Mettā: Tenderness & Connection

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:01:50

So it is unusually cold today. In case you wondered if that was really real, it is really real. On top of Mount Tam, which is the highest peak in Marin, there are three inches of snow tonight, with about two more inches expected. So that's really unusual. So it is really cold.

That's why tonight I wanted to talk about mettā. I thought it would warm us up a little bit. Really, I want to do it because we haven't talked a lot about mettā, and I'm a very big enthusiast of this practice. It's really a wonderful practice that brings so many benefits to us. Some of the benefits are somewhat clear early on. Some of them are not so apparent, and those are the ones that I want to talk more about tonight—the ones that are not so apparent.

But early on from doing the loving-kindness practice we can feel the growth in us of more warmth and more sweetness and more relationship with the people that we bring in, the friend and benefactor and even perhaps the difficult person. So we feel that warming up of our emotional field very immediately with the practice of loving-kindness.

We notice that as we feel better about ourselves, as the mettā for ourself starts to grow, other problems immediately go away. We feel less in conflict with ourselves, less self-judgment. We tend to feel less in conflict with other people. Someone commented in an interview today that as the mettā for self has grown, the judgments of others have gone way down just very naturally.

I noticed that a lot when I was doing intensive mettā practice. I started off, as we usually do in a retreat, with a reasonable amount of hindrances, a reasonable harvest of hindrances to work with. But as the mettā started to kick in, the judgments went completely away. Any judging thoughts of other people just disappeared. So these are some of the things that we notice immediately.

The Buddha talked about eleven benefits of loving-kindness practice. I'm going to read them a little slowly so that you can kind of feel into each one. These apply to a mind that has really become mature or steeped in loving-kindness: One sleeps easily, wakes easily, and has pleasant dreams. People love you. Devas and animals love you. Devas protect you. Weapons can't harm you. The mind is joyful. The face is serene. You die peacefully and you have a good rebirth.

It's almost worth doing for those reasons. It's a good list.

But tonight I want to talk mostly about two benefits that aren't so obvious right away, but these are kind of like slow-growing insights that dawn on us over the course of doing mettā over a period of time. These may be two of the deeper shifts that happen to us, and I'm going to call them tenderness and connection.

So this quality of tenderness is something that grows little by little. You know the best things in meditation grow little by little. A lot of things can happen with a bang, but things that come quickly also tend to pass away quickly. Or as one of my teachers said, experiences are like clouds—they come and they go. But realization is like space. You sort of don't notice it. And wisdom, he was tying this with wisdom, grows slowly.

You can think about this when you think about the real lasting fruits of your meditation practice. One of the main ones is equanimity, the balance of mind that lets you be even with all the changes that life presents. This quality of equanimity can't be rushed. It's not something that you can figure out in one retreat. It takes a lot of steady application over years to develop a strong sense of equanimity, but it's one of the most lasting strengths that we can have in our lives.

So the growth of tenderness and connection are a little bit like this too. They don't necessarily hit us over the head right away, but they grow slowly and strongly and they're really important.

This quality of tenderness—there's kind of an inherent tenderness to being human because we're very sensitive beings. We're very sensitive to changes of pleasure and pain. The fact that our skin is not covered by a thick fur is one factor that makes us more sensitive than most other creatures. The horses down there in the front field, I don't know if you've noticed, but sometimes it can be raining and they won't go under cover. Notice that? This rain will be coming down, you know it's cold, and they just stand there because they have very thick coats and thick hide.

It doesn't penetrate so much, but we're very sensitive as human beings. And then we take this innate sensitivity and in the practice of loving kindness, we're developing it every moment by tuning into our metta person and going, "Are you well? I hope you're well. Are you happy? I hope you're happy. Are you healthy? I hope you're healthy." This is what we're doing all through our metta practice. We're kind of checking in: How is this experience of life for you?

As we tune into the compassion practice, which I think James introduced today, then we also tune into the potential for suffering. So we're always, through the Brahma Viharas, we're always kind of holding people's hearts in our hands and saying, "How is your experience of life? Is it happy or is it sorrowful? I care about that. I want it to be happy. I don't want you to be in sorrow." So we're developing this sensitivity or tenderness in every moment of doing our practices of love and compassion for people. We're waking the heart up to the joys and sorrows in life, our own and others'.

