Mettā: Near and Far Enemies

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 55:19

When I was in college, I began to get interested in Buddhism and read all the books I could get my hands on, which at that time were not very many. This is ancient history we're talking about. I was very inspired by the Buddha's degree of peace and calm, and also by the fact that somebody could be alive and not be afraid of dying. That was a revelation to me—that this was a human possibility. So I was very uplifted by the stories of practitioners and the Buddha's life.

Also at this time in my life, when I turned about twenty—I think this happens for a lot of people entering adulthood—my world really opened up in a big way. I started having very strong experiences of love. Sometimes it would happen through connections with people, sometimes through connections with nature, sometimes through music or art. But my heart was just opening in these really new and unexpected ways. It was very powerful for me.

But as strong as these experiences were, they were equally unstable and unreliable. I didn't know why they came, and I didn't know why they went away. And yet I had this deep longing to refine that field, to reconnect with that way of experiencing life. This connection became a strong motivating force in my taking up dharma practice.

As the years went by, I came to realize that one needed an open heart—which I had to do some clearing to rediscover—and one also needed to understand deeply how not to cling, what we could call the wisdom of emptiness. And then the access to love could become more available, more stable.

Rumi said that someone who does not run toward the allure of love walks a road where nothing lives. So I join you all in running toward the allure of love. It's a central factor in the Christian path and has long been recognized as a powerful force in spiritual development. In our tradition, it is the practice of loving kindness that is the most direct route to awakening this factor in our own hearts and minds.

The Buddha said—actually it wasn't the Buddha, but a later commentary written shortly after his death—that practicing loving kindness develops all seven factors of enlightenment, the forces that lead the mind into awakening. And the Buddha said that when loving kindness is developed to its fullest extent, it becomes a liberation of heart, a liberation of mind.

It's quite interesting that in our tradition we use our connection with people and other beings to open the door to this love. But as you feel it awaken, you'll find it transforms the whole world and your whole experience of life. Our avenue is through connection with people and other beings.

It's extraordinary to meet somebody who has developed this quality to a great extent. The degree to which

it's possible to experience this state, you can start to feel when you're around some of these people. One master in our tradition of loving kindness is a teacher named Ajahn Jumnian. Ajahn Jumnian is a monk from southern Thailand, about seventy years old now. He comes to Spirit Rock about once a year. He's been doing mettā practice for a very long time, and you can feel the effect of it in his energy and his level of happiness. He always seems to be happy.

So he'd come and teach—he likes to teach. Sometimes he's around for a week or so, and someone would ask him, "Well, Ajahn Jumnian, what would you like to do today? Would you like to go see the Golden Gate Bridge, or would you like to go to the beach in Point Reyes?" And he'd say, "Is there anybody who'd like to hear the dharma?" because he really loves to teach the dharma. But he said, "If there's no one who wants to hear the dharma, I'm happy to do whatever you like. If you want to take me to the beach, you can take me to the beach. And if nobody comes and we don't go anywhere, I'm happy to sit here because I'm always happy." And he seems to be like that. When you're in his presence, you just feel that joy that he radiates. He says that he hasn't had anger in thirty years, and it seems believable when you're in his presence. So it's a very inspiring example.

But that level of development wouldn't be possible if this seed of love wasn't already in us as part of our deepest nature, part of our human nature. So in the mettā practice, we're encouraging it to come, we're cultivating it, we're strengthening it, and we're making it arise more regularly.

We use this quality of mettā as the foundation. Once it's developed—that open-heartedness and connection with life—then when that open heart looks on suffering, the mettā simply morphs into the emotion of compassion, the second of the brahmavihāras. When that open heart looks on somebody's joy in their life, then it morphs into sympathetic joy or appreciative joy. And when the open heart can simply rest, then it stays in a balanced place, even in its awareness of all the joys and sorrows of life. And that's the brahmavihāra of equanimity. So loving kindness is the foundation of all the rest.

Once loving-kindness is developed, the others come about quite easily. So what supports the metta? What helps us develop it? I want to talk a little about how this practice works during our week together.

