The Fruits of Mettā Practice

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 50:06

The talk tonight is on the fruits of metta practice.

When I started intensive metta practice some years ago, I'd been doing Vipassana practice for fifteen years or more. But when I started the metta practice, a lot of doubt came up in me, primarily because I didn't know if I was going to be able to do the practice or not. I didn't know if it was going to work for me. I really felt like a baby again, a new meditator. And I had to find out for myself the way through the doubt.

It reminded me of a story that I heard at a retreat about a year ago. I was sitting in a retreat and one of the other guys on the retreat was a college teacher. He teaches mathematics. He said there was a young woman who turned up for the first day of his calculus course and said she wanted to check the course out to see if she wanted to stay in it for the semester. She wasn't sure if she was going to stay or not. And she said that before she could commit to staying, she had to know that the course would help her.

And so the teacher said, "Well, what field are you in?" And she said, "Civil engineering." And he said, "Well, calculus is really a great benefit for civil engineers." And she said, "Well, can you tell me a problem that I could solve with calculus that I couldn't solve without it?" And he said, "Sure." And he sketched up this civil engineering kind of problem on the board and said, "You see, you need calculus to solve this." And she said, "And your course will teach me how to solve it?" And he said, "Yes, it will." And she said, "Well, how do I know that?" He said, "Well, I'm telling you, you have to trust me." And she said, "But I have to know it for myself before I take the course that I'll learn how to solve that problem in the course of doing it." And he said, "You just have to take my word for it." She said, "I'm sorry, that's not good enough." And she dropped the course.

So this was told at a retreat with a young Tibetan teacher who was leading the retreat, a teacher named Sokny Rinpoche. And he likes to watch a lot of videos when he's in this country because it helps him understand our culture. And his comment was—his comment was, "Good story, but bad ending." He said, "Like a European movie." That was pretty tuned in, European movie.

So hopefully we're in the American version of the film, and this story is going to have a happy ending.

You know, I think there are still a lot of questions for people about this practice. People are still wondering: Do I have to use these phrases? Do I have to say phrases at all? Do I have to say words at all? Can I just hang out with a feeling? But by and large, it seems to me that there has been a real shift over these five days. I've felt it in the interviews that people have really engaged with the practice and found that it has a lot of power. I've heard a few people comment that they're surprised by the power of this

practice. It just looks like a little kind of sentimental add-on to the Vipassana and finding it actually has a lot to offer.

So the faith has been there from various impulses to start to make the effort. And that's really what's needed. Faith leads to effort. Effort leads to the fruits of the practice. And the effort, as a lot of people have commented in this practice, is not an easy one. It's not like Vipassana where you can just come in, sit down, open up, and it all happens. There's a lot of work that's asked of each of us in the loving-kindness practice.

And what it reminded me of is a merit badge that I had to earn as a Boy Scout. I was going for a camping merit badge, and we had to make a fire without using matches. And I thought, surely that art isn't needed anymore in the world today, but I'll try it anyway. So the instructions were: you get a flat piece of dry wood, you make a little hole in it using your twentieth-century very sharp craftsman knife, and dig out a little hole about a quarter of an inch across, and you take a branch that's kind of round and about this long, you put it in the hole, and you shave some little wood carvings into the hole around the branch, and then you twirl the branch back and forth in your palms as fast as you can. And the friction of it in the hole...

And little by little, you get a little puff of smoke, and then a bigger puff of smoke, and then a little flame. But that's after a lot of twirling—a lot of twirling. My hands were getting sore, they were getting hot, and I was thinking, "I'm going to burn my hands before I burn anything in the wood." I didn't know what would happen, but finally it caught. And once it had caught, I could add more wood shavings and little leaves and branches, and then it burned by itself.

This is exactly like our metta practice. Twirling the stick is like the phrases. You say the phrases over and over again. It feels like it's wearing blisters in the mind. You kind of get worn out, but you keep going, and all of a sudden there's this heat, this warmth that comes from it. As you work with it, the phrases kind of become self-generating. They have caught fire over time, and a lot of the pushing that's so hard in the beginning starts to go.

