# The Power of Mettā

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 48:24

When we start a retreat, vipassana or metta, we often ask people on the first evening to reflect why they came, what they are doing here, because we feel that point of motivation is so important to how they guide themselves during the retreat.

That question came back in a lot of the interviews this morning, but framed a little differently. It was: what am I doing here? And what's this practice about? Where are we going? So what I wanted to do in the talk tonight was to try to answer this question of what we're doing here and talk a little about the mechanics of the metta practice—how it works, how it's meant to work, and what it does for us.

It's often said in the Buddhist tradition that a bird needs two wings to fly and our spiritual life really needs two wings to take off. These wings are called the wings of wisdom and compassion. In our tradition, the wisdom practice is said to be the vipassana practice, the insight practice that reveals the deepest kinds of freedom that are available. The other wing—you could call it compassion, you could call it loving kindness, you could call it the wing of the heart—is represented in our tradition by the metta practice. It's a practice that's designed to open up the heart qualities within us and bring them to flowering so that they can enrich our lives and the lives of the people that we touch, that we meet.

One of my early vipassana teachers—I asked him about the development of love in practice and he said, "Oh, very simple. Love is the child of freedom." The implication was just develop your vipassana practice and as the freedom grows, the love will come spontaneously. And there is a certain truth to that. Love does flower with more freedom.

But in my observation, it's not always that simple for people. And it wasn't that simple for me. My observation is that people who have a pretty emotional temperament tend to develop a lot of emotional openness through doing the vipassana practice. But people who are a little more cerebral or maybe people whose temperament tends to be aversive can really benefit—both of those describe me—can really benefit from the introduction, the addition of the loving-kindness practice. In my experience of vipassana and metta, it has been the most transformative for my own heart qualities.

I had another illustration of this. I was on staff at a retreat center in Massachusetts, Insight Meditation Society, in the late seventies. We had a visit from a very famous Asian master. We'd been preparing for months to receive this monk and four other monks who were traveling with him. It was a big deal for us. First time really that we'd had Asian leaders coming to the retreat centers in the West. Working on staff, we put a lot of preparation into it. We got to go to the airport to meet them and pick them up.

So we drove to the airport, Boston Airport, walked to the gate where the monk was supposed to arrive on the flight. You know how it is watching a plane arrive. A hundred people, a hundred and fifty people must have gotten off that flight. Couldn't see any monks. And it's not easy to miss those guys. Shaved heads and the orange robes. You're going to spot them. And no monks.

So finally, everybody came off the plane. We thought, well, maybe he missed his connection in Bangkok or something. But very slowly, very mindfully out of the gate came walking the head monk. Just another mindfulness day for him and the four other monks behind him. Each was carrying a fan, which is a teaching device in Asia. Often dharma talks are given with a fan in front of the speaker's face. The idea is that you should pay attention to the words and the dharma and not the personality delivering them. So it's a way to deflect the sort of personality cult that can develop.

Each of them was carrying a fan, and it was embroidered with the name of the monk. And then it said, "World Tour 1979." So it's not part of the monk standard issue, but it had obviously been provided by loyal supporters who wanted to wish him well on his trip.

So we took them home with us and had them in the center for a little over two weeks. Being on staff, I got to be with them behind the scenes and also I got to sit a part of the retreat that they led. They were very impressive individuals. Most of them had been monks since they were boys, probably eight or ten years old as novices and then took full ordination when they reached adulthood. I really felt a tremendous power of purity from their presence. They weren't looking for anything from us. They already had their return ticket, so that was covered. They didn't really care if we liked them or not. They didn't tell stories from their second grade schooling experiences or read Mary Oliver poems. It was very straight, straight dharma teaching. And I was very moved by the power of their words and that aspect of the transmission.

And in observing this head monk for two weeks, behind the scenes and in a group, I never once saw him smile or laugh or give any hint of joy. And I thought, hmm, is this the fulfillment of the spiritual life? Is this the fulfillment of the path that I want to go down? And for me, it was not an inspiration, that aspect of their being.

