Brahmavihāra - Guided Mettā Sitting

Patricia Genoud-Feldman · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 47:48

So this is once again a metta sit, and Rebecca last week set the stage for us. I think she really expressed the meaning of metta, and this expression we will call forth tonight once again—the expression of sharing friendliness, goodness towards ourself, towards other beings in a very caring way.

Simplifying as much as possible what this means for us: to actually connect with our inner goodness, the level of the heart, whatever that is present, inclusive of all mind states, because metta is just that—opening and accepting, being all-inclusive of what is, holding that quality of kindness, gentleness.

Beginning by sending and receiving kindness with ourself, that's usually the ground from which we then move forth to invite what is called a benefactor. A benefactor is a person who is easy to connect with. It's said that it's a loved being, one that may be a respected elder, a teacher, someone with whom there's a sense perhaps of gratitude. We've been helped by this person. In this part of the world we can also connect with a child or someone with whom there's a real easy connection, where spontaneously that feeling of love comes forth.

So you've been inviting those two categories of beings—yourself and benefactor—last week, and we'll do so tonight just as a way of connecting and nourishing the metta feeling. And if your intention is to stay with yourself or just with the benefactor, that's absolutely fine. It's really important to respect that possibility, just holding that intention in the heart and really going on the easy path rather than making it difficult for ourself.

Tonight will include another easy category. We're still working on the level of easy beings, and that's the next category, which is called the dear friend. So here again, quite spontaneously, when we think of a friend—or maybe we have many friends—there's this sense of kindness that comes forth pretty easily. And so once again, the dear friend is a person towards whom we may have an uncomplicated relationship. And it's really important that that is so, because we can have friends and then we can easily switch to seeing the negative side, just like it is with ourself. So here again, we really try to stay connected to the good qualities of this person. And it may be that there's more than one person coming up in the field of metta, of kindness. And so to allow that to be—if there are various beings that come forth, to invite them. Friendly beings, beings that we care for, that are dear to us.

So these are the three categories of beings that we'll invite tonight and with whom we'll share kindness, friendliness, gentleness of heart.

I'd just like to remind you before we begin that the kindness can be offered in a wordless way, meaning

that we can stay with the felt sense if that is of support to you. Or we can hold an image of ourself or the other person and connect in that way. Or it may be that we are helped with the phrases. So there will be moments when I will offer these phrases just a few times. You may have your own by now. Just as a way that you might want to be reminded of the phrases once or twice, and then you'll be noticing and experiencing for yourself what is most helpful. At different times I have found different ways. It's perfectly fine to explore and notice the impact of the metta on your own heart and mind.

So sitting very comfortably, as comfortably as you can. Ease of body is really essential here. If you have body pain, really offer yourself the space of metta towards your body, and you might want to move to a chair. And releasing those places that might hold tension in the body. Relaxing the body.

And very gently directing the attention to the space of the heart. You might want to even put a hand on your heart to feel connected. And in a very open and relaxed way, best you can, wishing yourself well, holding that intention to wish yourself kindness, gentleness of heart. Knowing that we totally deserve this gentleness of heart. And it's relating to our innate goodness.

Offering ourself metta, loving friendliness, holding that intention, bringing ease in the breath, in the heart, in the belly. Infusing kindness in the entire body. Inviting words of kindness if we wish, or simply staying with the felt sense.

May I be safe and protected. May I be happy and peaceful. May I be healthy and strong. May I take care of myself easily and joyfully while living on this earth.

Sending and receiving words of kindness, of metta.

Holding the intention to plant seeds of kindness. Just planting the seeds. Not worrying about the results. No expectations.

May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I take care of myself easily.

When the mind wanders, have the kindness to notice that and gently bring it back. Beginning again, connecting with the heart. Whatever is present—perhaps other feelings arising—including them all. Holding kindness for ourselves and receiving this kindness.

If we wish now, we may stay with ourselves. Or we can invite the benefactor and offer metta to this person. You might hold an image or just the felt sense of their presence, extending loving care to them. You might express metta through words:

May you be safe and protected. May you be happy and peaceful. May you be healthy and strong. May you take care of yourself easily and joyfully while living on this earth.

Now, if we wish—truly noticing if there's space to invite a new being—noticing for yourself if inviting a dear friend is what feels good to your heart. If so, bringing the image of this person or the felt sense, just

knowing the presence of this being near us.

Perhaps having a few moments of reflection on why we choose this particular person. Maybe seeing their good qualities, what makes them special. And very naturally, spontaneously, the heart opens and wishes them well. Wishes this person to be safe. Wishes this person to be happy. Healthy.

Notice the feeling of connection. Sending metta and receiving their goodness. At your own pace, with words or without words, truly caring for this connection, wishing this person well. Without forcing any feeling, the simple wish: *May you be well and happy.*

And now, if you were in someone else's company, saying goodbye, allowing that person to leave. Connecting with that heart space once again. Noticing, allowing whatever is present to be received in kindness. Holding ourselves with gentleness.

We'll end this evening's metta sit by allowing ourselves to appreciate each other's presence, each other's support. Holding a sense of the space in the room with everybody present, and wishing—including yourself—everyone to be safe and protected. Happy and peaceful. Healthy and strong. Wishing everyone to take care of themselves with ease.

If we wish, we can extend feelings and words of kindness outwardly, expressing kindness towards all the staff, the people who take care of us in such a caring and loving way, supporting our practice. And all the beings that live on this land—the birds and the chipmunks and the frogs, the flies and the butterflies, the turkeys and the deer. All living beings, seen and unseen, may we wish them well.

May you be happy.

Extending loving kindness in all directions to all living beings. May all living beings be safe and protected. May all living beings be happy and peaceful. May all living beings take care of themselves easily and joyfully while living on this earth.

Sending metta to this planet, Earth. May all the elements live in harmony with one another. And may all beings care for this Earth.

Just remembering that it's not because we are doing metta once a week during one sit that you can't invite yourself at other times to benefit and nourish and support your practice with this loving kindness. You can either choose to do a sit every day dedicated to metta practice—maybe the morning or the evening sit—or you may wish to begin some vipassana sits with ten minutes of metta, just to settle in and relax in the heart. This is especially helpful if we're having a hard time to just settle in. And then you leave it on the side and, as Rebecca said, not mingle the two practices together—knowing when we're doing metta practice and knowing when we're doing vipassana practice.

It's also helpful to know that if we have had ease with one of these categories—it may be yourself, or maybe it's not at all yourself; sometimes self is the difficult category—but a dear friend or benefactor, then

you'd like to really nourish that connection. It's really beneficial to stay where it's easy, because even if you choose that one, it will naturally flourish and expand to other situations.

So having said that, enjoy your evening practice.

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