

Brahmavihāra in Buddhist Philosophy: A Philosophical Analysis of Human Values

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Abstract: *This paper explores the Buddhist concept of Brahmavihāra as a fundamental framework for comprehending and developing human values. The four sublime states—mettā (loving-kindness), karuṇā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic delight), and upekkhā (equanimity)—represent, in my opinion, not only moral principles but also a thorough philosophical framework that incorporates moral behaviour, psychological development, and social harmony. In order to investigate how these virtues serve as both contemplative practices and normative principles that direct human behaviour, the study critically examines both canonical Buddhist texts and contemporary interpretations. I contend that Brahmavihāra offers a virtue-based ethical model based on relational interdependence and universal compassion, going beyond traditional ethical theories by emphasizing the development of inner dispositions rather than adherence to outward laws. Additionally, the concept of boundlessness (appamaññā) ingrained in these states offers a philosophical foundation for equality, inclusivity, and non-discrimination, making it extremely pertinent in tackling modern world issues like moral fragmentation, alienation, and violence. The article also emphasizes how Brahmavihāra can be used practically to promote social cohesiveness, emotional intelligence, and ethical responsibility in contemporary society. This study illustrates Brahmavihāra's ongoing importance as a comprehensive framework for reconsidering human values by placing it within both classical and modern philosophical discourse. In the end, I argue that cultivating these four sublime moods provides a revolutionary path toward individual well-being and societal harmony, helping to create a more compassionate and well-rounded global ethical system.*

Keywords: Brahmavihāra, Buddhist Philosophy, Human Values, Compassion, Appamaññā

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The development of inner dispositions that transcend egoistic constraints and promote universal well-being is a fundamental component of Buddhism's ethical perspective. The idea of Brahmavihāra, which literally translates to "divine abodes" or "sublime states," holds a prominent position among these dispositions as a framework for comprehending and realizing human values. The philosophical value of Brahmavihāra, in my opinion, is found not only in its meditative application but also in its ability to express a thorough moral psychology based on existential balance, relational harmony, and compassion. Together, the fourfold virtues of upekkhā (equanimity), karuṇā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic delight), and mettā (loving-kindness) provide an ethical paradigm that is both socially and personally transformational. These attributes are considered as "infinite feelings" that are directed toward all beings without distinction, as stated in classical Buddhist expositions. This embodies the universalistic ethos of Buddhist ethics. The Brahmavihāras are living ethical practices rather than abstract ideals from the perspective of core canonical teachings. "Let none deceive another, or despise any being... let none... wish harm upon another" (p. 3) is a clear instruction from the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta (Sutta Nipāta 1.8), which, in my opinion, establishes the fundamental principle of non-maleficence and universal goodwill as the beginning point of moral life. This statement is consistent with the larger Buddhist understanding of interdependence, which holds that moral behaviour results from an awareness of one's own vulnerability and interconnectedness. Comparably, the development of compassion is closely linked to the experiential awareness of suffering (dukkha), in which the ethical subject transcends selfishness and engages sympathetically with the suffering of others.

By portraying Brahmavihāra as a methodical cultivation of limitless mental states that purify the mind and enhance moral consciousness, scholars like as Nyanaponika Thera deepen its philosophical significance, according to my engagement with later scholastic views. He highlights that these states are "immeasurable" since they surpass all boundaries of ego and bias (Nyanaponika, 1996, p. 12). In my view, this idea of immeasurability indicates a moral ontology based on inclusion and openness and is consistent with the Buddhist critique of possessive individuality. Furthermore, through meditative formulations like "Sabbe sattā averā hontu"; "may all beings be free from danger" (Mahasi Sayadaw, 1985, p. 45)—which show how ethical intentions are internalized and universalized through contemplative discipline, Mahasi Sayadaw's exposition further clarifies the practical dimension of these virtues.

