The Power of Mettā: Is Insight Enough?

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 59:18

The Power of Mettā: Is Insight Enough?

I want to begin tonight with a quotation from one of my favorite romantic poets from the last century, E.E. Cummings. This is from a poem titled "Since Feeling is First":

"Since feeling is first, who pays any attention to the syntax of things will never wholly kiss you."

What I really love about this poem is that first line: "Since feeling is first." Feeling is first in the Dharma in a very important way. The Dharma is not about intellectual gymnastics or clever understanding. The Dharma is taught and practiced in order to heal our feelings of sadness, grief, despair, and fear. This is why the Buddha taught, and it's why we practice. It's really on the feeling level that the Dharma makes sense.

I believe that on this feeling level, the influence of loving-kindness—the practice of mettā—has a profound contribution to make for those who wish to take it up. There are five ways that mettā can influence our practice and our lives that I'd like to explore this evening.

First, loving-kindness has the potential to make the heart more responsive, or we could say to make the heart tender. Second, it purifies the heart of the unwholesome and develops the wholesome. Third, the practice of loving-kindness builds concentration. Fourth, it connects us to life. And fifth, it brings great happiness.

Let me begin with the quality of making the heart more responsive and tender. In our tradition, Vipassana is our wisdom practice. Seeing things as they are is the way to understanding and the way to freedom. This is the foundation of what we're doing, and it's in this context that we practice loving-kindness. From the point of view of the Buddha's teachings, loving-kindness doesn't stand as a complete teaching on its own, but in the context of the wisdom teaching of Vipassana, it's a very powerful tool.

Joseph mentioned in his talk last week that compassion and emptiness have a very close relationship. As we begin to touch the true quality of emptiness through our practice, compassion—or you could equally say loving-kindness—unfolds from that. So you could say that mettā unfolds naturally from the practice of Vipassana. One of my teachers put it this way: "Love is the child of freedom."

For some, I think that really may be enough. People who have very soft natures and tend to be emotional by temperament often find the emotions unfolding very nicely just through the practice of Vipassana. For myself, it was a little different, and I want to share a story.

I was on staff here in the late 1970s, and we had a visit from a famous Asian teacher—somebody we'd been planning and preparing for months. We were really looking forward to his visit. Because I was on staff, I both got to sit part of the retreat and hang out backstage as this teacher had contact with staff. So I got to see him both in his teaching role and his non-teaching role.

In the whole two weeks that I observed him, I didn't see a smile. I didn't see a laugh. I didn't see a sign of joy. And I didn't feel a kind of human warmth of connection with him. The way I felt afterward was that the teachings didn't inspire me very much because this quality that was really important to me at that time was not present. Other friends were very inspired and went to Asia to practice with this teacher.

I also didn't feel that this teacher was suffering. He had a very peaceful mind, very cooled out, very much at ease. So I didn't think there was any particular suffering going on in his being. One of my friends said they felt there was a quality of mettā there, but it felt like distant starlight—unlike, say, a teacher like Dīpamā, whose loving-kindness comes across more like the warmth of the sun.

So it wasn't that there wasn't mettā there, or that there wasn't compassion there, but somehow it didn't touch me, it didn't move me. In my own practice, because I'm more of a thinking type of person than an emotional type, the Vipassana practice didn't unfold quite so easily for me into the realm of beautiful feelings. So I tried to balance this development of character in myself by doing quite a lot of brahmavihāra practice. Over about a five or six year period, I did a number of brahmavihāra retreats.

And those retreats, I felt, did really awaken that tender part of myself. I felt they truly had the capacity to bring it out.

At the end of one of my retreats with a Tibetan teacher, Sogyal Rinpoche, he was giving sort of parting instructions to his students. You can think of these parting instructions that a teacher gives you as pith instructions for how to conduct yourself, how to live your life. What he told his students at the end of this retreat, he summed up like this.

He said, "When you go back into your life, I want you to follow three things. Number one, be normal. There are already enough strange people in the spiritual world. If you go back and be really strange, people are going to think Buddhism is like that, and they aren't going to be interested in it. So please go home and be normal."

Then he said, "Be wise. Don't make a lot of mistakes in your life. Do what's sensible. Take care of yourself. Take care of other people. Act with wisdom."

And the third thing he said was, "Be juicy. When you go back into your daily life, be juicy." By juicy, he meant let these sweet qualities of the heart come out of you and manifest in your life. Let them come out and touch people.

