

## Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras Year Three

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### Module 5: Freedom of Heart – Exploring the Brahmaviharas

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*Knowing now  
that the life at which I aim  
is a circumference  
continually expanding  
through sympathy and  
understanding  
rather than an exclusive centre  
of pure self – feeling  
the whole I seek  
is centre plus circumference  
and now the struggle at the centre is over  
the circumference  
beckons from everywhere.*

There are many places in traditional Buddhist texts where you can find very beautiful exhortations and descriptions of the Brahma-vihāras. The words above, though, are from ‘Walking the Coast’ by contemporary Western poet, Kenneth White. They are probably not a conscious attempt on his part to describe the experience of dwelling in the Brahma-vihāras (though he does refer to Buddhist texts and teachers in his poetry) but they certainly indicate something of the experience of the four great rational emotions of the Brahma-vihāras – loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy or gladness (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Here is an excerpt from the end of the *Kalama Sutta*. The Kalamans have asked the Buddha to help them think clearly about the various teachings they hear. After doing so, he ends thus:

*“Now, Kalamas, one who is a noble disciple – thus devoid of greed, devoid of ill will, undeluded, alert, and resolute - keeps pervading the first direction [the east] – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with good will. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.*

*“He keeps pervading the first direction – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.*

*“He keeps pervading the first direction – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with appreciation. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with appreciation: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.*

*“He keeps pervading the first direction – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.”*

(A.N. 3.65)

## **What is this course about?**

It’s a six week meditation course aimed at:

- Introducing you to the four Brahma-vihāra practices.
- Helping you to cultivate positive emotion.
- Helping you deepen your practice of meditation generally using the Brahma-vihāras.

Being focused on meditation practice, this course is different from the mostly study based modules you will already have covered.

Each time your mitra group meets you’ll be:

- Meditating together.
- Engaging in workshops which explore each of the Brahma-vihāras.
- Discussing your experience of the practices.

Outside of your weekly groups, you’ll be:

- Doing the practices each day.
- Perhaps checking in with someone else from your mitra group – a meditation ‘buddy’.
- Keeping a meditation diary.

There is audio material – talks and led practices – available to help you in all this.

You may know these practices already. You may have been on a meditation retreat which focused on them. That's great because you'll be able to help people in your group who are new to them. And you've got the opportunity now to reflect on them again and review the extent to which they are alive in your practice of meditation and daily life.

### **What's required from you?**

A commitment to:

- Go to your mitra group meetings for the duration of the course.
- Keep up a regular meditation practice over the course, the aim being a daily practice of at least 30 minutes, but, whenever possible, a 50 minute sit.
- Keep a meditation diary for the duration of the course. This is an outline of what practice you did, when and for how long; to what extent you were concentrated and how that felt; to what extent you were distracted and what the nature of that distraction was. It's up to you how much detail you include. Some people construct a chart that they fill in. Other people prefer to write more extensively. For the Brahma-vihāras you could make a note of who you put into the various stages.
- Do any given preparation between meetings.
- And, if it's possible, pair up with someone in the group as 'meditation buddies', i.e. you meet up, phone or email each other at some point in the week to talk about your mediation experience.

As you probably know there are Brahma-vihāra retreats that you could go on, maybe after doing the module with your group. That would certainly give you a valuable opportunity to take these practices further.

## The course programme

What follows assumes that you go through the material in six weeks. But you and your group leader may decide to extend that somewhat depending on your particular local circumstances, or maybe cover the material over a weekend retreat.

### *Introductory Reading*

If you can, please find the time to read the following either before or during the course.

- Sangharakshita's book *Living with Kindness*, which is based on the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*.
- The material on the Brahma-vihāras in Kamalashila's book *Meditation*.

### *Week One – Mettābhāvanā 1*

- Mettābhāvanā.
- Tea break.
- Led workshop on mettā.
- Discussion and report back on that.
- Study homework: listen to a talk on the Brahma-vihāras. Not everyone in the group needs to listen to the same talk. Or your group leader may decide on one talk that everyone listens to. Options on Free Buddhist Audio are:
  - *Mettābhāvanā – Introduction and Basic Tools* by Kamalashila:  
<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=M11A>
  - *Brahma-vihāras and the Key Moment* by Kulaprabha  
<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC99>
  - *Introducing the Great Love* by Padmavajra  
<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM690>
  - Meditation practice for coming week: mettābhāvanā, mindfulness of breathing.

### ***Week Two – Mettābhāvanā 2***

- Discussion points on the Brahma-vihāras:
  - Bring points that interest or puzzle you from the talk that you listened to.
  - Or bring questions from your practice of the mettābhāvanā.
- Tea break.
- Introduction to the near enemies of mettā. See Kamalashila's book *Meditation*, p.192.
- Mettābhāvanā practice.
- Meditation practice for coming week: mettābhāvanā, mindfulness of breathing.

### ***Week Three – Karuṇābhāvanā***

- Karuṇā workshop.
- Reporting-in on your experience in that.
- Introduction of the near and far enemies of karuṇā, p.197 in Kamalashila's *Meditation*.
- Tea break.
- Lead through of karuṇābhāvanā practice.
- Meditation practice for the coming week: mindfulness of breathing, mettābhāvanā and karuṇābhāvanā.

### ***Week Four – Muditābhāvanā***

- Muditā workshop.
- Reporting-in on your experience in that.
- Introduce near and far enemies of muditā, p.200 in Kamalashila's *Meditation*.
- Tea break.
- Lead through of muditābhāvanā practice.
- Meditation practice for the coming week: mindfulness of breathing, mettābhāvanā, muditābhāvanā.

### ***Week Five – Upekkhābhāvanā***

- Upekkhā workshop.
- Report back on that.

- Introduce near and far enemies of upekkhā, p.202 in Kamalashila's *Meditation*.
- Tea break.
- Lead through of upekkhābhāvanā practice.
- Meditation practice for the coming week: mindfulness of breathing, mettābhāvanā and upekkhābhāvanā.

### ***Week Six – Conclusion and Pūjā***

- Report back on your experience of the benefits and challenges of the Brahma-vihāras.
- Tea break.
- Either the upekkhābhāvanā or a Brahma-vihāra practice of your choice.
- Brahma-vihāras Pūjā featuring Brahma-vihāras readings.

### ***Summary of Main Reading and Audio Material***

- *Living with Kindness* by Sangharakshita. Very good background reading for this module:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=693>

- *Meditation* by Kamalashila, especially pp. 192-206

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=342>

*Online version:*

<http://kamalashila.co.uk/page7/page7.html>

- Notes on the Brahma-vihāras by Tejananda can be downloaded from the Vajraloka website:

<http://vajraloka.org/articles.html>

- *The Four Sublime States* by Nyanaponika Thera is available from the Access to Insight website:

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

- Audio material on Free Buddhist Audio (see above):
  - Mettābhāvāna – Introduction and Basic Tools by Kamalashila. Good listening for a recap of the practice:  
<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=M11A>
  - Brahma-vihāras and the Key Moment – a talk by Kulaprabha:  
<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC99>
  - Introducing the Great Love – a talk by Padmavajra:  
<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM690>
  - Led meditations available on Free Buddhist Audio:
    - Mettābhāvāna Introduction by Kamalashila, a short and full lead through of the practice:  
<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/meditation/>
    - The Brahma-vihāras – a series of led meditations and workshops by Kulaprabha:  
<http://tinyurl.com/6gaedls>