Introducing Mettā

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:43:50

Depending on what your day was like today, some of you may be wondering how what you're doing here has much to do with loving-kindness and friendliness for yourself. Sometimes that escapes the experience on the first day, especially if you're new to it.

Another common question comes up in my mind every time I begin a mettā retreat for myself: if it's true—which it is true—that loving-kindness, this friendliness, is a natural expression of who we really are, of our truest nature; if it's more true than our experience of separation, why do we have to work so hard to try and have a fleeting moment of experiencing it? Why do we have to work so hard to learn to recognize and trust it?

I want to talk about those two things tonight.

It's true, as Sharon said, that friendliness, mettā—I will probably mostly use the word mettā just because it's easier—is a natural, spontaneous expression of the truth of the deepest nature of all of us. And it's also natural in the sense that it's not some esoteric, incredibly blissed-out experience that you can only know if you're deep in absorption. Because that wouldn't make it quite universal, would it? It would make it much more conditional than it really is.

The experience of mettā, connectedness, friendliness, is the natural response of our heart to a situation when we're really open and present. For example, if you're outside today and you see a small child running and playing and bouncing with a ball, and you're present, the natural response arises without thinking about it. You don't wonder what that kid is doing here, who his parents are, what his background is, what he's thinking about. There's just a natural sense of friendliness, non-judging happiness. We simply feel our empathetic connection to that child.

Or if kids don't do it for you, puppies or kittens or whatever particular species of being opens your heart when you're present—you don't have to try to make that happen. It happens naturally.

But not always, right? And that certainly isn't the natural spontaneous response in most situations. So why not?

Same situation: you're out walking today and there's a small child laughing, playing, having a good time, but you're in a different state, in some way self-absorbed. You're hurrying to get to lunch. You're just starting to feel maybe the tendrils of a nice concentrated state. Or you're worrying about something at home, or you're thinking about how you could have brought a better raincoat or whatever. And you either don't even notice the kid, or if you're in an aversive mood, you think, "What's he doing screaming and

yelling? He's wrecking my possible concentration." Or if you're in a worrying mode, "Where the heck are his parents? What's he doing here anyway? Is he abandoned? Is he an orphan?"

We go into whatever our stories are. And those stories, that reaction stemming from our self-involved state of mind and heart at the moment, actually block the sense of connectedness. There's definitely more of a sense of separateness, of fragmentation in that case. We get locked in our mental world. And these mental worlds seem so real—never mind that you get locked in seventeen thousand different mental worlds in one day. Each of them seems so real, much more real than the underlying unity beneath all of our differences.

This sense of connectedness, this unity, is much more real and true. But we don't tend to notice that as readily. We get more involved in the seeming differences, in our habits, in our tendencies of reaction that increase the sense of separation and fragmentation.

What's interesting—and we discover this both in Vipassana or insight meditation as well as in the loving-kindness meditation we're doing here, and in any of the other three Brahmavihāras that Sharon mentioned this morning—we begin to discover that this experience we have, seemingly ongoing, however you experience it personally, whether it's fragmentation, separation, isolation, loneliness, neediness, fear, whatever, is actually due to a misperception of who we are and how things really are.

This is from Joko Beck: "Our misery stems from the misconception that we are separate. Certainly it looks as though I am separate from other people and other phenomena. And as long as we think we are separate, we're going to suffer. We're going to feel that we have to defend ourselves, that we have to find something in the world that will make us happy."

And by the very acts of doing this—having to defend ourselves, having to find something to make us happy—the continual making of separation in our mind strengthens and continues this illusion, this suffering state that we can so often find ourselves in.

For many of us, the illusion of separation, of the need to find something somewhere to finally make me happy, to protect and defend myself from all the bad things out there that could happen—that certainly has been more familiar.

It's more reinforced by the culture. It's the experience when I don't pay attention. It's what the mind most easily and naturally falls into. And since it's familiar, one tends to take it as real.

So the whole point of our practice, our metta practice here, is to consciously help us to not keep falling into this habit of delusion, of illusion, of separation. Each moment that we experience some metta, some connectedness, just basic friendliness—don't go out there looking for bliss, just that friendliness of all the kids playing, natural connectedness. Each moment that we experience that with awareness, that we recognize it, that's the moment where we're seeing through the idea of the fragmentation, the illusion of the separation.

It doesn't mean that I can't tell the difference between me and the child playing. We can have ideas about what unity or connectedness means that don't make sense to our rational mind and get caught in trying to think our way into it or out of it. It doesn't quite work. What our practice does is help us recognize over and over and over the visceral experience of connectedness, of unity, of simple, open-hearted friendliness, so that we begin to trust it more. And maybe we trust the illusion of our fragmentation, our isolation, maybe we begin to trust that a little less.

Maybe we won't think of ourselves as trusting fragmentation. But look at where your mind goes and look at how we make decisions and look at the conclusions we jump to just automatically. We do trust it. So we need to learn to actually trust the connectedness, to trust what Chögyam Trungpa used to call our basic goodness, a much deeper truth of who we are than all the superficial differences that we perceive with our normal seeing and hearing, smelling and tasting.

And we practice because hearing about it, believing that things are really different from how we perceive them, isn't enough. Certainly hasn't been for me. The difference between "oh yeah, that really is true, I think that makes a lot of sense," the difference between believing the idea, liking it, accepting it—the difference between that and knowing for yourself from your own experience that things are different from the seeming superficial differences—that difference between thinking it's a good idea and really knowing it is awesome. It makes all the difference in how we live our lives and how we respond to ourselves and others in any situation.