It's like gardening, which I'm sure many of you have reflected upon. Any spiritual practice resembles gardening. There are flowers, and there are weeds. You want to cultivate the flowers and dig out the weeds. You must be very patient and work at it day after day, maintaining real steadiness so the blooms can emerge.

Sally and I first met when we were working as gardeners in a Dharma community in England twenty-five years ago. We were doing intensive Dharma practice and gardening for the princely rate of three dollars an hour—the minimum agricultural wage in England at that time. We lived on this beautiful estate in southern England, which the owner had graciously offered as a site for our fledgling Dharma community.

Working in the garden day by day, I constantly saw images of how it mirrors meditation practice:

removing weeds and planting good seeds, then nourishing those seeds. This is what we're doing with every metta phrase—planting a good seed. As we continue nourishing those seeds, in time the flower grows, the plant emerges, and the blossom blooms.

What makes it a good seed? Every phrase becomes a good seed when we say it with genuine intention. You know in Buddhism that intention is the heart of everything we do. So as we say each phrase, what is the right intention? What makes that phrase a potent seed?

The right intention is simply that we mean it. Nothing more than that. When you say a phrase with sincerity, you're planting a beautiful seed.

This practice doesn't work like a mantra where we mindlessly repeat words again and again—that has very limited effect. But anytime you can truly mean the phrase for yourself or someone else, genuinely wishing happiness, you've planted a powerful seed. In formal terms, it's called a karmic seed: an action of mind bearing the intention of loving-kindness. It's a pure and powerful thing to do.

We are gardeners in this practice, responsible for planting karmic seeds. But we are not nature. Nature is the force that waters, provides sunlight, supplies minerals in the soil, and tells that seed when to sprout and how to grow. That's not our job. Gardeners can't force those processes. Our job is simply planting seeds, providing the best conditions we can, then letting nature—or the Dharma—do the real work.

The Dharma brings these seeds to fruition in experiences of love, compassion, and joy. Our work is planting seeds as carefully as we can. If we can bring care to each moment of saying the phrase, that's a powerful seed. If we miss it one moment, we try to catch it the next. This is our practice: planting seeds and letting nature take over.

Don't worry if you're doing much planting with no sprouts yet. Gardeners must be patient. Sometimes you wait most of a growing season before the plant appears. You can't tug on that plant to make it emerge quicker—you'll break it. You must be truly allowing, which means being genuinely patient. Remember, our job is only planting seeds, not forcing results.

Don't try to force feelings from your metta practice. We often think we must try hard to make metta come, but that very trying will squeeze it off and choke its life. As Sharda said, you need a light touch and must let it come naturally.

Sometimes it feels like nothing's happening in metta practice, and that's perfectly fine. Don't worry when it feels like nothing's occurring. Someone reported yesterday that sometimes metta would come very strongly, then completely disappear as if nothing were happening, then return strongly before disappearing again. Don't be concerned about these kinds of changes.

Don't feel like it's supposed to be strong all the time because it just can't be. That's like asking for a peak experience all the time, like the Calvin and Hobbes cartoon that Sally read. The heart's rhythm is that it

opens for a while and then it closes. It opens for a while and then it closes. And if we expect it to be different than that, then the head tries to put pressure on the heart and that's what causes the heart to shrink.

So I like to think of it that in this week together, this is kind of like a laboratory, a biological laboratory, where we want to learn to understand this kind of wild creature that is our heart. And we're feeding it these beautiful inclinations and beautiful suggestions, and then we just kind of want to sit back and listen and see how it responds. So if you have a child who's kind of shy or a wild animal, you know the thing to do is not stay right on top of them and put a lot of pressure because shy beings will recoil from that. But you want to give a lot of attention but in a very spacious way, and know that you're really interested, but not lean too hard.

So this is the kind of approach we want to take with our heart, to plant these great intentions and then to learn, oh, how is it going to behave? Does it have its own cycle of opening and closing? Are there conditions that make it able to open? What are the conditions that cause us to close with fear or contraction? So we just want to learn and observe all that. And the way to do it is to be like a new scientist with a really open mind discovering this new form of life which lives in us.

