Mettā and Connection

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 59:57

I hope those of you who were talking survived the exercise well. And a little shopping therapy always helps to restore balance—that's really why we provide the tables in the lobby.

Someone asked a Zen master one time, "What is the value of a lifetime of practice?" And he replied, "An appropriate response."

When I first heard that, I was really disappointed. For me, that was very undramatic for a Zen master. I thought for a Zen master, the value of a lifetime of practice is that when you come to the moment of death, you sit up spontaneously in full lotus, you utter a haiku that expresses your full dharma realization that has never been heard before, and then you pass away, still seated in full lotus. I thought that would be an appropriate response.

But the value of a lifetime of practice being an appropriate response mystified me until I started thinking about it more. And I came to really appreciate what a profound answer it was. Because what it asks of us is that in every moment of life, when we respond, we do that in an appropriate way. So this is not only the value, but it's the guideline for a lifetime of practice.

How do we do that? One of the beautiful things about the four brahmaviharas that we've been practicing and their associated states of near and far enemy is that it gives us this comprehensive roadmap to look at the way we respond to life.

And life is always changing. The essence of it is that it's constantly hitting us with pleasant experiences and unpleasant experiences and some neutral experiences in the middle. But it's this alternation of pleasant and unpleasant that keeps us off balance. And we develop these habits of mind in relation to those changing conditions.

So I want to take a look at these states—brahmaviharas, near and far enemies—in a little different lineup, just slicing it a different way. The four brahmaviharas that we've been working with—loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity—show us an awakened response. You could say the response from an enlightened mind, or you could say our own mind, when it's free and balanced.

As we've been able to touch these places, we know that these responses are in us. We know that in our human capacity, each of us has these responses as potentials. And then the practice is to bring them out more and more, even as painful and pleasant situations meet us.

But the near and far enemies give us another description of how we could also be responding. So we look

at the list of the near enemies and they are: liking with attachment, grief or despair, over-exuberance, and indifference.

Think about that list: liking with attachment, despair or depression, over-exuberance, and indifference. Now these aren't deadly sins, are they? These near enemies are not overwhelming sources of our greatest dukkha. These are just the normal way that in our neurosis we meet things. I think the near enemies are the normal neurotic response of humans to life. Nothing really extraordinary about them. But they're all based on some unclarity, unwisdom, unfreedom, lack of understanding in the mind.

Then the far enemies would go through that list: hatred, cruelty, envy, and agitation. Now we're getting into serious terrain. These are the states that provoke a lot of suffering in our own lives and in the world. And of course we see how these are potential within us too. We've seen and felt and experienced these in our lives also.

So we have the set of awakened responses, the sort of normal neurotic responses, and then we have the heavy kinds of suffering. And anytime we're in relation, we can see where on this map of twelve we're coming from. And it gives us an idea of the quality of our heart and mind at that point.

You can think of it like reacting to the stock market. For those of you who've put any money in the stock market and equities and funds over the last ten years, you've had the experience to have some of these occasions for these things to arise. The stock market goes up, we get elated, we get exuberant, we get over-exuberant. The stock market goes down, unpleasant thing happens, we get depressed. And the stock market here is just a symbol for all the things in our life that go up and down, which they do all the time.

So the Buddha said we go up and down with these changing conditions because we haven't really understood. We haven't really understood that they're all impermanent. He said that's what we lose track of. So we get swung into highs and lows not realizing that each of these changing conditions is going to change again.

As wisdom arises and we get less moved by the passing show, then we can abide more in this place of equanimity or balance of mind. It's not so thrown either into the neurotic functioning or the heavy suffering as the changes of life present. But we find the possibility to go more and more into this free or awakened kind of relation to life.

I think the beauty of this whole map—the map of the twelve—is that as we go back into life, daily life, we're in a relational setting.

as opposed to here, which is mostly inner and solitary. Back in life we're relating all the time to people and events and changing situations. We can use this map to look at how our heart is responding. What's skillful? What's really suffering? What's just a little bit off?

As we carry out this investigation, we start tuning into the movements of our heart and the hearts of

others. We begin to see what hurts and what leads to happiness, both for ourselves and others. This exploration brings profound benefits that take a while to develop, but they are deep.

