Mettā

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2010) · 1:03:40

So tonight I want to talk about metta, loving kindness. There are some reflections about the state of mind as well as the formal practice—making the choice, making the determination for love.

It's really not so much that we as an individual, which since we know from last night there is no such thing, make the choice for love, but wisdom makes the choice. Metta is described as not its own particular mental factor, but it's an aspect of the larger mental factor of, in Pali, *adosa*, which is non-hatred—quite a large mental factor, one of the beautiful factors. Whenever there is a so-called beautiful mind state, a state of wisdom without delusion, a state that isn't colored by any of the *kilesas*, adosa is always present. It's one of the universals in all beautiful mind states. So there can be non-hatred, which is clear what that is, but it's not necessarily metta. Metta is an aspect of non-hatred. And as such, it's an expression of the heart and mind that's clear from confusion. It's an expression of the heart and mind, the consciousness of wisdom.

Rather than thinking metta is something that we somehow have to find a way to cultivate in this culture—we don't really trust it so much and it's weak and this and that—it's really more about discovering, learning, having confidence in metta, in this non-individual love as a power of mind and heart, as an expression of wisdom. Even though probably most of us think it's a good idea, it may not be what we really deeply trust.

Let me just read some things you've heard a million times, really basic stuff from the Buddha, where he's talking about the power of metta. It's from the Dhammapada:

When we hold fast to such thoughts as "they abused me, mistreated me, molested me, robbed me," we keep hatred alive. If we thoroughly release ourselves from such thoughts as "they abused me, mistreated me, molested me, robbed me," hatred is vanquished. Never by hatred is hatred conquered, but by readiness to love alone. This is the eternal law. You too shall pass away. Knowing this, how can you quarrel?

And then just one last one that I like:

There is no fear if the heart is uncontaminated by the passions and the mind is free from ill will. Seeing beyond good and evil, one is awake.

I really like those, especially that last one, because that's an expression of metta. We often think it's blind, just seeing the good. But seeing beyond good and evil, one is awake. That's a great expression of the power of metta in the heart, in the mind.

Really, on a deep level, the practice is to keep looking in yourself. I look and ask, do I really, truly believe

that? Believe it in the way that that's where my mind goes when I'm feeling someone has abused me, mistreated me? Though I don't want to hold on to these thoughts—that just keeps me suffering. Intellectually, okay, I can go there. But really, in ourselves?

This is why we have a training. It's not that one has to cultivate metta as the intensive practice, as we've been doing in the afternoons, as the only way to experience it. Of course not. It's a really common everyday experience of our mind and heart. But we can learn to recognize it. We can learn how powerful it is, and we can learn to train our mind and heart to really take refuge here in this wisdom. It's a choice. We can begin with ourselves, begin where we are, and learn how to trust, how to incline the heart and mind in this direction.

Let me give you a current example: Maha Ghosananda. You may know who he was, the Cambodian monk. He died in 2007—actually, he died in Northampton. He was staying out at the Peace Pagoda a lot his last few years in Leverett. He was a Cambodian monk who, during the Khmer Rouge years, just before the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia and began really the genocide of the Cambodian people, happened to be in Thailand studying. So he missed the Khmer Rouge. But they killed all of his family, something like eleven or twelve family members.

After he heard what was happening, there were so many thousands and thousands of Cambodian refugees who had managed to get out of the country living in refugee camps on the Thai border. As with Maha Ghosananda, many of the people in the refugee camps had lost everything. Besides losing everything material, for many people their families had been killed. They'd just been through—you know, the killing fields, just a horrible situation you can't even imagine.

Maha Ghosananda was really committed to his path of awakening, but he was committed to it from the basis of loving kindness, of metta. As the story goes, he went into these refugee camps. He spent years really trying to bring Buddhism back to the people, because most of the people were Buddhist, had grown up in a Buddhist faith.

But again, most of the monks and nuns and temples were destroyed also in Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge. So he went into these refugee camps to help in what way he could.