This is from Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche on something that he called our soft spot: "It is as if we had a pimple on our body that was very sore, so sore that we do not want to rub it or scratch it. During our shower, we do not want to rub too much soap over it because it hurts. That sore spot on our body is an analogy for tenderness. Why? Because even in the midst of aggression, insensitivity or laziness in our life, we always have a soft spot, some point we can cultivate. A more vivid analogy might be of an open wound, which is always there. That open wound is usually very inconvenient and problematic. We would like to

be tough. We would like to come on strong. But there will always be a sore spot. At least we are accessible somewhere, so we are not completely covered with a coat of armor all the time. What a relief."

So this tenderness is kind of a vulnerable thing, but it's also our way into feeling and our way into opening the heart. One of the reasons we're vulnerable is we know at any time anything can happen. Anything can happen. And so we're faced with the potential of loss, of hurt, of pain, really at any moment. As you know, you can go into a doctor's office for a checkup. They do one test on you, and a few days later you get the message that changes your life. It can happen any time.

Other things. One of our friends was making a spiritual journey and a little bit of a vacation to India a few years ago. And he was there with his partner. They were staying in a bungalow very close to the beach. And he went out on the beach one morning to do some exercise and just enjoy the tropical air. This was down near Madras. But the morning happened to be December 26, 2004.

And he was standing on the beach. And all of a sudden, this big wave came up and knocked him over. He said, "That's strange. Usually it's a very placid beach." And so he got up, and as he was standing up, he watched the wave going out. And he noticed that it left this huge gulf behind it. It swept too much water out to sea and he got alarmed and he went into his bungalow and pulled his partner out and said, "Come on we've got to get to some higher ground." So another wave was coming so they jumped up on this brick stone wall.

And he grabbed a hold of a palm tree, and his partner grabbed a hold of him, and they just stood there, anchored as well as they could, about four feet above the beach. And then the second wave came. And you probably know that's the wave that was the real tsunami that killed thousands of people in that part of the ocean, India and Thailand and Sri Lanka. But because he hung on to the palm tree and his partner hung on to him, they were okay. They were rattled as the wave came up, but they hung on and they were all right. There's one point where you don't want to follow the advice of non-clinging. Clinging saved his life, so that was helpful.

But anything can happen. Just a normal day in South India.

Another kind of interesting story is the life of Nyoshul Ken Rinpoche. He was a very great teacher in the last fifty years of the twentieth century, one of the great Dzogchen masters of Tibet. He was born in ancient Tibet and grew up in that system where he spent many years in retreat, received teachings and training from great masters, and practiced really deeply.

In 1949 the invasion happened and things started to become more difficult for the Tibetans. Finally he fled in 1959 with the Dalai Lama. He fled to India. He was highly recognized at that point—thirty-seven years old and very well known, a great master. But he was in a strange country where the Tibetan community had not gotten well established. So his life was a little bit of a wandering life.

He said, "Sometimes I gave empowerments to great assemblies of people, including dozens of tulkus and

thousands of monks. At other times, I was utterly poor, living hand to mouth on the streets in Calcutta, wandering around with my hand out begging for pennies. So many unexpected ups and downs. Who can describe them?"

We just never know.

A few years ago, I was teaching a long retreat at IMS on the East Coast. There was a young man who had come to practice, very devoted to meditation practice, Dharma practice, and he became very inspired during the three months. At the end of the time, he wanted to go off and ordain as a bhikkhu somewhere—maybe the U.S., maybe England, maybe Asia. So he went home and was putting his life in order so that he could go off and devote his whole life to Dharma practice when he came down with this mysterious illness.

It affected his digestion so seriously that he couldn't eat a normal diet. And he had a lot of pain, bodily pain, no matter what he did. So the possibility of going off to ordain was no longer an option because his health wouldn't allow it. So here he was, young, seemingly in the flush of youth, on fire for practice, and his body wouldn't support him. What to do? Not an easy situation.

I've kept in touch with him over the years. He's still very into practice, practices when he can. His health is improving. He's understood more about diet. The situation is still not easy for him.

So life throws us these unexpected situations. How do we respond? How does the heart get strong enough to hold these kinds of changes, to hold these unpredictable events that can be so difficult to adjust to?

