

# Bhante Kusala

## Forgiving Ourselves and Others



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A Dhamma Talk and  
Reflective Journal

# Forgiving Yourself and Others:

A Dhamma Talk  
And Reflective Journal

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A Dhamma Talk  
And Reflective Journal

Derangala Kusalagnana  
(Bhante Kusula)



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The image features the study of a head by Gustav Klimt. It also incorporates three images released by their artists on Pixabay: clairewu's lotus, Piyapong89's branch with leaves and sunpath's Buddha. The text is in Sinhala and is translated as "Forgiving."

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Access to Insight made their translation of the Five Precepts available through a Creative Commons License.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Forgiving Ourselves and Others* is the third book in our “A Dhamma Talk and Reflective Journal Series” and has a slightly different format than the first two books where the dhamma talk was followed by a series of “Questions for Inquiry.”

*Forgiving Ourselves and Others* keeps those “Questions for Inquiry” but adds additional instructional material about concepts that Bhante Kusala mentions in his Dhamma Talk.

This is not a “new” format we are adopting for future books in the series. It is just one of the many formats that we will use to facilitate reflection.

We hope that you enjoy learning from Bhante Kusala’s talk and the additional information about the Buddha dhamma.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven L. Berg". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Steven" and last name "Berg" clearly legible, and a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the name.

Steven L. Berg, PhD  
Publisher  
Ehipassiko Press  
info@ehipassikopress.org





Image Credit: Tawnyowl

## **FORGIVING YOURSELF AND OTHERS**

Let us cultivate some forgiveness meditation to live peacefully. You do this by forgiving yourself for not understanding certain things. Forgiving yourself for not being able to explain things better. Forgiving yourself for not knowing. Forgiving yourself for telling the wrong thing. Forgiving yourself for telling the right thing, but at the wrong time. Forgiving yourself for not being mindful. Forgiving your enemies, if any. Forgiving your

friends. Forgiving those who judge you. Forgiving the thoughts that judge you.<sup>1</sup>

You don't have to beat yourself up. Let bygones be bygones. The supreme Buddha forgives you for any past wrongdoing. You are forgiven for wrongdoings that are bodily, mentally, or verbally done. You can ask for forgiveness for breaking precepts while making a determination to not break the precepts again.<sup>2</sup> You can ask for forgiveness from whatever that you hold in your life as sacred. The Buddha, the Divine. Anything that is sacred to you. You may ask for forgiveness now.

Please forgive me for not being diligent. Forgive me for not being sincere when I couldn't be sincere. Please forgive me for not looking after myself physically and mentally as much as I wanted to.

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<sup>1</sup> Please go to the chapter on "Forgiving Yourself" to reflect on how to forgive yourself.

<sup>2</sup> The five precepts are to refrain from taking life, to refrain for taking what is not given, to refrain from sexual impropriety, to refrain from wrong speech, and to refrain from alcohol and other intoxicants that cloud the mind. There is a section later in this book on "The Five Precepts."

You can forgive anyone.<sup>3</sup> You can forgive your brothers and sisters. Forgive your aunts and uncles. Forgive your parents. Forgive anyone. Your spouse. Children. Forgive your pets. Forgive those vendors out there. The traders. The workers. The innumerable number of beings with whom you have contact. Forgive those who have done wrong deals. Forgive those who may be in prison for committing grievous crimes.

Without holding on to any grudge, please forgive and clear your mind from the past and from any future wrongdoings. That's how we come into right understanding and your thoughts become cleaner. Your mind's radiance increases. The things that you have imagined, like having a snake on the wall, and discovering that there is no snake on the wall as such. Thinking that there is a self and now knowing that there is no self.<sup>4</sup> Please forgive yourselves for not having the wisdom to comprehend such details.

Please forgive yourself for being ignorant, ignoring the truths. The truth of suffering, the truth of the

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<sup>3</sup> Please go to the chapter on "Forgiving Others" to reflect on how you can begin to forgive others.

<sup>4</sup> The Buddhist idea of Anattā is further explained in the chapter on "Anattā, or No Self."

origin of suffering, the truth that the suffering can end, and the truth that there is a path that leads to the ending of suffering.<sup>5</sup> With that understanding, your thoughts become cleaner again, more refined and purified. And thus, your language, your words, your speech become cleaner. There's nothing that you cannot let go of.

When your words become fuel, your actions, your love, livelihood, your effort become pure. With the right effort,<sup>6</sup> you cultivate the wholesome energies, wholesome thoughts, positive thoughts such as loving kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity.<sup>7</sup> When you make the right effort, right things begin to happen. Wisdom arises. You are able to see both sadness and happiness the same way in your life.

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<sup>5</sup> This passage references the Four Noble Truths which are a foundation to Buddhist wisdom. You can learn more about these truths and reflect on them in the chapter on "The Four Noble Truths."

<sup>6</sup> Right Effort is one of the practices that are part of the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to enlightenment. For a discussion of the Eightfold Path please consult Bikkhu Bodhi's *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering* (BHS Piriatti Editions, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> You can learn more about these four forms of love in the chapter on "The *Brahma Viharas*."



