

**The Place of Samadhi in Metta Practice**  
**Lovingkindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening**  
**Rob Burbea**  
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So what I would like to talk about today is *samādhi*. This is a word some of you will be familiar with and some less so. It's a Pali word, *samādhi*. I particularly want to talk about it, in a way, and set up, hopefully, a little bit of an orientation or of an intention for the whole three weeks here, for the whole retreat, a little bit.

So this word *samādhi* is usually translated as 'concentration,' and that will do as a sort of first translation. It's usually translated as 'concentration.' And it's interesting – as one of the factors of the path that we're interested in developing in, what is our relationship with the development of concentration, of *samādhi*? And often it's an area where we just kind of assume, "Oh, I'm rubbish at that," and we kind of think, "Well, all right, there's other stuff in the path, too, so all right." Or we have a relationship with it where it's a bit fraught, or even a lot fraught; it's an area where we tend to judge ourselves and judge, "Well ..." Or there's a lot of anxiety around whether we're developing it or how well we're developing it. So I want to really explore this whole area, particularly its relevance in terms of this retreat of *mettā* practice, and as I say, set up an orientation for the whole retreat.

When a few years ago we were kind of conceiving of this retreat, one of the factors that really convinced me that it was a good idea to do it was that there are basically three major fruits to get out of a retreat like this. (1) And the first is **the development of loving-kindness and compassion, developing those qualities in the heart**. And that's a beautiful thing; it's an indispensable and lovely thing for a human being to develop that. (2) The second was this piece about **understanding how that leads to awakening, actually using loving-kindness and compassion to move towards awakening**, and understanding emptiness and that kind of liberation of the heart, liberation of the mind. (3) And the third one is **the development of *samādhi***, the development of concentration. And when I was sort of thinking about it, I realized, well, basically, at least some of that is going to happen for everyone, and you can't lose on this retreat. [laughs] It's a win-win-win situation, because all of that's there, and it's available.

Traditionally, in the tradition – actually in the commentaries from the tradition – these practices of loving-kindness and compassion are just regarded as: first of all, it's a good idea to develop loving-kindness and compassion, so something lovely to develop; but secondly, as something that leads to concentration. And this whole factor of awakening was kind of, was reckoned that that wasn't part of what was going on. The thrust of this retreat is actually finding a way back in, of that.

So *samādhi*, this word – in other traditions it has different meanings, but usually in this tradition it's translated as 'concentration,' as I said. And that's a fine translation. It doesn't give enough of a breadth of what it really means, enough either breadth or depth, this word 'concentration.' When we hear the word 'concentration,' either we tend to think kind of making the mind small and cramming it into a small place and sort of shoving it there and keeping it there, or you tend to think concentrated laundry detergent, so a lot of stuff in a very small space. Or this sense of *keeping* something *with* something, so

I'm concentrating *on* the breath, or I'm concentrating on that, just 'keeping it with.' And certainly that 'keeping with' is very much a part of what *samādhi* means, staying steady with something. But it's not all of it, and in a way, it might be better to keep the word in its original language to get more of a sense of the breadth of what it means, and actually the beauty of what it means. Something very, very beautiful in it.

So we could throw some more words out: certainly 'steadiness' of the mind with something. 'Collectedness' – there's a real collectedness. The mind, the awareness, feels collected, not scattered, collected. 'Unification' is a really good word, so particularly unification of the body and the mind – and in this case, the body, the mind, the heart. There's a real kind of sense of the body and the mind unifying, coming together, being *one* as the *samādhi* develops. 'Depth' of meditation is a word one of my teachers used to use a lot, and I actually quite like that. There's a real sense of deepening into something as we develop this.

One of the other factors with *samādhi* is refinement, so the consciousness actually being refined, and this is kind of an interesting one. If we take the other extreme, what's on the other extreme of *samādhi*? Well, something like a tantrum. Put it that way – it's about as far on the other extreme as you could get, a tantrum. It's not a very refined state of consciousness. Things are pretty gross, usually pretty black and white. It's not very refined. Letting go of that, the mind can move into more and more refinement. And one discovers, as one deepens in *samādhi*, more and more refinement to the mind, the consciousness.

So we certainly can talk about discrete states of depth of *samādhi* and this *jhāna* and that *jhāna*, and I'm actually not going to go into that today. Rather to regard it as a kind of continuum, that the mind can move in this continuum of deepening, of unifying, of refining.

And this is a lifelong exploration. It's something that there is actually no bottom to it, I don't think. We can just keep deepening and refining this. And to me, to be alive on the path and have that aliveness on the path, it's actually lifelong. We keep exploring this. Something very lovely there. Keep exploring the potential depths of consciousness. This is available to us as human beings, as meditators, to just go on this journey into the depths of consciousness.

*Samādhi* also brings with it, as it deepens – and I'm talking really about a very big picture now – but it brings an expansion of perception. So the typical, everyday perceptions that we go about our lives governed by – "I'm here, you're there, sitting in a room together, *da-da-da*," – that begins to be expanded. The usual sense of things begins to be expanded. And through that expansion comes a kind of receptivity, very slowly, very gradually – and sometimes suddenly. A receptivity, meaning the beginnings of an opening to another sense of things. Comes a deep sense of rest as the *samādhi* deepens. The whole being – the body, the mind, the emotions – the whole being finds a really deep rest. We find that as the *samādhi* develops – over our *life*, really – that we're actually more available to life and to others and to ourselves. There's more capacity in the being to be available. And there's a real freshness of discovery that comes with it, freshness of perception, that we we're able to look at life in very, actually *radically*, different ways, new ways, uncover different ways of looking.

Usually with *samādhi* – and this word 'concentration,' but let's keep it in the Pali or the Sanskrit – usually with *samādhi*, we think in terms of one object, of keeping the mind with one object. So in our case, the *mettā*. Could be compassion, could be one of the other *brahmavihāras*, could be the breath.

We tend to think of the *samādhi* deepening through staying over and over with one object. But actually, *samādhi*, the word, is even more general, and one could have a very open kind of *vipassanā* practice, and there's actually still a lot of *samādhi* there because there's still that collectedness, unification, deepening, etc.

Usually, our mind moves in relation to objects of experience, experiences that come up, but it moves in ways that are not that helpful. We move, grasping or rejecting or anxious about something or aversive to something. When the mind is in a relationship to experience that, you could say, is open and non-entangled – and whether that's in working with the breath, or doing a *mettā* practice, or an open *vipassanā* practice – when that's what's going on, then that's a state of *samādhi*. It's open non-entanglement.

When we think about the possible skills that a human being can develop, I mean, human beings are quite amazing, when we reflect on ... There's an almost infinite range of skills that a human being can develop, and some of them are just breathtaking. You know, you think about what it takes to play a piano concerto really well, or to write a piano concerto. Or David Beckham, when he curls the ball like that. [laughter] Amazing! Amazing. And the range is extraordinary. I don't know if you did this when you were a kid – you can pile coins on your elbow. Did you ever do this? And then do *that*. [swiping his arm down] And you catch them – or you hope. You *try* and catch them. The world record, I think, is like 104 10p pieces. So it's quite amazing. The person probably really put a lot of time and effort developing that skill. [laughter] Amazing! [laughter] Dharmically speaking ... [laughter] Question is, which skills are *worth* developing? [laughter] What's really *worth* developing? So I actually very much appreciate David Beckham. [laughter] But really, for ourselves, in our lifetime, we have limited time in this life, limited time. Our time *will* run out. We have limited energy. What's worth developing as a skill? What's worth developing?