People have talked about how the phrases can be going even while they're thinking about other things—one of the mysteries of the practice. So then you know it's really become somewhat automatic at that point. Not that that's a phase to stop at, but it's progress.

The fruits of the practice really are twofold. There are two main reasons that we do it. The first is concentration. The second is the loving-kindness itself, as one of the Brahma Viharas, and all the purification of heart that goes with that. These are the two things that I want to talk about tonight: concentration and loving-kindness.

Concentration is the translation we usually use for the Pali term samadhi. This is one of the most important factors of mind that the Buddha talked about. It's one of the aspects of the Eightfold Path under

the meditation section. It's one of the five spiritual faculties, and it's one of the seven factors of enlightenment. So it's a very important concept in the overall path.

There's no English word—or no word in any European language that I know of—that adequately renders this term samadhi. When there's no word in the language for a concept, it means the culture doesn't know this concept. So basically European culture doesn't have a clue what samadhi is about, and that's why it's so hard to understand. Mindfulness is easier because we have words like awareness and consciousness that come close to it. But we don't have any word that really accurately conveys samadhi. For me it was one of the more mysterious concepts that only became clear after probably fifteen years of practice.

It's usually translated as concentration, but this isn't quite right. This misses something really important. When we say in English, "I'm concentrating," what we usually mean is that we're taking a very narrow focus of attention. We might say, "I'm trying to concentrate on my book, could you please turn off the television?" or "I'm trying to concentrate on my paper, can you please shut the kids up in the other room?" There's this sense of exclusivity—that we want to bring the attention to one thing and exclude everything else.

Samadhi doesn't have this connotation. Within samadhi, there is no sense of an exclusive attention. There is a coming together, a unification. But it's not particularly about a unified attention that's exclusive in any way.

I'd say that the mind gets concentrated kind of the way frozen orange juice has gotten concentrated. You take this very liquid, runny substance that's a combination of water and essence of orange, and you throw out all that's not really essential. You're left with this frozen orange juice concentrate that you put in your freezer, then bring out and add water to make orange juice. It's gotten really potent. If you ever taste that concentrate by itself, it's a very potent taste—kind of like essence of orange times two.

That's the kind of power that the mind gets when it gets concentrated. It means that all the juice of the mind has been brought together. But it doesn't necessarily mean that it's just on one thing.

It can be brought together in a very expansive way. You can be in a state of samadhi and be very wide open with your attention. Have a very spacious and open kind of awareness and the mind can be unified. So a good way to translate samadhi might be collectedness, unification, composure.

And what it feels like is that the mind, when it gets collected in that way, feels very strong. It's returning all the power to its source. So it feels strong, it feels stable, it feels firm, steady, unmoving. And in the depths of it, it feels unshakable. And all this comes about because we are letting go of the distractions that normally carry us away from this present moment. So samadhi comes from collecting all our mental energy into the present moment.

I thought it was a really interesting question this morning about why do we call it a natural state of mind? And aren't these distractions fairly natural? I think that samadhi is a natural state of mind. I think in

Buddhism we use this word "natural" in a little different way. I think we use it to mean the mind that's not under the influence of self-centered bias.

And our distractions, if you look at them closely, aren't just neutral and random. They're really mostly about greed and aversion. They're about hope and fear. So they're fueling us to leave the present moment driven by these strong underlying emotions of self-interest. And that's why they're so powerful in their influence, because there's a strong force behind them.

So the natural state of mind, from the Buddhist point of view, is one where these temporary visitors of greed, aversion, and confusion aren't active. And we take a look at what's really there in our hearts, in our minds, without the influence of these distorting forces. And that's what we mean by natural.

So we acknowledge that the distractions are normal and universal in a way, but they're something that's been added to our natural being. And a lot of meditation is to find out what is your experience in a moment when those forces of self-interest aren't acting?

This becomes a really central topic for investigation, both in vipassana and in metta. What does it feel like when the forces of greed, aversion and confusion are suspended, even just for a moment, are temporarily absent? That experience is what we call the natural state. It's the state that's always there. It's, you could say, the foundation.