Another friend commented that this monk's metta was like starlight. It was there, it was pure, but it was rather distant.

So I've come to feel that for a lot of us, the opening of the heart really doesn't happen all by itself. It needs the extra support, the extra attention, and the kind of extra prompting that the practice of loving-kindness can give.

And I think this monk wasn't suffering. He was very cooled out, very equanimous. It's not necessary to have this juicy kind of heart quality to be peaceful. But my observation is that we touch other people more directly through the heart qualities that we manifest. And so I think of this almost as a bodhisattva practice—that we like to light up our own heart in order to touch other people in the world. And maybe as

a gift for the world to share that part of our being as it wakes up.

So one way that I think about it is that the vipassana practice, which is really the foundation that we all teach from, reveals the emptiness, the spaciousness, the equanimity of our being. And emptiness on its own can get a little cold. So the metta practice pervades it with warmth. And the two come together—they're slightly different tracks of practice, but they come together down the road in this building of a warm attention, this kind of warm present moment awareness that takes in the truth of life but can relate to it from a place of friendliness. And in my view, that's the kind of support that the metta practice can give to our vipassana practice.

One of my teachers said that what these practices do is that they bring juice into our lives. They're basically to juice up our practice and juice up our life. And juice here means the wet, fun, sweet stuff that's there in us. It means qualities of love and compassion and faith and devotion and joy. And all these qualities get activated by the practice of loving-kindness.

It's extraordinary when we meet someone who has developed these qualities to a great degree. And the person I often reflect on is the Dalai Lama who manifests this all the time. He was at a conference once and somebody asked him what his religion was—I guess they hadn't read the program notes very clearly. And he replied without any kind of irony: "My religion is kindness." And he said that many, many times.

He was at a conference here. He was actually in this room a little over a year ago with 220 Asian and Western teachers. And Sylvia and Sally and I all had the chance to sit in with him for a couple of days and meet with him. And he said it to us too. We were talking with him about how to transmit the Dharma in the West. And he said, "I'm not interested in propagating Buddhism. I'm interested in propagating human values"—which is basically kindness, the way that we can reach out and touch one another.

And it's very interesting to see how well he does that. Because at this conference, because he's the head of a state in exile, the U.S. State Department set up security here. So everyone who came to meet with him had to pass through security guards and metal detectors. And the people who were staying in the residences here had to evacuate their rooms at 7 in the morning so the guard dogs could run through and sniff for explosives and bombs and that kind of thing. So it was very serious stuff.

And let me tell you, the State Department security guards are not amateurs. They were manning the metal detectors with a pistol on one hip and a nightstick on the other. And if you tried to get a little too close, they very firmly stopped you—serious security professionals at this gathering.

At the end of the conference, all the security guards, who had no interest in Buddhism, asked if they could get their pictures taken with His Holiness. They all wanted to come together and hang out and just kind of bask in his glow because they felt what he had, the kind of heart quality that he had.

So metta is really just the introduction to the opening of the heart. And it's the first of these four states that in Pali are called the brahmaviharas. Brahma means heavenly. Vihara means home or abode. So we often

translate this as the divine abidings. They are the beautiful states of consciousness that are available to us that really are a natural part of our being. They are metta, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

They are actually separate practices for each of the four, and we'll be working with all of them before the retreat is over. But in our tradition, we consider that metta is the foundation for the other three.

And loving kindness, as we've talked about, is simply a sincere caring about the welfare of a being, ourselves or another being. There's this kind of open-hearted friendliness that holds another person or holds ourselves and really cares about how it feels inside to be this person or that person. How's the mind? How's the body? How's the heart? How's the outer life going for you?

It's said that when this open heart of metta turns to someone who's in suffering, the response of that heart is compassion. In fact, compassion is defined as the quivering of the open heart in response to suffering. And suffering is said to be the proximate cause for compassion.