It may seem like one little phrase isn't very powerful. But one after another after another starts to build an incredible power. Those of you who have done vipassana retreats know that a moment of connecting with the breath feels like nothing in the beginning. So I feel a breath. So what? But then when we put one moment after another after another and we keep it going, that mindfulness, that awareness builds an incredible momentum. And in the same way in our practice of loving kindness, it's the contact with that caring, moment after moment after moment, that builds this same kind of momentum in the direction of love.

The Buddha said, "Don't disregard the accumulation of wholesomeness, saying, 'This will come to nothing.' By the gradual falling of raindrops, a jar is filled." So each phrase is just like a drop of rain. But as we keep letting them drop in, the biggest jar will eventually get filled from that.

Another reason sometimes metta feels like there's nothing happening is that we're looking for something dramatic. And sometimes metta is not very dramatic. It has a really broad range of feelings in the spectrum of metta. So you could say at the high end, there are these very strong feelings of intense love and even union with people or with nature, with the earth. And then a little down from that, there are really strong feelings of connection and friendship, human kind of love. Down a little bit from that, there's just a mild kind of friendship of appreciating somebody at a little bit of a distance.

And then down a little bit cooler than that is just the flavor of acceptance. Anytime you can be accepting of yourself or somebody else, metta is there. Because as Sharda said last night, there's no aversion. Anytime there's the absence of aversion, there is a form of metta. And even a little cooler than acceptance is the quality of patience. You know, you may get in the food line at lunch and you really want that next dish.

And somebody seems to be going really slowly. And the irritation starts to be noticed. Why can't they move a little faster? And then all of a sudden you go, oh, I can be patient. And the patience transforms that aversion into acceptance. And then even that quality of patience has the flavor of metta. So sometimes it's not very dramatic. Nonetheless, metta is there and growing any time the aversion is absent.

The practice is hard going in the early days. Again, as Sharda said last night, just saying a phrase one after another after another seems incredibly laborious sometimes. Vipassana practice has never looked so good as on a metta retreat. Because it's like, just let me rest, please. Please.

So I want to suggest a way to bring some more rest into your practice of loving kindness. You can actually bring a lot of silence into this practice. So you can play with this, and maybe I'll give these instructions again tomorrow morning. You can play with it a little bit then. Think of each phrase as having three parts. There's a part where you connect with your person, let's say your benefactor.

And so maybe you bring up an image of your benefactor, and that's step one. That's in silence. Or maybe you just say their name. That's pretty quiet, pretty easy.

Then the next step is you send the phrase to them. So that's the work. You have to turn the mind on and turn out the phrase and direct it to them. That's labor.

Then for the third step, I want to suggest come back after you say the phrase and rest in your heart center. Just bring the attention into the center of your chest and let it rest there for a moment. No words at this point. And what you pay attention to when you rest there could be the physical sensation. Also tune into the feeling that's present right then. It's almost like you're listening to the echo of that phrase.

The phrase is like offering a gift, let's say to your benefactor. And then you want to just tune in for a second. How did it feel to offer that gift? Let the phrase just resonate a little bit for you. And you might feel some kind of warmth or affection or metta there. You might feel other feelings. You might have been sending metta to your benefactor and you become aware of some way that they've disappointed you or some difficult interaction where you felt hurt by them. And so it may bring up fear or some resentment. All of that is okay. I'll talk in a few minutes about how to work with all the other kinds of emotions that come in. But in that resting time, take time to tune in to what it is you're feeling.

So the three steps are the connection with the person, the phrase itself, and then coming into the heart center and feeling the feeling. So in actual fact, these are three different areas for mindfulness. Those of you who have a Vipassana background and have worked with mindfulness, we're not moving very far away from mindfulness. We're just choosing different things to pay attention to. So we're mindful of the connection to the person, we're mindful of the phrase, and we're mindful of the feeling that is there after we say the phrase.

