Cascading Pools of Mettā

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 45:26

Throughout the day today, we've been using different individuals to develop loving-kindness with, and the thinking behind this comes from an image in the ancient texts, in the suttas, which is the image of cascading pools.

The idea is that if there's a river running down a mountain slope and there's a big rainstorm on the top, the river will start to fill up at the top. As it gets to one pool, that pool will fill up, and as the rain keeps coming down, it will overflow. When that pool overflows, it will run further down the mountainside and come to the next pool. Then that will fill up, overflow, and run down to the next pool. This is the image of the cascading pools.

The reason it's an analogy for the mettā practice is that it's considered classically that it's easiest to develop loving-kindness with ourselves. So we let that pool fill up, and then we let it run down to the next pool, which is our benefactor. Then as that one fills up, we let it overflow and run to the next, which is a good friend. Then it fills up and spills over to a neutral person, then to a difficult person, and then to all beings.

There's actually a logic to this sequence of the way we develop the mettā practice. We start closest to home, extend to those we naturally feel affection for, those we're neutral toward, those we have difficulty with, and then we can extend to all beings.

Often for us in the West, it doesn't work quite in this logical order. Many people find that doing mettā for ourselves is actually the most difficult, and that it's very helpful to have someone like a benefactor or a friend where it's easy, because you can let that pool fill up and then come back to yourself and let it spill over to you.

Check this order out for yourself, but know that this is the principle of mettā: we develop it where it's easiest. This is actually quite refreshing after vipassanā, where it seems like everything develops in the most difficult way possible. But in mettā, it's intended to develop in the easiest way possible.

If the easiest access for you is through yourself, that's where you should spend most of your time. If it's easier for you going in through a benefactor or a friend, spend a lot of time there and then bring that mettā back to yourself.

The mettā coming back to oneself is really key. As we said at the beginning of the day, if we love ourselves, then we don't harm others. Everything starts inside. If there's love here, it's so easy to share it outward. But often the love for ourselves is the most difficult part to touch, and so we need to borrow from other

sources. We also need to be really persistent.

It's a process of training the heart. Like every other part of us, the heart is trainable. It can learn to love. We can learn to love—it's part of our nature. We just need to bring it out. By and large, we've never been taught how to do it. Our culture doesn't provide us the guidelines. Our parents don't provide us the guidelines. Typically religions have not provided us the guidelines. But there are practices such as this that are proven to bring it forth. We just need to do the work.

When we develop mettā for ourselves, we find that mettā has a range of flavors. Just like there are a range of people that we can extend it to, it comes in a range of flavors or degrees.

When mettā is really strong, we feel this strong sense of unity, of oneness, of integration that is a characteristic of love—of deep, true love. When it's a little toned down from there, we feel a warmth or a friendliness toward others. When it's a little toned down from there, mettā takes on the quality of acceptance. We may not be crazy about ourselves or the other person, but there's a growing sense of it really being okay with us—how we are and how others are. So just that spirit of acceptance itself is mettā too.

One of the phrases people sometimes like to substitute is an acceptance kind of phrase. You'll be going through a hard patch in practice and you'll be saying a phrase like "may I abide in happiness," and you just go, "That's out to lunch. Happiness? Not in this lifetime. I don't think so."

When the phrases start feeling that remote or disconnected, bring it back to earth. Acceptance is a really good way to do it. So instead of "may I be happy," you might say something like "may I accept myself just as I am." That is also the flavor of mettā. Acceptance is an important aspect. Some people like to phrase this: "May I love and accept myself just as I am."

This is a nice way to make it a little more approachable for ourselves.

Metta is a powerful healing practice. It is essentially the healing practice in our tradition. So where there's a sense of incompleteness in our relationship to ourselves, from earlier wounding, from a strong sense of unworthiness, something like that, metta is the recommended approach.

And you can stay with metta for yourself for a long, long time. Sometimes people connect with the practice and they just intuitively feel it's right to keep coming back to themselves. There's just a sense that there hasn't been enough care for oneself. And so there's a need to replenish the tank. So if you feel like that, you can just pour that metta into yourself for a long, long time. It's absolutely fine. You don't need to bring in other people in the beginning. One meditator worked with themselves for three years with metta before they felt ready to bring in anyone else. And if that's the case, that's absolutely fine.

Also be really open to what works, to bringing out the quality of metta. One meditator found that there wasn't really a good connection with any beings, so she used a stuffed animal that she actually had

brought on the retreat with her and that was on her bed. Other people like to use pets because we can really open to their vulnerability and to their innocence. The important thing is the quality of the loving-kindness. The person that awakens it is not as important.