So we often underestimate the power and the importance and the significance of *samādhi*. The Buddha, if you just open some of the texts, over and over and over going on about, “*Please develop samādhi. Develop samādhi. Develop this. You can do it. Develop that skill.*”

I don't know if this is fair to say, but in the West so far in the Dharma – the Dharma's very young, and so far kind of haven't really reached into the potential of this side of the practice, of this area of the practice. It tends to get viewed in the way of having a very microscopic concentration on something, so really being able to look at the fine detail. That's not what *samādhi* means, and the Buddha never meant it that way. So it's more in terms of this unification, this deepening, this coming together, and collecting of the mind. And with that – again, over a lifetime or over a retreat – as this develops, it brings with it a tremendous well-being. Really, the fruits of *samādhi* are a very deep sense of well-being. Healing – healing to the body, healing to the emotions, healing to the mind. The quality of life as the mind brightens and unifies – quality of life is actually perceptibly improved.

Brings a sense of steadiness into the life. And so if one is involved in long-term creative projects – say, writing a piano concerto, whatever it is – it takes actually a lot of steadiness of the mind, a lot of *samādhi*. You need to show up every day and do that and do that and do that. Any kind of creative project, whatever it is, artistic or non-artistic. Or if one's involved in service and the active expression in one's work or volunteering or whatever it is, or just with one's friends and family, the active expression of loving-kindness and compassion needs a kind of steadiness. And it's *samādhi*, in the long

run, that gives us that, gives us that kind of long-term steadiness to stay in there, in terms of service and creativity, etc.

Also in terms of insights, that there's something about *samādhi* being the best possible soil for insights to take root in. You've all been on retreat before. How many times have we been on retreat and said, "Ah, I *really* understood that! I really see the impermanence," or "I really get this pattern that I do over and over. I really see it so clearly," and the retreat ends, and a day later, it's just gone? It's just gone. It was just a memory. *Samādhi* – it's like good soil for a seed. It can take root and actually grow, and the insights become workable, liveable.

I think it was the first year we ran this retreat, and at a certain point – two-thirds or three-quarters of the way through or something – one of the retreatants said to me, "It's nice *samādhi* now. You know, I've been here two weeks," or whatever it was, "And some states of nice collectedness, and brightness, and luminosity, and concentration." He said, "But actually, what I think is that I'd be better off not having good concentration because when I leave here, in my life, my mind is scattered, and I'm busy, and I want to learn how to apply the *mettā* when my mind is how it usually is. And it's a bit unrealistic to sort of just be in these nice states and expect the *mettā* to apply." And so, actually there was a lot of integrity in what he was saying, but there's something about *samādhi* that allows things to take root at a cellular level, as the mind collects. So the *mettā*, too, as well as insight, can kind of *take root* in the being, permeate the cells, become something that's almost second nature in the cells, as the *samādhi* deepens. So, yes, to learn to apply the *mettā* and the compassion when the mind is scattered and it's not settled down, and we feel fragmented and not unified. But there's something about spending time with *mettā* when the mind *does* feel very unified. It gets into the being [on] some very cellular level.

Now, someone pointed out today, we show up on retreat, and (as I said this morning, actually) what we notice is the opposite. We want to focus the mind, and I'm all over the place – the mind's drifting here and there, and I'm off. This is normal. This is very normal. We have a lifetime habit of not paying that much good attention, and that's okay. It's okay. But we can begin to change that and begin to work on it. So just the steadiness of showing up for sitting, for walkings, for sittings, for walking, the steadiness, the continuity of the practice – can you see that that's already the beginning of *samādhi*, that the steadiness itself in the outer form is a kind of *samādhi*? Do you see? It's expressing a steadiness. That steadiness begins to percolate down into the being. And so the mind itself, the heart, the being begins to be more steady. It's the beginnings of *samādhi*. Just show up – *however one feels*.

So this goes for outside practice. You get up one day, and – you know, not on retreat, or here on retreat – and you don't feel so good: "Oh, I'll skip my sitting this morning. I'm a bit tired," or "I'm not feeling well." Understandable. There's something about the steadiness – no matter how one feels – that gives this steadiness, gives a strength as well. So strength is also an aspect of *samādhi* – strength of mind, a strength that's pliable. I'm not talking about something rigid or brittle, but a deep strength, a soft strength, in a way. And again, that comes into the being, begins to come into the being, just by virtue of showing up, practising, whatever we feel like. And in the practice, sitting or walking, returning: just returning to the phrases, returning to the body, returning to the object over and over and over. Again, it's embodying that steadiness. It's embodying that strength of commitment. That will find its way into the being. And in time, staying more with the phrases, staying more with the object.

So one of the fruits of *samādhi* – and I’m talking about long-term and in a lifetime. You will probably notice on this retreat, definitely. Again, please remember, what I’m talking about today might feel like, “Well, I’m nowhere near that.” It’s the beginning of the retreat. I’m talking hopefully something you can keep in the back of your mind, at least in the back, for the whole retreat. One of the fruits of *samādhi* is happiness – happiness, joy. And the Buddha talked over and over about this and the importance of it. Recently, in the last couple of years, there was a study done of meditators and found that meditators were actually happier than non-meditators. And there was something – if I get this right – the right prefrontal cortex was more active, which is your positive emotions. And the left was less active, which is your negative. I’m not sure if that’s the right way round, but something like that. And interestingly, what they found was, generally, meditators were happier. But meditators who’d done at least 10,000 hours ... [laughs] There’s some kind of significant *jump* in the graph there. [laughter] 10,000 hours and the whole thing leaps. So I don’t know how quick you are at arithmetic, but 10,000 hours is quite a lot! [laughs] It’s a lot more than you even do on this retreat. But just to say, hang in there! [laughs] But definitely, definitely, and the Buddha, you know, millennia ago, was very clear: *samādhi* in the long term leads to happiness, no question about it.

But he said something very interesting as well, and it’s kind of the reverse. And someone asked him, “Okay, so *samādhi* is a good idea. What’s the thing that most feeds *samādhi*, that’s the most important contributor to *samādhi*?” Without blinking, he said, “Happiness.”<sup>1</sup> So that’s interesting – happiness *comes* from *samādhi*, but happiness *feeds* *samādhi*. And this is very, very significant for us as meditators. We need, and particularly on a retreat like this, we need to take care, as much as possible, of a kind of baseline foundation of our sense of well-being, nourish our sense of happiness. So I’m not talking about any fireworks. I’m just talking about inclining the mind to a sense of well-being, of nourishment.

