Karma, Forgiveness & Equanimity

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 55:20

Here we are tonight on the last night of Metta Retreat. Someone said in an interview this morning, "I'm really, really hoping that you're going to talk about forgiveness in your talk tonight." So I was really happy to be able to say, as a matter of fact, I am.

It's not only always appropriate to talk about forgiveness, but it's particularly appropriate because it's really a linchpin key to the very heart of what we are doing. We talk about metta—benevolence or friendliness practice—that comes from that great balance of mind that enables us to meet each moment and each person as a friend.

Carol spoke last night so eloquently of being able to respond with the greatest depth of compassion only when we have the balance to hold suffering in our view and in our hearts without flinching from it and without aversion. And we are able to respond most fully to other people's good fortune with absolute sympathetic joy only when our hearts are balanced in enough equanimity so that our joy for them is not tinged and tainted with envy or jealousy or grasping.

So we need to talk about that great equanimity which is really the foundation of friendliness and compassion and sympathetic joy, and the way in which forgiveness is a key piece of that great equanimity.

Think about Carol's example of her friend who wakes up every morning and says, "Wow, this is the best day yet." Imagine getting up in the morning and saying, "Wow, thanks—another day to see the goodness of life." To do that truly with an awakened mind, you really need to have such spaciousness of mind that could hold the difficulties and the pain of life in it and still be able to say this. You would need to have the heart to open to all that pain, not drown in it. You'd need to be able to see your own situation and the situation of other people with tremendous clarity—really to see clearly the ubiquitous nature of suffering, our own and other people's—and to be able to do it with enough balance to have the power to respond with bodhicitta, with really the impulse to be of service, to address the great suffering of the world. And begin to see the possibility of service as happiness and generosity as happiness.

The great forgiveness—we'll start with the great forgiveness and then work down to the little personal forgiveness—is to be able to forgive life for being just what it is, so painful for everyone, sooner or later, not in the same amounts. The truth is that some people, for reasons of karma—we all have different rows to hoe and different amounts of difficulty. But everybody has difficulty.

I heard a story about a woman whose death remark—as death remarks of Japanese Zen teachers often are their final teaching—was apparently said as her final last breath remark: "Thank you very much. I have

no complaints." Imagine being able to do that.

I had a friend who died about twenty years ago now. He was in his forties when he died. He died of a cancer very rare in men. He had a wife, he had children, he had a very flourishing career. He did everything he could to treat his illness, every possible treatment that was available. And he died. He wrote a letter to be sent to all his friends after his death, and one of the things he said in the letter in describing his life is, "I would have wanted more, but I never wanted other." I thought that was marvelous.

Sometimes when you listen to that, you think, "Well, didn't Bill want other? Didn't he want to get well from his illness?" He certainly did. And he did everything that he could to get better from his illness. So not wanting other doesn't mean not having aspirations. Doesn't mean non-acting. Doesn't mean not being patient. It doesn't mean being passive in the face of whatever is happening. It means doing whatever you can do, seeing whatever you've got, and then not wanting other, because that's really the refuge of a balanced, equanimous heart.

It's really a place of great wisdom to be able to say: Things are what they are for reasons far beyond our ability to figure them out. Certainly life gets lived through us. We aren't helpless in our lives. We make decisions in every moment, hopefully in moments of clarity, in a skillful way, and we make decisions that influence our life and have tremendous influence on the lives of the people around us and ultimately, I believe, on all life. But we're not in charge. There's a way in which knowing that, there's a place that we can rest in the middle of a life of difficulty.

with a certain balance around the difficulty.

I was going to Spirit Rock to teach one day, somewhere in the last year or two, and I was arriving for class in the morning, hurrying because I was almost late. Down the path came another person who comes to class quite often, so I know her by name. I said, "Hi Rose, how are you?"

She said, "I'm fine."

Then as we were hurrying in together, she said, "Well actually, you know, I have this difficulty happening, and this other little problem in my life, and I have this other problem with my son. But actually," she said, "I'm fine."

After we had sat that morning—because I had a sense of what Rose meant—after we'd sat together, as is our habit every week, I talked about meeting Rose outside. I told exactly the same story I just told you now. We talked about that sense of being able to say: this is what's happening, this is what's true, this is painful, this is not so painful, this is more painful, this is pleasant, and I'm fine. I'm really fine.