It seems kind of funny. When we start the metta practice, the emphasis appears to be on my benefactor or my friend or my neutral person. But from the point of view of practice, the important emphasis is on the feeling tone and the connection and the caring. It really doesn't matter what we use to get it going. The fact is, once it's going, it changes our relationship to the whole world. If your heart is full of metta, you see everybody from that space of metta. The whole world looks different from a place of metta. So we don't really care how we get there. The important thing is to start drawing it out, strengthening that sense of caring and connection, and little by little that flame grows.

When we first touch it, it seems like something insignificant. It seems like, "Yeah, okay, I can care about my friend, so what?" It doesn't seem like it's going to go anywhere. And often because of that, we don't keep planting the seeds. We just think, "Oh, that was a nice little thing." Or we feel a moment's peace from our meditation, and we think, "Oh, that was nice, but it was no big deal."

What we don't see is that it's a radically different approach than we normally live from, and it's subtle in the beginning. Actually, the really wholesome mind states are hard to appreciate at first because their vibration is more subtle than the strong reactive mind states. If we get into a good bit of fear or anger or self-judgment, it has a lot of pop. We can really tell something's happening. We were having a discussion yesterday with some veteran practitioners who said that the difficult mind states sometimes give me a greater sense of vitality. I have a sense of being alive when I'm really coping with fear or desire or anger.

The beautiful mind states have a subtler kind of vibration, so they don't come up and knock you over the head immediately. But that subtle vibration can get stronger and stronger over time. And loving kindness is definitely like that. The first time we feel the sense of connection, we may feel it's no big deal, but we don't realize the potential that's there when we grow it. So may we not give up planting the seeds.

The Buddha said, "Don't disregard the accumulation of wholesomeness, thinking this will come to nothing. By the gradual falling of raindrops, a jar is filled." This is a nice image because in Asia, rainwater is usually collected in these large earthenware jars that are about three feet tall and two and a half feet across. And when I was a monk, I had one of these at the base of my hut. The rainwater would fall down into a gutter, and the gutter would channel the rainwater into this jar. So storm by storm in the rainy season, my jar got filled to a very, very big height. If you put any container out during one of our Marin winter storms, little by little, drop by drop, it fills up.

So it's this way with loving-kindness. Each drop doesn't feel like much. It feels like something we could write off. But please begin in your practice to tune into how it feels. Tune into that quality of connection, whether it's strong or weak, because that's what is going to grow and become as big as love can be. It can be huge. You meet somebody like the Dalai Lama and you realize how big the force of love can get. And it

all comes from one drop after another.

As you notice what each one feels like, then it gets easier and easier to put the mind back in that place. You're creating actually a channel to that quality of connectedness and affection and caring each time you activate loving-kindness in yourself. And then you can start to see it manifest. You can start to see it ripple through your life. And you know it's happening when your friends or partner tells you that something's changing. You can really count on it.

But the Dalai Lama to me is always an inspiring example. He was here, as I said, a year ago. And because he's the head of a state in exile, the U.S. State Department provides security for him wherever he goes. So while he was on the land teaching for a couple of days last year, everybody who came in to see him had to go through a metal detector. The people who were staying up in the residence halls had to evacuate their rooms at about seven in the morning so that the Secret Service could search and send dogs in to sniff for explosives.

The security guards, when we passed through the metal detector, were heavy duty. They had a gun on one side and a nightstick on the other. They were strong, professional—like professional bodyguards hired by the State Department. You didn't joke around with these people.

At the end of the conference, every one of them wanted to have their photograph taken with the Dalai Lama because he had so touched their hearts just in his coming and going. They all got together for a group photograph. Now would they have done that for Bruce Springsteen? Maybe. Bill Clinton? I don't know. So this quality of love has such a potential to reach out and touch others and to invite them into the way, into awakening.

I also want to talk a little bit about how metta and vipassana work differently with our conditioning. I mentioned that metta is a very strong healing practice. The way that it works is as the sense of friendliness or warmth grows, it's not that we get rid of our stuff—our psychic stuff, our reactive mind of wanting and anger and impatience and self-judgment. But more and more, it all starts being held in the space of acceptance and friendliness.

One of the qualities of love is it's tremendously integrating. Love joins things together. And when love starts to awaken in the psyche, it pulls the psyche together. So those parts of ourselves that we couldn't accept before—we just thought, "This is not good enough. If I allow myself to really feel my fear or my anger or my incompleteness or my sense of abandonment, I'm not a good enough person." Often we take these difficult emotions as invalidating us in some way.