Then when that open heart looks on someone whose life is going well, who's having a lot of happiness, what comes forth is a happiness at their happiness, sometimes called sympathetic joy. It's like those strings on the sitar, the little strings that resonate in tune with the big strings up top. They're called the sympathetic strings of the sitar. They're what give the richness to the sound. So this third quality of joy is considered to be a sympathetic resonance with someone else's happiness. Your happiness makes me happy. I get a response of happiness when I look on your happiness. That's the third of the brahmaviharas.

And the quality of equanimity is the balance of mind that can hold this whole range of the joys and the sorrows of life without being so deeply disturbed by them.

So in this way, the four brahmaviharas kind of provide a map of the emotional life. And not only a map of the emotional life with all its ups and downs and the beauty and the terror of our human life, but they also point us to a wise response that's already within us. So instead of looking on suffering and becoming depressed, we can touch, we can open up that place in us of compassion, whether it's our suffering or another's. Instead of looking on somebody's happiness and feeling envious or jealous, we can discover that place in ourself that can be happy and share in their happiness. And then all of them get held within this balance of equanimity.

So metta is the foundation of these four brahmaviharas, and it's really a part of our true nature. It feels like a lot of work in the beginning. I see some heads nodding. And I know after two days of it, you know how much work it is. It often felt to me in the early days of my metta practice like I was just pushing this big boulder uphill all day long. I'd done quite a lot of vipassana practice and I was reasonably comfortable in sitting. But just going over the phrases again and again and again—oh, it wore me down. It really did. It was very hard work in the beginning.

It does get easier. And it seemed kind of contrived to me at first. I'm kind of a wisdom type, basically. And I

thought, this stuff's kind of hokey. "Oh, may I be happy. May I be peaceful." Blah, blah, blah. It was for other people. It was not for me. I had a lot of skepticism about it.

But I put in my time and it started to make a difference. It started to make a shift for me. So even if in the beginning it feels a little bit artificial or a little contrived, if you're willing to hang in with it for a bit, in time the phrases really do start to evoke the quality of loving kindness, of caring. So hang in with it.

This is an intrinsic part of ourselves, but it just needs to be uncovered and uncaged. So the phrases are a way of bringing it out into the light. The Buddha said, "This mind is radiant and brightly shining, but it's colored by the attachments that visit it." And you've probably seen a lot of those attachments over the course of today. The restlessness, the sleepiness, the impatience, the frustration, the wanting to be somewhere else, the not wanting to be here. But when these clouds start to thin, then the loving kindness can start to show through in a purer and purer way.

The quality of metta is said to be unconditional.

And when I first heard this, I thought, "Boy, that's a really high bar. I don't know if I can jump quite that high. Unconditional love. Maybe Jesus or the Buddha, but not me."

But it actually doesn't mean unconditional in the sense that it never goes away. It means there aren't any strings attached to it. So when we look upon a friend or someone we don't know, we're willing to be friendly to them without asking for something back. That's all it means. We're willing to make the first step in friendliness.

Oftentimes in worldly life, friendship is kind of a bargain where I'll be friendly to you if you promise to be friendly to me. And this is friendship without bargaining. That's why it's unconditional. It's also different from romantic love in that way. Usually with romantic love, there's a lot of expectation about the return, or else the romantic love tends to crumble. I'm just waiting for a pop song—maybe the heavy metal bands will do this—whose lyrics go something like, "I love you, I need you, and I'll kill you if I can't have you." The essence of some kind of romantic love.

As we do this practice, we're connecting to ourselves and we're connecting to others. One of the questions that came up today was: Is this going to change something for the other person? As I send them my wishes of loving-kindness, can they feel it? Is it going to make a difference in their life?

Well, the texts say—the traditional texts say—that it can and does, but it depends on the power and purity of the sender and the clarity and purity of the receiver. So there are no guarantees in this business.

They actually did do an experiment, which I'm sure many of you have heard about, on patients who were recovering in a San Francisco hospital. They did it as a controlled experiment. Half the group was a control group and nothing happened for them. But for the experimental group of patients, they wrote their names out and gave them to Christian prayer groups in the city. They asked the prayer groups to say

prayers for these patients. And the fifty percent who were prayed for had a statistically higher rate of recovery than those who weren't. Kind of interesting.

