Mettā

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:03:40

So tonight I want to talk about mettā, loving kindness. There are some reflections about the state of mind as well as the formal practice—making the choice, making the determination for love.

And it's really not so much that we as an individual, which since we know from last night there is no such thing, make the choice for love, but wisdom makes the choice. Mettā is described as not its own particular mental factor, but it's an aspect of the larger mental factor of, in Pali, adosa, which is non-hatred—quite a large mental factor, one of the beautiful factors. So whenever there is a so-called beautiful mind state, a state of wisdom without delusion, a state that isn't colored by any of the kilesas, adosa is always present. It's one of the universals in all beautiful mind states.

So there can be non-hatred, which is clear what that is, but it's not necessarily mettā. But mettā is an aspect of non-hatred. And as such, it's an expression of the heart and mind that's clear from confusion. It's an expression of the heart and mind, the consciousness of wisdom. And so rather than thinking it's something that we somehow have to find a way to cultivate—in this culture we don't really trust it so much, and it's weak, and this and that—it's really more to discover, to learn, to have confidence in mettā, in this non-individual love as a power of mind and heart, as an expression of wisdom. And even though I know probably most of us think it's a good idea, it may not be what we really deeply trust.

Let me just read some of the teachings you've heard a million times, really basic stuff from the Buddha, where he's talking about the power of mettā. It's from the Dhammapada:

"When we hold fast to such thoughts as, 'they abused me, mistreated me, molested me, robbed me,' we keep hatred alive. If we thoroughly release ourselves from such thoughts as, 'they abused me, mistreated me, molested me, robbed me,' hatred is vanquished. Never by hatred is hatred conquered, but by readiness to love alone. This is the eternal law. You too shall pass away. Knowing this, how can you quarrel?"

And then just one last one that I like: "There is no fear if the heart is uncontaminated by the passions and the mind is free from ill will. Seeing beyond good and evil, one is awake."

I really like those, especially that last one, because that's an expression of mettā. We often think it's blind, just seeing the good. But seeing beyond good and evil, one is awake. That's a great expression of the power of mettā in the heart, in the mind.

Really, on a deep level, the work is to keep looking in yourself. I look and I ask, do I really, truly believe that? I mean, believe it in the way that that's where my mind goes when I'm feeling someone has abused

me, mistreated me. Though I don't want to hold on to these thoughts—that just keeps me suffering. Intellectually, okay, I can go there. But really, in ourselves?

And so this is why we have a training. It's not that one has to cultivate mettā as the intensive practice, as we've been doing in the afternoons, as the only way to experience it. Of course not. It's a really common everyday experience of our mind and heart. But we can learn to recognize it. We can learn how powerful it is, and we can learn to train our mind and heart to really take refuge here in this wisdom. It's a choice. We can begin with ourselves, begin where we are, and learn how to trust, how to incline the heart and mind in this direction.

I'll give you another example, a current example: Maha Ghosananda. You may know who he was—the Cambodian monk. He died in 2007. Actually, he died in Northampton. He was staying out at the Peace Pagoda a lot during his last few years, in Leverett. He was a Cambodian monk who, during the Khmer Rouge years, just before the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia and began really the genocide of the Cambodian people, happened to be in Thailand studying. So he missed the Khmer Rouge. But they killed all of his family, something like eleven or twelve family members.

After he heard what was happening, there were so many thousands and thousands of Cambodian refugees who had managed to get out of the country, living in refugee camps on the Thai border. And as with Maha Ghosananda, many of the people in the refugee camps had lost everything. But even besides losing everything material, for many people their families had been killed. They'd just been through the killing fields—a horrible situation you can't even imagine.

Maha Ghosananda was really committed to his path of awakening, but he was committed to it from the basis of loving kindness, of mettā. And so, as the story goes, he went into these refugee camps. Over and over, he spent years really trying to bring Buddhism back to the people, because most of them were Buddhist, had grown up in a Buddhist faith.

But again, most of the monks and nuns and temples were destroyed also in Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge. So Mahagosananda went into these refugee camps to help in what way he could.

The thing that he did—two things. One, he would go and build a little bamboo temple, just a little bamboo shack for the people to come. And then he would start chanting these metta phrases that I just read. That's what he started chanting. Amazing, isn't it? Amazing. And the people would know this. Most of the people would be familiar with these words. And after some time, it's said, other people would start to chant with him.

He spent years going around giving out copies of the Metta Sutta, the discourse on loving kindness, just trying to revive the goodness in the depths of people's hearts and minds, knowing that that's really our truest nature when the mind isn't clouded. The best way he felt he could help was to reconnect people with metta.

