

Brahmaviharas - The Divine Abodes

mettā
Loving-kindness,
friendliness

karunā
Compassion

muditā
Sympathetic joy,
appreciative joy

upekkhā
Equanimity,
equipoise

A mind well cultivated in metta is supreme in beauty. SĀ 743

Mendicants, of all the grounds for making worldly merit, none are worth a sixteenth part of the heart's release by love. Surpassing them, the heart's release by love shines and glows and radiates. Mettābhāvanāsutta, IT 27

Brahmaviharas as a meditative cultivation

affective dimension - transforming habit patterns, purification

It's impossible, reverend, it cannot happen that the heart's release by love has been developed and properly implemented, yet somehow ill will still occupies the mind. For it is the heart's release by love that is the escape from ill will.' AN 6.13

cognitive dimension - supporting insight into not-self

„A mind that has achieved meditative absorption induced by the sublime states will be pure, tranquil, firm, collected and free of coarse selfishness. It will thus be well prepared for the final work of deliverance which can be completed only by insight.“ Nyanaponika, 1995

Boundless, without measure - appamāna

Through the practice of the BVs the mind becomes vast, boundless, immeasurable.

One abides pervading one quarter 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 oneself, one abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will. MN 7

It is just as if there were a person skilled at blowing a conch. They go to a place where nobody has ever heard it. They climb up a high mountain at midnight, and with all their might they blow the conch. A wonderful sound comes out of it that pervades the four directions. (MĀ 152)

BVs as relational qualities

„These four attitudes are said to be excellent or sublime because they are the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings (sattesu samma patipatti). They provide, in fact, the answer to all situations arising from social contact. They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. They level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revive joy and hope long abandoned, and promote human brotherhood against the forces of egotism.“ Nyanaponika, 1995

Note: For compassion in action often the word ‚anukampa‘ rather than karuna is being used. (See Analayo, 2015, 13)

Cetovimutti - Liberation of mind

The practice of the Brahmaviharas leads to cetovimutti, a liberation from
- illwill and hostility (mettā), from vexation (karuna), from discontent (muditā), from lust (upekkhā).
- confines, boundaries (appamāna cetovimutti)

In this way the BVs support the progress to final liberation, but they need to be combined with the factors of awakening.

„The brahmavihāras offer a distinct advantage over other forms of tranquillity meditation. Due to their boundless nature, the condition of a temporary liberation of the mind can be experienced already with lesser degrees of concentration and does not depend exclusively on the successful attainment of absorption.“ Analayo, Compassion and Emptiness, 58.