So how do we go about that? Can we be on the retreat in a way that’s open? Sometimes, very understandably, we come on retreat, and because of what we’ve heard or seen or just get into a groove, we do *this*, and we kind of shrink down the awareness. And we say, “Right, I’m really going to apply myself,” and it shrinks down. Can there be – and please experiment with this – a kind of opening, receptivity, and an inclining the mind towards appreciation? So there are all kinds of things right here, right now, today, in this retreat, to appreciate. Many, many things – we have eight wonderful managers looking after us, cooking for us, taking care of us; we have the beauty of the grounds, the building, the nature; we have the teachings; we have each other. And again, I think Catherine said on the opening talk, you know, we can get very much into this ‘eyes down’ kind of thing. What would it be – please experiment – to look around? “Who’s here? Who am I practising with? Who are these lovely people dedicating themselves, supporting me in my practice? How wonderful!” Because how much more difficult it would be if we were here alone, one was here alone. Have a look around at lunchtime. You know, sometimes you want to be a bit more inner, and it’s appropriate to be with one’s own experience. But other times, open up. Can there be an appreciation of the beauty of what’s going on here and the loveliness of everyone practising together, trying together, supporting each other, in the silence, in the schedule, and all that?

Gratitude – so feeding gratitude, taking a little time in the day to incline the mind this way, to think everything that’s helped for you to even be here. Three weeks out of your life to be here – gratitude for

that. What else feeds this, kind of nurtures this base level of happiness? Maybe simplicity, and sort of letting go into the simplicity of being here. Love of the Dharma – you know, for some people, this is really strong, just loving to be able to practise, to have this time to practise, to be able to hear the teachings, to be able to be in an environment – brings joy. Nature – I mentioned this this morning. So please do take some time to open to nature. Go out. Take it in. Be nourished by it.

[24:51] So over time, gradually, the *samādhi*, the collectedness, the unification, the concentration begins to deepen, begins to deepen. This does not happen – ever – in a linear way. In other words, if someone comes into an interview and they just report this steady, smooth assent into the ethereal realms of bliss, without any ups and downs, it's not realistic. It doesn't happen. It's going to happen in a very non-linear way, very up and down, and that's just how human consciousness works.

So I was talking this morning about the hindrances and the sort of very typical challenges we face. Learn to expect the waves, okay? Just, they're a given. Learn to expect them. Learn to accept them, meaning accept that they're there. To accept them doesn't mean to kind of lie down and let them steamroll over you and dictate the whole course of your consciousness for two or three days. But to accept that they're there. They're a feature of consciousness. Sometimes it's a matter of just seeing them out – just be patient, just keep plugging away, and one sees them out. Other times, we gave a lot of possibilities this morning of ways of working with them, and really being quite active. So sometimes it's just seeing them out, and sometimes really working quite actively – very important though – in the context of accepting them. So learning to work with.

And the two things, the two general points that I mentioned this morning: **(1) if possible, not being taken for a ride, recognizing, “This is what’s going on. Ah, it’s such-and-such a hindrance. Aha! Okay,” and not getting so, in a way, seduced or infatuated by the story** and the content of what it seems that's going on – this craving or aversion or whatever it is, or the doubt. Seeing it for what it is, recognizing it – huge. Half the battle is right there. **(2) And not taking them personally**, so not judging oneself because of the presence of a hindrance. This is huge. Once we judge ourselves because a hindrance is there, we're adding fuel to the fire with the hindrance. Not to take them personally. Can we have an attitude of kindness, so that this whole retreat is kind of imbued as much as possible with an attitude of kindness? You know, the hindrances come up, it's difficult, you're in a difficult stretch, a couple of hours that are difficult, half a day that's difficult – how much kindness can we meet that with? Not reactivity, but kindness.

Anyone who's doing a practice like this, like a *mettā* practice, or working with the breath, or compassion, or some kind of cultivation practice, or anyone who *hears* about a practice like this – maybe not anyone, but 99 per cent of people – will often have at least one of four objections, if not all four. And it can seem like one begins to do a practice like this, and the whole idea of staying with something, and the whole idea of *samādhi*, seems like, “Hmm, maybe it's not such a good idea after all.” And it can feel very difficult. So I want to go into this and explore it, and hopefully just look at these with a bit of intelligence and reconsider them.

So, they are:

**(1)** When we give ourselves to cultivating *samādhi*, oftentimes what comes up is a sense of **tightness**. In the process, we actually feel quite tight – and you may have, probably, discovered that

already. Trying to stay with something, you're trying, and it can feel really tight. The very effort to stay with something can feel tight. Tightening.

(2) The whole notion of **working towards a goal**, a goal of deepening my concentration or developing *samādhi* or developing *mettā*, and “Won’t I get into some striving around that?” So these are very legitimate concerns, and I just want to explore them a little bit: tightness, relationship with goals and striving for goals.

(3) **Attachment** – if this leads to happiness or if *samādhi* feels good, won’t I maybe get attached there, and get stuck there?

(4) And the last one, **suppression**. Is it possible that through this just, you know, repeating phrases to myself, or just staying with one thing and maybe even feeling good in doing that, that I’m actually suppressing some emotion or some issue in the being, in the psyche, that needs to come up? Someone brought that up this morning.

These four: (1) **tightness**, (2) **relationship to goals and striving**, (3) **attachment, the possibility of attachment**, and (4) **the question of suppression – are we suppressing?** So I want to go into this a little bit. These come up. They *will* come up. They’re going to come up, these questions and these doubts. And a lot of people are going to feel put off as that comes up. So we’re practising *samādhi*, and something comes up like this, and we think, “Oh I should leave all that. I should leave this *mettā*. I should leave the *samādhi*. And I’ll just go to an open practice of ‘being with what is’ – not trying to do anything, just ‘being with what is’ or ‘just being’ or whatever.” And this is unbelievably common. I mean, almost everyone who goes about doing a practice like this will have that quite strong inclination at one point: “Too much work,” or “I don’t really think this is right, let me just – ah! – just *be*; go to an open *vipassanā* practice.” So I want to go into this.

(1) First one: **tightness**. How can we do this practice and not get so tight? So softness – in a way the opposite of tightness – softness is actually a factor of *samādhi*. So when we talk about what does *samādhi* mean, it actually has softness in it; it has a kind of non-rigidity, non-tightness in it; it’s part of the quality of *samādhi*. One of the ways that’s very important to prevent tightness taking too much hold – and it *will* come up. You *will* be dealing at times with tightness. There’s no question about it, as you try this practice, no question. One of them is to make the mindfulness a bit bigger, meaning make the range of the awareness a bit bigger. As I said at least once in the instructions, the Buddha says “sensitive to the whole body.”<sup>2</sup> Can we have, as very much a part of our practice, an awareness that includes the whole body? And kind of to be anchored in that. And as well, in this breadth of mindfulness, an awareness of, “How am I feeling about the practice right now? What’s my emotional relationship with the practice right now? Am I bored? Am I trying too hard? Am I disinterested? Am I striving?” The body sense can reflect this relationship that we have with the practice in the moment. When we get too tight, what happens? We actually feel it in the body. So part of the art of meditation, part of the art of deepening *samādhi*, is to have this kind of background awareness of breadth of the body awareness, and be sensitive to it. It will reflect what’s going on in terms of the relationship.

As the *samādhi* deepens, it’s actually, the body becomes really, really central. It’s very important. The body sense is actually crucial, and that’s why I keep saying the “sensitive to the whole body.” The body is really at the anchor of what we’re doing. And as the *samādhi* deepens, the body sense actually changes. So it gets a little bit more spacious or more refined or more open or less defined. And that’s all

part of – over time, over time – of the *samādhi* deepening. But we can work with this tightness, and in the sensitivity to the body, be aware of when it's there, and then just relax the body. Just relax the body. It's part of the big picture, the art of the *samādhi*, of the meditation. So sensitive to the whole body.