You could also say that these are the three objects that make up our concentration practice. Metta is a strong concentration practice. Some of you are already starting to report this in the interviews. You can

start to notice how it feels when you can string a few phrases together, how the mind collects around that and becomes quiet and a little firm. That's the feeling of concentration. So this will get stronger as the days go by because we keep coming back to these three points. The connection, the phrase, and the feeling.

All of these together—the moment of caring, the person that we feel some warmth for, the mindfulness of the present moment experience that we're having—all these are going together to create the sweet spot of meditation, where the present moment attention is developed as you've learned how to do it through mindfulness, and then it becomes suffused with the warmth of the loving-kindness.

This is the kind of balance of mind that we're looking to find through this practice in combination with the mindfulness practice. And you can think of these two, this fusing of the present moment attention with the warm feeling of the metta as a warm attention. This is really what we're trying to create. And once we find it through the metta practice, we can also find it in the mindfulness practice.

It's not to think that these two practices are really separate fundamentally. We want to shape the mind in the direction that it holds both. So that in doing the metta or doing the mindfulness, both these qualities start to come through and merge for us.

One of the images that I like to remind myself of this quality of warm attention is a story of Roberto Benigni, who was the Italian actor and director who produced the film Life is Beautiful, won an Academy Award a few years ago. He was honored after winning the Academy Award by an invitation to the White House. So he came to the White House when Clinton was still president and entered the room where Clinton was waiting for him. And as soon as he got into the room, he made a dash toward the president and leapt up with his legs around Clinton's waist, hugged him and said, "I'm so happy to see you."

So this is how we can meet our experience. Breath, I'm so happy to see you. They said that Clinton's Secret Service people were freaking out because they didn't expect a bodily assault, but Clinton was totally fine with it.

Another way to say it is that our practice of mindfulness opens up this great spaciousness in our experience. A lot of people talk about that. We get space around our thoughts. We get space around our emotions. We open up to the natural space of the universe. And then the practice of loving kindness fills that space with warmth. So it's no longer a cold and forbidding void, but it's a warm container that holds us really beautifully.

This change that happens as we plant these wholesome seeds and the quality of loving kindness starts to wake up as it's nourished by the Dharma is a process that we could call cleaning up the heart, or washing out the heart, or a more technical phrase we sometimes use: purifying the heart. Because instead of our usual intentions of distractedness, of leaping into the future with worry or desire, or mulling over the past with regret or sadness—instead of those intentions taking us out—we collect the mind in the present moment and the intentions become wholesome, turning to care, wishing well for ourselves and others.

So this moment-by-moment change starts to purify, starts to clean up what's in our heart on just a moment-to-moment basis. And this reconditions us. It retrains the heart how to be in the world. So this is one aspect of the purification that happens through this practice.

Many people will report that one of the biggest things we feel coming out of a week-long retreat—really whether it's Vipassana or Metta—is that it feels like our heart has been cleaned up, has been scrubbed, and we're going back with really fresh and open and kind of childlike eyes into the world. So this is how Metta does that piece.

But there's another way too that I want to talk about, and that has to do with the way that we work with two qualities of mind that are called the near and far enemies of Metta. Each of the four Brahmaviharas has two associated states of mind that are not wholesome states called the near enemy and the far enemy. Sally may have talked about this today with compassion.

So for loving kindness, the near enemy is a state of mind that looks like Metta and smells like Metta, but when you look at it closely, it isn't Metta. And that state is attachment—liking or affection with attachment connected to it. The far enemy of loving kindness is its opposite, and that's the quality Sharda mentioned last night: aversion or hatred.

So the far enemy of each Brahmavihara is its total opposite. The near enemy is something that looks like it, that's kind of an imposter, but is an unwholesome variation of the original.

Very often as we're practicing with the Brahmaviharas, the near enemy and the far enemy will come into our experience a lot. So it's very helpful to start to learn to identify them when they come. When you take that moment and return to the heart center, ground the attention in the body and see what feeling is there, just keep an eye out if one of the near enemy appears or the far enemy appears.