And so our metta practice is not about trying to create an artificial state of friendliness, a kind of static state, and then hold on to it for as long as we can. Probably a lot of us have done that from time to time, tried to do that. And let me tell you, it leads to enormous frustration because you cannot create a static state of heart and mind and hold on to it. You can't do it, not for long. So if you could just give that up right now, you'd save yourself a lot of grief.

What the practice is about is uncovering more the beauty of what we already are and learning to trust that a little bit more. Have a little more faith in it. Verified faith. Faith from your own experience.

For me, I've seen two basic ways that this deeper trust in my basic goodness, deeper trust that friendliness, metta, is a natural expression of who we really are—this has come about in a couple of ways in metta practice.

One way is what I was just describing: recognizing a simple moment of metta, connectedness, recognizing it when it's arising more and more so that we don't overlook it, so that we're not waiting for the big bang and overlooking the little moments of friendliness and connectedness. When you're just sitting here, it's like, ah, it's just so nice being here with everybody. An openness, a spaciousness. It's not that you should go, "Oh, a moment of metta! Let me write it down. That's three today." I don't mean that. But it is nice just to know, oh, yes, we're all here together. Not so much me and them. Just notice it. It's important. It strengthens our trust, our familiarity with it.

And then the second way—and sometimes it seems some days, some hours, like the second way is more prevalent than the first—is that in the deliberate cultivation, as we incline our mind and heart towards loving-kindness, whether it's to ourselves or toward the benefactor, through the repetition of the phrases, this practice by its nature highlights the states of heart and mind that we're quite familiar with that actually obstruct the connectedness, the states that obstruct our recognizing friendliness, metta. I'll talk a little about them, but we basically know all too well what those states are—all the difficult states: desire, aversion, boredom, everything you can name.

But that's part of the practice. As we continue inclining towards the metta, the so-called obstructions, the states of mind that we tend to believe in when we're not paying attention, that actually keep the connectedness hidden, they just get really big sometimes. But because we're paying attention—this is really where the learning comes in. When Sharon was talking last night or this morning about how what's really important on a retreat like this isn't having some nice state you can go home and talk about, it's the learning that happens.

Well, I hate to tell you, but it does seem to work that way—that a great deal of the learning that happens is about really seeing how we get hooked in these unpleasant or difficult states of heart and mind, and really seeing, "Oh, that's how it creates separation." The wisdom that comes from that takes so much juice out of our continuing to fall back into our habitual responses that it allows the open heart to shine much more strongly, allows us to trust it more.

So let me try again to talk about some ways of understanding what metta is and is not, and then I'll speak a little about the obstructions.

Some of the nouns we might use to describe metta include loving-kindness, friendliness, and the classic one: non-hatred. In the Theravada tradition, they do tend to put things in the negative a lot, but non-hatred—that's pretty good. Non-hatred, open-hearted connection, patience, acceptance, inclusiveness, expansiveness.

That last one—inclusiveness, expansiveness—has actually been very helpful and important to me, because you can get hooked into looking for some idea of what love should feel like. And a lot of times, metta is actually this inclusiveness. When I said earlier, "Here we are, all in the room together," it doesn't feel like what you might think of when you use the word love. But if you think of inclusiveness, expansiveness, connectedness—oh, yes, that's metta too. You can appreciate it.

The word love in this culture, anyway, in the culture I grew up in, in the popular entertainment culture—it has so many connotations that just don't have anything to do with metta. Love in the form of passion, for instance. You know, passion comes from the root word that means to suffer. Metta doesn't mean to suffer. But that kind of love—the idea that it's not real love if you're not tormented, if you're not in agony when the person you love isn't nearby—that has nothing to do with metta. Yet that is sometimes what we mean by love.

Or this sense of yearning. When I read about chivalrous love in medieval times, the whole idea was based on a knight cultivating this chivalrous love for a woman who was usually married to someone else, which meant they could never really be together. So the love was characterized, in its supposed purity, by this sense of unsatisfied yearning.

Metta is not unsatisfied yearning. It's not yearning in any sense of the word at all. Yearning signifies that there's something lacking, that we're looking somewhere for completion. And I do think a lot of the use of the word love in popular culture has that connotation in it somewhere, even in a slight way—that the presence of the other, even somewhere in the world, makes me more of a complete person. This certainly feeds into our Western propensity for feeling rather less than worthy of much of anything.

Really, of all the people we talk with on retreats, I would say over ninety percent have in some way a deep-seated sense of worthlessness, of not being good enough, of self-hatred. And it's so sad, because it's so not true, and because it's so deeply painful. Love in the form of yearning, in the form of needing someone to make me whole, really plays into that. The whole advertising industry—my God, you know, it's making billions and trillions of dollars off of that assumption: that if we buy the right thing, wear the right clothes, go to the right place, or take the right course, we'll be more lovable and somehow happier.

Metta is so much the opposite of that, because metta arises from the understanding—whether intellectual or just from the heart—that we are already complete. Metta is a springing forth from the internal knowing that everything is already here.

This is from Mark Epstein, the psychiatrist. I think it's from his book *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart*. He says: "When plagued with 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. In the Buddhist view, connection is already present. We are not separate and distinct as we think we are. Connection is our natural state. We just have to learn to permit it, to allow it."

That's a great description of metta practice. We're not trying to create connection. We're learning how to permit it, to allow it, to trust it. And I'm not saying that's easy, but it's really, ultimately, the source of our living from a much deeper ease and happiness with ourselves, with one another, with the world.

I want to give another example of the spacious, inclusive aspect of metta—how it doesn't have to be directed at someone we know, but can simply be an attitude of acceptance that is itself metta. Last year I was on Maui with two friends, actually with Kamala and another friend.

