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ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE FOUR SUBLIME VIRTUES IN BUDDHIST PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the Four Sublime spiritual practice also known as the Brahma Viharas, which is a set of Buddhist principles that form the foundation of the Buddhist way of life and their ethical significance. These principles include lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. The research paper aims to comprehend the four sublime virtues and their importance for morality. A healthy and peaceful existence can only be achieved through unity, compassion, and empathy with other humans. It is proved based on the original texts, commentaries, sub-commentaries, and other academic sources from the Theravāda point of view. This research reveals that most individuals would understand lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic delight, and serenity and the ethical value of moral qualities.



KEY WORDS: *Mettā (lovingkindness), Karuṇā (compassion), Muditā (sympathetic joy), Upekkhā (equanimity), sublime virtues, Ethical Importance.*

INTRODUCTION

The Four Sublime spiritual practice is an entire set of Buddhist principles regarded as the foundation of the Buddhist way of life. The Four Sublime Dhamma is known as the Brahma Viharas in Buddhism. Brahmavihara is derived from the Sanskrit "Brahma," which means supreme or divine, and "vihara," which implies residence or living place. These Four Sublime Dhammas or sublime abodes encompass compassion, lovingkindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Buddhism believes that a healthy and peaceful existence can only be realized by unity, compassion, and empathy with other human beings. For this reason, people depend on the Four Sublime Dhamma to lead an ethical existence. It refers to developing or remaining in these four characteristics of mind and heart. The work discusses the concept of the four Brahmavihara and the moral values of *Mettā* virtue, *Karunā* virtue, *Muditā* virtue, and *Upekkhā* virtue.

Definition of the Four Brahmavihara

***Mettā* (Lovingkindness)**

Mettā, generally translated as "lovingkindness" is a core notion in Buddhist ethics and meditation, symbolizing absolute and infinite compassion, goodwill, and generosity offered to all sentient beings without discrimination. It conveys a profound desire for the well-being and pleasure of oneself and others, recognizing the interdependence of all living forms and the widespread pursuit of

happiness. *Mettā* meditation, known as “*Mettā Bhāvanā*” deliberately nourishes lovingkindness via structured phases, beginning with self-love and expanding to loved ones, acquaintances, difficult persons, and finally, all sentient creatures. Beyond meditation, *Mettā* discovers practical applications in everyday life, enriching relationships, assisting dispute resolution, fostering self-care, and motivating acts of compassion and generosity. Illustrative examples such as *Aṅgulimāla*’s from a murderer to a peaceful monk using *Mettā* and the Dalai Lama’s embodiment of *Mettā* in supporting compassion and nonviolence emphasize its real-world transformational power. Modern followers also share their experiences online, stressing *Mettā*’s significance in negotiating life’s problems and creating meaningful relationships, thereby demonstrating its practical influence on well-being.

***Karuṇā* (Compassion)**

Karuṇā, the Buddhist concept of compassion, goes beyond sympathy to encompass a profound emotional connection and a sincere wish to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings. It emerges from realizing the universal essence of suffering and knowing that all creatures want pleasure and escape from pain like oneself. Through compassion meditation, people develop and enhance their capacity for compassion, starting with self-compassion and spreading it to loved ones, acquaintances, and even those with whom they might encounter difficulties. The action develops a sense of connectivity and decreases feelings of loneliness. Compassion finds expression in everyday life via compassion, understanding, and assistance for needy people, benefitting both the giver and the recipient. Prominent personalities like Avalokiteshvara and modern exemplars like Mother Teresa exemplify the transforming power of compassion, proving that small acts of kindness can bring about tremendous beneficial change in individuals and communities.

***Muditā* (Sympathetic Joy)**

Muditā, commonly translated as “sympathetic joy” or “joyful appreciation” is a fundamental idea within Buddhism, signifying the real enjoyment and happiness one obtains in response to the achievement and well-being of others. This virtue has been defined by selflessness, non-jealousy, and a warm attitude towards the success and happiness of others. It emerges from a profound feeling of connectivity, realizing that the pleasure of one is related to the happiness of all. Meditation methods focusing on building *Muditā* entail increasing awareness, meditating on the pleasant qualities of others, and imagining their enjoyment vividly, which in turn develops feelings of delight within oneself. Beyond meditation, the practice of *Muditā* includes:

They are actively enjoying the success and pleasure of others in everyday life.

