

## The Awakening Heart and the Divine Abodes

*“When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.”*

- Martin Luther King “Why I Oppose the War” 1967

### Introduction

In this booklet we will look at both the brahmaviharas or divine abodes and the bodhicitta practice of tonglen in the context of the heart’s awakening. We will do this by exploring ways of going deeper into the brahmaviharas and bodhicitta practice, unpacking their significance in the context of a maturing spiritual life. The booklet will also be interspersed with links to led meditations that unfold the practices.

The ‘citta’ aspect of ‘bodhicitta’ is often translated as ‘mind’. We will, however, use the translation ‘heart’ as it undercuts the view that the bodhicitta has something to do with the conceptual mind and places it clearly back in the context of the body and the wholeness of our being, of which the heart is the ‘core’. Without experiencing the body, we cannot hope to experience the heart, so the approach we take to both the the brahmaviharas and bodhicitta practices will be bodily based.

We will be using the words ‘soma’ and ‘somatic’ quite a bit as well, so it’s useful to unpack what we mean by this. We use it to mean the quality of vibrant, ‘energetic’ livingness or aliveness of our body and indeed our whole being. We all have an immediate sense of being alive but what is this aliveness, what does it consist of in experience? It’s the sum of all our sense experience, including the mind regarded as a sense. We will start from this felt sense of aliveness, particularly as it appears in the body. It’s not about leaving the mind behind but suggests the mind coming into its natural relationship with the other senses. The mind has a habit of taking control, shoving the other senses aside from our experienced being. This leads us to spend most of our lives in the mind and mental activities such as associative thinking, imagining, fantasising etc. Prapañca - mental proliferation -

abounds! Unfortunately, we have come to believe that the stories the mind tells are really who and what we are. This inevitably gives rise to suffering.

## **Bodhicitta**

The teachings on the awakening heart or bodhicitta come from the Mahayana, but all Buddhist traditions see the Buddha as a fully awake, compassionate being and a full exemplar of the qualities of wisdom and compassion which the bodhicitta embodies. The 'relative' aspect of bodhicitta is associated with the compassionate motivation to awaken fully in order to benefit all sentient beings and lead them towards full awakening. Here, we are dealing with a positive myth - that of leading all sentient beings beyond suffering. To be effective in bodhisattva activity though, we must wake up from the dream of delusion and suffering and it is in this context of awakening or enlightenment (*bodhi*) that the practices we are going to be looking at should be seen. The more awake we are the more we can help others to awaken.

In order to approach the awakening heart, we need to be as fully embodied as possible and engaged with the living energy of our being.

After doing the meditation, if awareness seems to disappear, look at where it went. Associative thinking frequently arises as the conceptual mind looks for something to hold onto. Often, when there's no reference point in meditation, there can be a sense of unease as the mind wants to *do* something. As one becomes more embodied, that sense of unease and the associated prapanca is likely to diminish as one's body and being relaxes more readily into simply being aware.

**To help with taking what we are writing about deeper you'll find a series of led sits on the website for streaming or in the zip file for downloading.**

**AH1 Introduction and Just Sitting.** Tejananda {25.24 mins}

**AH2 Whole Body Awareness.** Tejananda {20.31 Mins}

**"Love is the Awareness of the Being of Another Person"**

It is said in alchemical teachings that the most important fire for cooking the material is that of Hestia the goddess of the hearth. Working with this image, in the context of awareness one can get a sense that becoming aware can be like coming home to the warmth of the hearth, to the heart of love. Being able to start from this warm sense of the heart and being able to come back to it is important in the context of what we are going to be doing with the brahmaviharas. Things come up and it's not necessarily comfortable as it often means coming into relationship with parts of ourselves that we'd prefer to turn away from - parts that are not redolent of sympathetic joy or a compassionate response. If that warmth of the heart is there, all this can be held without judgement and with a kindness that allows the possibility of change.

The sense of ok-ness is important. The more that we settle into the body in the here and now, the more a kindly awareness is available and the less we are likely to dissociate from what is happening. Peter Levine in his work on 'somatic experiencing' goes into this, emphasising the importance of what he calls 'pendulation'. With pendulation, you move from a sense of safety into the more difficult material and then back again if things become overwhelming.