The juice in our practice, or the qualities that we awaken, tend to be associated with the heart: love,

reverence, awe, compassion, devotion, humility, kindness, faith, and humor. These qualities, when they're alive in our practice, alive in our being, they really make life a sweeter experience, a much sweeter place to be.

But I wouldn't say that it's absolutely necessary to develop them to great strength along the spiritual path. I think there's a little bit of a choice here. The task of developing these qualities strongly may appeal to some people and may not appeal to everyone. And I think that's okay. One can, as that teacher did, develop a great deal of freedom and peace without activating these qualities so strongly, and that's fine.

So to some extent, it's a matter of personal taste—whether insight is enough for you, or whether you feel you would like to develop these other qualities of heart that really bring the juice to life.

But perhaps the most important thing about these qualities is that they're the way we can touch other people. They're the way that when we go back into our daily life, other people feel the fruits of our practice. Other people can know that something has shifted in us as a result of dharma practice. And in that, maybe they're the best advertisement for dharma practice.

In a way, I think that if you take up seriously the motivation of bodhicitta in your path—that you are cultivating the heart and mind in order to benefit all sentient beings—then these qualities become of particular interest to you. Because it's really through the development of these qualities that, to a large extent, you can touch other people and perhaps bring them a little bit closer to the dharma, to the truth, and perhaps help set someone on the path to liberation.

I think this is why the heart quality of compassion, or you could call it loving-kindness, became so important in the Mahayana expression of Buddhism. As we direct our attention outward to take in all beings, it's these heart qualities that can touch them and bring them in.

And of course the Buddha had developed the quality of loving-kindness to an extraordinary degree. I have to believe that his personal magnetism was immense. Someone who could deliver a dharma talk and have 500 people enlightened at the end of it had an amazing transmission quality—part of which I think was emptiness, but part of which I do believe was loving-kindness.

There's a story from the later part of his life. The commentaries say that he was probably 72 when this happened, when his cousin Devadatta tried to kill him. You may know about this story. His cousin became very jealous and wanted to take over the sangha. So he made one attempt on the Buddha's life himself and failed. Then he decided to kill the Buddha a different way.

He went to the elephant handlers, the mahouts of the king at the time, and asked them if there wasn't a mad elephant, a very savage elephant known as a man-killer—an elephant that had already killed human beings—that could be turned loose against the Buddha. And the king's elephant handlers agreed to this.

At one time the Buddha was walking into the town, and Devadatta alerted the elephant handlers and got

them to turn this savage elephant out onto the road. It began to charge toward the Buddha as he was walking into town. Devadatta gleefully rubbed his hands together and thought, "This will be the end of that recluse Gautama."

But as this great elephant charged directly toward the path of the Buddha, the Buddha's followers were saying, "Please step out of the way, Venerable One. Please don't let the Blessed One stand in the path of this charging elephant."

The Buddha said, "A Buddha never dies by violence. Don't worry."

And as the elephant came toward him, he encompassed the elephant with his force of loving-kindness. It's said that the charging elephant slowed down under the force of that loving-kindness and came to a rest just in front of the Buddha and bowed down in front of him so that the Buddha could stroke his forehead. Then the elephant, after being stroked, picked up some dust from the road and dropped it on the head of the Buddha.

And from that point on, this elephant was said to be tamed. He had been tamed by the force of the Buddha's loving-kindness.

One of the great blessings in our lineage is that we have heart practices—a variety of heart practices designed to bring these qualities to fruition in us, the primary one being loving-kindness. In the Mahayana traditions, compassion is usually discussed as the primary emotion. In our lineage, we speak of metta, though we shouldn't draw too rigid a line between these two. The Dalai Lama once explained that what he meant by compassion was simply basic human caring. This is really the same thing we mean by metta. They're just slightly different modalities of the same quality, both based on this simple sense of caring for ourselves and for others.

The seeds of metta and compassion are in everyone. It's what Trungpa Rinpoche called our "soft spot." I'd like to read this passage from Chögyam Trungpa:

It is as if we had a pimple on our body that was very sore, so sore that we do not want to rub it or scratch it. During our shower, we do not want to rub too much soap over it because it hurts. That sore spot on our body is an analogy for compassion. Why? Because even in the midst of aggression, insensitivity, or laziness in our life, we always have a soft spot, some point we can cultivate. A more vivid analogy might be of an open wound which is always there. That open wound is usually very inconvenient and problematic. We would like to be tough. We would like to come on strong. But there will always be a sore spot. At least we are accessible somewhere. So we are not completely covered with a suit of armor all the time. What a relief.