But thinking about it—to go into a situation where everyone is in such a state of loss and trauma and bitterness and fear and grief, and to start chanting, "If you hold on to thoughts that 'he beat me, he robbed me,' then you're not really practicing"—it's really amazing. And he spent years doing this.

When he died, there was an obituary in the New York Times. I just want to read a couple of lines from that. Scott A. Hunt, a professor of Buddhism at the University of California in Berkeley, wrote that "Mahagosananda's ability to forgive those responsible for the murder of his entire family is incomprehensible until one heard his explanation of Buddhism." Mahagosananda said—and this is written for non-Buddhists—that he "does not question that loving one's oppressors, Cambodians loving the Khmer Rouge, may be the most difficult attitude to achieve." But he then added, "It's the law of the universe that retaliation, hatred, and revenge only continue the cycle." Reconciliation, he continued, "means that we see ourselves as the opponent. For what is the opponent but a being in ignorance? And we ourselves are also ignorant in many respects."

Just an example. It's a high bar, you could say. I realize it's a high bar. So don't let your mind go into "Well, it's hopeless." It's a high bar. But this is someone who's been living in this world as it is, in some of the worst ways that it is, and knowing deeply that metta as an aspect of wisdom is really the deepest expression of wisdom—how we can live with ourselves and with each other as human beings.

I'm bringing up this high bar on purpose just to let it get in, to let ourselves—not in a judgmental way at all—but just to really explore in ourselves over these days: Do I really have any confidence, any faith, in the power of love, of non-hatred, of kindness as an aspect of wisdom?

Again, this really has to be approached without judgment. Not "Well, if I really had faith, I'd never feel aversion again. If I really had faith, I'd go around loving all the time." Not that kind of stuff. But just seeing if somewhere in the background—way, way back—there are beliefs operating that, well, loving kindness is nice, but when the chips are down (that's an American expression that means when the going gets tough), then one needs to get tough. Is that what one believes? When the going gets tough, when the chips are down, I need my anger. I need fear. That's the best protection. Of course, we're not going to say "Oh, yeah." But just look at what's operating in the background sometimes.

And so as a formal practice of metta, as an intensive practice, but also just inclining your mind to recognize the qualities of metta in your vipassana practice—we do this as a way to really see for ourselves. To move from the concepts of loving kindness and wisdom ("It's nice, it's good, yes, I'm committed to it") to the deep experience on the insight level of both how loving kindness can manifest in my mind—in relation to the beautiful, in relation to the difficult, in relation to the boring—and also what gets in the way. A lot of our exploration in practice is learning what habits block my recognition of loving kindness, of connectedness.

So it's not that we actually have to create so much as just begin to trust, to uncover the possibility of this natural state of mind—this connectedness, this caring for others, this friendliness.

So I just want to talk a little bit about what the heck is it anyway? What is metta? Just some descriptions.

As it's described in the Abhidhamma, metta is an aspect of non-hatred—a very powerful wholesome state. We talk a lot about hatred, we talk a lot about greed, we talk a lot about delusion, but they have their opposite wholesome states: non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion. These are factors of heart and mind that are actually more powerful.

Metta manifests as the sincere wish for the good and welfare of all, without discrimination. It's not personal love. It's not personal affection. It's not any kind of sexual love or affection. It has an aspect of inclusion, meaning not these people but not those people—that's not metta.

And again, as I said before, I really like to recognize that everything is just moment to moment. So I don't have to think that my mind and heart need to be filled with all-embracing, cosmos-pervading metta all the time before I can begin to have a sense of what it might be. That's possible—the Buddha talks about that, and I'll read that in a minute. But you don't have to wait. And it's not helpful to denigrate or put down what arises: "Well, maybe that was metta, but it really wasn't very good or very strong. It was a little bit of caring for all beings, but not really vast. It's not good enough." That wasn't metta talking, that line.

In a moment of metta, you can just really feel it. It doesn't have to be this incredible emotional state. In fact, it doesn't have to be an emotional state at all. But it's a quality of heart and mind that's inclusive. Whatever the attention turns to, the proximate cause, the immediate cause for a moment of metta to arise in consciousness, is seeing the good—seeing the lovableness in anybody. Then in that moment of metta, the mind just opens and connects with the whole of what it sees.

To me, the essence of metta is really connection. Not a kind of holding back, and not saying, "Well, this part is good, but let's not look at that over there." So the proximate cause for metta to arise is seeing the lovableness in a being. But then when the attention turns to that being, the metta spreads out and includes everything—a being out here, or even a being in here.

