Exploring the World of Loving Kindness
Lovingkindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening
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January 30, 2008
https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/11951/

Tonight I'd like to talk about some of the aspects of *mettā*, of loving-kindness, some of the dimensions that we begin to uncover, begin to feel, when we explore, when we move into this practice.

So, to reiterate something we've already said a few times: to remember that *mettā* can never just be a feeling. Sometimes we are just having that faith in planting the seeds, seeds of intentionality, and how profound – very simple but profound that is, and powerful.

But even when *mettā is* felt as a feeling – and we have a *feeling* of loving-kindness – even then, it's not just one feeling. And I sort of mentioned this in the morning instructions the other day. And you may have noticed this in your practice. In those moments, in those times when there is a feeling, there is something felt, in the heart, or in the body, might *more* accurately talk about a constellation of feelings. So sometimes the *mettā* feels warm. It's felt as a warmth. Sometimes it's a kind of bubbly feeling. There's a happiness with it. Sometimes it's very soothing. Sometimes calming. Sometimes it's very bright, very luminous. Sometimes very gentle. And the loving-kindness, the felt experience of loving-kindness, can go through all those different textures, different colours, different flavours. It's actually important to feel that. And this is partly why we keep encouraging this sensitivity that's developed in your practice, particularly sensitivity to the body, and just actually *allowing* the *mettā* to take these subtly different flavours, at times. Sometimes, when it has that feeling, to go through that, and really just allowing that.

And you may also have noticed, many of you may also have noticed by now, sometimes one's doing *mettā* to oneself, or *mettā* to the friend or the benefactor, and we are conscious of our suffering or their suffering, and the *mettā* takes on the colour, the flavour, of compassion at that point. So, certainly, we need to discriminate between these two, between *mettā* and compassion, and be quite specific and precise about what is *mettā* and what is compassion. But they also overlap. And when the *mettā*, as many of you will have experienced already, when it touches suffering, it has the flavour of compassion. And just to allow that, just to allow that. It's part of the constellation of feelings that *mettā* is.

[3:30] Apologies tonight if I'm a little low energy – I'm still struggling with an illness, and it seems to have got the better hand this evening, but …

So, there's a constellation of possible feelings. And we go through these categories. We're beginning to unfold these categories. And so, we have the self, the benefactor, the friend, etc. And it's important to recognize that these categories are not fixed. Someone is not *inherently* a friend, or *inherently* – later we'll do the difficult person, or neutral – that they're very fluid categories. So someone might be a benefactor or a friend, in that category, and then they say the wrong thing to us. [laughter] And you know, they get relegated a couple of divisions. [laughter] And hopefully, you heal that, and they get promoted again. [laughter]

But they're not – there is nothing fixed. The whole practice is very fluid. The reason for the categories – it's just a technique to gradually extend the range of the *mettā* towards this boundlessness, which is the aspiration of the *mettā*. So it's just a tool.

And we start with the self, and we've spent two days with that. This has already been said, but just to say it again: how common it is, actually, for that to be quite a difficult orientation for the *mettā*. Difficult to direct the *mettā* towards the self – not for everyone, but it's really quite common. And there are all kinds of reasons for this. We can talk about childhood and family and school, and many, many possible reasons. And a lot of it, in fact, is just cultural. Sometimes, looking at the culture we're in at the moment, it's almost like there's a bit of a mixed message out there, about how one is in relationship to oneself. In many respects, perhaps looking at the culture, we can see that we're in a bit of a culture of selfishness: "me first." Maybe a few people around me, but "me first." And somehow with that, the message from the culture – and sometimes it's not even overt – the message is, "To love oneself, to cherish oneself in a healthy way, is somehow selfish." There's quite a confusing message, just that we're getting from the culture.

But in a way, whatever the reasons (and it can be quite complex), we often, or many people find themselves in a situation where it's quite difficult to direct the love towards themselves, the intention of love towards themselves. Or even to have an idea or a belief, a view, that it's not a good idea, that it's selfish. And just to have that view.

All of that – quite complex, the reasons for it, but *might* be just a habit, might have just become a habit of viewing, a habit of a way of relating to our self, or a way of not relating to our self. And as such, one of the functions of *mettā* practice is just to weaken that habit. Again, it's not a very glamorous way of looking at the Dharma, but it's extremely powerful: we're just weakening habits that are unhelpful.

And it's so necessary, so necessary for our lives, for our path, for our practice, to be in the context of love for oneself. That is the inner climate of the way we're moving through our life, and the way we're moving through our practice. So necessary. And just to repeat, actually, that quote from the Buddha again, so powerful:

> You could search the entire universe for someone more deserving of loving-kindness than yourself, and you will not find that person. You will not find that being.[1]

Something to really reflect on. It's not about what we think we deserve. It's not about what we think we've done, or how we think we measure up. What we haven't done, what we've said, what we didn't say, what goes through our minds, what we think of ourselves – we're saying all of that's actually irrelevant. Just the fact of your being means that you deserve it. And to give the love to ourselves is actually a gift to others, begins to become a foundation from which we can give to others, and actually, an indispensable foundation for making that a steady and a deep giving that lasts.

So there's the self, and then there are the categories of the friend, and the benefactor, which we've done these days. Now, has anyone mentioned the word 'near enemy' yet? No? Okay, well people are smiling, so they've heard of it. But in this retreat, has anyone?