What Rinpoche is saying here is that in every human being, however much they have tried to armor themselves, there is always this tender avenue in. There is always a point that can be cultivated, a way into the heart.

He continues: *There's also an inner wound called Tathagatagarbha, or Buddha nature. This is like a heart that has been sliced and bruised with wisdom and compassion. When the external wound and the internal wound begin to meet and to communicate, then we begin to realize that our whole being is made out of one complete sore spot altogether. That is called bodhisattva fever. That vulnerability is compassion. We really have no way to defend ourselves anymore.*

If you have an inclination to dive into bodhisattva fever, metta is our avenue.

Some Vipassana practitioners have a philosophical reservation about the metta practice. I don't know if this is true for anyone here, so I may be addressing a non-issue, but some feel that the insight practice is so elegant, so impeccable, so pure—just being aware of what is. That's it. It's so clean. The metta practice, on the other hand, seems a little suspicious, somewhat contrived, perhaps even new-agey. It's like we're trying to put something on. Are we doing affirmations? Is it somehow fake?

Someone once said in an interview, "Vipassana is letting go of everything and metta is bringing something in. Aren't these contradictory?"

I think it's helpful to remember the Buddhist definition of right effort. Right effort is about developing the wholesome states of mind and abandoning the unwholesome states of mind. Whatever serves to do that embodies the primary sense of right effort. As loving-kindness develops the wholesome quality of metta, it is directly in alignment with the Buddhist definition of right effort.

These are different practices, but I feel they really come together. Down the road, along the track of our meditation practice, the practice of insight and the practice of loving-kindness can converge. Where they converge is in a present moment attention that's filled with warmth—in the generation of this quality of warm attention which we can bring to every experience we have.

Sometimes people complain that metta seems diluted: "We say, 'may I be happy,' but there is no I. What do you mean? This is delusion practice."

So, for those of you who have that concern, I have a reformulation of the metta phrase. This is for the Vipassana purists in the audience. Instead of saying something like, "May Kamala be happy," you could say it like this: "In this ever-changing stream of physical and mental phenomena, conventionally designated as Kamala, may the mind state of happiness arise on an ever more frequent basis." So there we have a statement that I think even the Abhidhamma scholars could get behind, and that I hope you may also.

It is extraordinary when we meet someone who has developed the heart qualities, and the person that comes to my mind again and again is the Dalai Lama, who has said—and I don't think he's kidding—"My religion is kindness." He was at a conference, a teachers' conference at Spirit Rock a couple of years ago. It was a gathering of about 220 Buddhist teachers from around the world, from Asia and from the West. And he was with us for about a day and a half, answering our questions, listening to our concerns, and sharing

from his point of view.

One of the things that he said struck me a lot. He said, "I'm not interested in propagating Buddhism. I'm interested in propagating human values." I think that's how deep his caring is. It's beyond all kinds of sectarian divisions or thinking. "I'm interested in propagating human values." And this kind of attitude is so contagious.

Because he's the head of the government in exile, the United States State Department had to provide really high levels of security for his visit to Spirit Rock. For example, the meditation facility at Spirit Rock is nestled at the base of high hills that are about 700 or 800 feet tall. The Secret Service part of the State Department asked to borrow horses so that their marksmen could ride up onto the top of the hills with rifles and look down and guard the meditation halls.

Every day at 7:30 at breakfast time, all the residence buildings had to be evacuated, and the rooms were searched with dogs one by one for explosives. And before we could enter into the grounds every day, we had to go through metal detectors that were staffed by security guards from the State Department.

These security guards were not lightweight. If you think United States airports are getting intense, you should have seen these guys. They had a pistol on one hip and a nightstick on the other and were bristling with walkie-talkies and cell phones and such. You didn't joke with these people. It was very clear as you were going in, you were not going to make fun with this crew.

I got to talk to one of them a little bit about their career. They traveled all around the world providing protection and provided protection for visiting dignitaries in this country under even more extreme security situations. So they were very heavy duty in their profession.