1. Establishing harmonious relationships.
2. Developing true happiness in response to the well-being of those around us.

Research findings, including examples from Buddhist scriptures and present situations, underscore the transformational potential of *Muditā* for cultivating connectivity and nurturing pleasure in the happiness of others.

***Upekkhā* (Equanimity)**

Upekkhā, generally translated as “equanimity” is a significant term within Buddhism, especially among the Four Sublimes (*Brahmavihāras*). It indicates a condition of balanced and unbiased thinking, marked by emotional stability and inner peace. This virtue arises from a deep understanding of impermanence, interconnection, and the nature of suffering. In the domain of *Upekkhā*, there is neither attachment to what is pleasurable nor resistance to what is unpleasant; instead, one feels peace and acceptance in the face of life’s swings and obstacles. In particular, *Upekkhā* is the completion of *Mettā*, *Karuṇā*, and *Muditā* since it provides stability to all creatures. The development of *Upekkhā* via meditation comprises specific practices aimed at establishing calmness and mental strength. This includes mindfulness meditation to examine thoughts and emotions without attachment, contemplation

on interconnectivity to eliminate bias, and attention to impermanence to increase serenity. Combining compassion with serenity improves the capacity to respond to meditation on *Upekkhā*, and individuals progressively develop peaceful, non-reactive awareness in their everyday lives. *Upekkhā*'s practical worth becomes more apparent during hard times. To maintain emotional balance in adversity, people can engage in mindful breathing, notify themselves of the impermanence of difficulties, search for understanding of the suffering of others, extend equanimity and compassion to themselves, and nurture gratitude for the growth opportunities adversity presents. Prominent personalities like *Gandhi*, *Thich Nhat Hanh*, and *Mandela* exhibit *Upekkhā* in their lives. Their constant devotion to justice, peace, and forgiveness illustrates that *Upekkhā* is not passive indifference but a deep inner power that allows one to react to life's obstacles with knowledge, compassion, and harmonious emotions.

The Ethical Importance of *Mettā* Virtue

Mettā is one of the Four Guardian Meditations- *Caturārakkhabhāvanā*. *Mettā* defends us from inner and exterior threats. Protection and security are required everywhere. Many sorts of hazards might occur within the mind and outside it. External threats are simple to recognize. In Buddhist thinking, they are considered "distant" because they come from beyond one's own body and mind. These remote threats are dubbed *Puggala vera*, an opponent that arrives in human form." We also confront internal hazards emanating from inside. In *Pali*, they are known as *Kilesa vera*, "the enemy of mental defilements". The Buddhist notion of *Mettā* could be elucidated utilizing the fourfold definition. According to *Dhammasaṅgāṇī*;

1. Lovingkindness is described as encouraging the well-being of others (*Lakkhaṇā*).
2. Its role is to seek the well-being of others (*Rasa*).
3. It is exhibited as eradicating aggravation (*Paccupaṭṭhāna*).
4. Its proximal source is witnessing the liveableness in beings (*Padaṭṭhāna*).

It succeeds. It causes ill will to decrease and fails when it gives rise to selfish attachment. *Mettā* meditation strives to exercise compassion and lovingkindness towards oneself and others.

To develop *Mettā*:

1. Find a comfortable and peaceful spot where you can meditate. Sit in a comfortable posture that supports the back and relaxes the body.
2. Take a few deep breaths and concentrate on your breathing. Inhale deeply and slowly, hold your breath for a few seconds, and then exhale gently.
3. When you feel comfortable, repeat the Metta sentences yourself. Some typical words are: - May I be happy - May I be healthy - May I be secure.
4. Once you've recited the words to yourself, proceed to offer the same desires to others. Start with someone you love, and repeat the phrase for them: May he/she be happy, May he/she be healthy, May he/she be safe, May he/she be peaceful.
5. Finally, apply the exact words to someone you feel indifferent towards and, finally, to someone you may be dealing with.
6. Finally, expand the sentences to all creatures: May all beings be happy, May all beings be healthy, May all beings be safe, May all beings be peaceful, I will be serene.
7. Stay with the phrases for as long as you feel comfortable, and allow yourself to experience the love and compassion you express towards yourself and others.
8. End the exercise by taking a few deep breaths and observing your feelings. Carry this sense of lovingkindness and compassion with you throughout the day.