But when love is present in the mind, we can look at those things and we can go, "Oh, that's okay. That's just a part of being human. We all have the whole package. We all have all those feelings." And love makes it all acceptable. It brings it all together under the light of acceptance. So there's this very deep unification and healing that takes place through the metta.

The other thing that happens with metta is that positive states of mind—the brahmaviharas for shorthand: love, compassion, joy and equanimity—are starting to really take root and flower in the mind. These are real alternatives to our habitual reactions. The mind finds a new home in these positive states.

My experience was that this was a little different from vipassana. The wholesome qualities that vipassana activates are more neutral in tone. Mindfulness, for example. Awareness is extremely powerful—I'd say it may be the most powerful factor on the whole path—but it's very neutral in its quality. It's like clear water. It doesn't have a property of its own. It doesn't have a coloring of its own, because it can go with everything. You can put clear water with rocks, with soup, with sugar, with anything. Mindfulness goes with anything, so it doesn't stand out.

What I found with many years of vipassana practice was my dominant mental tendency in the beginning was fear. If my mind went off balance, it would go to fear or anxiety. And over years and years, that got smaller and smaller and smaller with the influence of mindfulness.

But still, if I went somewhere, I would tend into fear. That was the conditioning. The Vipassana, through its great spaciousness, kind of reduces the conditioning. But on the emotional level, it doesn't necessarily put anything in its place. The Brahma Viharas, though, do. And after I'd been doing metta practice for a while, I found that instead of leaning into fear, my mind would lean into metta. That's the sort of new home that it found.

So what I found is that I was generating a new kind of conditioning, a wholesome conditioning, that my mind could find a home in that was different from my conditioned reactions. The way I kind of sum it up to myself is that Vipassana reveals this vast emptiness and loving kindness fills it with warmth. So the two practices are actually very supportive. As Vipassana empties the mind, the space is there for the metta to come through, to really be felt and to really color our whole world. And as the metta comes through more and more, we're more inclined to let go of the reactive patterns. And it's the letting go that opens us up into the emptiness. So these two sides are very complementary. They really both develop one another and offer alternative ways of working with our conditioning. Both are really helpful.

Metta is also, because of its quality of friendliness, the antidote to aversion. And aversion has many forms. You probably know that in Buddhist psychology, people are sometimes talked about as one of three types: a type dominated by greed or wanting, a type dominated by aversion or negativity, or a type dominated by delusion or confusion. These are the three ways that psychology classifies us from a Buddhist point of view. It's just to understand that we all have all three of these. It's just whichever one happens to be predominant in our makeup. It's not that we get rid of the other two or don't have the other two.

So in someone who is particularly prone to aversion, it usually expresses itself in anger, critical mind, judgment of others, judgment of ourselves, irritability, or fear. Those are all different manifestations. I would also probably include depression in the list of aversive reactions. So because metta has this quality of affection, warmth, and friendliness, it undoes aversion. The mind cannot be in a space of metta and

negativity at the same time. So for people whose personalities are governed by aversion, metta is the traditional antidote. It is the practice that undoes or counterbalances the tendency to negativity. So that's why for me, with the fear temperament, it was such a good fit.

When I discovered the metta practice, I got into it big time for about two years. I'd been doing Vipassana practice for probably fifteen or sixteen years at that point when I did my first metta retreat. And I was so taken with the metta, I basically didn't do any Vipassana for the next year and a half. Everything I did in retreat and in daily life was metta.

Sharon Salzberg used to tell stories about when she was getting into metta. She was practicing with Upandita, who is this very fierce Burmese master. And every time she'd go to sit a retreat with him, he would want her to sit Vipassana. And she was also really getting into the metta practice and would say, "But I'd like to sit in metta this retreat." He'd say, "Okay, okay, you're sitting for three months, you can do two weeks of metta, the rest Vipassana." She'd say, "How about two months of metta?" He'd say, "No, maybe one month." She'd say, "Okay, six weeks, done." So they'd negotiate and she'd get a little more metta than he had first thought.

So I think as you go through your spiritual path, and I'm assuming most of you are also doing some Vipassana practice or will be doing some Vipassana practice, find your own balance between the two. If you feel really drawn to the metta practice, it can be your primary practice or exclusive practice for some time. That's absolutely fine.