You are able to see how you are like the prisoner with a key in your hand, yet you remain in prison.<sup>8</sup> With that, you make more effort to be mindful that your mind's attention goes from one thing to another. And how does that happen? By catching root of greed, the attachment that leads to suffering. Thoughts of anger that lead to suffering. Roots of delusion that led to suffering. You'll forgive yourself for not knowing these poisonous roots that cover your radiance. Even if anyone were to do any harm to you, you will forgive them and give them the gift of loving kindness.

May all beings come to the richness of good health, wealth and happiness. May they be content to take contentment as their highest wealth thus being mentally healthy and cultivating connectedness of your mind. Now let us come. Let us reflect on connectedness. *Samadhi*.

*Samadi* is overcoming the five hindrances. These hinderances include sensual attachment that you can overcome. No addiction. No anger. You

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<sup>8</sup> This is a reference to a poem by Rumi which is discussed in the chapter on "The Prisoner With the Key."

overcome that, too. No resentment. No restlessness. No doubt. You overcome those, too.<sup>9</sup>

These five hindrances can be overcome just like a clear lake.<sup>10</sup> As you stay stilled and collected both inwardly and outwardly you allow the lake to be, you allow the nature to be. The beauty around you in nature that manifests beauty in the outside world also manifests beauty within yourself. Like a lotus blooming from on the water its roots grow from the dirt. In the same way, your mind opens as such, being free from fear. Being free from hatred. Being free from cruelty. And inside the lotus there is fragrance and beauty. More layers to be opened. Just as your mind does. More layers of the mind open and show the next layer. You allow this to happen.<sup>11</sup>

Closing your eyes and sense faculties, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, physical sensations and thinking are closed. And you do deep breathing, inhaling and exhaling allowing your neck and head

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of *Samadi* is developed later in this book.

<sup>10</sup> The initial version of this dhamma talk was given while sitting in front of a clear lake. You can reflect more about calmness and nature in the chapter on “The Clear Lake.”

<sup>11</sup> For more explanation as to the symbol of the lotus and its relationship to forgiveness, please go to the chapter on “The Lotus.”

to rest on your spine. Keeping your body straight upright. You now allow your mind to settle. You'll see what is in there. It's like when you allow the lake to settle and you see what is in the lake. Mindfully you breathe in. Mindfully you breathe out. Taking a long breath, you know you are taking a long breath. Taking a short breath, you know you are taking a short breath. Exhaling a short breath, you know you are exhaling a short breath. Being sensitive to the entire breathing body you breathe in and breathe out. Tranquilizing the breath, you breathe in and breathe out.<sup>12</sup>

You may now come out of your meditation and express gratitude for your body, for all your benefactors, friends, family. For all the Buddhas.<sup>13</sup>

Forgive yourself for trying too hard, if that was your case, and have a wonderful rest of the day.

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<sup>12</sup> Please see the chapter on "Breathing Meditation" for directions on how to focus on your breath.

<sup>13</sup> Many people think that there was only one Buddha, the Gautama Buddha who taught us the Buddha *dhamma*. But there were an infinite number of Buddhas before him. Including the Gautama Buddha, we know the names of 28 of those Buddhas. The difference between the Gautama Buddha and the other Buddhas is that he taught the path to enlightenment that he had learned. Because of his teaching, it is easier for us to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

And they got to know some merits. Let us share the merits we have earned by practicing *dhamma*.<sup>14</sup>

May the suffering ones be suffering fear. Fear struck fearless be. May the grieving shed their grief. May all beings find relief. May all being share the merits we have just acquired for the acquisition of all kinds of happiness. May beings inhabiting space and earth be at peace. May serpents of mighty powers share this merit of ours. May those divine serpents and diets long protect you and protect the Buddha's teachings.

*Sādhu. Sādhu. Sadhu.*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> To reflect on the merits you earned and the importance of sharing them, please go to the chapter on "Sharing Merits.

<sup>15</sup> *Sādhu* is an expression of excitement that could be translated into English as "well done" or "excellent." Later in this book, you will have the opportunity to reflect on those things for which you can express *Sādhu*.

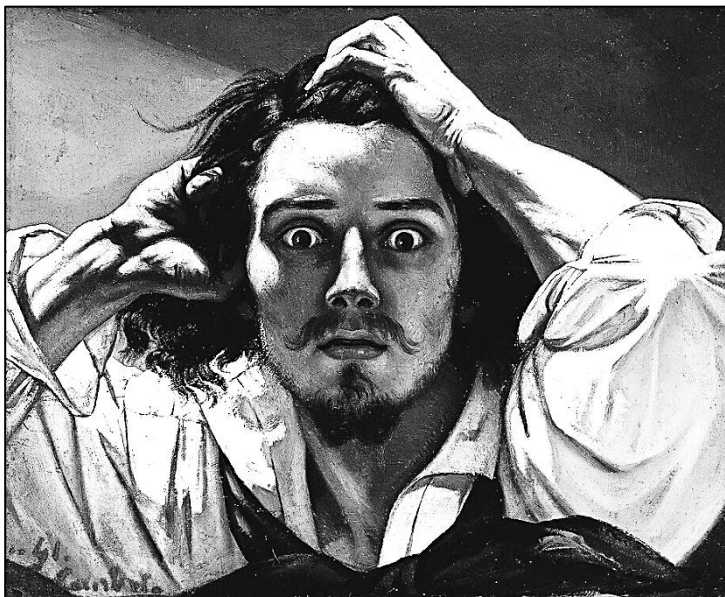


Image Credit: Gustave Courbet's self portrait *The Desperate Man* (1843-1845).

