Expressions of Metta
Lovingkindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening
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Okay, what I want to talk about today is a little bit some of the different expressions of *mettā*, some of the different dimensions of loving-kindness. So first just to restate something I said in the instructions this morning, which is that *mettā* is not just one feeling. We have this word, *mettā*, and we go looking for *one* thing: "What is that *mettā*?" And try and see, "Have I got it? Have I not got it?" And just to really be conscious that it's not one feeling. Could more accurately talk about perhaps a constellation of feelings, when it expresses itself as a feeling at all. There's a constellation of feelings, and I've said, sometimes it will take on, it will feel to be, to have, a slightly different colour, a slightly different flavour. Sometimes it's very calming, very soothing. Sometimes there's a quality of healing in it. Sometimes it's a very bright energy, a very sort of luminous energy. Sometimes bubbly. Sometimes there's a real warmth in it, or gentleness. So in the practice, however it seems to kind of come up and manifest, it's fine, and to really allow those differences, allow those differences of flavours, of colours. And just to notice and feel. It's all included in what we mean by *mettā*.

And sometimes, and you may have noticed this already, sometimes we're doing *mettā* practice and we're aware of our own or someone's suffering, and then the *mettā* meets that suffering and actually is then coloured – and perhaps quite strongly at that point – by compassion, by the kind of tenderness of compassion. And we'll go into quite a lot of detail, the difference between compassion and *mettā*. But really not to worry too much about that. In a way, it's just words, and not to strangle the thing too much with words and concepts. So very much to allow the different flavours.

And then we have these categories that we've been slowly going through. We started with the self, and the benefactor, and the friend, and it will go on. And to really see that this is just a tool. It's just a tool. The aspiration of *mettā* is for something that extends itself boundlessly, without limit. So usually our love is quite narrow in its scope. It's just towards ourselves, hopefully, and maybe a few people around us that we care about. And the aspiration of *mettā* is a really boundless love, completely without limit. And the categories are just a tool to help us move towards that boundlessness, that's all. So there's nothing fixed about them. A person can be our benefactor one day, and then they say the wrong thing, and they get a demotion. [laughter] And they find themselves in the difficult category. And then hopefully we work it out, and they get a rise, and they're back to benefactor or friend or whatever it is. But there's nothing fixed about this at all. And similarly, of course, the difficult person can rise through the ranks. Just to see: it's just a tool. It's just a tool.

And so the first one we start with, which we spent two days on, is the self. And the huge importance of giving love to ourselves, of really having a relationship with ourselves of *mettā*. It's really crucial. It's crucial for our lives. It's crucial also for our practice of *mettā*. And so it's interesting: sometimes, for some people, this is very difficult, for all kinds of reasons, to give *mettā* to oneself – for, you know, reasons in the family, upbringing, or the education; all kinds of reasons. It can be very challenging, actually, to give *mettā* to oneself. And some of the reasons sometimes are just cultural. We live in a culture that – it's a weird mixed message, I feel sometimes. It's a culture of individuality, of self, of

what I want and going out to get that. And at the same time, the notion of loving oneself in a healthy way is often regarded as selfish. So we're getting this very mixed message. And I remember last year on this retreat being struck by, especially when we moved on to compassion, how many people found it difficult to stay with giving love to themselves.

So the culture might say it's selfish, and for whatever reasons or combination of reasons, that's there, or it may be there. And sometimes it just ends up that's a habit. It's a habit to not give love to ourselves, or to regard it as indulgent or selfish or whatever. And somehow, through practice, we have to weaken that habit. So every time we say, "May I be well, may I be happy, may I be peaceful," we're actually weakening that habit. And not to underestimate the power of that. The analogy I gave this morning, the Buddha's actual words, "Drop by drop, the bucket is filled."

And the Buddha also, when he talked about this, giving love to ourselves, he said something very strong. He said, "You could search the entire universe for someone more deserving of love and compassion than yourself, and you won't find that person, you won't find that being." So there's something – to me, it's a very powerful statement. There's something he's pointing to. Whatever we think we've done or not done, or worth or not worth, or however we rate ourselves and measure ourselves and all that disease, really, the Buddha is saying you're worthy of love, you're worthy of giving love to yourself. This is an enormously powerful statement. And to see, as I said before, the necessity of this, that when we begin to love ourselves, we are that much more available to giving love to others. And in our love we are that much less needy in what we are going to get back, and the *mettā* can be more pure. Through loving ourselves, we're not only giving a gift to ourselves. We're actually giving a gift to others, to humanity.