Metta is inclusive, connected, very simple, and non-judging. It discards ill will. Ill will is the far enemy, you could say. When there's metta in the mind, there's not ill will in the mind. They don't coexist.

Metta also has the quality of spaciousness. The example often given in the suttas is this: if you had salt and you put it in a cup of water, you'd have extremely salty water. But if you take a spoon of salt and put it in the pond around there, you don't even notice it. So the quality of mind of metta is just spacious, including, not causing trouble about anything, not pushing away and not saying, "Yes, I need this." Just connected, inclusive, spacious, kind, not discriminating. And it's really normal and natural.

The example I always use, because it just really works for me, is this: if you walked out here and you saw two little kids, three-year-olds, playing with each other, laughing and bouncing a ball, what would be your normal feeling? Assuming you're not in a really aversive yogi mind, and it's just a normal day—you walk out, the kids are laughing, they're cute or they're not cute, but they're just little kids. It's like, ah, don't you

wish them well? It's just appreciated. It's not rocket science. It's not some big esoteric state that you have to crank up intensive meditation for three months to feel. You just walk out and go, "Oh, yeah." You may not say, "May you be happy and peaceful, may you be safe and protected," but you feel that sense of how the mind and heart just expands, connects, includes all of them, all of the kids.

And it's not blind. It doesn't mean you can't act. So the kids are playing. And if, as happens with three- and four-year-olds, they go from being friendly to getting into a fight, and one of them picks up a big stick and starts hitting the other one over the head, you don't go, "Oh, aren't they cute, la la la." You also don't go, "Well, I hate them. Look at those kids. They're so horrible."

You kind of take the stick away, out of metta, right? You still have this sense of appreciation, friendliness for the little kids. That's metta. It sees the whole situation with friendliness, with inclusivity. It acts appropriately, but your mind and heart isn't troubled. You're not filled with rage and hatred because, "Oh no, look at that! You can see the evil of human nature right there." One could go there, but that wouldn't really be the choice.

So metta is not rocket science. And on that simple level, we all know it. This is the simple level we bring to our own experience. Acceptance is a huge aspect of metta, just what Melanie spoke about the other night. This quality of simply bringing all our attention right here, whatever's happening, seeing it clearly without adding anything extra, without adding hatred, without pushing away. So that's an aspect of our Vipassana practice as well.

But metta—all the wholesome states, but especially all four Brahma viharas: metta, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity—all four of them can become really unbelievably powerful forces in the heart, in the mind. And you can sometimes even feel it. You almost feel like you've walked into a metta field around certain persons, or sometimes at the end of a metta retreat when people have been practicing metta for a week together. You can kind of feel it.

There's a quiet, lovely Sayadaw, a Burmese monk and teacher in Sagaing up in the hills that we usually go to visit—U Jayanta. He doesn't speak English, and he seems very simple. His monastery is small. It's always impeccably clean. There are only ever a few monks there. We go up to visit him every year. I love it. And I've told him this, because I just feel the sense of metta and peace whenever I walk in there, whenever I come and we just talk to him. He's simple, and he remembers us, and loves it if we have a dharma question. There's no big amazing thing going on, but it can just feel like walking into a field of purity, a field of metta, because it touches that in oneself—just living a simple, quiet life.

Although I have to say, my friend Greg, who goes every year too, said that last year his illusions were shattered because U Jayanta was on the cell phone when he walked in. Which doesn't mean you can't have metta. Let's not go there.

But metta can become a powerful force in the mind. This is from the Buddha, describing metta when it's

really moving into a force:

"That disciple of the noble ones, thus devoid—or empty—of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unbewildered, alert, mindful, keeps pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with goodwill, an awareness filled with goodwill. Likewise the second direction, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, and all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness filled with goodwill—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. This is called the immeasurable deliverance of mind, the immeasurable deliverance of heart."

So metta is a simple, really accessible, normal and natural state. And it can also, when it comes together with wisdom and real purity in our heart and mind, open into the immeasurable deliverance of mind. It's really extremely powerful. Immeasurable—without measure.

So what does obstruct or hide or keep us from recognizing the measureless quality of mind, of heart? What keeps us in these perceptions Joseph was speaking about last night—the perceptions that seem to lead to and increase fragmentation, separation, limited mind, limited heart, affection for myself and a few? What feeds the fear?