One afternoon we went to a local event in a high school auditorium or civic center. It was called "Honoring Our Kupunas," which means honoring our elders. I didn't really know what it was—we just went to see.

And it was so... I really felt like the whole afternoon was permeated with the spirit of metta.

What it was: all ages were there, from small children to whole families. It centered around several groups of elderly people—some from local retirement homes, some from their local churches. Many of them knew each other, and many of the people present were their families spanning all generations. But then there were people like us who didn't know anyone there. And everyone was equally welcome.

What would happen is we would sit on the bleachers, and group by group, mostly women, would get up—some by themselves, some in groups—and do hulas. These were women ranging from early sixties to mid-nineties. They would get up, all ranges of skill level and physical type and ability, and really with such goodwill, so unselfconsciously, just getting up in front of everybody and dancing very sensuously and laughing—and everyone just loving it.

There was no sense whatsoever of judgment, no thinking, "How can she get up in front of everybody at her age?" I tried to imagine my mother getting up—of course my mother would never do the hula—but to imagine her just getting up and being able to be so at ease. Or me, never mind my mother.

To see the sense of warmth and acceptance that just flowed through this room, and the love. I thought, that's really a metta experience: the non-judging, the acceptance, the inclusiveness. And it wasn't hard. It wasn't something one had to manufacture.

So metta, whether it's toward beings or toward ourselves, has this connected, inclusive aspect.

And that leads into another misconception of metta—not so much the passion and yearning side, but the other extreme: that it's mushy, clouds and angels, a perpetual Valentine's Day, as Sharon put it. Everything's always nicey-nice. It accepts everything and you really don't look at what else is going on. If there's anything ugly or negative, you just pretend it doesn't happen. A kind of false, blind, stupid way to be in the world, basically.

Also not true.

Metta is an expression of wisdom. Wisdom really sees things as they are. The mind of metta sees things quite clearly. It's not mush-minded at all. But again, we have to experience this for ourselves.

I was teaching a retreat a few years ago specifically for environmental activists—I think it was with Sharon, this one. It was a Vipassana, an insight meditation retreat, but we would spend a session each day going through the formal metta practice, the same practice we're doing here, only condensed.

In the beginning—I did several retreats like this—many of the people, the environmental activists, had never done any meditation at all. We announced we were going to do loving-kindness meditation, and you could see the flinches or the groans. Someone actually said to Sharon, "I don't want to do that mushy practice. I don't want to lose my edge." You know, out there working every day for the environment—really tough, hot-shot lawyers and activists—"I can't afford to do this loving-kindness mush

stuff and lose my edge."

I don't think that's an uncommon response. As Sharon mentioned, many people come to retreat and say, "I don't want to do this metta-shmetta stuff."

And again, it's a misconception. Invariably, on these environmental retreats, by the end of it—because the people are tough, they stick it out, grit their teeth and do it—the truth starts to shine through. Even if you hate it, it doesn't matter. Just the willingness to incline your mind, and it happens by itself.

Invariably they really appreciated the metta practices. Sometimes that was the best thing for them about the retreat.

So we begin to discover that the ability to love, for each of us, is boundless.

And that our happiness does not depend on having people love us, or even on our external conditions, but it really depends on our ability to love. And as we begin to contact that ability, as we begin to trust it, as we begin to see that you don't lose your edge—when we begin to trust the strength of boundless connectedness, it's actually far more strong and more courageous than acting from anger, acting from fear. But again, we need to begin to experience this for ourselves.

I'll tell you one story about someone I've been reading about recently who's deeply inspirational to me. I haven't met him or heard him personally, but he's a man, still alive, named Jim Lawson. He's an African-American man who in the late 1950s, early 1960s, was teaching nonviolent workshops. He's a minister, a Christian minister. He was teaching nonviolent workshops in Nashville to some young college students who began, actually, the sit-ins in Nashville and then the Freedom Rides. Together with some other students in North Carolina, they were really the beginning of the whole sit-ins and Freedom Rides, the civil rights movement, based off of the Montgomery bus boycott.

Jim Lawson was a deep believer in nonviolence based on love, on unity as human beings. He had been a conscientious objector during the Korean War and had spent time in prison for that. And he spent three years working in India because he was a very devoted disciple of Gandhi. That was really a lot of his inspiration for nonviolent activism.

I also love the threads of how you can't pin down metta or universal love to any particular path. Gandhi, of course, is a devout Hindu. And here we are, Buddhists, and Jim Lawson, a devoted disciple of Gandhi, was a devoted Christian. And it all just strings together.

This particular story takes place at the beginning of some of the marches for these sit-ins, and they hadn't turned violent yet. This is through the eyes of a young man at that time, one of the students named Bernard Lafayette. They were marching from the church to a lunch counter in downtown Nashville just to sit in and demand to be served. This is the early 1960s, so forty years ago.

Bernard was recalling it some years later. He said he hadn't really felt he'd been tested yet, and so even

though he had the deep belief in the power of love and nonviolence, he really didn't know how he would respond when actually faced with violence—which is really honest. We don't know, do we? Do I really believe this? And that's our test as humans, isn't it?

Bernard was at the very end of the line when some young white toughs—like what they would have called greasers when I was a kid, with leather jackets and jeans and slicked back hair—attacked him and started beating this one man. Then the other young men, without even thinking about it, Bernard turned around and did what they'd been taught, which was to throw his own body over the body of the man who was down and being kicked, so that it diverted the attention to him. He did that without even thinking. Then they started beating on him.

At this point—and this is from Bernard—Jim Lawson comes walking up. He said Jim just walked up, not in a hurry, not upset, not as if he was going to fix something, just like he was coming to a day of work at the office. And he was so nonchalant that it really enraged one of the white guys. The white guy spat on Jim Lawson.

