Patience in Mettā

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 52:15

If this is the first time that you've done a loving-kindness retreat—or maybe even if you've done other ones before—you might be discovering by now that metta, or loving-kindness, has many different aspects. You can experience it in various ways, and perhaps some of those aspects have very little to do with our expectations or our ideas about what loving-kindness should feel like or how we should experience it.

Tonight I want to talk mostly about a particular, less flamboyant aspect of loving-kindness, but one which is, I think, particularly helpful to tune into at this time of the retreat. It's also an aspect that really opens us to deep acceptance and freedom. This is the aspect of metta that is sometimes called patience, or open acceptance. It's not too flamboyant.

I remember a conversation I had a couple of years ago with a man who was on a Vipassana retreat. He really wanted to talk about loving-kindness and his resistance to it—his sort of negative feeling about loving-kindness and why he didn't really want to practice it or think it was a good idea. I think this shows one of our inaccurate expectations or ideas about what love is. To him, metta conditioning us to really accept whatever arises, to meet whatever arises with friendliness, was a form of weakness, of real passivity, leading to victimization, to letting ourselves be used as a doormat. Just this kind of namby-pambiness where everything's okay, everything's lovely.

This corresponds, I think, to some of the ways that in our culture we experience the idea of love—ideas that carry over into what we perhaps unconsciously associate with metta. One aspect that we often think of as love is what you could call sentimentality: everything is kind of soft and rose-colored. It's the kind of thing in movies when lovers are tripping through a beautiful field of flowers and Mozart is playing in the background and everything is just so perfect. And of course they have to end it with "they lived happily ever after"—which, as we know, is impossible—but they have to end it there because you really can't keep up that illusion of soft, beautiful, everything's-nice perfection.

It's easy to drift into that sort of sentimental idea of love and to bring that into what we might expect of metta: that somehow all our experience turns nice, and if we're filled with metta, everyone we meet is really so sweet and pleasant, and the world takes on that rosy glow. But we can forget that that's not what happens exactly, and looking for that just sets us up for trouble. That's not love with wisdom. And metta comes with wisdom. Metta arises from wisdom, is associated with wisdom, with seeing things as they are.

The flip side of our inaccurate assumptions about love is not weak but really strong—the real sense of passion, which is usually blind, but leads to incredible strength and sacrifice and willingness to be together, willingness to die for love, love of country, love of another person, whatever. This real strength

can lead to a sense of blind passion. In our loving-kindness practice, it can subtly, at times, lead us to expect that the metta should be these throes of ecstatic bliss. Most of the time, that's really the culmination of it, and if we're not experiencing it that way, we think we're not there yet. In fact, we may believe we've never experienced one single instance of metta at all, because we don't experience it that way. But I can promise you will not always experience it that way. And it would be exhausting, I think, personally. I'm one of the people who rarely experiences things that way. But again, that blindness, that passion is associated with clinging, with attachment. And this is also not the true love, the pure love that comes from wisdom.

Metta arises from wisdom, and one way that I like to express the essence of wisdom is the deep recognition of our intrinsic wholeness, of our essential inner completeness. Metta is a powerful force that lets us access this deep truth—not an intellectual truth of "oh yes, we're essentially complete," but experientially knowing, living from that place of inner wholeness, of completeness.

The Buddha often said that everybody wants to be happy. I think—this is me now, not the Buddha—that the real yearning, that yearning for happiness, that yearning for whatever it is we're yearning for, is at least in my own experience a yearning for that unity, a yearning for coming home to deep inner connection, to true peace.

The sad aspect of our experience is that in that yearning for deep completion, we don't really see—we somehow have lost sight of the fact—that we've already got it. We keep looking outside to experience, to people, to whatever, to try and somehow feel whole again, somehow feel complete.