The way the Brahmavihāras together tackle the complexity of human emotional existence is what I find most interesting. Equanimity keeps the mind steady in the face of dualities of gain and loss, compassion lessens cruelty, sympathetic delight eliminates envy, and loving-kindness combats ill-will. The practitioner "is not elated by gain nor depressed by loss," as the Majjhima Nikāya advises (MN 140, p. 109), demonstrating a balanced ethical knowledge that goes beyond reactionary inclinations. This equilibrium, in my opinion, is a greater engagement with the world, driven by wisdom and non-attachment, rather than a retreat from it. Brahmavihāra is thus revealed by philosophical analysis as a dynamic combination of psychological training and ethical intentionality. It bridges the gap between moral theory and actual behaviour by providing a model of human values that is both normative and empirical. The Brahmavihāras offer a timeless ethical framework that can promote compassion-driven social harmony and inner development in the modern context of conflict, alienation, and moral fragmentation. As a result, this study aims to critically examine these four sublime experiences as both enduring pillars of a universal human ethics and doctrinal components of Buddhist philosophy.

2 | CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF BRAHMAVIHĀRA:

According to my understanding, the Dhamma's ethical, psychological, and metaphysical framework forms the conceptual underpinnings of Brahmavihāra in Buddhist philosophy. Brahmavihāra, which literally means "divine abodes," refers to a methodical development of moral consciousness that

harmonizes human existence with universal harmony rather than only elevated emotional emotions. In my view, these four sublime states—*mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity)—form the cornerstone of Buddhist human values, serving as existential transformation techniques, ethical precepts, and meditation techniques all at the same time. The Buddha proposes an all-encompassing moral attitude based on universal compassion in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, which is the clearest expression of the canonical basis of *Brahmavihāra*. According to my understanding, the passage “May all beings be happy and secure; may all beings have happy minds” (*Sutta Nipāta* 1.8, p. 143) establishes the ontological universality of moral concern beyond differences of identity or difference. The Buddhist understanding of interdependence (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), which holds that everyone’s well-being is inextricably related to one’s own, is reflected in this universalization of ethical purpose. Additionally, the same discourse uses a potent ethical metaphor to ground compassion in an affective intensity that goes beyond self-centered attachments: “As a mother would risk her life to protect her only child... so should one cultivate a boundless heart” (*Sutta Nipāta* 1.8, p. 149).

The *Brahmavihāras* are viewed as *appamaññā* (the immeasurable states) from a philosophical perspective, which suggests that they are limitless and non-exclusive. According to Nyanaponika Thera, these states are “the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings” and act as “great peace-makers in social conflict” (Nyanaponika, 1998, p. 6). This, in my opinion, places *Brahmavihāra* at the nexus of social philosophy and individual ethics. This description emphasizes how *Brahmavihāra*’s conceptual underpinnings go beyond individual spiritual growth to include the moral restructuring of interpersonal relationships. A profound break from partiality is also implied by the idea of boundlessness, which suggests an ethical universalism that opposes all types of discrimination, even those based on caste, class, or identification. Furthermore, a complex moral psychology is shown by the four virtues’ structural coherence. Equanimity (*upekkhā*) guarantees emotional balance and impartiality; compassion (*karuṇā*) reacts to suffering with sympathetic concern; sympathetic joy (*muditā*) combats jealousy by relishing in others’ happiness; and loving-kindness (*mettā*) serves as the positive affirmation of goodwill. According to the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the practitioner “pervades one direction with a mind imbued with loving-kindness... and likewise the whole world” (*AN* 4.125, p. 1). This, in my interpretation, refers to the deliberate ethical practice of cultivating these states in a broad and disciplined manner.

The merging of *Brahmavihāra* with meditative discipline (*bhāvanā*) is another important conceptual feature. The development of these moods is not just theoretical; it is accomplished via methodical mental training that cleanses impurities like jealousy, cruelty, and hatred. These attributes should “become our inseparable companions” in all activities, as Nyanaponika further notes (1998, p. 8), highlighting their function as enduring dispositions rather than fleeting feelings. This confluence of ethics and meditation, in my opinion, shows the holistic character of Buddhist philosophy, which holds that moral growth and cognitive reform are inextricably linked. Therefore, a comprehensive ethical paradigm based on universality, boundlessness, and psychological refinement is revealed by the conceptual underpinnings of *Brahmavihāra*. They present a view of human values that goes beyond normative guidelines and into the domain of lived experience, where moral principles are cultivated in a disciplined manner. I contend that *Brahmavihāra* provides a deep framework for reconsidering human values in terms of relational interdependence, emotional intelligence, and moral inclusivity in the context of modern philosophy, so promoting both individual freedom and societal well-being.