Somebody came into an interview today with a really interesting insight, and he said that he had discovered the silence in which all sounds are held, and a silence that's not disturbed by the arising and passing of any sound. And in the same way, there's a natural peace and undistractedness of our own heart and mind that we can discover. And when we discover it, we see it isn't even damaged by the comings and goings of greed, aversion and delusion. But it's hard to discover when those things are thick and really active.

So the function of samadhi is to collect all the mind's energy by letting go of those distractions. And then we find that the mind has a natural stillness and steadiness and power that returns to it.

How do we develop samadhi? We develop it by bringing our full attention to whatever we're doing. So if it's repeating a phrase, we give our wholehearted attention to thinking that phrase or saying that phrase. If it's feeling the echo in the body, we give our full attention to feeling that echo in the body. We're doing it in vipassana practice too, obviously, by being fully with our experience. In metta the objects are different, but the concentration is the same, or the samadhi is the same.

The Korean Zen teacher, Sansanim, said, "When you sit, just sit. When you walk, just walk." That was the way he expressed this flavor of samadhi. And then one day his students walked in on him in the dining room, and he was eating his breakfast and reading a newspaper. And the student said, "But teacher, you told us when you do one thing, just do that one thing fully." And he said, "Yeah, and when you eat and read, just eat and read." Samadhi continues.

When we bring the attention back in this way and bring it home—and a lot of people describe meditation as homecoming—when we bring it home in this way, then the mind can settle in its own steadiness, or in its own stillness.

And one of the images that came to me is actually when I was doing a period of metta practice and feeling the growth of samadhi. Anybody remember—I think a lot of us are of a similar generation—remember the Prell shampoo commercials on television in the late fifties? And there was this bottle of Prell, which you knew was green, even though the TV sets were black and white. You knew it was green because you'd seen it at the supermarket. And they were trying to illustrate the richness of the shampoo.

And do you remember what they dropped into the top? A pearl. They drop a pearl into the top, and then it just floats ever so gently and steadily down to the bottom of the bottle of shampoo. And that proves how thick and viscous the Prell shampoo is.

That's actually what samadhi felt like to me at that moment. I had the sense—this might be the Prell sutta—I had the sense that my mind was settling into my body, the thickness of my body, just like that pearl drifting down slowly, easily, relaxed, calm, peaceful, held in this really gentle way. That was what the actual experience of samadhi was like for me at that time.

So as the mind settles within itself, it finds a buoyancy, an ease, a quality that's very satisfying. And then it doesn't have to rush out to look for past and future, doesn't have to concern itself with hope and fear, because the present is very rich.

I'm describing my experience in fair detail, but I hope it relates to your experience when you're feeling connected to the phrases, to the person, to the loving-kindness, to your heart center. I know you've all had these moments when the phrases are going well, the connection with the person is there, the practice has come together, even if it only lasts for a set of four phrases. Take a look and examine that state of mind, the steadiness of the attention and the feeling in your mind and body. Part of it is the steadiness and firmness of samadhi, of the mind coming together.

The second fruit of the practice is the loving-kindness itself in all its expressions. It's really a spectrum from acceptance to patience, warmth, friendliness, all the way up to real love and passion. I've had some very passionate moments, particularly with my benefactor. There's a practice in one tradition of Buddhism called union with the teacher. The aim is to realize that our wisdom mind is the same as our teacher's wisdom mind—there's no difference. In doing the metta practice for my benefactor, I felt that their wisdom and their love and their kindness had completely penetrated my being. It was a very ecstatic discovery.

So loving-kindness has this whole range of feelings that are all aspects of metta. As the retreat has gone by, I know you've all touched aspects of this in different ways. We suggest the different individuals because each one might provide a better entry point for each of us. For some, the self is the best way in. For some,

the benefactor. For some, the good friend. One of the beauties of metta practice is we're taught to go where it's easiest. Isn't that a relief? Go where the metta is easiest, because the practice really is about gladdening the mind. It's not to make things any more difficult.