So there's the self, and then there's the benefactor and the friend, which we've gone into. Sometimes when we talk about *mettā*, we talk about it being unattached, and it's said that the near enemy of *mettā* – that's a funny phrase; it means what kind of looks like *mettā* at first but actually isn't. So something that bears a lot of similarity but actually isn't. And the near enemy of *mettā* is what's called attached love. In other words, "I'll love you *if*," and then a whole list of whatever. So just to see in the practice when this comes up, when the *mettā* has more attachment in it or less attachment in it or whatever. It's fine. It's part of our humanity that this comes into the practice. Not to expect a pure *mettā* all the time that's completely free of attachment. We can see this in the practice.

Can we then include our humanity, our complexity, the messiness of – I was going to say *some*, but actually probably *most* of our relationships? This is just what it is to be in relationship, all kinds of relationships. There *will* be attachment coming in. In the *mettā* practice seeing that near enemy of attachment, you don't want to be, "Oh, no, attachment. I'm doing it wrong," or "Oh," pushing it away or whatever. Actually just to see it. Seeing it, being aware of it is part of the practice and part of the learning process. If we're not familiar with what attachment is, we're not going to learn about *it*, and we're also not going to learn about what *pure mettā* is. So not to be in too much of a hurry to judge or discard or whatever, and just to see.

And we have this category of the friend. And to ask: what is it to be a friend? What is it to be a good friend? And again, sometimes with the *mettā*, and sometimes for me (and I know I'm not the only one), reading the suttas, we can read about this stuff and it's almost inhuman, it sounds, almost something otherworldly or abstract. Reading the suttas is sometimes a bit like chewing cardboard. It's

not that juicy. It doesn't seem to sometimes relate too much to our actual life. What is it to be a good friend? Some of that, to me, is really seeing another, really seeing a friend. We talk about *mettā* not being attached, but to me, being realistic, being human, to be in a friendship means I also want to be seen. So I see the other, but I am seen. And this is, you know, we can talk about idealized *mettā*, but in the reality, in the nitty-gritty of our life, we see, hopefully, the other. We give that fullness of seeing. And we want to be seen. Maybe we *need* to be seen. And we see ourselves as well. We see ourselves. And this is a huge part of what meditation practice is about, just seeing ourselves – whether it's *vipassanā* or *mettā*. Seeing ourselves. And we appreciate the other. We appreciate their particular beauty, their particular uniqueness, their particular expression in the world.

And for many, to take in appreciation is also quite a big step. Are we open to actually hearing someone express appreciation of how we are, what we are, who we are, how we did something? This is a huge part of *mettā*, as well, receiving that love. And for many, this is not easy. Are we appreciating other, are we appreciating ourselves, and are we letting in the appreciation of others for ourself? So often, for many of us, these things – seeing, being seen, appreciating, being appreciated – were not actually there that healthily or that fully in the growing up, in the family environment, in the education, in the social environment, etc. And so to me, one way of looking at practice, a big part of it is actually re-parenting ourselves. We're giving to ourselves the kind of attentiveness, the kind of seeing, the kind of appreciation that maybe we didn't quite get as fully as possible when we were younger. Re-parenting, re-gifting ourselves with that. And that can be, you know, one way of looking at it is that can be a very important focus of practice for many years, many years.

As I said, we have this idea, or we hear about *mettā*, we read about it, maybe in the suttas or whatever, and we get this aspiration: it's boundless. It has no limits. No one, no being is excluded. And it's also unconditional – it does not depend on you saying that you like me or being nice to me or anything like that. It's unconditional. It doesn't even depend on you being that likeable or that nice. It's unconditioned and boundless. And sometimes, as I say, it can seem a bit unreal. We can also get the sense that we're sort of aiming to be these *mettā* machines, and everyone will, at the end of this three-week retreat, go through the grinder, and emerge as this sort of *mettā* machine, #1, #2, #3, and all look the same. That somehow in the *mettā*, in the high aspiration of it, it's going to preclude our personality and our personal, particular expression of *mettā*, our self-expression in that, our uniqueness. And to me, it doesn't mean that at all, absolutely doesn't. So not to make *mettā* something unreal in our life.