At the end of the conference, all of these tough State Department security guards packing their pistols asked if they could be photographed with the Dalai Lama. So of course he agreed and gathered for a photograph with all of them. His heart just touches people.

This quality of loving kindness is really within each of us. It's part of our nature. We've all known it, certainly when we were children. We've all known this. For me, a lot of the draw of spiritual life has always been to rediscover this quality of love in my life, to have it available, to have it accessible, to live in it more and more. So for me, it's felt like the pull of the whole path is my heart pulling me home. That's really been my deepest motivation all along.

And of course what we find is that this love can't be stabilized unless it's supported by wisdom. It can only flare up temporarily, kind of erratically, and in a way that we can't understand, much less control. But as we cultivate love and wisdom together, the wisdom provides the stability through non-clinging so that the love can flower and be accessible.

So sometimes this practice may look a little contrived, the practice of loving kindness. It is fabricated in

the beginning. But then it kind of catches fire, and it can take off on its own. And remember that it is a natural quality of heart.

I think back to my grandmother, my father's mother, who's one of the most loving people that I've ever known. She was born in the countryside in North Carolina around 1890. And she was married to my grandfather, who was one of the orneriest, most aversive men that I've ever known. And yet she maintained the sweetness of her disposition all through her married life.

When we kids came to visit them, we would just be showered with her love. She would put her lips into the hollow of our neck and sort of nuzzle around in our neck, saying that she was going to steal our sugar. That was just the way that she related to us.

My grandmother had no formal training in Buddhism. She hadn't even done any psychotherapy. And yet, the love just flowed out of her. So it really is an intrinsic quality in us, but sometimes it needs a little encouragement to come out. It needs a little help in being uncovered.

So we get into the second aspect of the power of loving kindness, and that is the aspect of purification.

Metta is a strong purifier of the heart. All the work of purification begins with this simple intention—the wish for the welfare of ourselves or another. That's where all the power comes from. Whether the happiness of another actually comes about isn't so much our concern. In our metta practice, it's not about focusing on the results or the outcome for someone else.

In our practice, we think, "I hope you're happy"—whoever we're directing it to, we think, "I hope you're happy." And we try to be sincere in this wish. If we are, that's really the driving force of the metta practice: the sincerity of that intention for someone's happiness. If you can feel that with each phrase, the practice will develop. It will have the power.

The phrases don't work like a mantra, where you can just say them mindlessly again and again and expect the magic to happen. The phrases need this wish accompanying them. The wish is really expressed through the phrase. But when you marry the phrase with this wish, that is the seed that makes the practice go, that makes it happen.

You really can trust in this seed. You don't need to force the feeling or fabricate or manufacture any particular feeling. Our job is just planting the seed again and again, watering it again and again. It's not our job, once we've planted the seed, to make the plant grow up. Only nature can do that. It's our job to plant the seed and trust that nature knows how to grow the flower once we've planted the seed.

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."

In Vipassana practice, we understand this to mean the cultivation of mindfulness. The gradual falling of raindrops is the moment-by-moment development of mindfulness. Over time, that creates a huge power, a

huge force in the mind.

In the loving-kindness practice, it is the moment-by-moment development of this wish for someone's happiness. That's the gradual falling of the raindrops that in time fills the jar.

As we direct these thoughts of good wishes toward ourselves, this can be a difficult part of the practice. Because as we direct the mind to love for ourselves, it brings up all the ways inside us that aren't loving. It can bring up feelings of self-judgment, of unworthiness, of self-hatred, of fear, of shame, of regret, of remorse. Sometimes we think, "I'm doing it wrong. Something's gone off track. This doesn't feel like loving kindness. It's the opposite."

But in fact, because the metta practice is so purifying, sometimes these feelings are the very sign that it is working, that it is doing exactly what it's meant to do. Because metta will go straight for the heart. It goes directly there. And it will bring out anything that's not of its nature.

It's as though loving kindness is this positive pole of a very strong magnet. We're holding this magnet against our body, running it up close to our heart center. What that positively charged magnet will do is draw out toward it anything that's of the opposite polarity. Anything that's still in us that's not resonant with the positive force of metta will come to the surface.

This can be one of the most difficult times in the practice of metta, but it's also so valuable because those parts of ourselves—if the tendencies are still there—have been operating subconsciously, but we haven't been able to contact them perhaps. So this is a way of bringing them into the light of awareness, into that warm attention that metta provides. In the light of awareness, the healing can take place. The release can take place. The liberation can take place.