## **FORGIVING OURSELVES**

In the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, The Gautam Buddha teaches:

So with a boundless heart  
Should one cherish all living beings;  
Radiating kindness over the entire world:  
Spreading upwards to the skies,  
And downwards to the depths;  
Freed from hatred and ill-will.

To radiate energy requires that there be a central point from where energy is being emitted. In the case of loving-kindness, that central point is each of us.

In the same way that we cannot emit loving-kindness to others if we do not have it ourselves, it is difficult to forgive others until we have learned to forgive ourselves.

What are some things that you don't understand? In what ways do you feel bad about yourself for your lack of understanding? To lack knowledge about something doesn't mean that you have a character flaw. How can you put your lack of knowledge into perspective so that you can forgive yourself for not understanding these certain things?

*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

How can you forgive yourself for the times you were not able to explain things better? Consider what you learned from these situations. How can you be more skillful in the future.



*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

In what ways do you feel badly about yourself for not knowing something? How might you forgive yourself for these situations?

## *Forgiving Yourself and Others*

What types of dissatisfaction do you feel when you tell the wrong thing? What changes can you make in your attitude to overcome this dissatisfaction? Consider how you can positively let bygones be bygones.

Sometimes, we tell the right thing but not in a skillful way. How can you forgive yourself for telling the right thing, but at the wrong time?

## *Forgiving Yourself and Others*

We too often think in the binary as if there are only two sides to an issue. If we are not 100% mindful, we consider ourselves to be failures. How can you forgive yourself for not being 100% mindful?

*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

Please forgive me for not being diligent. Forgive me for not being sincere when I couldn't be sincere. Please forgive me for not looking after myself physically and mentally as much as I wanted to.



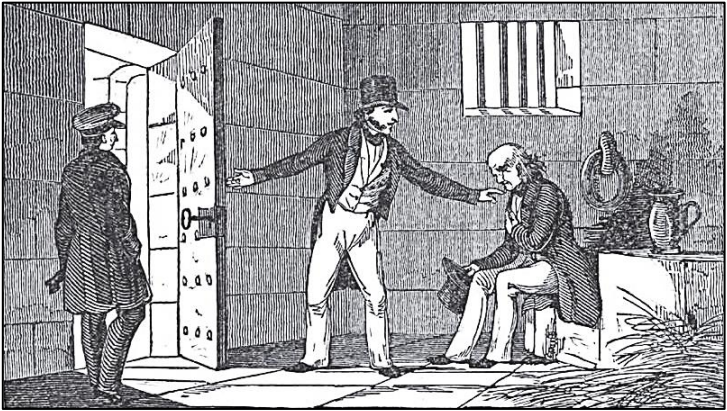


Image Credit: "Sketch of Richard Mentor Johnson freeing a man from debtors' prison" from Asahel Langworthy's *A biographical sketch of Col. Richard M. Johnson, of Kentucky* (1843).

## **FORGIVING OTHERS**

In the past, someone could be sent to jail simply because they were in debt. As a prisoner, they would have no way of earning money to pay off their debts. They did not have the key to let themselves out. Individuals who advocated for prison reform argued that debtors should not be held in prison. They did not argue that the debts these people owed should be excused.

Too often, there is the misunderstanding that offering forgiveness means that individuals are not held accountable for their actions. This is not the case.

When we ask others to forgive us, we do our best to correct any harm that we have done and resolve to do our best not to do similar harm in the future. We do not expect them to absolve us from our responsibilities. The same happens when we forgive others. We can understand why someone might have acted wrongly, forgive them, and then still expect that they be held accountable. For example, you can forgive someone and still expect them to pay the debt that they owe to us or to society.

Forgiveness lessens our attachment and eases our suffering. It is not, to use a common expression, a get out of jail free card.



*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

Make a list of any enemies you might have. How would it benefit you to forgive them?

## *Forgiving Yourself and Others*

Our friends can do us harm through a careless word or action. You might want to consider whether you have done a similar action. How would you like to be shown forgiveness? Make a list of friends toward whom you feel ill will because of what they have done. What can you do to forgive them?

Family members are the people closest to us. They could be related by blood or marriage, but they might be someone with whom we share our lives in close proximity, for example a roommate. Consider situations in which you have needed forgiveness from them. Then consider how you could go about forgiving them.

## *Forgiving Yourself and Others*

Consider circumstances in which you have judged others. Then consider the roots that lead to your judgement such as envy. Might some of the root causes of judgementalism apply to the people who judge you? How might you forgive those people who judge you?