I think it was yesterday that John talked about *anattā*, not-self, and we'll be talking much more about that. And again, this is very important, to really be clear that *mettā* and certainly *anattā* are not closing the door on our individuality, on our uniqueness, on our particular self-expression. Actually, rather the opposite. It's more a question of, "Am I attached to my particular individuality, my particular self-expression in a way that's causing suffering for myself or other?" Usually, normal human beings, normal human consciousness, the answer is, "Yes, I am." I'm somehow regarding this particular individual as somehow separate, somehow fixed. A fixed self, a separate self, and an independent self. And if I view my individuality and the whole culture of individuality and what I need and what I want and what my rights are, if I view it from that vantage point of a separate, independent, and fixed self – bound to cause suffering for myself and for others. No question.

If I have another view, and I begin to see that this individuality, this uniqueness of self-expression is actually arising from an infinite web of conditions, absolutely unfathomably infinite, mind-blowingly infinite, unentangleable web of conditions. So just the physicality of who *I* am, in this case: there was the genetic make-up of both my parents, and where that came from, and the infinite regress of that, the sunlight, the food, where all that comes from. So just in the physical being, it's actually an infinite web that has given rise to this appearance, this form right now. And then psychically, psychologically, mentally, emotionally, everything that has influenced in the present or in the past, everything that I've read, everything that I've heard, all the music I've listened to, all the conversations I've had, all the interactions, all the education. All of that. Everything, everything, everything. Every moment of my life has come together in some completely inextricable web to create this, and in some completely unrepeatable way, to create this particular form right now, and including this particular expression right now as I'm talking.

When we see that individuality in that context, then we're completely free to be as unique and individual and expressing ourself in any way, that we feel free to. But it's always embedded in the context of all of life, of the whole universe. It's never divorced from that. It's actually inextricable from that. We can hear that as an intellectual concept and think, "Ah, yeah, that's cute," you know. But it's a whole other thing to begin retraining the mind to see the self that way, to see what we do, what we say, how we interact, to see it in terms of a web of conditions. It takes time. When we begin to see in terms of this infinite web, then it releases the freedom, our freedom to be as individual as we feel, and releases also love because it's bound up with all other beings and everything else.

So humanity to come into the *mettā*, a realism to come into the *mettā*. You know, when we talk about friendship, are we actually really, truly willing to work with the messiness of our relationships, of our friendships, the difficulties there, the complexity there, the humanity, what I call the humanity there? Do we really have a full relationship with life, with friendship, with all of that? Or are we just trying to shave it down to some kind of spiritual ideal, or out of aversion or whatever it is? Is it really full?

Some of you will know this passage, a beautiful passage from Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet,* and it's about friendship. I'll read it. It says:

> And the 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 "no" 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 aught 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.[1]

So there's the friend and friendship and all that that means. And then we extend, and tomorrow we'll move on to the neutral, what's called the neutral category – which actually will be most of the six and a half billion people on the planet. They're actually neutral to us. And this is quite interesting; this is an interesting category. Sometimes, again, this can seem kind of abstract or removed, or we're not so involved. In the practice we can begin to lose interest. This is where we start kind of spacing out a little bit. To see: there's something very interesting going on here. What makes someone neutral? What makes someone just sort of fade into the greyness of the background?

Can we begin to see – and this is, in a way, a really crucial investigation in our life, and it takes some time to see it: when the self-sense is strong, when the self is strong and built up, clinging is strong, and we're clinging to something. And that clinging is actually building up the self, and the self is building up the clinging. Self and clinging build each other. They're co-dependent. They're mutually dependent. When self is strong, some other thing is strong – some *thing* that's happening, maybe some other person in our interaction with them, maybe something in our body, in our mind, something in the environment. Something is strong, and self is strong, and they go together, bound by the clinging. Clinging is strong, self is strong; self is strong, clinging is strong.

When that happens, we get a tunnel vision: just me and this other thing, whether it's in me or outside of me or another person. Everything else just fades. It's just other, grey other. The more self-sense there is, the more sense of neutrality of other people, irrelevancy of others. And to really begin to notice this, and to really look into this in our life. How is it that we exclude, that we put others in the background? Now, obviously some people are more in our everyday life. But something's going on here about clinging and self. And to really look at that and investigate it until it's very clear. It's also another way of looking at seeing what we call the emptiness of self. Self depends on our clinging to something, on our struggling with something inner or outer. The more we struggle, the more we cling,

the more self is built up. Self by itself is empty. It needs that clinging, that struggle. This is something that, spiritually speaking, we really need to understand. We need to be completely in ourselves clear about this. And it takes time.