And really, it's not like there's some monolithic thing. Moment to moment, the sense of fragmentation in our heart, in our mind, the sense of isolation, the sense of separation—that perception is created moment to moment. It's not something we're carrying around with us that maybe someday, if we're lucky, will go away. There are plenty of moments when it's not being created. A moment of acceptance without any judgment, presence and awakeness—that's a moment of non-fragmentation, when one can almost intuit the measureless quality of heart and mind. Until we think, "I have experienced it," and boom, measurement is back, limitation is back. Fine. Notice that.

So these habits—the habits of seeking pleasure, the habits of wanting, the habits of fearing the unpleasant, of pushing away, of aversion, of ill will, the habit of shutting out certain aspects of our experience: "I don't want this to be part of me. I don't want this to be happening."

I don't want to know about this. This is undesirable. This basically cannot be happening.

All of these habits—and these are just the ones we talk about all the time—but this is really the essence of why these habits are the source of suffering for ourselves and others. They're creating, in the moment, this sense of insufficiency, of separation, of isolation, of neediness, of fear. And then we believe it. And then we tell ourselves a story that feeds that. And then we act on that. And then we act with somebody else on that. And they respond. And then it just keeps on going, boom, boom, boom.

A friend of mine was just telling me he had been doing a retreat somewhere else, and he came out of it with a big insight into the basically empty nature of thoughts—a lot of what Joseph was talking about last night. He was telling me, "I came out of the retreat and was visiting friends I hadn't seen, and they would say, 'Tell me your story.' And it was sort of like they'd talk to me—all these thoughts, thoughts, thoughts,

thoughts, thoughts—and then they'd hand it to me. And then I'd say my story—thoughts, thoughts, thoughts, thoughts, thoughts—and hand it to them. And then our thoughts are kind of meeting in the middle, la la la la la." He said, "It's just also nothing. It's just also nothing. We could just sit here and be here together, and that's fine."

So a lot of our practice, our cultivation of metta in the direct way and also through the attitude in the mindfulness, is through recognizing the qualities of metta and also recognizing these habits of mind and perception that feed the sense of limitation, that feed the concept of separation.

They say the word metta has two root meanings. I like both of them. One is *gentle*, and the example often given—very appropriate for today—is that of a gentle rain that's just falling everywhere. You know how it was gentle this morning, just coming down? I love it when it's like that. It falls everywhere in a particular area. Don't go scientific on me. But if the gentle rain is falling, it's not like it says, "I'll fall everywhere, but I'll just miss that lilac bush over there." Just gentle rain on everywhere. It doesn't select and choose.

And the other aspect is *friend*, friendship, friendliness. A true friend is someone who, in happiness and in difficulty, doesn't reject you, isn't envious, doesn't rejoice when you're unhappy, is always present without judgment, without picking and choosing. So these are two qualities of the mind of metta, the heart of metta.

And I really feel that with metta practice and in noticing the metta in the vipassana, it's gentle. There's no way to be with metta other than gentle. You just can't say, "May I be happy" without gentleness. It has to be gentle. And we become a friend—a friend to ourselves, a friend to our minds and hearts, a friend to each other, a friend to the world. We start to see through the perceptions and the habits of mind that feed separation, that are not inclusive.

I'll read you this little story a friend of mine uses and gave to me, from a nurse who said:

"During my second month of nursing school, our professor gave us a surprise test. I was a conscientious student and I went easily through the questions until I read the last question, which was: 'What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?' Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired, and in her fifties, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count towards our test grade. 'Absolutely,' said the professor. 'In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello.' I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy."

That's metta.

Whatever's here, it deserves our attention, even if all we do is smile and say hello.

And the subtle habits of exclusion—sometimes they're very subtle in my mind, sometimes they're not so

subtle, but sometimes they're very subtle—these habits of exclusion. Whether it's about what's happening internally or externally: "Well, these people are more interesting or more important." Or in some subtle way, "These people don't count," or "I just don't have the time." Just to notice that quality of mind that picks and chooses.

In the formal practice of metta, as we've been doing on the Tuesday afternoons, as some of you are doing more steadily through the days here—Sharon says she'll go to her grave saying this, and I'll say it too. I don't know if I'll go to my grave saying it, but I'll say it: The practice of metta is not about creating and holding on to a great emotional feeling. It's not about holding on to anything. Metta has a wide variety of how it manifests. It's not necessarily about trying to feel anything.

The formal practice of metta is really the practice of training our hearts and minds through the cultivation of thought, the use of attention, to cultivate our intention—the motivation, the movement of mind. As I think Melanie said, that very famous line from the Buddha: what we naturally think and ponder upon becomes the inclination of our mind. Well, metta practice—what is the mind saying over and over and over?

