

Brahmavihāras: Equanimity (5 of 5)

January 1, 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

love, equanimity, freedom, compassion, appreciative joy, purity, friendly, caring, peace, ease, goodwill, generosity, mind, heart, *brahmavihāras*, *muditā*

Gil Fronsdal

Welcome to 2021. Last year, the idea was to have 20-20 vision. Little did we know what 2020 would bring. Maybe it's a little silly. But when I think of 2021, the obvious thing for me is that it's a year for us to become adults – for our country and the world to step into some greater maturity – because of the challenges of last year.

Certainly, I think it's supportive, healthy, and empowering to wish something like that. We're interested in incorporating and using the challenges of last year as fuel or a catalyst for further growth along the Buddhist path of freedom and compassion. So may we continue to grow and mature into a kind of cultural adulthood together.

The *brahmavihāras* are four qualities or expressions of love. In the teachings of the Buddha, *brahmavihāra*

refers specifically to the meditation practice on these four states. We practice them in daily life, and in some ways, they're not unique to Buddhism at all. Friendliness and goodwill are everywhere hopefully. I think most people and cultures celebrate compassion and appreciate its value. Celebrating with people is a great human custom. Maybe they don't call it *muditā* or the complicated phrase “appreciative joy,” but people celebrate together all the time. Equanimity might not be as common, especially equanimity as a kind of love. But all four of these are a meditation practice and teachings of the Buddha.

It is an amazing, astounding thing that these four wonderful qualities of love can pervade and characterize the whole quality of one's mind, heart, and very being. If you're okay with the word ‘pure,’ it's almost as if we can live in a mind or heart that's pure love, which has freed itself from ill will, cruelty, and any kind of selfish forms of being in relationship with other people that might look like love, but is complicated by selfishness. It's possible to have purity with no selfishness, self-preoccupation, self-conceit, or attachment. And have it be the primary focus or absorption of concern for the mind and heart.

Just like with deep concentration, the goodness that comes from meditation on breathing becomes what we get absorbed in. So, we can be absorbed in love. It is an astounding and beautiful thing that human beings

have this capacity – and to appreciate this capacity. We don't have to leave it to chance. We can cultivate and develop it. In this regard, I think it's interesting to consider whether love, goodwill, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity – are they emotions? Are they attitudes? Are they motivations? Or are they decisions or choices that we make?

I'm not sure how to answer this question myself, except to say it's probably a bit of all of those. But the last one is the one that may be the most surprising – that it's a decision. It's a choice to make. And the choice is easier to make if we've cultivated, discovered, or recognized the innate capacity for love, care, and compassion that lives in us.

There are other innate things we have. We have innate capacities for cruelty and hostility. But those are more of the surface mind and heart. They're more states of agitation. And to have the agitation quiet and experience this. I think of love and its purity as a state of profound well-being and peace.

Even compassion has a sweetness to it, if it's pure compassion without selfishness, self-concern, or agitation. In that they're already here for us – at least as a capacity or a potential – when we start recognizing it's there, to choose that. To choose love over hostility. To choose love over being mean. To choose love and af-

firmation rather than negation. To support people and build them up, rather than tear them down. To appreciate what's good in them.

For that to grow and develop, don't be too focused on what's not so good in people. Because sometimes what we focus on is what we feed and develop. So make a decision to love more. Let's love. Let's choose to be friendly and caring. However, be careful it isn't another agitation, should, or obligation. But rather, it is a manifestation. We're allowing for something to manifest, which is already here – an impulse, feeling, desire, or a form of wisdom. So it becomes more innate, in a sense, than it is. It's a choice, but it's a choice to connect to something that's here, and allow it to manifest, rather than manufacture it.

In this regard, these *brahmavihāras*, when they have a kind of purity or fullness in them, are also a manifestation of freedom. They're closely related to the Buddhist path of freedom. Independent of cultivating the *brahmavihāras*, the more free we become in meditation, Buddhist practice, or life – most people find that there's a natural impulse to be compassionate, to care, and to love. As we become more loving, that tends to bring more freedom.

Love is an antidote and a solvent for attachments. Love is a solvent for fear and hostility, which we may be car-

rying with us. Love is a solvent for resistance. So whether we're on the path of freedom and then discover love comes along – or we're on the path of love and then discover freedom comes along – this freedom and love go hand in hand.

The equanimity *brahmavihāra* is one of love's most mature forms, where we have a deep, deep love – a fullness of love that's almost synonymous with peace. We are so at ease and peaceful with what's there – and unactivated by the Eight Worldly Winds of gain and loss, praise and blame, pain and pleasure, success and failure – that these worldly winds can happen to us. Because love is so stable, it doesn't agitate the love. There's peacefulness and ease with it. We stay free. Freedom protects our love, and love protects our freedom.

So, it's partly a decision – a wonderful decision. It's a decision that maybe is itself an expression of our freedom.

May 2021 be a year of greater and greater love and care. If we're going to have a better world for everyone, I believe it needs to include our love, friendship, and goodwill. If it doesn't, then I don't really think we can make a better world for ourselves.

Let this new, good world develop in 2021, starting with you. Don't sit around, expecting and waiting for someone else to make the world better. Each of us is the agent for the new world of 2021. May we bring our love, care, freedom, goodness, and generosity out into the world for this year. Thank you very much.