The more we are in awareness with the heart the more we can be open to our own being and our sense of others. The more we relax, the more we can be in contact with the senses beyond the mind and open to the multi-various forms of experience.

Sangharakshita once said, when talking about listening, "Love is the awareness of the being of another person."

I would say, by extension, that love for ourselves is a genuine awareness of our own being or, in other words, an intimate relatedness to our aliveness. Life can be seen as a process of constantly arriving into the body of our experience. As we approach metta from this perspective, we can open to the possibility that metta is already here, right now, without the need to 'develop' it.

**AH3 Led Sit Body Awareness Sit.** Rijumitra {35.15 Mins}

**Background to the Metta Bhavana.**

When the Buddha introduces metta in the early Buddhist texts, it is a simpler practice than the one which we introduce today as the metta bhavana. Generally, he simply suggests that one should sit and radiate metta in all the directions. There are no other stages. The way the practice is now taught in Triratna and other Buddhist traditions is taken from the Visuddhimaga, an extended collection of practices written down by Buddhagosa almost a thousand years after the time of the Buddha. In this and some other texts contemporary with it, we find the stages as we know them described. So what happened to give rise to this developed metta practice? Possibly, the simple instruction to radiate boundless metta in all directions wasn't found easy to put into effect and it was found that introducing the stages involving other people supported the generation of love without discrimination.

In many ways, the metta practice is about relationship and, without sufficient integration, the instruction to simply radiate metta without object can lead to a vague dreaminess. What is most valuable about the stages, though, is that they provide us with the possibility of coming into relationship with our sense of others and our attachment, indifference and aversion to them. It is from this basis that we can move into the boundless quality in the last stage of the practice. Thus, in the second stage with the good friend, it might be that a natural experience of metta arises for them, in which case you stay with that. But, on the other hand, the practice might bring up your attachment and stickiness in relationship to the friend, in which case you can come into relationship with that. The practice is evoking our 'stuff' and revealing to us how it can get in the way of seeing the other person clearly and having a mettaful response to them. So the practice is about both our sense of the other person *and* our habitual responses to our idea of them.

I like the image of knots in this context. It's as though within our being we have developed knots which restrict our ability to be open and responsive to life. So the practice is about bringing the warmth of awareness to these knots and allowing them to undo themselves. These knots are found in our habitual thoughts and the emotions held in our body.

With the 'neutral person' stage, we are confronted with our indifference and how it limits us in relation to having response of metta for the whole breadth of their being. The stage of the person we dislike or have difficulties with elicits how

we separate out from people to whom we are averse. Are we willing to recognise that indifference and aversion both as thoughts and as the actual physical feeling of turning away? If we stay with the physical feeling of emotional resistance, it is possible that habitual knots held in that experience can loosen and untie within the kindness and awareness that we are bringing to the situation.

Metta can sometime be internalised as a one-tone feeling that we 'should' be generating for others - sort of pumping it out to them. This is a noble, if somewhat naive, way of doing the practice but it can lead to the situation where the feeling tone can't be replicated and then it feels as though the meditation is failing. Alternatively, it may feel like the practice is working and that a feeling tone of 'metta' is being produced, but what can be happening is that our actual feelings and responses are being bypassed. This can lead to our reinforcing of a sense of separation from others. In addition, it takes quite a lot of effort to keep overriding our actual experience and people can actually give up the metta practice because the effort to do so becomes too much.

My experience of living at a retreat centre and asking people what practices they do has shown that quite a lot of people give up metta as a meditation practice because it has become too much effort to sustain in the way they had been taught. It's important to add, though, that they have not given up the principle of metta - love, kindness, benevolence - in their everyday lives. A part of doing retreats on this topic over the years has been trying to find ways of making the meditation practice of metta relevant to a practitioner's maturing spiritual life so that it reflects and supports their growing sensitivity and begins to unfold the insight qualities of metta and the brahmaviharas.

Going back to Sangharakshita's aphorism

"Love is the awareness of the being of another person."