One of the beautiful things about the system of the Brahma Viharas is that it shows us how an awakened heart can respond to the joys and sorrows of life. Metta is the heart opening, compassion shows the response to suffering, sympathetic joy shows the approach to happiness, and equanimity holds it all in balance. So it gives us an overview of what's possible for our human potential.

But then how do we develop it? How do we move into that wisdom?

I like this quote from Bob Dylan. This is from his memoirs, Chronicles. He said, "My grandma was filled with nobility and goodness. Told me once that happiness isn't on the road to anywhere, that happiness is the road. Had also instructed me to be kind because everyone you'll ever meet is fighting a hard battle."

This is that attitude of caring and compassion that can pervade our relationship to life if we let it. And it means opening up in each new moment and seeing who we're in touch with and what's happening for them and what's happening for ourselves. This constant tuning in to the experience of sentient beings is what creates this connected feeling. It's really quite amazing.

So then there are these stories that illustrate these moments of connection that are very strong. There was a story that appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle a few years ago. Most of you probably know that humpback whales do annual migration from further north down the coast of California. Then they go to

Baja California in the spring where they breed. They have their babies in the warmer waters.

So one December, there was a female humpback whale that was going by the coast near San Francisco, actually near the Farallon Islands, which are about fifteen miles off the coast here. Some fishermen came upon her, and unfortunately she had run into an area where crab fishermen had set up their traps. The way that crab fishers set up their traps is they lay out these nylon ropes with what are called crab pots hanging off them. The crabs get caught in the pots and the fishermen reel them in. Well, the thing is that these ropes with the pots are really quite heavy.

So she had gotten tangled up in numerous ropes, some wound around her body four times—around her back, her flipper, her tail, and her mouth. Each line carried about a thousand pounds of weight from the crab pots attached to it. The fishermen who discovered her could see that the ropes were cutting deeply into her flesh, and the tremendous weight was pulling her down. She was struggling desperately to swim to the surface for air, fighting a losing battle against the relentless downward pull. Without intervention, she would inevitably sink beneath the weight.

The fishermen called the Marine Mammal Center on the Marin headlands, and a rescue team was quickly assembled. It took several hours to locate her, but when they arrived with a group of divers, the enormity of the challenge became clear. How do you approach a creature of such immense size and power? One flip of her tail could easily kill a human being. Yet here was a whale drowning, and they faced the terrible choice between risking their own lives and watching her perish.

The divers chose to enter the water.

Armed with curved knives, they began the painstaking work of cutting through the ropes. One diver later described working around her massive head, carefully cutting the line that encircled her mouth. "Her eye was right there," he said, "watching me, winking at me. It was an epic moment of my life." Can you imagine swimming alongside that enormous, gentle eye as you work to free her from her bonds?

After an hour of careful, dangerous work, they managed to cut through all the lines. The moment the whale realized she was no longer burdened, she began swimming in circles in what appeared to be pure joy. Then something extraordinary happened—she swam deliberately to each diver and nuzzled them, one by one.

One rescuer described it this way: "It felt to me like she was thanking us, knowing that she was free and that we had helped her. She stopped about a foot away from me, pushed me around a little bit and had some fun. She seemed kind of affectionate, like a dog that's happy to see you. I never felt threatened. It was an amazing, unbelievable experience."

Such moments are rare gifts. Imagine that kind of heart-to-heart exchange with a mammal of such magnificent size, feeling her sentience and joy at being freed. These are the experiences that break through our ordinary barriers and remind us of something profound about connection.

This is precisely the kind of connection that the brahmaviharas make possible for us. It's so powerful because most of the time, we don't recognize how deeply connected we actually are. We forget. It's remarkably easy to forget, because the ego-mind has this persistent trick of making us feel isolated. We tell ourselves that we're fundamentally different, unique in some essential way—either better than others or worse than others. One way or another, we convince ourselves we're separate, not like everyone else.

By repeating this story to ourselves over and over, we begin to believe it completely, and it creates an profound sense of separation. "I'm not really part of the human family," we tell ourselves. "Everyone else belongs, but I don't fit because of this quality or that quality. I'm outside. I'm on the outside."

The brahmaviharas directly challenge this sense of isolation. I remember teaching a retreat for scientists a couple of years ago—we occasionally hold meditation retreats specifically for people in the physical sciences, social sciences, and neuroscience, because there's such growing interest in the intersection between neuroscience and contemplative practice. We want neuroscientists to experience these states from the inside, not just study them from the outside.