I read in a newspaper last year a little description of an Oprah Winfrey show. I assume you all know this is a talk show—I've actually never seen it. But she was mimicking a movie called *Sleepless in Seattle*, which I think was about a widower who called into a radio show to try and meet a partner. On Oprah's show, she had five men who had, in some recent period of time, lost their wives. I think they had children too, and good jobs—doctors or lawyers or something. I assume they were probably nice-looking; it didn't really mention that. But the point of this program was simply introducing these guys. I mean, what can you really get to know about some guys sitting on Oprah Winfrey for an hour? And then she invited any women who were interested—so this was rather heterosexually biased—to write in letters asking for a date.

Two weeks later, she came on her show with a bulldozer. She had received 60,000 letters. These guys had actually received 60,000 letters from women looking for love, looking for happiness, looking for a partner. It made me really sad in a way—the loneliness in our culture and the lack of connection, of family, of whatever. We can read all kinds of sociological interpretations into it, but my point for now is simply this: that deep yearning for completion, for wholeness, keeps sending us outward when what we seek is already here.

is that to me this was a great example of how we posit our happiness, how we think that somehow

completion can only be found outside of ourselves—sometimes way outside of ourselves. And it's precisely this looking that keeps us from recognizing we're already home.

Loving-kindness, this mettā practice that we're doing, is opening up our heart, opening up our experience so that more and more deeply we can come to recognize this place of inner completion—to dwell here, to rest here more and more frequently, and to respond to other beings and to the world from a place of unity rather than from a place of fear, separation, and fragmentation.

There's a passage from a Tibetan text about how the sense of completion is already here within us:

Not knowing that this state is within oneself, how amazing that one searches for it elsewhere. Although it is clearly manifest like the radiance of the sun, how amazing that so few see it. No matter how much happiness and sorrow is experienced, how amazing that this state is never impaired or improved on in the slightest. This self-awareness is naturally free from the very first. How amazing that it is realized by just resting at ease in whatever happens.

Resting at ease in whatever happens. This is really one of the aspects of mettā, one of the ways of being in our life and in the world that mettā opens up to us. And that's the aspect I want to talk about tonight.

What we call in English "patience"—which is pretty undramatic and even boring, we could say—opens us up to this resting at ease in whatever happens, which is truly connected and beautiful as a way to live our lives. It's transformative. And this acceptance, true acceptance, patience, is mettā.

I think it's often something you might experience here in the retreat, but because it's so unflamboyant and often nothing special—just a kind of mild friendliness, a sense of okayness with things—we can easily overlook it and think, "This isn't quite good enough. It's not quite juicy enough." We try to work it up a little bit. Or we might think, "Patience? I didn't really come here for that. I was expecting some kind of really blissful, far-out unitive state that I would reach at least by the end—hopefully by the fifth day—and stay there, maybe with breaks for eating, until the retreat ends. And if I do enough retreats, that'll be it for the rest of my life."

You can see that there's a way—I know that's a little exaggerated, but it hits the nerve—there's a way that we're still looking for loving-kindness to bring us out of our sense of fragmentation. And it's a false sense of fragmentation. We're not fragmented, but we think we are. We live as if we were. We perceive experience as if we were somehow separate or fragmented. And we look for mettā as a way to take us out of it—out of the fragmentation, the separateness, the loneliness—but also it should take us out of everyday mundane experience as well.

I mean, the stuff that's been going on the last two days, the large part of some of your experiences—does that count? Is that what you're looking for? The knee pain, the sleepiness, the incredible boredom with these four phrases that pound in your head like a drill, this over and over coming back, coming back, the effort it requires. And then when you say you're putting out effort, we say, "Take it easy." And then the

next minute we say, "Be continuous, keep it up no matter what you're doing—but take it easy." Not exactly what—well, we might not have even consciously known what we had in mind, but usually it's not that. Usually that's not what we think when we think about practicing mettā.

And this is exactly the place where patience—not as "okay, I'll wait it out till it gets better," which is not patience but a mild form of aversion—but a true "okay" with what is. It's in these difficult places, or simply mundane places, or just sort of boring places, that we begin to discover truly what mettā is and truly what the power of this open, accepting quality that mettā brings to experience.