Just as in vipassana practice, we start with the breath and then move on to body and sounds and thoughts and emotions. In the beginning, all the different objects seem so important, so critical. I think if there were going to be wars in Buddhism, they would be wars between people who say you can only do meditation on breath at the nose, and those who say you can only do it on breath at the belly. Sometimes these views get really tightly held. But that's not the key thing. The key thing is the mindfulness. What stone you want to sharpen it on is really secondary. The objects aren't the most important thing—the most important thing is that present moment attention.

Similarly in metta, the different individuals that it can be directed to are actually not the most important thing. The most important thing is the quality of metta that they evoke. Just as in vipassana practice what we're aiming to do is stabilize the attention in connection to the present, in metta practice our real aim is to stabilize the heart in loving-kindness. To be able to find a reliable channel to the quality of metta more and more and more. We just use whatever tools, whatever individuals best evoke that, so that in the long run we want to be able to find ourselves in metta independent of the circumstance of our life. Just as with vipassana we want to be in that state of clear awareness, untroubled by greed, aversion, delusion, regardless of the outer circumstance that we find ourselves in.

When we find that stability coming in more and more in the flavor of loving-kindness, then the heart starts to become really responsive. It starts to become really sensitive and open and juicy. And of course when the heart opens, it doesn't just open to the beautiful.

It also opens to the difficult. So sometimes in the metta practice it can feel like we're going backwards because we've opened up to beauty and then we might get hit by one of the difficulties, one of the hindrances that Sally talked about the other night. And because we're more sensitive, we actually may feel its impact more strongly than we did before. But that's actually a sign of deepening. That's not to be avoided. Because what's also happening is that the heart is getting wider at the same time and is more able to allow all of our emotional life within the spirit of acceptance, within the spirit of metta.

So both these developments of samadhi and of metta bring with them a really deep sense of contentment. That's one of the great combinations of this practice. They both reinforce each other in that way.

This Tibetan teacher I mentioned a little while ago, his name is Sogkni Rinpoche III. And Sogkni Rinpoche I, who was a couple of generations back, was the abbot of a large monastery in Tibet, in eastern Tibet. He actually had a large nunnery also. And to this day, the nunnery continues. There are a thousand nuns living at this nunnery in eastern Tibet.

It's kind of interesting because the Chinese government doesn't seem very concerned about nuns. They're

not very threatened because they don't take them very seriously out in eastern Tibet. So they've continued with really deep practices. And they're allowed to continue in ways that at least monks in Lhasa have not been allowed to continue.

So a few years ago, Sogkni Rinpoche III was asked if he would take his old nunnery back under his guidance, because they consider him the third incarnation of the first Sogkni Rinpoche, and he said that he would. And so then they invited him to their tummo ceremony.

The tummo ceremony is an event they do on the midwinter, where the nuns wrap themselves up in sheets that have been soaked in ice water, walk around the nunnery walls at midnight, and they have to dry the sheet by the time they finish one walk around, with the power of tummo, which is the yoga of inner heat. And out of the thousand nuns at the monastery, about seventy completed that exercise in the past year. So Rinpoche said he actually declined that invitation because he was afraid they would ask him to join in and do it too, and he didn't want to do that.

Anyway, this first Sogkni Rinpoche had a really beautiful poem. And part of the lines of this poem said, "There is nothing else to search for, rest in your natural face. There's nothing else to search for. Rest in your natural face."

And this is kind of the feeling of this union of samadhi and metta. When they come together, there is the peacefulness, the steadiness of samadhi, and there is the warmth and friendliness of the loving-kindness. And the combination of the two leads into this deep sense of contentment because we really feel this is what we've been searching for—this combination of peace and warmth. And so there really is nowhere else to go.

So it reinforces both the samadhi, because we're more happy just to rest. We don't tend to look outside as much. And it reinforces the metta, because the growing sense of contentment brings a happiness with it.

Also, one of the really amazing things when these two come together and they're strong is that the hindrances are suspended. Sally talked the other night about the five hindering energies in meditation: sense desire, aversion, sleepiness, restlessness and doubt. When samadhi reaches a certain depth, a certain strength, the hindrances can no longer arise. And when the loving-kindness is present as well, it acts as a further block to them.

So again, tune into your experience in these states where the concentration feels good and notice the absence of the hindrances in that situation. It's such a delight to have the mind not being assailed by desire and aversion, restlessness, dullness, doubt.