During one of these retreats, as we were discussing metta and the nature of connection, one scientist mentioned a recent study showing that one of the deepest sources of unhappiness for people was precisely this sense of isolation.

One of the greatest normalizing qualities was a sense of being connected. And you can look at this culture where so many threads of connection have gone. The family is not held together so strongly. The communities are not so functional. And people often feel isolated in their apartments or homes. This creates a deep sense of unhappiness, as though we are not part of the family—the human family. So metta shows us something different.

I want to talk about how this happens. First I want to read a little bit of this poem from Naomi Shihab Nye called "Kindness." She's a Palestinian-American poet and has some really beautiful creations. This is just a fragment from a poem called "Kindness":

"Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing. You must wake up with sorrow. You must speak to it till your voice catches the thread of all sorrows and you see the size of the cloth. Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore. Only kindness that ties your shoes and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread. Only kindness that raises its head from the crowd of the world to say, it is I you have been looking for, and then goes with you everywhere like a shadow or a friend."

What I love in this passage is the line, "till your voice catches the thread of all sorrows and you see the size of the cloth." The size of the cloth is all sentient life. All sentient life knows sorrow, knows happiness, knows pain, and knows pleasure. And as we sink into this realization through loving-kindness practice, we start to realize that we're all in that same boat. All of us are dealing with these basic problems of the

succession of pleasure and pain that's out of our control and how anything can happen. Our life can be taken away. Our health can be taken away. Our loved ones can be taken away. We're all that vulnerable in the same situation.

So this is one of the great connecting truths of the Brahmavihara practice. Our basic concerns are the same. Those four phrases that you've been working with—they apply for everyone. Safety, happiness, health, and ease. We're all looking for the same things. So that's one level of connection. We see that basically it's the same heart in each of us, open to the same kind of joy and sorrow, and open to the same possibility of love in each of us.

Then there's another way we're deeply connected that the Buddha talked about. The Buddha had different kinds of psychic vision that are described in the ancient texts, in the suttas. And with that psychic vision, he could see back into the history of different people's lives and existences. And he said, from looking at that vision, all of us have lived so many different lives in the past and have been in touch with each other over many different lives in the past. And he said because of this truth of being born and dying and being reborn again and again and again, countless times since beginningless time, we've crossed paths in really intimate ways. He said, because of this, it's not easy to find a being who has not been at some time in the past, your mother or your father or your sister or your brother or your son or your daughter.

So you may or may not believe in this whole teaching on rebirth and past lives, but what if it was so? What if that was true? And just looking around the room tonight, that we all have been family to each other maybe many times before. There's a possibility that we're much more intimately connected than we ever imagined that we were. The Buddha said it's like that. He said that he could see that was so. And so what if that was true? What if the person sitting next to you had been your mother? What would you want to do for her or him?

And that's where we come upon the line that's in the sutta that we've been chanting every night from the Metta Sutta: "Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings, radiating kindness over the entire world." The instruction is to treat every being as though they were our own child. That's the possibility that the loving-kindness practice directs us to look at.

So another little story. Jack Kornfield, the founder of Spirit Rock, has a daughter named Caroline who's about twenty-five now. She's in law school at Berkeley. She's planning to become a human rights activist through her work as a lawyer.

So she was driving from Berkeley back to Woodacre one day, traveling along the six-lane stretch of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard near the ferry crossing where the ferry departs for San Francisco across the bay. The traffic was slowing down in a way that seemed unusual for that time of day, and she couldn't understand what was causing the delay.

As she drew closer, she discovered what was happening: a mother duck was attempting to cross the road to reach the bay, followed by six little ducklings. Cars were slowing down and coming to stops, trying to navigate around them. But this being Marin County, nobody really wanted to stop completely—heaven forbid being five minutes late to catch the evening news. So traffic crept forward while people drove around the duck family, honking their horns in growing frustration.

When Caroline and her friend reached the scene, she stopped her car right in the middle of the road. Her friend got out to flag down the other vehicles, ensuring they came to a complete stop. Caroline then carefully shepherded the duck family across three lanes of traffic to the center divider. The mother duck hopped up easily enough, but the little ducklings couldn't make it—the divider was too tall. So Caroline gently gave each duckling a boost up to safety.