So I'll talk about both of these in a little more detail. The near enemy is affection with attachment. It's a liking, but the feeling is not unconditional. We say in Metta that the caring is unconditional. In this sense, it doesn't mean that nothing can break it. Sometimes I think about Jesus as having had unconditional love because he could still have love when he was being nailed to the cross. Nothing could break, it seems, his ability to love.

This sense is not so much in that. It's just that we can care for somebody without them satisfying any particular condition first. So in that sense, we're not asking somebody to fill out a form or sign on a dotted line or be really nice to us first. We'll care for them anyway. We'll take the initiative in caring. So in that sense, loving kindness is unconditional.

But affection with attachment has a condition, and it is basically: "I'll love you if you'll love me." And when that second part of the contract isn't filled, then my love goes away.

We see this a lot in the phenomenon of romantic love, the phenomenon of falling in love with someone.

There's a very strong attraction. Obviously we appreciate a lot of things about that person, but fundamentally the emphasis in romantic love or in the phenomenon of falling in love is on me. "I love you because you make me feel so good. And once you stop making me feel great, I'm not so interested in you anymore."

Metta is different because the emphasis really is on the other person's well-being. It's not fundamentally a narcissistic exchange. It's fundamentally about the other person without regard to whether it profits us or benefits us or not.

So it's sometimes hard to tease these apart in the beginning. We're so used to caring being dependent on this affection exchange that it's hard to know what the pure form of Metta is. And it's why in the beginning we recommend that you don't take a relationship partner as your benefactor. For many of you, your relationship partner may be a great benefactor in your life, but there's also liable to be some attachment, some dependency, some kind of reciprocal need in that relationship.

So in order to discover just the purer flavor of Metta, it's helpful to work first with a relationship where there's not so much expectation. And often the benefactor is relatively free of that. And then we'll move on later to a good friend, where it can be a little bit freer of that kind of expectation or attachment.

I think about the progress of romantic love, and I don't know if anybody's written a pop song exactly like this, but it could certainly be written.

The lyrics would go something like: I want you, I need you, I love you, I'll kill you if I can't have you. It's a little different from metta.

So start to tune in as you're holding your metta subjects. Can you feel sometimes a wanting of something? Can you feel a kind of neediness or an expectation or a looking for some return from the relationship? That's a sign of the near enemy being present.

Now, it's not to be judgmental about that. It's not to expect that that degree of attachment has to go away. It's just to become aware that it's present.

For instance, in our intimate relationships, we usually have quite a lot of forces come together—quite a lot of things that we want focused on that person. There is a desire for companionship. There is a wanting of affection. There is sexual desire. All different kinds of parental influences come into it.

So in my relationship with Sally, for example, I feel a lot of attachment to her. And I don't expect it to be otherwise, maybe as long as I live. It could be that I'll get really, really free and that attachment will go sometime before I die, but I don't have an expectation of that. And I know if something were to happen to her, if she were to get really ill or if she were to die, I would be devastated. So for me, that's just part of the terrain. This attachment piece is part of the terrain of having a close and committed relationship.

So I've chosen to be in that relationship. I know that there's going to be some suffering that comes as a

result of my attachment in that field. And I don't think it's within my capability to completely let that go at this point in my development.

I'm just sharing from a personal outlook. I don't know anyone who is in a committed relationship that doesn't have some degree of attachment. Sometimes people can get very idealistic about Dharma language and think they should be able to be in an intimate relationship without attachment. But I haven't seen it work. Usually it means that they want something of the relationship, but they don't want the commitment piece.

Speaking broadly, I don't think it's very realistic to expect the attachment in this central area of our life to suddenly disappear while we still have ego invested in so many other areas—in sense pleasures, in our house, in our career, in having money or status or whatever. So as long as desire is operating in the mind, it's going to latch on to certain objects in our life. Relationship partners are a big one. Children are a big one. Even after children are grown and completely out of the house, and you've done most of the caring that you can for them, there's usually a strong element of attachment that continues.

So it's not something that should be judged as wrong or inappropriate at all. It's part of what we take on in living as laypeople in the world. It's just to recognize it when it's there: There is desire on my part. This desire is born of attachment, and at some point it will cause me suffering, but it's just part of the way that I'm choosing to live in this life.

