

Visuddhimagga (“The Path of Purification”) Chapter 9 The Divine Abidings (91 – 101)

Now having thus known these divine abidings
Told by the Divine (*brahma*) One supremely [wise],
There is this general explanation too
Concerning them that he should recognize.

Meanings

Now as to the meaning firstly of lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity: it fattens (*mejjati*), thus it is lovingkindness (*metta*); it is solvent (*siniyhati*) is the meaning. Also: it comes about with respect to a friend (*mitta*), or it is behaviour towards a friend, thus it is lovingkindness (*metta*).

When there is suffering in others it causes (*karoti*) good people's hearts to be moved (*kampana*), thus it is compassion (*karuna*). Or alternatively, it combats (*kindti*) others' suffering, attacks and demolishes it, thus it is compassion. Or alternatively, it is scattered (*kiriyati*) upon those who suffer, it is extended to them by pervasion, thus it is compassion (*karuna*).

Those endowed with it are glad (*modanti*), or itself is glad (*modati*), or it is the mere act of being glad (*modana*), thus it is gladness (*mudita*).

It looks on at (*upekkhati*), abandoning such interestedness as thinking 'May they be free from enmity' and having recourse to neutrality, thus it is equanimity (*upekkha*).

Characteristics

As to the characteristic, etc., *lovingkindness* is characterized here as promoting the aspect of welfare. Its function is to prefer welfare. It is manifested as the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing loveliness in beings. It succeeds when it makes ill will subside, and it fails when it produces (selfish) affection.

Compassion is characterized as promoting the aspect of allaying suffering. Its function resides in not bearing others' suffering. It is manifested as non-cruelty. Its proximate cause is to see helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It succeeds when it makes cruelty subside and it fails when it produces sorrow.

Gladness is characterized as gladdening (produced by others' success). Its function resides in being unenvious. It is manifested as the elimination of aversion (boredom). Its proximate cause is seeing beings' success. It succeeds when it makes aversion (boredom) subside, and it fails when it produces merriment.

Equanimity is characterized as promoting the aspect of neutrality towards beings. Its function is to see equality in beings. It is manifested as the quieting of resentment and approval. Its proximate cause is seeing ownership of deeds (*kamma*) thus: 'Beings are owners of their deeds. Whose [if not theirs] is the choice by which they will become happy, or will get free from suffering, or will not fall away from the success they have reached?'. It succeeds when it makes resentment and approval subside, and it fails when

it produces the equanimity of unknowing, which is that [worldly-minded indifference of ignorance] based on the house life.

Purpose

The general purpose of these four divine abidings is the bliss of insight and an excellent (form of future) existence. That peculiar to each is respectively the warding off of ill will, and so on. For here lovingkindness has the purpose of warding off ill will, while the others have the respective purposes of warding off cruelty, aversion (boredom), and greed or resentment. And this is said too: 'For this is the escape from ill will, friends, that is to say, the mind-deliverance of lovingkindness ... For this is the escape from cruelty, friends, that is to say, the mind-deliverance of compassion ... For this is the escape from aversion (boredom), friends, that is to say, the mind-deliverance of gladness ... For this is the escape from greed, friends, that is to say, the mind-deliverance of equanimity

The Near and Far Enemies

And here each one has two enemies, one near and one far.

The divine abiding of *lovingkindness* has greed as its near enemy, since both share in seeing virtues. Greed behaves like a foe who keeps close by a man, and it easily finds an opportunity. So lovingkindness should be well protected from it. And ill will, which is dissimilar to the similar greed, is its far enemy like a foe ensconced in a rock wilderness. So lovingkindness must be practised free from fear of that; for it is not possible to practise lovingkindness and feel anger simultaneously.

Compassion has grief based on the home life as its near enemy, since both share in seeing failure. Such grief has been described in the way beginning, 'When a man either regards as a privation failure to obtain visible objects cognizable by the eye that are sought after, desired, agreeable, gratifying and associated with worldliness, or when he recalls those formerly obtained that are past, ceased and changed, then grief arises in him. Such grief as this is called grief based on the home life. And cruelty, which is dissimilar to the similar grief, is its far enemy. So compassion must be practised free from fear of that; for it is not possible to practise compassion and be cruel to breathing things simultaneously.

Gladness has joy based on the home life as its near enemy, since both share in seeing success. Such joy has been described in the way beginning, 'When a man either regards as gain the obtaining of visible objects cognizable by the eye that are sought ... and associated with worldliness, or recalls those formerly obtained that are past, ceased, and changed, then joy arises in him. Such joy as this is called joy based on the home life'. And aversion (boredom), which is dissimilar to the similar joy, is its far enemy. So gladness should be practised free from fear of that; for it is not possible to practise gladness and be discontented with remote abodes and things connected with the higher profitableness simultaneously.

Equanimity has the equanimity of unknowing based on the home life as its near enemy, since both share in ignoring faults and virtues. Such unknowing has been described in the way beginning, 'On seeing a visible object with the eye equanimity arises in the foolish infatuated ordinary man, in the untaught ordinary man who has not conquered his limitations, who has not conquered future

[kamma] result, who is unperceiving of danger. Such equanimity as this does not surmount the visible object. Such equanimity as this is called equanimity based on the home life'. And greed and resentment, which are dissimilar to the similar unknowing, are its far enemies. Therefore equanimity must be practised free from fear of that; for it is not possible to look on with equanimity and be inflamed with greed or be resentful simultaneously.

Divine Abiding	Character	Function	Manifestation	Proximate cause	Effects	Purpose	Near Enemy	Far Enemy
Lovingkindness	promoting the aspect of welfare.	Its function is to prefer welfare.	removal of annoyance.	Its proximate cause is seeing loveliness in beings.	It succeeds when it makes ill will subside, and it fails when it produces (selfish) affection.	warding off ill will	greed	ill will
Compassion	promoting the aspect of allaying suffering.	Its function resides in not bearing others' suffering.	non-cruelty.	Its proximate cause is to see helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering.	It succeeds when it makes cruelty subside and it fails when it produces sorrow	warding off cruelty	grief based on the home life	cruelty
Gladness	characterized as gladdening (produced by others' success)	Its function resides in being unenvious.	elimination of aversion (boredom).	Its proximate cause is seeing beings' success.	It succeeds when it makes aversion (boredom) subside, and it fails when it produces merriment	warding off aversion (boredom)	joy based on the home life	aversion (boredom)
Equanimity	promoting the aspect of neutrality towards beings.	Its function is to see equality in beings.	quieting of resentment and approval.	Its proximate cause is seeing ownership of deeds (kamma): 'Beings are owners of their deeds. Whose [if not theirs] is the choice by which they will become happy, or will get free from suffering...?'	It succeeds when it makes resentment and approval subside, and it fails when it produces the equanimity of unknowing, which is that [worldly-minded indifference of ignorance] based on the house life.	warding off greed or resentment	equanimity of unknowing based on the home life	greed and resentment