So it could well be that what we're doing does affect the other, does reach them and touch them and help them. But we might never know that. If you're doing it in order to make that happen, it might be unreliable. You might never know the effect.

But what we do know and can feel firsthand is that it really affects us. Sylvia talked last night about the eleven benefits of loving-kindness—the list that starts with "sleep easily, wake easily, and have pleasant dreams. People and angels love you." It's a nice list.

The Buddha said that the heart of loving-kindness, even if sustained just for a moment, brings really great blessings in our life. He said there are great blessings from worldly actions like generosity. Giving and expressing our caring for people through sharing what we have brings merit, brings wholesome results to our own life. But he said that the benefits of generosity and worldly actions are not one-sixteenth the benefit of a heart of loving-kindness.

So that's a very powerful force to awaken in our lives.

And somebody who manifests this a lot—this kind of benefit—is Ajahn Chah. He's a Thai master, about sixty-five now, a Thai forest master who was just here. He was here in the latter part of June. Ajahn Chah has done a lot of vipassana practice and a lot of metta practice. He's one of the happiest people I've ever met. He actually says that in the last twenty-five years he hasn't had any anger, which is astounding. And he's a teacher who can talk from the moment he sits on a platform in the morning until ten o'clock at night when everybody else is ready to go to bed. He can give Dharma talks all day long because he has that fantastic energy. And his favorite teaching—he doesn't know much English, but his favorite teaching is just two phrases. He goes, "Empty, empty, happy, happy. Empty, empty, happy, happy." And he just manifests it.

He's got this beautiful, strong, radiant energy that you can just feel when you're in his presence. And it's a combination of his Vipassana practice, but also his metta practice. He has a huge heart.

The other thing I really love about the practice of loving kindness is that it opens us out to all of life. It can't help but do that. It's part of the design. With Vipassana practice, it's not meant to do this, but it can be kind of self-enclosing. With Vipassana practice, we can get really concerned about my suffering, my problems, my pain, my patterns, my conditioning, my progress, my peace, my liberation, and so on. But the metta practice you can't use in that way because from the very beginning it opens us outward. First to someone that we're close to like a benefactor and then further in these rings until it takes in all beings. So it's really a beautiful way to open our practice to connect to all of life. It connects us with everything that lives.

This is from Shantideva, who was a Buddhist philosopher in India in about the 9th century AD. He said,

"Whatever joy there is in this world, all comes from wanting others to be happy. And whatever suffering there is in this world, all comes from wanting only myself to be happy." This really gets to the heart of our practice of loving kindness. It's a tremendous source of happiness to care for others. And it's also a tremendous source of happiness to care for ourselves. Both pieces are really true. And this is actually the mechanism by which the loving-kindness practice develops happiness in us.

The Dalai Lama said, "If you can get off on somebody else's happiness, your chances for happiness go up by the odds of six billion to one." So this is a very good gamble to be making. It's putting your money on a winner.

Sometimes when metta gets described as unconditional love or unbounded love, it seems really grandiose. And I think it's really helpful, especially in doing the practice, to bring it down to your and my reality, to something that's really accessible. Just think of it as this sense of friendship, or warmth or caring or connection. This is really the essence of metta. If you, as you think of someone, just can have that spark of connection, sort of just touching the truth of their human life and thinking, "Ah, I hope you're happy. I see there's a human being in there. I hope you're happy." That little spark of caring is the fuel for the whole power, and it's a really transforming power of loving kindness. That is metta.

That little wish, or you could call it an intention or an aspiration, is what fuels the whole practice. And that's all that needs to be there. It doesn't have to be a full-blown, overwhelming, blissful, tearful experience. Just that inclination of caring is enough and everything will unfold from that.