One is that we become more and more tender with ourselves and with others. We grow more sensitive. As you tune into the impact in the heart, you start to feel concern, care, love, compassion, happiness. So we tenderize the heart by touching the play of life in ourselves and others.

This is from Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche: "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 suit of armor all the time. What a relief."

This quotation points to this tenderness as also being a kind of vulnerability. It's where we feel life, but it's also where life touches us. We realize that our sensitivity means we're vulnerable all the time because at any moment, anything can happen.

This really came home to us with the experience of a friend of ours. He's a Dharma practitioner who was having some practice time and vacation in Asia a few years ago. He was out on the beach in the morning—a beautiful southern tropical beach—doing some exercises, enjoying the view of the ocean, when suddenly he saw a wave that was a little too big. He happened to be out there on December 26, 2004.

This wave that was a little too big came up and knocked him over. He said it wasn't too scary, but when it went back out, there was this really unusual trough. It was much deeper on the outflow than it should ever be, and that concerned him. So he immediately went to grab his partner who was still sleeping and brought her out of the bungalow, where she was actually sleeping under a big chest of drawers that could have fallen over and crushed her if anything happened.

He took her by the hand and they climbed up on this concrete wall that was about four feet tall. Then he hung on to a palm tree growing beside the wall and she hung on to him. You probably know the next chapter. The bigger wave came—the second wave of that tsunami in 2004—and it was the second wave that was the killer.

So that wave killed tens of thousands of people on that day. My friend was in southern India. It hit there, it hit in Sri Lanka with devastating impact, it hit in Thailand, and it hit in Burma. The huge wave came. My friend was holding on to the palm tree and his partner was holding on to him and they were okay. The wave passed up and then it passed back and they were still standing on that wall. So he survived. He was on a beach near Madras in southern India. One time when the practice of non-clinging was not advisable...

But by holding on, they were both okay. But who would know? You wake up, it's a beautiful beach, it's a sunny morning. Who knows what's going to happen?

This can happen to any of us. Any of us could walk into a doctor's office the next time we have to go and find out that we have a disease projected to be terminal. This could always happen to us. So as human beings, this vulnerability and unknowing is just part of our life's condition.

I was teaching at IMS a few years ago, and a young man was on the three-month course. I was teaching the first half.

And he was very inspired by the Dharma and had a great love for the practice. His intention was to go to Asia after the retreat, to ordain as a monk and immerse himself in long-term practice. He felt a deep calling to be in silent retreat for an extended period.

We talked extensively during the retreat and I kept in touch with him afterwards, offering support for his plans. I believed he would thrive in the robes and do well in Asia. But as we continued our correspondence, he shared that he had developed a mysterious illness affecting his digestion so severely that he couldn't eat without excruciating pain.

Going to Asia with an abdominal problem is not recommended—mostly you go there healthy and come back with digestive issues. His condition became quite severe. He couldn't find a diet that prevented him from doubling over in pain after every meal. So he couldn't go to Asia. He couldn't ordain. He couldn't enter retreat because he had to tend to his health. The pain made it difficult to maintain full-time employment. Despite visiting numerous specialists, doctors couldn't diagnose his condition.

Here was someone young, healthy, bright, full of love for the Dharma and the best of intentions—yet this curious illness blocked his journey. We never know if something similar might happen to us. Fortunately, over the years his condition has improved somewhat. He's learned to work with it better, moderate his diet, and receive some medical treatment. He can practice again, though he's not quite ready for Asia yet. He continues to make progress and maintains his love for the Dharma, but hasn't been able to fulfill that original vision.

We never know what will happen or how we'll respond. We can't always control circumstances. But as we tune into this reality, it awakens our compassion for ourselves and one another because we're all in the same boat—the same place of vulnerability.

Bob Dylan writes in his memoirs: "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. She had also instructed me to be kind because everyone you'll ever meet is fighting a hard battle."

As we open to this human situation and the possibilities of difficulty, we develop a connection to life that comes from a different place. Sally shared a whale story the other night—the whale tangled in fishing

nets. She mentioned another incident off our coast near the Farallon Islands. I'd like to read from that account.

This humpback whale, a fifty-foot female, had become entangled in crab pot lines—fishing lines with heavy pots dangling at the ends. Four lines, each weighing nearly a thousand pounds, were dragging her down. The Marine Mammal Center sent out a boat of divers to rescue her by cutting the cords.

