

Samadhi in Metta Practice
Lovingkindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening
Rob Burbea
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So I'd like to talk a bit today about *samādhi*, which is a word some of you may be familiar with. It's a Pali and a Sanskrit word, *samādhi*. And go into the meaning of that and the development of that and some different aspects and implications of it. When we were thinking about this retreat, we thought, one of the primary questions was, "Well, is it going to be helpful to people? Is it going to be worthwhile for people?" And I reflected on it a little bit, and I thought, "Well, people will develop *mettā*, which is a lovely thing. They'll develop that quality of heart. And then, hopefully, there'll be the exposure, the chance to open to the kind of insights that come from *mettā* practice. And then also there'll be the opportunity to develop *samādhi*." So three possibilities, any of which, or any amount of which, are all completely worthwhile, would make this time here worthwhile to someone.

So this word *samādhi* in different traditions actually means different things. I'd just like to use it in quite a particular way. Traditionally – rather, in the Buddhist tradition – not maybe what the Buddha meant, but what has come out of that is actually that *mettā* practice is something that's pretty much only good for *samādhi*. I'll explain what that means. Also what's come to us through the tradition is that this word is usually translated as 'concentration,' and with a particular meaning to the word 'concentration,' meaning the way sort of laundry detergent is concentrated. [laughs] You know, it's like a lot of it in a very small space. [laughter] In other words, a very *narrow* focus of the mind, a kind of microscopic – looking at experience through a microscope. And that has come to be implied in the word *samādhi*.

Now, there is some benefit to being able to make the mind small and narrowly focused like that. There's a certain amount of power in it. But if one goes back to the Buddha, and looks through all the volumes of what he said, you can't actually find anything implying anything like that at all. For some reason, that's what's come to us. So rather, I would like to use *samādhi* in what I feel is more the Buddha's sense of the word, which is more something like 'collectedness': collectedness of mind, collectedness of mind and heart and body. Something maybe even better: 'unification.' Because there's a sense – as John was talking last night – you know, often we're kind of out of contact with the body, a little distant from the body, or the mind and the body feel like two very separate things, disjointed. Or the mind is just scattered here, memory, planning, worry, whatever it is, obsession. And so *samādhi* is this unification of the mind – unification of the mind, the body, and the heart.

One of my teachers uses the phrase, uses the translation, 'depth of meditation,' which I like very much. So *samādhi* is really pointing to a sense of the meditation process, the mind sinking in a very lovely way into its depths, in the way that the sea is calm in its depths. Now, we can talk about a range of states of *samādhi*, certainly. We can also talk about a continuum, a continuum of depth, a continuum of unification. And this is, I feel very much it's a lifelong exploration. So it's not just something that's a little bit, then we forget about. It's something that all of us as human beings have the potential to grow into and to explore, and usually it's a very gradual, very slow process of exploring.

So it's an investigation, a lifelong investigation, exploration of the depths of consciousness, of the depths available in consciousness. Also of the kind of expanded perceptions that come about when the consciousness deepens. And all of this, not to grasp too much at these words or the possibilities, but just to know that there are possibilities, and that we can move in a very lovely and gradual way to explore some of this.

And why? Well, because it is very lovely. It's really, really very lovely. Of the lovely things that are available to human beings, *samādhi* is really up there. But more than that – although that's already quite something – we *need* a sense of nourishment in life. We *need* a sense of loveliness, a deep loveliness, deep nourishment. A sense of beauty that comes with that, a sense of rest, and very *deep* rest that comes with that. This is something we really, really need as human beings. We're generally pretty frazzled, pretty scattered, pretty undernourished on a heart, on a being level. And often we don't even realize that.

So this rest then allows us to be actually more available to others, which of course is a big part of what *mettā* is about; more available to others, more available to ourselves, more available to life. And brings a freshness to life. It's almost like the quality of life actually can begin to feel like, or actually it *does* increase as the mind learns to settle down that way. Freshness to life, fresh discoveries in life come out of this settledness of mind, this unification. Fresh perceptions. And really a sense of receptivity in that, so that our typical way of being in the world, which is, "I'm here, you're there, we're separate, I'm trundling along in my life," all this, this is part of the human condition, that with *samādhi* we're actually maximizing the receptivity of the mind to other ways of seeing ourselves, seeing others, seeing life. And it's those other ways of seeing that are potentially liberating. So the significance of *samādhi* is actually huge. It's huge.

Usually when people talk about *samādhi*, they're talking about taking one object, like the breath – which we've now put aside, and working with the *mettā* – or the *mettā* is one object. So in the instructions here, we're taking one object, which is the *mettā*, and just the mind staying with that as much as possible. And that's usually what's implied in *samādhi*, staying with one object. But actually, *samādhi* in itself, in the broad sense, is something bigger than that, and it can be that we actually have a very *open* awareness, and not necessarily staying with one object, but there's a sense of this unification happening because of the non-entanglement with things that come up. There's just a free, open, easy, and wise relationship with what's coming up. And that wise relationship brings the unification, brings the depth of mind. It doesn't have to be just with one object. And perhaps as the retreat – in fact, *definitely* as the retreat goes on, we'll be exploring what that means to open it up too.