Taking that principle in relation oneself, in the first stage of the practice, it could be enough to simply be in relationship with one's present experience with kindly awareness. This means being sensitive to what's happening in an embodied way, which will be naturally sensitive and responsive to what is arising. The first stage isn't just about how we feel emotionally, but about the sense of connectedness we

have to the various textures of our experience. It's a sort of coming home to what is here, what is now. It's not about bringing one's problems to mind, though they might arise. Nor is it about creating any particular kind of feeling-tone, though feelings too might arise, but more a matter of allowing awareness to undo the knottiness of our experience.

In the second stage the sense we have of our good friend might elicit a natural response of metta, but it might be that this natural response is restricted by attachment, aversion or indifference. If this is the case, then it means coming into relationship with this restriction with kindly awareness, getting to know the restriction or knot both in its story form and its bodily held form and if possible moving towards an experience of the latter. The more one can be in relationship to the bodily held experience without dissociating, the deeper the unknotting that can occur.

There are two other levels to the practice. One, more 'absolute', is to remain open and responsive to all experience with less and less separation from what's arising, whether what's arising is another person, a sound or a tactile feeling. The other, more 'relative', is to experience the restrictions in us that limit that openness. We all have our limitations and if we *force* openness we can become overwhelmed, so boundaries are also necessary. Where there is sensitivity, appropriate boundaries can be recognised more clearly. We can have an ideal of bountiful openness, but when it's an ideal rather than a lived experience, we can get into trouble. So the practice can be about clarifying appropriate boundaries.

We can all try too hard. The more we can relax into experience the less we have to try. It's not always easy to trust this. Quite naturally, with the emergence of ease, the innate qualities of awareness can manifest.

Metta can be seen as the beginning of the brahmaviharas but also as what we come back to. The other Brahmaviharas bring us explicitly into relationship with, for example, the suffering of people to whom we are attached, indifferent or averse. They thus deepen our relationship with what we might habitually turn away from and create the possibility of refinement of our sensibility and responsiveness.

**AH4 Led Metta Bhavana Practice. Rijumitra {36.53 mins}**

**AH5 Lying Down Body Awareness.** Tejananda {39.17 mins}

**AH6 Body, Breath and the Heart.** Tejananda {25.26 mins}

### **The Karuna Bhavana**

The more we can relax back into our senses the more we can actually be *here*, rather than in an idea of somewhere else. The more we are here, the more we can be sensitive to the needs of what's actually going on. Also, the more we are in our senses the more alive we are and awareness is vividly awake with the experience of the here and now.

Rumi's poem "The Guest House" brings this alive:

This being human is a guest house  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door, laughing,  
and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
for each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

Rumi catches something about our relationship with life. There's a beauty in the line "Welcome and entertain them all", evoking the spirit of welcoming whatever is happening into the heart space. The important thing is, as far as possible, to be living more and more as the heart's awareness. It's as if everything that arises

wants to be seen and experienced and then go on its way back into emptiness. "The Guest House" catches this beautifully. The guests are not there to set up home, but rather stay for a while and then move on their way. Often, although part of the experience of painful emotional responses can be a feeling of these being a permanent feature of our being, this is only a story. The more we can be in our senses, the more we can experience the ever-changing nature of the experience and recognise the story for what it is. We can also come to see that it is our resistance to the experience that is arising that causes dukkha. Thus, it can quite naturally happen within the heart space of awareness that the laksanas of insubstantiality, impermanence and dukkha can be recognised, moving us naturally into a deeper responsiveness to the way things are.

However, it's important to have appropriate boundaries and to be aware it it's the case that we can't deal with some particular experience and things tend to become overwhelming. A certain degree of discomfort is often a good thing, but if it does become overwhelming, a tactical retreat could well be appropriate. For example, we may move our attention instead towards something that can nourish us. It's important not to try to 'nut' things out. We all know from our own experience that sometimes simply sleeping on something, or going for a walk, can bring resolution to an underlying issue.

In the *Salattha Sutta* the Buddha talks of two types of dukkha, primary and secondary. We cannot avoid the primary pain of life - accidents happen, things end, people die, the weather or world events don't accord to our plans, we can't control things. Primary dukkha does have an effect upon our being and often sets up shock reverberations. But if there is no strong resistance, then any such experience lasts for a while and goes on its way, like the guests in "The Guest House". Sometimes it can feel though that they take up residence, but this is due to the habit of telling ourselves stories about what has happened and creating further secondary pain around the primary dukkha.