Yogi: It's referenced.

Rob: Well, okay. 'Near enemy' is a bit of a strange concept that comes from the Buddha, actually.[2] And what it means is something that *looks* like love, *looks* like loving-kindness, but isn't. It's pretty close, but it isn't. And the near enemy of *mettā*, of loving-kindness, is *attached love*. Now, we all have experienced that. It's not unconditional love. So *mettā* in its aspiration is: it doesn't matter what you do, what you give me back, what you say, whether you're grateful, what you've done, whether I like you – none of that. It's unconditional. But usually, there are strings and conditions attached to our love, and it's actually attached love.

This is very important, because what we find when we begin exploring for ourselves what *mettā* means, what we run into is a lot of this near enemy stuff, a lot of attached love. And the first thing to say is that's totally okay. It's totally normal and okay.

We practise with the totality of our humanity. That's what we are, and that's what we bring to practice, and that's what we practise with. And as human beings, of course, well, we are human. We are complex. A lot of our relationships and intentions – there's quite a messiness there. And in a way, that messiness is the stuff of our humanity. And so it's important to enlarge the picture of the practice and just include all that. We're going to run into these near enemies. No question about it.

And they're actually part of the practice. So not to see them as, "Oh, I give up," you know, or "Oh, I'm not doing it right." They're actually part of the practice, to encounter attached love, in the meditation, in the walking, as you go about the day, in your interactions with people. It's part of the practice, and actually a necessary part of the practice, because it's through that that we learn about what 'near enemy' is, but we also learn what pure *mettā* is. Without the near enemies, we could never make that journey of learning. So not to regard it as a kind of failure, or "I'm not getting it right." This is a learning process as much as anything else. And one's beginning to see the different aspects.

So today we introduced the friend, the category of the friend. And so to reflect a little bit – I mean, each of us, I think this is really important in our lives, to reflect: what does it mean to be a friend? What does it mean to be a good friend in this life? And actually, there are a lot of aspects just to that.

Part of it is *seeing* another. Do we *see* our friend? Do we really *see* them? Krishnamurti used to talk about this a lot – how easy it is to just habituate oneself to another, especially when we're very familiar or very intimate with them. And we begin almost to not see them freshly. So I would say an aspiration of friendship, or what friendship means, is to have the aspiration to keep seeing another, to keep seeing them, to keep that fresh, open, not to put another in a box. This goes on all the time, in the best of our friendships. It goes on all the time. And it's just a matter of admitting that to ourselves. And again, what does it mean to be a good friend? It means to care about that, and to try and keep breaking that open, and having it be fresh. And that's quite a task. I think it's quite a task. And especially, you know, relationships, friendships, intimate relationships that last years – how easy it is to just gloss over the other with time, with familiarity.

So that's part of what friendship means, that aspiration. But this is where our humanity comes in. Also, let's be realistic. If I'm friends with someone, perhaps until we are completely enlightened, completely awakened, I'm also, as much as I want to see the other, I'm going to want to be seen. So that's already attached. You know, there are already some strings attached there. I would say, in the context of a friendship, that's okay. That's part of what it is.

What we've got here is something quite human and complex, and not, perhaps, quite the stainless picture that we might at first see, that might at first seem the case when we come to *mettā* practice. We want to be seen, and it's a beautiful thing to feel like you are being seen by a friend. And perhaps that's a necessary part of our friendships, and a necessary part of our humanity. How does it feel in a friendship when we don't feel seen? We see the other, we try to see the other, we want to be seen, we need to be seen, and we also need to want to see ourselves. How am I in this relationship? I'm interacting – what's going on for me? What are my intentions? What are my feelings? So we see ourselves, too, and that's equally important. We talk about what is friendship, what makes good friendship.

We appreciate the other in a friendship. There is appreciation for who they are, for how they are, for what they do, for their manifestation. And hopefully there is the willingness and the ability to express that. And this is something we all need to look into: do I hold back my voicing of appreciation in the relationships that I'm in? How easy it is to get into that pattern, and just a little bit inhibited in doing that.

And conversely, again, we take in appreciation. And again, this is a very interesting one. How many of us – is it actually quite difficult? We have someone who loves us, and they're expressing appreciation, and some wall comes up over the heart, just can't take it in. It just bounces right off. How common this is. And again, to appreciate oneself – all this is part of what friendship is. Or rather, I would say, friendship is the commitment to growing in all of that, and to uncovering all of that, to discovering all of that.

[16:31] So I think it's fair to say there's a kind of level of practice, or a dimension of practice, that's really about reparenting ourselves. I mean, that's a way of putting it. Sometimes, for some people, literally, the parents did not provide enough of what was needed. And there is, in a way, a very real reparenting that goes on, very gradually, over months and years. And that's one of the functions – not totally, not the complete practice – one of the functions of practice, this reparenting.

Sometimes we can hear some of the teachings, or read some of the suttas, and they talk about loving-kindness, and this boundlessness of it and the unconditionality of it. And it can seem a little unreal, or unrealistic. It's a bit too squeaky clean. Like, the image – squeaky clean *mettā* machine. It somehow doesn't feel very human – *sometimes*, *some* of the references. And there's a way that it can feel like it excludes or precludes our personality, our self-expression, our uniqueness. So this is really important: it *doesn't*. The manifestations of loving-kindness, the expressions, the intentions of loving-kindness, very much include our particular uniqueness, our particular self-expression. It's very human, very personal. And yesterday night, John talked about *anattā*, this teaching of not-self, the emptiness of self. And yesterday he approached it via the aggregates, the five aggregates. There are many ways to approach it.