I'm reminded of my grandmother who used to say, "My arthritis is giving me a lot of trouble, my knee hurts, I haven't had a letter from my cousin Sophie in a long time. And I myself am not too good." There's a sense that I myself could be good or not good, fine or not fine, and people understood what she meant.

When I told that story about Rose's remark, Gwen made a comment that has gone down in Spirit Rock history as Gwen's remark. I said, "You know, maybe we should have as a password here: I'm fine." Like clubs and secret societies have passwords they say to each other—the secret hand sign or handshake or secret word. We said, "How about we'll have a password here at Spirit Rock, and the password will be 'I'm fine.'"

We all thought about that. Then Gwen made her remark, which has gone down in history. Gwen said, "When people ask me, 'How are you, Gwen?' I say, 'I couldn't be better.'"

That is always true for all of us. Always. If we could, we would. Nobody purposely suffers. They don't get up and say, "I'm feeling great, but now I'm going to mess up the day." Nobody purposely does that. We couldn't be better, any of us.

It is really that awareness that everyone is always operating at whatever level of clarity they have—sometimes not much, sometimes unskillfully, sometimes unwholesomely, sometimes in a way that creates great deal of pain for other people. But they couldn't be better. That doesn't mean the behavior is okay. It just means they couldn't be better. It's really the clue to being able to forgive people.

This moment in which we couldn't be better, we can be different. The next moment can be different because if this moment is one of clarity, we can make a judgment that will make the next moment better. We can make a judgment in a moment of clarity that changes this moment completely and our reality completely from here on. In fact, that's what we're hoping to do here this week.

I really think of this practice as transformative in the deepest sense and in ways often that I feel are heroic and monumental, like changing the course of the Mississippi. But we can do it because we really have that possibility in moments of profound clarity to choose differently and live differently and have a different reality.

But this moment, as it arrives, is the child of everything that ever happened—always. We say, as part of the equanimity reflection, every individual is heir to their own karma. I think about that a lot, about what it means. Every individual is heir to their own karma.

In my mind, I don't hear it with a sense of "we deserve what we got." We got what we got in a lawful way because of everything that's gone before.

I was teaching in Grand Rapids, Michigan, sometime a year ago. At the end of the retreat workshop that I taught there, someone said, "You know, there's a person in our community that you haven't met yet. There's Arnold Boorstein. He's 86 years old. You should meet him. Maybe he's a relative of yours. It's not that common a name."

So I sought him out, and we talked a little bit.

We determined that we were not relatives—his family came from northern Germany, while my

father-in-law's people were French. He was 86 years old, and when I asked if he had been born in Germany, he said no. His father had been born there and come to the United States, but Arnold Borstein himself had been born in Grand Rapids in 1906.

"That's really interesting," I said. "All the folks I know came to this country, got off the boat, and stayed in New York. Nobody moved. They maybe moved to New Jersey if they were adventurous, but nobody moved to Grand Rapids. How did your father get to be there?"

"Well," he said, "my father actually came to New York and stayed there a while. He and a cousin went into business, but the business failed. So they were thinking of something else to go into business doing together, and the cousin said, 'Let's go into the pickle business in Chicago.' So he said okay. The cousin went to Chicago first, and then my father got on the train to join him to open a pickle business. But he had to change trains in Detroit, and in Detroit, he got on the wrong train. He got on the train to Grand Rapids."

He arrived in Grand Rapids in mid-afternoon on a Friday, alone in a new city on a new street, not knowing anybody. He walked down the main street and saw a store that said "S. Cohen and Son, Men's Haberdashers." He went in and said, "Listen, I'm new in town. I just got here. I don't know anybody. Do you know any family that would invite a single Jewish man home for Shabbat dinner?"

So S. Cohen took him home for dinner. In the home of S. Cohen, having arrived there a week before, was S. Cohen's niece from Europe. Arnold Borstein's father married her and lived the rest of his life with her in Grand Rapids. And Arnold Borstein was born there.

If Arnold Borstein's father had gotten on the right train to Chicago, he would have had a whole different life—not his children, not his grandchildren, not his story.

When I think about this, I realize we are all, all of us, all the time getting on the train for Grand Rapids. Every single thing we do, every decision we make, is another train to Grand Rapids.

I told that story to my friend James, and he said, "I think it's wonderful that story happened in Grand Rapids, because that's like what life is—it's a river that's one long Grand Rapids."

When I see clearly, in the moments that I see clearly, I recognize that for me to be here in this moment, every single thing in history has had to happen. For me to have my children or my grandchildren, for you to be here, for anything to be what it is now, everything else has had to happen.