People say, "Well, it's boring." Okay, it's boring. How really fascinating is the other stuff your mind is saying? "May I be happy and peaceful. May you be happy and peaceful" is a lot better. "I don't really feel it." Who cares? Just come back. The intention to say it, the intention to connect with the sense of the person—just that is strengthening the intention, is inclining the heart and mind. And it does have an effect.

Wanting to feel good. Now let me see, does wanting to feel good sound like metta? Does wanting to have a better experience sound like the quality of open, connected, well-wishing for all beings? Or does it maybe sound like wanting, which is the near enemy of metta—which I'll get to in a minute.

Through the cultivation of intention, every moment that we can connect—whether it's with ourselves, with benefactor, with friend, with all beings, with whoever—ultimately it doesn't matter. Because in the moment, whether it's yourself or benefactor, when there's that phrase of wishing well, "May you be happy and peaceful," and you don't feel a huge emotion, but in that moment there's some connection with it, and there's really no ill will in the mind just for a second. I know sometimes you could say the phrase with ill will; I'm aware of that. But we're talking about a time when there's not ill will. In that moment of metta, it's a little metta, but it's metta.

It doesn't really matter whether it's for you or benefactor or whomever, because the moment of metta in itself has this expansive, inclusive quality. It's just that moment of metta—you just feel, "Oh, may I be happy, may you be happy." That's one reason we say start where it's easy, if yourself isn't easy, and come back, because once the metta is there for a moment in the mind, it's easier to include the self or the difficult person.

So we're working through the cultivation of intention to really stop feeding the habits of mind of resistance, of greed, of aversion, of separation—to stop feeding those perceptions and instead to strengthen the intention of well-wishing, the intention of spaciousness, the intention of inclusion. Just very simple, very matter-of-fact, very practical, moment after moment after moment. And a lot of moments, that's not what's happening. Fine.

But every time you're trying to wish well to someone, and your mind goes off—"Well, they would be happy if they'd only do what I said," and "I've been doing this all day"—and you say, "Okay, that doesn't feel like metta," and you just come back, reconnect, say it again: that's powerful. Instead of going on the whole train, you're seeing—maybe you don't use these words—but you're seeing, "Oh, that's the habit, the perception of separation, of not good enough or something lacking. Let me not feed that right now. Let me just come back to: May I be safe and protected."

It doesn't seem like a lot, because we're always looking for some big, juicy something or other. But this is the level, the subtle moment-to-moment level, that is really changing the deepest habits of our mind. When Joseph was talking about concepts last night, I'm sure—well, I'm not sure, I'm not sure of anything—but maybe you got a sense of how fast and subtle the concepts are that give us a sense of self. It's not something we can think our way out of.

So the effects of those concepts are gross and with us a lot. But the creation in a moment of perception and concept is so quick and so subtle, isn't it? And the habit of mind is so quick. So it's the subtle habits of mind that really, in some way, represent the deepest level of freedom and the deepest level of ignorance.

It doesn't always have to be this big blowout experience, but just this willingness, this determination to cultivate friendliness, loving-kindness, gentleness, inclusivity over and over. This is really what we're cultivating here.

And the part we don't like so much is that a big part of the practice—whether it's the formal metta or the vipassana too—is the recognizing, learning to see and understand these habits that get in the way. We've talked about those a lot. I don't want to go into them too much, but just a little bit in terms of metta.

The two biggest habits in terms of metta, of course, are desire or lust and ill will. Desire, or lust, is called the near enemy of metta because it's often confused with, mistaken for metta. It masquerades as metta. It can look like metta—which, when we're really caught in lust or desire and we recognize it, it doesn't actually seem like metta at all, does it? It's kind of surprising that we can confuse lust or wanting for metta, but we can.

One way is because metta, when you're feeling it, when you're just inclining towards well-wishing to someone, it's pleasant. And pleasant, when there's not mindful awareness—when the awareness kind of drops—the habit of mind is to move from pleasant into wanting something, isn't it? Often in metta, it can move into wanting more about the person you're sending metta to. And so then we don't quite recognize

it.

"Oh, may you be happy, my good friend." I remember when I was doing metta and would feel so much well-wishing for her and happiness for her. And then these little thoughts would come in: "We really should spend more time together." "Oh, may you be happy." "Really, why doesn't she call me more?" "May you be happy." "Maybe when I get out, I'll call her up. We'll go into town. We'll go to that good restaurant." And then it's not so subtle anymore—you're off. But it's very easy to kind of slip over into that. And when it's connected to the person, we sometimes don't quite see it.

Another way that we can really get into wanting with metta—classically they say it's lust, that you actually get into sexual desire for the person. I think that's actually a lot less common than the wanting something back.