This is from one of the divers: "The whale floated passively in the water the whole time, giving off a strange kind of vibration. When I was cutting the line going through her mouth, her eye was there winking at me, watching me. It was an epic moment of my life."

Can you imagine working on the whale right next to her eye? He spent about an hour cutting through that line while other divers worked around her. When the whale realized she was free, she began swimming in circles in apparent joy. Then she swam up to each diver, nuzzled them, and moved to the next one.

"It felt to me like she was thanking us, knowing that she was free and that we had helped her," one diver said. "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 happy to see you. I never felt threatened. It was an amazing, unbelievable experience."

Can you imagine the connection they felt with her? That is tenderness. That's beauty. These connections—to the people in your meditations, to one another, to the animals here on this land—are very special. We shouldn't gloss over them because there's deep meaning here.

These connections, when we feel ourselves in another's shoes or understand what someone else is experiencing, ease our sense of isolation. We've been teaching retreats for scientists for years, both here at Spirit Rock and at IMS, because neuroscience has become so connected to the Dharma. This didn't happen by accident. Some neuroscientists were meditators who became close to the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama, with his great appreciation for science, personally and enthusiastically endorsed these yearly gatherings of meditators—many from Asia—and Western scientists, because he felt there was tremendous potential there.

These retreats grew from that recognition. We felt it would be valuable for scientists to have first-person experience of what they were investigating.

This insight resonates deeply with our meditation practice. So if scientists could understand what meditation was about, they could design research more effectively, ask more compelling questions, and truly comprehend what the meditators were experiencing.

The scientists needed a name to present this project to their superiors. Attending a retreat like this wasn't simply a meditation retreat—it was called "first-person research." There was indeed extensive first-person research happening at these scientific retreats, creating a wonderful exchange of understanding. Toward

the end, the participants would engage in dialogue with each other.

During one of these retreats, a scientist shared something particularly striking. Among the many different research projects—and I cannot recall which specific study this emerged from—they mentioned that recent research suggests perhaps the deepest source of people's unhappiness is a sense of isolation.

This isolation manifests on multiple levels. In our country today, community has largely broken down. The nuclear family structure has become unstable, the extended family is often absent, and the wider community frequently provides no support at all. We grow up in the West without a sense of deep connection, which differs markedly from established societies in Asia.

This sense of isolation manifests within us in a way that makes us believe we are truly unusual. We lack sufficient close, extended contacts to recognize how normal we actually are. We are all genuinely normal, but we remain unaware of this truth. Each of us grows up within our individual cylinder of personality, convinced we are strange, when we are not. We are remarkably alike.

The Brahmaviharas begin to reveal this interconnection. As we develop these qualities through practice, they break down our sense of being different. This is, in many ways, the consequence of excessive emphasis on individualism. Western cultures place tremendous emphasis on individual rights, while many Asian cultures prioritize social cohesion and accepting some sacrifice of individual choice to align with the community.

Here in the West, we have become overly individualistic, breeding this profound isolation. Within this individualism, we define ourselves by how we are individual or unique. As we mature, we tell ourselves countless stories about how we differ from others. We convince ourselves we are different because we suffer more, or were more wounded in childhood, or because we are the best athlete in school, or achieved the highest SAT scores.

In both directions—whether we consider ourselves better than or inferior to others—we continuously tell ourselves these stories as a distinctly Western emphasis. Each time we repeat these narratives, we believe them a little more deeply, and this isolates us further. What we forget are the stories about how similar we are to everyone else.

The ego, the self-sense, does not focus on connection—it focuses on separation. We create this separation through these stories of our self-image. By repeating them continuously, we come to believe we exist in some isolated corner, when we do not. We share at least as many similarities as we do differences.

I want to explore how both the Brahmaviharas and insight work to reconnect us. There is a beautiful image from the Avatamsaka Sutra, a Mahayana text that formed the foundation for Huayan Buddhism, Dzogchen, and Mahamudra, called the Jewel Net of Indra.

Imagine the universe as a vast net—a rope net spanning all of space. At every intersection where two

strands cross, there sits a gem. The entire universe resembles this rope net with gems at each crossing point.

These gems are all different—crystals, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires—with varying cuts, weights, and facets. Yet each is a gem, and every gem is translucent. When you gaze into one gem, it reflects all the other gems in the universe. Each gem contains reflections of all others.