The Buddha said that one who has temporarily set aside the hindrances feels like someone who has been freed from debt, who has recovered from sickness, and who has been released from prison. It's a really beautiful state.

And we may only touch it for a few moments, and we may think it's nothing really special. It's just kind of a passing meditation state. But it's really a pointer to this true nature that we want to get more and more familiar with. This is what our hearts and minds are capable of when we're not distracted. This is, you could say, the basis of our being.

They say that as concentration develops, you can start to look for five factors that are signs of it. And these are called the five jhanic factors. When they're strengthened, they lead into strong states of concentration called jhana. And the first is connecting with the object. The second is sustaining the attention on the object.

The object here is the phrase or the image, the person, the heart center, and so on—the feeling itself. The third factor is a quality of rapture. The fourth is the quality of happiness. And the fifth is the quality of one-pointedness, which is that collectedness of mind, that samadhi.

It's said that each of these factors actually offsets one of the hindrances. For example, rapture offsets aversion, because when the mind and body are full of rapture, there's no interest in disliking anything—that experience is intrinsically pleasant. Connecting the attention offsets sloth and torpor. When we rouse the energy to connect to the meditation object, it cuts through dullness. Sustaining the attention offsets doubt, because when we're able to be with the meditation object for a period of time, doubt can't arise. Furthermore, happiness offsets restlessness, because the mind's not going outward. And one-pointedness offsets sense desire—again, we're not looking outward for satisfaction.

As concentration develops, the experience becomes greatly wholesome, free of the disturbances that our minds are usually subject to in normal life and in the early days of retreat. It's not that this kind of experience will be the ongoing reality for all the days of retreat—it may just be there for a few moments, a set of phrases. But tune into the quality of this kind of mind. As we access it more, we generate a pathway back. The more we're able to find it and get to know it, the more familiar it becomes, the easier it is to place ourselves back there. So start to look into these times when the attention is strong and clear, and feel in yourself what that actually feels like.

One of the things that helped me in understanding the practice of loving-kindness was understanding that the path of practice is basically a karmic unfolding. The whole Eightfold Path is an exercise in karma. The overall meaning of karma is essentially this: when we act in the world out of a wholesome intention, wholesome things come back into our life. When we act in the world out of an unwholesome intention, unwholesome results, painful results, come back into our life.

The whole unfolding of the metta practice depends on karma in the same way. The essence of karma is intention—what is our intention in acting? If it's a wholesome intention, what comes back into our life is wholesome. When we're doing the metta practice, we're generating wholesome intentions moment after moment after moment: this intention of caring about someone else or ourselves. It's that little seed of caring that is the karmic engine that drives the metta practice. Moment after moment, we are developing

the wholesome, acting on the wholesome. In fact, you could say that the path is really for those who love the wholesome, who delight in the wholesome.

In Tibetan teachings, the phrases for loving-kindness and compassion are clearly karmic phrases. The Brahma-viharas are called the Four Immeasurables, and the metta phrase in the Tibetan tradition is expressed like this: "May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness, which is virtue." The compassion phrase is expressed like this: "May all beings be free from sorrow and the cause of sorrow, which is non-virtue."

So we start to look at our intention in practice really, really closely, because it is the key to the unfolding. For me, this became more clear with metta than with anything else I'd done. I was practicing in my first metta retreat, and I'd been doing it for about ten days. The practice was starting to develop nicely. The mind was settling down. I was starting to get some feelings of caring. Then something came in externally that interrupted the flow of my meditation. It threw me off track for about a day.

I started to settle back in, and I really wanted to get back to where I had been. Have you noticed that? Sometimes it's so sweet, all you want to do is get back to it. So I was in that headspace—I just want to get back. So I tried really hard. I tried really hard with myself. I tried really hard with my benefactor, which is what I was up to at that point. And it just wasn't coming together. I was struggling. My body was tense.