Image Credit: geralt

## ANATTĀ, OR NO SELF

The Gautama Buddha's teaching on *anattā* or no-self is found in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* which begins:

Bhikkhus, form is nonself. For if, bhikkhus, form were self, this form would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.' But because form is nonself, form leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'

The idea of *anattā* or non-self is very difficult to understand, in part, because in our day-to-day language, we have different meanings for the word "self." If we don't define the term, we end up talking about different things. It gets very

confusing. Even Thanissaro Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Bodhi, two monks respected for their translations of the suttas, disagree on the meaning of *anattā*.

For the purposes of this book, we are not going to reflect on the role of *anattā* itself. Instead, it is an example of why we need to forgive ourselves for not fully understanding difficult texts.

The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* is the second discourse that the Gautama Buddha taught after his Enlightenment.

Make a list of things that you don't understand about the Buddha *dhamma*. They might be words you hear whose definitions you don't know, concepts that are mentioned, or practices around the temple. Then, don't worry about them, at least for now.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In Buddhism, there is a concept of *saṃsāra* which is the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. As Buddhists, we have more than one lifetime to learn all there is to know. If you don't know the term *saṃsāra*, add it to the list on this page.

We need to forgive ourselves for feeling bad about our ignorance. This is different than needing to be forgiven for our lack of knowledge. It is not reasonable to expect yourself to know everything. What is the root of your pervasive dissatisfaction in yourself when you don't understand something? How can these feelings be overcome.



Write down no more than two questions you have about the Buddha *dhamma* or Buddhist practice. How can you learn more about what you have listed? Next, find an answer to your question. Once you have your basic question answered, cross the question off and add a new one. Please realize that you do not need to understand the concept fully, just enough that you are comfortable with it and have a foundation to learn more later.



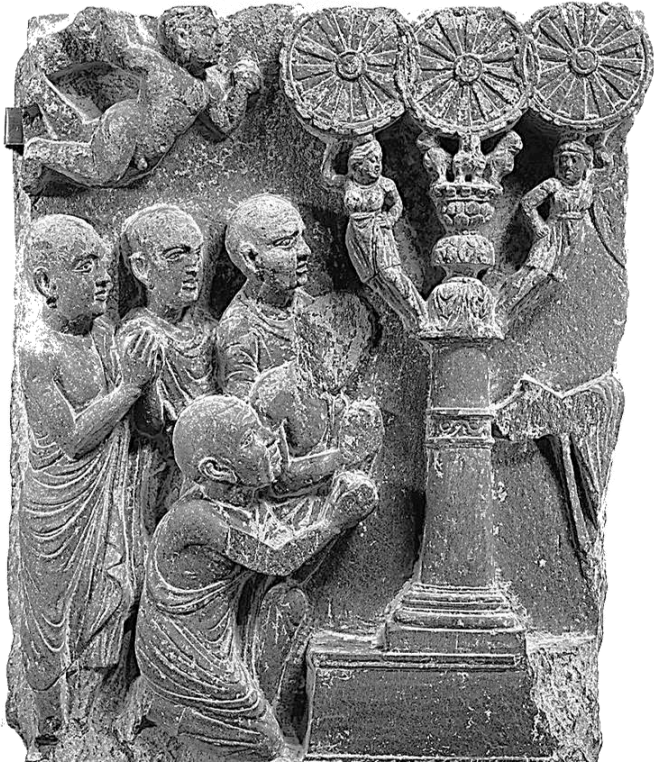


Image Credit: A relief showing the Gautama Buddha teaching his first discourse in which he lays out the Four Noble Truths (c. 200s).

## FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The first discourse that the Gautama Buddha preached after he reached *nibanna* was the *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta* (The Discourse of the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma) in which he taught the Four Noble Truths. These truths are:

1. The truth of *Dukkha*.

Life involves suffering which might also be described as pervasive dissatisfaction, anything that is difficult to bear, the opposite of *sukha*, something that is easy to bear.

2. The truth of the cause of *Dukkha*.

The cause of suffering is our craving and attachments.

3. The truth of the end of *Dukkha*.

Suffering ends when we give up our cravings and attachments.

4. The Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path provides us with the necessary practices that lead us to *nibbana* or Enlightenment.

Most of us do not know the Pali language. As a result, we read scripture that has been translated

into another language such as English. Translated words do not always fully reflect the same meaning as the original word or another word used in the translation.

*Dukkha* is a very hard word to translate because there is no real English equivalent. Usually, when we think of “suffering,” we get the idea that someone is being tortured or physically harmed by another person. But we also experience *dukkha* when we need to leave the friends with whom we have been spending an enjoyable evening.

It can be helpful to read multiple translations of Pali writing to get a better understanding of the original Pali text.



In what ways have you ignored the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth that the suffering can end, and the truth that there is a path that leads to the ending of suffering. How would your life improve if you accepted these truths and stopped ignoring them?