So there's no need to fight with it, there's no need to judge yourself about it, and no need to push it away—just to recognize when it's there. Then, once you start to see that clearly, you can also start to see the parts of the relationship that are more purely the care for the other person's well-being.

I'll say in my relationship with Sally, one of the really notable changes is that over the years, that pure metta-feeling has gotten stronger and stronger, and my neediness has gotten less and less. And so I regard that as a beautiful development. It gives me a lot more freedom in my day-to-day relating with her, and it puts a lot less pressure on her. I think we've both gotten a lot happier as a result.

So this is the area of the near enemy—affection that has some string or attachment connected with it. The opposite side is the far enemy. And this is when we notice in our relationship to one of our metta subjects, or just someone who comes to our mind as we're practicing, a quality of disliking, of aversion, or sometimes really strong hatred. Mixed in with this aversion can also be the forms that not-liking takes around being hurt or being afraid.

This comes up often during metta practice. As we get into metta for people that we've had long relationships with—it could be a benefactor, it could be a friend—we end up going through a whole life review of our time with those people. All kinds of memories come up spontaneously. Have you noticed that? As you stay with your benefactor, you remember lots of times you've spent together, lots of things that have happened between you.

We start with the benefactor because more of them tend to be positive. As we move into the friend, then there tends to be much more of a mix, as friendships are.

So we'll remember times that we did something unskillful, where we hurt our friend and we may feel a lot of guilt or shame about it. We remember times that they did something unskillful to us, and we might feel hurt, we might feel afraid of them, or we might feel angry or resentful in return.

This whole area of all the aversive reactions that can come in doing metta is a very, very big part of the practice. When we first encounter these other reactions, we often think, "I'm doing it wrong. I was supposed to get metta, and I'm getting the opposite. I must be doing it wrong. Let's push that aside, and I'll try really harder. Or I'll change the person. Yeah, that's it. I'll go to a different person."

In fact, this work is half of what the metta practice is about. This is the other half of the purification of heart that metta brings. As we incline the mind to loving kindness, somehow our sneaky subconscious says, "Oh, but wait, there's another story here." And it will kind of bring to the surface anything that's in there that's not of the nature of loving kindness.

It's sort of like starting metta practice is like running this big magnet right up the center of your system. You've got the strong north pole coming against your heart, and that pulls out all the particles that are magnetized in the opposite direction. "You want to go metta? Boom. Boom." So all different kinds of aversion start to come through, sometimes really strongly.

The more sensitive the heart gets through the influence of the loving kindness, the more impactful the negative emotions can be too. So this is all part of this process of opening up. Unfortunately, we can't just choose to open to the beautiful. When we open to the beautiful, we also open to the difficult. And this is still part of our mindstream. All these different kinds of aversion are in all of us, so they will come and will be experienced to different degrees around different people and with different memories.

There is something quite beautiful and quite magical about the meeting of the force of metta with these different kinds of aversive reactions. You really do not want to push them away. So let's talk about how to work with them.

A common one that comes up is self-judgment. We're sending metta to ourselves, and as we do it, we remember all kinds of things we did in our life earlier that we feel really badly about. When I did my first long retreat, I had this parade that I had to write down to get it out of my thoughts—what I wrote down as the ten biggest mistakes I ever made in my life. I reviewed these things over and over in the silence of the retreat setting because they just kept coming. I hadn't really looked at them before with the spirit of kindness.

One of them was a time I was about sixteen years old and I went on a hunting trip with my father. My father was an avid hunter and fisherman. We got up at like three o'clock in the morning, drove to the edge of this river in the middle of winter where he had a little rowboat with an outboard engine. We motored

across to this island where he had a duck blind. We had to get there before dawn came up to go into the blind, so the ducks wouldn't see us, and we'd be hidden away as the light broke.

The light was coming up, but it wasn't time yet to shoot ducks. So my father, who had given me this 410-gauge shotgun, said, "Why don't you take some target practice?" And he pointed to a songbird that was on the limb of a tree not very far from me. I was just a sixteen-year-old kid. I didn't know what to feel. I didn't know what I was feeling. So I followed my father's advice, and I pulled the trigger on the 410, and there was just this explosion of feathers where the bird had been.