This secondary pain is a psycho-physical phenomena and leads to physical and emotional knots of resistance that are held in our bodies. These knots of secondary dukkha are formed around what we are attached to, indifferent to, or averse to. It's wonderful if we can recognise such a knot and turn towards the story and the physical, somatic manifestation of the story that keeps the knot knotted. The more



we align with awareness, the slower is the habitual response of secondary dukkha stories. The Buddha says that if we don't recognise the secondary nature of most dukkha, we can get caught in a loop of seeking pleasure to get out of feeling pain. Inevitably the pleasure runs out and you are back into pain again and so the loop of reaction goes on. The Salatttha Sutta clearly reveals the mechanism involved.

The more we are open to awareness of the heart, the more naturally things will release themselves and the less we have to protect in our distorted views and patterns of bodily holding.

The Karuna Bhavana is inviting us to have a look at whether we can be compassionate to people we are attached to, ignore, or dislike. It also throws into relief the differences in our willingness to be open and responsive to different kinds of people. The practice is traditionally in six stages. Firstly oneself, coming into relationship with an open heart to one's current experience, though without particularly dwelling on one's own suffering, even though that might arise. In the second stage a sense of someone who you know is suffering is invited into awareness. The immediacy of their suffering is the kindling which gets the karuna going. Is it possible to have compassion for their suffering? It's important not to try and take their suffering on yourself, but to respond to it with a sensitive kindness. You're not trying to sort them out, although it's important that there is a current of well-wishing that goes beyond just witnessing their experience. It may be that it becomes clear in the heart space that there is something you could actively do to help them - or not. Some situations just cannot be made completely all right. There might also be a clearer recognition of their suffering and, without judgement, just how much of their suffering is primary and how much secondary.

The other stages then continue in their normal order. If it happens that we experience a feeling of overwhelm or find that we drift away, then just be with that with the hearts awareness and only turn back towards the other person when we know that we are ready to so. As with the metta, if there is a natural responsiveness then we stay with that but if there is a turning away we recognise that and hold our attachment, indifference or aversion with a kindly heart, opening to the possibility of untying the knots of our own secondary dukkha.

Each of the Brahmaviharas have 'far enemies' and 'near enemies'. The far enemy of compassion is malice, a delight in the suffering of others and the near enemies are horrified anxiety and sentimental pity. When they arise, it's good to recognise their arising without judgement but being aware of just how painful and separating they are and let there be compassion for them. With regard the two parts of the last stage, in the coming together of the other four people, it becomes clearer just how much difference there is in our openness to their respective beings. We are not trying to be everyone's friend or to make them 'nice' in our minds when they might be quite unpleasant. Rather, it's a question of how much can we be open to their being and allow compassion to be there for their suffering. The second part of the last stage opens to the possibility of opening out as boundless compassion in the way the Buddha originally taught the practice.

At an ordinary level, life can sometimes be sad and painful. In recognising the universal quality of that dukkha, it can take us out of our self-preoccupations and, in a certain way, open us up to a greater sense of solidarity with one another. At a deeper level we can see that so much of our own and others' suffering is caused by our attempts to hold onto what is impermanent and insubstantial.

**AH7 Led Karuna Bhavana Practice.** Rijumitra {45.37 mins}

### **The Heart Space and the Heart Wish Meditation.**

We are not going into the tonglen practice yet, but let's give more space to coming into the heart and exploring the qualities of the heart. Through relaxing, the body becomes more open and spacious. Simply by evoking or opening to an atmosphere of metta, we can become more sensitive to the heart space. There's an ineffable quality to metta that is nonetheless a quite distinct and recognisable quality of being. The cultivation of the stages is a way of coming into relationship with whatever gets in the way of the natural quality of love. This is not foreign to our nature and, if we 'over-cultivate' or force too much effort, we may tend to fabricate an *idea* of metta rather than simply opening to the quality. We have to be careful not to become too habitual in the way we undertake practices. This is why, in the approach we're suggesting, there is something of a paradigm shift in the way we evoke or contact metta. Rather than cultivating it 'from scratch' every time, with

phrases and so forth, we can discover that, by opening to and sensing the quality of the heart, metta is already here.