In the long run, you want to incorporate it with Vipassana because Vipassana is the practice that liberates. In our tradition, the wisdom practice is Vipassana, and it's wisdom that frees us in the end. Opening the heart can go a certain way, but without the clear seeing into the nature of things, there's no lasting freedom. So at some point, the Vipassana practice needs to come in for your spiritual path to be complete, or something equivalent, some equivalent wisdom practice.

But you can kind of find your own schedule with it. You can do it at your own pace. In your daily life, you might like to do some metta every day and some Vipassana every day. You do ten or fifteen minutes of metta and the rest of the sitting Vipassana as you like. So feel your own way and see what your own intuition leads you to. See where you feel drawn and follow that.

Trust that. Trust your own sense of what is right for you at this time.

It's interesting—Ajahn Sumedho was here about a month ago. He gave a nine-day public retreat, and then a five-day retreat for the Spirit Rock teachers. I happened to sit in both of them, the first time I'd sat a long retreat with him. He was a very impressive and inspiring teacher.

One of the things he commented on, looking over the whole spectrum of meditators he's seen—and he's seen a lot—he said the main thing he thinks is that people need to trust themselves more. There needs to be more trust in our own wisdom. I thought that was a really interesting comment. He basically said we

know more than we give ourselves credit for knowing. So we're often looking to an outside authority for the answer, but we need to start trusting in our own seeing.

He also said something beautiful about good qualities. At the start of a metta session, we're instructed to reflect on our good qualities. Sometimes those are hard to find, especially when we've been sitting for three hours and feeling a little lonely because of the silence. It's hard to connect with those good qualities.

So he said something I found really refreshing. He said, "I thought about when I was a child, and I realized that I always wanted to be a good child. And I've always loved what was noble and beautiful in life." I thought, you know, I bet that's true of most of us. In the spiritual scene, most people who come here have very good intentions. You wouldn't sit through the discomfort if you didn't. But sometimes we lose sight of the fact that in the general scheme of things, we're basically pretty good people.

Generally, we do care about others. We could do a poll—I bet a good part of this room is involved in service work as livelihood, or does volunteer work of one kind or another, and generally has a sense of coming from a place of caring about the world, caring about the environment, caring about creatures. So in the general scheme of things, that makes us pretty good people. It's not to puff up about that, but just to take it as our intentions are basically good and we can trust in that. Maybe reflecting back to your childhood will be a way into that for you too. We tend to be way too critical of ourselves.

As the pools cascade and we come into relation with the benefactor, this can be another really powerful part of practice. There's a tradition in one school of Buddhism called "union with the teacher"—it's called guru yoga, actually—where we meditate a lot on our teacher. In that tradition, the teacher is usually the benefactor. The point of that meditation is not worship. It's not like putting them way up on a pedestal. It's to realize that their wisdom mind and our wisdom mind are one and the same. So if they can be free, we can be free. It's actually coming to an understanding of our basic nature being the same as the Buddha's, already being awake in our basic nature. And it actually increases our self-confidence.

So when you pick a benefactor, if you pick somebody who's got a lot of wisdom, a lot of love, a lot of understanding, as you hang out with them in doing the metta practice, you're going to soak all those things up. You're actually sort of practicing union with the teacher, if your benefactor is that caliber of being.

I had some very strong, almost ecstatic moments in doing the meditation on the benefactor when I did the intensive metta. I was practicing with the benefactor actually for three weeks of the six-week retreat, and got very familiar with them. It really deepened my connection with them, but it also deepened my trust in my own wisdom mind. Because how could I recognize their wisdom except from my wisdom? How could I recognize their love except insofar as it touched my love?

So picking a benefactor who has those qualities is a really good way to bring them out in yourself. That's why some people like to use, even if they don't know them personally, the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh or somebody of that stature, like the Karmapa. I don't know if you've tuned into the Karmapa. He's a

seventeen-year-old who just escaped from Tibet into India. It was quite a big international news story when he did it. He's tall, he's young, he's very good looking. I think he's going to be incredibly charismatic. And his predecessor was an amazing yogi, the last Karmapa who died in the early eighties—I think it was the 16th Karmapa. He's the head of one of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

When he was dying, he was in a Chicago hospital. His followers were looking after him and were very concerned about his passing. But every time they came into the room to check on how he was doing, he would sit up and ask them, "Oh, how are you doing?" and have this big smile. But after a while, he could tell they were really worried about him. He didn't want to see them worried, so he told them, "Oh, don't worry. Nothing happens when I die. Nothing happens."