Image Credit: DGJ

## **PAÑCA-SĪLA: THE FIVE PRECEPTS**

1. Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī–  
sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.
2. Adinnādānā veramaṇī–  
sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.
3. Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī–  
sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.
4. Musā–vādā veramaṇī–  
sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.
5. Surā–meraya–majja–pamādatthānā  
veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Why begin this section by listing the Five Precepts in Pali, a language that most of the readers of this book do not know? To make the point that we rely on translations to understand Buddhist texts and that different translations have different meanings. Let us take the first precept as an example.

Access to Insight translates the first precept as “I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.”<sup>17</sup> An article in *Lion’s Roar* translates the precept as “Not Killing”<sup>18</sup> while Dharma Wisdom’s translation is “I take as a training precept to refrain from taking life”<sup>19</sup> and Pema Khandro’s translation is “Avoiding harming other beings.”<sup>20</sup> These translations are similar yet give different interpretations of what is meant by the precept. Reading multiple translations is helpful for our spiritual growth.

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<sup>17</sup> “The Five Precepts: *Pañca-Sila*.” *Access to Insight*. 2005. [www.accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/pancasila.html](http://www.accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/pancasila.html).

<sup>18</sup> Sperry, Rod Mead. “What Are the Five Precepts?” *Lion’s Roar*. 11 June 2021. [www.lionsroar.com/what-are-the-five-precepts/](http://www.lionsroar.com/what-are-the-five-precepts/).

<sup>19</sup> “The Five Precepts.” *Dharma Wisdom*. 2023. [dharma wisdom.org/the-five-precepts/](http://dharma wisdom.org/the-five-precepts/).

<sup>20</sup> “The Five Precepts.” *Pema Khandro*. [pemakhandro.org/the-five-precepts/](http://pemakhandro.org/the-five-precepts/).

So what are the five precepts in English? Here is the translation provided by Access for Insight.

1. I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.
2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.
3. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.
4. I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech.
5. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.



When you ask for forgiveness for breaking the precepts, you make a determination to not break them again.

Read several different translations and explanations of the Five Precepts. How do the different interpretations and explanations give you insight that will help you not break the precepts in the future?





The god Brahma as depicted in Mary Held's *The Land of Temples, or, Sketches from Our Indian Empire* (1882).

## THE *BRAHMA* VIHĀRAS

The Buddhist god Brahmā<sup>21</sup> is often represented with four faces and four arms. Each face represents one of the four types of unselfish love: *mettā* [loving-kindness], *karuṇā* [compassion], *muditā* [sympathetic joy], and *upekkhā* [equanimity].

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<sup>21</sup> Brahma is a god also found in Hinduism.

A *vihara* is a dwelling place. Because Brahma dwells in these forms of love, they are known as the *Brahma Vihāras*.

When we practice the *Brahma Vihāras*, we do not consider whether or not someone is worthy of our unselfish love. We begin with loving ourselves and then allow the love to radiate to all sentient beings.



*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

In what ways have I shown loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity to myself?

*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

In what ways have I shown loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity to others?

*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

In what ways have others not shown loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity to me? How can I forgive them for their shortcomings?

*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

In what ways have I not shown loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity to others? Can I ask for forgiveness from them?



Image Credit: Charles Louis Lucien Muller's Charlotte Corday in prison (c. 1900 – 1912).

## **THE PRISONER WITH THE KEY**

In his poem “A Soul in Prison,” Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi writes about a prisoner who has the key to liberation in his hand, yet he doesn’t use it. He remains in prison.

One of the marvels of the world  
is the sight of a soul sitting in prison  
with the key in its hand.

Covered with dust,  
with a cleansing waterfall an inch away.

After reading Rumi's poem, someone might express disbelief. "How could a prisoner not use the key to secure their freedom?" This might even be said of the same person is suffering from pervasive dissatisfaction because of their attachments.

What are the roots of our attachments? Greed is an attachment that leads to suffering. Anger can lead to suffering. Delusional thinking leads to suffering. The Five Hindrances lead to suffering.

The Gautama Buddha provided us with the key to liberation from suffering yet many times we don't want to use it. We prefer our attachments even if they require that we remain in a prison of discontentment. But sometimes, we remain ignorant of the roots of our suffering because we have seen no other way to live. We become prisoners of our childhoods.

Rumi observes that

If a prisoner had not lived outside,  
he would not detest the dungeon.

There are times when, because of our childhoods, we accept things as normal that are unacceptable. Because we did not see any other ways to live, we thought that what we were told or what we experienced was normal for everyone.

As adults, we sometimes choose to remain locked in a prison created by our childhood experiences because we are unable to forgive our parents and others. Because we remain attached to the past, we cannot live contented lives in the future.

To forgive our parents or others who did horrific things to us as children does not mean that we say that what they did was acceptable. It means that we are not willing to hold on to the anger or resentment that keeps us imprisoned. It means that we don't want to remain covered in the dust of the past. We want to bath in the cleansing waterfall offered by the Buddha *dhamma*.





In what ways do we remain prisoners to our attachments and resentments?

*Forgiving Yourself and Others*

How can we forgive ourselves and others for what happened in the past so that we do not remain prisoners of the past?



Image Credit: Paul Signac's *In the Time of Harmony: The Joy of Life—Sunday by the Sea*, 1895-1896.