And the thing that he did—two things. One is he would go and build a little bamboo temple, just a little bamboo shack for the people to come. And then he would start chanting these metta phrases that I just read. That's what he started chanting. Amazing, isn't it? Amazing.

And the people would know this. Most of the people would be familiar with these. And after some time, it's said, other people would start to chant. He would then spend years going around giving out copies of the Metta Sutta, the Sutta on loving kindness, and just trying to revive the goodness in the depths of people's hearts and minds, knowing that that's really our truest nature when the mind isn't clouded. The best way he felt he could help was to reconnect people with metta.

But thinking about it, to go into a situation where everyone is in such a state of loss and trauma and bitterness and fear and grief, and to start chanting, "If you hold on to thoughts that he beat me, he robbed me, then you're not really practicing"—it's really amazing. And he spent years doing this.

When he died, there was an obituary in the New York Times. I just want to read a couple of lines from that. Scott A. Hunt, who is a professor of Buddhism at the University of California in Berkeley, wrote that "Maha Gosananda's ability to forgive those responsible for the murder of his entire family is incomprehensible until one heard his explanation of Buddhism." This was written for non-Buddhists. Maha Gosananda said—and this is in quotations—he "does not question that loving one's oppressors, Cambodians loving the Khmer Rouge, may be the most difficult attitude to achieve. But," he then added, "it's the law of the universe that retaliation, hatred, and revenge only continue the cycle." Reconciliation, he continued, "means that we see ourselves as the opponent. For what is the opponent but a being in ignorance? And we ourselves are also ignorant in many respects."

Just an example—it's a high bar, you could say. I realize it's a high bar. So don't let your mind go into, "Well, it's hopeless." It's a high bar. But this is someone who's been living in this world as it is, in some of the worst ways that it is, and knowing deeply that metta as an aspect of wisdom is really the deepest expression of wisdom and how we can live with ourselves, with each other as human beings.

Again, I'm bringing up a high bar on purpose just to let it get in and just let ourselves—not in a judgmental way at all—but just to let us really explore in ourselves over these days: Do I really have any confidence, faith, in the power of love, of non-hatred, of kindness as an aspect of wisdom?

Again, this really has to be without judgment. Not, "Well, if I really had faith, I'd never feel aversion again. If I really had faith, I'd go around loving." Not that kind of stuff. But just seeing if somewhere in the background, way, way, way back, there are beliefs like, "Well, loving kindness is nice, but when the chips are down"—that's an American expression that means when the going gets tough—"then one needs to get tough." Is that what one believes? When the going gets tough, when the chips are down, I need my anger. I need fear. That's the best protection. Of course, we're not going to say, "Oh, yeah." But just look at what's operating in the background sometimes.

And so as a formal practice of metta, as an intensive practice, but also just inclining your mind to recognize the qualities of metta in your vipassana practice, we do this as a way to really see for ourselves—to move from the concepts of loving kindness and wisdom, the "it's nice and it's good" or whatever, "yes, I'm committed to it," the concepts of it, to the deep experience on the insight level. Both how loving kindness can manifest in my mind in relation to the beautiful, in relation to the difficult, in relation to the boring—and also what gets in the way. A lot of our exploration in practice is learning what the habits are that block my recognition of loving kindness, of connectedness.

So it's not that we actually so much have to create, but rather to just begin to trust, to uncover the possibility of this natural state of mind—connectedness, caring for others, friendliness.

So I just want to talk a little bit about, well, what the heck is it anyway? What is metta? Just some descriptions.

As it's described in the Manual of Abhidhamma, metta is, as I said, an aspect of non-hatred—which is a very powerful wholesome state. So we talk a lot about hatred, we talk a lot about greed, we talk a lot about delusion, but they have their opposite wholesome states: non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion. These are also factors of heart and mind that are really more powerful.

