

Brahmavihara Practice: Mudita and Upekkha

Possible Phrases for Mudita (Appreciative or Sympathetic Joy) Practice

May your happiness and good fortune continue. May they increase. Or

May you enjoy happiness and well-being. Or

I appreciate the blessings in your life. Or

I'm happy that you're happy. Or

May your blessings continue. Or

May the good things in your life continue. Or

May you never part from the sublime bliss free from suffering.

Gratitude Practice

Practicing gratitude can be understood as a form of mudita in relationship to oneself. (Some say that gratitude may be the fifth of the brahmavihara.) One simple way of practicing gratitude is to contemplate what you are grateful for on a daily basis. You might answer the question, "What am I grateful for?" and produce a list of ten items. Then take five minutes or so once or twice a day to reflect on some of these items, and/or what turns up spontaneously when you ask, "What am I grateful for?" It might be very simple, like having eaten well.

Traditional Sequence of Mudita Practice

Someone for whom it is easy to rejoice, typically someone close to us: A "happy friend."

[Self might come next, although it is not included in the traditional sequence. Gratitude practice and reflecting on what is good in one's life are two possible forms of mudita for self.]

Benefactor

Dear friend

Neutral person

Difficult person

All beings

Further Resources

James Baraz, course on "Awakening Joy" (see his web site, <http://www.awakeningjoy.info/>)

Buddhaghosa (1976, originally 5th century C.E.), *The path of purification, Vol. 1.* (pp. 341 – 342).

Dharma Seed downloadable audio talks on joy, gratitude, mudita, by many teachers at <http://www.dharmaseed.org/>).

Christina Feldman (2017), *Boundless heart (lovingkindness, compassion, joy, equanimity)*

Jack Kornfield (2002). *The art of forgiveness, lovingkindness, and peace* (pp. 131 – 135).

Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown (1998). *Coming back to life* (Chapter 6 on gratitude).

Nyanaponika Thera (1986). The four sublime states [the brahmavihara]. In: *Vision of dhamma* (pp. 185-200) ["Access to Insight" website].

Patrul Rinpoche (1998, originally 19th century), *The words of my perfect teacher* (pp. 213 – 217).

Sharon Salzberg (1995). *Lovingkindness* [chapter on joy and all of the other brahmavihara].

B. Alan Wallace (1999). *Boundless heart: The four immeasurables* [Tibetan perspectives].

(Donald Rothberg, December 2024)

Possible Phrases for Formal Equanimity (Upekkha) Practice

No matter what I wish for, things are as they are. And I care. Or

I will care for you but cannot keep you from suffering. Or

Whether I understand it or not, things are unfolding for you (or me) according to a lawful nature. Or

All beings meet their joys and sorrows according to a lawful nature. Or

May I accept things just as they are. Or

I wish you happiness but cannot make your choices for you. Or

No matter how I might wish things to be otherwise, things are as they are.

And I care. Or

May my heart be at ease with the conditions of my life. Or

You are the heir to (owner of) your karma. Your happiness and unhappiness depend on your actions, not so much on my wishes for you. Or

I have my path. You have your path. And I care about you.

Traditional Sequence of Formal Equanimity Practice

Neutral person

Benefactor

Dear friend

Difficult person

Self

All beings

Some Other Modes of Equanimity Practice

Ask the question: “What’s difficult for me to accept?” After identifying what’s difficult, then bring mindfulness and inquiry to the area that has surfaced. You might explore reactivity and unacknowledged pain related to particular states of affairs, assumptions and expectations about what should have happened, etc. Such inquiry can help equanimity to arise.

A group practice (developed by the Wednesday sangha at Spirit Rock) is to give a short time (5 – 10 minutes) at the end of a sitting for people to bring attention to people or situations in which there is, on the one hand, a situation involving suffering or difficulty, or, on the other hand, one connected with gratitude, celebration, and joy, giving, one person at a time, some specific details, as others in the group listen.

Further Resources (see also many of the resources listed for mudita practice)

Sylvia Boorstein (2003). *Pay attention for goodness sake: The Buddhist path of kindness*. [chapters on metta and equanimity].

Sylvia Boorstein (2008). *Happiness is an inside job: Practicing for a joyful life*.

Dharma Seed downloadable audio talks on equanimity, at <http://www.dharmaseed.org/>.

Donald Rothberg (2006). *The engaged spiritual life: A Buddhist approach to transforming ourselves and the world* [Ch. 8 on equanimity].

Sharon Salzberg (1995). *Lovingkindness*. Boston: Shambhala [chapter on equanimity].