## **SAMADHI: OVERCOMING THE FIVE HINDRANCES**

The Gautama Buddha explains the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*) in the *Nīvaraṇa Sutta*.

Monks, there are these five hindrances. Which five? Sensual desire as a hindrance, ill will as a hindrance, sloth & drowsiness as a hindrance, restlessness & anxiety as a

hindrance, and uncertainty as a hindrance. These are the five hindrances.

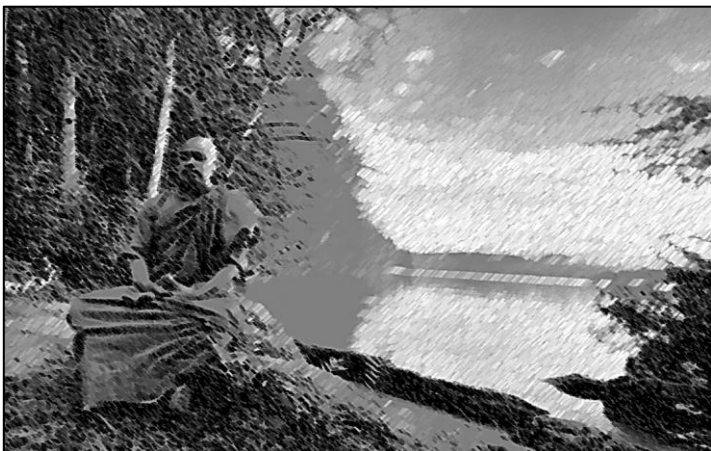
To abandon these five hindrances, one should develop the four frames of reference. Which four? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves... mind in & of itself... mental qualities in & of themselves — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. To abandon the five hindrances, one should develop these four frames of reference.

To summarize, the five hindrances that are obstacles to concentration are:

1. *Kāmacchanda* (sensory desire)
2. *Vyāpāda* (ill-will)
3. *Thīna-middha* (laziness)
4. *Uddhacca-kukkucca* (restlessness)
5. *Vicikicchā* (doubt)

In what ways do sensory desire, ill-will, laziness, restlessness, and doubt have a negative impact on my growth in the Buddha *dhamma*.





Bhante Kusala meditating next to a clear lake.

## **THE CLEAR LAKE**

The five hindrances of sensory desire, ill-will, laziness, restlessness, and doubt are like a storm on a lake. As long as the weather is agitated, the lake cannot be calm. When the weather calms, the lake becomes clear.





What actions to I take—especially in terms of sensory desire, ill-will, laziness, restlessness, and doubt—to cause chaos in my life?

As part of forgiving myself, I make a determination to change how I will act in the future. What changes will I make so that sensory desire, ill-will, laziness, restlessness, and doubt no longer have such a negative impact on my life?



Image credit: lcallard210

## THE LOTUS

The lotus flower is an important symbol in Buddhism because it reminds us that all sentient beings are capable of obtaining *Nibanna* (Enlightenment). The lotus begins its life in the mud at the bottom of a lake or pond. Just as the lotus is able to rise above the mud to bloom on the surface of the water, we are able to transcend the mud of our lives and blossom in spiritual enlightenment.



Without mud, there can be no lotus. What is some of the mud in your life (past or present) and how has that mud been able to help you transform yourself into a better person?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Thich Nhat Hahn developed this idea more fully in his *No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering* (Parallax Press, 2014).

## *Forgiving Yourself and Others*

Like the blooming lotus, what are steps you can take to make yourself free from fear, hatred, and cruelty? In what ways do these steps involve forgiving yourself and others?

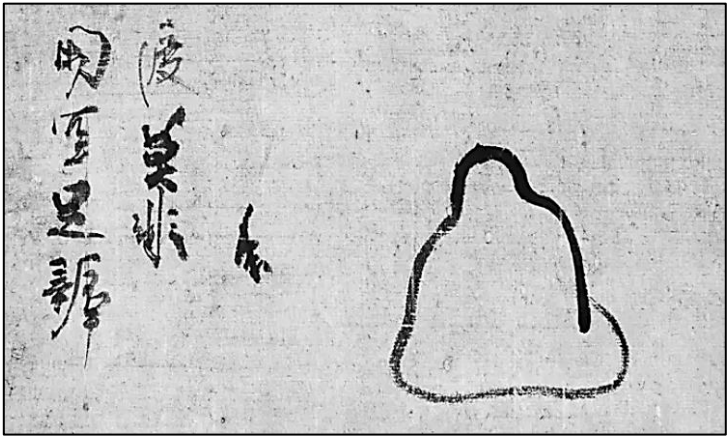


Image Credit: Konoe Nobutada's *Meditating Daruma* (late 1400 – early 1500s). The text is “Quietness and emptiness are enough to pass through life without error.”

## BREATHING MEDITATION

Thanissaro Bhikkhu provides “Basic Breath Meditation Instructions” from which the following is an excerpt.<sup>23</sup>

Sit comfortably erect, in a balanced position. You don't have to be ramrod straight like a soldier. Just try not to lean

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<sup>23</sup> The complete version of Thanissaro Bhikkhu's “Basic Breath Meditation Instructions” are available at the Access for Insight website.