Acceptance and patience arise from mindful, clear seeing. So it's arising again from wisdom. As we pay attention to our experience throughout these days, we can see that one of the ways mettā, acceptance, and the clear seeing from which acceptance arises helps to heal us from fragmentation is by allowing us to discover moment to moment how this sense of fragmentation is being perpetuated—how it's arising in our moment-to-moment relationship with experience, how it's being perpetuated throughout the day through more moments of experience. Through not really looking at what's happening and then drawing conclusions and interpretations about what's happening, we take ourselves really far away from just being here and now.

Let me give an example of what I mean. Just reflect for a minute on any of the various experiences you've had today. I know that we're pretty much doing the same thing as a form—holding to the sense of self or benefactor, repeating the phrases. Within that, there are varying degrees of loving-kindness or friendliness or acceptance—or heart of stone. And there are also other experiences. Physical experiences of comfort or dis-ease or pain or heaviness or sleepiness. Mental and emotional experiences of frustration, discouragement, love, boredom, self-judgment, self-loathing, sleepiness—whatever.

So just for a moment, reflect on all the various beautiful experiences, difficult experiences, sort of boring experiences. And if you can remember: what was the attitude of heart, of mind, that would flow into and meet these experiences?

Or did actually, on the unpleasant experiences, was there any semblance of flowing in and meeting the experience?

Now the attitude of heart, of metta, of true acceptance, of patience, is a real open-hearted, full meeting of whatever's arising. Without judgment, without trying to change, without hating, without loving. It's a wholehearted embracing of each event—whether it's knee pain, whether it's heart like a stone, whether it's feeling really loving and fulfilled, whether it's just ho-hum, another sitting. Whatever it is that arises, this willingness to be fully present, to experience it quite openly, not cling to it if it's beautiful, not try to make it stay, not flinch away if it's difficult or unpleasant or not what we had in mind. That's the attitude of metta.

But is that our habitual reaction to experience? If things are just coming and going and we're trying to get

into loving-kindness? It becomes more habitual through this cultivation of the intention of metta that we're doing, absolutely. But one of the reasons that we are really working so hard, devoting so much time and energy to the cultivation of the intention of deep loving-kindness, of self-acceptance, is because it's not, for many of us, the habitual response or reaction of heart to experience that comes up.

Most likely, most habitual is that if something is difficult or unpleasant—painful physically, painful emotionally, or unpleasant simply in that it's not what we wanted, that it doesn't meet some idea we have of what should be happening—that in itself can be extremely unpleasant. The tendency when we're not really meeting or paying attention, when any of these experiences come up, is: "Ah, this is a mistake, this shouldn't be happening, I've got to get rid of it," or "I've done something wrong," or "Somehow this has to change so I can do the practice properly, so I can get on with things."

If a pleasant experience arises—feeling very loving or very light and at ease in the body, or in some way it meets your expectations, even if only for a moment—quite insidiously, the thought can come up or not even quite form: "Ah, this is right. Now somehow I've got on the right track and I've got to figure out how to make it stay this way, and in fact get more this way until it doesn't change anymore."

And if it's neutral, actually, we just don't even notice it. And then it becomes difficult because it's not intense enough, and so then we've moved into difficulty.

Right here, in this very basic relation to emotional, physical, inner or outer experience—this rejecting of certain things, denying, avoiding, this clinging to others, kind of madly trying to make things happen or make things stay, choosing one experience as the way things should be and throwing others away—this in itself is creating a sense of real fragmentation in our lives. We're rejecting half of our life experience as not being valid, as not being okay. We're looking for other things that aren't here that we need to be complete, to be fulfilled. And then there's a whole level in the middle that we're just ignoring completely and not really alive and vital in.