It's very interesting. We have a sense of *me*, *my* personality, *my* individuality. The question, Dharmically, is not that that shouldn't be there, that we shouldn't have a sense of our individuality and our uniqueness. It's rather, is the way that I'm regarding my personality, my uniqueness, my individuality, is the way I'm holding that leading to suffering for me and suffering to others? Am I over-identified? Am I wrapped too tight in my self-definitions, in my self-views, believing, "I'm like

this," and needing that affirmed all the time, or too rigid? Am I wrapped up in that self-view? If I am, then it's going to cause problems, for self and for other.

[19:25] Is there another way of looking at it? Actually, there are many other ways of looking at it. One is that this – in this case [gesturing to self] – this particular individuality, this particular self-expression, this particular uniqueness, is the result of an infinite web, completely inextricable web of conditions, in the present and reaching far back into the past. So just this body, genetically, from the parents and the whole sort of, you know, millennia, multi-millions, billions of years recess, actually, right back to the Big Bang. And the evolution of matter, and the genetic passing on – this body. And then this body nourished by air, nourished by food, nourished by sunlight. This makes this particular expression of the body, like it or not.

Personality, everything that I've read, all the relationships I've had, all the interactions, all the music I've loved – all of that goes to make this particular unique expression right now, this moment right now. And there's a way that the self and the very individuality and uniqueness of the self is inextricably bound up with, actually, *everything else* in the whole universe. We have a delusion of separateness. Can we practise – and this is a really important word, 'practise,' because we can kind of understand this intellectually – can we practise reversing that delusion and actually seeing another way, seeing in terms of this web? So part of what 'practise' means is playing with ways of looking, shaking things up, saying, "Let me look at this another way. Let me practise looking at this another way," until that other way, which brings freedom with it, which brings love with it, becomes much more accessible, much more normal for us.

So the kind of realistic messiness of what *mettā* means and looks like in our lives, in terms of our personalities and in terms of how we are with others, how we *are* in our friendships, how we *are* in our relationships – all of them. This is really a question for us as practitioners: are we really willing, *fully* willing, to work with that messiness in our lives, to work with that complexity, to work with our humanity in the context of our friendships, of our relationships? And sometimes we think we are, but if we take a real honest look, the truth is – well, there's a lot of places that we just, "Hmph," actually can't really be bothered to go there. Are we willing to work with the fullness of our life, and have, in that sense, a very full practice?

There's a very beautiful passage from Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet*. I'm sure some of you know this. And he's talking about friendship. And he says:

> And a youth said, Speak to us of Friendship.
> And he answered, saying:
> Your friend is your needs answered.
> He is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving.
> And he is your board and your fireside.
> For you come to him with your hunger, and you seek him for peace.
>
> When your friend speaks his mind you fear not the "nay" in your own mind, nor do you withhold the "[yes]."
> And when he is silent your heart ceases not to listen to his heart;

> For without words, in friendship, all thoughts, all desires, all expectations are born and shared, with joy that is unacclaimed.
>
> When you part from your friend, you grieve not;
>
> For that which you love most in him may be clearer in his absence, as the mountain to the climber is clearer from the plain.
>
> And let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit.
>
> For love that seeks [anything] but the disclosure of its own mystery is not love but a net cast forth: and only the unprofitable is caught.
>
> And let your best be for your friend.
>
> If he must know the ebb of your tide, let him know its flood also.
>
> For what is your friend that you should seek him with hours to kill?
>
> Seek him always with hours to live.
>
> For it is his to fill your need, but not your emptiness.
>
> And in the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter, and sharing of pleasures.
>
> For in the dew of little things the heart finds its morning and is refreshed.[3]

Very beautiful.

So there is the self, the benefactor, the friend. Tomorrow we introduce the neutral, the neutral category, the category of people that feel neutral to us, not particularly for or against.

This is very interesting. Can be at that point in the practice, that this is where we just … [mimes falling asleep] [laughter] The very neutrality means there is nothing in it for us. It becomes a bit abstract. We lose interest. It feels removed. But that effect in itself is actually quite interesting. What is it that makes us lose interest in people? What is it that makes them, makes most of humanity, perhaps – it's interesting: for some people, no one is neutral; there's always some kind of tussle. But what is it that allows people to kind of fade to the background for us? Very interesting question.

When we're struggling with something, when consciousness is struggling with something, we're in a tizzy about something, either wanting to get rid of something, pushing something away, or trying to hold on to something, trying to grasp – when there is clinging (in Dharma shorthand), the more clinging there is, the more the sense of self. And what one has then is a very prominent sense of self and a prominent sense of one thing that one's in a bit of a tizzy about.