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/breathmed.html>

forward or back, to the left or the right. Close your eyes and say to yourself, 'May I be truly happy and free from suffering.' This may sound like a strange, even selfish, way to start meditating, but there are good reasons for it. One, if you can't wish for your own happiness, there is no way that you can honestly wish for the happiness of others.

...

Bring your attention to the sensation of breathing. Breathe in long and out long for a couple of times, focusing on any spot in the body where the breathing is easy to notice, and your mind feels comfortable focusing. This could be at the nose, at the chest, at the abdomen, or any spot at all. Stay with that spot, noticing how it feels as you breathe in and out. Don't force the breath, or bear down too heavily with your focus. Let the breath flow naturally, and simply keep track of how it feels. Savor it, as if it were an exquisite sensation you wanted to prolong. If your mind wanders off, simply bring it back. Don't get discouraged. If it wanders 100 times, bring it back 100



times. Show it that you mean business, and eventually it will listen to you.

If you want, you can experiment with different kinds of breathing. If long breathing feels comfortable, stick with it. If it doesn't, change it to whatever rhythm feels soothing to the body. You can try short breathing, fast breathing, slow breathing, deep breathing, shallow breathing — whatever feels most comfortable to you right now...

Once you have the breath comfortable at your chosen spot, move your attention to notice how the breathing feels in other parts of the body. Start by focusing on the area just below your navel. Breathe in and out, and notice how that area feels. If you don't feel any motion there, just be aware of the fact that there's no motion. If you do feel motion, notice the quality of the motion, to see if the breathing feels uneven there, or if there's any tension or tightness. If there's tension, think of relaxing it. If the breathing feels jagged or uneven, think of smoothing it out... Now move your attention over to the right of that spot — to the lower right-hand

corner of the abdomen — and repeat the same process... Then over to the lower left-hand corner of the abdomen... Then up to the navel... right... left... to the solar plexus... right... left... the middle of the chest... right... left... to the base of the throat... right... left... to the middle of the head...[take several minutes for each spot].

Breathing meditation is an excellent way to begin meditating, but it is not the only type of meditation practiced in Buddhism.

The foundations of mindfulness which includes descriptions of meditation practices are found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bhante Kusala translated *The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: A Brief Guide to Reading the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta with the Pali and English Texts* (2023).

Describe your meditation practice. What are ways you can improve your practice? You might also list some questions you have about your practice, questions you could discuss with a monk, nun, or some other experienced meditator.





Image credit: Henry Ossawa Tanner's "The Thankful Poor" (1894).

## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

In the *Dullabha Sutta*, the Gautama Buddha teaches,

Monks, these two people are hard to find in the world. Which two? The one who is first to do a kindness, and the one who is grateful for a kindness done and feels obligated to repay it. These two people are hard to find in the world.

When the Gautama Buddha spoke these words, he was encouraging us to recognize both the value of a kind gesture as well as the importance of expressing gratitude for it.



What are some specific ways you have expressed gratitude in the past 24 hours? week? month? year?

How does expressing gratitude make it easier for you to forgive yourself and others?





Image Credit: truthseeker08

## SHARING MERITS

After performing meritorious actions, the merits you earn can be transferred to gods, divas, spirits, or deceased relatives.

There is not one standard chant for transferring merits. However, a stanza from the *Tirokudda Kanda* is used in funeral rituals. While the monks chant, the relatives of the deceased individual pour water into a cup until the cup overflows.

As water raining on a hill flows down to the valley, even so does what is given here benefit the dead. As rivers full of water fill the ocean full, even so does what is given here benefit the dead.



One way to help us forgive ourselves is to balance our negative thoughts with positive ones. Make a list of meritorious acts you have performed recently for which you have earned merits.

To whom might you transfer those merits? What did you learn from them?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> You might want to consult Bhanthe Sankichacha's *Learning from Others* (2023) which is part of Ehipassiko Press's "A Dhamma Talk and Reflective Journal Series."



Image Credit: Detail from Honoré Daumier's *Croquis Pris au Théâtre* series (1864).

## **SĀDHU. SĀDHU. SADHU.**

*Sādhū* is an expression of excitement that could be translated into English as “well done” or “excellent.” It is somewhat equivalent to clapping at the end of a performance to show one’s appreciation for work well done.



Make a list of things in your life for which you can exclaim “*Sādhu. Sādhu. Sādhu.*”







## **ABOUT EHIPASSIKO PRESS**

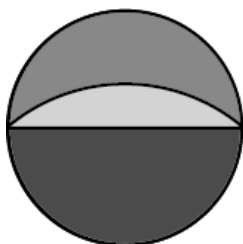
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PEACE HOUSE

## **ABOUT CAMBRIDGE PEACE HOUSE**

Bhante Kusala is a resident monk at Cambridge Peace House, in Cambridge, Massachusetts

### **Vision**

We imagine a world where everyone experiences inner peace, belonging, and community. We believe in the powerful transformation possible when community, inner peace, and outward peace are cultivated together.