These filters of clinging and attachment, of aversion to what's difficult, of not even noticing what's neutral—they become filters through which we experience and evaluate and perceive experience. And they keep us spinning in confusion. Because it's through this filter then that we'll try for something more pleasant to come back, to find that sense of completion, to find true happiness. And of course, whatever pleasant thing we find, at some point it changes, it goes away. So then we look for another and we look for another, not seeing that we need to see through the filters themselves.

This whole sense of confusion, fragmentation, limitation—the habit of mind that keeps us in the sense of separation, this particular one I'm speaking about—is fed very deeply by not recognizing the truth of impermanence. By somehow, even though consciously we know everything changes, we're all born, we all die, there are seasons, nothing lasts—even though consciously we know that, to really on a deep level live from that place, so that we respond to experience knowing that things change, that I cannot control that, that if something beautiful goes away it's not my fault, and if something difficult comes up I'm not to

blame, that none of it will last—if we really related to our life, in our life, to experience from that deep understanding, you'd see so much of our sense of struggle, of our sense of fragmentation and limitation, would fall away. Because the sense of looking outside for something that's changing to bring us ultimate satisfaction would go away.

And if you think of it, any time during the next day or so when you realize that the metta sort of faded and you're in a sense of some kind of struggle with whatever's going on—whether it's knee pain or back pain, whether it's a feeling of sadness or a sense of self-judgment, whatever—see if you can notice that there's some underlying, maybe not quite conscious assumption. One, that what's happening is never gonna change: "I'm gonna have to live the rest of my life feeling this miserable, with my knee hurting, hating myself this much, being this unconcentrated," or whatever. Or how much comes from a sense of something that you liked having gone away, and the despair and the sense of self-blame that can come from that—that somehow I've done something wrong, I lost it, and I have to find a way to get it back.

And it's just this shrinking back from the unpleasant and lunging into the pleasant that keeps us from opening fully to what's here right now. It's what keeps us from seeing that we're already whole.

So metta, this loving-kindness practice—why it's so revolutionary is because it's a real training in opening our hearts and opening to our life experience in a whole other way. It's revolutionary because it's a real training. It's not like we just have to wait and hope that a bolt of insight hits our heart and we suddenly see through all the clinging and all the aversion. That'll happen from time to time. But along the way, each time that we can come back to a moment of metta, strengthen in that moment simply the intention of well-wishing to whoever it is, to whatever the situation is, that's a moment of strengthening that ability to be really patient and accepting and not feeding our old habit of looking for happiness where it can't be found.

So this: a moment of metta brings a real equality of attitude. We cultivate that through the formal practice. As you know, we'll go through different sets of people. We start with people that are supposed to be easy to feel metta for—not a contradiction. I say "supposed to be" because often for ourselves it is a contradiction. But a benefactor, a dear friend. Then it moves to a neutral person, and then we move to a so-called difficult person, cultivating a true well-wishing, a true equality of attitude to each of these people.

And it really works. I know that at some point the person I was using for my neutral person—I didn't even know her name, I was sitting here and she was sitting there—and after a few weeks, if I saw her somewhere

I would get so happy—just this happiness would come up. I knew nothing about her, just from the cultivation of well-wishing for somebody.

As the metta practice goes on, it's very carefully planned so that we open up the field and consciously

begin to cultivate the ability to tune in to some lovable aspect of anybody or any situation. And then you find that this begins to be the attitude we bring into meeting whatever experiences arise.

Since we're here on retreat, you might think that if you're not saying the phrases, you're not cultivating metta. But each time you bring this openness, this equality of attitude, this really flowing into experience—that is metta, that is loving-kindness. And it's not blind, it's not one-sided. Actually meeting the difficult with this open acceptance brings a spaciousness and an inclusivity of experience that's quite amazing.