I was hurting. I wasn't getting any concentration. There wasn't any peace at all. And then I had an interview with Joseph, as it turned out, who was my teacher at that point. I told him my situation, and he did a very skillful little intervention. He pointed out that I was trying to get back to something pleasant. And he said, "But Guy, we're not doing this practice for ourselves. We're doing it for the other."

All of a sudden this light went off in my head. I'd forgotten about really caring about the other. And that's when I saw that my effort had become corrupted. It had become completely self-centered—I didn't care about my benefactor anymore. I just wanted to get back to my own peace and happiness. So I was doing the phrases in order to get calm, and what it was doing was making me tense. Or if I was doing the phrases in order to feel metta, because it felt good to feel metta, that was a selfish motivation. And that doesn't work either. Or if we do the phrases to make the result happen—you know, I think I'm going to make my benefactor happy—that's striving also, and that doesn't work.

So there's only one way to do this practice so that it works, and that is to genuinely care about the people that you're sending to. But the curious thing is when we genuinely care about the people that we're sending to, it feels great. And for me, this was a really beautiful teaching on karma, on right effort, on wise intention, and on generosity. Because what it points to is that when our real intention is wholesome and not self-centered, it rebounds in filling us up with peace and happiness and joy. But if we start doing pseudo-practice in order to feel those things, it doesn't work.

So the metta practice is a constant reflection of the authenticity of our intention. You can't trick this

practice. If the intention isn't quite right, it won't deepen in exactly the same way.

Now, it's also important to say that the strength of our intention and our ability to really be with it goes through lots of ups and downs. Samadhi is a very impermanent factor. And you may have noticed that. You can get really concentrated in one sitting, do the same thing, bring the same integrity of effort, and the next sitting it will have fallen apart. And it's not because you have done anything wrong. It's just because samadhi is an impermanent factor. Whether you did it perfectly or imperfectly, it's going to come together and it's going to fall apart. It's going to come together and it's going to fall apart. So don't take it personally. It's a very impersonal process.

And mindfulness, for example, is a much steadier factor in life than concentration. The path kind of develops mindfulness on an overall upward line. But concentration is bouncing around that upward line like crazy all the time. So don't worry about it. Don't feel like you've done anything wrong or like you have to really change the way you're practicing. Just hang in there with it and wait for it to come back together, which it will.

You can't make concentration happen. The proximate cause of concentration—I thought this was really interesting—is happiness. It's not effort, which is what I'd assumed for a long time. It's happiness. So again, there's that sense of just the contentment of settling within ourselves as being the key to concentration. If we have our effort directed to a particular goal that's kind of a self-centered goal, that kind of effort doesn't work.

There's a story from Japan. A young student of karate goes to the greatest master of karate in all of Japan. And a very dedicated student, traveled all the way across the country to meet the master, goes up to the master and says, "I want to be the best student in all of Japan. How long will it take me?"

The master says, "Ten years."

And the student says, "Ten years, that's a really long time, but I'll train twice as hard as anybody else of your students. Then how long will it take me?"

The master says, "Oh, in that case, twenty years."

And the student says, "But I'll stay up all night training. Then how long will it take?"

"Thirty years."

And the student says, "Well, how come? I'm willing to do anything!"

And the master's reply is: "Because someone who has one eye on the destination has only one eye to see the way."

Can we bring this kind of quality into our practice of loving-kindness—really with our attention on the way and not on the destination? And what that really means is: can we make a really full effort and not be

attached to the results, to the outcome?

When I reflected on this a little, I realized that's also what our Vipassana practice is asking. The Vipassana practice really, in its pure form, works when you're willing to be fully in the present moment without expecting anything back out of it. If there's an expectation of something back, then desire is active, and then the ego is involved again.

So in Vipassana: can you come into the present moment fully without expecting anything in return? But metta takes it a step further: can you come into the present moment fully without expecting anything in return and give away everything you've got? Give away your heart and your caring and your kindness. Then it unfolds.

That's the amazing thing about life in virtue, life in generosity, life in giving. This is from Rilke:

"I believe in all that has never yet been spoken. I want to free what waits within me so that what no one has dared to wish for may for once spring clear without my contriving. If this is arrogant, God, forgive me, but this is what I need to say. May what I do flow from me like a river, no forcing and no holding back the way it is with children."