Sometimes people say, "Well, wait a minute, what does your life have to do with Marco Polo establishing a trade route to the Orient?" I don't know, but I think it has something to do with it. Who knows what those trade routes to the Orient did about commerce in Europe, about the business affairs of people in Europe, which caused different people to make different decisions about where to live, how to marry, when to emigrate, when to do what.

There are such things as proximal karma and distal karma. Marco Polo is probably very distal to my

personal karma, but nevertheless, when I realize this, I really am awestruck. Had I gotten on one plane later, or turned the corner ten minutes before, or married Arnold Schwartz instead of Seymour Borstein—that's proximal karma—but everybody's life would be different.

We really get this on some level. So then it's hard to realize why we don't forgive people for being what they are. It makes so much sense to do it if we realize that people who do hurtful things are in pain. Everybody knows that people who do hurtful things are in pain. Happy people don't do hurtful things. It's so sensible to think that.

Why aren't we compassionate? Why don't we right away respond with great compassion? Why don't we forgive them? Sometimes I hear people say things like, "I'm never going to forgive so-and-so as long as I live."

I'm never going to give them the pleasure of the satisfaction of my forgiveness. As if the other person gets better from us forgiving! It is actually we who stay locked in a prison of discontent, in a prison of tight heart when we don't forgive. And yet we imagine that we somehow are causing... First of all, we imagine that we're causing pain to the other person by not forgiving them, and we imagine that the sense of pain we're causing them is making us happy, but it's not true. Vengeance is sweet? It's not true. Vengeance is terrible, and it's painful.

It takes some deeper understanding, though, because it makes sense to forgive, and yet we remember who offended us and who hurt us. We keep a little list, even though we know it's tedious.

When we listen to the Metta Sutta, it's so beautiful: "May all beings be happy, whatever their living nature." The Metta Sutta doesn't say how to love everybody. It says take care of everybody, love everybody, wish everybody well. It's very beautiful. And it's a little bit like the Nike ad—it says "just do it." It doesn't say how to do it.

So I think we need another sutta called the "no-grudge sutta" or something—how to do it. That might also shed some light on how we can work with those tightnesses in our own heart that have not yet relaxed.

I think that we don't forgive because we've been either frightened into a guardedness of the heart or saddened into a hardened heart. I think that's what happens.

Sometimes people will say, "I'm not frightened, I'm angry legitimately because I see injustice. And my anger causes me to address it." My father used to say, "I need my anger because it keeps me active for social justice." And I would agree with him. I would say, "I think you're half right. You need it as an alarm bell to tell you something's not right. And then you need to act. But when we act clouded with anger, we don't act well and we don't act wisely. We need it as mindfulness. Wake up. This isn't right. I have to fix it." And then we have to act out of clarity.

You know, the things that people worry about sometimes is that forgiveness might mean excusing or

condoning or justifying or actually becoming friends with people who are hurtful or dangerous. And it doesn't mean any of that. It means seeing things clearly and responding to them wisely. That space of wise forgiveness comes out of clarity—seeing not through a veil of anger. Sometimes it means seeing our own shadow. Sometimes we're afraid of seeing our own shadow.

I had a ten-year grudge. It was the longest grudge I had, I think. I had a letter once from someone accusing me of something that so offended me. I remember telling people twice in my life I've had a rage. I'm not a very wrathful person—I come from mild-mannered people. I have other problems, but wrath is not my main problem. And I tell people I had two rages in my life, one other and then this one.

So I got a letter that accused me of something, and I just was filled with rage. I could not... it was terrible to me that this person had accused me of this, that, and the other thing, for which I felt wrongly accused.

By the way, Shantideva, in Chapter 6 of the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life—the chapter called Patience—teaches that when someone challenges your good name and you feel offended and anger rises, you should reflect in the following way: Is that person right? If they're right, you should be grateful to them because they're pointing out something about yourself that you could improve or fix. Since our intention in life is to be as good as we can be, we should be grateful and think of them as teachers. And if they're wrong, what's the problem? Forget about it.

I didn't do it that well. I had a grudge for ten years.

Now, it wasn't a terribly debilitating grudge because I didn't think about it every day or nurse it daily. I don't run into this person very often—I live in the same county, and sometimes our paths cross, but not much. But for ten years it was more a story of how I couldn't let go of that grudge. I would tell my friends, "I can't believe that so-and-so said this about me. Can you believe it?" Ten years.