So I want to talk a little bit about how to refine the artfulness of doing the loving-kindness practice, built around the idea that this seed is really what's important. When people were asking today in interviews, "Isn't this a lot like affirmations?" or it could be compared to prayer. And I think this is a Buddhist kind of prayer, actually. Although who it's to, I'm not quite clear. I haven't figured that part out yet, but I do believe it's a prayer.

But I think one of the real differences between affirmations and prayers and loving kindness is that in the first two, generally we're really interested in the result. If we say something like, "May you be happy" or "May you be healthy," what we really focus on is the outcome, the production of the happiness or health in the other person. But in the loving-kindness practice, we realize that that outcome is kind of out of our control. As much as I wish for my benefactor's happiness, I can't change it very much. If they're ill, I can't heal them through my wishes. So that result is kind of out of our power to a large extent.

And so the motive in the metta practice is different. The outcome is really secondary. That's not our main focus. The main focus in the metta practice is on this aspiration. The wish that we have for their well-being is real, independent of the actual outcome, whether they're happy or not, whether they're healthy or not, our wish is genuine. And it's the genuineness of that wish that does the change, that makes the difference in our heart. So it's by putting ourselves in this very wholesome place of wishing well for another that little by little and moment by moment we're transforming the way we relate to the world.

It's actually the exact analogy to the quality of mindfulness in our Vipassana practice.

In Vipassana, we want to just touch that quality of pure awareness moment after moment after moment. It's that which purifies our consciousness—purifying the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion. In the metta practice, the exact analog is this little seed of caring. It's a very pure quality. As we plant that seed in our heart again and again and again, it purifies our hearts moment after moment by bringing out the wholesome that's already within us.

Often when you first touch it, it doesn't feel like it adds up to much. Similarly with mindfulness—you connect clearly with one breath and say, "Okay, that was no big deal. I don't get the power of this. What's going on?" But you put a lot of those moments together, as most of you have done in intensive retreats, and you see that there's a tremendous momentum that grows from those moments when they're put together. This is the onward leading quality of mindfulness practice, and it also applies to the practice of loving-kindness. Moment after moment, as we purify our heart through this caring motive, the heart becomes clearer and purer—again, relieved of the forces of greed and hatred and delusion.

The Buddha said, "Don't disregard the accumulation of wholesomeness, saying, 'This will come to nothing.' By the gradual falling of raindrops, a jar is filled." However big the jar is, it is filled. I used to have, when I was in the monastery in Thailand, this huge earthenware jar outside my kuti that caught the rainwater when the rainy season came. It was a very big jar and at the start of the season could be bone dry. As the rains fell, little by little that huge jar would fill up and then became a reliable source of water for me. It's the same way with our practice, either of mindfulness or of loving-kindness. Our mind fills up with these qualities—either of the pure awareness of Vipassana or of this open-hearted caring of the metta practice.

So I want to talk a little bit about the way that I try to do this practice when I can do it the best that I can. To get a little bit more into the technique of it. People commented that it's tiring to always be involved with the phrases—it's kind of wearying just to be with phrase after phrase. So one of the things that I do is start my phrases from silence. When I'm going to start a set of phrases, I touch into the silence that holds all the words. That gives me a sense of being able to rest without interrupting the flow of the practice, but starting from a place of quiet, of peace, of restfulness. So I interrupt any sense of busyness or habituation by touching into the silence before I say anything.

Then I put my attention into the center of my chest, into the heart center, and just let it rest there for a moment. I get in touch with any physical sensations that are there. The heart center is a strong emotional seat and a good place also to experience a lot of different emotions. In connecting with that physical center, you're also opening yourself to feel any of the emotions that might come through.

Then I generate an image of the person, because I found this is really helpful for keeping the connection. In generating the image, I let myself feel their qualities—whether it's my benefactor or myself. I generate an image, and in doing that, I feel their vitality. I feel their uniqueness, their personality. It brings them alive for me.

Then, still in the silence, I try to connect with that sense of caring about them. It's a non-verbal caring, but it kind of expresses this: "Oh, I hope you're happy. I hope things are going well." Then I say the phrase. I sort of let the phrase carry the wish to the person, travel out across the space to touch the person, going from my heart outward. The phrase is just another expression of this wish—this basic wish: "Hope you're happy, hope you're well."