So there's the benefactor, and the friend, and the neutral. And sometimes, as I said, the friend or the benefactor, there can be some difficulty, and they find themselves in the difficult category. Well, they probably don't know it, but whatever. They're in the difficult category at times. So I also feel very strongly that an important part of what we might call the realistic expression of *mettā* is working with the difficult with love. In other words, actually expressing anger, expressing a "no" when we need to in a situation: "No, actually that's not okay. No, that was overstepping a boundary," whatever it is. That kind of strength of "no," in the context of love, in the context of *mettā*. So *mettā* is actually a strong thing, it's not some namby-pamby Pollyannaish thing. It doesn't mean being a doormat. It doesn't mean that everyone's then going to step over us, and we don't care, and everyone just treats us like a doormat. Sometimes we end up acting that way, a bit like a doormat, because of fear, fear of actually expressing anger, fear of saying that "no," inability of setting boundaries. This is really common.

I have a very good friend who's suffered for many years, suffers from depression. And she's beginning to realize in more recent years that, for her – this isn't for everyone with depression, but for her there's a real, first of all, inability to express anger and to even be with the anger inside herself when something happens. And she's beginning to see what she does with it: she turns it inside and kind of attacks the anger, starts to attack herself, and it ends up in depression. She's beginning to see that. And in so doing, it's actually closing her love. The depression actually closes what, in her case, is quite an extraordinary capacity to love. It just closes that.

And I see this as being very, very common in sort of spiritual circles, or spiritual-type people. It's extremely common. And I know it is certainly true for me in the past, a real shyness about expressing anger, about just feeling anger even. I feel that anger is something very complicated, and the expression of anger is something very difficult. It's one of these areas that we tend to jump to a conclusion maybe too quickly. If we're into meditation and all that: "It's bad. No anger, no expression of it." Or we may be into certain kinds of psychotherapy that are all about letting it out, and venting it, and expressing it, and the catharsis of that. But just not so quick to conclude. It's, to me, a very tricky area. It's definitely true to say that there's too much anger in the world. There's too much violence, hatred, ill-will, anger. We just have to open a newspaper to see that. Just have to go into a lot of high streets to see that. So anger is complicated, and it's interesting.

Oftentimes anger is blind in a number of ways. It's blind to its causes. So something happens, and we tend to think, we feel angry, we tend to think, "*You* did that wrong. *You* are making me angry," or whatever. We don't see the wider, again, the wider web of conditions. I needed to be seeing the situation in a certain way. I needed to be in a certain mood. I needed a whole host of inner and outer factors to be there for the anger to come. A lot of them are inner in the way we have been, in the moments preceding that, predisposed to seeing or assuming or perceiving or holding a situation. And all that, that crucible of conditions, are the causes of anger. But we tend to just isolate one thing: "No, *you*," or sometimes "I," or whatever.

So anger has this, I would say almost inherently in anger (very lightly saying that), almost inherently in anger is a blindness to its causes and the web of causes, and the greater picture of causes.

But as I said, this is a very complex area. So anger can be blind to its causes, can be blind to its effects. Oftentimes when we have anger it's kind of like a heat, a pressure inside that just wants to kind of burst out and burst forth, and we want to express it and get it out.

I remember, I don't know when it was, twenty years ago or something, I had just started working in psychotherapy when I lived in America, quite an intensive psychotherapy process. And the therapist said, "You need to express some of this anger. You need to get it out." And so she suggested I go to the gym and pummel a punch-bag. I was a very keen client [laughter], and so off I went to the gym, and this huge punch-bag. I was pummelling this thing. I connected with anger, pummelling this punch-bag, and what I noticed was, I would do it and I would get more angry. And just start pummelling it more, and anger would build. Being a very keen client, I just kept going, and there was huge rage building up. And I did it – this was over weeks, actually – and it got to the point where my hands were blistering and bleeding.

At a certain point, some sense kicked in, and just realized: this is actually *building*. There's something going on here that's actually – what feels like it should be a letting out, an expression, a release, is actually building. There's something going on. It's building the anger. At first I thought, "Oh, now I'm connecting at deeper levels of it. Now it's really coming up." But after a while it was … [laughter] I was very young! After a while, it just became clear: no, this is building it. There's something going on here that's actually building it.

So anger can have this blindness to its effects – on ourselves, we think it's going to release, it's going to let something go, and also on others, on the effect it has on others. And anger can also be blind to itself. It tends to view itself as, when we're sitting with anger, "I see a completely clear vision of something. Here I am with Mañjuśrī's sword of wisdom, and I'm cutting through with my anger." And it's actually completely clouded with all kinds of things. But it has a *feeling* that it's clear.