Sometimes we'd be on the same program, even on a panel together, and I'd think, "Uh-oh, I'm going to meet so-and-so there tonight." We were certainly always civil to each other, but I always couldn't see this person without thinking of what they said about me and having my grudge come up.

Then one night, fully ten years later after the event, I was driving to a gathering where I knew this person would be. Who knows why—perhaps it was enough clarity of the moment, the position of the stars, enough reflection, a moment of grace—but I had a really clear moment while driving along. I thought, "Well, I'm going to see so-and-so here tonight." Instead of the story coming up about "How could he have said that about me?" I thought to myself, "He was right, what he said about me. He was right. It's a piece of my shadow that I didn't want to see."

So I came to that place and met him. I said, "I'm really glad to see you." I felt really glad to see him. He said, "I'm really glad to see you," and he looked like he was. We finished the evening and he said, "Can we have lunch?" We made a lunch date.

We have become good friends, good colleagues, really study partners, spiritual friends to each other. I love him. He had health problems last year. I worried so much for him. I prayed so much for him. We've become quite close.

In the course of our becoming close, there was a long time before we actually spoke about the event that had happened. We would speak about it in veiled ways when we left each other after lunch. He'd say to me or I'd say to him, "I'm so glad we're friends." He'd say, "Yeah, it's really wonderful. I'm really glad we're friends." It was a code.

Finally, after a long time, I said, "I want to tell you the story of the event, because we have to talk about it sometime." I said, "I just would like to tell you how I felt when I read that letter. I read the letter, and I felt the rage, and I felt so inflamed that you had said that about me. So offended. It hurt me so much. It was very hard for me to think about." I told him the whole story about all the times I'd met him over the years, how that story always came up.

I said, "On that night when I said to you, 'I'm really happy to see you,' I had been driving to the place, and on the way, in a moment of clarity, I realized that what you said about me—you were right."

He said, "No I wasn't. I wasn't seeing clearly."

I was not understanding where you were at that time. I should not have said what I said in the harsh way that I said it. It was inexcusable of me to have said it in that way. I was not seeing clearly. Please forgive me."

It's quite extraordinary, the amount of happiness that this one friendship has brought to my life. And it's one where we see each other every month or two for lunch—it's not a big piece of my life. But the healing that happened and the learning that I did from it is a very big piece of my life.

It's really important, that awareness of when we hurt people. It's the only thing that really can be happening there—it's the fruit of that moment, the accident of the karma of that moment.

There's a very important passage in the book of Deuteronomy that instructs the Israelites about building cities of refuge. It says there ought to be cities where people can go to be protected from the angry kin of those they may have hurt, perhaps even killed, accidentally. The example given is if you were chopping down a tree in a forest with another person and your axe handle flew off and struck this other person and killed them, it would certainly be an accident. But their family, in moments of great grief and confusion, might come after you and kill you in return. So cities of refuge are for people to go "until the heated hearts of the family, of the hurt person, can cool down."

When one first hears that story, you might say, "Well, that axe handle flying off was an accident." But I think about this: everything is an accident of karma—of when we were born and who brought us up, our circumstances, our nervous system, our systems of self-control, our ability to see clearly, our needs to take

care of ourselves that have somehow emerged from our viscera.

If we go back to Gwen's great wisdom: I couldn't be better. No one can be better. That doesn't mean we don't have to be careful and take action to preserve and protect people who can't control themselves so they don't hurt others. It just means we can see it as the accident of the karma of their lives rather than something they meant maliciously.

Sometimes you say, "Well, people meant to do it. They purposely did it. They premeditated it." That was also an accident of their karma—also a sadness. It's still important not to let a person who does that sort of thing do it freely. It's important to figure out how to stop those people from doing harm. It's important to figure out how to do it without hatred, understanding that everything is an accident of karma.

The Dalai Lama says everybody wants to be happy. Sometimes it expresses itself in a tremendously tragic and unwholesome way. When the mind is clear, we see that everyone is who they are and everything is what it is because of everything that's happened in the whole of creation, forever and ever since the beginning. And then we can take every step we can to take care of everybody, but with forgiveness in our hearts and compassion in our hearts.

A year ago I had the great good fortune to be invited to Dharamsala to a conference with twenty-five other Western dharma teachers to meet with the Dalai Lama. It was a tremendous honor to be invited and a tremendous trip to take. Among other things, I learned something about moments of seeing clearly in which it becomes apparent that the balanced heart really recognizes that everybody is just who they are because of circumstances, and everyone is lovable.