I'll give a small example. Yesterday I was driving home in the afternoon, and for some reason I was physically just really tired and heavy. I was driving home aware of that, feeling "I'm so tired, I'm so heavy. Why am I so tired?" I was aware of it—I knew that's how I felt—but it wasn't the awareness of mindfulness, of non-judging, needing acceptance. My heart and mind were really shrinking back from the experience of heaviness and tiredness. There was aversion to it. And that was all I was aware of—that and the road. That was my world. It was very constricted.

Then, not consciously, I didn't decide "Oh, I should do metta." What I did was simply let my real open attention flow into the physical experience of the tiredness and heaviness itself—whereas before I had been shrinking back, I just flowed all my energy and mindful attention into it. Feeling heaviness. Feeling tiredness. Just being fully present without judgment or expectation.

Very interesting—in just a moment the tension eased, because so much of the tension was the result of aversion, resistance to what I was experiencing. The tension eased and a real spaciousness came in. I stayed tired, of course, but all of a sudden, quite spontaneously, I said, "Wow, isn't this a beautiful day?" Then I started noticing little chipmunks, which are all over, playing on the side of the driveway as I was driving. "Oh, isn't that cute? Isn't that sweet?" Just this whole sense of inclusivity of life—that there's a lot of beautiful stuff, some really pleasant things happening—and I was still feeling tired and heavy, yes, but it really didn't matter very much.

That's just a little example. But that's what I mean by bringing the attitude of metta, of patience and acceptance, to our experience.

Especially in these first days of retreat—well, really all along, but especially in the first days when the focusing and the being pulled inward of the metta hasn't developed as strongly yet—you'll be much more aware of physical discomforts, annoying sounds outside, things going on, emotional states. There will be times when what else is going on is a little too strong to simply notice it and come back to the metta. That's the time when our mindfulness, our awareness practice, can really come to our aid. And the awareness is really grounded in the field of metta. In a way, the two are corollaries—they're really intertwined, especially the attitudes.

Bringing in the quality of bare attention, of moving directly into experience when you're beginning to feel

a struggle, not able to stay with the metta—bring your bare attention immediately into the experience with this attitude of patient, loving acceptance. Bare attention to the bare experience, as opposed to our interpretations and ideas and judgments about experience.

With my tiredness yesterday, before I used bare attention to flow right into the physical experience of tiredness itself, what I was caught in—knowing I was tired—I could easily have said, "Oh, I'm aware that I'm tired. There's awareness." There was awareness, but there wasn't mindfulness. There wasn't bare attention grounded in metta. Instead of really feeling the tiredness, I got into feeling I don't like it, I wish it would go away, it's happening because of X, Y, and Z, there's something wrong with me, something physically wrong, I should go to a doctor, I need a full checkup. You know how the mind just goes. And if we're not really paying attention, we say, "Oh yeah, I'm aware of that. I was really aware that I was tired"—sort of aware of this whole process, but not bringing attention into the bare experience.

And so that's something to really begin to pay attention to over these days, because there will be times when this is an invaluable tool—this bare attention grounded in metta.

When a difficult experience comes up, notice how you habitually respond. What constructs, what interpretations does the mind tend to get hooked into? If it's unpleasant, does it bring up aversion or fear? "I've got to get rid of this. Something horrible is going to happen. It's a mistake." Does it bring up self-judging? "This shouldn't be happening. It's happening because I'm no good, because I'm worthless, because I'm useless." Does it bring up a sense of outer anger? "It's happening because these people sitting around me are total jerks. It's happening because this place is really out to lunch. It's happening because the food isn't right."

Once you notice that you're beginning to get hooked into some interpretation, you might try to come back to the metta. "Okay, I know my knee hurts, I'll just come back. May I be happy." You send metta to the knee. "Uh-oh, another forty minutes. Uh-oh, I wonder if I'm going to have to go to the hospital. I wonder why Carol sits on the chair. I bet she really blew her knees out." And the mind goes on and on.