A way in can be by 'listening' to the heart. What does the heart wish for? what is our heart's desire? The heart has depths that our limited and separate sense of self cannot fathom. This "limited self" is a conceptual construct, a fabrication of the mind, and concept has no way of plumbing the depths of being - but the heart does. Through awareness of the heart, we can have direct contact with heart space and its intrinsic qualities.

The hindrances - desire, aversion, anxiety, sloth and torpor and doubt - hold us back from absorption and being truly present. Approaching metta, attachment, aversion and ignoring are specific hindrances that hold us back. Can we recognise and let go of those hindrances so that we can discover what the heart and the heart space are in our actual experience?

In the following recordings, after discovering the heart's wish, we will go onto the 'one stage' metta that the Buddha himself taught.

**AH8 The Heart Space and the Heart Wish.** Tejananda {17.24mins}

**AH9 One Stage Metta.** Tejananda {23.31 mins} no bell at the end

### **Some General Points**

The stages of the brahmavihara practices are there to support our entering into and embodying their qualities ever more deeply. Sometimes it's helpful to do all the stages, while at other times it's appropriate to do just one or two. There are different ways of playing with the stages. Sometimes, for example, it might be useful to put yourself (or, likewise, someone you know) in all of the stages. What's important is approaching the practices in ways that keep them alive. The same can be said regarding the stages of the mindfulness of breathing - at times, when the mind is very distracted, the counting stages are helpful, whereas when we find the mind is already more or less settled, these first two stages can get in the way of a deeper absorption.

Other 'rules' that have been picked up when learning the metta originally can also be put down. For example, people can be left thinking that they shouldn't be putting their partner or a close relative into the second stage *ever*. Well, it's perfectly ok to do so. I would even say it's fine to have animals in the stages! What is important is finding *whatever* works to support the deepening of kindness and awareness.

A little about the 'neutral person' - sometimes this stage can feel a bit abstract if the you don't know much about the life of the person to whom you're cultivating metta. So perhaps look for someone you know pretty well but feel neutral, bordering on indifferent, about. You could even be quite close to them but find they have become associated with a habitual indifference. It's this factor of habitual ignoring that it's important to note and work with.

Before we look at mudita, a few words about awareness. In a sense what we are is knowingness, what we often think we are is usually stories and habits layered on top of our more direct experience. As Sangharakshita once said, rather tongue in cheek,

"We are nothing but habits - and probably bad ones!"

What we are is what knows. I remember sort of momentarily getting this as a teenager when I was pondering what did it mean to grow up following a lesson where an exasperated teacher had asked us "When will you lot ever grow up". I found the question somewhat confusing and when I looked at the confusion I realised that I couldn't understand how awareness which was sort of always there could grow up as it had been the same since I had, I suppose, become aware. I quickly forgot the insight and carried on with my life.

It's quite easy to equate the conceptual thinking mind with knowingness and to start thinking about the body and other senses rather than allowing direct experience to 'know itself'. We don't need to have this intermediary mental voice constantly telling us what our experience is. The more we relax out of this, the more food can be really tasted, rain or bird song simply heard, and life just lived. When I get anxious I notice a tightening in the body and energy moves into the head. Then it feels more and more that "I" am up in my head facing a hostile world out there

which is the cause of “my” anxiety. With relaxation, the the thinking mind softens and the heart can open. Even in the tightness, if awareness is recognised, the possibility for relaxation arises.

In the body, the sensations are known to themselves, not to the thinking mind. The more we just are the body’s awareness, the less we are separated from life and the more the mind sense can be supportive rather than being the sense that appears to want to dominate our whole life.

We have put a lot of effort in sustaining the habit of separation so it’s important not to be self-critical when the old separating habits arise. So often these habits of separation are from childhood, developed to give us a sense of safety. These strategies have, however bizarrely, tried to look after us. So a sense of appreciation for them is in order rather than judgemental denigration. As Rumi says “Treat each guest honourably”. I know myself with migraines that they started happened at a time when I was trying to do too much and take on too much responsibility for everything, so I’d get a migraine which would force me to stop. An unconscious and somewhat crude strategy but it achieved what I could not.