And this is the power then. This is the method and the connection. Jim looks at him and says, "Do you have a handkerchief?" The man was so shocked that he reached in his pocket, took out a handkerchief, and gave it to Jim, who calmly wiped his face. Then he looked at the man, saw what he was wearing, and said, "So do you have a motorcycle or do you have a souped-up car?" The guy says, "Well, a motorcycle." And they fall into this conversation about what he's done to soup up his motorcycle and what kind of motorcycle he rides, on and on.

Meanwhile, Bernard and the other man get up. They get back on the line. They all start walking. At that point, the line has moved on. So then Jim joins the line and he waves goodbye to this man. The man didn't wave back. But he also didn't do anything else.

As Bernard said, that was such a wonderful example of Christian love. To me, that's been very inspiring, because it's an example of the real courage—not thinking that nonviolence and human love is a good idea, but knowing the power of connectedness. Because that's what Jim did. He found a way to connect with that young tough, found a way they could both see each other's humanness. And that's because he so knows that we're all human, that we're all connected. It wouldn't work in every situation, but it's the power of the knowing. That's real metta.

That's the power of metta. Stronger than fear, stronger than anger, because it's really coming from truth.

So if it's so strong, how do we get so lost in the separation, in the fragmentation, in these habits of mind?

There are two main habits. Kamala's going to talk more about them tomorrow night. But what we're doing here, moment to moment—we don't have to be at the end of a line being attacked by some racist thug. All you have to do is sit here and look at your mind and heart when your knee starts to hurt, when you wish the bell would ring and you look at your watch and there's twenty-two more minutes. When you go out

and it's raining again, you think, "Oh my God"—maybe you don't. You're from California, it's all good, it's raining. "We need the rain"—that's what everybody says. "Oh, I love it, we need the rain."

All you have to do is look at your mind and we see the two biggest habits. They're actually labeled in the tradition of loving-kindness practice as the near and far enemy. Enemy of metta. I know I just finished saying metta has no enemies and now we've got the near and far enemy. They're just words.

But they are desire or attachment—the near enemy in that we can confuse desire for metta, just as I was saying with that kind of yearning. We confuse it for loving-kindness. Not just sexual desire or desire for a person—I was going to say that's obvious, but actually in your practice it often isn't so obvious. It feels sort of good if you don't really look and see that it makes you feel incomplete. It feels sort of good, we really get into it, but it's not metta.

Desire is a maker of limitation, attachment. It doesn't have to be that kind of sexual yearning desire. It can simply be desire to see more of the person. Desire for a more pleasant experience of metta. Desire for the bell to ring. Or you might notice when you're thinking of yourself, you start just subtly wishing you could be a little bit different. "If only I didn't get so distracted, I'd be more filled with metta. If only a really nice state happened, if only this would keep going, then the metta would really flow."

Desire makes limitations, whereas metta is boundless. Even when we have to begin where we are—which is metta for ourselves, for benefactors, for people we know.

But a friend of mine was describing how she noticed even that real open-hearted metta for people she knew, how she could see it made limitations when you limit it. She was visiting her ex-husband who was dying in a VA hospital. They had long ago reconciled and she had a good relationship with him; she was his main support. He was fairly old and he was going through a long sickness and death. She would go to visit him really filled with metta, with caring, with friendliness, happy to be there, just radiating peace and being with him.

And after—I don't know how long she said, whether it was weeks of going—it suddenly dawned on her that she was walking past rooms and beds filled with other men that she just didn't even notice. She was focusing all her sense of friendliness and love and compassion on her ex-husband. Which was fine, but as soon as she noticed that, she noticed that sense of limitation. Like, "I only have enough metta for this guy, and maybe the one on either side of him, but it can't go any wider than that." The sense we have of its being too hard, too limited.

So, just notice that. Notice when you're wanting something, how it shrinks our world. Notice if there's a sense of separation at that time. Do you feel really connected? Do you feel more isolated? I can tell you what to find—I mean, get the drift—but really look, because we have to get it for ourselves. "Oh, wanting keeps the illusion of separation and neediness going." Just begin to notice the difference between wanting and metta. They're not the same.

And the so-called far enemy, which is more obvious: ill-will, aversion towards people that are difficult, towards that which is unpleasant in our experience. It's more obvious how this creates separation. I mean, no one's going to say—I doubt anyway—that yes, really holding on to ill-will and anger against this person brings us closer together.

But the kind of hook in ill-will and aversion is that it's generally directed toward the things we actually don't want to be brought closer together with. Like our environmental friends who say, "I need my edge. I don't want to feel buddy-buddy with this jerk of a lawyer who's trying to cut down all the trees I've been working to save for nine years. He's a jerk, and I don't want him in my heart."

So this is where we have to really begin to experience for ourselves even the willingness to find a way to connect to that person—or to ourselves, to the things we're having difficulty with in ourselves—to connect with them. We don't have to love them in the common sense, but just not hate them. Just not push them away.

On this environmental retreat, one of the men who was most vociferous against wanting to do the metta practice was someone very dedicated who had been spending years on a particular project, working with a group of trees in northern New Mexico. A very dedicated guy, really not into metta. By the end of the retreat, it was one of the more moving experiences I've had of meeting people at the end of a retreat, seeing what's arisen for them. It's always beautiful, actually, at the end of a retreat. You go through so much, and the truth just shines out in a different manifestation for everyone.

This man was actually filled with anger. And at the end of the retreat he was weeping, saying, "You know, I really see how the anger doesn't serve. Because I couldn't just keep the anger and direct it towards the work I was doing. It's turning into bitterness, it's leaking out on my family, on my kids, it's eating me up inside." And the metta just—it's not like everything is hunky-dory forever, but it's beginning to see there's another way. And in the connectedness we can actually act with more courage, like that story of Jim Lawson.