We went through the rest of the day hunting, and I was never a very good shot, fortunately, and didn't contribute by killing any ducks that day. But as I was sitting in meditation, this memory came up, and I felt so badly about it. In light of the first precept, refraining from killing—innocent songbird, I hadn't even thought twice about taking its life. There was nothing I could do to make it better, and so I was just left with this incredible guilt.

In starting to work with that, I just had to let that be. There wasn't anything else I could do with it. We have now a practice that will be shared with you, I think tomorrow, of forgiveness, where as we come in touch with things that we've done that have been unskillful, we have a practice very much like the metta practice that works to forgive ourselves for those actions.

So we'll share that with you.

I didn't know about the forgiveness practice at the time, so I just had to sit with this memory. And in the investigation, I learned something interesting about the quality of guilt. Guilt is not a helpful emotion. Guilt is the judging of ourselves, beating ourselves up over what we've done, taking the blame, directing anger toward ourselves. Not helpful.

But what is helpful and ultimately cleans it up a little bit is the willingness to feel the remorse. I felt deep regret about having shot that songbird. And although I couldn't make it up to the songbird, the regret that I felt strengthened my resolve to be really careful in my relationships with creatures from then on. So that remorse is a very wholesome quality, that feeling of regret.

Now I can think about the incident. I still have a feeling of regret and some remorse, but I don't have guilt anymore. Do I wish it was different? Yeah. But I no longer beat myself up about it.

So when self-judgment comes, if this review of our own actions arises, remember to examine the difference between guilt and remorse. See if you can open to the feeling of regret without strong judgment and self-blame. Because you're a very different person now than you were then. Your actions were different. Your understanding was different.

Other times, the memories that come are times that we've been hurt. So we might find a strong feeling of hurt arising. And then we have to allow that to be there. Sometimes in response to the hurt, anger can

come really strongly. And then how do we work with that?

You probably know that one of the traditional ways is to send loving kindness to the person who has hurt us. That's difficult to do if you're angry. I had one retreat where some memories came up of an incident and I was getting angry at the person. I thought, I should probably try sending loving kindness to them. And I thought, I don't want to do that. That's really hokey, because then I'd have to pretend like I really love that person or at least like them a lot. There's no way I'm going to do that because I'm pissed off.

But I was at the end of my rope. This scenario kept running. The image kept coming. I kept getting angry, and it was unpleasant—one of the things we find about anger is that it doesn't feel good. So I was tired of the pain of it, and I was getting desperate. So I thought, okay, I'll try it.

I started directing thoughts of loving kindness to the person. And what was so interesting is that I found as soon as I could really wish for their happiness in a sincere way, the anger was gone. Because the anger has a component of ill will, which means there's a piece in anger that wants the other person to hurt the way we were hurt. If you take it a step further, that's what leads to cruelty.

So when I saw the connection between ill will and cruelty, I sort of couldn't stand the sense of myself being a cruel person or wanting to be cruel. So it really motivated me not to prolong the ill will. And as soon as I could bring in a sense of good will, that blocked the ill will.

So it's a very interesting thing with anger. If metta is truly present, anger can't get in because goodwill is the opposite of ill will. So it was very skillful for me to find I could wish the other person well, and that really deflected, diffused the anger.

But nonetheless, we can find different ways to work with the individual emotions that come. Metta is very skillful for relating with a number of them. But I want to talk generally about how to hold any of these feelings that come, whether it's guilt or remorse or fear, anxiety, anger, hurt.

So let's say you're going along, you're doing the loving kindness phrases, and you come to rest in the heart center and you notice a different emotion is there. Let's say it's a form of the far enemy of aversion, some degree of negativity there. You feel the pain of it, you recognize it's not metta—what to do with it then?

There are about three different things that you can do. The first is the simplest: you just let it be there in the background and you keep turning your intention to the metta phrases.