When you can begin to notice that that's what's happening, that's the time to see that you're getting hooked. Take your attention at that point off of the phrases and bring it right into—very lovingly but very openly—the actual experience of sensation in the knee itself. No expectation, no judgment, good or bad, no "it should go away if I do it right." Nothing of that. Just simply, lovingly, openly being there for it, being there with it. Notice what happens.

That is the quality of all-embracing metta—simply being with what is because it's there. It doesn't mean that we can't tell the difference between a painful sensation and a pleasant one. And of course, given our preference in life, we're not going to say, "I don't care if I stick my hand in a fire or not." We're not talking about losing discriminating wisdom. But we're talking about being able to open to life as it presents itself.

And as life presents itself, it's going to have the whole show. There are going to be many painful and

difficult moments in our bodies, in our hearts, in external experience. There are going to be many beautiful and loving and connected moments and pleasant moments. And there are going to be many that are sort of neutral. The quality that transforms our life is to meet each moment with a real open, affectionate curiosity—with an all-embracing willingness to be present because it's what is so. In that, you can find that we meet life with a real peace and spaciousness that is not dependent on having things change. And it's not dependent on receiving something from the outside in order to feel happy.

That's really one of the wonderful things about this loving-kindness practice. We see over and over that the happiness, the connectedness with ourselves, with other beings, with our own experience that's generated in the loving-kindness—no one else is beaming that into you and making it happen. And it's not that somehow it's being created artificially. It's really much more of a purification, a clearing away of the barriers, clearing away the false sense of limitation, of separation, of preference, that lets the loving-kindness, that lets the unitive energy begin to shine forth more and more.

So patience, metta, acceptance is not a sort of stepping back from experience. "Okay, I can be with this. I can be with this. I know it'll change." Not really. That's sort of indifference or fake patience. Real metta patience is actively connected—really actively connected to experience, very wholeheartedly present in experience, actively aware—yet with the bare experience itself, not constructing some tower of interpretation and personal story about it.

And seeing the whole show. The proximate cause in the commentaries, the proximate cause for patience to arise, is seeing things as they are. Patience is a result of true wisdom, of seeing things as they are. That's really quite profound. When we really see that things are changing, when we really understand that, patience—active connection without expectation, open acceptance—arises quite naturally. And it's not a kind of passive submission, "I can't do anything about it anyway." It's not passive at all. It's not victimization. It's active, very powerful, and it lends great strength and courage. Much more so, actually, I find, than the sort of pretend "I can put up with it" kind of false equanimity.

It's transformative. Seeing things as they are lets us meet whatever arises with deep acceptance. I don't know why it's so difficult for us to really get this—how things are.

Even just the simplicity of change. Look in your own practice and see how often we resist it. Look at the world, the rhythms of nature, the fact of seasons, the fact of day and night, the fact that we're all aging, that sometimes we're healthy, sometimes we're sick, sometimes we're happy, having a good year, and sometimes it's like a year from hell. You can look around and see how some friends are going through very beautiful times while others are going through very difficult times, and then two years later it will be switched around.

I have a good friend who said to me last year, "You know, I've been so happy. I wonder what's going to make it change." I thought that was a very wise thing to say, because he knew, of course, it would change. He was just wondering what would seem to be the catalyst for it.

Or we can see that even when something's beautiful, it isn't all beautiful—there's also difficult experience. We go outside, it's finally so beautiful after all these months, and the black flies are there immediately as soon as it gets warm. I can't stay outside for more than five minutes. It's just how it is. There are both sides—just like being really tired and it's also a beautiful day.

Opening deeply to one aspect, we open to all aspects. Trying to block out one aspect, even unconsciously, we block out access to our own completion. We block out access to true love and connection.

So in your practice here, in the simple metta practice, really know this: sometimes the practice will be calm, centered, connected, and the metta will seem to flow. Sometimes it will be restless, jumpy, boring. Your heart feels like a dead stone. Nothing's going on. That's just the way it is. There's absolutely nothing going wrong in that.