This serves as a metaphor for sentient beings. Each gem represents one being. We differ from one another, yet we are also translucent. Light shines into us and through us. If you could truly open up any individual, what you would discover is all the rest of us. Your experience right now is composed of everyone else in this meditation hall. This is only possible because you are fundamentally empty.

So she thought, "What's going on here?" She slowed down and got in the slow lane, and as she approached the light, she could see that there was something in the fast lane. And as she got closer, she could see that it was a mother duck with about six or seven ducklings, and they were all just sitting in the middle of the fast lane.

The mother duck wasn't moving. The ducklings were huddled around her, and Caroline could see that the mother duck had been hit and was dying. And all these cars—this is a busy road—all these cars had just stopped. Traffic in both directions had come to a complete halt. People were getting out of their cars. Somebody was directing traffic around the duck family. People were on their cell phones trying to call animal rescue services.

And Caroline said she just sat there and started crying, because she realized that everyone had stopped. Nobody was honking their horns or getting impatient. Everyone recognized that this was a mother with her children, and she was dying, and the children didn't want to leave her. And somehow everyone understood that this was more important than getting where they needed to go.

Caroline said it was one of the most beautiful things she'd ever seen—this spontaneous expression of compassion for this duck family from all these strangers who happened to be driving by. And I think this really captures something about how metta works. There's a natural arising of care and protection that happens when we recognize suffering and vulnerability, especially when we see the bond between beings who love each other.

This is how the heart naturally operates when it's not caught up in its own agenda, when it's not too busy or distracted to notice what's happening around us. The Buddha called this "mudita"—sympathetic joy and care that arises spontaneously when we're present enough to see clearly.

And I think this also points to something profound about how interconnected we really are. In that moment, all those drivers weren't separate individuals trying to get somewhere. They became part of something larger—a community of beings responding to the suffering of other beings. The artificial boundaries we usually maintain between "me" and "not me," between "my concerns" and "their

concerns," just naturally dissolved in the face of genuine need.

This is why the Buddha taught that the brahma-viharas—these divine abodes of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—aren't really practices we have to force or manufacture. They're expressions of our deepest nature when the obstacles to love are removed. When we're not caught up in fear, anger, jealousy, or self-preoccupation, these qualities arise naturally, just like they did for all those drivers who stopped for the duck family.

There was no reason for the traffic. It was just inching along, and as she got up to where it was slowest, she saw what was happening: a mother duck was trying to cross the three lanes of traffic.

Cars were stopping and swerving around her, trying to go on their way—because in Marin, nobody wants to be five minutes late for dinner, for goodness' sake. So they were still moving, and the mother duck was going in between the cars, with six little ducklings behind her.

Caroline and her friend reached this point and said, "This is no good." She stopped the car and blocked her lane. They both got out and slowed down and stopped the cars next to them, giving the mother duck a clear path to walk to the median and hop up. The six little ducklings walked to the median, but they couldn't hop up. So Caroline scooped each of them up and put them on the median.

Problem solved, right? No. Three more lanes to get to the water.

Cars were slowing down on the other side, people honking and shouting, "Get moving! What's going on?" So Caroline and her friend went over and stopped that line of traffic. They let the mother duck and six ducklings walk across three more lanes, and then they had a clear shot to the bay.

I thought that was such a beautiful gesture. Just stop, you guys. We're going to let these ducks go across. That's protecting as one would protect one's only child—cherishing all living beings like that.

This brings us to a really lovely quality that's discussed in Buddhist practice, one that grows out of this universal love and universal compassion. When we have this feeling of metta for all beings, as Sally led us in this morning with such beautiful imagery, we want all beings to be happy, don't we? I hope you could touch that possibility. Any being we can imagine, we want them to be happy.

As compassion can be extended in the same way, we don't want them to suffer. This is love and compassion together—we want them to be happy and we don't want them to suffer.

What's the best way we can affect that? We can't control the outcome right now, but what's the best way we can influence it? In other words, if you really wanted someone you cared about to be as happy as possible and truly not suffering, what would you want them to do? Wouldn't you want them to wake up and become inwardly free? Isn't that the best security for happiness and release from suffering—this complete inner peace and freedom?