So continue to do the metta practice, again meaning each phrase as much as you can. You know the emotion is there in the background and you just let it be there. Then as you continue with the metta, you'll find that the metta will develop and start to come in contact with that difficult feeling.

When metta starts to wake up, it's not directed to just one person. It fills the mind and heart, and so it touches the whole world. As the metta starts to come through, it begins to touch that aversive mind state. The meeting of those two is where the magical thing happens that we could call healing. The presence of

metta makes that aversive state much more acceptable—not something that we have to toss out of ourselves, but something that we can simply acknowledge as another part of the human psyche, something that we all have. We all have a reaction of anger sometimes.

So in this mode, just continue with the loving kindness and allow it to hold and eventually touch and change that aversive reaction.

If the aversive reaction gets stronger—let's say anger is there really strongly—it will block the ability to generate an intention of loving kindness, and you really can't do a phrase with any meaning anymore. The emotion is strong enough that it's blocking the metta practice, so there's no point in continuing with the phrases. Then turn your attention with mindfulness to the direct experience of the difficult emotion and just open up to it. Say, "I invite you in, let me feel you."

If you've caught it near its beginning, or near its beginning of intensity, often just that opening up is enough. You can have the sense, "Okay, come on in, express yourself, I surrender." That invitation lets it present itself and often just wash through. Very often after you do that opening, it'll come, manifest for a short time, and pass through. Great. When it does, when it gets weaker or goes away, you can just return to the metta.

Let's say that doesn't work. You open to it for a minute and it's still strong. The next thing you can do is turn to a compassion phrase, as Sally introduced this afternoon. You're suffering because it's a painful mind state. Recognize that suffering and bring the compassion attitude directly to it. You might say something like, "May I hold this anger with compassion?"

Feel the pain of it for yourself. You're not trying to make it go away. You're not trying to aim above it by looking for happiness, because sometimes metta can be too idealistic. In times like this when we're suffering, metta aims too high. Compassion goes right to the reality, the truth of our present moment experience, can meet it and hold it in a bigger picture. Just "May I hold this pain, this anger, this hurt with compassion." Be with that for a while. Often that will soften the whole mind state and soften the aversive reactions.

It's nice to move to compassion because you stay within the brahmaviharas family. You're keeping the concentration part of the practice going, staying connected to the metta field.

The fourth thing you can do is switch to vipassana—switch to mindfulness practice. Drop any phrases. Just turn your attention to the experience of the emotion in the body, in the mind, and through the door of thinking. Stay with it as long as it's presenting itself. Because of impermanence, it will eventually fade. When it does, you can return to the loving kindness.

This approach of four graduated steps—leave it in the background, open and let it wash through, turn to it with compassion, or turn to it with mindfulness—can work for any of the difficult and painful emotions that come. You can try each of them. These are just four different tools. Try them and see which ones work

for you when these visitors show up.

As we keep opening and allowing in ourselves again and again, letting metta widen our hearts and widen our being, we find there's room for all these difficulties. The heart can expand enough to hold them and finally accept them so that we don't have to push them away. That's where the second stage of this purification comes from.

By opening to the difficult and transforming it with all the different tools that we have, another kind of purification of heart and mind takes place. These states may recur—they may come again—but once we learn the tools, we learn that they're all workable, and we develop more and more confidence that we know our way back to balance. Whatever is thrown up by the mind, whatever presents itself, we start to trust: "I know how to work with this. I know how to come back to my center, find my balance, and restore the loving kindness in my heart."

This gives a lot of self-confidence. We really don't have to be afraid of these parts of our mind because we find the tools to make them workable.

So this is very healing.

I'll close with this segment of a poem by Galway Kinnell, which many of you know, "St. Francis and the Sow":

"The bud stands for all things, even for those things that don't flower. For everything flowers from within of self-blessing. Though sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness, to put a hand on the brow of the flower and retell it in words and in touch, it is lovely, it is lovely, until it flowers again from within of self-blessing."

So let's just sit for a minute together, please.

Sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness until it flowers again from within of self-blessing.

Thank you for your attention. Thank you for listening.

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