So clinging *builds* self. This is another way of saying self is empty. It depends on our clinging. It depends on us struggling with something in some way. The more we struggle, the more built up the self is. And you have the self, and you have *one thing* with which one is clinging or grasping to some degree, and everything else, every*one* else, just fades: "Not interested right now." You've got the self and this thing, feeding each other – the more thing, the more self; the more self, the more thing. Clinging is building that process. Everyone else fades to grey: "Not interested." We really need to see this. We need to see this process. What's happening? How is it that self gets built up, a thing gets built up, and everyone else can kind of go to …? [laughs]

Very, very important to see this. As I said, there are many ways into this *anattā* business. And to see the emptiness – self is something that's built. We fabricate it. We need to [huffing noises] huff and

puff and blow the house *up*, actually. We need to construct it. And we can actually see this going on. And then we see what that does to the love, see what it does to the expansiveness of the love. It basically shrinks.

So there's self, friend, benefactor, neutral, and as I said, there's the difficult category. And sometimes, in fact, the friend, as I said, can find themselves in the difficult category, the category of the person with whom we have difficulty. And this, I think, is a really interesting area, really important area for us to look at.

What loving-kindness is not, absolutely is not, is making us doormats that people wipe their feet over and walk all over, and basically treat badly. It's not doing that. It's not designed to do that. It's not about being Pollyanna, or whatever the phrase is.

So in the context of this, when we have difficulty with someone, whether they were a friend or it's just someone on the street that we don't know, whatever it is, it's actually important to look and really, with care, investigate our relationship to expressing anger, expressing "no." Are we able to do that? First of all, are we *able* to do that? Are we *willing* to do that? Are we able to do it skilfully? These are, you know, hard challenges for us.

So it may be that expressing anger, and expressing a "no," is actually a part of what *mettā* is. It's actually, in that moment, what *mettā* looks like, that it's the most loving thing to do and the most healthy thing to do: to express a "no" or express anger in a way that's helpful.

Sometimes, and this, again, is quite common, there's a real fear of doing that, fear of saying "no," a fear of standing in one's truth and speaking it, fear of expressing anger – very common. I have a very good friend. She suffers from quite severe depression at times. And she's beginning to notice this relationship – it's only part of what goes on for her, and depression itself is quite complex, so it's only a strand. But she's beginning to notice that there are times when something happens with someone, and she's angry. Something goes on that she's really angry about, and she feels so fearful of expressing the anger. She's just beginning to be aware of this now: she turns it in on herself. The next thing she knows, she's in a state of depression (which is one of the possibilities of what can happen here). And in her case, it's doubly tragic because, I feel that she's someone with a very natural, very naturally, very deep *mettā* and compassion. And every time this happens, the depression comes on, it just closes down her ability to express that and to offer that to others and to herself.

Interesting too – terrible phrase, but 'spiritual types' (which actually includes all of us, the kind of people that are in this room right now) … [laughter] Oftentimes there's a real no-no with anger. It's like there's a real recoiling from it, a real fear of it, or a real assumption that it's really a no-go area. But just to check where one's patterns are with this. Am I the kind of person that goes around barking at people and biting their heads off very quickly? Or am I really reluctant to express that? Where do I fall with this? To know oneself.

And it's a very interesting question with anger. I think this is another of the areas not to be too quick to jump to conclusions – "Never express it," or "You always need to express exactly what's going on."

I think it's completely fair to say there's too much anger in the world. There's too much violence. It's too much out there – with all the consequences. It's really worth our investigating. So I'm talking now about investigating anger and expressing anger as actually one of the faces of loving-kindness –

can be, can be. Anger is interesting. When we really look at it, and when we're really honest with it, it's usually blind, and it's usually blind in three ways.

(1) It's usually **blind to its causes**. So usually something happens, we get angry, and we say, "*You* are making me angry," or "*This* is making me angry." And what we don't see in that – it seems so obvious; what we don't see is the whole inner constellation, or both inner and outer constellation of conditions that allow the anger to be. All kinds of assumptions, perceptions, views, thoughts. What was the state of mind before the anger? Perhaps there was a little bit of irritability and leaning that way anyway. Anger comes, and it becomes blind to its causes, and wants to put it on one thing. Dharma practice means to uncover that. Blind to its causes.

(2) Also often **blind to its effects**. Anger is blind to its effects – so both energetically and on others, and I'll explain what I mean. When was it? Twenty? More than twenty. Around twenty years ago, I had just started a psychotherapy process, working in psychotherapy with a therapist in America. And it was quite early days, and she said, and it seemed clear, there is obviously some anger there, needs addressing, needs to come out. Get it out. And so she suggested: go to the gym, and get one of those big punchbags, and pummel, pummel the punchbag, and be with that process of the anger expressing itself.

So I dutifully did that, for quite a while. Huge! [gesturing size of punchbag] [laughs] And what I noticed was that I would punch this thing, and anger would indeed come up, and I'd punch away at it really hard. What happened was that the more I punched, and the more *into* it I got, the more anger came up. So I thought, "Ah, now we're really liberating some stuff." [laughter] And I went, really going for it. And I was quite young. Going to the extent that my knuckles – I was actually wearing boxing gloves, but my knuckles were still bleeding underneath. So I was a very *eager* client. [laughter] After a certain point, something occurred to me. [laughter] Maybe this is actually *building* it and not *releasing* it, which would be the assumption.

Anger can be blind to its effects. What's going on? We tend to think, "There's such a pressure inside. It needs to release. I need to get it out. It's like a heat, a burning. Get it out! And then, when I get it out I'll feel better." Even if we don't consciously think that, is that the case, always? It can be blind to its effects.