Usually the mind moves – even if we're practising, you know, insight meditation, the mind is on this, and then it's on that, and then it's on this. So the mind is moving a lot. And oftentimes, even if we think we're being mindful, the relationship with what we're mindful of is actually not all that skilful. There is some degree of pushing away what we don't like, or trying to hang on or something. It's not that skilful, not that conducive to depth of calm.

We'll see as the retreat goes on that actually to have a relationship of *mettā*, of loving-kindness with what comes up, is actually – well, potentially – *the* most skilful kind of relationship to have with what's going on. And that skilful relationship brings with it this depth, this deepening, I should say.

So of all the things that it's possible for a human being to understand or master or have some skill in – you know, you can think, I don't know if you all know what the *Guinness Book of Records* is? It's this sort of big book of weird things that people ... [laughter] And they get famous because they can do that more or better or faster than anyone else. And so things like, you can stack coins on your elbow and then do *that* [moves arm] and catch them all in one hand. And some people stack whatever, sixty coins and catch it. And some of it's pretty amazing, you know. [laughter] But if we really think ... And actually, some things are very beautiful – the ballet or musical facility, or you see a great football player or basketball player, there's something, I feel, very deeply beautiful in that. But to really ask, actually: in this life, of all the things, the skills, the crafts that we could develop, what's really worth developing? And this *samādhi* is something that a human being, it's one of their best friends to have some facility in that.

And we often underestimate its importance, and its power, and its significance, but if you look at the Buddha's teachings, I mean, it's hard to just turn a few pages without him going on and on, it seems, just constantly repeating himself about the importance of *samādhi*. I feel that so far in the West – and the Dharma is very young in the West, but – it seems like we've kind of sidelined the importance of *samādhi* a little bit. So I'm pretty sure that will change just as the Dharma grows up in the West, but so far we've tended to sideline it.

Samādhi is important, as I said. It brings this well-being, this healing, on a physical level, on an emotional level, on a spiritual level. It also brings insights. Just by itself, it brings insights. And not only that, but it's like the perfect soil for insights to grow in. So when there's *samādhi* there, it's really the optimum conditions for insights to occur. When the mind is scattered and not unified, we can think we see something: "Ah yes, impermanence. I understand. Fantastic." Or something about the way – our particular patterns of contraction or difficulty, and we see, "Ah yeah, I see it!" If there isn't that *samādhi*, what tends to happen is we see it very clear, and then five minutes, five weeks, however long later, it doesn't seem to stick. Somehow it doesn't seem to stick. We've had the insight, but it didn't seem to really make a difference to our life. One of the prime reasons for that is there isn't enough *samādhi*. The soil wasn't quite right; it wasn't quite rich in the nutrients enough, wasn't quite enough moisture in the soil.

Sometimes we have insights and they're just on the intellectual level: I see it with my mind. But there's something about *samādhi*, because it involves the whole body, the whole being, actually the insights really go deep, very deep down, and they stick, almost like they're in the cells or in the bones.

How do we develop *samādhi*? How does it come? We have, as I'm sure you're all aware in just being a day or two on retreat – if you've forgotten, it becomes quite obvious – again, we have lifelong habits, basically, of being scattered, of being entangled in things, of not being collected and calm and unified. And that's really a lifelong habit. And so, first of all, to have some compassion for that. This is – as I said, I think, in the opening talk – it's just part of the human condition.

On the most sort of basic level, though, just the steadiness of practice is really what begins to give life to the *samādhi*. So that means there's the schedule – just coming to every sitting, just doing every walking. Don't underestimate the power of something that seems so futile, and not to judge too quickly where it is that our mind seems to be. And this transfers, of course, to everyday life, to have an everyday practice that we do everyday. There's something about the steadiness of the form. So

whatever I feel like – I feel great; I feel really inspired about meditation; I feel completely disinterested; I feel like crap – doesn't matter. That steadiness, just the *word* steadiness, the steadiness of the form, it finds its way inside. It finds its way inside, and slowly, slowly becomes a steadiness of mind, a steadiness of the heart.

And in that steadiness is the beginning of strength. And this strength is a factor that we really need in life. Sometimes we're just swamped and bowled over by what's happening. Or something happens, and we realize, "Gosh, I was so in it, and it seemed so huge." Why did it seem so huge, and later it doesn't seem so huge? It's because the strength wasn't there, and we're just swayed. *Samādhi* has this strength in it, but it's a very pliable strength. It's like there's a softness to *samādhi*. And these are indispensable factors of mind for the path, and something that we really need, probably more than we realize.