I saw this for myself when I was doing a loving-kindness retreat, a long retreat, and I got to the so-called difficult person. They'll tell you to start with an easy difficult person, not the worst, most horrible person in your life—just someone who gets on your nerves a little bit. That's hard enough.

So this was a person who got on my nerves a little bit. I could say the phrases easily and mean it. But then I saw what was going on. It was only if he was over there. There was a moment where I could really feel as if experientially my heart would open and the person would come in, and I saw myself say, "No, I don't want him in there. No, thank you. It's okay if he stays over there."

That was really so instructive. I said, "Oh, I'm really creating the separation. The problem's not him. The problem is me wanting to keep that out." And that's really all you can do—notice that, and boom, the separation's gone in that minute. And I really saw how a lot of the stuff about him that bothered me was

just who he is. It was just him being him. He wasn't doing any horrible thing. It was my reactivity, my aversion that was creating the separation and the difficulty. It's really quite powerful to just begin to experience it to where you can trust it.

So these habits of aversion and desire are very, very strong. We'll talk more about them as we go on. But they're really some of the roots of what keeps us in this dream of separation, of illusion—creating the sense of the other, whether it's the other that we want and need, or the other that we want to go away. Whether it's another being, or whether it's the pain in your knee, whether it's the sleepiness that hits at 2:30, whether it's the boredom, whether it's "My God, if I have to say this phrase one more time, I'm going to run out of this room screaming."

It may seem like a huge leap to walk up to someone who's beating our friend and try to connect on a human level. Conceptually, it may seem beyond anything we could do or would even want to do. But we don't have to start there. We really can start not looking for perfection, but moment to moment, with what comes up when you're sitting and walking here.

The moments that you don't feel friendliness, connectedness—when you feel or notice something other, any of the difficult things: aversion, boredom, restlessness, self-hatred. You're off in worlds of desire, planning your fifteenth vacation to Bali, planning what you wish you had done on New Year's Eve. You can spend endless time in totally meaningless stuff and get completely wrapped up in it. When you notice that, how you meet that moment—that can be the cultivation of metta as well. If you meet that moment with "Yes, let's continue this, let's really get lost in Bali, the hour will go faster"—okay, we're back in separation.

If you meet the unpleasant experience with "this really does stink, I hate it, and I hate myself for hating it, and I'm never going to be able to cultivate metta, I'm a no-good, worthless jerk" — okay, what are we cultivating in that moment?

One of my favorite quotations from the Buddha is when he said that what the mind dwells upon frequently, towards that the heart will naturally incline. It's so simple, it's so obvious. Well, left to its own devices, what does the mind dwell upon frequently? It's a little scary as we start to notice.

So don't treat the moments when you get distracted or when the metta isn't happening as lost moments. Those are the places when you wake up and notice where you are and notice how you connect to that moment. Is it with spacious acceptance? Is it with desire? Is it with hatred? Notice. Those moments are really the cultivation of metta also.

There's huge potential for cultivating metta in saying, "Oh, off in Bali again, yep. May I be free from suffering. May I be happy. May I live at ease." Right back, without reaction, into the metta. That's a tremendous opportunity. Each moment that we do that — never mind if you don't feel a thing — each moment that we can offer a phrase wholeheartedly, we're inclining the heart towards metta. And we're

cutting through that habit we've cultivated for so long of either desire or distractedness or aversion.

So if we can really be patient, not looking for the big results, not looking for the big states — that's desire again — but simply having that willingness, that acceptance, that spaciousness to meet this moment with kind acceptance, that's metta. Then the willingness to begin again with the next phrase — that's the concentration part. The two strands come together really in every moment. You don't have to be doing something spectacular. Just have this willingness to meet each moment with friendliness, with clarity of seeing, and to begin again.

It's a choice, you know. And in more moments than we realize, we do have a choice where to let the mind dwell. Now there are plenty of times you don't have a choice. The mind's going to go off. You're not going to usually say, "Oh, I'm about to have a fantasy now about what's for lunch tomorrow." Usually you don't see that until you've already gone over the recipe for the dinner party fifteen times. But in that moment you wake up and notice, "Oh, right, I'm sitting in the meditation hall. I'm not really in the supermarket" — in that moment, you do have a choice. Do I want to stay in the supermarket? Do I want to get into self-recrimination? Or do I just want to say, "Okay, wanting. May I be safe"? Just that simple, that non-reactive.

We can't force results. We can't force some feeling of expansive loving-kindness. But we can be patient. We can be simple and humble and learn to trust that if we have the commitment and the willingness to simply be present, to try and be kind, to not turn against ourselves, then the truth of our connectedness with ourselves and with others will naturally begin to shine forth. And we begin to see that metta really isn't a deluded or a blind state at all. It's really the truest expression of our humanity, our common humanity.

I just want to end with one quotation I read that was really quite beautiful. This is from a review of a book by a woman — she and her husband were Harvard academics on the big career track. They wanted children, they got pregnant, and they found out before the baby was born that it was going to have Down syndrome, a form of mental retardation. All their friends were saying, "Have a therapeutic abortion." But they just didn't want to do that, so they didn't. And all their friends thought they were crazy. They had this baby.

And she said it turns out that this baby was the most wonderful thing that ever happened in their lives. They left Harvard, moved to New Mexico, so that they could step back—I mean, they still had careers, but the career wasn't the most important thing anymore.