It can also be blind to its effects on others. So again, we say, we *voice* our anger, we *vent* our anger at someone. And really what we want is for the situation to change, or part of what we want. And yet, I think it takes an extraordinarily evolved human being to have anger flung at them, energetically, that level of anger, and not to react. Just energetically, it's such a strong energy. We human beings, we're very sensitive, very vulnerable, fragile beings, energetically. Someone, "*Bleurgh!*" – it takes a *very* evolved person, practising *very hard* … [laughter] to just hear that and say, you know, no reaction, "I hear," you know, and just to respond, and not react. Anger can be blind to its effects on others.

(3) Blind to itself, as well, the third blindness. Anger often – it feels like it's so clear, that we're just striking through things with the wisdom sword of Mañjuśrī: we're seeing *exactly* what's happening! The Buddha likened the angry mind to water that's boiling.[4] You actually can't see anything underneath. It's just raging away.

So part of practice is to really be honest about this, and about these blindnesses, and explore them. Oftentimes, when we feel anger, it feels a lot easier to vent it. And it might feel easier in the moment.

But in the long run, it's not. It's really not. What am I building when I vent anger? What am I crystallizing and conditioning in myself, and in the relationship, and in others? Again, this is one of these quite complex issues, so I just want to, in a way, open it up.

Is it possible to feel anger, to feel the anger, and to express it in a way that the person does not feel dumped on, vomited on, flung at? Some of you may be familiar with, just to say, "I feel angry." It's very different from just ranting at someone. One is taking ownership instead of hurling or dumping the feelings on another. Big difference in effect. Now, that's not easy. And there's no way that I think anyone realistically would say that's easy. It's very challenging.

This whole area of communication, and particularly communicating what's difficult in our relationships – how much of the difficulty we have in relationships is around our lack of skill and care and consciousness around communication? Such a huge area, and we can easily have a whole Dharma talk, a whole day, just on that. And just a little piece – the Buddha said when there's something difficult to communicate to another, that one speaks what is true, *if it's helpful*.[5] In other words, if you feel that the person can really hear it, and can learn from it, what's true and helpful, in a helpful way, skilfully – and this is a practice – what's true and helpful, in a helpful way, at the right time. [laughs] So that's *quite* a … [laughs] I think it's just a practice. It's really a practice, and of all the precepts, all the five precepts, it's the hardest one. It's such an art, such a skill. And in a way, to learn to hold back and to do it in the right way, in a helpful way.

I think, and I know for myself, and I see it in others, that this is really a learning process. Again, that word 'practice' – it's a practice. It's going to take time. So if I think back, for myself, again, going back twenty years or more, I wasn't even *aware* of when I felt angry. And then, didn't connect with it. And then, afraid or unable to communicate that to others. And then, learnt, gradually, willing to try and do that, but went way over the other side. So I basically dropped, you know, small thermonuclear devices on people, *really* going overboard. It was part of the learning process. Luckily I could say sorry in a lot of cases, but it actually fractured a lot of relationships. And again, it was coming out of, in a way, wanting to be earnest, and wanting to address what was actually an imbalance in myself, and wanting to be honest, and wanting to stand in the truth. And yet it was so difficult to do that in a way that was balanced. So we're going to make mistakes, and I think that's okay. Or we neglect to say something when we actually should have.

A while ago – can't remember when it was – I had a situation that went on with someone, and I felt quite upset by what was going on. I can't actually remember what it was now! But anyway … [laughter] And I remember asking to speak with this person, and the first thing I said when I went in to speak with her was, "I really want you to know my intention is not to hurt. I really don't want to hurt in what I'm saying, and I don't want to retaliate. It may be that what I'm saying doesn't come out perfectly. I still feel agitated and upset a little bit, and I don't know if I can say it perfectly, so please just bear that in mind and excuse that. But please, please know my intention is not to hurt."

And in a way, I felt that was really helpful, just first thing, saying that, setting up, setting up a kind of context of non-harming, setting up the intention – setting up also the humanity of it, so I could be human, I could be less than perfect, which actually also invited her, or allowed her, to be less than perfect, to be human. And that was something, it felt very, very helpful to do that at the time. Now, of course, if one does something like that, you have to make sure that you really don't have an intention to

hurt. You can't just go in there saying, "Yeah, I don't intend to hurt," and then, you know, you've got your … [laughter]

Sometimes it takes time, sitting with it – couple of minutes, couple of hours, couple of days, couple of weeks, or more – sitting with something that really hurts, working with the anger, being with the anger, teasing out what's there, the hurt underneath, etc., the sadness, until we feel pretty sure that we can go in there, and there's very, very little intention to hurt or retaliate, or be the one who's right, or whatever it is. And then we're much more ready to have that conversation. All this is very challenging.

Sometimes we find ourselves in relationship on the receiving end of anger. Someone is angry at us for what we've done or not done, whatever it is. And then it's a whole skill to hear anger. And this is very interesting too. Again, if I think back, I used to be a person, when people were angry with me – again, and I feel, looking back, and I'm sure many others share this, it was coming out of a kind of earnestness, you know, and really wanting to look at my faults and see where I could grow and open and transform. So someone was angry at me, and would hurl that anger, or would just go – you know, back in the eighties, when it was really … you know, that was the way to do it. [laughter] At least in America it was. [laughter] And what I would do, out of earnestness, was completely open up, energetically: "Yeah, give it to me." [laughter] Because I really wanted to be totally honest and totally open and totally take in what was being said. Maybe I could learn something about myself. Maybe there really was something that I needed to be honest about, and get to the bottom of, and transform.

