

Bron: Wenger, M.: Wind bell; teachings from the San Francisco Zen Center 1968-2001. Berkeley 2002, p. 65 e.v.

Sojun Mel Weitsman, Sensei was an early student of Suzuki Roshi. He started Berkeley Zen Center at his request and was appointed Abbot there in 1985. From 1988-1997, he also served as Co-Abbot of San Francisco Zen Center. This talk on the four aspects of love and their near enemies is a gem. - M.W.

Four Views of Love

Mel Weitsman, summer 1985

During sesshin, one of the topics I talked about was friendliness or relations between people. Because Zen puts so much emphasis on *prajna* or wisdom, seeing the true form through the cold eye of wisdom, we tend to neglect the warm eye of compassion, without which our practice becomes unbalanced. In Buddhism, there's a meditation practice that focuses on love in four different ways. It's not a formula, but it's a way of looking at love from a Buddhist point of view, a non-self-centered point of view. It's something I think we need to bring up frequently and remember. They are called the four *brahmaviharas*. They are four unlimited places from which we act. They're also called the Divine Abidings. They're very ancient and come from the Hindu background of Buddhism. They're highly regarded in Theravada Buddhism and considered a basis for any serious practice.

If you don't remember what they are, I'll refresh your memory. There are quite detailed meditations on each of these, but we don't have time to go into them here. The first of the four brahmaviharas is **metta** or lovingkindness. There is a [Metta Sutra](#) which you should know about. Metta is translated as lovingkindness; it's a way of extending yourself to everyone without partiality. When we meet people or are having some interaction, we should always be extending metta. It means good will or concern with the wellbeing of others. Strictly speaking, it means extending love impartially without having any desire in it or any kind of ulterior motive.

We always have to look at our motives when we do something: "Why am I doing this?" If we have a motive, we may say, "Well, I'm doing this good thing now so that maybe later something good will come to me because of it." That's a kind of motive, a kind of desire. It's okay, but it's not really pure. It's okay to have a motive, and within our relationships we do have motives: if I do this for you, then you'll do this for me. But strictly speaking, pure metta is to extend ourselves regardless of whether or not anything comes back. So the practice of metta is simply to extend lovingkindness. And, of course, the enemy of lovingkindness is hate or ill-will. They cannot exist simultaneously. It's easy to recognize the enemy, but it's also interesting to look at the counterfeit, what's called the near enemy.

The near enemy is something so close it looks almost the same. Selfish affection is the *Sojun Mei Weitsman* near enemy of metta, and it looks like love; but there's often so much desire in it that one's motives get mixed up easily. It's very easy to fool oneself, very easy to create an imaginary kind of love based on self-interest. So, to be really clear, we should know and respect a person in many ways before we decide what kind of relationship we're

going to have with them. Love, we say, hides many faults. It's easy to fall in love with someone for selfish reasons and overlook what later you will observe as faults.

This can be a big problem between men and women: how as a man can you extend lovingkindness to women impartially, or as a woman, how can you extend lovingkindness to men impartially? That's a big challenge: how not to let it get mixed up with your desire or your illusions and fantasies. It's something we have to practice in a conscious way. It's especially important in relating to members of the opposite sex, where desire can easily come up, to be able to relate from a non-selfish standpoint. That has to be at the basis of the practice in order that we don't get confused in our goodwill. This is just one example. Metta is something which can be extended to all of our relationships. First to ourselves and to those to whom we are close, then to those we don't know, and finally, if possible, to those we don't like.

The next brahmavihara is **karuna** or compassion. Karuna, strictly speaking, means to identify with someone's suffering or to suffer with others. We have a sympathetic understanding with people which leads us to help them because we can identify with their suffering. Sympathy is a kind of compassion, but compassion is a little bigger than sympathy.

The near enemy of compassion is feeling sorry for people who don't get what they want in a materialistic way. If John doesn't get his Mercedes, we feel sympathy, but we don't necessarily feel compassion. But for the persecuted people in Central America and the starving people in Ethiopia, we feel compassion. And for people who don't see the underlying cause of their suffering, we feel compassion. It comes up in relation to the suffering people have because of their ignorance or because of the inability to change their lives in a wholesome way. The polar enemy of compassion is ruthlessly causing people to suffer. Anything we do that causes real suffering is the enemy of compassion.

The third one, **mudita**, is sometimes called gladness, but it's more usually called sympathetic joy. Sympathetic joy is being able to feel glad about another's happiness. Of course, its polar enemy would be jealousy or envy. So it's freedom from envy, freedom from competition. If something good happens to somebody, we can share that with them and rejoice in their good fortune, even if it's someone we don't like particularly. That's the hard part: even if it 's somebody you don't like. That's hard to do.

The near enemy of sympathetic joy is joy over material wealth or something which satisfies our greed. So sympathetic joy is more the happiness you feel for people's true welfare or accomplishment in a fundamental sense. If you realize your Buddha Nature, we feel sympathetic joy with you. If you make some progress for social change in the world, we rejoice in your success. I won't begrudge you your new automobile or stereo set, but, strictly speaking, mudita applies to rejoicing in someone's success in unfolding as a human being. Its polar enemy is boredom or aversion.

The fourth one is **upekkha** or equanimity. Equanimity means observing things impartially, to maintain a balanced view; to be able to see every situation as it is and to be able to

decide something from the point of view of impartiality. The near enemy of upekkha is indifference based on ignorance. Upekkha doesn't mean to be indifferent. Rather it means not being one-sided or partial, not being influenced by resentment or approval. It's the basis for seeing clearly. In our meditation, in zazen, impartiality is one of the strongest factors. But we must always be careful not to mistake indifference for impartiality or non-attachment, and be ready to respond to each situation that confronts us free from greed and resentment, the two enemies of equanimity.

Although these four factors are always present in our lives in some form, they become strong guiding principles when we focus on them as meditation. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the near enemy is that which masquerades as the other, and the far enemy is its opposite. The far enemy is usually obvious. What one has to be careful about is the near enemy, which may not be so obvious.

If you know how to extend metta to everyone that you meet, you may find that people respond to your unguardedness and they in turn become unguarded. Even at some risk, you may do it, you may extend it. Walking down the street, without any motive in mind, just to say hello to somebody. You can try it - just walking down the street - some kind of greeting. Try it on someone who looks different than you do.

There are systematic meditations on these four, and the meditations are very elaborate. The meditations are pretty much the same for all four categories with minor differences. For metta you start by extending feelings and thoughts of lovingkindness toward yourself until you feel that you can accept it. And when you feel metta toward yourself, you can extend that to others.

So the first thing is to extend feelings of love or goodwill toward yourself and to be able to just settle in it. And when you've settled on that feeling, you can extend that to a friend, someone that you know and like. That's pretty easy, maybe easier than extending it to yourself. Then, when you can do that, you extend it to someone you're indifferent to, someone you don't have any particular feeling about. Then, when you can do that, try to extend metta to someone that you don't like, maybe someone you really can't stand. That's what's recommended: start with what is easy and work up to the difficult ones until you can completely open yourself. It's called eliminating the barriers. Then you can do the same with compassion, and with sympathetic joy and equanimity. After that you can extend these meditations to everyone, everywhere.

The brahmaviharas appear in their most elaborate form in the [Visuddhimagga](#), but there are other places where the meditations are more abridged. In our daily interactions they can be practiced as an outgoing expression of zazen.

It's not necessary to practice them in a formalistic way. The underlying principle is, of course, compassion. But if you try it out, you can see your weak points and enhance your awareness.