This is the woman speaking. She's talking about how she once spoke to an entering class of Harvard Medical School students about her pregnancy and her decision to keep the baby. Adam, the baby, was asleep on her lap at the time. After the speech, she was approached by an elderly professor. He had just become the grandfather of a little girl with Down syndrome. As he talked to her, he stroked Adam's soft blonde hair and wept. He loved his granddaughter with inexplicable openness, and the experience had

changed his whole life.

Whoever said that love is blind was dead wrong. Love is the only thing on this earth that lets us see each other with the remotest accuracy.

So let's just sit quietly for a moment.

Thank you for your attention.

This afternoon we're going to get into a topic that's been on people's minds since the last time we've been together, and that is where we go from here.

I want to say hello to everyone. As most of you know, Bhante has been on retreat and has just come out to be here with us. So we're honored and really delighted to have your presence. Do you remember how to talk?

"Sure. You'd be really surprised if I didn't know."

How's it been going?

"Good. There's still a bit of construction going on around the place, so until the contractors are finished, we're just having an open routine during the day. A lot of solitary time. It's agreeable."

And Mary, you came in towards the end of the morning. Want to say hello?

"I don't think there's anything to say except hello. I'm really happy to be here and spend this last day and a half with you."

I know there's been a planning committee that's met a few times, which we'll hear from in a little while. But I thought I would share with you some thoughts I've had and maybe update you on things that have been going on regarding where we go from here.

It's been interesting hearing from the different teachers. I've been asking each of the teachers who've come and stayed with us, as they end their time, if there are any words of offering or advice for the group. A number of teachers have emphasized the importance of staying in touch—colleagues, sangha. So we have to figure out a good way to do that, one that works for the group and really supports you.

Here's been my thinking. One possibility is for the group to get together once a year. At the same time, there's another group that I'll be starting—it's not clear yet whether that will be at the end of this year or the beginning of next year. Actually, I've been more focused as far as dates and planning on this group.

What I'd like to do, and I think I put this out in an email to you, is get the larger teaching community more involved besides just the Spirit Rock teachers. One, I think it's healthy for you to have input from people

outside the radical left of the Dharma teaching world. I really respect all the different Dharma perspectives, honestly. And also, I'd like this not to be so Spirit Rock-focused, which means including all the different teachers in the community. I would love to see this be something that can support Dharma communities that other teachers are involved in as well.

So what I did, I wanted to see about having a meeting for this group on the East Coast. And I think I mentioned that Tara Brach said that she would be interested in being involved and supporting in some ongoing way.

I also, ideally, had in my mind that I'd love to see you have more contact with Joseph, and him have more connection with you. Sharon, if she's open to it and interested. Carol Wilson, who perhaps many of you know is a very dear friend of mine and somebody who I respect tremendously, and who is a kind of bridge between East Coast and West Coast. She comes out here and teaches with us and is also starting to be encouraged to do some teacher training on the East Coast.

So I wanted to have something happen there, and ideally the one time that it could happen where Carol and Joseph and Sharon, if she's into it, could be involved would be before the three-month course. It could also be after the three-month course, although actually in January there's usually the staff retreat, but it starts getting cold after that. And besides, after the three-month course, the teachers are kind of burned out.

So I called and just put out some feelers to see if, one, the study center is a possibility and also if teachers would be open to it. The study center couldn't hold everyone on an accommodating basis, but they have retreats or workshops where people come and meet at the study center but stay in town at various motels and inns. I spoke with Joseph about it and Carol, and they are both open to that happening.

I want to share with you some delicacies about this as well. There are some Dharma politics to be worked out. And there are some valuable things for you to keep in mind as I explain a little bit of the Dharma politics.

By the way, I spoke with the study center and Andy Olendzki, and I had a really nice conversation. You probably all know Andy Olendzki, who's the head of the study center and a scholar of the Pali Canon and the suttas. He's quite open to us being there and would even be willing to rearrange some dates that had been planned for us to be there. So it's possible. And I invited him to participate as well.

So here's the thing, just to be straight about it. We all know this is an incredible program, right? Not just because of any one person, but because the group has manifested so beautifully and has supported each other, and because of all the great Dharma work that you've been doing around the country.

But not everybody knows what has been happening here. And different people have different concerns. Here are two main concerns from outside of our teaching community.

One: who are these guys? Who are these community Dharma leaders? Remember, that was the first question—what is a community Dharma leader? Well, now it's more, who are the community Dharma leaders? People don't know you like I know you and the teaching community knows you. Are you really qualified to be sharing the Dharma? Gina's shaking her head no. But as Hillel said, "If not me, who? If not now, when?" And for some reason, you've been invited and have been doing a beautiful job. But there is that concern: who are these people, are they qualified, and what are they doing?

And it's not just what are you doing now with your communities, but what are you doing with your practices? A number of people—Joseph and a few others—have said, and Eugene in his closing words was saying, make sure that your practice is at the forefront of your Dharma work.

I spoke with Sharon, who said just one thing that she would really hope is that you consider yourself Dharma students, even before Dharma leaders. Because as Joseph and Jack were saying today, it's so seductive, isn't it? And that identification with role, which we've been talking about since the beginning, will be an ongoing issue. Even for people who've been leading retreats for fifteen years, it's an issue. So it's really something for you to keep in mind, and also something for you to know that other teachers outside of our community are also keeping in mind and watching.

Another concern is the parameters that we have an understanding or agreement upon. When we started, it was spelled out that this was to authorize, encourage, and support people to be teaching classes, beginning classes, ongoing sitting groups, day-longs, and weekend retreats.

And obviously, there is a tremendous need and demand. Your communities might say, "Hey, let's do a two-week retreat. Let's do a month-long retreat. Let's really go for it." And there's a need there. We might, out of really caring, want to respond to that need, but that raises flags for people. It really does.