And what I found with that was basically, I was keeled over. I mean, energetically, in some instances, I remember, it would take weeks to recover. I mean, it was so strong, the energetic effect. And then I remember a teacher, Michael, at – I can't remember what it was – a day retreat or an evening class or something, and he said, "You know, we're not obliged to take on or open ourselves to, or even stick around for, someone's energy of rage, energy of anger." And I heard that, and my jaw hung. It seemed completely radical to me. And what he was saying was, you could say to a person, "I really see that you're angry, and I really want to hear what it is that you're upset about, and I really want to hear what's going on. But I'm not prepared to take on that energy. I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to open myself to that. So when you feel able to just tell me that in a way that's more calm, then I'm ready to listen. So maybe, you know, go for a walk or whatever."

Now … [laughter] Of course, the person is probably going to … [laughter] go through the roof, so … [laughter] I think there has to be some skill in saying, but I think the point is quite interesting. And again, I'm sure I'm not alone in that pattern, so I'm voicing it. But I'm sure I'm not alone in that pattern of, out of earnestness, opening oneself up to that. Do we open ourselves up to listening to what the person has to say? Yes. The energy, the rage, that violence? Why?

Anger often comes, a person is often angry, people, individuals, political groups, socio-economic groups, ethnic groups, often angry because they feel unheard. How much at the root of anger is a feeling of being unheard – and a feeling, from that, of powerlessness? A person's not hearing, and I can't do anything about it. Feeling of frustration with that, feeling of hurt, that we feel hurt, and it's not being heard. So individually or with groups.

I think in a situation that's difficult – and again, none of this is easy at all. But in a situation like that, when one person can say to the other, can look and see the hurt that's underneath the anger, and then express to the other person *genuine* feeling: "It really pains me. I feel sad that I hurt you." And

there's something going underneath just this clashing at the surface. In a way, when two people are like that, someone has to do that. Someone has to be the one that takes the risk and is vulnerable, and expresses that and softens. Someone has to show their hurt. Not easy, but if that doesn't happen – well, we all know it just keeps battering at that same level. Somehow to say to someone: "I'm really … It pains me that I hurt you."

So, loving-kindness, and all through the categories as it opens up. Talking a lot about – or *I've* been talking a lot about the body and the importance of the body in loving-kindness. And to say a bit more about this, can there be, for us, here, now, on this retreat, can there begin to be, can we encourage, can we nurture, a gentleness and a care that runs through the body and runs through the bodily expression – today, tonight, the rest of the retreat, through this retreat? So you may want to explore this a bit. I feel this is a very important aspect of *mettā*. So it's not just about sitting and, as I say, you know, grinding through the phrases and mumbling away to yourself … [laughter] Sometimes I forget the tape recorder's on. [laughter]

Can we begin to explore – this is an option – can we begin to explore a tenderness of touch for ourselves? So this might sound a little, I don't know, hokey for some people, or embarrassing. But what would it be – and we've all got single rooms here, so it's fine to do it. [laughter] What would it be to actually begin to explore – it's just an option – explore touching the body with tenderness? What is it? One hand touches the other hand, and through the hand, in the touch, through the touch, there is tenderness there. You can actually feel it. And one part of the body is expressing to the other tenderness. Hand on the arm, hand on the chest, hand on the belly – just feel into that, and imagine it, and just feel the tenderness moving through the body. Play with it as a practice if you want to. I feel it's very important. Or we're standing outside or doing the walking meditation outside. And again, some of this you may have uncovered anyway. Walking, walking meditation, and the foot touches the earth, and actually, there can be a kiss there. There can be love, somehow felt, tenderness, beauty felt, between foot and earth. This is available to us, something we can explore, something we can play with.

So to experiment with this. What are the ways that the *mettā* can open up and flow through the body, through the eyes? And there are ways of looking that are imbued with loving-kindness. And in a way, attention and love go very closely together. How often is it that someone needing love, they come to us, and what they really need is our attention and the fullness of our attention, the softness of our attention? And through that very attention, that's actually all they need. They need to be heard, need to be seen, need to be held in that attention. The looking itself expresses the love, carries the love. And can be with each other here, can be with nature, trees, to look at a tree with that – what is it? Play with this, possibly, if you want.

[52:05] And again, here, as I said on the opening night, I think, no hurry. Nothing to hurry for here. To really slow down. In a way, that slowing down can also open up this tenderness that flows through the body. So stomping down the corridor, slamming doors, and clunking cutlery – you know, of course it's all fine. There's no problem with any of that. But can there actually be, through all these little movements, little interactions, there is actually the tenderness running through? Experiment with it. Touch the handle of a door. There's somehow the tenderness flowing through that – can be.