So the steadiness of form – the steadiness of the form of sitting and walking – and then the steadiness of just doing the practice. So returning, in our case now, to the phrases of *mettā* when the mind wanders. And then sometimes it feels like I'm really staying with either a feeling of *mettā*, and can really let the mind stay with that for a while, or staying with the phrases. The mind's quite steady for a few moments, or seconds, or even minutes. And so, just that, the simplicity of that – this is how *samādhi* begins. Not to underestimate the power of what seems like the most trivial, basic steps.

When the Buddha was asked what the most significant cause for *samādhi* was, he said something that might at first sound a bit surprising. He said, "Happiness." It's the thing that most leads to *samādhi*. A happy mind can settle itself, can become unified, can sink into the beautiful depths.

So happiness is actually a fruit of *samādhi*: when there's *samādhi*, the happiness comes in a very natural way, a very organic way, from that collectedness, from that unification. But the Buddha's saying it's also something that is a *cause* for *samādhi*. This is quite interesting. And in my experience, it's absolutely, definitely true. So that when people come on retreat, especially if it's for an extended period of time, just to make sure – you know, we usually make sure with them: "Is everything sorted out in your life, as much as possible? Just have you tied up any loose ends and all that?" So this kind of simplicity of being actually lends itself to happiness.

Gratitude – these are the kind of qualities. We have to think about, "How can I feed happiness? What can I reflect on in a way that brings a sense of gratitude? How can I nourish that sense of gratitude so that a sense of happiness can flow out of it?"

Freedom from remorse. So that means taking care of our ethical behaviour, that we can feel actually happy and proud about how we are acting with each other. That's really, really important as a basis for practice.

Appreciation. Again, this is linked to gratitude, but maybe being at Gaia House, maybe being with a group of people so committed to the Dharma, so committed to loving-kindness, so committed to practice. Appreciation for the people here, the managers who are taking care of us. All this. How can we open the heart in a way that nourishes the happiness? This is something to actually reflect on and take steps towards. Really important as a foundation for *samādhi*.

Just one's own love of the Dharma. One's own love of practice, one's own love of exploration, one's own love of stillness, of quietness. To allow that in.

Nature. For myself, that's a huge part of – just the connection with nature. And we're in a very beautiful part of the country. Is that something that we're allowing in, to feed the practice, to feed a sense of happiness? So as I said, *samādhi* is not this sort of, "Okay I'm going to put blinkers on and do this microscope thing." It actually has a beauty, even in the beginnings of it. There's an openness to beauty. There's a width, a breadth to it.

As the mind begins to settle through taking care in the basic ways that I've said so far, what we begin to see is that it's a completely non-linear process. It's completely non-linear. And I've talked to monks who've spent decades living in caves and forests – basically decades of their life, devoted to this exploration of the depth of consciousness, of *samādhi*. And they say, "Yeah, you know, sometimes it's just really hard. The mind just doesn't settle down." It's always going to be like that, always. And not to expect it to be different. It's never a linear process. It's always got to have these waves to it.

One of the signs of maturing in practice is actually we've learnt, we're learning, to expect these waves. So the 'hindrances' – some of you are familiar with this word – the hindrances to meditation. To really expect them and accept them. We can learn to see them out, okay? We can also learn to work with them, and this is really important, because it's not going to be this lovely, smooth ascent into the heavens of bliss. It's going to be pretty much a rough ride. [laughter] And pretty much you can expect every time there's a deepening, somehow, for some reason that I don't think anyone's really figured out yet, there tends to be a backlash. So you feel like, "Wow, that's opened to a new level!", and then all hell breaks loose. Don't know why, but that's just the way the human mind unfolds into depth, for some reason.

When it's rough, what we can begin to realize is this is just the mind doing the mind's patterns. It's just the human mind doing the human mind's patterns. We don't have to be taken for a ride with it, by it. So for example, I think Catherine's going to talk about aversion tomorrow night. Aversion is one of the hindrances. When I sat down first to do *mettā*, my very first experience of *mettā* twenty years ago, "Great! Sounds like a great idea." Sat down, listened to the instructions, tried it. *Fuming* with rage! [laughter] Coming out of my ears, it was! What's going on? Aversion is what's going on, anger.

So to expect these things to be there. Now, sometimes they're very subtle, and sometimes they're quite strong. The difference, the important thing is, as we get maturity in the practice, we actually realize, "Oh, it's just aversion. It's not *actually* that the person sitting next to me deserves to be kicked out of retreat or die or something." We tend to think that it's the situation that's a problem. And the maturity is, "Oh, it's just the human mind with the seed of aversion," and that seed of aversion has come and made a little, usually ugly, plant of aversion. And that's just what it is. And to recognize it for what it is. We don't have to get so caught up in the content of what the aversion is saying, or what the greed is saying, or what the restlessness is saying, or whatever it is, or the doubt.