What an incredible place of freedom to see one's death even as "nothing happens." That kind of a mind has really transcended birth and death. That kind of a mind has found a freedom beyond any kind of change. It's awesome and inspiring. So taking someone like that, even if you haven't met them, can be a beautiful way to start opening our own hearts and minds.

What we're trying to do in developing the metta moment after moment, based on these different beings, is basically to try and stabilize the heart in that quality of friendship. Just like in vipassana practice we practice mindfulness moment after moment—what we're really aiming at is stabilizing ourselves in a state of awareness. So in metta, we're aiming to stabilize the heart in the quality of loving-kindness or friendship.

This stability actually becomes more important than the changing events of life. It gives the mind greater strength and greater steadiness as it becomes more rooted, more of a home in our being. It's really supported by the factor of concentration. I think I mentioned earlier that metta is a concentration practice.

You may have noticed when the metta practice is going well—I mean, take a look at what's happening in your mind when you sustain the metta practice even for a short time. It's pretty amazing. You've pulled up an image of, let's say, your benefactor, which is a positive image for you. You have developed a quality of caring or connection or friendship through the metta. And the phrases that are going through your thoughts are very wholesome phrases about wishing the other person safety, happiness, and health.

What makes up our mind stream at any moment in time? Isn't it basically images, emotions, and thoughts? Is there anything else there? That's pretty much it, isn't it? So when the metta practice is going well, you've taken control of your entire mind stream and set it in a very positive and wholesome direction. Even if that doesn't last very long, that's an extraordinary thing to do.

How many moments in a waking day of daily life are we in charge of our images, emotions, and thoughts? Not very many. And so when we're not in charge of them, often they're in charge of us. Often we're invaded by unwholesome tendencies of reactivity, thoughts of anxiety, images of what might happen next

week.

This is a very—I would say quite an audacious undertaking, the metta practice. And that's why you shouldn't be discouraged if they don't all come together at one time for you. This is a big deal, pulling all three of these together. So sometimes maybe just the image will be there. Sometimes just the emotion. Sometimes just the phrase. Maybe two will be there. And then sometimes when all three are really there together, that's kind of like a peak experience in life.

But as the concentration grows, we find more and more the ability to hold all three of these at the same time and to stabilize that kind of experience. And that's a very, very wholesome direction to put into the mind stream.

What we want to come to in the long run—the vipassana developing the awareness and the loving-kindness developing the warmth—is a fusing of the two. We want to develop a mind that is here and now, is really awake and aware, but is filled with warmth. Or a way that I kind of like to remind myself about it is, we're really developing a warm attention. To bring the quality of warmth into our mindfulness practice and to bring the quality of present moment attention steadily into our loving-kindness practice.

When we come to the friend, often for many people this is the easiest. A lot of people in the West don't really have a benefactor. It wasn't part of our growing up often. And so the friend is often the easiest person for us to connect to. But one of the things you might find is that the relationship with the friend can slide into what are called the near and far enemies of loving-kindness. And every one of the Brahmaviharas has both a near and a far enemy.

The near enemy is a feeling that looks like the Brahma vihara but is actually an unwholesome state of mind. The far enemy is the exact opposite, so it's definitely unwholesome.

With metta, the near enemy is affection with attachment—a clingy or grasping kind of love. The far enemy is anger or ill will.

With friends, we often encounter both the near and far enemies. We find that, yes, we like them, but we want something back. And if they don't give it to us, then it can slide into ill will or anger. So especially with friends, start tuning into the tendency of our mind to slide into the near and far enemies.

One of the qualities of metta is that it doesn't come with strings attached. We don't say, "I like you if," or "I'll be friendly to you if." It's just a kind of unconditional state of caring that doesn't expect anything particular back. But affection with attachment is looking for something back. You hear this all the time in pop music—it's hard to miss. "I love you, I want you, I need you. I'll die if I don't have you." It can't really be true love if there's a demand attached to it. It's the near enemy of attached affection.

With a difficult person especially, of course, the far enemy tends to come in, and then you have to find

ways to make space for that. Sometimes it's helpful to be creative with the difficult person. One person said that they could do loving-kindness for the difficult person only if they imagined them bound and gagged, so they couldn't talk back. Somebody was doing loving-kindness for the difficult person on a retreat up here, and they said they could only do it if they imagined them as far away as Woodacre. They couldn't bring them in the room, but if they were far enough away, then they could do it. So it's okay to get creative in that way.