So metta also has the quality of spaciousness. Again, the example that's often given in the suttas is that if you had salt and put it in a cup of water, you'd have extremely salty water. But if you take a spoon of salt and put it in a pond, you don't even notice it. So the quality of mind of metta is just spacious, including, not causing trouble about anything, not pushing away and not saying, "Yes, I need this." Just connected, inclusive, spacious, kind, not discriminating. And it's really normal and natural.

The example I always use, because it just really works for me, is this: if you walked out here and saw two little kids, maybe three years old, playing with each other, laughing and bouncing a ball, what would be your normal feeling? Assuming you're not in a really bad, aversive yogi mind—just a normal day. You walk out, the kids are laughing, they're cute or they're not cute, but they're just little kids. Don't you wish them well? It's just appreciated. It's not rocket science. It's not some big esoteric state that you have to crank up intensive meditation for three months to feel. You just walk out and go, "Oh, yeah." You may not say, "May you be happy and peaceful, may you be safe and protected." But you feel that sense of how the mind and heart just expands, connects, includes all of them, all of the kids.

And it's not blind. It doesn't mean you can't act. So the kids are playing. And if, as happens with three- and four-year-olds, they go from being friendly to getting into a fight, and one of them picks up a big stick and starts hitting the other one over the head—you don't go, "Oh, aren't they cute, la la la." You also don't go, "Well, I hate them. Look at those kids, they're so horrible."

You kind of take the stick away, out of metta, right? You still have this sense of appreciation, friendliness for the little kids. That's metta. It sees the whole situation with friendliness, with inclusivity. It acts appropriately, but your mind and heart isn't troubled. You're not filled with rage and hatred because "oh no, look at that—you can just see the evil of human nature right there." One could go there, but that wouldn't really be the choice.

So metta is not rocket science. And on that simple level, we all know it. This is the simple level we bring to our own experience. Acceptance is a huge aspect of metta, just what Melanie spoke about the other night—this quality of simply bringing all our attention right here, whatever's happening, seeing it clearly without adding anything extra, without adding hatred, without pushing away. So that's an aspect of our vipassana practice as well.

But metta, all the wholesome states—all four brahma viharas: metta, compassion, appreciative joy,

equanimity—can become really unbelievably powerful forces in the heart, in the mind. And you can sometimes even feel it. You almost feel like you've walked into a metta field around certain persons, or sometimes at the end of a metta retreat when people have been practicing metta for a week together. You can kind of feel it sometimes.

There's a quiet, lovely Burmese Sayadaw, a monk and teacher in Sagaing up in the hills that we usually go to visit, U Jayanta. He doesn't speak English, and he seems very simple. His monastery is small, always impeccably clean. There are only ever a few monks there. We go up to visit him every year. I love it, and I've told him this, because I just feel the sense of metta and peace whenever I walk in there, whenever I come and we just talk to him. He's simple, and he remembers us and loves it if we have a dharma question. There's no big amazing thing going on, but it can just feel like walking into a field of purity, a field of metta, because it touches that in oneself—just living a simple, quiet life.

Although I have to say, my friend Greg, who goes every year too, said last year his illusions were shattered because U Jayanta was on a cell phone when he walked in. Which doesn't mean you can't have metta. Let's not go there.

But anyway, metta can become a powerful force in the mind. This is from the Buddha, describing metta when it's really moving into a force:

"That disciple of the noble ones, thus devoid or empty of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unbewildered, alert, mindful, keeps pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with goodwill, an awareness filled with goodwill. Likewise the second direction, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, and all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness filled with goodwill—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. This is called the immeasurable deliverance of mind, the immeasurable deliverance of heart."

So metta is a simple, really accessible, normal and natural state. And it can also, when it comes together with wisdom and real purity in our heart and mind, open into an immeasurable deliverance of mind. It's really extremely powerful. Immeasurable—without measure.

So what obstructs or hides or keeps us from recognizing the measureless quality of mind, of heart? What keeps us in these perceptions Joseph was speaking about last night—the perceptions that seem to lead to and increase fragmentation, separation, limited mind, limited heart, affection for myself and a few? What feeds the fear?