I'm going to talk a bit more about anger, but it's very complicated, so I don't want to say one thing or the other. I just feel like, for me, it's an ongoing exploration with anger. I've seen there've been times when I've been in this camp, times when I've been in this view. And in a way, I feel maybe for me right now the wisest thing is not to settle so much on "This is how it is, and this is not how it is," and just to keep the creativity and the questioning open with that.

When we express or when anger is expressed very uncensoredly from one to another, I feel as human beings we are enormously sensitive and vulnerable; we are fragile creatures, our hearts are fragile, our very physicality is fragile, our energetics are fragile. When anger is thrown at us, it's extremely difficult not to just react to that anger, not to just automatically go into a reactive mode. Someone yells, and we just immediately go into that, and it just builds. To me, I think it takes quite an evolved being to hear, you know, have that torrent of anger come at them, not automatically go into reactive mode, be very spacious, distil the truth of what's being said, and respond appropriately. Would be a very evolved being working very hard, as far as I can tell. [laughter] So when we fling anger, that's part of what the blindness is to its effects: we expect, "Well, I just want this to change." We're adding a whole load of other stuff. It's very difficult to hear anger and stay open, and spacious, and responsive, and loving.

So sometimes it can feel easier to vent anger in the moment. It feels like there's pressure that wants to come out. It's just easier to vent it, easier to just *bleurgh.* But in the long run, what are we building

there? What are we building? We're building the habit of that. We're building the habit of not caring how it lands, how it affects. We're building the pathways of anger, all of that. In the long run, it's not easier. In terms of our relationships, it's not easier.

So a real practice in life, I feel, is to – I'm not saying not to *feel* anger, because for most of us in this room that would be just a bit ridiculous, a step too far. What is it to feel anger and to say, "I feel angry"? Not to throw that, not to hurl it or dump it on another person. It's a whole different thing. I don't think that's easy at all, not at all. And it's a real practice. The Buddha talks about the communication of what is difficult. He talks about speaking what's true and what's helpful, in a helpful way, at the right time. It's quite a lot there! [laughter] To reflect on, "Okay, I feel angry. Breathe. How am I going to …? What's the best way?" That can take time, just to let it calm down a little bit, and then assess: what's going to be best here? It's really a practice, not easy at all. And we learn this as a practice. We're going to make mistakes, absolutely. There's no question that we're going to make mistakes in this area. Absolutely no question.

For me, my history, my whatever reasons, upbringing or whatever, I had a very strong tendency to not express anger. Certainly not express that "no," not be able to express a "no." Oftentimes not even to be in contact with a feeling of anger when I felt it. So I'd be completely purple in the face or whatever, and "*No, everything's fine*!" [laughter] And that was my particular leaning. And then, through practice and therapy and all this, learnt how to say "no." And for the first period, which to be honest was actually a few years, I would basically bite people's heads off, completely nuke them. Went really to the other extreme in the way I said "no," and it caused a lot of fracturing in a lot of my friendships and relationships and family and stuff. Thankfully, you know, I healed it, but. I had a tendency to be a little extreme, anyway. The point is that we're going to make mistakes with this, and we're either going to go to one extreme or the other, and it's fine. It's really fine. If we *do* make mistakes, a "sorry" goes a long way, a long, long way, a genuine "sorry." And just to expect the mistakes and the moving back and forth as we learn. And I don't see any way other than that it takes years to learn this. And as I said, even then it's an evolving thing. There's no place we come to: "Right, that's it!"

A while ago, there was a situation that happened over a little bit of time, and I felt quite angry about a number of things with a person. And I sat with it for a while, and was with it, and met with this person. I remember saying right from the bat, right from the first thing, "I want to talk about something difficult. I'm upset." And I said, "Please, please know my intention is not to retaliate. I don't want to hurt. My intention is not to hurt. I'm still feeling a bit upset. I'm still feeling quite upset, and confused a little bit, not so clear. So maybe I won't express it so clearly, so perfectly, because of the agitation and the hurt." And I felt like that was very helpful. It kind of set something up in this interaction. First of all, it set up the humanity of it, and secondly it set up something about allowing me to then express what it was, what I was troubled by, in a non-perfect way; I didn't have to do it perfectly. And I hope that it also allowed the other person to then be not perfect. So we could be human together.

Now, of course, that intention not to retaliate, not to hurt has to be real. You can't go in there and say, "Yeah, I don't want to …" [laughter] And actually you've kind of got a gun there. So to take the time with this, to really calm, and find that place where genuinely we can say, "Okay, I'm still upset, I'm still hurt, I'm still confused, I'm still angry, but I really, really, really am clear in myself: I have no wish to hurt, no ill-will, no wish to be right, to retaliate, any of that."

