be defined as sublime living. In other words it can mean, living like the brahmas.

However, *Sayadaw Ashin Jankābhivamsa* explained that, it is so called as *brahmacariya* because mind of one who is practicing four sublime *dhammas* is neither hot nor dry just like the mind of those having unwholesomeness (*akusala*) but peaceful and cool.

Loving kindness (*Mettā*)

Mettā denotes loving. Such a kind of love is completely devoid of attachment, only having the pure white love. On the other hand it is a kind of good will for others things. Wishing others to be endowed with all kinds of good things such as to be free from danger,

be filled with peace of mind and body, and to be successful in education, economy, and social life is not other things but *mettā*.

True *mettā* is pure and cool without any sorrow (*soka*), craving (*taṇhā*), and passion (*rāga*). Therefore, the true *mettā* is compared to clean, pure, and cold water. While performing for the welfare of others the main thing is to accomplish others' welfare. It should not be hoped for the return of reward for deeds having done for others. Moreover, it should not be attached and should not keep the fetters (*samyojanas*). In this way, it should be noted that it is not true *mettā* if it is mixed with attachment while doing for the welfare of others.

Love to son, love to wife, and love to relatives etc. mix with attachment; such kinds of love are called love depending on the household in Pāli 'gehasitapema' in scriptures. This kind of love is a mixture of true *mettā* and attachment. According to the saying 'too much *saddhā* leads to craving, *taṇhā*, it goes beyond true *mettā* and reaches to the area of craving with the strong nature of attachment. Therefore, the proximate enemy of true *mettā* that is clean and cool is craving (*taṇhā*), and passion (*rāga*).

The far enemy of true *mettā* is anger (*dosa*), ill will (*byāpāda*). *Bāpāda* consists of wishing to oppress others, thought of ill will to others, and envy. Therefore, there is never true *mettā* if it is persisting of these kinds of unwholesome darts (*akusala*).

Venerable Channa who was born at the same time of the Buddha attained enlightenment only after the Buddha had entered *prinibbāna* as he was too attached to the Buddha. The respect of *Thera Vakkali* to the Buddha was more attachment than that of *Thera Channa*. Therefore, love with craving is not true *mettā*.

Once, a devotee asked who he should start to send his love first while cultivating loving kindness (*mettā*) to his master. His master said he should start to send love to whom he love most. Accordingly he was sitting outside his bedroom and sending love to his wife. He suddenly stood up and went to his wife as his love to his wife was stronger and stronger with passion and attachment. He suffered the effect of passion and attachment by nodding the door with his head as the door was closed inside. This kind of love should be noted as *gehasitapema*, love depending on the household.

There are several examples showing wholesomeness (*kusala*) through love with true *mettā*. Once upon a time, a mother cow was not hurt by lancet thrown by a hunter while she is feeding her baby calf by breast feeding with true tender love. The lancet could not hurt the mother cow and it became soft like a palm leaf because of the power of true *mettā*. In this way, true *mettā* that is pure, clean, and cool can be seen between parents and children, husband and wife, and between friends. The nature of true *mettā* is the ability to keep the mind straightforward both for love ones and hateful ones and enemies to be free from danger and want them to have prosperity.

Therefore, wishing all beings for their good and welfare just like oneself is one of the main characteristics of *mettā*. Moreover, *mettā* does not have the thought of ruining or ill will others (*byāpāda*).

Compassion (*Karuṇā*)

Karuṇā is a kind of pity for others or compassion. The main characteristic of *karuṇā* is wishing of others' suffering to be cured. In other words, *karuṇā* denotes the nature of wishing to help others from their mental and physical sufferings.

Several kinds of rescuing such as rescuing victims of natural disasters like fire hazard, flood, and conflagration done either by in person or by financial support is conducting the manner of *karuṇā*.

Ture karuṇā is pure and clean without any tinge of sorrow (*soka*). One should not hope for gratitude from helping with *compassin* those who are in need. The proximate enemy of *karuṇā* is sorrow (*soka*). Worry appears while tending the ill children and sorrow appears due to having no capacity to help one's relatives in spite of wanting to help them are the sorrow (*soka*) that goes beyond the area of *karuṇā*. Therefore too much *karuṇā* will lead to sorrow.