Really, it's not like there's some monolithic thing. Moment to moment, the sense of fragmentation in our heart, in our mind, the sense of isolation, the sense of separation—that perception is created moment to moment. It's not something we're carrying around with us, and maybe someday, if we're lucky, it'll go away. There are plenty of moments when it's not being created. A moment of acceptance without any judgment, with presence and awakeness—that's a moment of non-fragmentation, when one can almost

intuit the measureless quality of heart and mind. Until we think, "I have experienced it," and boom—measurement is back, limitation is back. Fine, notice that.

So these habits: the habits of seeking pleasure, the habits of wanting, the habits of fearing the unpleasant, of pushing away, of aversion, of ill will, the habit of shutting out certain aspects of our experience. "I don't want this to be part of me. I don't want this to be happening."

I don't want to know about this. This is undesirable. This basically cannot be happening. All of these movements of mind.

And these are just the habits we talk about all the time. But this is really the essence of why these habits are the source of suffering for ourselves and others—because they're creating in the moment this sense of insufficiency, of separation, of isolation, of neediness, of fear. And then we believe it. And then we tell ourselves a story that feeds that. And then we act on that. And then we act with somebody else on that. And they respond. And then it just keeps on going, boom, boom, boom.

A friend of mine was just telling me he was doing a retreat somewhere else, and he came out of it having had a big insight into the basically empty nature of thoughts—a lot of what Joseph was talking about last night. And he was telling me, "I came out of the retreat and was visiting friends I hadn't seen. And they would say, 'Tell me your story.' And it was like they'd talk to me—all these thoughts, thoughts, thoughts, thoughts—and then they'd hand it to me. And then I'd say my story—thoughts, thoughts, thoughts, thoughts—and hand it to them. And then our thoughts are kind of meeting in the middle, la la la la la." He said, "It's just also nothing. It's just also nothing. We could just sit here and be here together, and that's fine."

So a lot of our practice, our cultivation of metta in the direct way and also through the attitude in the mindfulness, is through recognizing the qualities of metta and also recognizing these habits of mind and perception that feed the sense of limitation, that feed the concept of separation.

They say the word metta has two root meanings. I like both of them. One is gentle, and the example that's often given—very appropriate for today—is gentle like a gentle rain that's just falling everywhere. You know how it was gentle this morning? It's just coming, and I love it when it's like that. It falls everywhere. If the gentle rain is falling, it's not like, "I'll fall everywhere, but I'll just miss that lilac bush over there." Just gentle rain on everywhere. It doesn't select and choose.

And the other aspect is friend, friendship, friendliness. A true friend is someone who in happiness and in difficulty doesn't reject you, isn't envious, doesn't rejoice when you're unhappy, is always present without judgment, without picking and choosing. So these are two qualities of the mind of metta, the heart of metta.

And I really feel that with metta practice, and in noticing the metta in the vipassana, it's gentle. There's no way to be with metta other than gentle. You just can't say "May I be happy" any other way. It has to be

gentle. And we become a friend—a friend to ourselves, a friend to our minds and hearts, a friend to each other, a friend to the world. We start to see through the perceptions and the habits of mind that feed separation, that are not inclusive.

I'll read you this little story a friend of mine uses and gave to me, from a nurse who said: "During my second month of nursing school, our professor gave us a surprise test. I was a conscientious student and I went easily through the questions until I read the last one, which was: 'What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?' Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired, and in her fifties, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count towards our test grade. 'Absolutely,' said the professor. 'In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello.' I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy."

That's metta.

Whatever's here, it deserves our attention, even if all we do is smile and say hello.

And the subtle habits of exclusion—sometimes they're very subtle, I see in my mind, though sometimes they're not so subtle—habits of exclusion about what's supposedly internal or external. "Well, these people are more interesting or more important." Or in some subtle way, these people don't count, or I just don't have the time. Just to notice that quality of mind that picks and chooses.