Sometimes we go about this practice, and it's very much like rolling up the sleeves, and “*May. I. Be. At. Ease.*” [laughter] It's not going to happen that way. It's not going to happen. Best intentions may be there, you know, but there needs to be a real gentleness and relaxation in the approach. Gritting the teeth, you know, *sometimes* it's appropriate, but more often – it's a real art. All this stuff is a real art. It's very delicate. It's a very delicate art, a very subtle art.

[35:12] So again, can there be kindness to oneself in this? We drift off – okay, watch that point. Am I judging that? Am I getting too tight in response to the fact that I drifted off? Can there be kindness imbuing the *whole* thing, gentleness imbuing the whole thing? And sometimes there's just going to be tightness. There's just going to be tightness, and you *will* feel, “Ah, I should go to *vipassanā* practice. Just be open.” Sometimes you just have to – you try to relax it, you're being as gentle as you can. It's just, “Okay, just accept the tightness.” And just to have that sense of kindness around it and accepting of it, and it will change.

But we can be sensitive to the effort that we put in. In this body sensitivity, you can feel when there's too much effort because the body reflects it – tightness in the shoulders, or the belly gets tight, or something just cramps up a little bit. And be sensitive to that, as part of the practice, and relax it. So part of the developing the art is deepening this sensitivity and subtlety of attention to effort levels. And we learn: “Oh, a bit more, you know, a bit more foot on the gas; a bit off, a bit more off.” Part of the art – play with it. Experiment. Bring it in rather than leaving it out.

So in a way, and particularly in the context of *mettā* practice, Catherine – I spoke to Catherine last night a couple of times. And she told me she spoke a bit about – to oneself, the *mettā* to oneself – giving and receiving love. So this is also connected with the effort. Sometimes we might need to move more into a receptive mode, receiving. And that can very much help with the tightness as well, and generally with the *mettā*. If we're too tight, too tight with the effort, too efforting, it can have the opposite effect of what we intend. And the mind is actually squeezed, and – not a particularly great image, but it's a bit like a half-peeled banana, and you're squeezing the bottom end, and the banana ... Well, either it crushes it ... [laughs] Or it flies off. With the best intentions, you're trying to be too tight. You're actually ending up being too tight with the mind, and it has the opposite effect: the mind drifts off more. More thoughts and more following thoughts. Or sometimes we're too loose, and there's just a dullness that comes in, a kind of sinking of the consciousness that comes in. To be aware of this: it's all part of the subtlety, and you can be aware of it, and you can play with it. It's a very delicate process. Okay, so that first objection, tightness.

(2) Second possible one is this, around **goals**. And we could really, gosh, talk all day about this. But sometimes, or quite often, there's the temptation to think, “Goals are not spiritual. There's nowhere to get.” And we may have heard that, and it might really resonate with us: “There's nothing to do and nothing to get, nowhere and no one to be, nothing to become,” etc. It can be very powerful. And yes, there's definitely something to that, there's definitely a depth that needs to be explored there. But don't be too quick with it. Don't be too quick. And to bring one's whole integrity and intelligence to this question, and honesty. Our life is *full* of goals. *Full* of goals our life is! So at 5:30 it will be teatime, and



the bell will go, and then my goal is going to be, and probably most of you, is going to be to get to the tea and get some soup down the throat. That's my goal. It's not a big deal! [laughter] Our life is *full* of goals. Right now my goal is to communicate something about this piece in a way that's as helpful and clear as possible. And your goal is to try and not fall asleep. [laughter] Hopefully.

Our life is *full* of goals. Be very careful with this area. Yes, non-duality – and as the retreat goes on, we'll be talking a lot about this area of non-duality and emptiness and stuff. But to really understand it, to really understand what it means, non-duality – it's hard to really understand at any depth without a depth of *samādhi*, funnily enough. It's actually going through all this, and this efforting, and even a notion of goals with the *samādhi*, that actually brings a whole reorientation in terms of dualities and goals – because usually, people are too quick with saying, “Oh it's all non-dual. There's nothing to get.” But they fall back on a default perception, a default understanding of the way things are, and it's still, “I'm here, and this is what's going on for me: the mind is cloudy, or the mind is like this, or whatever. And that's okay, and that's where the non-duality comes.” A deeper understanding of non-duality – which can come out of *samādhi* practice and *mettā* practice – is that actually, there's no ‘way things are.’ The mind is *not* like it appears to be right now, it's *not* clouded, it's *not* clear, it's *not* deep, it's *not* shallow, I'm *not* sitting here, you're *not* sitting there, this is *not* Gaia House, this is *not* a meditation retreat. It can be hard to understand that without having gone through the depth of *samādhi*. So there's a depth of understanding non-duality, and I think it's important to uncover that, not to settle for something that's – well, in a way, cheaper.

I think in the opening talk John mentioned this word *brahmavihāra*. So *brahma* means ‘divine’ or ‘sublime,’ and *vihāra* means ‘dwelling.’ So these practices, loving-kindness and compassion, are really dwellings for the heart: the heart, the being, the consciousness dwells in a space, in an inner space, of beauty, of sublimity, of something that feels divine. And more and more, as the retreat goes by, you will get a sense of that, of a real dwelling place for the consciousness, for the mind, for the heart. So *brahmavihāras* – *mettā*, compassion, joy, and equanimity – they are divine abidings, divine dwellings, *brahmavihāras*. *Samādhi*, too – as the *samādhi* deepens, it becomes a dwelling for the consciousness. When we think about “Where does my consciousness, my mind, usually dwell?”, and we actually look at that, it's often not in the greatest of places. [laughter] Oftentimes it's not really actually dwelling anywhere at all. It's all over the place. It's not dwelling. It's not abiding anywhere. It's literally just pulled here and then pulled there, and whatever it is that's sort of making the biggest impression is where it's ‘dwelling.’ Very *unsettled*, *not* dwelling. Or, and maybe even worse, is we're actually dwelling in something that's really not very helpful for us – self-criticism, self-judgment, irritability at others, a whole range of difficult states that sadly, but realistically, human beings can kind of make a home out of. We can get so used to this over our life and over the decades, so used to, as I was saying this morning, the groove kind of being one of unhelpfulness and unhappiness. Something not so helpful becomes our dwelling, and it's almost second nature to us.

So part of the *mettā* practice, as I was touching on this morning, is actually replacing that negative dwelling with a bit more positive one – or a lot more positive dwelling. Oftentimes we find ourselves with a lot of thought, and it's oftentimes a lot of self-critical thought, self-judgmental thought, or judging others, or a situation. What if we use that energy of thought (which is already zipping around),

and we use the *mettā* (which is thought; it's thought-energy)? And we're just redirecting the thought-energy, replacing the unskilful thought with skilful thought.