### **Mudita Bhavana**

Mudita is happiness for the happiness of others, ‘sympathetic joy’, a resonance with another’s happiness. Depending on temperament, some people look more to the suffering side of life whilst others more to the happiness side. The Brahmaviharas are looking to help balance out whichever tendency we have, and create the conditions to broaden out what we are willing to experience. For this reason, mudita is particularly helpful if you have a tendency towards looking at the world from the perspective of suffering. Life is not just suffering - it’s the whole gamut of experience.

Happiness arises in multiple ways. We all experience little moments of uncomplicated happiness, such as from the feel of the sun, a beautiful colour, the texture of a fabric or the sound of rain. Or it could arise from having passed some kind of test, reaching a transition point in our life such as marriage or childbirth, from a skilful action or even the simple feeling of a life well led. As with all the brahmaviharas, mudita is an ethically ‘skilful’ quality, so the appropriate response

for a someone achieving a 'perfect' bank robbery, for example, would be compassion rather than sympathetic joy.

In the second stage of the mudita bhavana we bring to mind a "boon companion". A boon is like a gift. Bringing them to mind with metta and having a sense of their happiness, skilfulness or kindness and so on opens up the possibility of the resonance of mudita. After the boon companion, the stages continue in the usual order. How open can you be to the happiness of neutral people, or people you actively dislike? When separation or drifting occurs its important to notice this with kindness. Sometimes we can feel less than joyful (to say the least!) at someone's happiness or success - maybe they 'undeservedly' have a possession or a quality that we'd like. If such feelings arise, it can help to turn towards the somatic emotional experience of our resistance to their happiness with kindly awareness and allow the possibility of this awareness to undo the knots of resistance. Underpinning the practice is a continuing sensitivity to what is arising. Coming into relationship with envy, resentment or the stickiness of vicarious satisfaction, if it arises, can be regarded as a success rather than a failure. As Rumi says "be grateful for whoever comes".

**AH10 Led Mudita Bhavana.** Rijumitra {44.15 mins}

### **Introduction to the Tonglen Practice - Tejananda**

We have been leading up towards the Tonglen Practice. Tonglen means "receiving and sending". It can be seen as a fully somatic way of expressing compassion, by *receiving* a sense of the pain/ dukkha of ourselves, others and the universe and *sending* relief from and cessation of the dukkha. It can be done very simply - you don't need to use a great deal of imagination or visualisation beyond having a sense of the dukkha coming into the heart and the relief of it coming out from the heart. This is the essence, however, a lot of Tonglen practices elaborate on this and involve various visualisations and meditations. Personally, I prefer to do it in the simplest way possible. One thing that can help is starting the practice with a simple recitation such as:

"We go for Refuge to all the Buddhas so that all sentient beings may realise Buddhahood."

In addition, you might wish to recite this “apramana pranidhana”, an aspiration to embody the ‘limitless qualities’ or apramanas, another traditional term for the brahmaviharas. This is followed by a bodhicitta aspiration:

May I and all beings be happy  
And have the causes of happiness.  
May I and all beings be free from suffering  
And the causes of suffering.  
May I and all beings have the happiness of complete Awakening  
That will never diminish or fail.  
Thus may we abide in great equanimity,  
Unruffled by attachment and aversion  
And with equal love for all beings.

May the Heart’s Awareness  
Awaken in the unawakened;  
Where it has begun to stir  
May it never fade  
And may it awaken fully.

In doing this you are acknowledging the aspiration to free all beings from suffering. Next, bring awareness into the body, opening to the qualities of the soma and the heart. You could then ‘feel out’ the heart qualities by sensing into the connections that words such as ‘love’, ‘benevolence’, ‘goodwill’, ‘compassion’ and ‘kindness’ can evoke. The right word or words can really hit the spot, as long as you are going beyond the conceptual meaning and using them to contact the actual quality. As soon as there is a steady sense of metta present, you can start the tonglen, first of all by getting a general sense of breathing in suffering and breathing out relief from suffering.