Thinking the rescue was complete, Caroline watched as the mother duck hopped down on the other side, preparing to cross three more lanes to reach the bay. Immediately, traffic in the opposite direction began exhibiting the same behavior—slowing down, honking, drivers getting out of their cars wondering what the holdup was. So Caroline and her friend stopped those cars as well, escorting the duck family across until they finally reached the other side with a clear path to the water.

This is what caring for all sentient beings like they're your only child looks like—that quality of love that puts the welfare of others above traffic schedules and personal convenience. It's one of those gestures that moves us deeply.

This attitude of caring for all living beings as though they were our children can blossom into what's considered a very powerful motivational factor. Let me explain this development step by step.

When we genuinely care for all sentient beings—as you've been practicing in the loving-kindness meditations over these past days—we develop a sincere wish for people to be happy. In compassion practice, as you'll discover, this extends to genuinely wanting people to be free from suffering. But if we truly want someone to experience complete happiness and freedom from suffering, what does this actually require?

They need to awaken, don't they? As long as we remain unawakened, we're trapped in this cycle of birth, death, and suffering, with our hearts continually clouded by confusion and reactivity. So when we take loving-kindness and compassion for all beings to their logical conclusion, we realize what we truly want is for everyone to awaken.

This raises an important question: How can we help others awaken if we haven't awakened ourselves? The answer is, we probably can't—not effectively. Someone like the Buddha could guide others to awakening because he had completed that journey himself. But without having traveled that path ourselves, our ability to truly help others remains limited.

This understanding gives rise to a particular motivation: "Let me awaken so I can help others awaken and

transcend the boundaries of suffering, moving into true happiness—the deepest happiness possible."

This specific motivation has a special name: bodhicitta. "Bodhi" means awakening, and "citta" means heart or mind. It's sometimes translated as "the heart of awakening" or simply "the awakening heart." As our heart begins to awaken and this sensitivity and interconnection permeates our being, we naturally want to bring all beings along with us on this journey.

This aspiration to awaken for the benefit of all beings—so that all beings can be brought to freedom—forms the core of the Bodhisattva movement and the Bodhisattva vow. It's the foundation of the Bodhisattva path.

It's as though this unlimited, boundless love and compassion we sometimes touch in practice returns as motivation for our own spiritual development. "I want to awaken as the most effective way to help others emerge from suffering and discover true happiness."

This is called the practice of bodhicitta, and we can incorporate it more or less as an expression of our love and compassion. We can make it part of our intention in meditation practice. This is why we sometimes say we meditate for the sake of all beings.

We wish to awaken for the benefit of all beings.

Now, that's not easy to maintain. That's a very lofty aspiration. So it's not like it has to be a big flame that's burning us all the time in our practice, but just a little candlelight that can inspire us from time to time to practice for others. We can start a sitting and remind ourselves that that's our inclination. At the start of every sit, I say something like, "May I come to awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings." It's just a reminder that that's a piece of my motivation. And then that can grow.

We don't expect it to grow huge. It's very difficult to make that huge, but it's a piece. It can be a piece. Even the Dalai Lama says for him, it's not huge. He says, "I cannot pretend that I am really able to practice bodhicitta, but it does give me tremendous inspiration. Deep inside me, I realize how valuable and beneficial it is. That is all."

This is, in a way, a grown-up side of our own love and compassion—this factor of bodhicitta. If it appeals to you, it's helpful to do it as a practice. If you like it, you could say it at the start of every sitting or every walking, every period of practice. Remind yourself it's part of what you're here for, if that connects for you.

Metta also has a big influence on our intention and our conduct. Really, the care for others, this loving kindness for others, is a true source of our commitment to sila, to compassionate, wise conduct. When we practice the precepts, we're offering people that sense of safety, what the Buddha called freedom from fear.

This development of sila can be taken a long way also. Normally, for most of us, I like to think we don't

take the precepts expecting to keep them perfectly. We take them expecting to break them. That's why it's a training. We don't think we're going to be perfect with this. We know we're going to fall short. That's okay. We learn each time. But then you look at somebody who's really developed this practice, and it's pretty impressive.