In the formal practice of metta, as we've been doing on the Tuesday afternoons, as some of you are doing more steadily through the days here—Sharon says she'll go to her grave saying this, but I'll say it too. I don't know if I'll go to my grave saying it, but I'll say it: The practice of metta is not about creating and holding on to a great emotional feeling. It's not about holding on to anything. And metta has a wide variety of how it is. It's not necessarily about trying to feel anything.

The formal practice of metta is really the practice of training our hearts and minds through the cultivation, the use of thought, the use of attention, to cultivate our intention—the motivation, the movement of mind. As Melanie said, that very famous line from the Buddha: what we naturally think and ponder upon becomes the inclination of our mind. Well, metta practice—what is the mind saying over and over and over?

And people say, "Well, it's boring." Okay, it's boring. How really fascinating is the other stuff your mind's saying? "May I be happy and peaceful. May you be happy and peaceful." "I don't really feel it." Who cares? Just come back. The intention to say it, the intention to connect with the sense of the person—just that is strengthening the intention, is inclining the heart and mind. And it does have an effect.

Wanting to feel good—now let me see, does wanting to feel good sound like metta? Does wanting to have a better experience sound like the quality of open, connected, well-wishing for all beings? Or does it maybe

sound like wanting, which is the near enemy of metta, which I'll get to in a minute.

Through the cultivation of intention, every moment that we can connect—whether it's with ourselves, with benefactor, friend, with all beings, with whoever—ultimately it doesn't matter. Because in the moment, whether it's yourself or benefactor, say, in the moment when there's that phrase of wishing well, "May you be happy and peaceful," and you don't feel a huge emotion, but in that moment there's some connection with it, and there's really no ill will in the mind just for a second. I know sometimes you could say the phrase with ill will—I'm aware of that. But we're talking about a time when there's not ill will. In that moment of metta, it's a little metta, but it's metta.

It doesn't really matter whether it's for you or benefactor or whatever, because the moment of metta in itself has this expansive, inclusive quality. It's just that moment of metta—you just feel, "Oh, may I be happy, may you be happy." That's one reason we say start where it's easy, if yourself isn't easy, and come back, because once the metta's there for a moment in the mind, it's easier to include the self or the difficult.

So we're working through the cultivation of intention to really stop feeding the habits of mind of resistance, of greed, of aversion, of separation—to stop feeding those perceptions and instead to strengthen the intention of well-wishing, the intention of spaciousness, the intention of inclusion. Just very simple, very matter-of-fact, very practical, moment after moment after moment. And a lot of moments, that's not what's happening. Fine.

But every time that you're trying to wish well to someone and your mind goes off—"Well, they would be happy if they'd only do what I said," and "I've been doing this all day"—and you say, "Okay, that doesn't feel like metta," and you just come back, reconnect, say it again—that's powerful. Instead of going on the whole train, you see, maybe you don't use these words, but you're seeing: "Oh, that's the habit, the perception of separation, of not good enough or something lacking. Let me not feed that right now. Let me just come back to, 'May I be safe and protected.'"

It doesn't seem like a lot, because we're always looking for some big, juicy something or other. But this is the level, the subtle moment-to-moment level, that is really changing the deepest habits of our mind. When Joseph was talking about the concepts last night, I'm sure—well, I'm not sure, I'm not sure of anything—but maybe you got a sense of how fast and subtle the concepts are that give us a sense of self. It's not something we can think our way out of.

So the effects of those concepts are gross and with us a lot. But the creation in a moment of perception and concept is so quick and so subtle, isn't it? And the habit of mind is so quick. So it's the subtle habits of mind that really, in some way, are the deepest level of freedom and the deepest level of ignorance.

It doesn't always have to be this big blowout experience, but just this willingness, this determination to cultivate friendliness, loving-kindness, gentleness, inclusivity over and over. This is really what we're

cultivating here.