I know some people in this group, even before the group started—I can think of one who's actually no longer in the group—had been doing some teaching before coming to the program. We didn't want to exclude them or say, "No, you can't do what you were doing before." And a couple of people here were invited by teachers to teach retreats with them. But it is a very delicate and tricky subject that people are watching.

I think you should be aware of this, not just for your own sense of playing within your game—knowing what your healthy limits are—but for the whole program, this current group, and future programs as well. It's something to take quite seriously. The temptation will be there, coming from the best possible intention. But it does cast some question for some people on the program and what we're doing.

So those were some questions and concerns that have had to be addressed before the study center can just slot us in. I've done what I can to start addressing those concerns, and I'll share with you what I've done.

I wrote a letter, emailed it to everybody in the larger community whose email addresses I had, explaining what the program has been, what's happened, and talking about the next program, the next group. What I

did was ask for people to give names of candidates for the next group. First, because I wanted to get as many good, qualified people as possible. And second, I wanted to have them buy into the program and realize that this is not just a Spirit Rock enterprise. This is our Vipassana community. It can be a program for all.

What I said was: please give me names for the next program, if you're interested, by the end of January. Then at the end of that time, I will post all the names that have been submitted and send them out to everybody again. If anybody has any reservations, let me know. So at least everybody will see that in the next program, people seem to be qualified.

I also said in that letter that I heard there might be some concerns people have about the program, about this program. And when I say this, I don't want to get you really paranoid. Mostly, people feel great about this program, but all the little niggling things have to be cleared up before there are no doubts.

So I said, please, if you've had any concerns, I'd like you to tell them to me, because I want to really do the best job I can in creating this program. I want to learn and have your input and your guidance, rather than having you carry some question in your mind, where we don't have the benefit of it, and it might color your whole perception of what I think is quite a good program. It's going quite well, and there's a lot of good Dharma work happening. So I've welcomed that, invited it.

One person who had some concerns sent a very nice email and also asked if I could hold seven slots for the next group. So that's the kind of thing that happens as they start feeling more connected.

This is something, again, that we've talked about in your own communities. If there are any kind of grumblings out there, although it might not be an easy thing to do, invite the feedback. Because in the long run, it's going to serve you a whole lot better anyway. The talk will be going on. You might as well hear it straight on, and then you can deal with it.

So I'm kind of figuring—and I said please contact me by the end of January—if people don't have concerns other than the ones who've shared them with me, or if they do have concerns and haven't talked about them, then they've had the opportunity to, and they just haven't moved on it. And actually, that's felt pretty good to people like Joseph and Carol, that at least we've given that space for that to happen.

So that kind of gives you a sense of the delicacies of learning a little bit about Dharma politics. I guess the essence of it is just have a smile on your face, welcome feedback, and say thank you, I really appreciate it.

By the larger community, do you basically mean the IMS, Spirit Rock community?

IMS, Gaia House, Spirit Rock. I've emailed people in Europe, in South Africa. There was a big teacher's conference in the summer and I got a lot of email addresses. So just everybody in the Vipassana community worldwide that I know.

So there's a possibility of us getting together in September if we're to be done on the East Coast. The dates

that I think tentatively we were looking at were September, after a two-day sit here with the teachers, like September 12th, which is a Tuesday, and then on through maybe from Tuesday to Sunday or something like that.

So that's kind of where we're at on that end. The thing is, if that happens, then probably I will start the next program, the next CDL program in January here. And I told Marianne to save some dates for us to do that. If it doesn't happen at the Study Center, or for whatever reason that doesn't happen, then I would be more inclined to start the next program in the fall here. And one other possibility would be that we come back here in January instead of going to the East Coast. Again, I said to Marianne, hold some dates. I don't know whether it'll be for the next group here in January or for this group in January, and we'll do something with the other group in the fall.

I would love to see ongoing contact be part of the process. I'd love to see this group having ongoing contact with each other, whether it's the listserv or website that's being discussed, and also a connection with the new group. I could see, at some point, having retreats with just CDL people, annual retreats or something like that.

Actually, I should say just on a personal level, the thought of coming and leading or being part of leading a week-long retreat here, for me, is great. I schedule a few retreats a year and this would be a wonderful retreat. It's a bit different when it involves coordinating teacher involvement and presentations. So I just want to put that out to you. Whether it's here or even traveling, even if it's going to the middle of the country or on the East Coast, doing a retreat, a silent retreat, I'd love to sit in silence with you, do a talk in the evening or whatever we decided to do.

So I think I'll stop here. The only other thing before the planning group goes is at some point, whether it's this afternoon or later on, I want to look at the whole issue of mentoring and what that will look like for the continuation of this group. I mentioned in that letter to the larger teacher community that when they nominate somebody as a candidate for the program, it's not just "oh yeah, this person asked me, good luck with them." It's that you feel good enough about them that you would consider being a mentor for them or take some role of active support.

Hopefully that will make it so that the people who are mentors for the current group, if there's been a good mentor relationship, don't have to take on five more people. And also, again, more involvement from the teachers outside the Spirit Rock community.

Question from participant: I certainly see the political reason for doing that, and I think it's extremely wise, but then it seems like it kind of puts the teachers in the position of recommending people that they know really well. In other words, people that are in their group.

Well, yeah, but the thing is that when a teacher recommends somebody, it's not necessarily somebody that they're in the same community with. It's people that have been on retreats whose practice they really

value. That was mostly what I've been encouraging—people whose practice warrants and whose natural paramis warrant them being Dharma leaders. But as a little extra incentive, I said think about, besides that, if there are people who could be of real support for your local community who can fill all the requests that you can't do. So there are two ways that teachers would recommend people.