From the Buddhist point of view, it is the best way to help someone attain happiness and come out of suffering. So if our goal is to help all beings become free, what's the best way for us to affect that? Is it to set up a scholarship fund for Spirit Rock? Or would it be to practice ourselves so that we became free and understood the path out of suffering and toward true happiness?

That's the thinking in the Buddhist understanding anyway—that if we can attain our own freedom, then we're in the best situation to help all other beings come out of suffering and into genuine happiness.

This motivation to free ourselves in order to be of greatest benefit to all beings is called bodhicitta. These are two words: bodhi means awakening, and citta means consciousness, mind, or heart. So a beautiful translation of this is "awakening heart"—the awakening heart.

When we have this aspiration to free ourselves so we can best help others achieve happiness and release from suffering, this can become a motivation in our practice that we reflect on, strengthen, and restate to ourselves again and again. It's really just an outgrowth of unlimited love and compassion—the most pragmatic approach to activate our love and compassion for others.

This is something highly recommended in many schools of Buddhist practice: to reflect on your wish to help others in this way, to become free ourselves as the best way to help others become free. This wish then forms the foundation for the Bodhisattva path and the Bodhisattva vow. It's really a statement that "I want to become free so that I can help all beings become free."

This can become a very important direction in our practice. It's a beautiful practice because it will sustain us all the way through. If we have a more limited aspiration, we might give up before the end.

But this one would sustain us all the way through.

So I say something usually at the start of every sit that reminds me of this aspiration. It's something that I would like to accomplish. At the start of sits, I say something like, "May I come to awakening in order to benefit all beings." That may sound a little grandiose, but it's just putting our little bit into the stream. Even the Dalai Lama says he has a hard time really making this a big practice.

So it may not appear like a big burning bonfire right now, but even a little candle flame is good—a little suggestion of this. The Dalai Lama 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 one way that we can feel that connection and use that connection as a motivation for ourselves.

Loving kindness is also the source of ethical conduct. When we took the five precepts at the beginning of the retreat, that's really founded in loving kindness and compassion. We don't want others to be hurt by our actions. We want them to be safe in our presence. The Buddha said when we activate that intention, that care with our conduct, we are giving all the beings around us the gift of fearlessness. You know how it

feels when you're around somebody who's really safe in their actions, who's really careful? They create a kind of atmosphere where people feel safe around them. And when you feel safe, then you can flower. This can be refined a long way.

So a few years ago, Oprah Winfrey was interviewing the Dalai Lama. I have a lot of appreciation for Oprah and the way she takes brilliant spiritual teachings and offers them to a wide audience. She has taken people like the Dalai Lama, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, and James Baraz, and introduced them to a very wide readership. James's class attendance doubled after his appearance with Oprah.

She was interviewing the Dalai Lama and started off by asking him, "Have you ever had to forgive yourself for anything?" She was asking him about his conduct and how he felt about that.

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

"Killing an insect?" Oprah said. "Okay."

The Dalai Lama continued, "My attitude toward mosquitoes is not very favorable. Not very peaceful. Bedbugs 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. She fell silent and looked out the window. There was awe in her voice when she finally 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."

Of course, part of that beauty of mind and that clarity and stillness and peace is because of his care with his conduct—that lets him enjoy a lack of guilt or remorse or confusion that lets his mind settle. So he's been doing this a little longer than us. We're probably about fourteen lifetimes behind at this point, but we'll catch up. We just have to keep going.

Loving kindness is also the source of this quality of generosity. Kamala talked this afternoon about the practice of generosity and its central role in the Buddha's teachings. Generosity is founded on the sense of empathy that we care about others.

There are a lot of things going on in the world these days that are very discouraging. You read a news report, you read a newspaper—it hasn't gotten a lot better in the last week. So it's easy to have a

pessimistic view of the world today. But there are also a lot of beautiful things going on that don't make the papers.

Paul Hawkins's second most recent book—I'm going to read the title—

Paul Hawkins' book is called "Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming." He documents the countless non-profits, non-governmental organizations, and individual foundations that have emerged from people simply caring—whose mission is to promote health, justice, education, and general welfare for people all around the world.

This represents a huge movement happening in both small and large groups. Consider the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with its endowment of approximately fifty billion dollars, or take smaller, closer-to-home initiatives. Hawken conducted extensive research and identified about a million of these groups. This is beautiful—almost everywhere you turn, you hear such stories.