And the part we don't like so much is that a big part of the practice, whether it's the formal metta or the vipassana too, is the recognizing, learning to see and understand these habits that get in the way. We've talked about those a lot, so I don't want to go into them too much, but just a little bit in terms of metta.

The two biggest habits in terms of metta, of course, are desire or lust and ill will. Desire, or lust, is called the near enemy of metta because it's often confused with, mistaken for metta. It masquerades as metta. It can look like metta. When we're really caught in lust or desire and we recognize it, it doesn't actually seem like metta at all, does it? It's kind of surprising that we can confuse lust or wanting for metta, but we can.

One way is because metta, when you're feeling it, when you're just inclining towards well-wishing to someone, it's pleasant. And pleasant, when there's not mindful awareness, when the awareness kind of drops, the habit of mind is to move from pleasant into wanting something, isn't it? Often in metta, it can move into wanting more about the person you're sending metta to. And so then we don't quite recognize it.

"Oh, may you be happy, my good friend." I remember doing metta and just feeling so much well-wishing for her and happiness for her. And then these little thoughts would come in: "We really should spend more time together." Oh, may you be happy. "Really, why doesn't she call me more?" May you be happy. "Maybe when I get out, I'll call her up. We'll go into town. We'll go to that good restaurant." And then it's not so subtle anymore. You're off. But it's very easy to kind of slip over into that. And when it's connected to the person, we sometimes don't quite see it.

Another way that we can really get into wanting with metta—classically they say it's lust, that you actually get into sexual desire for the person. I think that's actually a lot less common than the wanting something back.

With metta also we can start wanting the feeling, right? "May you be happy." How do I feel? "May you be peaceful." How's the heart doing? "May you..." And you're always checking it out. Is it open? Not quite open. It was better yesterday. "May you be happy. May you be peaceful." Maybe if I go slower...

And you have to look and see: what's the motivation right now? Is it metta? Metta is a complete generosity of the heart, just wishing well for the person. Seeing them, the energy goes out, includes them, spreads out. "May you be happy." Do I feel good yet? Oh, okay. Maybe that's not metta. Just seeing.

The near enemy is still bound up. It's still all about me. And you can see that.

The sense of me is still a reference point when we're caught in the near enemy, when we're in wanting, whether subtle or gross. And that's just something you can really notice. As I said, when I really look at wanting in its essence, it doesn't look like or feel like metta at all.

The essence of wanting, of craving, is separation. I'm wanting something else. It's a sense of insufficiency,

of inadequacy, of incompleteness. I need whatever it is to feel okay, to feel peaceful, to feel happy. We don't say it that grossly, maybe, but the craving and the wanting itself creates a sense of separation, of insufficiency, and actually increases it, feeds it. The more wanting there is, the more it grows.

When wanting is present in the mind, unseen, that's really the perception that keeps this sense of me and other going. But in a moment of metta, that perception of separateness, of insufficiency, of neediness, of inadequacy is not here. A moment of simply, "just as you are, may you be happy." Just that. There's no sense of "I need something else in this moment." You're not even thinking about "I." Even though we're using the language of "I" and "you," in the moment of metta, it's just, "may you be happy." That's it. Simple, expansive, inclusive. Nothing is lacking. Nothing is in excess.

Wanting is just the opposite of this—whether it's wanting outwardly or inwardly.

This is from Mark Epstein. He's talking about the sense of unworthiness. He says, "When we have a sense of unworthiness, it is easy to feel deficient and to see the love of another person as the only possible solution to this plight. Meditation tends to work against this assumption of deficiency by restoring the capacity for connection from the inside." In doing this, meditation challenges the common assumption of our culture about where connection comes from. We see that connection is already present. We are not as separate and distinct as we think we are. Connection is our natural state. We just learn to permit it, to allow it. I would say to recognize it, actually. You can't stop it. We just learn to recognize that connection is already present. There's nothing to want from outside.