So with metta we can also start wanting the feeling, right? "May you be happy." How do I feel? "May you be peaceful." How's the heart doing? "May you know..." And you're always checking it out. Is it open? Not quite open. It was better yesterday. "May you be happy. May you be peaceful." Maybe if I go slower...

And you have to look and see: What's the motivation right now? Is it metta? Metta is a complete generosity of the heart. Just wishing well for the person. Seeing them, the energy goes out, includes them, spreads out. "May you be happy." Do I feel good yet? Oh, okay. Maybe that's not metta. Just seeing. The near enemy is still bound up. It's still all about me. And you can see that.

The sense of me is still a reference point when we're in the near enemy, when we're in wanting, whether subtle or gross. And that's just something you can really notice.

As I said, when I really look at wanting in its essence, it doesn't look like or feel like metta at all. The essence of wanting, of craving, is separation—I'm wanting something else. It's a sense of insufficiency, of inadequacy, of incompleteness. I need whatever it is to feel okay, to feel peaceful, to feel happy. We don't say it that grossly, perhaps, but the craving and the wanting itself creates a sense of separation, of insufficiency, and actually increases it, feeds it. The more the wanting there is, the more this sense grows.

When wanting is present in the mind and not seen, that's really the perception that keeps this sense of me and other going. Metta, when there's a moment of metta, that perception of separateness, of insufficiency, of neediness, of inadequacy, is not here. A moment of "just as you are, may you be happy"—just that. There's no sense of "I need something else in this moment." You're not even thinking about I. Even though we're using the language of I and you, in the moment of metta it's just: may you be happy. That's it. Simple, expansive, inclusive. Nothing is lacking. Nothing is in excess.

Wanting is just the opposite of this, whether it's wanting outwardly or inwardly.

This is from Mark Epstein. He's talking about the sense of unworthiness. He says, "When we have a sense of unworthiness, it is easy to feel deficient and to see the love of another person as the only possible

solution to this plight. Meditation tends to work against this assumption of deficiency by restoring the capacity for connection from the inside." In doing this, meditation challenges the common assumption of our culture about where connection comes from. We see that connection is already present. We are not as separate and distinct as we think we are. Connection is our natural state. We just learn to permit it, to allow it—I would say to recognize it, actually. You can't stop it. We just learn to recognize that connection is already present. There's nothing to want from outside. And love, metta, is an expression of this wisdom. It then strengthens our trust in this reality, in this aspect of reality. Just open-hearted, simple connection.

The Buddha said that lust is a maker of measurement. Hate is a maker of measurement. Delusion is a maker of measurement. In one whose taints, whose poisons are destroyed, these are abandoned—that's an arahat. But in terms of the near and far enemy of metta, lust or craving, far enemy ill will—these in themselves, when we don't recognize them, when we believe them and identify, and there's the sense of me doing it—these are makers of measurement.

You can feel measurement in the mind, rather than the immeasurable mind that the Buddha speaks of with the brahmaviharas. This maker of measurement—you can almost feel everything shrink, contract. It comes down to me and other, whether it's wanting or aversion. Suddenly there's this measurement, and I'm the center that everything's measured from. The mind contracts. The world contracts. Our view contracts. And that in itself is a form of suffering.

So the far enemy of metta—and I'll say a little more about this—is ill will. Well, that's obvious. We're not going to mistake ill will for metta, I hope not. And metta is said to be the antidote to ill will. The Buddha gave lots of advice to his son, Rahula.

One of his teachings was: "Rāhula, develop meditation on loving-kindness. For when you develop meditation on loving-kindness, any ill will will be abandoned." They don't coexist. They simply don't coexist.

So ill will is the far enemy. And as we practice mettā, just as we practice vipassanā, sometimes you might feel like it's bringing up more ill will. I think it just highlights it, because the ill will starts to seem so abrasive, so out of sync with the mettā, with the vipassanā, with the acceptance. It's just so much harsher. But we still believe it often, still get caught in it.

And in terms of what I said earlier—do we really have confidence? Do we really know that the strongest aspect of wisdom, the strong heart, manifests as mettā, manifests as compassion? Or do we, as people so often say, think we need our anger, need our fear? "If I'm just full of mettā, I won't be able to function. I'll just sit passively by while people walk all over me. How can I protect myself?" These are reasonable questions given the culture we grow up in. That's why we sit and look and see what's really true.