After I say the phrase, I return the attention to the heart center and just let myself feel the reverberations. Sylvia mentioned this last night also—listening for the callback. What's the response of your heart to the meaning and the sense of this phrase and the offering it to the other person? In that, I'm back into the silence again. So then I'm ready for the next phrase to go through the same sequence.

That's the way that I try to practice. I try not to rush with the phrases at all and have the sense that each one is like a gift that I'm sharing with my friend or my benefactor or myself. I have the sense that it's an offering from my heart in a very slow and relaxed way to them.

When I practice like this, I don't feel busy because I find enough space and silence within it that the whole thing feels really spacious to me. But I have to admit, it's hard to do that if the mind is quite active. I have to have a certain amount of stillness to do it. So you could say it takes a degree of concentration to do this. But at the same time, doing it this way really builds concentration.

Because think of all the things that you have to be aware of to do that style of practice. You have to connect with the physical sensations. You have to summon up the image of the person. You have to connect with the caring. You have to be mindful of the phrase and the meaning as you send it to the person. And then you have to come back and feel the effect in your own heart. So there's mindfulness, there's attention with each of those steps. And because you're with a lot of different objects, your concentration has to be good to do that. But doing it in that way, you will refine your concentration. It'll have to build up to meet that challenge.

So I offer this as one possibility. When my mind is very active, as I said, I'm not able to do it in this way. And then what I try to do is just stay with the phrases. And I find if my mind is active, but I'm able to stay with the phrases, then it starts to calm down. So it's a way of using the phrases to bring back a little bit more stillness. And once the mind has settled again, I can go back to this really slow and more artful way of practicing.

This is just the way that I do it. You don't have to do it this way. It's just a suggestion if you'd like to play with it. There are lots of different ways to do the phrases. Some people like to sing their phrases, and I just thought I would mention that. Some people find that naturally comes to them, and that can be a really nice way to get the rhythm going.

One time early in my metta practice—I have a set of long phrases where I get a lot of meaning, and I have a set of short phrases that are really good for the rhythm—my long phrases started to fall into a country

and western song. And I'm not going to share that with you because those things can be contagious and I wouldn't want to wish it on you. Fortunately, it didn't last very long, so I went back to the short phrases.

As you're with the phrases, you'll go through lots of different cycles with them. Sometimes the phrases feel incredibly dry to me. Dry and meaningless and rote and mechanical and repetitious and boring and unenlivening. Anybody familiar with that? Yes, it happens at times. And you might think, I'm doing something wrong or these aren't the right phrases or this isn't the right person. I need to be with a different person. But just know that the practice itself goes through cycles of dryness and wetness or juiciness. So there will be times when it will just be dry.

And actually, I don't know if it's possible for the heart to be open all the time. I don't know. Mine isn't. Mine goes through periods of opening and periods of closing, and I see that a lot in my metta practice. And I've come to realize it's not that there's something wrong with me. It's just the heart doing its thing. It opens for a while and it closes for a while. So just know that that's part of the natural cycle. Don't feel like you're doing anything wrong.

Also, don't worry if it doesn't feel like any strong feelings are coming through. You'll talk to some really emotional friends who've done metta practice and they say, "Wow, it was so powerful. I was crying by the second day and then I was in bliss on the third day and had strong concentration on the fourth day."

That's not the standard model. Don't take it as the standard for your metta practice. People respond very, very differently to this practice, and they're all perfectly fine.

Sharon Salzberg, who loves this practice deeply, said the first time she did a metta retreat, she felt absolutely nothing for the first week. But at the end of the retreat, as she reentered daily life, she found she had totally changed in relation to it. Something had shifted within her.

It's very difficult to evaluate a metta retreat while you're in the middle of it. Please, no need to try. Wait until you're able to go back home. See how you feel going back into your daily life before you judge the effectiveness. What happens is often subtle. The lasting transformations that occur are subtle—a subtle way that we change in relating to the world. That's what really emerges from this practice.