The Buddha often talked in the suttas of loving kindness as the main antidote for the force of hatred or aversion in the mind. This is another reason that metta was such a powerful practice for me. As someone in practice whose primary hindrance has been fear—a form of aversion—metta was a beautiful antidote to that fear. I recommend it really highly to all my brothers and sisters who are also aversive types. It is a really good fit for our temperament. It is the antidote to aversion, especially if pain has been a feature of life for a long time.

If pain has been with us for a long time, then we tend to develop a kind of chronic habit of aversion because of just not being able to open to it, not being able to accommodate it. And metta is strong enough, is powerful enough to get in and touch that chronic state of aversion or fear.

Because this can be a difficult part of the journey in loving kindness for self, it's why it's often helpful to bring in someone that you really can like quite easily—a benefactor or a friend—so that you alternate your practice at times, if it seems sensible, between yourself and a benefactor or friend. And then you can kind of generate the loving kindness with the benefactor and borrow some of that love and bring it back to yourself. And use that warmth to soothe your feelings for yourself, to stoke the fires of love for yourself.

As the metta grows, it really has a strong unifying effect in the mind. Love unifies. It brings together. It is the attractive force, you might say, in the spiritual universe. It's interesting because in a lot of ways, vipassana takes us apart. The vipassana practice is a very analytic meditation. I'm sure you've noticed this. It sort of takes the human being apart either into the six sense bases or into the five aggregates. It deconstructs us.

It's very helpful that it deconstructs us because we've, coming into the practice out of unawareness, not understanding, we've come together around a false center—around self-centeredness or the false sense of self or craving or whatever you want to call it. That false collection needs to be dismantled so that it can come together around a true center. It could be the center of emptiness, as Joseph mentioned in his talk the other night. But metta is a beautiful glue that as we open to this quality of emptiness, the true center, is able to reconstruct the personality on a wholesome and wise basis and integrate what has been taken apart.

We've talked about how in doing the loving-kindness practice, if you run into a hindrance—that the suggestion is to leave the hindrance in the background. It could be fear, it could be sadness, it could be anger. Leave the hindrance in the background and continue doing the practice of metta. The inclination in vipassana is to turn to what's predominant, but in metta that's not the instruction. Leave it in the background and continue doing the metta practice.

And what's interesting about this, as you start to work with the hindrances in this way, is that you see that fear or anger or sadness can still be there, or desire, and you can still generate caring. And as you do that, what you find is that the metta starts to pervade even the hindrances. Or another way to say it is even these hindering energies sort of get wrapped up in the embrace of loving-kindness. And this is part of the integrating power, so that we don't have to push them out of the mind, but all of a sudden we start to be able to accept those parts of ourselves, those really difficult parts, in the spirit of kindness, in the spirit of acceptance, an aspect of metta. And this is very healing.

I'd like to read this poem from Galway Kinnell, which I'm sure a lot of you have heard before, but it says it so beautifully. It's called "St. 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. To put a hand on the brow of the flower and retell it in words and in touch. It is lovely. Until it flowers again from within of self-blessing. As St. Francis put his hand on the creased forehead of the sow and told her in words and in touch, "Blessings of earth on the sow." And the sow began remembering all down her thick length, from the earthen snout all the way through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail. From the hard spininess spiked out from the spine, down through the great broken heart, to the sheer blue milk and dreaminess spurting and shuddering from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath them, the long perfect loveliness of sow.

Everything flowers again from within with self-blessing.

One of the things that surprised me when I was doing the metta practice over an extended time is the way it affected my fear. I'd done a lot of vipassana practice by this time and had worked with fear a lot and had seen a huge change in my relationship to fear. And over the years, the fear had just gotten smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller through the force of equanimity, acceptance, spaciousness, non-identification. The fear could arise and it just wasn't that much of an event most of the time. But when the mind tipped off balance, it would still tip into fear. That was sort of its conditioning. It was its habit. That was the way it went.

After doing the metta practice, what I noticed is that the fear started to actually be displaced by loving kindness. The metta started to actually take the place of fear in the mind. So when it moved in a particular direction, it started to move in the direction of metta. And that was really interesting to me, but in my case it was true. The vipassana hadn't changed my conditioning very much. It had just worn it away more and more. But the metta practice actually put something different in its place and shifted the conditioning.