The Buddha won over the *Māra* with *mettā* when he was about to become Buddha as he had fulfilled perfection (*pāramī*) during many existences of the Buddha-to-be. Likewise, the Buddha won over *Devadatta* who endangered his life by cultivating compassion (*karuṇā*). Therefore, those who want to be virtuous ones should emulate the example of the future Buddha's practice of loving kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*).

Sympathetic Joy (*Muditā*)

Muditā means feeling happy. *Muditā* should be cultivated only on those who are in the state of wellbeing (*sukhitā*). Feeling happy for those who are wealthy, those who get promotions, those who are successful in education and business is called cultivation of sympathetic joy (*muditā*). It is easy to cultivate compassion (*karuṇā*) towards those who are in state of misery but cultivation of sympathetic joy (*muditā*) towards those who are prosperous is difficult to perform. Ordinary worldlings (*puthujana*) are overwhelmed with envy (*issā*) and stinginess (*macchariya*).

Therefore, the opposite of sympathetic joy (*muditā*) are covetousness, wanting others' belongings and success of others by unfair means (*abhijhā*) and envy for others' wealth and success (*issā*).

The proximate enemy of sympathetic joy (*muditā*) is joy (*pīṭisomanassa*) associated with craving (*taṇhā*) and greed (*lobha*). Crying of parents out of happiness for their children's success, such as, getting promotion, developing in business and education is beyond the boundary of sympathetic joy (*muditā*). Therefore, we should keep our mind to cultivate true sympathetic joy (*muditā*) that can be cultivated in all the prosperous beings without discrimination.

Equanimity (*Upekkhā*)

The fourth *dhamma* among the four sublime *dhamma* practices is *equanimity* (*upekkhā*). It is the most essential thing to have and the most difficult to practice. *Upekkhā* means to ignore. The desired meanings of the word *upekkhā* are "right analyzing, right seeing", "seeing fairly", and "seeing impartially." In other words, it is devoid of fetters (*samjōyjana*), hate, and no partiality.

Upekkhā is neither in line with the nature of *mettā* that has love, nor *karuṇā* having compassion, and *muditā* having sympathetic joy for others in the state of *prosperity*. It is devoid of hate like *dosa* and keeping up straightforwardly with no bias.

The nature of *upekkā* is keeping one's mind in peace realizing that the effect is deserved in accordance with one's deeds done before just as the saying goes, 'sabbesattā *kammasakā*'. However, some do neglect their children, pupils, and friends who do not obey their admonishments or advice. Such a kind of negligence cannot be called *upekkhā*. It is just a kind of disregard. Therefore, the true *upekkhā* of sublime *dhamma* practice should be cultivated along the middle way after abandoning the two extremes of love and hate, happiness and sorrow.

Cultivation of true *upekkhā* can be practiced only after one has mastery over any cultivation of *mettā*, *karuṇā*, and *muditā*. Therefore, cultivation of sublime *dhamma* practice, *upekkhā*, is the most difficult to practice.

Cultivation of Sublime Dhamma Practices

Cultivation of loving kindness (*mettābhāvanā*) can be practiced in two ways. Either according to the method explored in the *Metta Sutta* or according to the method explained in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* in which loving kindness should be cultivated in ten directions.

In the *Metta Sutta*, the Buddha taught that one who cultivates loving kindness (*mettā*) should love all beings just like one's only child. While conducting cultivation of loving kindness (*mettā*) one should not discriminate between superior, middle, and inferior. Moreover, having to look down and harming each other should be avoided.

When cultivating loving kindness (*mettābhāvanā*), one should send loving kindness (*mettā*) to the four kinds of person, namely, (1) oneself, (2) dear one, (3) middle one, and (4) enemy. One should cultivate loving kindness (*mettābhāvanā*) either in *Pāli* or in Myanmar that one could understand well. The main point here is one's mind must intend towards the person one wishes to. One can send loving kindness (*mettā*) either mentally or verbally as one desires to do so.

The first being to cultivate oneself among these four persons mentioned before is because one can sympathize for others. Every being in the world loves oneself most. Therefore, one should send loving kindness towards others to be happy and healthy as one wishes to be. After that one has to send loving kindness towards the person who one dears. And after that, a person to whom one neither loves nor hates (the middle one), and lastly one's enemy should be sent loving kindness.

Cultivation of loving kindness (*mettābhāvanā*) used by many people is according to the method mentioned in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga Pāli*, sending loving kindness in 528 ways. These are as follows.