Dr. Paul Farmer's work in Haiti exemplifies this. Greg Mortenson's efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan, despite some criticism, have accomplished tremendous good. Even within our own community, I know four separate friends doing work in Burma.

Kamala and Steve run a schools project there, raising at least one hundred thousand dollars annually to build schools. In Burma, you can construct a school for twenty-five thousand dollars. Over the years, they've built approximately twelve to twenty schools that wouldn't have existed otherwise, since the government isn't providing that funding. Once a school is built, however, the government will provide a teacher.

Another friend collects donations through an email list and last year brought sixty thousand dollars to provide relief to villagers affected by the cyclone, while also supporting nunneries that don't receive as much assistance as the large monasteries. She visits and supports a very small nunnery where two nuns had been planning long-term retreat practice. When the cyclone hit—Burma's version of the tsunami—many children were orphaned after their parents were killed.

Suddenly, twenty young girls from that area found themselves without families. These two sisters set aside their retreat plans and decided what they really needed to do was create a small nunnery where they could raise these twenty girls. Of course, they lacked the financial resources, but they committed themselves to finding ways to have the girls fed, clothed, and educated.

Initially, they lived in ramshackle conditions with leaking thatched roofs and ten girls crammed into a room about six by ten feet for sleeping. Carol and her friends discovered this nunnery and have steadily brought more resources, enabling them to build larger buildings and provide better classroom facilities, books, and robes. When you visit now, you see these twenty little novices with their shaved heads and pink robes—absolutely adorable—receiving support because people care.

Another friend, Hal Nathan, previously served on Spirit Rock's board. Sally currently serves as board president, and before her, Hal held that position. As a deeply valued sangha member, Hal established the Foundation for the People of Burma, annually gathering about six million dollars to bring healthcare to Burma, primarily in rural areas where no health services would otherwise be available.

We witness this phenomenon everywhere. People become inspired and, from their own sense of loving-kindness and compassion, take on these projects, offering assistance to those who desperately need it. This represents one of the most encouraging developments I see in today's world. All of this springs from care.

Alice Walker, author of "The Color Purple," offers this insight: "As I get older, I realize the thing that I value the most is good-heartedness." We begin to feel this ourselves. We start looking for it, recognizing how it manifests in the world, embracing it as our own value.

Trungpa Rinpoche continues from his quote about the sore spot: "There's also an inner wound called Tathagata-garbha 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 out of one complete sore spot altogether. That is called bodhisattva fever."

That vulnerability is compassion. We truly have no way to defend ourselves anymore. Yet what's beautiful is that as the heart opens in this way, it gains strength. Opening the heart doesn't make us weaker—it makes us stronger.

Consider another story about the Dalai Lama, who operates on a vast stage of global spiritual leadership and has for years carried political responsibility, bearing the weight of Tibet's future on his shoulders. Several years ago, he came to this very hall for a meeting with about 220 Buddhist teachers. The format involved people making presentations to him and then requesting his response—perhaps not the ideal structure, but the one we used.

So one person would present, then another person would present, then another person would present, and then say, "Your Holiness, what do you think about all that?" And at one point I remember he just said, "Oh, nothing left up here. First person present, I had something to say, but now that's gone. I don't remember anything." And he just laughed about it. So straightforward about it.

But some of the presenters were rather direct or I would say even a little cheeky with him. So one of the presenters wanted to ask the Dalai Lama about the popularization of Buddhism that was going on in our culture. And I'm sure you can see there are things like perfume called Samsara. Resorts will advertise with taglines like "In two days here you'll be in nirvana." This is beginning to happen. It's getting commercialized. So this person mentioned all this popularization that's going on and he said, "And you, Your Holiness, are the biggest popularizer of them all. There's a risk that Buddhism is going to become

trivialized and commercialized through this. So what do you think about this?"

The Dalai Lama was just quiet for a minute while he reflected on it. And then he said, "Some people, you see, they call me Living Buddha. Other people call me God King. No, I am not. I'm just a simple Buddhist monk. But others call me counter-revolutionary. They call me wolf in monk's clothing. But you see, I look back at my own intention. If my intention is sincere, then that's what is important. How I'm perceived is up to others. I don't care."