3 | BRAHMAVIHĀRA AS A FOUNDATION OF HUMAN VALUES:

According to my interpretation, *Brahmavihāra* functions as a fundamental basis of human values in Buddhist philosophy. It is not only an ethical ideal but also a transformative framework that redefines the essence of human relational existence. Together, the four sublime states—*mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity)—present a picture of mankind

based on moral balance, empathic responsiveness, and global benevolence. According to my interpretation, these values emerge naturally from the development of consciousness that acknowledges the interdependence of all beings rather than being imposed by an external moral code. According to the canonical scriptures, Brahmavihāra is a broad moral perspective that goes beyond egoistic constraints. The Aṅguttara Nikāya highlights the infinite reach of loving-kindness, saying that one “pervades one direction with a heart full of love... and likewise the whole world” (AN 4.125, p. 1). This, in my opinion, shows the universality of ethical concern as the foundation of human values. The transition from self-centred morality to an inclusive ethical consciousness, where the welfare of others becomes inextricably linked to one’s own, is reflected in this universalization. Such a paradigm places human values in a larger cosmic and relational perspective, challenging traditional moral boundaries.

From a philosophical standpoint, Nyanaponika Thera’s view is especially helpful in comprehending Brahmavihāra as the moral basis for human cohabitation. According to him, these sublime moods act as “great peace-makers in social conflict” and are “the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings” (Nyanaponika, 1998, p. 6). According to my understanding, this realization places Brahmavihāra not just as personal qualities but also as social harmony principles that deal with the underlying causes of conflict—hatred, envy, and attachment. In this way, Brahmavihāra offers a normative framework for rebuilding human connections based on emotional intelligence, empathy, and respect for one another. Brahmavihāra’s role as an endless source of human values is further highlighted by its conceptualization as appamaññā, or the immeasurable states. These states are “boundless... not narrowed by any limitation,” as stated in classical explanations (Nyanaponika, 1998, p. 7), suggesting that genuine ethical behaviour must transcend all types of prejudice, including caste, class, and identity disparities. This boundlessness, in my opinion, is essential to creating a truly global ethics that promotes inclusivity and opposes discrimination. It establishes equality as a basic human ideal by reflecting a moral worldview in which all beings are deserving of respect and care.

A complex ethical psychology that tackles several facets of human emotional life is also revealed by the fourfold structure of Brahmavihāra. Equanimity (upekkhā) guarantees impartiality and emotional stability; compassion (karuṇā) reacts to pain with active concern; sympathetic joy (muditā) celebrates the happiness of others, preventing jealousy; and loving-kindness (mettā) fosters unconditional goodwill. According to contemporary readings, these attributes “provide the answer to all situations arising from social contact” (Nyanaponika, 1998, p. 5), implying that taken as a whole, they constitute a comprehensive ethical framework that may direct behaviour in a variety of scenarios. According to my study, this interwoven structure shows that Buddhism’s human values are interdependent rather than fragmented, with each virtue supporting and balancing the others. The transforming capacity of Brahmavihāra in forming both individual character and community existence is another important aspect. People can integrate ethical concepts at a deeper psychological level by cultivating these ideals through meditation practice (bhāvanā). This combination of ethics and meditation guarantees that human values are experienced realities rather than just theoretical concepts. These actions are claimed to produce happiness for “infinite living beings” and contribute to the moral elevation of society, as emphasized in more general Buddhist doctrine. This transforming quality, in my opinion, is what makes Brahmavihāra especially pertinent in the modern world, when moral dilemmas frequently result from emotional imbalance and a lack of empathy. Therefore, I contend that Brahmavihāra, which provides a universal, inclusive, and psychologically grounded ethical framework, forms the very basis of human values in Buddhist philosophy. It presents a picture of mankind based on compassion, joy, and composure, bridging the gap between communal peace and individual moral development. The philosophical ideas of Brahmavihāra offer a timeless resource for recreating human values in a way that is both deeply personal and universally applicable in the current global situation marked by division and war.

