Mettā Practice Day 4

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Today we'll continue the radiating metta practice that we've been exploring this retreat.

Just a couple of comments to start. As we've been saying with respect to the concentration practice, there are so many different ways into settling the mind, and each person will find their own way in that. So we offer a number of ways to explore. Likewise for the metta practice, different minds will respond to certain teachings. Some of you may find this form of the radiating metta—starting with the radiating metta—to be very natural and easeful. Others may find it challenging. This is quite natural; different ones of you would have different responses to this practice. If you have a form of metta practice that works well for you, you don't need to feel like you have to do this form that we're teaching this retreat.

Both Philip and I learned this particular form from Bhikkhu Anālayo earlier this year. We both found it to be quite interesting and a different alternative for metta. We felt we'd like to offer it during this retreat as a form that might blend more easily with the breath practice, as Philip did yesterday in the guided meditation, blending the metta with the breath. So we're exploring that this retreat. But again, if you have a different form that works for you, it's fine to use that form.

In the practice of doing this radiating metta, one of the pieces that really supported me, as Bhikkhu Anālayo described it, was not that we were trying to expand the metta outwards, but rather allowing it to flow out as far as it wishes to go. As I guide it, I will be reminding you of that. As I practice this form of metta, I find that if I'm trying to push the metta out or trying to expand it, my mind gets tired. That's a kind of reminder for me: oh right, just let it go as far as it wants to.

Finding a comfortable posture for yourself, begin with relaxation as we've been doing with the mindfulness of breathing practice. Allow the body to relax. Allow the mind to relax. Allow yourself to be just as you are in this moment.

The very allowing of yourself to be as you are is right in the field of metta. It's in the terrain of metta to have that sense of allowing yourself to be just as you are. Metta is inherently an allowing quality. It's a quality of "it's okay just the way it is."

Allow the body to relax. The mind to relax. Allow your attention to rest in the area of your heart. Just notice how it is there for you in this moment. No need for it to be any different. Allow your heart to be just as it is.

Exploring this practice of metta, it's helpful to connect with something that may support a generation of that feeling for you in a small way. It doesn't have to be major. It might help to put your hand on your

heart, for instance, and have the sense of your heart held in your hands. It might be supportive to call up an image or think of a person or a being that makes you smile. Bhikkhu Anālayo said that to start this practice, he remembers these very cute squirrels in Germany. Anything that makes you smile—allow that feeling to be there.

We'll go in each direction, much as Philip did yesterday. The image I like to use: if we connect to that sense in the area of the heart, whatever is there—a feeling of allowing or friendliness, okayness, kindness—have a sense perhaps of opening the door of your heart and seeing how far that feeling in the heart wants to move to the front. No need to try to push it out. Allow it to flow if it wishes to.

In that allowing it to flow from your heart, with your heart being in the middle of your body, allow the feeling to flow first through your body, through your chest, all of the muscles and spaces and tissue in your chest and abdomen towards the front of your body. It may go out just partway through your body; let it go as far as it wants to go, allowing it to flow in whatever direction or form it wants to flow in. At some point it may find the surface of your body and begin to almost have the sense of breaking through the skin, evaporating off the surface of your body, perhaps spreading outwards into space a little bit. Just allow it to go as far as it wants to go. It may expand and contract. It may go in and out. Just be aware of how that feeling flows and moves.

Now letting go of the frontward direction for now, allow the door on the right side of the heart to open. Let the feeling of kindness, caring, friendliness, allowing, flow outwards from the heart through the right side of the body, flowing through and around the spaces, through the air element, the water element, the earth element, the fire element, flowing through the body. There may be places where it feels like the feeling flows around instead of through, and that's okay. Again, as it reaches—if it reaches—the edge of your body, notice how it moves.

ripples through the surface of the skin—perhaps a sense of it evaporating off the skin on the right side of the body, out into space, if it wants to flow out into space.

And if it ever feels tight or tense, check in and see if you're trying to push it outwards. See if you can relax and allow it to do whatever it feels like doing, this sense, this feeling of caring. Again, you may notice a pulsing quality to the field expanding outwards on the right side of your body.

If the mind wanders, just come back to that connection in the heart. You may need to recall a being that makes you smile, or something to support the quality. And then simply allow a relaxation and a flowing.

Letting go now of directing to the right. Today we'll have the next direction be allowing the doorway of the heart to open to the left, allowing the feeling to flow out from the heart through the left side of the body—all of the tissues and muscles and liquid and space on the left side of your body. Allow it to flow however, in whatever direction or form it wishes to. You might notice some directions are easier than others, and that's natural also. Allowing the metta to expand outwards past the body if it wishes to,

however far it wishes to expand.

Relax. This is much more of an allowing practice than a doing practice. Honor and respect how it wishes to flow, whether it has a sense of pulsing, expanding and contracting. We don't need to have any agenda for what this field of metta does.

Letting go now of the leftward direction, envisioning allowing the door at the back of the heart to open and expand outwards through the back of the chest, through the back of the body. Allowing it to bubble off of the surface of the body if it wants to do that, flow out of the surface of the body if it wants to do that. If it helps you to use imagery of certain beings that make you smile, that's also fine as we continue allowing the metta to flow as it wishes.

Letting go of the direction to the back for the moment, allowing the door at the bottom of the heart to open and let the metta flow down through the body as it wishes to flow. No need to be in a rush in its flow. Let it take its own time, allowing the quality of friendliness, caring, allowing kindness to flow from the heart down the body. And if it wishes to flow out of the skin, allow it to do that and reach down into the earth, however far it wants to go through earth's element. Love and earth connected.

Letting go for the moment of the downwards direction. Allowing the door at the top of the heart to open and allowing whatever feeling of kindness or friendliness is present for you to flow upwards through the body, through the neck and head, if it wishes to. Allowing the flow to happen in whatever way. And if that reaches the edge of your body, allowing it to soak through the skin and release into the air, letting it flow upwards as far as it wants to—maybe a few inches, maybe quite expansive. Allowing rather than pushing.

And letting go of the upwards direction for just a moment. Allowing the doorway to the front to open. To the right, to open. To the left, to open. To the back, to open. To the bottom, to open. And to the top, to open. Allowing the metta to flow from the heart outwards through the body in all directions, however it wishes to flow, however far it wishes to flow.

Relax. Allowing yourself to abide in the middle of this field. Allowing yourself to connect with the breathing with this field. The body breathing in this field of metta. Just noticing how far outwards this field of metta wants to flow. With the breath there may be a sense of expanding and contracting of the field, and that's okay too.

And while sitting in this field, recognize that not only are you a participant in creating a field of metta, allowing it to flow outwards as far as it wishes to go—you are sitting in a field receiving metta from everyone else in the room. A community of metta. Breathing with friendliness, caring, and kindness.

Thank you for listening.

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