And love, metta, is an expression of this wisdom. It then strengthens our trust in this reality, in this aspect of reality. Just open-hearted, simple connection.

The Buddha said that lust is a maker of measurement, hate is a maker of measurement, delusion is a maker of measurement. In one whose taints, whose poisons are destroyed, these are abandoned—that's an arhat. But in terms of the near and far enemy of metta, lust or craving, ill will—these in themselves, when we don't recognize them, when we believe them and identify with them, when there's a sense of me doing it—these are makers of measurement.

You can feel measurement in the mind, rather than the immeasurable mind that the Buddha speaks of with the brahma-viharas. This maker of measurement—you can almost feel everything shrink, contract. It comes down to me and other, whether it's wanting or whether it's aversion. Suddenly there's this measurement, and I'm the center that everything's measured from. The mind contracts. The world contracts. Our view contracts. And that in itself is a form of suffering.

So the far enemy of metta is ill will. Well, that's obvious. We're not going to mistake ill will for metta—I hope not. And metta is said to be the antidote to ill will.

The Buddha gave lots of advice to his son, Rahula.

One of his teachings was: "Rahula, develop meditation on loving kindness. For when you develop meditation on loving kindness, any ill will will be abandoned." They don't coexist. They simply don't coexist.

So ill will is the far enemy of metta. And as we practice metta—just as we practice vipassana—sometimes you might feel like it's bringing up more ill will. I think it just highlights it, because the ill will starts to seem so abrasive, so out of sync with the metta, with the vipassana, with the acceptance. It's just so much harsher. But we still believe it often, still get caught in it.

And in terms of what I said earlier: Do we really have confidence? Do we really know that the strongest aspect of wisdom, the strong heart, manifests as metta, manifests as compassion? Or do we, as so often people say, "I need my anger. I need my fear. If I'm just full of metta, I won't be able to function. I'll just sit passively by while people walk all over me. How can I protect myself?" These are reasonable questions given the culture we grow up in. That's why we sit and look and see what's really true.

I've told this story often, but I'll tell it again. At a retreat quite some years ago—I think it was with Joseph, up in the mountains of New Mexico—it was specifically for specially invited environmental activists. People who weren't necessarily Buddhist practitioners, and some of them hadn't done much meditation at all. It was a ten-day silent retreat, very intensive, and we were just doing a regular retreat like this. Once a day, just like we do on Tuesdays here, one sitting every day, we would teach the metta practice. And we had discussion groups.

These environmentalists were lawyers and activists, really on the front lines, living very intense lives. Actually, it was billed as a retreat for burned-out environmental activists. They were pretty stressed, I tell you, and working very hard. Very smart people—it was a little intimidating, extremely smart.

So we started teaching the loving kindness. And in one of the groups, about the second or third day, one of the men there said very sincerely, "I'm in the middle of this huge, acrimonious, anger-filled court case. I have to go into court. These other lawyers will stop at nothing. They're angry." He said, "I need my anger. I can't get into this mushy metta, weak stuff. I need my anger."

But he was sincere. He kept on doing the practice anyway. And at the end of those ten days—I don't know what happened after—but at the end of those ten days, he was really so touched. He expressed, "I really see from this time, from working with the vipassana and the metta, I see that that anger was eating me up inside. It's not like I can just have the anger and take it in and throw it at those other lawyers in the courtroom, and then everything's okay. It's coming out at my family. It's eating me up inside. It's making me sick. It's just taking over my life." It was so touching.

But I know he had to walk back into the court case, and then we're surrounded by it again, and our old habits spring up. We know that. We've seen that here in these three weeks. So I'm not saying it's easy—to find in ourselves, over and over and over, the trust that comes from wisdom, from seeing your own

experience.

And then we almost make a resolution, an *adhiṭṭhāna*. It's one of the ten paramis, resolution. I'm resolving to choose love when I can. And when I can't, meeting that with metta too. That's also metta.