I remember a period – I can't remember how long it was, maybe a year, or two years or something – when I just gave myself just to *mettā* practice for that time. So all my formal practice, and as much as possible throughout the day – you know, in the shower, walking down the street, whatever it was, just *mettā*, *mettā*, *mettā*. An absolutely wonderful thing to do. At the beginning of that period, what was quite interesting was I would be walking on the way to work, down the street, and would be trying to do the *mettā*, and the inclination that would be there was, “Well, I don't want to kind of fill my mind with that. I want to let my mind be creative and let things come to me spontaneously.” And then I had a kind of closer second look at kind of, well, what was coming up in my mind if I just let it be? And it wasn't really that creative. [laughter] You know, most thoughts, you've thought them at least a thousand times before. How many thoughts do you actually have that you've never thought before? How many thoughts do you actually have that are truly helpful? I mean, when you really look at it, it's not that many. And so, once I began to see that, it's like, “I'm fine replacing all that junk with the *mettā*.” And the mind actually, slowly, it becomes less enticed by all this other stuff that can feel – we can feel so, “Well, I *need* to think that, I just *need* to think that,” or “I need to let my mind go in some way.” It becomes less enticing. The hindrances, and the seduction of the hindrances, and their story – like I said this morning, what they build up – becomes gradually less enticing as the *samādhi* develops, very gradually.

[45:51] And the *samādhi*, the collectedness, the simplicity of mind becomes something we love and we're drawn to. And it's really an acquired taste. It's so interesting – delightful as it is, it's still an acquired taste for almost everyone. So we can be on retreat, and you're doing some walking meditation, and a car arrives. Or someone comes out to do some walking meditation, and you're doing the walking meditation. And if the mindfulness is there, you can catch this moment of wanting to see: “Who's that? Who's arriving? Who's going? What's happening?” [laughs] And if the mindfulness is bright enough, is present enough, you can just say, “I don't need to know. I don't need to know.” Does it really matter what kind of car is coming up the drive? Does it really matter who's coming out or going from the walking meditation? I don't *need* to know that. And you can begin to catch it.

Or in the sitting sometimes, you start to think something, and you're halfway through a thought. And you can actually just catch it. As the *samādhi* develops, you can begin to catch this, and you just catch, “Do I actually *need* to finish this thought?” [laughter] “I'm halfway through. Is it really ... is there going to be that much payoff from thinking it?” So as it develops, you can begin to catch this and just let things go, just let things go. *Samādhi* and letting go are two sides of the same coin. They're two sides of the same coin. It's not obvious at first.

As the *samādhi* develops over – for most people over quite a while, but you know, certainly possible on this retreat. So that's why I'm mentioning this. But again, saying some things today that will apply for the whole retreat. For some people, the *samādhi* develops, and something begins to (how to put it?) *arise* in the experience, and it's called *pīti*. So some of you may have heard this word; it's another Pali word, *pīti*. And it really means any pleasant physical sensation that arises, you could say, from meditation. So anything at all – could be just a feeling of warmth or comfort, or sometimes tingling, or lightness, or pleasure, or heart-opening, or sort of a rising feeling, opening, expanding. It

can be all – a whole range of what it actually is in terms of experience, but also a range of how strong it is. So sometimes, for some people, its *unbearably* strong; it's really like a lightning bolt of ecstasy, just "*Pleugh*, it's *too* much!" I don't know how common that is, you know, statistically. I don't know, but it can happen. And the other extreme is something really not that remarkable, that you're not going to be rushing to write a postcard to your friend saying, "Guess what happened to me today?" It's just some nice feeling of comfort and well-being and pleasure in the body. But all of that is *pīti*.

Sometimes it gets translated as 'rapture,' sometimes 'ecstasy' (which is a little strong, but can be), 'bliss,' whatever. It arises partly from the *samādhi*. You can think of it as the mind just – this is not a very good analogy, but the mind rubbing against the object over and over, so rubbing and rubbing against the *mettā*, against the phrases. And there are kind of *sparks* that comes from that. As the mind is less scattered, it's like it's actually, literally, *throwing out* less energy. When we go, "Tomorrow, yesterday, worried about this, worried about *da-da-da-da*," you're throwing away energy all the time. The mind gets less scattered, and it's actually *collecting* energy. And that energy begins to manifest. It begins to manifest physically – for some people. I'm just mentioning this as something that *may* come into your experience. Not a big deal if it doesn't at all. Not a big deal if it doesn't. Not a big deal if it does. But it's worth knowing about.

[50:12] Sometimes it comes out of interest. When the interest is there, when we're really interested in this moment of *mettā*, or this moment of experience, it can lead to this. Sometimes just comes because there's energy there, and there's just energy, and it's beginning to express. *Pīti* also comes – it has a lot to do with openness, openness of being. So usually, we tend – in the tradition, it's tended to regard *pīti* as coming out of concentration, and certainly it does. The more steady we are – it *can* come out of that. But actually, *pīti* is – interestingly, it has more to do with openness of being. And so that's why some people, when they listen to music, there's openness of being, and something happens. Or you're in nature, and you're just there, and you're open, and there's a feeling coming in – sometimes.

'Non-entanglement' is a good word. So when the mind, when the consciousness is not so entangled with things, then that allows this *pīti* – *can* allow *pīti*. When there's *mettā* there, it's actually a state of non-entanglement. There's kindness there. We're not embroiled in experience in the moment in an unhelpful way, and it can allow this. Now, if we're talking about *samādhi* on a retreat like this, you actually want to encourage that. So any kind of comfortable, pleasant feeling – and this may seem like, "Wow, that's never going to happen," on your third, second day or whatever it is of the retreat. It's like, "I don't know *what* you're talking about." Again, I'm pointing at something for the whole retreat. But it's actually something you want to encourage. So any kind of pleasantness, sense of well-being, sense of comfort, pleasure in the body, physical, you want to encourage. It's part of the practice, and you want to kind of mix it in with what's going on. And *pīti* is actually just the first stage of other stages – of joy and peacefulness and stuff. We won't go into that.

(3) Here's where the third of the possible objections come in: "Whoa! **If that feels good, might I not get attached to that?** And that would be bad." It actually *doesn't* lead to attachment in the long term. It might if one just has one or two isolated experiences, but as one develops it over time, it does not lead to attachment. The pleasure of meditation does not lead to attachment. It does not lead to attachment. So if there's any kind of – even if it's unremarkable – sense of enjoying the practice, really

let yourself enjoy it. See if you can bring that in and mix it in with what's going on. Open to the enjoyment, however it is.

I remember one of my teachers, Ajaan Geoff, saying, actually, "You know what? Go ahead and *get* attached to it. *Get* attached." And I'd never heard anything like this before, so I was like, "*Really?*" [laughter] And of course he proved totally right. It's actually fine to get attached to this. The being matures, the consciousness matures, and it lets go of that attachment. Don't worry about it. Go ahead. Enjoy it if there's something to enjoy. Oftentimes the people that make a big fuss about getting attached to pleasure in meditation don't seem to make too much fuss about all kinds of *other* attachments that are in their life – you know, great food, a nice house to live in, you know, whatever else it is. And that goes unchallenged, and yet the attachment in meditation gets challenged a lot. I think that's a little backwards. Not to mention all the unhealthy stuff inwardly, the self-criticism, etc., that we can get attached to.