A very important, in fact vital, point is that the suffering is not coming into you personally: it’s not a matter of ‘me personally’ taking on the woes of the world. What we are doing is allowing the woes to be transformed by the bodhicitta into the bliss of awakening. The heart can become open, when its depths begin to be revealed, to the bodhicitta itself. ‘Bodhicitta’ can be translated as ‘the thought of

enlightenment', but I prefer translations such as 'the awakening heart' or 'the heart's awareness'. So you may simply feel or imagine that the bodhicitta is here, even if it's not at all how the heart seems at the moment, while doing the practice. Some people find it helpful to use a visualisation such as imagining a jewel made of pure light in the heart centre. This is like the wish-fulfilling jewel that Avalokiteshvara holds to his heart in iconographical images, symbolising the 'actual' awakening heart of bodhicitta. This helps make it clear that it's the bodhicitta and not 'you' who are taking on and transforming the world's sufferings.

Feel free to experiment and explore ways of coming into connection with the heart space of the Bodhicitta. What we imagine can have a very strong effect. The main point is to truly feel that the bodhicitta is what we essentially are, and it is here in the depths of our heart.

Once this simple 'receiving and sending' is established, if you wish to introduce a more imaginative element, then on each in-breath you can not only have a sense of the suffering coming into the bodhicitta in your heart but also visualise it as dark, oily, heavy smoke. On each out-breath, as well as sensing relaxation and 'sending out' relief from dukkha, you could visualise pure light emanating from your heart and pacifying dukkha wherever it may be. You can send out light of any colour which gives a sense of compassion to you. If the image of a jewel in your heart doesn't feel right, perhaps a beautiful flower - such as a red lotus made of light - will. Notice that there can be a tendency to over-emphasise the breath at first, but this is fine as long as you notice and allow it to settle down as the practice continues.

The tonglen can be done in a simple way as just described, or with elaborate visualisations and recitations, as in some traditional bodhicitta practices, and anything in between. As for ways of proceeding with the practice, at the simplest level it would just be receiving on the in-breath and sending on the out breath with a sense of 'all beings'. Alternatively, you could start with the sense of receiving and sending 'in yourself', with your own being and suffering in mind, and then expand it to all beings, all life, everything. It's also fine to do it towards particular people and other living beings who come to mind. Another possibility would be to use the same stages as the Metta practice as a structure. In all cases you are resonating with the fact that like ourselves, all beings suffer. If you let the process begin in relation



to your own dukkha, with the in-breath all your suffering is going into your heart or the heart-jewel, and on the out breath there is relief. If there are painful responses you could ask the heart what it truly wishes for. This tonglen practice opens you up to the living reality of the heart's depths - the heart's awareness - as being none other than the Bodhicitta.

**AH11 Led Tonglen Practice.** Tejananda {32.42}

### **Introduction to Equanimity (Upekkha)**

Thought can get a bit of a bad press in Buddhist circles, yet the sensitivity of thought is an integral part of the Brahmaviharas. When, for example, another person is brought to mind, it's a *thought* of the other person, a mental construction. But if there is also a corresponding physical sense of the image, then the experience becomes more fully embodied. There can then be a sensing relationship to that mental image that includes the sensitivity of thought coming into relationship with the experience that the image throws up. The recollecting of the image can bring in further images of that person or being, of their life, what it's like to be 'them'. This can be uncomfortable, but as long as any discomfort is held with the sensitivity of awareness, it can be resolved back into awareness. This can lead to a resolution that relaxes any tightness that is manifesting. There's a working together of the different senses, including the mind sense, in the harmony of sensitivity. This might sound complicated, but it's simply about being sensitively aware and engaged with your feeling for the other person and whatever responses might arise. The more embodied we are, the more the sensitivity of thought can be there without the stories we are usually telling about the way the world is or should be.

We want the world to be a certain way and are very attached to outcomes. To the extent that we are attached in this way, we are separated from what is actually going on. The sense of discomfort that can arise is caused by the disparity between our stories and what is actually being experienced. The more deeply we are embodied, the more balance there is, so the happenings of life are less disturbing. Things are known and felt without losing a centre of balance. It's from this sense of balance that the upekkha bhavana proceeds.