Sometimes this 'slow/hurry' thing, and its relationship in the life, is actually easier to see outside, off retreat. So I know if I go to Newton Abbot, and – I'm not saying anything about Newton Abbot. If I

go to Newton Abbot and I've got an agenda of things to do, a list, and I've got a limited amount of time, and I'm hurrying through the high street – got to go to the bank, got to go to the chemist, whatever – and somehow, in the very hurrying, the leaning forward, and I'm going through Newton Abbot with my little summary of *what I want* sort of on the sheet of paper, and that very *what I want* – basically, clinging encapsulated on a piece of paper … [laughter] What happens? Again, everyone on the street is just people in the way. They're just 'other,' 'other' in the way.

Versus – and you know, this is actually part of life nowadays, to have to be in a hurry. But versus sometimes being there and dropping that, a little bit, and maybe still getting the stuff done. Dropping that *what I want* – you can play with this. What happens when you're moving in the hustle, the bustle, the busyness of Newton Abbot high street, wherever it is … and you just drop that? Possibility for a wider sense of mystery of being to come in, and in that, a wider sense of love. And one sees: it's life going on. It's life expressing itself. And children moving, and old people, and interactions with shopkeepers, and business transactions, and – it's all just expressing itself. And dogs, and whatever it is – life expressing itself. And there is an opening of the heart to that.

Can be even – small example, but very pertinent to what we're doing here – come on retreat: "I want to get concentrated." Too tight in the *what I want*, and what's the downside? Irritability. Someone just breathes a little bit too loudly next to you, and there is irritability there. Or the radiator makes a noise, or whatever it is. Heart's closing. So again, *what I want* and clinging, and the struggle with all that is related to the opening and the closing of the heart.

On any retreat, and on this retreat, there is a possibility, as we deepen, as time goes on, to begin slowing down, but also to begin relaxing this struggle with experience: pushing away what we don't like, pulling towards us what we like, and this *what I want* so much. And through relaxing that, it's possible that a stillness comes gradually into the being, just gradually into the being. And the body, the being, in a very unforced way, begins to feel more and more still – very non-linear. And also a silence inside, and the outer silence, can begin to become more prominent.

As there's more stillness in the being, and more silence, a couple of things, a number of things can happen. One of them is that our sense of priority gets much clearer. So the usual stuff that we're caught up in as feeling very important in our everyday bustle begins to just settle. And what's most important, what's most deeply important to us – which may be the absolute necessity of love, the wish to surrender to loving-kindness, to open in compassion – what's deeply important to us comes more and more to the fore, becomes prominent in consciousness. It's something that comes out of the stillness and silence.

Another thing, another aspect that can come up, in a way because of the stillness and the silence, but also because of the *mettā*, is memories of things that we've done or not done, that we regret. And with that – we remember we said this, we did this, we didn't, whatever it was – and the pain of the memory. How easily that can move into guilt, and just wrapped around, repeating the memory and the pain of that. This is a natural part, I think, of doing a *mettā* retreat, and also of just being in silence for a while. It will allow this stuff to come to the surface.

A distinction between guilt and remorse. I don't know if these are dictionary definitions, but guilt, I would say, is when we remember something, we don't feel good about it, and the self defines itself around it. It's making a conclusion about what we did – making a conclusion about the self, rather. We

did this, or we didn't do this, and it's saying, "Therefore I am bad." Do you understand? Are we still here …? [laughter] Guilt is making a conclusion about the self. Remorse, I would say, is making a conclusion about the action. So guilt has a way of making definitions and binding oneself in a definition of the self: "I'm bad. I'm useless. I'm a failure. I'm not a good person." Remorse is saying, "In the future, I would rather not act that way. I want to choose something different." It's saying something about the action. It's forward-looking, creative, open, whereas guilt is backward-looking and just stays around the self.

[59:03] So this, as we let go more, the sense of stillness and sense of silence can begin to deepen, *can* begin to deepen for some people, and can begin to become very prominent. The actual sense of silence – so-called 'inner' and so-called 'outer' – begins to become more and more prominent, *can* begin to come more prominent. And it's almost as if the silence takes on a fabric of itself, a meaning of itself. Almost a mystical sense of silence can open up. That can have everything to do with love. It's almost as if the silence holds love in it.

There's a beautiful poem by Pablo Neruda, which again, some of you will know this. It's called "Keeping Quiet."[6]

[1:00:25 – 1:02:00, poem]

The more letting go there is, the more the sense of silence, for some people, can become prominent and can have a kind of love in it. Usual human consciousness is preoccupied with things, events, things that happen inside or outside. And that can begin to just die down a little bit, and there's a sense of something *other* in and through the silence – *can* be, for some people.

And in that silence, for some people, sometimes, it's almost as if the *mettā* becomes something that we are held in, that we receive. This silence that seems to permeate the universe has love in it. Everything, our being, everything that comes up is held in that, held in that love. So usually, when we do the *mettā*, we have a sense of *me* doing it. There's self, and there's effort involved, and the phrases, and we're creating this *mettā*. But again, talking about aspects of *mettā*, facets of *mettā*, it's not always like that. And there are other ways that it can reveal itself. And so, for some people, the whole way that we're going about it, with phrases, etc., is not the way that's most helpful. For some people, a much more devotional practice, using Green Tārā, Kuan Yin (the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara), Jesus – beings, archetypal beings of great love – tuning into them, devoting oneself to them, and receiving, in a way, the love that way. It's not always that *mettā* feels it's coming from the self.