### **Mission**

To provide a sacred place that is first and foremost a monastic residence: a supportive place for monks to further their spiritual development. Second, through various offerings, we invite visitors to engage in spiritual discovery,

meaningful community, and practice. We aim to create conditions where individual and collective peace, connection, and discovery can flourish.

## **Peace House is a Sacred Space**

Located in the heart of Cambridge, Peace House is a 501c3 nonprofit focused on spiritual development and community building. We are a monastic residence that welcomes visitors – religious and non-religious – to share our sacred space. We care for the spiritual needs of our community by being a beautiful, calming refuge from the busyness of daily life.

## **Programs**

Resident monks offer weekday chanting and meditations, which are welcoming to beginners as well as experienced practitioners. Monks are also available for 1:1 spiritual counseling appointments.

Peace House also offers monthly dhamma talks, silent retreat days, and other special events. With peace and loving kindness at the heart of all we do, we welcome folks of any spiritual or religious tradition, no tradition, and multiple traditions.

Website: <https://www.cambridgepeacehouse.org/>.



Halton Peel Buddhist Cultural Society  
**West End Buddhist Temple**  
And Meditation Centre



## **ABOUT WEST END BUDDHIST TEMPLE AND MEDITATION CENTRE**

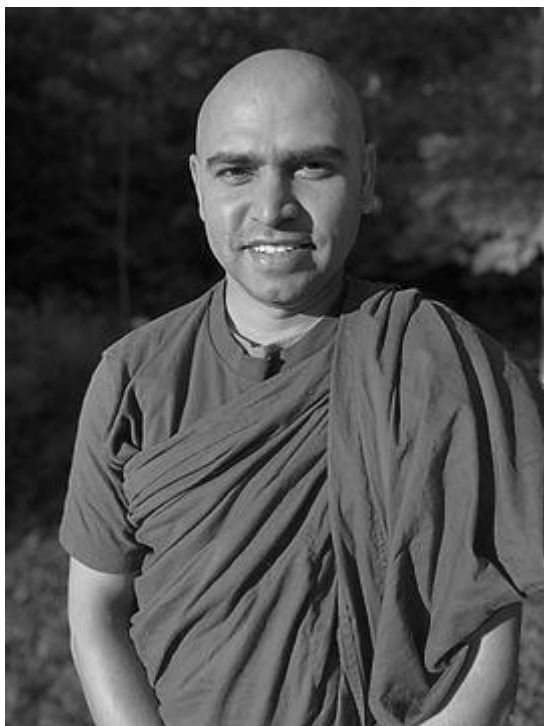
Bhante Kusal splits his time between Cambridge Peace house and the West End Buddhist Temple in Mississauga, Canada.

The Halton Peel Buddhist Cultural Society is a Registered Canadian Charity #89170 8166 RR0001. The West End Buddhist Centre is dedicated to building a community of support in the larger Canadian community that nourishes intellectual and spiritual growth while embracing our Buddhist traditions.

The Centre provides weekly classes in meditation, Buddhist teachings, and the Pali language. A Dhamma School is available monthly as are Full Moon (Poya) Days. Several annual celebrations are also conducted.

Website: [www.westendbuddhist.org](http://www.westendbuddhist.org)





## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Bhante Kusala is a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka. Born in 1987, he entered the monastic life at the age of 16 in 2004 at Sri Gangagiri Vihara in south Sri Lanka. He did his undergraduate and graduate studies in the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka majoring in Pali language.

In 2012-2013, he moved to Italy and studied cognitive science and engaged in mindfulness-based research at the University of Trento.

At Harvard University, Bhante Kusala pursued a Master of Divinity degree. After his graduation, he became a resident chaplain at Brigham and Women's hospital and Dana Faber Cancer Institute.

Bhante Kusala has conducted research on mindfulness, provided spiritual care in United States hospitals, and taught at universities as a lecturer in Pali and Buddhist studies. Bhante Kusala helps children, youth, and adults with their spiritual counseling needs.

Since 2011, he also has been serving as the translator for Ajahn Brahm, Ajahn Brahmali, Bhikkhu Analayo. He has offered his teachings in Moscow, Europe, Canada, United States of America, Indonesia, and many other places.

Bhante Kusala splits his time between the West End Buddhist Temple in Mississauga, Canada and Peace House in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



## **PUBLICATIONS BY BHANTE KUSALA**

*DSMC Chanting Book: Buddhist Chants in English and Pali (2014)*

*Forgiving Ourselves and Others: A Dhamma Talk and Reflective Journal (2023)*

*Happy Meditation!: A Weekend Retreat Practicing the BrahmaVihāras (Sublime States) With an introduction to Dhamma (2023)*

*The Satipatthana Sutta: A Brief Guide to reading the Satipatthana Sutta With the Pali and English Texts (2023)*



## **A Dhamma Talk and Reflective Journal Series**

*Learning From Others* (July 2023)  
by Bhante Sankichcha

*Five Factors for Positive Growth* (August 2023)  
by Bhante Sankichcha

*Forgiving Ourselves and Others* (September 2023)  
By Bhante Kusala