Instead of walking down a street wrapped up in our own fantasies, we start to walk and realize there are other beings out there. Every once in a while, we might tune in and wonder, "Hey, how's life for you? How's the heart? How's the body? How's life in the world for you?" We're simply reforming a habit of connecting to the happiness and sorrow in the lives of every being we meet. When we start to do that, it changes how we feel in the world. We feel more connected to people and to life.

This doesn't happen overnight, obviously. It takes cultivation, just like mindfulness practice does. We also can't control the rate at which the unfolding happens—the opening of the heart. We start to realize it's not our job to control that.

The phrases are actually just like seeds. Every time you say a phrase, you're planting a seed. That's all your job is. You plant it and you water it by doing it again and again and again. That's all you can do. You can't decide when the plant is going to grow up and how tall it's going to get and what color flowers it's going to have and when those flowers are going to bloom. That's not your job. Your job is just planting the seeds and providing the fertile conditions. Then you let go.

Trust that the phrases which have been working for at least fifteen hundred years—the details of this practice go back at least to the Visuddhimagga, which is fifteen hundred years old, with echoes of it before that and the Buddha's general instructions twenty-five hundred years ago—they've been working for people for all these centuries. None of us is so special it's not going to work for us. Just trust that all you have to do is say the phrases with that connection of caring, and nature will take care of the rest. The phrases will evoke the feeling. It will happen.

You don't have to worry that you have to create some special feeling as you're saying it. You don't have to summon up any strong feeling of any kind. One of my friends was practicing with Sayadaw U Pandita, a very powerful Burmese teacher. He's actually the teacher who taught our teachers this practice—the one from whom we basically imported this practice. My friend was practicing with U Pandita, doing extended metta in Burma, and he said, "I'm not feeling much as I do the phrases and as I connect to different people. Is that a problem?"

U Pandita said, "That's no problem at all. As long as your mind is inclining to metta, that's all that you need. The practice and the phrases will take care of the rest."

So you don't have to force any particular kind of feelings. As we generate loving kindness toward ourselves, it actually tends to bring up all kinds of feelings. We may think that these are not at all like metta. This is not what we expected from this practice. We thought we were going to love ourselves more. But we actually start the practice and find ourselves feeling blame, judgment, guilt, sadness, or resentment.

All different kinds of feelings arise. It's easy to think, "Oh, I'm doing it wrong. This isn't what loving kindness is supposed to feel like." But this isn't true at all. Actually, the very act of directing the mind toward loving kindness tends to bring out anything in us that's not like that. As we incline the mind in one direction, everything that's a different flavor will come up as though to say, "It's not like that. You're not like that. That's not really true. That's not really the way it is."

This is part of the beauty of the metta practice. The fact that those states come, those difficulties, doesn't mean that it's not working—it means it is working. Because when we start the metta practice, it's as though we take a magnet with strong positive energy and run it right through our body. Everything that's of another charge comes right forward and is drawn to it.

This is part of the beauty of this practice. It's a purification practice. The only way all that material within

us can be purified is by being brought to the surface. Holding it in the light of awareness, holding it with the flavor of metta, is what allows it to be released.

So this is a natural part of the practice and, I believe, one of the great powers of metta meditation. It's a practice that goes straight for the heart and brings out what needs to be purified within it. Whether it's sadness, grief, self-judgment, or anger—whatever it is—these feelings will come forth. This is why the metta practice is such a powerful healing practice. It is really, in my view, the main healing practice in our tradition.

I'd like to close by reading a poem that speaks to this aspect of healing. Many of you have heard this poem before. It's one of my favorites, by Galway Kinnell, called "Saint Francis and the Sow."

*The bud stands for all things, even for those things that don't flower, for everything flowers from within, of self-blessing; though sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness...*

Let's sit for a minute together.

For everything flowers from within, of self-blessing, though sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness, to put a hand on its brow and retell it in words and in touch: it is lovely, until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing.

Thank you for your attention.

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