People experience the pain, pleasure and ordinariness of life and respond in all sorts of ways. It's towards this that we turn with awareness. Life unfolds, their life and our life. We can be supportive towards others, but we are not responsible for how they they respond to this unfolding. Benevolence, compassion and sympathetic joy are folded into the equanimity but do not dominate it, which would give a partial view. This can be a revelation. When I first did the practice I realised just how much over-responsibility I had been taking for life and that I was in a state of horrified anxiety. The equanimity brought me back to what I was actually responsible for and there was a maturing, an 'allowing-ness' regarding the way things are. With this, life can become more of dance, an intimate moving relationship with what is actually happening. A continuing or unfolding, yet with stillness at its heart. The more presence of awareness there is, the more stable equanimity can be, and with this comes a natural recognition of the nature of life in all its insubstantiality and impermanence.

The world is in a bit of a pickle but, if you really drop into non-resistance to the here and now, then there's a sense of 'all right-ness', whatever is going on. This does not mean that you do nothing to alleviate suffering, but rather that you are in a better position to respond because you are not trying to make what's actually happening appear as something different by projecting what you want upon it. The fewer stories there are, the greater the sensitive responsiveness will be. There can be more of a dance of relationship rather than trying to force things to be certain way. The less we have to protect, the more the fearlessness of Amoghasiddhi's spontaneous all-accomplishing wisdom can manifest.

This is an ongoing process, work in progress. Yes, we keep on messing up, so it's important not to take it too seriously. In one way of looking at it, it's just our stuff. Equanimity is not about dulling down into indifference but really *feeling* and having a greater engagement with what is actually happening. If what's happening is dissociation, in the face of overwhelm, it's important to recognise this - with equanimity. I have been looking for this in my own practice as I feel I've had a bit of a habit of thinking dissociation was equanimity. There is a stillness to equanimity but also a positively energetic quality.

Lots of life is quite ordinary, and it's easy to switch off from this. Part of the equanimity practice is to remain open to this ordinariness and begin to recognise its extraordinary nature.

There are five stages to the upekkha practice. The only difference to the metta bhavana's stages is that the neutral person and the good friend exchange places. You then come into relationship with the 'neutral' person from the perspective of awareness the totality of their being. Life is a flow of unfolding conditions and equanimity can hold this unfolding-ness.

**AH12 Led Upekkha Bhavana.** Rijumitra {39.20 mins}

**AH13 Led introduction into the Tonglen Practice.** Tejananda {11.43 mins}

### **Bringing Things Together**

Bringing things together, how do we integrate what we have been looking at into a day to day practice? We started with Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, as a symbol for awareness, the warmth of the hearth and the coming home to the still point at the heart's centre. We have been emphasising that awareness is not just a quality of the mind but also the body and other senses, a 'sensing' from and coming home to all the senses, relaxing into them. When this happens there is less and less separation from what's arising and thus a real intimacy with experience.

It might be that staying as that awareness is enough and a natural metta can just flow out from the heart space. This is what the Buddha was pointing towards in his instruction regarding boundless metta - a natural overflow into awareness. The brahmaviharas as we learn them were described many hundreds of years after the time of the Buddha and these methods were developed to bring us ever closer to, and more intimate with, the heart qualities towards which the Buddha was pointing.

It's good to turn towards our own 'stuff' from a point of relative ease and relaxation and to recognise any sense overwhelm. Then, if overwhelm does arise, coming into the heart's awareness, coming into relationship with the resistance caused by our attachment, indifference and aversion. The brahmaviharas challenge

our ability to remain open with love to the being of others - and ourselves. The practice reveals the points of the secondary dukkha arising in our experience, the stories and emotional-physical knottiness. The more the knots are loosened and undone, the less we resist experience and the more we discover intimacy and the heart's awareness.

It's possible to bring the qualities of the different brahmaviharas into our daily metta practice rather than, necessarily, doing all the individual practices. In this way, the practice of metta both on and off the cushion gets richer and richer and life can be experienced with greater freedom and spontaneity.

**AH14 Lying down Hara Breathing.** Tejananda {14.09 mins} No Bell at the end

**AH15 Led Tonglen.** Tejananda {29.58 mins}