The trip to Dharamsala—if you haven't done it—is very difficult. You can't fly directly from San Francisco to Delhi; you have to go San Francisco to Frankfurt, Frankfurt to Delhi. Then from Delhi, we took a night train, which is a whole other experience in India. Carol talked a little last night about the difficulty of conveying in words the enormity of the Indian experience. The night train from Delhi to Pathankot is twelve hours—an extraordinary journey in very close quarters. Many of us who could meet in Delhi traveled together to Pathankot.

Then there's another four hours in a taxi cab from Pathankot to Dharamsala. Those of you who have ridden in an Indian taxi will know that's an extraordinary experience—seriously, seriously life-threatening. Your attention becomes very, very high.

The entire trip was marked by this heightened state of awareness. The level of prayers happening was extraordinarily high throughout the journey.

So we arrived, and by the time you reach Dharamsala after such a pilgrimage, it's such an altered experience just to have made this trip. And then suddenly, here you are in Dharamsala, which really is, in certain ways, a very poor Indian village. It's not magical in the way you might imagine a Shangri-La sparkling kingdom. It's not that kind of beautiful—it's simply a poor Indian village.

On the other hand, it's situated high in the Himalayas, breathtakingly beautiful in the mountains. From our window in the hotel where we stayed, you could look down on the roofs of different monasteries and see monks walking back and forth in walking meditation. It was deeply inspiring to be there.

And so here you are, suddenly at the end of the world, in another world entirely. We had seven days to be there, with only the middle days designated for meetings with the Dalai Lama. We had three days where our group was going to meet—just the twenty-six teachers who had come together to develop our agenda for what we would discuss with the Dalai Lama when we met him.

Not all of us knew each other. Perhaps half of that group I had never met before. There were teachers from all three traditions of Buddhism. I knew some of the people there, but certainly not all of them.

On the very first morning of our meetings together in preparation, my friend Jack Kornfield, who was moderating our session, gathered us all in a great circle. He said, "Well, why don't we go around the room and introduce each other?"

You know how these introductions usually go: my name is so-and-so, I live in such-and-such place, and this is what I teach, or whom I teach. But Jack didn't ask for that. Instead, he said, "Why don't we go around the room and say our name, and then share what is the greatest spiritual challenge facing us now in our lives, in our work, and in our teaching? I'll go first."

That's about the most serious question a person could ever be asked, and deeply personal. There's no fooling around with that question. He said, "I'll go first," and there wasn't even a question of who would go second. He announced he would begin, then pass the microphone to the person at his left. You couldn't even decide when your turn would come—it was simply starting, and you were in line.

There's a kind of sharpness that comes in the mind, or perhaps a surrender, when you know there is absolutely no way out of this situation. However challenging it might be, I found myself thinking, "Uh-oh, I don't know these people. How do I know if my spiritual dilemma will measure up to theirs? Will they approve of me?" In a certain way, I was the new person, since some of them had been to Dharamsala before and I hadn't. What if this, what if that?

But there was no room for such thoughts. We were in Dharamsala. You couldn't easily escape from there. The chips were down—it was one of those situations where you couldn't decide when to speak. Ready, set, go.

There's a wonderful kind of surrender that happens because there's nothing else to do. Clearly you're going to tell the truth, because there's nothing else possible.

Now, I must tell you something about this circle of twenty-six people—Jack and Sharon and myself and twenty-three others, many of whom I didn't know. There were people I knew and liked tremendously, people I knew and liked somewhat, people I knew and felt neutral about, and there were two, possibly

three—two and a half people—with whom I didn't feel exactly on the same wavelength. Over the course of our time together in the dharma world, they had offended me at some point, and I had them on my little grudge list in my little heart. We were all very cordial to each other, but they weren't the people I chose to spend time with.

So here I was, looking around the room: good, good, good, good, ugh, good, good, good. You see the different faces and feel the response of your heart—how it opens toward the people you love and closes toward those you don't love as much.

But here came Jack with his question: tell the biggest spiritual challenge of your life, ready, set, go. He began and told his truth. The next person spoke and told their truth. Then the next person told their truth.

Meanwhile, I realized that whenever it reached me, I was going to have to tell my truth without worrying about what anybody thought, because worrying was impossible. I couldn't tell anything but the truth—here I was.