A few years ago, Oprah Winfrey interviewed the Dalai Lama, and the interview got published in her magazine, O. I have to say, I keep getting more and more respect for Oprah because of the way she brings these teachings and so many beautiful sources of wisdom to such a broad audience. First there was her afternoon talk show and then the magazine, and you probably know she started her own TV network called the Oprah Winfrey Network. In describing it in an interview when it was launched, she said, "What I consider the Oprah Winfrey Network to be is mindful television."

She really understands she wants to make a positive impact in people's lives, and she has access to a lot of people. She's featured on her show or in her magazine people like James Baraz, Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein. I think Joseph was in O doing an interview about non-attachment in relationships, for which he gained the nickname Dr. Love. Oprah's kind of infiltrating these nuggets into mainstream society, and I think it's really wonderful.

So she was interviewing the Dalai Lama, and it became quite interesting. She began by asking him, "Have you ever had to forgive yourself for anything?"

The Dalai Lama replied, "Small incidents, like accidentally killing an insect."

"Killing an insect?" Oprah said. "An insect? Hmm, okay."

The Dalai Lama continued, "My attitude toward mosquitoes is not very favorable. Not very peaceful. Bed bugs also."

"And that's it?" Oprah couldn't quite believe what she was hearing. "In your lifetime, that's what you have to forgive yourself for?"

"Small mistakes every day, maybe," the Dalai Lama said evenly. "But major mistakes, it seems, no."

"No major mistakes," Oprah repeated, mulling over the idea. She fell silent. There was awe in her voice when she continued, "You have nothing in life that you have regrets about. That's a great life, to have no regrets."

Regarding service to Tibet, the Dalai Lama said, "Service to Buddhism, service to humanity, I have done as much as I can. Regarding my own spiritual practice, when I share my experiences with more advanced meditators—even those who have spent years in the mountains practicing single-pointedness of mind—I don't lag too far behind."

So he's only about sixteen lifetimes ahead of us on this journey, so we'll catch up. That's the possibility of

development that's there. And this refinement of meditation that he has is what allows him to practice his *sila* so effectively. The two go together.

When the mind has a lot of greed, aversion, and delusion rampant, it's very hard for conduct to become purified. But as the mind gets more and more quiet and established in loving-kindness and compassion, it's much easier for the conduct to reflect that kind of skill.

Carol talked a lot about generosity the other evening, and loving-kindness is also the source of generosity. We have to tune into what somebody else needs and wish for their happiness before we're inclined to be generous toward them.

There are a lot of dark forces in the world today. I can't speak so much for Europe and Canada, but for the United States, this is probably as sour a mood as I have felt in many years—a very pessimistic mood in the nation. So it's rare when we can look around this society and see glimmers of hope.

But one of the big ones was pointed to by a recent book by Paul Hawken. I just want to read you the title. He called his book *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming.*

What he's pointing to, the research that he did, was thousands of individuals and small foundations who are motivated by a sense of generosity and justice and caring, going out independent of governments, just making an attempt to do in the world what they can. He started to catalog all these organizations and came up with something like a million that he found around the world—just people who have dedicated their lives or come into some money and dedicated a chunk of their money to doing good in the area that they can access immediately.

He gives many examples. I'm sure you've heard a lot. Dr. Paul Farmer in Haiti, Greg Mortenson with the schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan, schools for girls there. So many different movements.

But just from our scene, we have three friends who are doing relief work in Burma through three different groups. Carol talked about the money that she took in and the work that she does every year looking after nunneries and providing food for villagers who lost a lot through the cyclone. We have another friend who has made schools in Burma his main priority. Every year he's gone in and taken about $100,000. In Burma you can build a school for $25,000, so every year he's gone in and established four new schools in different, usually remote rural areas of Burma, the money provided by generous donors. Once you establish a school, the government generally will commit to send a teacher. So it's not just putting in a building and then it goes away—the government has continued to supply teachers for these schools.

Then another of our friends has really given up his life in business and devoted his work life to a nonprofit called Foundation for the People of Burma. He's one of our past board presidents—I don't know if you know, Sally is currently president of the Spirit Rock Board, and he was the president before her. His name's Hal Nathan. In 2009, I think it was, Hal raised something like $650,000 for the people of Burma and

went in and worked with established nonprofit groups to deliver healthcare and sanitary drinking water in many villages that had nothing because the government doesn't provide.