I thought that was beautiful. But you know, it takes a strong heart not to care. You're being attacked on the front page of the New York Times and called a wolf in monk's clothing. He says, "I don't care. I look at my own intention." That's a strong heart.

One other story about a strong heart. Metta in the face of fear or anger. It's said that when the mind gets very spacious with metta and when metta is strong, anger can't stick in it. It's said the way if you take a bucket of paint and you throw it through space, the way it doesn't stick in space is the way anger doesn't stick in the mind of metta. There's no place for it to grab.

Maha Gosananda was a Cambodian monk who died a few years ago. When the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, he was living in Thailand. He'd gone there to practice years earlier with Ajahn Dhammadharo in southern Thailand. While the genocide was going on, in which most of the monks and nuns were killed—there had been one to two million monks and nuns in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge, and there were hardly any, like 60,000 afterwards—while all that was happening, Maha Gosananda was living in Thailand. He lost something like seventeen family members in the genocide, and of course many friends who he had been in the robes with before.

Then when the political system changed—the Vietnamese invaded and the Khmer Rouge were pushed out of power—it became safer to live in refugee camps along the border with Thailand. At that point, Maha Gosananda moved into the refugee camps to give some Buddhist support and teaching and solace to his people, the country people. While he was living there, he began to teach what he understood would be needed for the healing of his country.

He had a lot of grounds for anger. He'd lost his sangha. He'd lost almost all his family members. But that didn't change his attitude. So he started holding large gatherings on the holy days, and tens of thousands of the refugees would come and gather to hear his talk on the Dhamma, because there weren't so many monks or nuns left anymore.

And what he had them do—he printed up brochures and handed them out, having them chant a passage from the Dhammapada, that classic Buddhist text. The passage is the fairly famous one that says: "Hatred never ceases by hatred. Hatred only ceases through love. This is an ancient and eternal law."

So he was preaching nonviolence, love, compassion, and reconciliation. He was attracting a lot of interest and a lot of followers. Well, this threatened the Khmer Rouge's power because they were also in the

camps, trying to wield what power they had. So there began to be threats against Mahagosananda's life.

His supporters became very concerned and said, "Look, we want you to stay. We want you to survive." He had become, about this point in time, the patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism because he was the most senior monk left. "We don't want to lose you. You're too important for your country. So look, take some money, go to the capital, Phnom Penh, get a flight to Paris, and you'll be safe there. The Khmer Rouge won't get you in Paris."

So Mahagosananda took the money, got on a train, and was away for about a week. When he came back, his friend said, "You're not supposed to be here—you're supposed to be in Paris!" What he had done with the money was print up fifty thousand more brochures with the chant "hatred never ceases through hatred," so he could pass more of the chant books out to the villagers in the refugee camp.

So this is metta in the face of anger, metta in the face of fear. There's enormous strength in this state of mind.

This kind of connection opens up to us. Metta reminds us how much alike we all are. We all want those things in the metta phrases—we want safety and happiness and health and ease in life. All sentient beings want that, human and non-human.

So we start looking around and we start to feel: we have the capacity for the brahmaviharas, we want the same things, we know the near enemies, we know the far enemies. How different are we on a heart level? And as we start to share with other people and hear their stories, listen to how their hearts are moving, we see it's just how our heart would move too in the same situation. We start to feel like the same heart has just been poured into all these different vessels.

And the vessels are not that different either. Two eyes, nose, mouth, ears, heart. Our vessels are not that different. Same heart, same human consciousness, same vessel—we've just had different life experiences along the way. So we have gotten shaped, and our collection of qualities becomes unique, becomes singular. But what it's based on is all the same. Fundamentally, there's no real difference in our makeup.

Ego picks out all these apparent differences of gender and age and race and class and ability—of intellect and athleticism and so on—and makes all these discriminations. When we're lost in that world of dividing, we forget what we all share, because we are basically the same being that's gone through different experiences.

So I'll close with this lovely poem from Rumi's teacher. Not much is known of Rumi's teacher. His name is Shams. He came from a town called Tabriz. But this poem is attributed to him:

"I, you, he, she, we. In the garden of mystic lovers, these are not true distinctions."

Let's just sit with that for a minute. I, you, he, she, we. In the garden of love and compassion, these are not true distinctions.

So thank you for your attention. We have about thirty minutes for walking meditation, then we'll have our last sitting with chanting of the sutta.

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