This is a real sign of maturity: "Oh, it's just that. I don't have to be pulled into the story of it." This comes with practice. It comes with a maturity, and it's just, "Oh, okay, just the hindrance. Strap in!", you know. It's okay. It's really okay. Don't have to be sucked into the story. Also with maturity, we don't have to take it so personally: "Oh, doubt again. Oh, sleepiness again. Oh, greed again. I'm such a lousy meditator. I'm such a greedy person, such an angry person. If I were *da-da-da-da*, then this wouldn't happen." It's the human mind. In the Buddha's words, it's *anattā*. It's not me, not mine, it's not-self. It's not who I am. It's just the mind has these seeds. Human minds have these seeds, from the

day you're born till the day you die, unless you're completely and utterly enlightened. It has these seeds, and they're not-self; it doesn't imply anything about ourselves.

So can we actually begin to see (and this is part of maturing in *samādhi*; this is part of the insight of *samādhi*), can we see it's just stuff? It's just human stuff. It doesn't say anything about me. I am a human. I have a mind. This is what it's going to do. And can we actually begin to look at it that way? It's not me, it's not mine. Don't have to take it personally. Can we have some kindness towards what's difficult in meditation? We'll be talking much more about this as the retreat goes on. Not getting so much into reaction because a certain difficulty is around.

In the instructions, we're taking one object, which is *mettā*, and we're returning to that. So *samādhi* in that sense, so far. In my experience, both for myself and teaching, it's very common for – quite soon, often – when people take an object, whether it's the breath or *mettā*, for a sense of tightness to come in. And then, usually, if you're sitting an Insight Meditation retreat, what happens is the instructions move quite quickly to opening out. And then there's a sense of, "Ahh," just being with everything, and not staying with an object like the breath. What happens for most people is that when they open out, the tightness that they felt in trying to stay with one object goes away. And it's like, "Ahh! Lovely!" So the answer is, ditch the trying to meditate on one object, and just kind of relax and open out. And that has a certain benefit to it. But is it possible, actually, that we can find a way of working that doesn't feel tight, or doesn't feel uncomfortable, limited that way?

Usually, it's my experience that people shy away from *samādhi* for a number of reasons. One is this tightness that comes in, very normal. One is the whole notion of seeming to be striving or orienting towards a goal. Very understandable, and I'll go into these in more detail. And one is a question of, "If I'm staying with one thing and getting nice and calm, am I suppressing something else that needs to come up? Am I suppressing some emotions that need to come up? Am I suppressing some part of my being that needs to come up?" That's a very intelligent and important question to ask, and it reflects a kind of integrity and honesty when people ask that question, that they really, you know, "Let's look at what's going on here. Am I hiding from something?"

So, to unpack these a little bit. How can we practise without this sense of tightness or work with this sense of tightness? *Samādhi* actually has a kind of softness to it. It's one of the characteristics, one of the qualities of this unification of mind, is actually there's a softening, a softening of the being, softening of the heart, softening of the sense of the body. How to move towards *that*, and not so much of this tightness?

One way, or one important factor, is actually that – well, we might say the mindfulness, the awareness, has a bit more breadth to it. So as I say, it's not this totally microscopic thing. A bit more breadth to the mindfulness, and an awareness of the body as a whole: how the body is feeling, the sense of the body at any time. And the sense of the emotions at any time. In other words, what's my emotional relationship with the practice right now? Is it tight? Is it disinterested? Is it grasping? Is it striving? And we can actually feel that emotion, and feel it in the body, because that will be reflected as a kind of contraction in the body if the mindfulness has a certain breadth to it and is aware of the body. This breadth is actually a very important factor. When we feel that tightness, can we actually just begin to relax it? So, awareness of the body, the whole body, just seeing if that tightness can be relaxed in the body. And sometimes it *can*, just by becoming aware of it.

Samādhi, or moving towards this unification, this deepening, it's not the case that you roll up your sleeves, and you clench your jaw, and you grit your teeth, and "Right, I'm going to go for it!" The whole question of effort is really, really crucial, actually. And it turns out that it's very subtle. It has a lot of subtlety, this question of effort. You can't be too clenched, and you can't just throw the whole baby out with the bathwater, as the phrase goes.

First thing: are we coming from a place of kindness to ourself? So we are aspiring to transformation; we are aspiring to opening. Can we just take care of where we're coming from, as much as possible? Coming from a place of kindness. And maybe periodically to check in with where we're coming from, as I said. If there is tightness, sometimes it can be relaxed. Sometimes we may just have to actually accept that that's what's there. Can we be okay with a sense of tightness? Can that sense of tightness be accommodated in a larger awareness? It's really okay. Sometimes it has to go through a sense of tightness.