The subjective effect of universal love is apparent enough. The pleasure of well-being, excellent health, peace of mind, bright looks, and the love and goodwill of everyone are undoubtedly enormous gifts of life flowing from the practice of *Mettā*-meditation.

The Ethical Importance of *Karunā* Virtue

"*Paradukkhe sati sadhunam hadayakampanam karotiti Karuna*" After witnessing the pain of others, the tremor that emerges in the hearts of gentle people is known as *Karunā*. According to *Dhammasaṅgāṇī*, compassion emphasizes the ability to alleviate pain. Its role consists in not enduring others' sorrow. It is expressed as no brutality. Its proximate cause is to observe helplessness in individuals overcome by suffering. It succeeds when it helps harshness recede but fails when it generates sadness. The practice of *karuna* entails cultivating empathy and caring for the pain of others. We must acknowledge that all people are subject to pain and difficulties and be motivated by a desire to relieve this suffering.

To develop *karuna*, we may participate in a variety of activities, such as:

1. Engaging in actions of kindness and compassion towards others. This might be serving at a local charity or shelter or being extra attentive and helpful towards friends and family members who are struggling.
2. Practicing mindfulness and meditation. By building a feeling of awareness and presence, we may become more responsive to the pain of others and develop more profound empathy and compassion.
3. Learning the teachings of the Buddha and other spiritual traditions that highlight the need for compassion. We may strengthen our knowledge and desire to practice *karuna* by reading and pondering these teachings.

The Ethical Importance of *Muditā* Virtue

As explained by *Dhammasaṅgāṇī*, Gladness is regarded as gladdening (caused by others' achievement). Its function stands on being unenvious. It is exhibited by the reduction of aversion (boredom). Its proximate cause is seeing beings and success. It performs when it helps aversion (boredom) lessen and fails when it increases mirth. The practice of *Muditā* entails taking satisfaction in the happiness and success of others. We need to acknowledge that all creatures can enjoy pleasure and respect and enjoy this reality.

To establish *Muditā*, we may participate in techniques such as:

1. Cultivating gratitude and appreciation for the positive things in our lives. By establishing a feeling of appreciation, we learn to appreciate the pleasure and success of others more fully.
2. Contributing to actions of compassion and goodwill towards others. By assisting others to experience pleasure and success, we can generate a feeling of satisfaction and contentment.
3. Developing a feeling of community and connection with others. By producing connections and a sense of shared purpose, we could gain better respect and reverence for the pleasure and success of others around us.

The Ethical Importance of *Upekkhā* Virtue

According to *Dhammasaṅgāṇī*, Equanimity cultivates a sense of neutrality towards living things. Its objective is to perceive equality in beings. It is demonstrated as the quieting of wrath and approbation. Its proximal cause is perceiving ownership of deeds (*Kamma*) thus: "Beings are owners of their deeds. Whose [if not theirs] is the option by which they will become joyful, be free from sorrow, or stay away from the success they have reached?" It performs when it causes wrath and approbation decrease, and it fails when it develops the serenity of unknowing, which is that [worldly-minded indifference of ignorance] in the domestic life. *Upekkhā* entails cultivating mental equilibrium and fairness. It requires us to understand all things' interdependence and react to the world with tranquillity.

To develop *Upekkhā*, we can take part in actions such as:

1. With the impermanence of all things, we can cultivate a feeling of tranquillity and avoid Cultivating a feeling of detachment and non-attachment by recognizing that we are overly attached to specific goals or results.
2. Engaging in mindfulness and meditation practices. By cultivating a feeling of presence and conscious awareness, we can achieve more emotional balance and react to the environment with greater equanimity.
3. Learning the teachings of the Buddha and other spiritual traditions that demonstrate the value of *Upekkhā*. We can broaden our knowledge and desire to perform *Upekkhā* by reading and thinking about these teachings.

CONCLUSION

The Four Immeasurable - lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity- are vital for living a peaceful, harmonious, and meaningful existence. These qualities do not belong to any religion or cultural tradition; they are universal concepts everyone may use. Cultivating these characteristics involves regular effort and devotion but may bring significant changes in ourselves and our world. We can develop a more harmonious, equitable, and compassionate world for all living things by cultivating lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and tranquillity.

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