

The Brahma Viharas

The *Brahma Viharas* are a set of meditation practices. A '*brahma*' is a refined divine being and '*Vihara*' means dwelling. The practices are therefore the heavenly abidings of one who enters deeply into these meditations.

There are four practices, most of you will have some familiarity with the first. The other practices can be done as an extension of the Metta Bhavana or as an alternative practice. In my experience, they work particularly well in a retreat context.

Below is a table summarising the practices and also their near and far enemies. The far enemies are the opposite of the *Brahma Viharas*. The 'near enemies' are unwholesome states of mind that seem superficially similar to the *Brahma Viharas* but are unskillful (*akusala*) states to be avoided.

Practice	Translation	Near Enemy	Far Enemy
Metta Bhavana	Loving Kindness	Sentimental attachment	Hatred
Karuna Bhavana	Compassion	Sentimental pity Horrorified anxiety	Cruelty
Mudhita Bhavana	Sympathetic Joy	Vicarious enjoyment	Resentment
Upekkha Bhavana	Equanimity	Neutrality	Indifference

Below is an outline of how the practices are conducted. If there is enough time, instead of stage one a whole *Metta Bhavana* can be done. It requires a lot of effort, receptivity and imagination to meditate like this so between practices it is good to just sit.

Karuna Bhavana

1. Develop metta towards oneself
2. Develop metta towards a suffering person, creating compassion
3. Develop compassion towards a good friend,
4. Develop compassion towards a neutral person
5. Develop compassion towards an enemy
6. Develop equal compassion towards all five persons
7. Extend compassion towards all living beings throughout the universe

Mudita Bhavana

1. Develop metta towards oneself
2. Develop metta towards a happy person, creating sympathetic joy
3. Develop sympathetic joy towards a good friend
4. Develop sympathetic joy towards a neutral person
5. Develop sympathetic joy towards an enemy
6. Develop equal sympathetic joy towards all five persons
7. Extend sympathetic joy towards all living beings throughout the universe

Upekkha Bhavana

1. Develop metta towards oneself
2. Reflecting on their suffering, their joy and their conditionality, develop metta towards a neutral person, creating equanimity
3. Develop equanimity towards a good friend
4. Develop equanimity towards an enemy
5. Develop equal equanimity towards each person including ourselves
6. Develop equanimity towards all living beings