I've told this story often, but I'll tell it again. At a retreat quite some years ago—I think it was with Joseph, up in the mountains of New Mexico—specifically for specially invited environmental activists. People who

weren't necessarily Buddhist practitioners, and some of them hadn't done much meditation at all. It was a ten-day silent retreat, very intensive, and we were doing a regular retreat like this one. Once a day, just like we do on Tuesdays here, one sitting every day, we would teach the mettā practice. And we had discussion groups.

These environmentalists were lawyers and activists, really on the front lines, living very intense lives. Actually, it was billed as a retreat for burned-out environmental activists. They were pretty stressed, I tell you. Working very hard. Very smart people—it was a little intimidating, extremely smart.

So we started teaching the loving-kindness. In one of the groups, about the second or third day, one of the men said very sincerely, "I'm in the middle of this huge, acrimonious, anger-filled court case. I have to go into court. These other lawyers will stop at nothing. They're angry. I need my anger. I can't get into this mushy mettā, weak stuff. I need my anger."

But he was sincere. He kept on doing the practice anyway. And at the end of those ten days—I don't know what happened after—but at the end of those ten days, he was really so touched. He said, "I really see from this time, from working with the vipassanā and the mettā, that anger was eating me up inside. It's not like I can just have the anger and take it in and throw it at those other lawyers in the courtroom, and then everything's okay. It's coming out at my family. It's eating me up inside. It's making me sick. It's just taking over my life."

It was so touching. But I know he had to walk back into that court case, surrounded by it again, and our old habits spring up. We know that. We've seen that here in these three weeks. So I'm not saying it's easy—to find in ourselves, over and over and over, the trust that comes from wisdom, from seeing your own experience.

And then we almost make a resolution, an adhiṭṭhāna. It's one of the ten pāramīs—resolution. I'm resolving to choose love when I can. And when I can't, meeting that with mettā too. That's also mettā.

I was just on the phone with a man who stays in touch once in a while. He's in his late 70s. He's been doing this meditation for years. He's a welder farmer from Kansas—just a very down-home guy, the kind who says, "You know, I can never really do this practice." But he's completely dedicated. He said to me yesterday, "You know, I've really been doing metta practice for the last two years. You told me to do that." I actually don't remember, but anyway, that's good. "You told me to do that, and it's really making a change."

I said, "Well, what? What change is it making?"

He goes, "Well, you know, when I walk down the street, anyone I see, I really try to send the metta. And if I can do it at that moment, that's great. And if I can't do it at that moment, then that's okay too."

I thought that was just a perfect example. Metta outward, metta inward, when we can't be perfect. Okay,

that's okay too. This is how it is right now. May I be happy.

Ajahn Sumedho has a wonderful way of expressing metta in terms of the difficult—in terms of scary, frightening, violent situations. That's when we think, "No, I need my fear, I need my anger. Metta's blind, metta's weak." Sumedho says, "With metta, one is not blinding oneself with an ideal." And that's where we can often go. You're not blinding yourself with an ideal. Instead, one is witnessing the unpleasantness in a situation, a thing, a person, or in oneself without creating anything around it.

I just love that. One is witnessing wholeheartedly the unpleasantness in a situation, in a person, in a thing, or in oneself. Just witnessing without creating anything around it. Just space. It's like this. That's Sumedho—the one who always says, "It's like this." That is an aspect of metta.

So my friend is walking down the street. He tries, he can't send metta now. Okay. You don't have to make up a big story. Acceptance, presence, spaciousness—it's like this. Those are aspects of metta.

This is especially true, much as Melanie talked about, towards your own internal experience. There's an interesting transition that occurs naturally and spontaneously. We begin to find that to the degree that there is bravery in ourselves—the willingness to look, to look directly at our own hearts—and to the degree that there is kindness towards ourselves, there is confidence that we can actually forget ourselves and open to the world.

The only reason we don't open our hearts and minds to other people is that they trigger confusion in us that we don't feel brave enough or sane enough to deal with. To the degree that we look clearly and compassionately at ourselves, we can feel confident and fearless about looking into someone else's eyes.

Sharon likes to say, "To pay attention is to love." And also listening—there's a slogan on public radio. They have a series of stories where they go around getting people's stories, and their slogan is, "Listening is an act of love." And I think it's James Baldwin who said that an enemy is someone whose story we have not heard.

With this ill will, in the face of the difficult, of course we do want to be separate from violent people, from people that are harming us, or that we don't like, or that we don't agree with, or who get us upset. The tendency of our mind in that ill will is to create the sense of me and other, to put the other in a box—these bad things they do, these scary things they do—and to just disconnect. That can seem safe. But first, it's not true about them that they're just all this bad thing.