Sometimes we – and please keep a lot of this in ... As I keep saying, for the whole retreat, just keep it in mind as possibilities. Sometimes there's a sense of opening up and deepening in the meditation – and pleasure, even. And it's unfamiliar, and fear comes up. And this is very, very common. Sometimes we're meditating, and the fear is really strong. We're in very unfamiliar territory, and it's like, "*What is going on? Bring back normality, please.*" That's okay. When that happens, just go to the fear and work with the fear in terms of being with the fear as you probably all know how to do in terms of *vipassanā*. But sometimes, what happens is a kind of interesting in-between state: there's some degree of opening and enjoyment, and we feel like, "Oh, I'm opening into something new here," and there's pleasure, and the fear as well. And we're sort of – got both things going on. Unfortunately, how often the mind gets pulled like a magnet into the fear. And does it have to? If the fear's not that strong, it's possible – just take a step back, say, "I've got two things going on," not push away the fear, but just incline towards what's pleasurable, what's enjoyable in the experience, and just lean that way. And the very enjoying of it will help the fear to just subside. It's a matter, again, of an acquired taste, of getting used to it. So, slowly, slowly it's like just learning that we can trust that in meditation.

Sometimes that fear comes up because there's a softening as we do the *mettā* and as the *samādhi* goes. The self softens; the sense of self actually softens and begins to – not completely dissolve, but just get less defined. There's less of a sense of a 'doer.' And sometimes the fear that this brings up can be very strong – fear of death. It's very related to losing one's self at death. Very common, very important as part of the practice. And we're learning different experiences of the self. We're learning to let go of the rigid way we've bound ourselves to a self-view, both through the *samādhi* and through the *mettā*. And this happens, and it's very important.

Okay, I'm just ... almost finished. As this happens, the *samādhi* deepens, and there's less of a fixed, less of a sort of defined sense of self – there's actually more love that's coming out of the *samādhi*. So *samādhi* – you know, love comes from doing *mettā* practice. Love *also* comes from doing insight practice, if you're doing it well, and right. Love also comes from doing *samādhi* practice. So as the *samādhi* deepens, the self softens. Love comes out of that, and it *should* come out of that – love for the self, love for others, love for nature, for all things, for all beings. That's a kind of mark of *samādhi* as it deepens. And I *have* known, occasionally, people to be able to go into deep states of *samādhi* and actually do it without this sense of openness and receptivity and love, and what they end up with is

something that's very fragile. So in one case I'm remembering, a person that was on retreat long-term – I wasn't working with them – and they were here long-term, doing this kind of practice, but in a way that wasn't really receptive and open, didn't really have a lot of love in it. And then they hit a quite ... definitely a very challenging health crisis, and it all, the whole practice just went out the window, just completely crumbled. And partly, the reason was it didn't have this softness in it, didn't have that love and that receptivity in it. They were actually going about it in the wrong way. But generally, the *samādhi* naturally has the love in it.

(4) Last point, and it's the last of the objections – so we talked about the tightness and working with that, the goals and the striving, and the attachment. **Suppression** – it came up this morning. Is it possible that if I just focus on something, and I even feel good in that, and just keep doing the *mettā*, that I'm actually suppressing something that needs to come up emotionally, something in my psyche, in the being that needs to come up?

This is a very interesting question. It's a very delicate question. And I think mostly what I want to say is, don't rush into an answer here. It's very interesting what's going on. So just, can we really bring an investigation to this? I remember at least ten years ago – more. Twelve? I can't remember. I was at an evening class of meditation in the States. And there had been a situation of a person that I knew who had been (what to say?) very criminal, was doing some criminal stuff, and it involved me and some other people. And I was feeling really angry about this, and I had uncovered this over time. There was a lot of anger around, over a period of time, and really trying to be with this anger and work with it. And one evening at this meditation class, I was just meditating, and there was some degree of *samādhi* – nothing particularly deep or *jhānic* or extraordinary, but just some degree of collectedness. And into that, the memory of this person, the image of this person came up. And it was very clear. There was a lot of clarity there. I could see: the image came up, and a *moment* of the anger, a *moment* of it. But what wasn't there was – it didn't spark into anything bigger. Like usually, [it would be] quite a big anger and a big whole feeling of that. And it just came up, and it was anger, and it just ... nothing came of it. It's like nothing – it was a spark that didn't ignite a fire.

[1:01:07] This made a huge impression on me. It's sort of a story of a non-event, but it's actually a huge impression it made on me. And there was a work retreatant here a while ago dealing with some difficult experiences, and she was also experiencing some *samādhi* and some calmness, and I said to her, "When the *samādhi*'s around, take a risk: drop in the thoughts of what's difficult. Just remember what it is that's causing you difficulty and anxiety, whatever it is, just drop that into the calmness and the *samādhi*. See what happens." And she came back and she said, "I did, and nothing happened. Dropped it in. Nothing happened." Nothing ignited. Nothing got built up. What I realized, and what she realized from that – something that we take as a given, as something that needs to come up, in this case the anger (I can't actually remember what her emotion was), it needs us to build it up. It needs conditions to be there. And in that moment, when I was in the meditation, it didn't have the conditions to create it. So we *can* tend to think, "Here is a storehouse of old emotions" – I'm treading very delicately here. I don't want to come down on one side or the other. I just want to expose this area. I'm not saying one of them. I'm just saying, "Have a look at it a bit more clearly." We tend to think of a storehouse of old emotions: "Here's anger. I need to release it. I need it to come up." But it cannot come up unless the conditions in the present moment are there for it to come up. And sometimes when

we're really clear, we can actually see this process, that if we don't feed it in the present, it doesn't come up. It *cannot* come up.

When we see this over and over, begin to see that some of the issues that we feel we have, emotionally, are actually – in Dharma language, they're *empty*. They're empty of inherent existence. They don't exist by themselves. They don't have self-existence. They need me to do something in the present. They're not lurking in there, waiting to rear their ugly heads in fully blown form. It's not how it works. We actually need to see this over and over and over for it to become really clear.

So usually we tend to think of *samādhi* as, I'm kind of – “Here I am, trying to keep my *samādhi* together. I'm trying to keep the *mettā* practice. I'm *doing* something. I'm *making* something there.” As we go into it, we see that *samādhi* is actually making less and less. We're doing less and less. It's very, very interesting – it's not obvious at all. As we make less and less, we make less and less self, and there's more and more love coming out of that. We begin to see this emptiness of things. It comes out of the *mettā* practice and out of the *samādhi* practice. Begin to see that things cannot be ‘things’ without me *doing* something, without me actually faffing around a lot, and putting a lot, and building them up in there. And it's this seeing of emptiness – and you see it in a very gradual way. It's not really a sudden thing. It's a very gradual, over and over – it's this seeing and understanding of emptiness that brings the deepest freedom in life and in our practice. And that's something that *is* available to us through these practices.

Okay, I'm going to stop there. Are there any questions? We have time before tea. If there's anything about what I've said today, about anything someone else has said, or anything at all about what we're doing, so ... Please, yeah.

### **Q1: when to use phrases and when to let them go; responsiveness in practice**

Yogi: I'm getting the impression from what you're saying about *samādhi* deepens – may be *pīti* or not *pīti* – we let go of it more, that at some point we maybe let go of the phrases too.