4 | ETHICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS:

The ethical and philosophical aspects of Brahmavihāra in Buddhist philosophy, in my opinion, show a highly integrated framework where morality, psychology, and metaphysics come together to provide an all-encompassing view of human values. The four sublime states—mettā (loving-kindness), karuṇā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic joy), and upekkhā (equanimity)—represent a transforming way of being that reorients the individual from ego-centered life toward universal moral consciousness. They are not just ethical recommendations. These aspects, in my opinion, show that Buddhist ethics is virtue-oriented rather than rule-based, centered on the development of inner dispositions that organically show themselves as moral behavior. The early canonical writings, especially the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta, where the Buddha declares, “May all beings be well and safe... may they be happy” (Sutta Nipāta 1.8), best capture the ethical basis of Brahmavihāra. According to my understanding, this directive creates an unwavering moral requirement that cuts across all social, cultural, and personal barriers. It represents a radical ethical universalism where the well-being of all creatures becomes the primary focus of moral existence. Additionally, the same passage aligns Brahmavihāra with the larger Buddhist commitment to ahimsā (non-violence) by emphasizing non-harm as a fundamental ethical principle: “Let none deceive another...” or wish for another to suffer.

From a philosophical perspective, I believe that Brahmavihāra represents an advanced moral psychology that tackles the foundations of moral conduct. Instead of enforcing external obligations, it modifies the person’s internal emotional makeup. These four states act as “great peace-makers in social conflict” and are “the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings,” according to Nyanaponika Thera’s perceptive observations. This, in my opinion, emphasizes how Buddhism’s ethical life is inextricably linked to psychological development; moral behaviour emerges organically when the mind is cleansed of negative impulses like cruelty, anger, and envy. Therefore, the philosophical aspect of Brahmavihāra is found in its synthesis of ethics and mental discipline, where moral behaviour is based on the cultivation of wholesome moods. The idea of boundlessness (appamaññā), which describes the Brahmavihāras as immeasurable states that extend to all beings without discrimination, is another important philosophical component. According to my interpretation, this idea creates a universalistic ethical framework by opposing all types of exclusivism and partiality. To demonstrate this boundlessness, the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta uses a potent metaphor: “As a mother would risk her life to protect her only child... so should one cultivate a limitless heart.” This metaphor elevates ethical commitment to a logical concept of universal care while simultaneously heightening its emotional intensity. According to my argument, by basing value on relational interdependence rather than individual autonomy, such an ethic goes beyond traditional moral frameworks.

Furthermore, Brahmavihāra’s fourfold framework represents a well-rounded ethical philosophy that addresses several facets of the human experience. Equanimity guarantees impartiality and stability, compassion relieves pain, sympathetic delight eradicates jealousy, and loving-kindness combats malice. Nyanaponika goes on to say that these states “provide... the answer to all situations arising from social contact.” This integrative framework, in my opinion, shows that Buddhist ethics is flexible and context-sensitive, able to adapt to intricate human relationships while upholding moral consistency. In particular, equanimity adds a philosophical dimension by avoiding bias and emotional attachment, bringing ethical behaviour into line with wisdom (paññā). Brahmavihāra’s intellectual and ethical aspects are further enhanced by its association with meditation (bhāvanā). These virtues are developed via disciplined mental training, which results in a change in both perception and behaviour. They are not just abstract ideals. A person who develops such a “limitless heart” lives in a condition of existential and moral harmony, as the writings suggest. This connection of ethics and meditation, in my opinion, shows the comprehensive character of Buddhist philosophy, which holds that experience, action, and knowledge are interconnected. Therefore, I contend that Brahmavihāra’s ethical and philosophical aspects offer a thorough framework of human values based on universality, compassion, and psychological

development. They provide a significant alternative to both strict moralism and relativistic subjectivism by redefining ethics as an interior cultivation that organically spreads outward into social harmony. In my opinion, Brahmavihāra offers a timeless philosophical framework for developing empathy, balance, and universal responsibility in a world characterized by conflict and moral fragmentation.

5 | CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE:

I believe that Brahmavihāra is still relevant today because it provides a universal framework of human values based on compassion, inclusion, and inner development, thereby addressing the ethical, psychological, and social issues of the current world. The four sublime states—*mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*—emerge not only as antiquated spiritual aspirations but also as useful ethical tools that might reorient human life toward peace and respect for one another in a time of conflict, alienation, and moral fragmentation. I contend that Brahmavihāra's ongoing significance stems from its universality, which surpasses cultural and historical barriers while remaining profoundly pertinent to modern human issues. When Nyanaponika Thera considers the usefulness of Buddhist teachings in the contemporary world, he deftly foresees this question. He notes that while some may question "how words spoken 2,500 years ago can have relevance to our 'modern world,'" he maintains that these teachings are still relevant because they deal with "basic facts of life that are common to all humanity" (Nyanaponika, 1965, p. 3). This insight, in my opinion, emphasizes how the ethical precepts of Brahmavihāra are based on universal human experiences like sorrow, desire, and reliance in relationships rather than historical context. Thus, in a world that is becoming more and more split by violence and hatred, cultivating loving-kindness and compassion becomes not just spiritually significant but also socially essential.