When Bush was president, I couldn't stand to even think of anything good about him. I didn't want to hear anything good. Now, that's not reality. I just wanted to stay in this hostility. I was feeding hostility. That's not so helpful. It keeps me in the prison of hostility and separation. And it's not seeing accurately—it's delusion. Delusion keeps the perception of separation going.

Non-delusion, clear seeing, the mind that's alert and free—this sees well beneath the separation, beneath

the box of "that bad thing" we put people in. And it's incredibly powerful. So I just want to read two examples, current day examples, nothing to do with Buddhism, about the power of this clear seeing that comes from metta, from loving-kindness. Metta, far from being blind, actually allows for a clearer seeing of things as they are.

The first is from Tracy Kidder's book *Strength in What Remains*, about a man named Deo who had escaped from Burundi at the time of the huge genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. Through a series of events, he managed to escape as a very young man in medical school, get to New York, and went through years of hell there. It's a great book, actually—really uplifting.

Kidder writes that Deo had spent a lot of time in Manhattan classrooms—he was going to Columbia—thinking about the catastrophic violence in Burundi and Rwanda. He had come to believe that the misery of the people, while not the sole cause of the mayhem, had been a primary cause, a precondition too often neglected by scholars: that there was little or no education for most people. Many people had lessons in brutality, toil, and deprivation—hunger, disease, and untimely death, including rampant infant mortality.

As an example, Deo said, "Almost everyone has got worms. They're there since they were born, and worms will be their friend—intestinal worms—until they die. Can you imagine that kind of life? It's terrible. So how are you going to think right with pain everywhere? It's been really hard for me to blame the people who have been slaughtering each other, although I do blame people all the time. They were not themselves. They were something else."

Tracy Kidder says his stance is remarkable. How many people in his place would have divided up the world into good guys and bad guys, Hutus and Tutsis, and left it at that? But somehow he had found a way around the self-poisoning of hatred. He kept his mind flexible. And in that flexibility, you see more clearly. That's an aspect of metta. It's not just loving—it's seeing deeply, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, and not creating anything extra around it.

The second example is from John Lewis, who was a congressman from Georgia for over twenty years—an African-American man who was in the early days with Martin Luther King in the Civil Rights Movement. He was one of the young college students in Nashville in the late fifties and early sixties, one of the early Freedom Riders, one of the founders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and deeply committed to nonviolence—not just the idea that you don't fight back, but a very deep and profound way of life, internally and externally.

This is from his autobiography, where he's talking about nonviolence. He was beaten many times on the Freedom Rides. He's not talking theoretically here. This is a man who put himself on the line over and over and over. They trained with Jim Lawson, another African-American who had studied in India, studied Gandhian principles.

I want to read this from John Lewis, because to me, this is metta. He's talking about the suffering—the suffering of being beaten, the suffering of racism and violence. He wrote: "The suffering is nothing more than a sad and sorry thing without the presence on the part of the sufferer of a graceful heart, an accepting and open heart, a heart that holds no malice towards the inflictors of his or her suffering. This is a difficult concept to understand, and it is even more difficult to internalize, but it has everything to do with the way of nonviolence.

"We are talking about love here. Not romantic love, not the love of one individual for another, not loving something that is lovely to you. This is a broader, deeper, more all-encompassing love. It is a love that accepts and embraces the hateful and the hurtful. It is a love that recognizes the spark of the divine in each of us—even in those who would raise their hand against us, those we might call our enemy. This sense of love realizes that emotions of the moment and constantly shifting circumstances can cloud that divine spark. Pain, ugliness, and fear can cover it over, can turn a person toward anger and hate."

It is the ability to see through those layers of ugliness, to see further into a person than perhaps that person can see into himself, that is essential to the practice of nonviolence.

One method of practicing this approach when faced with a hateful, angry, aggressive, even a despicable person is to imagine that person—to actually visualize him or her as an infant, as a baby. If you can see this full-grown attacker who faces you as the pure, innocent child that he or she once was, that we all once were, it is not hard to find love and compassion in your heart. It is not hard to find forgiveness.

And this, Jim Lawson taught us, is at the essence of the nonviolent way of life: the capacity to forgive. When you can truly understand and feel, even as a person is cursing you to your face—if you can understand and feel, even in the midst of critical and often physically painful moments, that your attacker is as much a victim as you are, that he is a victim of the forces that have shaped and fed his anger and fury—then you are well on your way to the nonviolent life.

This is to me one of the best expressions of the incredible power of a commitment to continue working towards metta, towards compassion. Only wisdom can give us that strength. But there is wisdom, and we can really trust the depth and the power of this force in our heart and mind.

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