So anger in the context of love, anger in the context of *mettā*. Sometimes we find ourselves with – someone we love is angry at us. And we find ourselves having to hear the anger. So again, this is quite interesting. I remember being in a meditation class in America when I lived there, and one of the teachers saying, "You know, we're not obliged to take in, to kind of bear anyone else's angry energy. There's no obligation to do that. And you can say to a person, 'I really want to hear what you're saying, but I'm not going to do that when you're in that much anger, when you're ranting and yelling or whatever it is. So if you want to go for a walk and calm down and whatever, and then I'll hear you.'" Of course, then they'll probably be [angry at that suggestion].

But there's something, when he said that, when I heard that … And this is, again, interesting about the types of people that are sort of very committed to spiritual practice – I had been so much in the mould of – I think because often people who find themselves in these kind of environments, very committed to personal growth, really want genuinely to admit their faults, to learn about themselves, to change, to grow, to look at their shadow side, their weak points, etc. And so, like I said, I had been very keen, and someone was angry, and I would just kind of open my heart to them, and "Yeah, give it to me." [laughter] And of course I was completely bowled over by this, I mean really, really bowled over. And it would take me, in some instances, days or weeks to recover energetically. And I think sometimes it just goes with a certain kind of earnestness, really, and sort of genuine openness of heart.

So when he, this teacher said that, I was completely like, "Wow, that's radical," just to say, "I'm not obliged to take in that energy. I'm not obliged to do that. But I want hear what you have to say. I want to hear your hurt." *That* piece is crucial, because often that's the piece that's missing, and that's the piece that allows anger to escalate – that people, we or another person feels unheard. That's where the anger comes in, or can escalate, at least. And you see this in individuals. You see this in groups of people, in terrorism and all that. In a way, terrorism, you know, you could say part of it is just this trying to break through with violence to try and be heard. A group of people or whatever – I mean, obviously it's much more complicated than that, but a group of people or whatever feels completely unseen in the whole progress of globalization or whatever, disenfranchised, etc., and "I will be heard." And you know, a bomb, what's louder than a bomb to be heard?

When we feel unheard, there's a kind of powerlessness. There's a frustration and a hurt there. And it's that hurt that's not being heard, and the frustration and the powerlessness, and a want to break through that. So a gift to another person is to really hear their hurt, to offer that. So for me, in relationships when there's been this kind of thing, what's been really healing is when I've been able to see that hurt in another, and actually just the heart then sees the hurt and connects with it, and there can be just the love there. The recognition, "Oh, I hurt you," and a genuine "It really pains me that I hurt you. I see your hurt. I see how I was a cause in that, and it really hurts me that I hurt you." And there's a genuine sorrow there. So someone, and you know we've all been in this, there are just two hardnesses, two angers bumping up against each other. Someone at some point has to soften, let go, be vulnerable. Otherwise it just keeps bumping. And we've all been there. Okay, anger. That was anger in the context of *mettā*.

Different expressions of *mettā*: in the body. So we put a lot of emphasis on the sensitivity to the body in the practice. Can it be that throughout our time here, throughout the day, that there's a kind of gentleness and care that comes to flow out of the body? So how we are walking, how we're opening

and closing doors, how we're handling the dishes and the cutlery, how we're eating. The whole, all the outflows of the body are actually reflecting a gentleness and a care. So beginning to kind of incorporate that, a much wider expression during the day.

Touch. Of course with human beings we express love through the hands, through touch. Can we actually explore this while we're here in the context of a *mettā* retreat? What would it be to actually even touch ourselves, let the hand rest, the hand rest on the other hand? And feel, allow, a tenderness of touch to flow through, in this case from one hand to the other hand, one hand to the arm, whatever. And you know, you may be a little shy about this, or it's a bit weird or whatever, but if you want to experiment with this, what is it to let the body and the hands really exude that and feel that? So if you want to, maybe in your room or whatever, just quietly. What is it to touch the body with tenderness and to feel that?

And this can go through the walking practice too. What is it to walk, a human being walking on the earth, and the feet touch the earth, and in that contact, the sensations between the foot and the earth, there's love there? There's somehow love in the contact, in the mystery of what it is to be a human being with the foot touching the earth, walking on the earth. Somehow there's love. And to explore. This is all really possible in the practice.

Love as expressed through the eyes as attentiveness. To really look. To really look at another, at something in nature, ourselves in the mirror. So oftentimes in relationship we express love as attentiveness. And what a person needs often is attentiveness, the kindness of our attention. That's what we can offer others. So attentiveness as *mettā*.