So all these individuals are just taking it upon themselves, out of their care and kindness, to make the difference that they can in the world. I've never seen anything like it before, and it's happening all over. It's quite impressive.

This movement of good-heartedness is active in the world. It's really happening. We come to appreciate it as one of the mature aspects of dharma practice—maybe one of, along with equanimity, one of the real great testaments to dharma practice.

I like this quotation from Alice Walker, you know, the author of *The Color Purple*. She said, "As I get older, I realize the thing that I value the most is good-heartedness, because this can inspire everything."

I think Winnie said that *metta* and compassion are two of the three aspects of right intention, the second factor in the Eightfold Path. This good-heartedness, as you could say, is a path factor—a central path factor.

So Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche goes on from that story I read a little earlier about the soft spot, which is talking about an outer wound on the body that's sore that we don't want to touch. He continues: "There's also an inner wound called *Tathagatagarba* or Buddha nature. This is like a heart that has been sliced and bruised with wisdom and compassion."

When the external wound and the internal wound begin to meet and to communicate, then we begin to realize that our whole being is made up of one complete sore spot altogether. That is called bodhisattva fever. That vulnerability is compassion. We really have no way to defend ourselves anymore.

This is the truly ripened heart of compassion that is in the world to give, that is in the world simply to make a difference, to alleviate suffering, to bring happiness. This kind of attitude was expressed beautifully in a short poem by the Japanese hermit monk Ryōkan, when he said, "Oh, that my monk's robes were wide enough to gather up all the people in this floating world."

As we begin to feel that we truly are doing this for all beings, all beings become part of our consideration in our practice and in our daily life. What will best support us? And then as this quality of tenderness grows, we find that far from making us weaker, it actually makes us stronger. Originally we think, "I can't be tender in the world—I'll get wiped out. People will take advantage of me and use me if I'm too soft." But we discover that as we develop this tenderness along with the other qualities of mindfulness, equanimity, and joy, it makes us stronger. We find new skills, new powers for dealing with all the difficult mind states that come our way.

Take, for example, criticism. One of the things that's hard to deal with in the world is praise and blame. When we get criticized, it's painful. We had a very interesting lesson on this from the Dalai Lama in this

very room, on this very spot. He was here several years ago at a conference of Buddhist teachers. About two hundred of us assembled for a few days and spent a day and a half with him here.

The format involved different people presenting topics to him to get his mind turning, then asking for a response. Sometimes it was a little bit like turning a fire hose on him—somebody would present, then somebody else would present, then somebody else, and then we'd ask for a response. After one such sequence, someone said, "Well, Your Holiness, what do you think?" And he replied, "Oh, all gone from up here. Don't remember anything. First somebody talks, and then I could think of something to say, but then somebody else talks. I forget it all. Nothing left." He laughed heartily, totally unconcerned that he'd forgotten it all.

One of these presenters was rather bold—I would say a little bit cheeky. He started off saying, "Well, Your Holiness, I'd like to ask you about Buddhism's place in the world today. It's becoming very popularized. We see advertisements for a perfume named Samsara, or a resort that says it will carry you to nirvana the first day. And you yourself, Your Holiness, are the biggest popularizer of them all. This risks trivializing the Dharma and losing its essence. What do you think about that?"

The Dalai Lama fell silent and reflected for a moment. Then he answered in a way that really moved me. He said, "Some people, you see, call me living Buddha, or they call me the God King. No, I am not. I am just a simple Buddhist monk. But other people call me counter-revolutionary or a wolf in monk's clothing. But you see, I look back at my own intention. If my intention is sincere, then that is what is important. How others perceive me is up to them. I don't care." He said that very strongly: "I don't care."

That was such an expression of confidence from knowing his own mind, from a mind free from ill will and confusion. I thought, "That's amazing that he can feel that," because he's in a position of such responsibility—more than just about anyone I know. He's perhaps the only person who may be able to help the six or seven million people still left in Tibet. Something like a million people were killed after the invasion, and the hopes of the Tibetan people for their culture and any degree of freedom rest on his persona in the world.

And yet he can still say, "How others perceive me is up to them. I don't care." That's the strength of loving kindness and compassion and equanimity.