The neutral person is actually a really interesting one because it's kind of the turning point of the metta practice. It's the place where we start to open up not based on self-interest. Self, benefactor, friend can all be about self-interest. But the neutral person we really don't care about. That's why they're the neutral person. And what's our tendency with someone we really don't care about? We ignore them.

With someone we like, we tend to develop greed. With someone we don't like, we develop aversion. And with somebody we don't care about, we develop delusion. So these are the three main distortions of mind: greed, aversion, and delusion. With the neutral person, it's delusion. We just kind of write them out of our lives. They don't matter because they're not important to me, to my satisfaction.

So when we start to look on the neutral person and find we can care about them, this in spiritual terms is a big deal. This is really opening up to the possibility of boundless compassion, boundless caring. And that's what makes it possible then for us to go into all beings. Because a neutral person is kind of like the representative of all beings. It's kind of the generic being in the universe. And if you can care for the generic being, you're there, basically. You can care for any generic being.

It's very interesting to develop this meditation on the neutral person because most people who do find that they actually fall a little bit in love with their neutral person. There was a fellow who did a day-long with me a few years ago who picked a supermarket cashier for his neutral person. He said he worked with that neutral person for about a year. Then he came back and told me that he started to get nervous every time he went into the supermarket because he developed a secret love for the person. Every time he got around her, he got a little bit fluttery like she was going to find out that she was his secret love.

So this is really cool that we can care that much about people that we don't know and who don't trigger us in any particular way. That's what opens it up to the possibility of all beings.

I'd like to read just a little bit from the Metta Sutta. This is one of the main texts from the Sutta Nipata on the theme of loving-kindness, where the Buddha said:

"Wishing in gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease. Whatever living beings there may be, the seen and the unseen, near and far away, those born and to be born, may all beings be at ease. 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. Freed from hatred and ill will, one should sustain this recollection."

This is said to be the sublime abiding.

So that's a really beautiful and inspiring vision—that we can sustain this recollection of a truly unconditional care for all beings everywhere. But it doesn't come particularly easily. It's one of those things that develops more and more through practice. Yet this is the potential, this is the direction of the practice of loving-kindness.

So I think we'll stop there with the talk and ask if you have any comments, questions, or experiences you'd like to share—anything to clarify.

"How do you tell if you are in the near enemy?"

Good question. Let's just take metta to keep it simple. One way that I approach this is to examine whether the emphasis is on me or on the other person. When we are in the near enemy, the focus is really on what I need from them.

Sometimes we may not actually know it at the time. If there's a hidden link back, if there's a condition on the affection, we might not recognize it right away. So sometimes in the middle of it, it's not possible to tell. Then you kind of have to track it over time and see.

I think it's a question of tuning into the extent to which the relationship is gratifying me, or whether there are demands that aren't being met. That definitely tends to highlight the quality—or whether the focus is really on their well-being or not.

You could also imagine some different situations. I have to be honest: intimate relationships always have this quality of need, as far as I can tell. If you're with your partner, you could say, "Well, if they were happier with somebody else, good for them." But we aren't actually going to feel that way.

So it's important not to be too idealistic about it. Realize that relationships with intimate partners are going to have a lot of the near enemy, and it's probably a big part of what motivated us to get involved in them. I think they tend to clarify fairly slowly over the whole course of spiritual practice.

So not to set out to make a project of clarifying the impurities out of one's intimate relationship, because I think that's a lifelong practice. Just be accepting that we got into those relationships out of need. Even if our needs went away, hopefully we'd stay with it out of compassion. But the point at which our needs will go away is some way in the future. So not to get impatient about that or judgmental about that.

Any other questions?

"Could you say some more about metta practice as purification?"

Yes. One of the main ways I think metta practice works or is helpful is as a purification of heart. Basically what it means is that when we undertake this practice and we keep turning the mind to the wholesome—to love or compassion or joy or equanimity—it actually tends to evoke out of our being the

opposite.

There's some way in which I'm going to set my direction this way, and something in us says, "Oh, no, you're not." And anything that's of the other nature pops up.

So when it pops up, there's the possibility of transforming it through holding it in love, holding it with compassion, and seeing it clearly with awareness. When those things are buried and don't pop up, we don't have any possibility of releasing or transforming them.

The metta practice is particularly good because it evokes the difficult states so easily. When they're evoked, we can work with them. At the same time, it's growing the wholesome. All the time, through these seeds that we're planting, the wholesome is growing up, and the wholesome is part of what does the work of purification of the difficult.

Thank you for listening.

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