By focusing on relational ethics and emotional intelligence, Brahmavihāra provides a potent alternative to utilitarian and individualistic moral frameworks from a modern ethical perspective. The modern world, which is marked by social separation and technical growth, frequently lacks a cogent moral foundation that combines empathy and reason. According to Nyanaponika, the Brahmavihāras offer "the answer to all situations arising from social contact... the great peace-makers in social conflict" (Nyanaponika, 1998, p. 5). This remark, in my opinion, emphasizes how these values can be used practically to address current problems like socioeconomic injustice, intercommunal violence, and ecological crises, where systemic harm has resulted from a lack of compassion and balance. Furthermore, Brahmavihāra's idea of boundlessness (*appamaññā*) is especially pertinent in light of globalization and intercultural harmony. Ethical frameworks that are constrained by identity, nationality, or ideology are inadequate as contemporary cultures become more interconnected. In contrast, the Brahmavihāras promote an unbiased and all-encompassing mindset that "should not be restricted by any limitation... not confined by..." biases (Nyanaponika, 1998, p. 7). According to my research, this idea provides a conceptual basis for global ethics, which promotes tolerance and respect for one another by viewing all beings as deserving of moral thought and care.

The psychological relevance of Brahmavihāra in treating mental health issues is another aspect of its current relevance. The development of these four states offers a way to control emotions and promote inner healing in a world where stress, anxiety, and emotional instability are more prevalent. According to Nyanaponika, compassion eliminates the rigidity of selfishness and "makes the narrow heart as wide as the world" (1998, p. 12). This transforming capacity, in my opinion, is essential for building emotional equilibrium and resilience in contemporary life, where people frequently experience loneliness and existential insecurity. By encouraging stability and non-reactivity in the face of shifting conditions, equanimity in particular provides a philosophical answer to the unpredictability of modern life. In addition, I contend that Brahmavihāra is highly relevant in the field of practical ethics, especially in fields like global justice, environmental ethics, and peace studies. In line with current ecological concerns, the development of loving-kindness and compassion promotes a non-exploitative relationship with both human and non-human beings. While equanimity offers the ethical balance required for just and

unbiased decision-making, the emphasis on empathetic delight opposes consumerist and competitive impulses. In this way, Brahmavihāra helps create a comprehensive ethical framework that combines social duty and personal development. Therefore, I contend that Brahmavihāra is still relevant today because it may transcend cultural and chronological boundaries while meeting the basic ethical and psychological needs of contemporary mankind. It provides a timeless yet evolving framework of human principles that promotes inner harmony, compassion, and inclusivity. The philosophical ideas of Brahmavihāra offer a foundation for creating a more compassionate and peaceful global community in addition to serving as a guide for individual behaviour in a time of fast change and moral ambiguity.

6 | CONCLUSION:

Finally, I contend that the philosophical study of Brahmavihāra reveals a profoundly transformational and cohesive framework of human values that combines existential insight, psychological development, and ethical intentionality. Together, the four sublime states; *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*; articulate a picture of moral life that acknowledges the interconnectedness of human existence and transcends egoistic limits. In my view, Brahmavihāra is a dynamic process that reorients consciousness toward global kindness, sympathetic participation, and balanced awareness rather than just a collection of ethical virtues. This inward metamorphosis serves as the foundation for external ethical behavior, proving that mental cleansing and social concord are inextricably linked. Additionally, these qualities' universality and boundlessness (*appamaññā*) provide a conceptual basis for inclusive and non-discriminatory ethics, which is especially pertinent in a world characterized by conflict and division. When compassion and serenity are combined, ethical responsiveness is led by wisdom and impartiality in addition to emotional sensitivity. As a result, Brahmavihāra provides a comprehensive ethical framework that unites the emancipation of the individual with the welfare of the group. In this way, I argue that its lasting importance stems from its ability to offer a timeless yet useful framework for developing human values based on joy, compassion, and inner balance, ultimately leading to a more peaceful and compassionate world community.

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