Rob: Yes, good, good. Yeah. So I'll repeat this anyway at some point, but the phrases are really a crutch. Sometimes you're going to really need the phrases and the fullness of the phrases, and this kind of steadiness of the phrases, and the concreteness of the phrases. And as I've said, at some point yesterday or today, if the mind feels quite scattered, even good to say each phrase twice. You're sort of there for the first one, and then the second one, you're really there.

As the *samādhi* deepens or the feeling of *mettā* deepens, you will find that your need for the phrases changes. So sometimes you don't need any phrase at all, and there's a feeling there, and you feel warm, and there's love. Just be with that. Just be with that in the body, and just let the phrases go. But it's a continuum. You can be in this not saying any phrases as long as it lasts like that, as long as you can stay connected. When it fades, come back to the phrases. There's a sort of in-between, when you might find the phrases can be a lot more light and a lot more sparse. In other words, you can – what are the phrases again? “May I be safe.” [laughter] “Safe and protected,” sorry. Or “May I live with ease.” That's one. [laughter] That might become just one word, so instead of “May I live with” or “May I *da-da-da*” or “May you *da-da-da*,” it just becomes “ease ... ease ... ease.” And it can become *very*

sparse, even less regular than that. You can be very fluid. This is a very fluid, very responsive practice. One of the skills in *samādhi* practice, one of the skills in *mettā* practice, is responsiveness. So what is the way of using the phrases or leaving the phrases that's most helpful right now for you? That's it. In the art of what's going on is this responsiveness to more, less, tighter, looser. Does that answer? Yeah? Good, good. So very important, really important.

## **Q2: investigating assumptions about suppression, the storehouse, and emptiness**

Yogi: I asked a question in the morning, and I understood what you said – but maybe I didn't. When you said whatever it is that you don't know if you're suppressing or not, you might just wonder if there is something, or maybe it's a behaviour, let's say, that only shows itself in a certain situation. So how do you know if you've dealt with it or not? Do you see what I mean? I know you said there has to be certain conditions for it to arise. In other words, it doesn't show itself. And this is how I suspect that my mind works. I don't know. I can sit on retreat, and then I come out, and the conditions arise. They have to be like in a certain, specific manner. And unexpectedly, and there it is!

Rob: Okay, so a couple of things here. One is just take a step back. So this is a really delicate – and for a lot of people, it's a very sensitive question. It's really quite a charged question.

Yogi: It's sort of very loose in the mind, huh?

Rob: Rather than saying, "It's like this," or "It's like *this*," assuming either that things pre-exist as a storehouse, and they're waiting to come up, or assuming that, "Hey, none of that's true, and they don't exist, and it's all empty," which would be two extremes, I just wanted to draw attention to something, that there may be much more to [it] than [it] first seems. So not to kind of rush to a conclusion either way. In what you just said, it was interesting the language that you used. So when there are certain conditions, up it comes.

Yogi: Or factors, really. But not so much a storehouse.

Rob: Is there an assumption in there that here's this thing, kind of pre-packaged, waiting to coming up? So in other words, what I'm saying is, anger can't be anger, a behaviour can't be a behaviour, without us building it in the present moment.

Yogi: It was there, and then it was gone. This is what happens. It's like there is nothing, right? And it's almost like one can't see in a certain situation. And then when that situation isn't there, there's nothing. But it's not a storehouse, exactly, either, or pre-packaged. Maybe it is. Maybe it is that view or that idea.

Rob: I think it's just an interesting thing to look at. I mean, so rather than trying to come to a conclusion now, maybe you could just investigate that. I think it's an ongoing question, because

sometimes the model of a storehouse and things needing to come up is really appropriate and really important, and very much a skilful way of working. But to deepen in understanding in the Dharma, one of the most central things is actually deepening in understanding what are the conditions that build things in the present moment. And we begin to uncover that more and more as the practice deepens. Usually, it's not a way we're used to looking, so we don't usually look that way. But to begin to actually tease them out and see, "Okay, so what was actually contributing to that?" It's something that takes time, but you may just want to keep it open right now and just explore. See what you see about it.

Yogi: Sure, but I've done that for fifteen years. [laughs]

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: It's okay. It just seems to go into hiding. And then, how do you make the mind more transparent? Maybe. I don't know.

Rob: Well, that's the assumption. Is it going into hiding? Now, sometimes, maybe something *is* going into hiding. We are actually ...

Yogi: Or is it just not there?

Rob: Well, that's the question – is it really not there?

Yogi: This is the one I don't understand.

Rob: Is it not there? And if we can just approach this with a very open, fresh mind, no preconceptions, and just see: "Am I assuming that it's gone into hiding – it's actually there, but I just can't see it? Or is it really not there? Is it really not there? There are times in our life when we are actually repressing things and suppressing things. There's something around that we don't want to deal with, we don't want to feel, and it's pushing it down. But a lot of the times, when things are not there, there's the assumption that they're in hiding or repressed or just out of the range of consciousness. And that's what I'm saying. Can we just approach that differently?

Yogi: [?] too much individual existence.

Rob: Yes, giving it too much existence, and just kind of scrap the whole thing. Just start from zero, and say, "What's going on?" Okay? Yeah.

### **Q3: temporarily putting away stories and self-definitions; defining oneself without being imprisoned by self-definitions**

Yogi: Just something I'd like to share, really.



Rob: Please, yeah.

Yogi: In order for me to be here, I have to put all of my stories about who I think I am on a back burner for a while. If they come up, I have to let it go, because if I really believed those stories, I wouldn't be here. If I believed the kind of person I think I am, you know, how my friends think I am, and the fears around that, I wouldn't be here. So I have to put it away, just for a while, and try and be empty of that. Otherwise it won't work for me.

Rob: Thank you. Yeah, and that's, I think, really, really skilful, and a beautiful thing to do. Someone was saying this to me in another retreat the other day, "I just want to put all that self-definition aside and just see what's what," and put it away for a while. Maybe put it away for longer. Maybe you put it away, and it comes back. But if you keep putting it away over and over, maybe when it comes back it doesn't have the kind of total convincingness that it seems to most of the time. In other words, sure it comes back, but we don't automatically just totally believe that about ourselves, that we're like this – either how we're telling ourselves how we are, or how other people are telling us. There's a sense of moving in and out of defining the self, as practice deepens. So of course we live our life defining the self to our self and to others, but we have times when we don't, and those are beautiful times, precious times. You can't stay forever in a state of not defining the self, but if you do it enough and repeatedly enough, when you go back to defining the self, you just know, "Well, this is just a conventional definition," and you're not bound by it. You don't feel wedded to it. Does that make sense? Its believability is that much less. It's just, "Yeah, sure, I'll define myself. I do this, I do that, I'm like this, I'm like that." But it's not imprisoning the being in any way. You understand? So yeah, very beautiful. Thank you.

#### **Q4: seeing unreality of stories; defusing hindrances by coming back to *mettā* or being with unpleasantness**

Yogi: You talked about that spark that didn't ignite, didn't get the fuel to ignite. This morning you were talking about kind of the seeds, which kind of have these hook things, but they need the conditions. Is it the same thing?

Rob: Yes. Very related, yeah. So, yes, in fact, exactly the same thing, or very, very similar.

Yogi: So it feels like, by the time we've got the hooks going, or the fires [?], then very little chance, because I've – there's no emptiness to be found [?]. So it feels like there's a lot of potential in the place where it's the seed [?] or the spark. Is this right?