I really like this image of "the way it is with children" to describe our natural state of mind. As children, we had access to that natural state of mind in a very ongoing way. Unfortunately, children don't have the wisdom to support it. And so that natural state of mind gets covered over and closed down as the years go by, and we have less and less access.

But if you hang out around kids, you'll see that natural state of mind. It's hard to get a kid out of the present moment. They almost don't know any other way to be than the present moment. And the joy and the love and the instinct for generosity.

Sylvia's grandson and granddaughter were at lunch today with us. And Harrison's grandson is three and a half—a very bright, verbally precocious guy and a beautiful spirit. At the end of the meal, we had all pretty much finished, and he had brought a box of cookies from home. He went around to each of us at the table and asked us if we wanted a cookie.

I was engaged in another conversation and didn't quite get what was happening. He came over and offered me a cookie, and I said, "No thanks, I'm not hungry." Sally kind of nudged me and said, "Yeah, take the cookie." So I said, "Oh, thank you. Thank you very much," and I took the cookie.

And Harrison said, "I brought this box of cookies from home so I could share it with the people here."

It was so sweet and so spontaneous and not something he'd been taught—just something he wanted to do. It was that natural impulse of generosity. It was a very nice cookie too.

This gives me a lot of trust that our basic nature, which we see in children all the time, is so good. There's

so much goodness and happiness in it, but it's gotten obscured over the years of habit, over the years of self-centeredness, of unwise intention.

So often now, as adults, we kind of feel victimized by our own mind stream. We feel the victim of these forces that come in—the various manifestations of greed, aversion, and confusion. When we look closely, we see how we generate them ourselves. When we touch a certain depth, we see that they are volitional. But it's hard to touch that kind of depth.

But in the metta practice, we're doing something really pretty radical. We're taking the unwholesome thoughts that often come and we're replacing them with the thoughts of the metta phrases.

We're taking the images that often provoke anxiety or regret or grief and replacing them with images of people we care about. We're taking the feelings that frequently invade—of fear or sadness or wanting—and beginning to encourage the heart to move toward metta, toward acceptance, toward peace, toward love.

What we're actually doing is taking control of our own mindstream and orienting it in a wholesome direction. This is very audacious. This is a big, big undertaking.

When you feel in the flow with the phrases, with the image, and with the feeling of metta, you are protected. You are protected from any unwholesome influx from thoughts, images, or emotions. This is a big deal. It's not something we learn to master in a day or a single retreat. It's really a lifetime of dedication. But this is the direction we're moving in. This is the direction of the loving-kindness practice.

So don't feel badly if it doesn't all come together all day long. If you connect with one of these elements and you have wholesome thoughts in your mind for a good part of a sitting, that's a big deal. If you have wholesome images, that's significant. If the feelings of loving-kindness in its various forms start to come through, that's a real shift. Little by little, we develop it more and more and become increasingly protected.

The curious thing is it all revolves around this simple intention for caring. We can't replace these mental formations in a heavy-handed way because that would only come out of more desire, more greed, and more aversion. So we start the shift just out of this simple act of caring, and then we surrender. We put it out, and then we trust in the universe to grow those seeds into the flowers of metta and samadhi.

We can't force those things to happen. But we can plant the seed and then surrender. And so we're back again with faith. We're back again in the atmosphere of trust. We say the phrase, we connect with the caring, and then we just open and let the Dharma carry us. This path of faith is a whole path in itself.

The Buddha described this state of loving-kindness as an immeasurable deliverance of mind. Feel it when you're in that space. It is a deliverance. It is a liberation. And it's a boundless one, an immeasurable deliverance of mind, when the mindstream is protected like that. Then we trust more in opening up to the

Dharma, to the flow of this current.

I'll close with a quotation from the Buddha: "Pingya," he said, "other people have freed themselves by the power of trust. Vakali, Bhadravuda and Alavi have all done this. You too should let that strength release you. You too will go to the further shore beyond the draw of death."

Let's just sit together for a minute, please. Other people have freed themselves by the power of trust. You too should let that strength release you. You too will go to the further shore beyond the draw of death.

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