A wonderful kind of expansive surrender happened, truly a place of equanimity—an unusual, wide-awake, alert, bright, relaxed equanimity.

This person spoke, this person spoke, this person spoke, and then came one of my people—someone I didn't have such good feelings about. As he told his story, I realized it was as if I had never met him before. I was not meeting his sharing with all my accumulated stories about the times he had said things I didn't like, or when I took offense, or what he had said about me.

I listened without a story. Because when the heart really rests and the mind is truly clear, you listen without a story.

So he was just a person telling a story of struggle, the same way as everybody else had struggle. Because everybody's story is one of struggle. The very question itself—the biggest spiritual challenge of your life—already indicates struggle. People are going to tell you what their difficulty is. This person says, "This is my difficulty," and that person says, "This is my difficulty," and another says, "This is my difficulty."

And there was this person with his difficulty, and I was hearing it the same way. He had become a new person. Then there was the other person with her difficulty, and I was hearing it plainly. I realized as it was happening that it was happening, and I was so thrilled because I knew that I was free. In that relationship, that peace had returned.

With both of those people, I hung around afterward. We actually spent a lot of friendly time together and turned out to be very nice people. Sorry I had missed them before. I can't even remember who the half a person was—it got better. The half must not have been so significant. I remember the two clearly, and I remember that we spent a lot of time together. One of them I don't see at all now, simply because of where we live, but the other one I see quite often. We've really become good friends.

This happened, I think, because of the absolute surrender of the mind into a space of balance, which was necessitated by the location and the circumstances, and by the clarity of mind brought on by both the pilgrimage and the importance of paying attention. Everything had moved in the direction of attention, and everything had moved in the direction of surrender. You can't be in India without surrendering to begin with, and to undertake this whole journey in that group—the combination allowed me to see clearly and to absolutely forget. I would actually have a hard time remembering the stories of the offenses if I had to think them up.

When the mind is clear, it becomes so expansive. Everyone is just who they are. As a matter of fact, we begin to appreciate everybody for being exactly who they are. It's amazing how everybody is so completely themselves. It's awesome that you're you, not me. I look at different people living different lives and think, "Look how life is moving through that person. That's so amazing." It's remarkable that life comes through each of us so differently.

So we have the possibility of really respecting those karmic differences in all of us that make us uniquely ourselves—with our own name and our own story and our own way of being. And at the same time, when the mind is clear, we see how pervasive suffering is. No matter how unique our story, suffering is truly pervasive. It's the story of experience.

When we see from a place of equanimity and clarity how pervasive suffering is, it calls forth from us a vow to impeccability. When we see the pervasiveness of suffering—in myself, in others, all around us—we must not add one more drop of pain to an already very painful experience for all of us. This makes me understand better the Bodhisattva vow: "Although suffering is endless, I vow to end it."

I have a friend who's a Dominican nun, a member of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael. She's been my friend for twenty-five years, one of my spiritual companions. She taught me a prayer that speaks to me deeply about being able to use insight to balance the recognition of suffering with clarity about the extraordinary, incomprehensibly profound truth of our interconnectedness. The prayer is: "May I be filled with that sense of awe that opens my capacity for loving."

So tonight, since we are ending this metta retreat, I thought we would sit for a little while, and I would read you the Metta Sutta.

Let's sit.

"This is what should be done by those who are skilled in goodness and who know the path of peace: Let them be able and upright, straightforward and gentle in speech, humble and not conceited, contented and easily satisfied, unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways, peaceful and calm, wise and skillful, not proud and demanding in nature. Let them not do the slightest thing that the wise would later reprove."

Wishing in gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease. Whatever living beings there may be, whether they are weak or strong, omitting none—the great or the mighty, medium, short or small, the

seen and the unseen, those living near and far away, those born and to be born—may all beings be at ease.

Let none deceive another or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill will wish harm upon another. 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, spreading upward to the skies and downward to the depths, outward and unbounded, free from hatred and ill will. Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down, free from drowsiness, one should sustain this recollection. This is said to be the sublime abiding.

By not holding to fixed views, the pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision, being freed from all sense desires, is not born again into this world.

As we conclude this metta retreat together, may the seeds of loving-kindness we have planted continue to grow and flourish. May the practice of metta become not just something we do in meditation, but a way of being in the world—radiating outward from our hearts to touch all life with boundless compassion.

Thank you for practicing together. May all beings be happy, may all beings be free from suffering, may all beings live with ease.

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