Rob: Yes. Totally.

Yogi: So it feels like a process that I'm trying to track.

Rob: Yes, so it's great. Over time, what happens, the more and more skilled you become, the more you can actually catch that process of, "Here they are, these little things going out looking, and they're looking for something." Before they've got their teeth sunk in something, you can actually just, "Oh, thank you very much, and we won't be going there." [laughter] But don't feel, if you miss that moment, it's all, "*Ugh*, now I've missed it, missed the train. I have to wait for the next. I have to sit this out." It's not quite like that. And actually, two things happen.

One thing is, over time, you've seen it enough, and even in the middle of it you know, "Well, this is a process that's (take it lightly) somewhat unreal. It's kind of created. I've made this, somehow. It's not as real as it seems to be." And just that knowledge helps to lessen its impact. Does that make sense? So that becomes stronger and stronger, more and more embedded. We believe less in the stories that hindrances and aversion, etc., are telling us, because we've seen it over and over, how they build things, how they want to make [issues], and we believe it less. So that helps defuse, even if you're in the middle of it.

Secondly, it's possible, even if you're in the middle of it, to find a way of working that's simpler. For instance, just keeping doing the *mettā*. You're just coming back to a very simple level instead of trying to engage with the complexity of this sort of raging fire or the complexity of all this difficulty that's going on. Instead of trying to address it at that level, trying to address it at a much simpler level, just keeping doing the *mettā* and staying very simple with that, or possible also to just be with the unpleasantness of what's going on. So once these hooks are in something, they're shaking something, it's probably going to be agitated and unpleasant. You can just feel that energetically, physically, as an unpleasantness, and just stay with that unpleasantness. It's a very simple stratum of experience to be with. If you stay there and just let it be unpleasant, you're not building it any more. Does that make sense? So two ways there. Good? Okay, great.

#### **Q5: working with tiredness; experimenting with effort levels; nurturing happiness and appreciation**

Yogi: Can you talk something about effort? Because you were talking about the mind tightening up, and I am, as you know, extremely tired, and effort kind of sends me straight to sleep, as people might have noticed. And yet, how to arrive at kind of effortless – I wonder, how can one arrive at effortless effort? In other words, how little can one do and still make enough effort for the practice to work?

Rob: Yeah. Um. [laughs] Golden question. I don't think there's one answer to that, unfortunately. I don't think it's that simple. In the course of practice, and in the course of a retreat like this, it's more like, "How willing am I to experiment with the whole range of it?" Sometimes what really is needed is this, "Right, okay, when the tough get going ..." What is it? "When the tough get going, the going gets ..." [laughter] "When the going gets tough" – thank you. You know, it's really just, you just stick in there, and you just say, "I'm just going to stick with this thing, and I'm just going to see it out," and it pays off. And it really is a question of effort. And that's kind of one extreme. At other times, it's more of just allowing and really non-efforting, and being very spacious and allowing, and *that* seems to be

the ticket. Again, it's this responsiveness, this creativity, this aliveness of response and relationship with the practice. And I think 'willingness' is a really important word – willing to try everything, even when we feel like, "I don't really want to try that end of things," or "That can't be right," you know? It's not the case that one thing is always going to work. It's just not. One day, one hour, one approach will work. The next hour, the very opposite. So it's more in this willingness to experiment, and willingness to sometimes do what you don't feel like doing, and sometimes it's very much the opposite. I wish it was a very simple sort of, "There you are." But I don't think it is. I think it's really the whole range of that. But certainly the allowing the spaciousness, the letting go, is very significant. You can be letting go of a lot of aversion in that. Aversion has a lot to do with tiredness. When there's aversion around, it's just very tiring. So letting go, being spacious, actually allows that to just let go.

Yogi 2: Letting go ...? Sorry.

Rob: Letting go and being spacious allows the aversion to go, and then the mind can actually settle, because aversion unsettles the mind and tires the mind. So there's always more than one approach, and always, always it's the case that it's not one thing that's going to just be what's working. Is that ...?

Yogi: Yes. I've been trying to experiment.

Rob: Okay. Yeah. It's still early days, you know. You've had a lot of challenging stuff in the life coming up. So, you know, you're settling in still. But if you keep that willingness around, and that [experimenting], and take care of the other piece I said about nurturing a sort of base level of happiness and appreciation – that may be as significant as efforting. This is really important. When we think about *samādhi*, the whole picture is important. Taking care of that, nurturing appreciation, gratitude, etc. – very significant. Yeah? Okay.

#### **Q6: working with positive mind states and apparent distractions**

Yogi: Just to go back to what you were saying about the hooks getting in and recognizing that. So I've sort of, for the last year or so, managed to get that part, with the negative mind states – "Oh, that's what it is. Okay, that's ... you know, let that go." But with the positive mind states that come up in the midst of the phrases, doing the phrases, and then the mind goes to a positive mind state, to the face of somebody that you – you know, like your child or someone like that. Should one still be – how to differentiate between letting that go and getting back to the *mettā* and ...

Rob: This is quite interesting as well. In a way, as practice develops and deepens, it's a bit like riding currents, like if you see sometimes there are hawks around here, and you see them kind of gliding and riding the air currents. A positive mind state might come up – your child, a loved one, and there's love there. Now, it may be that that feels like a bit of a distraction. But it may be that you can also use that energy as something that feeds back into the *mettā*.

Yogi: Sometimes feels more like, “Ah, this is nice! So I don’t need to – why should I go back to the *mettā*? Because this is nice.”

Rob: Okay. If there’s *mettā* in it – in other words, it goes back to the phrases as well. If it feels like, “Oh, here in this memory of this person is *mettā*,” then go with that. In other words, ride it as a manifestation of *mettā*, or pull the *mettā* out of it. Does that make sense? There could be a lot of *mettā* in what you’re talking about; it’s not just a distraction. Similarly, this morning we were talking about sexual energy and when there’s fantasy coming up or whatever, opening to that energy and allowing that, feeling it physically, instead of being so much, “Oh, I need, I need, I want,” or so much caught in the fantasy. It’s an energy that one can actually ride and navigate. What seems like a distraction can actually be – you can work with it. So sometimes the mind moves, and it *is* just looking for a distraction. But then it doesn’t actually feel that good. So this is interesting. Again, if you have the sensitivity to the body, you can feel when it feels, “Ah, this is actually good. It’s helping. It’s helping this good feeling.” And other times when it’s just – it’s not really helping.

Similarly, we were talking about eye contact and what Catherine mentioned in the opening talk, and I said today, “Let yourself look at who you pass in the corridor, and the lovely” – not all the time; you don’t have to go around grinning at everyone. [laughter] This is England, after all. [laughter] But sometimes, you know, to let yourself do that. See if you can notice when it’s coming out of restlessness and distraction and wanting just to entertain, and when it’s actually coming out of wanting to look and appreciate. One begins, in time, to discern the difference. Does that make sense? So it may – it *will* be the case that in *mettā* positive feelings come up; just see if they can be kind of enjoyed and brought into the practice so that the *mettā* itself deepens. Is that okay? Okay. Good. Let’s have a bit of quiet together before tea.

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<sup>1</sup> SN 12:23.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. DN 22, MN 110.