I was speaking with someone about their meditation practice a little while ago, and they were struggling with this for a while. We had a conversation, and they went away. And they actually came back and figured out for themselves – I can't remember what I said, but it obviously wasn't very helpful! [laughter] – they came back and said it was just a matter of actually accepting that the tightness was there. And once they had just accepted that, that that's what the quality of the awareness was, there was just some tightness, it actually made a big difference.

As the retreat goes on, we'll be talking about even perhaps going a step further, and beginning to turn the *mettā* itself on the emotions, on, for instance, a sense of tightness. So we'll really go into that in more detail. But can there be kindness, even, to the sense of tightness?

There needs to be a growing, deepening sensitivity to the whole question of effort. It's really important for *samādhi*. It's also very important for insight. It's very important for love too. Sometimes there's more of a relaxed sense, more of a just – let me put it another way: that the awareness might be *receiving* the phrases, or *receiving* the breath, if we're working with the breath. And sometimes more of a *probing* sense. And this balance, it's very connected with effort. When it's more relaxed, there's a less efforted space. Very important to play – important word: play – with this balance. This is something we need to explore for ourselves, and make it very personal, very alive, very meaningful for ourselves. We can actually do *this* and do *this*, and see, "Ah, what's needed now? How does it feel? What are the effects?"

In *mettā* practice, this actually has other implications. Already now, we're giving the *mettā* to ourselves. We're *giving* the *mettā* to ourselves, so we're giving, but we're also *receiving mettā*. So sometimes in doing the practice, you can tune into the sense of what it is to feel that flow of giving, and sometimes tune into the flow, "I'm *receiving mettā*. I'm *receiving* that goodwill." And what does it feel like to be in the receiving of it? Both are important. Some of us need practice, actually, at receiving love, not only giving it. Sometimes we, for all different kinds of reasons, we put up barriers and defences to actually receiving love. So sometimes it's good in the practice to really tune into that quality, and feel oneself receiving.

If there's too much tightness, it can actually cause the mind to spin off in thinking. It's like a banana that's peeled, and you're squeezing it, and it's like, it might shoot off out the end. Somehow, too much tightness in practice actually causes more thought – *can* do. Sometimes too much relaxation actually

causes kind of sinking, which then just spins off into tiredness. So this is something that's very delicate; this whole question of effort is very delicate. And it's very connected with love at a very deep level, actually. When there's effort, there's a sense of "me being somewhere and trying to get somewhere else." Now, there may be some acceptance in that, but if we talk about a really boundless love, a boundless acceptance, there's a duality there: this and that. I am here, and I want to be there. That duality, that separation, at a very deep level, a very deep level of love, that's exactly what gets ended, that duality – in *all* things; not just between self and other, but between *things*. So this question of effort is connected, at a very deep level, with a sense of duality, and a sense of duality is very much connected with a sense of love.

As I said, it's very delicate. There's a lot to learn from playing with effort and really understanding it for oneself in a practical way. People also shy away from the development of *samādhi* because, as I said, because it seems like a goal-oriented practice. But we have all kinds of goals in life, and maybe we actually *need* goals in life. Some are very simple. You know, at 5:30 when the bell goes for tea, probably most of us, it will be our goal to go and have a drink and eat tea. Where's ...? There's no problem in that. It's very simple. Goals don't have to be a problem.

And there also doesn't have to be that much attachment in the *samādhi*. In fact, *samādhi* doesn't really lead to a sense of attachment, contrary to what we might hear. This is something that we can really enjoy. When there's the mind calming down that way, we can really begin to tune into that sense of enjoyment. And that enjoyment, even if it's very quiet, just nothing to really write home about at this point, that is very beneficial and very much what helps the *samādhi* deepen. So when there is a sense of enjoyment, just letting the being open to that, letting the being be touched by that.

When the Buddha talked about love and compassion, loving-kindness and compassion, he called them *brahmavihāras*, which translates as 'divine abiding' or 'divine dwelling.' So this is actually something – to live in love is to live, is to dwell, in what is divine for a human being. *Samādhi* is also a kind of dwelling. Where is the mind dwelling? Is it dwelling in that depth, in that stillness, in that calmness? In the enjoyment of that? Or oftentimes, you know, as humans, it's not; it's dwelling in what's really difficult. Actually, obsessing is a kind of dwelling. So some problem, some issue, something about ourselves that we don't like or are having trouble with, or in relationship, and the mind just goes round and round and round and round, and just sticks to that, and can't seem to disengage the mind from it. So we're exhausted by the end of the day, and you flop into bed, and you get what's called 'poor man's *samādhi*!' You spend the night, and hopefully some relief, and then you wake up, and it just starts all over again. [laughter] But this is where we dwell a lot of the time. And so to deepen in *samādhi* is to actually learn – the mind learns to find a home, the heart learns to find a home, a dwelling, in a more lovely space. Really, really crucial.