With anger, the heart of metta is one where it's hard for anger to gain a foothold. It's said that loving kindness creates a mind that is so spacious, anger can't stick. It's compared to tossing a bucket of paint through space—it can't stick to the space. And anger can't stick in a mind that's full of loving-kindness.

I'm sure you've read that Aung San Suu Kyi was recently released from house arrest, and she's given a few interviews. I didn't expect anything else, but she said it very clearly in one of her first interviews: "I have no anger toward the military leaders. No anger. I'm ready to sit down and talk with them at any time for the benefit of the people of Burma."

I know, and you probably know too, that she practiced a huge amount of loving kindness during her house arrest. She was under house arrest for most of the last seventeen years. During that time, she was receiving instructions from a well-known Burmese Sayadaw, and part of what he instructed her in was loving kindness. She did a lot of loving kindness practice, and with that, she was able to deal with what I imagine would have been a lot of anger, so that she doesn't have it now.

I was reminded also of something that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said along these lines: "Never succumb to the temptation of being bitter. As you press for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline using only the instrument of love." That is why he was such an amazing leader—that he could follow that. He could see the huge injustices that were being done and keep his own heart in a place of love as he moved forward, as he taught, as he acted, as he spoke.

So this development of tenderness and the insight into connection has a very healing quality in our life, in our heart, in our practice. Sometimes it touches parts of difficulty from the past. Memories come up, hurts come up, resentments come up.

This is from an Australian poet, Michael Leunig: "When the heart is cut or cracked or broken, do not clutch it. Let the wound lie open. Let the wind from the good old sea blow in to bathe the wound with salt and let it sting. Let a stray dog lick it. Let a bird lean in the hole and sing a simple song like a tiny bell and let it ring."

So when we come upon these difficult places in practice, we hold them with this heart of loving kindness. And the loving kindness changes those wounds. They heal under its warmth and under its light.

We commit ourselves more and more as our practice goes on. We commit ourselves to this idea that we don't have to move out of the place of loving kindness. When I came into dharma practice, I thought, "Well, my anger is a useful thing. I'm always going to keep it so I can be strong if somebody infringes on my rights." But the more we practice and see the strength that comes from loving kindness, the more we trust in the possibility of being able to always act from that place.

It doesn't mean that we don't act forcefully. It doesn't mean that we don't act strongly. It doesn't mean that we're shy about speaking our truth or speaking to power. You can see that in the Dalai Lama. You can see that in Martin Luther King. But we let it come from this place of compassion and care. That is a possibility.

Because we always remember through metta how much alike we all are—that we all want safety and happiness and health and ease. We all want the same. And you start to wonder, how different are we anyway?

You look at our bodies—they're small variations, but they're much the same. Two eyes, two ears, a nose, a tongue, a mouth, a heart. You look at our minds, and we all know sadness and fear and anger and wanting and longing and embarrassment. And we all know love and compassion and joy and contentment and happiness.

So what is so different? Same body, same heart. It's kind of like one organism that's been poured into different jars, and then those jars have gone off and had different experiences.

And so they've gotten shaped or colored a little bit differently. But basically it's the same jar with the same stuff in it. And so metta makes us realize that. We're all basically the same. And that's a deep kind of understanding of connection.

There's this beautiful quote from Rumi's teacher, Shams of Tabriz: "I, you, he, she, we. In the garden of mystic lovers, these are not true distinctions." These are not true distinctions in the eye of loving-kindness. We see the unity that underlies all the apparent differences. And that takes away this sorrowful sense of isolation or separation or not belonging, not being connected.

So I just want to close with this end of the interview Oprah had with the Dalai Lama. And before I quote him, I just want to mention that in the Mahayana tradition, the Tibetan tradition, compassion is the primary brahmaviharā. In our tradition of Theravāda, loving-kindness is the primary brahmaviharā. But these two are very, very close. So when we say mettā, we could say compassion, and when we say compassion, we could say mettā. Think of them as virtually the same.

So Oprah finishes by asking the Dalai Lama, "In my magazine, I do a column called 'What I Know for Sure.' What do you know for sure? The one thing on which you have no doubt." The Dalai Lama did not hesitate: "Compassion is the best source of happiness. For happy life and happy world, there is no doubt."

So let's just sit for a minute together. Loving-kindness is the best source of happiness for happy life and happy world.

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