Sabbesattā, may all beings be

1. *Averāhontu* - free from danger
2. *Abyāpajjāhontu* – free from mental suffering (*domanassa*)
3. *Anīghāhontu* – free from physical suffering (*dukkha*)
4. *Sukhi attānaṃ pariharantu* – be happy and able to have long life.

Focusing one's mind either on many beings or on one being and wishing them for their welfare, such a kind of concentrating and wishing could radiate loving kindness (*mettā*) to them. Mere verbal recitation of “*averahontu*” without one's mind not focusing is not real cultivation of loving kindness (*mettābhāvanā*) and loving kindness (*mettā*) could not reach to the desired person. Therefore, it is better to cultivate loving kindness what one understands than reciting in *Pāli* what one had learnt by heart. One should stick to the method which one had preferred among various methods relating to cultivation of loving kindness (*mettā*).

Eleven benefits of cultivating loving kindness mentioned in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* are as follows.

1. having sound sleep
2. waking up peacefully

3. not having bad dreams
4. being loved by human beings
5. being loved by celestial beings
6. being protected by celestial beings
7. being unaffected by fire, poison, and weapons
8. ability to develop concentration quickly
9. becoming serene and cheerful
10. dying without bewilderment
11. being reborn in the *brahma* world after death

Cultivating sympathetic joy (*karuṇā*), one should radiate it either in *Pāḷi*, “*dukkhamucchantu*” or in Myanmar “be free from suffering that is suffering right now”. True *karuṇā* is wishing one to be free from all the suffering that he is suffering now.

However, it is not the true *karuṇā* praying for the patient to die quickly when seeing he is suffering from illness and wanting to shorten the period of suffering. And it will be a kind of unwholesome conduct of ill will (*byāpāda ducarita*). When cultivating compassion (*karuṇā*) one should focus his mind on the person who is in the state of misery. It would not be true *karuṇā* by just reciting “*dukkhamucchantu*” and not focusing the mind on the person who is in the state of misery.

Sympathetic joy (*muditā*) is a real feeling of happiness for those who are in the state of prosperity (*sukhita sattā*) and not them to lose their wealth they have possessed. Therefore, cultivating sympathetic joy (*muditā*) should be radiated “*yathāladda, sampattito māvigacchantu*” in *Pāḷi* and “continue to possess for long what they have”. True sympathetic joy (*muditā*) is the feeling of joy when seeing and hearing of others’ prosperity.

Cultivating equanimity (*upekkhā*) should be radiated either “*kammasakā*” in *Pāḷi* or “*kamma* only is the only one’s wealth”. When cultivating thus, one should bear in mind that every being should enjoy and suffer according to his *kamma* and no need to worry. Keeping one’s mind that either good or bad is the consequence of his *kamma*.

Buddhist people are radiating loving kindness (*mettā*) after daily routine of paying respect to the Buddha. It is not only radiating loving kindness (*mettā*) but also cultivating all four sublime *dhamma* practices (*brāmacariya*).

Loving kindness (*mettā*) is focusing the mind on beings as being love. Compassion (*karuṇā*) focuses the beings as pitiful beings, sympathetic joy (*muditā*) is focusing the mind on beings as being happy, and equanimity (*upekkhā*) focuses the mind on beings as to be ignored. Therefore, all four sublime *dhamma* practices could not be cultivated at the same time simultaneously.

Wild and crude mind and volition will be diminished even only by cultivating loving kindness (*mettābhāvanā*) of the four sublime *dhamma* practices (*brahmacariya*) whenever getting opportunity to practice. After diminishing the wild and crude mind and volition, one will be eager to perform for the welfare of oneself, for others, for the country and race. Finally, one will perform these good things for all beings in practical ways. Therefore, these four sublime *dhamma* practices (*brahmacariya*) are the practices all Buddhists should conduct practically.

Conclusion

Although one cannot do cultivating four sublime *dhamma* practices (*brahmacariya*) always one performs energetically for the welfare of others, one's nation and race, helping those who are in the state of misery, feeling happy for those who are in the state of prosperity when the opportunity comes. Such a kind of conduct is practicing the four sublime *dhamma* practices (*brahmacariya*). By practicing thus our human society is always peaceful and enjoyable.

Therefore, the four sublime *dhamma* practices (*brahmacariya*) are practices that should be conducted not only by Buddhists but by every race and religion. Thus, these practices are the practices important for the fields of religion and social dealing.

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