And a slowness. Not to hurry. At Gaia House, there's not really much to hurry for. [laughter] It's really sitting and then walking, sitting and walking. Then there's lunch, but …We can see this in our everyday life outside of retreat. I notice very clearly if I'm on the high street somewhere and I've got a list of errands. I need to go to the bank, I need to – I don't know, buy groceries – and I need to go to make an appointment at the doctor, whatever. I've just got this list, and I'm on the high street, in London or Boston where I lived, or Newton Abbot or wherever it is. There I am, and I'm on the high street with the agenda of *what I want*, basically, in the humble form of this list. But basically it's *what I want*. What happens? What happens then?

I'm going through, and all the other people on the street are kind of beings in the way, beings in the way of *what I want*. It's not even that dramatic. This is our normal mode of consciousness. We have *what I want.* We're moving towards something, and there's stuff in the way, and some of that stuff happens to be human beings! [laughter] We don't even realize that this is going on most of the time. What happens? The consciousness shrinks. What is it – and you can really experiment with this – what is it to be slow, not be in a hurry, be on the high street without the agenda of *what I want*? And this is very experienceable, a whole different sense.

We begin to notice the whole diverse, beautiful, wondrous expression of human life in all its diversity: the children with mothers, and interactions, and friends, and exchange of this and that. And it's all going on. There's a widening of the perception instead of that tunnel vision again. You can be on the high street, and this sense of boundless love and all that, it's not just going to be constricted to the retreat and the careful conditions of a retreat. When we drop *what I want*, the heart opens in a very different way, has a very different sense of life and the mystery of life. So when there's *what I want* and

we're caught up in that, we close the doors to the mystery. And it's right there, believe it or not, in Newton Abbot, if any of you know Newton Abbot. [laughs] It's right there. Totnes, it's there all the time, but … [laughter]

When we slow down, slow the hurrying, drop a little bit *what I want (*and especially on retreat we can see this), there can come into the being a kind of stillness, a stilling of the being at a very deep level. Unforced stillness just organically comes into the being, this stillness. It can. In that, a sense of silence – and I talked a bit about this in the opening talk – a sense of silence can actually begin to stand out, to have a prominence. This sense of silence and all that that brings with it, the beauty of that.

I touched on this, again, in the opening talk, just briefly: one of the things [about] this sense of silence, as it begins to stand out, begins to emerge, is it allows what's really important to the heart, what's deeply important to rise to the surface. And all the kind of little really flotsam and jetsam, all the trivia that we're so preoccupied with, that can kind of just settle. And what we really, what the heart really cares about in this life can begin to come up and be clear. And our priorities are clear and in place and accessible. That's a huge gift of silence.

Related is something else, and especially silence, especially in the context of a *mettā* retreat: just automatically, memories come up of things that we did, that we wished that we didn't. Or something we said that we wished that we didn't, or didn't say that we wished that we had. So this is a very common possibility of the softening of the *mettā* and the silence. I view remorse as something very much a part of the *mettā* practice and the silence and the retreat. Just remembering and allowing that, remorse being different from what guilt is. I don't know if this is correct English, but guilt, I would say, is when the self has got wrapped around something: "I did that wrong. I am a terrible person. I'm unkind. I, I, I, I, I. You, you, you, you, you. I, I, I." Self has wrapped itself around. Remorse is something much more soft, much more open, much more creative: "Oh, that's what I did. That's what I neglected to do. I feel the pain of that. I feel the sadness of that," but it's open. Not so much self. It's just saying something not so much about *me*, but about *behaviour*. If that situation arises in the future, I'm very clear I want to do it differently now. And so the sadness is part of realigning the intentions of the being. So that kind of remorse, that kind of sadness, can be a really important part of, at times, of the *mettā* practice and the silence.

As, potentially, for some people, this silence can really begin to stand out and become prominent, and it becomes almost something all-pervasive and all-inclusive, there's almost a mystical sense of silence, something really palpable. There's a poem about this by Pablo Neruda. Again, some of you might know it. It's a very beautiful poem about this mystical quality of silence and its relationship to love. It's called "Keeping Quiet."[2]

[55:25 – 56:58, poem]

So it's possible, one of the possibilities is for this sense of silence to really become strong and really have a very deep effect. In the silence, what happens is the silence begins to embrace everything, be a backdrop for everything, hold everything. The silence begins to stand out, and we begin to let go of our preoccupation with things, with objects, which is the normal preoccupation of consciousness, with things and with objects. That begins to go a little bit into the background. We let go of that

preoccupation, and it's almost like some other sense, this sense that Neruda is talking about, some other sense can begin to come to the fore, and make its impact on the heart.