If we get away from knowing this, if we get lost again in our expectations, you can see what a rich field that creates for self-judgment. Getting lost in one slightly unpleasant experience that we don't see we're resisting or avoiding or thinking is a sign of our badness—it can lead into a whole world of self-loathing and everything bad we've ever done, everything we've ever failed at since we were five years old. You've had five thoughts in a row, one of them lasted five minutes. You come back and say, "See, I could never focus. I can't do this. I can't concentrate. I failed math when I was in third grade." And it'll just keep going and going. Then you wonder why you don't feel loving-kindness for yourself.

It really starts with something so simple as not accepting that in this moment the mind is wandering. In another moment it won't be wandering. Both are okay.

When we're not deluded anymore by changing conditions—not deluded into thinking that there's some lasting, unchanging condition we can create or hold onto that's going to bring us happiness—when we stop looking outside ourselves for that, this is what metta can open to us. Not that we think the metta itself stays in some unchanging way of experience. It will experience the whole range. But metta as an attitude, as a way that we greet life, far from being weak and passive, opens us up to the whole show with great courage—the courage of seeing things as they are, and the willingness to act that comes from real love and compassion.

And that sense of inclusivity—for me it's a kind of knowing that in any situation going on in the world, among people, when I'm really tuned into acceptance and patience with myself and others, I know that I could probably at some point act in any of the roles unfolding in that situation. Who am I to judge or say that one is better than another, or to withhold including a sense of well-wishing for one person because they don't deserve it?

What made me think of that—I just want to read something from the newspaper this morning. Just a little scenario, one of however many millions are happening in the world. It's a painful scenario. It's in Sarajevo. A young man, about twenty, was just walking across the street and was hit by sniper fire. It

struck him in the back, knocked him down, and he's paralyzed now.

But the scenario is this: as he was walking across and got hit, there was a television cameraman filming it. There was a United Nations peacekeeping soldier standing on the side under cover, frozen, watching the whole thing. And then there was a civilian who was galvanized to action, who came and yelled at the United Nations soldier to move his vehicle to cover the wounded man from the sniper. Then the civilian ran and dragged the young man out of the street.

It's interesting—a very strange scenario, but just a little synopsis of so many different ways of being happening in one situation. There's the sniper, the civilian shot on the city street, the television cameraman waiting there for something like that to happen so he can film it, the United Nations soldier who is really afraid and frozen and doesn't know how to act, and then the civilian who is galvanized and simply goes and helps.

It's just a scenario of life. To me it represented all the different ways that humans can be, captured in one little synopsis. And I could really see how, at different times, I could be any of those people.

The sense of metta is not to say, "Well, it doesn't matter if you shoot somebody, who cares?" I don't mean that at all. But for me, the challenge is: can I find the place in my heart that can open, really deeply open, to the fact that each of those things is happening? That is life. It isn't all beautiful. It isn't all ugly. It's the whole show.

And the power of metta, of this patience, of this open acceptance, is that it lets us be really alive there in the middle of the show. We embrace all aspects of ourselves, and in that way we really heal our sense of fragmentation. In embracing all aspects of ourselves with acceptance, we find that we can embrace aspects of others with acceptance and understanding.

This doesn't mean that we encourage people to kill. We might be able to be the one who could act. When we're not lost in fear, when we know things change, we might be the one who could act. But at another time we might be frozen in fear. And can that be okay too? Can we embrace all aspects of ourselves and all aspects of life?

This power of metta really lets us begin to do that. And in doing so, it absolutely transforms how we relate to ourselves and how we relate to life.

I want to end with a quotation from Dostoevsky. The language is a little different from ours, but I think he's basically talking about metta and embracing the whole show:

Have no fear of human sin. Love people even for their sin, for that love is the semblance of divine love and is the highest love on earth. Love all of God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand of it. Love every leaf, every ray of light, love the animals, love the plants, love everything. Because if you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day.

And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.

Or just an all-embracing acceptance.

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