This is the second factor of purification of the metta practice. The third factor is concentration. And I think we've talked before about how the practice of loving kindness is a concentration practice in the way that we do it.

Concentration itself is a unification of mind. And as we've discussed, metta is also a powerful unifier of the mind. This is why the two go so well together. Both of them really bring the mind to a point. So the combination is so powerful because each one supports the other.

Someone once asked Deepa Ma, struck by her presence, "What's in your mind? What are the factors that are there?" And she said, "I only have three things in my mind: peace, metta, and concentration." What a mind.

As I was talking about this aspect in one retreat, somebody gave me a reading from a Russian saint from the 19th century named Theophan the Recluse, who was in the Russian Orthodox lineage. He has a passage that sounds like it could have been written about metta as a concentration practice. It's so unusual that I thought I would share it with you:

"For so long as the mind remains in the head, where thoughts jostle one another, it has no time to concentrate on one thing. But when attention descends into the heart, it attracts all the powers of the soul and body into one point there. This concentration of all human life in one place is immediately reflected in the heart by a special sensation that is the beginning of future warmth. This sensation, faint at the beginning, becomes gradually stronger, firmer, deeper. At first only tepid, it grows into warm feeling and concentrates the attention upon itself. And so it comes about that whereas in the initial stages the attention is kept in the heart by an effort of will, in due course this attention, by its own vigor, gives birth to warmth in the heart. This warmth then holds the attention without special effort. From this, the two go

on supporting one another, the warmth and the attention. They must remain inseparable because dispersion of attention cools the warmth and diminishing warmth weakens attention."

The fourth aspect of loving kindness that I wanted to talk about was connection—that it really connects us to life. It opens our practice to all of life. Vipassana practice can do this too, but we can also stay in Vipassana in a kind of self-centered way for a long time. We can use Vipassana to focus on my pain, my problems, my neuroses, my path, my progress, my healing, my peace, and my liberation. This emphasis is quite appropriate for the first stage of the journey in Vipassana, but at some point it needs to be let go of, this solitary emphasis.

Metta kind of forces us into a broader view of practice. This is from Shantideva: "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."

The Dalai Lama said that once we expand our concept of happiness to take in others, our odds for success go up by six billion to one. So if you're a gambler, this is a good bet.

You could say that the neutral person is really the turning point in opening our connection to all of life—someone that we don't particularly care about and we find that we can care about just because they're a being, because they're a being like us. And we start to get the sense of how metta is like this gentle rain that falls everywhere without discrimination. This is one of the aspects of the immeasurable nature of loving kindness.

And the Buddha said something pretty amazing. In the Samyutta Nikaya, he said, "It's not easy to find a being who has not been your mother or your father or your brother or your sister or your son or your daughter in some previous life."

What would that be like if we remembered that? Now, even as you're looking around the hall tonight, what if you thought that everyone here had been an intimate member of your family in some previous life, that our connections go that deep? Well, that may depend on how you feel about your family. But allowing for the possibility of happy connection—this is an amazing reflection. What if we could relate to everybody in this world from a place of love? What a place this would be to live. And there are people who seem to be able to do that, for whom that's a reality.

The last aspect I want to talk about is the happiness through loving kindness. One of the people who always strikes me this way is Ajahn Jumnian, the Thai meditation master who I mentioned the other night in a talk. Ajahn Jumnian is in Jack Kornfield's book, formerly called *Living Buddhist Masters*. But since most of them have died, we thought it really should be retitled *Recently Deceased Buddhist Masters*. But I guess the publisher thought that wasn't very commercially viable. So it's been re-released as *Living Dharma*.

Ajahn Jumnian is one of the few teachers from that book who's still alive. He has a monastery in the south

of Thailand, near the town of Krabi. And he visits Spirit Rock once a year, usually in May. He is one of the happiest people that I've ever met. He's just kind of bubbling with energy most of the time. So, for instance, we'll ask him to give a teaching and people will come to the meditation hall.

He can start at 9 o'clock and teach pretty much through until lunch without a break. And then he'll take a break for lunch and come back in the afternoon to teach through the entire afternoon without a break. He has this boundless energy and tremendous delight in what he's doing.