That possibility also opens the door to a possibility of this sense of the *being* being in the space of silence, and in a way, receiving love. That space, that silence holds everything. Everything arises and passes in that silence, in that space. And we begin to get a whole other sense of love, a whole other sense, as love as a kind of holding, as a kind of receiving, that we ourselves are held and received. All things, all beings are held and received in that silence, in that love.

So on this retreat, we happen to be choosing the technique of the phrases, the systematic way of doing it that way. But actually there are tons of ways of doing *mettā*. So very fruitful for some people is having a figure like Jesus or Kuan Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, some figure that completely embodies love, and one is just reminded of that and tuning into that energy, and allowing that to radiate and permeate from that being. Or there can be this sense of silence and letting go into the silence. It actually doesn't really matter too much. But the *mettā*, especially in these other ways, if you have a kind of bodhisattva figure or the silence or something like that, it begins to give a sense of the self not always *doing* the *mettā*, that the *mettā* is self-created, it's always self-created, coming from effort. There can be a sense that, in a way, something is unveiled, something that's woven into the fabric of the universe: love. In a way, some veil is lifted, and we begin to get a sense that somehow it's there all the time.

A little while ago, there was a work retreatant here, and we were working on *mettā* in different ways, so some slightly different ways than what we've yet been doing here. But she wrote me a note where she talks a bit about this, and I keep it because it's put so well, so beautifully. And English isn't her first language, but:

> Dear Rob,
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> 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 by the pain, 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. 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, yet 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 been 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?

I assured her that she wasn't! [laughter] It's very beautifully put. And again, not to grasp at any of this stuff. I just say this or that; not to grasp it. But just to say that this actually isn't that uncommon. It's not that uncommon. So some may relate to this. Some may relate to the idea of a bodhisattva, to the silence, to this kind of all-encompassing love, and some not. It doesn't matter. The important thing, I think, is that perceptions, through this practice somehow, perceptions are changing and opening. And that is really significant. Perceptions are changing and opening. And that's more crucial than it at first appears.

So we go back to the phrases for a second. Sometimes with the phrases, as I said, sometimes there's no feeling of *mettā* there, and we're just patiently, steadily working away, grinding away at the phrases. Sometimes there *is* a feeling of *mettā*. And then the feeling of *mettā*, whatever it is, warmth or pleasantness or openness, sometimes it's there and it's quite steady, and then you might want to experiment with letting the phrases go, or let them get very light, and maybe let them go, and just be with the steadiness of that feeling. Now we have the friend and the benefactor. Sometimes it's possible that we are giving *mettā* to the friend or the benefactor, to another, and there's the sense of them, and the *mettā* deepens, the *samādhi* deepens, and even the visual sense of them kind of fades a little bit, and there's just a sense of a heart radiating *mettā* to another heart. Just a heart to a heart.

Sometimes even *that* sense begins to fade a little bit, and it's just hearts merging, and just a sense of a kind of communion of hearts. And maybe the sense of the other person is gone a little bit, and there's just maybe light there, or just this sense of communion, warmth. Communion of hearts. In that, then there is a sense of oneness.

Now, oneness – I'll go into this in a bit more detail, too, in another talk, other *talks* – oneness is not quite the same as not-self, *anattā*, but it's hugely important. It's hugely important for a human being to open to that sense of oneness in their life. It's a sense that comes and goes, but it begins, potentially, to question the perception, our everyday, taken-for-granted perception of separation: "I'm here, you're there. I'm here, the world is out there." This is our everyday, normal consciousness perception. If – and I'm talking about a lot of practice with *mettā* – if there is this going in and out of the sense of oneness, a sense of just merging, a communion of hearts, it really does begin to question our taken-for-granted perception of separation. And a person can wonder over time: what actually is the truth? Separation? Oneness? What's the truth?

So I'll be picking up, we'll be picking up again on this, these questions of oneness and perception and truth and *anattā* and all of that, as the retreat goes on. But I think I'll stop there for today. Just to outline some of the range of possibilities of the kind of dimensions and expressions of *mettā*.

Shall we sit together for a minute?

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[1] Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923).

[2] Pablo Neruda, *Extravagaria: A Bilingual Edition*, tr. Alastair Reid (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 27–9. Archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20201002145556/https://english.duke.edu/news/poem-day-keeping-quiet, accessed 1 Nov. 2020.