When we're doing the *mettā* practice, what we're actually doing is replacing all that mess of negative thought that's so often around, replacing that with actually thoughts that are skilful, that are helpful, that are calming and conducive to calm. It's actually difficult to have the *mettā* phrases going and be really, *really* involved in something else. I, some years ago, took on as a practice to do the *mettā* phrases all day, no matter what I was doing, as much as possible – not if I was talking to someone, but just going down the street, or in the shower, or whatever it was. I think it was a few months I did it for, and to really take it on. At first, I noticed there was, "Oh, well, I'd rather be thinking about (whatever it

was)”, and then I sort of began to give a closer look to what it was that my mind sort of spent its time thinking about. And generally, it wasn’t particularly interesting. I don’t know if your mind is anything like mine, but it was really not very interesting! [laughter] It was extremely uncreative. I can’t even count how many times I had the same thoughts. Very unoriginal, not at all helpful generally. And so very shortly into this time of sort of ongoing *mettā* practice, I just thought, “Actually, to have the *mettā* phrases is just way nicer, way more helpful, just a much better thing to have, a much better inner environment.”

Slowly, slowly and gradually, over time, we get less enticed by the compelling, the *seemingly* compelling nature of what goes through our minds – you know, all these issues and these things that we need to think about and figure out. They begin to lose their compellingness. It’s usually a gradual process. And instead we begin to really acquire a taste for a mind that’s, a heart that’s, unified, that’s calm, that’s deep. And it really is for most people an acquired taste. It *sounds* great. I don’t know, maybe you’re listening and thinking it sounds really boring. [laughter] It can sound great, but it’s actually for many of us an acquired taste. We’re really not used to it. We’re not used to it.

And so in the practice, we can see: we get off onto some train of thought. In the formal practice, [there’s] really no need to finish that thought. It’s not going to make much difference whether you get to the end of that thought or not. Am I going to be happier for finishing that thought? Probably not. Am I going to be more miserable? Maybe! [laughter]

Similarly, you can notice if you’re doing walking meditation, you know, maybe you’re in the walking room, and someone comes in: “Who is it?” The mind wants to go. It’s a natural tendency of the mind. Or you’re outside and a car goes by: “What? Who? Who? What?” Does it make much difference to my sense of well-being that I know it was a red Ford Escort that went by? Or whatever. Or it was so-and-so that came through. It really doesn’t make any difference. And so we learn. The compulsion of things that we’re so addicted to, it begins to just lose – in a very real way, a very in-the-moment way, not in an abstract way: not interested. And the mind becomes interested and loving this centredness, this collectedness.

Okay. As this collectedness begins to deepen in the being – probably not for everyone, but for some people at some time – there can arise what’s called *pīti* in Pali. That’s usually translated as ‘rapture.’ And this goes back to what I was talking about, if there’s a feeling of enjoyment in the body, no matter how subtle or quiet it seems, how ‘not so much of a big deal.’ Sometimes this *pīti*, this feeling in the body, can be extremely strong, so strong that it’s uncomfortably strong. The whole body starts shaking with it, and just really off-the-scale ecstasy. It’s quite rare, but it certainly does happen. And there’s a whole range.

So basically I’m just talking about – and again, not to grasp all this stuff, but just to introduce – there’s a whole range of what’s available in this word, *pīti*, from just a very quiet sense of pleasant feeling in the body (and that may be located in the body; it may be throughout the body), to really strong, overwhelming waves of ecstasy or bliss. And it’s a whole range. It could be like a kind of tingling, or it could be a feeling of lightness, a very pleasant lightness, or expansion that feels very lovely, or warmth.

Not to grasp at this, but just to know that this, when it comes – and again, this is not permanent; it can’t stay forever, but if it comes and when it comes, to open to that as much as possible. Even if it’s

very quiet. And usually it *is* very quiet. But just to really allow that in, and actually let the mind go there, and let the mind go into that. So in the *mettā* practice, it might be typical for a nice feeling to be in the heart area, centred around the heart area. And so, to really let that nice feeling be part of the practice. In a way, to centre the practice around that nice feeling, *in* that nice feeling, in that pleasantness, in that enjoyment. To centre it in it, and also to open the being to the enjoyment. Sometimes the enjoyable feeling, as I say, it may be in the heart area, or maybe the face, in the head. Maybe it fills the whole body, and we can sometimes *allow* it to fill the whole body.

Again, this is all part of the craft, the art, even, of *samādhi*. It's really an art, and it's a lifelong art. So please, not to grasp at any of this. It's part of the whole terrain, and sometimes it's a little strange to hear about things if we haven't experienced them, and we think, "Oh, I should have," or "When will I?" or "That's the only thing that's important" or something. But just to paint a bit more of a big picture. And to be okay with having a sense of where things may unfold. That's just the beginning, and really there are infinite depths of *samādhi*. It's really an infinite journey into depth, and a whole range of states and states of consciousness that can open up.