And even the question of the whole mentoring here has come up. Sometimes it's worked really well and sometimes less well. We can take a look at that when we explore that issue.

So anything else that you want to ask me before the planning group goes ahead? They've asked for about an hour to explore and present.

Question from participant about getting teacher support, noting it feels like karma that people end up in places without much teacher support, and that it seems like unless you move...

What would that look like, or what are you asking? I bet if you look at who teachers nominate, the greatest number will be in the local area.

I mean, I may be wrong, but take a look. I'm not talking about this group. I'm talking about the group coming. And if you see that happening, then I would really look at what Rosemary said and see if there's some other way to stay connected to the communities that don't have a lot of people involved.

And actually, another thing is there have been a few places like Washington or New York or Colorado where there's been a benefit in having a few people work together and kind of having a critical mass. So I could see how it would be really helpful if you're kind of a lone orphan out there in the wilderness and there's somebody else in your community who's got really strong practice—you know, to consider them for the next program. Ideally, and so I'm open to those suggestions, ideally if they were people who knew, had some relationship with some teacher so that the teacher could sponsor them. But I'm still open to other possibilities. We'll continue what's going on one way or another. It's more about the East Coast branching out. There just needs to be an opportunity for anyone's concerns to be heard.

I see that now you're going to be communicating with a much larger body of people looking at you.

Well, they're looking anyway. I'd rather have them look from the inside than the outside. I mean, why not?

For this group, I sent out a letter to everyone—IMS, Gaia House, and Spirit Rock. And there were a few people that were nominated through IMS and Gaia House. There were a handful. There were a number of people who were nominated or whose names were given, and I sent applications to them and never heard from them. They just kind of put it in the waste paper basket or whatever. So that was a little statement right there. But there were some people—Claire was nominated from a few people on the East Coast. And Tamara and Sandra also. So there's been some involvement, and people have appreciated it from the outset, but I just wanted to open it up and include them on the inside.

Someone asked about my concern about the nominations for the next round of people coming via

teachers—is that so that they're kind of taking care of the politics of it, so that everyone's coming through an approved channel? It's twofold. One, because I respect teachers' estimations of people's practice. And also to include them and give them a chance to have input into the program.

One person offered this perspective: there's actually quite a lot of groups here where people would recognize within their own community very worthwhile individuals who might not have been spotted by various teachers. Because if you're coming in and you're teaching a retreat for a hundred people or eighty people, when you've got a ten-minute interview every couple of days, you've got to be pretty sharp to say, "Oh, this is a good one." So I would tend to encourage more weight coming from the input from these folks to the people they're actually working with and functioning alongside, rather than having that as the primary criterion. Personally, I feel that's worth more weight.

That's good to hear. And like I said a moment ago, I'd be open to that. In so far, I've been more concerned about teacher buy-in. Can I keep getting other teachers on board? But that makes sense.

We talked about this a little bit last week. Someone in our community came up to me after I'd given a talk one night and said, "I really want to be a teacher. I want to become a teacher. How did you become a teacher?"

And I said I'd like to hear a little bit about that. My impression of the traditional way that one becomes a teacher is that a teacher says, "Go out there and teach." Not "Gee, boss or guru, I want to go and teach now." That's not really the way it goes, right? It comes from the top down.

So it seems like you're trying to use that model in a more structured way by saying, you know, make these formal recommendations and send them applications and all that. And yet I do hear this thing that there are communities where maybe even the community should nominate someone—a group out there somewhere.

I don't know how you know about that. This is a puzzling piece, because it might be that there'd be somebody in your community that you would know better than we would know. But let's assume this person has done a fair number of retreats and a lot of practice. If you brought them to the attention of a teacher—perhaps it's someplace that James has traveled to a lot—then both could make the nomination. It seems highly unlikely that there's going to be somebody whose practice is fabulous, who's done gazillions of retreats, and there's not a teacher anywhere who knows them. That just doesn't seem possible. And I would really want whoever would be doing the program to be steeped in intensive practice. So I'd say at least five years of experience and five retreats, at a minimum.

And you raise a point that actually a lot of teachers have to deal with all the time: "I want to apply for the job. Where do I sign up?" If you knew how many people asked, "I hear Jack Kornfield has a teacher training program. How do I find out more information about it? Where do I apply?" I wouldn't need Donna if I had a nickel for every time that came up.

One of the things the teachers actually asked for, because it's been awkward for them—even teachers outside of the Spirit Rock community have been saying, "I've had a number of people tell me they want to join the Dharma Leaders program." And it's a little awkward saying no. So I actually said in the letter that there's officially a limit of two slots per teacher. And if you have more than that, I'd consider it. But that'll be a simple way to say no—my slots are filled.

I may be missing something, but I don't see what the problem is with either approach, or both. It would be like inviting people here to also be submitting names, with no assurance that there are people whose names they submit who can make the final cut. And January 31st was just something I wanted to start sending out applications for new people, but it's not a hard and fast deadline.

Anyway, that's mostly about the next group, and I want to bring it back to this group as well.

My understanding of the original purpose of the group was to be able to have places all over the country where dharma would be held in their communities. I did that last time, actually. I asked specifically teachers who I knew went to certain areas to consider somebody from this area or that area. And these are the names that came through.

But yeah, I definitely have in mind—like with New York, Tamara and Sandra were just, I think, the last two people to come into the program. I really wanted to have somebody from New York, because that's my hometown. And they need it there. Then I didn't know that Gina would create that critical mass there, but that's one of the really great delights—everything that's happened in New York. That just kind of happened at the last moment, really. I certainly want to look for areas that need some support. And Soren, who started out as local, ended up in New York.

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