Some days we might say to him, "Well, Ajahn Jumdian, would you like to go out somewhere today? We could take you to Point Reyes and you could see the Pacific Ocean. Or we could drive across the Golden Gate Bridge and you could see San Francisco." And he says, "Are there people who'd like to hear the Dharma? If there are people who'd like to hear the Dharma, I'd like to teach the Dharma. But if there's no one there, I'm happy to go to Point Reyes or San Francisco. That's all right. But also, if you just want me to sit here, I'm very happy just sitting here also." Whatever he does, he is simply happy.

He has done long, long stretches, both of vipassana practice and of metta practice. One really feels both the concentration, the settledness and the stillness in his body, and the happiness that comes from the metta practice. He gives a short transmission in English of his teachings. He doesn't know very much English, but he will break into it for this special transmission, which is his pointing. He'll sort of just touch the air and say, "Empty, empty, happy, happy. Empty, empty, happy, happy." That's his energy.

In our loving-kindness practice, I think that this quality of happiness can come through in a really beautiful way, perhaps through our benefactor. And there's a certain amount of wisdom in choosing a benefactor who embodies these beautiful qualities of heart and mind.

When I did my first metta retreat, I worked with my benefactor for half the retreat, the first three weeks. So I had a lot of time to hang out with them. I picked someone who inspired me greatly in both wisdom and in heart qualities. Over time, I started to feel that as I hung out with them, I was soaking up their qualities of heart and mind. They were starting to pervade my being because I was with them eighteen hours a day.

This is why some people like to use for their benefactor beings who really inspire them—people like Dipa Ma or the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh. There's one practice tradition that has a central practice called union with the teacher, or guru yoga. In it, one is meant to visualize the teacher so strongly that one feels the teacher's being and one's own being becoming identical—that one sees that essentially one's nature is just like the teacher's nature. This is the kind of feeling that we can get from the benefactor practice.

There is a real merging that can go on so that the wisdom, the compassion, the joy, the freedom, the love of great spiritual beings can come to resonate with those qualities within us. This is really the purpose of developing metta for a benefactor—one of the purposes of that practice.

I think I've mentioned two of the Tibetan teachers that I've connected with: Sogyal Rinpoche, and in an

earlier talk, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, where there's amazing transmission of emptiness. Sogyal Rinpoche has also practiced with Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche. One time after a period of practice when Sogyal Rinpoche was leaving to go back to his home, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche gave him a parting transmission of pith instruction. And the pith instruction was, "Love me. Love me."

This was not said out of any egotistical, grandiose, self-flattering inclination. It was so that the student's heart could be full of love by connecting with a beloved teacher.

When these qualities start to take real root in our heart—these juicy qualities that are awakened by the tenderizing of metta—they bring a really deep sense of contentment. We have the sense that we've come home, that in some ways the kinds of satisfaction that we've been looking for, we're starting to find within our own hearts and minds.

One Buddhist poem puts it like this: "There is nothing else to search for. Rest in your natural face." We really have the feeling that we can just rest in that contentment of metta, of love. In a way, as the Buddha said, it is a deliverance. It is a liberation of the heart.

The vipassana practice reveals the quality of emptiness, and metta is what fills it with warmth. It's metta that transforms what could be this kind of cold, lonely voidness into something filled with the spirit of friendliness, of connection, of love. So it makes this space inviting and rich and welcoming and kind of cozy in its way.

In one tradition, they talk about this as the avenue that opens up the treasure chest of the heart and mind. Each of our hearts is a treasure chest, and it's only waiting for the right key to let all that beauty out. In our tradition, loving kindness is that key so that we can begin to trust in this treasure that is in us. We can open to it. We can surrender to it. And we understand that this really is our own true nature.

And a sense of unworthiness or self-judgment or fear of insufficiency that we may have felt as we started the practice starts to evaporate as we just trust more and more that love really is our nature and that this warm, friendly quality is accessible to us, that we can touch it and rest in it. We really have the deep sense that our own nature is basically good.

And then as that becomes an area of faith and trust and confidence, then it becomes a joy to share it. It becomes a joy to open it up and allow it to go out into the world and allow the possibility that others can be touched by it.

I just want to close with another quotation from Shantideva. This is one of the favorites of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and I think it really expresses his own aspiration as the incarnation, as the embodiment of compassion, as a bearer of this treasure chest of love:

"For as long as space endures and as long as sentient beings remain, may I too abide to dispel the misery of this world."

So let's just sit for a minute together.

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