So what allows this *pīti*, this rapture? What allows that? What encourages that? One of the ways, and the sort of most traditional way, is that the mind is *with* its object – either the breath or the *mettā* or the phrases – and it's sort of, in one way of thinking about it, it's like rubbing, two sticks rubbing against. The mind is rubbing against the object, and the friction causes the sparks, and the sparks are the pleasant feeling. I think that's traditional – I hope I didn't make it up! [laughter] So that's the traditional way: the mind, instead of being scattered, it begins, because of the collectedness, to actually gather energy. When it's scattered, the energy is being pulled. *Pīti*, that pleasantness, that rapture, is actually a kind of energy. And so, with the collectedness there, the mind begins to gather energy in a very organic, natural way. And then that energy expresses itself as pleasantness.

Interest is very related to *pīti*. When we're really interested in the meditation, interested in the feeling, interested in the phrases, that interest lends itself to *pīti*. Sometimes the word *pīti* is translated as 'interest.' So they're very related. And we can notice this even outside of meditation: when we're really into something, actually, if you check, there's a feeling of pleasantness. "Ahh," really interested. Usually it's very quiet outside of meditation, but there's that feeling of pleasantness. And so to tune into and allow and enjoy.

Openness of being. Openness of being is really very, very conducive to this rapture. So what does that mean? Finding what that means. Just that the energy is open, the life is open, the receptivity is open. This is why nature and everything that I talked about earlier is important. It brings an openness of being, as if the channels are then open, and those channels can allow this movement of *pīti*.

When we get down to it, it's actually a non-entanglement with things. That's the fundamental cause for arising of *pīti*. When the mind is not pushing, pulling, obsessing, grappling with things, then there can be that *pīti*. And again, that has very much something to do with *mettā*, because *mettā* is a non-struggle. *Mettā* towards experience is a non-struggle with experience. And as I said, we'll be going into that aspect of *mettā* as the weeks go by.

So this *pīti* when it's there, it's very much to be encouraged. Very much to be encouraged this openness, this interest, this everything that allows *pīti*. For some people, for *many* people, actually, when the mind begins to settle in *samādhi*, or even also this *pīti* when it comes, it can actually bring

fear. It can be quite fearful. The Buddha, one of the five most prominent fears that the Buddha listed was fear of unusual mind states. [laughs] It is unusual. When the mind begins – we’re just not used to it, the mind settling down. And so there can be some fear in there. And just to know that’s really okay. And if there’s a breadth of awareness, we can be, “Ah, the mind is settling,” I’m aware of that, and I’m also aware, as I said, of my emotion about the practice. Maybe it’s fear. Can I then, without pushing away the fear, just very gently incline the mind towards the pleasantness of the depth? Just very gently. We don’t need to push anything away. And so the mind gets slowly, slowly used to the new terrain.

Everything I’m speaking about today, *samādhi*, it’s really speaking about this whole retreat. So some of it may not seem relevant on the second full day of a retreat. That’s fine. It’s for the whole retreat, and actually the whole of our life. As I said, this is a lifelong exploration. So just to hold it as something for now and for always.

Samādhi, as I said, has this quality of softness to it. One of the things that begins to soften with *samādhi* is the sense of the body, the body softening. The boundaries of the body begin to soften, *can* begin to soften. What can also begin to soften is the sense of self. Usually we have a very fixed, rigid kind of sense: “I am *here*, I stop *here*, and you begin *there*, and this is *not* me.” The whole sense of self, or self-image, is quite fixed, rigid, and set.

As the *samādhi* and also the *mettā* deepens – both, both together – the sense of self can begin to soften, can really begin to attenuate some more. There can be less of a sense of a ‘doer,’ a ‘meditator.’ And this, too, may bring up a lot of fear at times. It can be a fear, an existential fear of disappearing, similar to a fear of death. This is not at all uncommon. Some people don’t get it at all, and then it’s fine, not a problem. But some people do. But again, it’s okay, and we can gradually work with this. It doesn’t have to be a problem.

What we learn is that our fixed views of self begin to lose their fixity. Instead of just one view of self that we have and we’re stuck there, and this is where it is and it’s rigid, we begin to let go of that and open up to different ways of seeing the self. Who am I, if I’m not caught in some issue, caught in some views or thinking? Who am I when the thinking – if it calms down, am I still me? Am I the same me that I thought I was?

So when the sense of self attenuates, this has a lot to do with the sense of love, because when there’s too much of a separation between self and other, that’s perhaps the primary block to love flowing. Love, in a way, is that coming together, communion. *Samādhi*, anyway, should, I very strongly feel, it should have love in it. Somehow when the mind collects, calms, deepens like that, there should be a quality of love in it: love for oneself, love for others, love for nature, love for all things.