When, or if, there's this sense of silence – it's actually not that uncommon. I have a friend who, for years, never did any practice – *very* sporadic kind of flirting with different practices – and she was working somewhere one day and went to get lunch in a restaurant. And she said, just suddenly, she felt like she was sitting inside God's love. And the whole restaurant was – her words – "inside God's love." And she said, "Why isn't anyone talking about this? Why are they all pretending it's not happening?" [laughter]

But it was interesting because it didn't come out of any particular practice or anything, it just sort of spontaneously arose. But this is something that it is much more likely to come out of practice. It's as if something is unveiled. Some quality of the universe is unveiled.

I got a lovely note from a yogi a while ago – not on this retreat, but we were working on *mettā* together. And it's expressing this. She said:

> Dear Rob,
>
> Practising after the meeting in the library, an old, well-known, apparently insoluble pain arose very quickly. Already aware that there wasn't any wholehearted acceptance, yet an attempt to embrace the pain lovingly, coming from a hidden agenda of wanting it to go away, to dissolve. Somehow it was clear that this unloving attitude was known to the pain, and so it wouldn't pass, but intensify. What was needed was very clearly a pure embrace of loving-kindness, breathing to expand the capacity of accepting the unacceptable and relax.

So she was working with the breath as [well], with her *mettā*.

> Breathing to expand the capacity to love the unloved and relax. And then, a change: Deep, pitch-black darkness, familiar though, was around. And the thought was: "Even the unloved is surrounded by love all the time anyway." And it went on: "We all are surrounded, loved, all the time anyway. We may not know. We may not have experienced it yet, but love is around all along, awaiting us to open up to it, to become sensitive to it, to receive it. With all our incompetence, imperfection, impurities, we are surrounded by love nonetheless."
>
> If that is so, doesn't it bring with it a kind of responsibility, as it were, to expand our capacity to love unconditionally? As human beings we are never able to embrace unconditional love. It always embraces us – always has and always will. Is that true?
>
> Question: how can love appear as dark black? Isn't it said and written umpteen times, "It comes as light"? Am I experiencing a hoax?

[laughter] Very lovely. And I told her that she wasn't, of course. English isn't even her first language. Very beautiful. But this *is* a sense – I'm just pointing out, again, different aspects of the way the *mettā* can appear and manifest and be. So some will relate to that; some may or may not have had that experience, will or will not. It's not that important. Just pointing out a range. But it may be something that comes up.

What's more significant is the fact of perceptions changing. The heart opens, and perceptions change. Perceptions open. Our perception of the world, our perception of the universe, our perception

of the fabric of being, begins to change. That's actually much more significant that it seems at first – much, much more significant.

[1:08:09] Last point – I mentioned in the instructions the other day, sometimes we have a moment where there's a feeling of *mettā*. There's the warmth or whatever it is there, and we feel that. And sometimes that feeling actually becomes relatively steady. And then we can let the phrases go, if that feels helpful – could just let the phrases go and be with that feeling, and just give ourselves to that feeling and enjoy and open to it, and feel into the texture of it, and radiate it. And let the phrases go.

Sometimes that can deepen. And we may be directing the love towards the friend or whoever it is, the neutral, the benefactor. And it seems at first that there was a person *here* and a person *there*, and the love is moving towards them. It can deepen. And it's almost like the sense of the person begins to *blur* a bit. And there is just the sense of two hearts, and a flow, a radiation, between the two hearts. And even that can deepen. And can become, at times, a sense of a kind of communion of hearts. There's just really one heart, one consciousness, imbued with love. Beautiful possibility – not forever, but for a moment, for a stretch of time. Again, not to snatch at any of this. I'm just saying what can come sometimes from the practice.

And in that communion of hearts, a sense of oneness. Is it really separate? So oneness is actually something different from *anattā*, what John talked about yesterday. But it's still very important. It's extremely important. Our usual sense of things is separateness, is *not* oneness: "I'm here, you're there – separate things, separate beings, separate selves." And to begin, in a way, opening ourselves, getting a taste of some other sense, a sense of oneness. It's not an ultimate truth, but it's extremely important, an extremely beautiful opening.

[1:10:16] And again, *can* be that a person goes in and out of that kind of experience many times. And the more significant thing – rather than staying in a sense of oneness, which is not ultimately true – the more significant thing is actually the question, "What is true?" Typical, unenlightened consciousness assumes separate self to be true. It's just – it's a given! It's obvious! Or then we might assume oneness to be true. What's true?

And we begin to question our taken-for-granted perceptions of separation, that we completely take for granted without even thinking about it, that everything is separate. Through the change of perceptions that is possible sometimes, we question our perceptions, and in that, beginning to go deeper into truth.

Okay. Why don't we sit together for a couple of minutes?

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[1] A similar quote is attributed to the Buddha in Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 31. For the canonical passage, see Ud 5:1.

[2] The concept of a 'near enemy' of *mettā* seems to originate from post-canonical Pali texts. See Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti, 1999), 311.

[3] Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996), 35–6.

[4] SN 46:55.

[5] MN 58.

[6] Pablo Neruda, *Extravagaria: A Bilingual Edition*, tr. Alastair Reid (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 27–29. Archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20201002145556/https://english.duke.edu/news/poem-day-keeping-quiet, accessed 1 Nov. 2020.