There should also be this quality of receptivity that I was talking about, just an openness to some kind of wonder in being. Occasionally I’ve come across people where that isn’t the case. Somehow the mind is really, really, really settling down, getting very focused, getting very still, very deep, and there aren’t those qualities of love, of receptivity. A person is moving around, and there’s no sense of openness to nature, a connection. There’s no sense of connection with the people practising around one. And what I’ve seen is that that doesn’t really bear the fruit. It doesn’t really bear the fruit. And in one case, there was someone practising for a long time in this way, without that receptivity and love. And then a situation changed, and there were quite some difficult health issues, very difficult health issues, understandably challenging. But the whole practice went out the window, completely. Not only in

terms of as a resource, but actually as a practice. It just stopped. And I feel that for *samādhi* to really go deep in a way that it's really making an impact deep in the being, there has to be that love and receptivity there.

So finally, I just want to touch on this question, the other reservation that sometimes people can have about *samādhi*. It's this question of "Am I suppressing? Am I suppressing emotion or some part of my being through collecting the mind that way?" So this is a very delicate question, actually. It's not to rush to too soon an answer, and assume that I *must* be suppressing.

I remember years ago, I had been in a certain kind of relationship with someone. It was actually a teaching relationship with someone, and they were *my* teacher. It's a long story, but there was a lot of anger there. I felt a lot of anger. The relationship had ended, and there was a lot of anger. And I went to practise one evening at a meditation centre, and got quite calm. There was some *samādhi* there, nothing particularly deep. The memory of this person came up, and the beginnings of anger. And instead of going off into the whole big production of anger and all the fullness of that, and all the story and everything, because of the *samādhi*, there was just a moment of anger – no sense of repression – and it didn't actually go into anything else. Because of the *samādhi*, there was a clarity, and I actually saw: "Ah! This is something very significant." It's *not* that – the assumption might be that "This is what's happening. We're angry, and the anger is kind of living in me, in my heart, in my psyche, waiting to come out. I *need* to express this." It was rather that, because of the *samādhi*, because of the settledness of mind, there weren't the conditions there for that anger to arise in the present – which is a very different understanding, and has huge implications about our emotional life as human beings. It has *huge* implications.

Similarly, there was a work retreatant here a while ago who was experiencing some calmness and also some periods of real struggle with issues. I can't remember what it was, but it was a whole very involved thing. So I suggested, when the calmness is there, why don't you see if you can just drop in the thought of the issue? Just drop it into the calmness like a drop in the still water. And just see what happens. So she did that, went away and did that, and came back. Nothing happened. And she was so shocked almost by that. Why does nothing happen? Because the conditions aren't there. The anger, the issue that we think lives whole, ready inside of us, needing to come up, the conditions aren't there in the moment for it to be there.

It's a very different understanding, very significant. So what that means is the issues that we – we have to be delicate with this; you can't make it a black or white thing. I just want to introduce the question, because sometimes things *are* there, and they *do* need to come up. But oftentimes the issues that we think are so real, so compelling and so needing to come up – they don't come up, because the conditions aren't there. And we see this with *samādhi*. They're, we say in Dharma language, empty of inherent existence. They don't exist by themselves. We usually need to see this over and over. So probably, as I'm saying it, it doesn't sound that significant. But we see this over and over with *samādhi*, and actually it's something very, very deeply significant.

We tend to think of *samādhi* as we're *creating* something, we're *creating* this calmness, we're *creating* this nice state or whatever. Actually, when we really practise, and we really look at the question of *samādhi*, you understand it's the opposite: we spend our lives creating things. We spend our

lives creating a lot of problems, often, and *samādhi*, we're beginning to *stop* creating things. We're creating less and less.

As we go deeply into the nature of love, too, we actually see we're creating less and less when we're doing *mettā*, and it's the things that we create that cause barriers. When we create less and less through the *mettā* practice, through the *samādhi*, we actually see: there's love there. It leads to love because we're creating less barriers.

So this question – I'm just touching on it briefly now – this question of the emptiness of things and seeing that through the *mettā* practice, seeing that through *samādhi*, it's hugely significant. I mean, it's probably *the* most significant thing in the Dharma, actually. When we talk about awakening, that's really what it is: it's awakening to emptiness, and what does that mean, and what's the effect on the being and the effect on the heart. So we'll be talking hopefully as the retreat goes on much more about this and the place of love in discovering the meaning of that.

But to understand – and it's usually a gradual, slow understanding – to understand this emptiness brings freedom gradually, slowly, and that's the freedom that the Buddha was pointing to. And it doesn't have to be this sudden, you know, lightning strike under the bodhi tree. It can be just a gradual or sudden movement into freedom that's actually very available, very accessible to all of us. It's really a potential for us as human beings in a very real way.

Can we just sit quietly for a few moments together?

May all beings live in peace. May all beings open to joy. May all beings live in freedom.