I was just on the phone with a man who stays in touch once in a while. He's in his late seventies. He's been doing this meditation for years. He's a welder farmer from Kansas—just a very down-home guy, the kind who says, "You know, I can never really do this practice." But he's completely dedicated.

He said to me yesterday, "I've been doing metta practice for the last two years. You told me to do that." I actually don't remember, but anyway, that's good. "You told me to do that, and it's really making a change."

I said, "Well, what change is it making?"

He goes, "Well, you know, when I walk down the street, anyone I see, I really try to send the metta. And if I can do it at that moment, that's great. And if I can't do it at that moment, then that's okay too."

That, I thought, was just a perfect example. Metta outward, metta inward when we can't be perfect. Okay, that's okay too. This is how it is right now. May I be happy.

Ajahn Sumedho has a wonderful way of speaking about metta in terms of the difficult—in terms of scary, frightening, violent, difficult situations. That's when we think, "No, I need my fear, I need my anger. Metta's blind, metta's weak."

Sumedho says: "With metta, one is not blinding oneself with an ideal." And that's where we can often go. You're not blinding yourself with an ideal. Instead, one is witnessing the unpleasantness in a situation, a thing, a person, or in oneself without creating anything around it.

I just love that. One is witnessing wholeheartedly the unpleasantness in a situation, in a person, in a thing, or in oneself. Just witnessing without creating anything around it. Just space. It's like this. That's Sumedho, the one who always says, "It's like this." That is an aspect of metta.

So this man is walking down the street. He tries, and he can't send metta now. Okay. You don't have to make up a big story. Acceptance, presence, spaciousness—it's like this. Those are aspects of metta.

And so this is especially true, much as Melanie talked about, towards your own internal experience. Pema Chödrön writes about this. There's an interesting transition that occurs naturally and spontaneously. We begin to find that to the degree that there is bravery in ourselves—the willingness to look, to look directly at our own hearts—and to the degree that there is kindness towards ourselves, there is confidence that we can actually forget ourselves and open to the world.

The only reason we don't open our hearts and minds to other people is that they trigger confusion in us, that we don't feel brave enough or sane enough to deal with. To the degree that we look clearly and

compassionately at ourselves, we can feel confident and fearless about looking into someone else's eyes.

Sharon likes to say that to pay attention is to love. And also listening—there's a slogan on public radio from a series where they go around getting people's stories. Their slogan is: "Listening is an act of love." And I think it's James Baldwin who said that an enemy is someone whose story we have not heard.

So with this ill will, in the face of the difficult, of course we do want to be separate from violent people, from people that are harming us, or that we don't like, or that we don't agree with, or who get us upset. The tendency of our mind in that ill will is to create the sense of me and other, to put the other in a box—these bad things they do, these scary things they do—and to just disconnect. That can seem safe. But first, it's not true about them that they're just all this bad thing.

When Bush was president, I couldn't stand to even think of anything good about him. I didn't want to hear anything good. Now, that's not reality. I just wanted to stay in this hostility. I was feeding hostility. That's not so helpful. It keeps me in the prison of hostility and separation. And it's not seeing accurately. It's delusion. Delusion keeps the perception of separation going.

Non-delusion, clear seeing, the mind that's alert and free—it sees well beneath the separation, beneath the box of "that bad thing" we put people in. And it's incredibly powerful.

I want to read two examples, current-day examples that have nothing to do with Buddhism, about the power of this clear seeing that comes from mettā, from loving-kindness. Mettā, far from being blind, actually allows for a clearer seeing of things as they are.

The first example is from Tracy Kidder's book *Strength in What Remains*, about a man named Deo who had escaped from Burundi at the time of the huge genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. Through a whole series of events, he managed to escape as a very young man in medical school, got to New York, and went through years of hell there. It's a great book, actually—really uplifting.

Kidder writes that Deo had spent a lot of time in Manhattan classrooms—he was going to Columbia—thinking about the catastrophic violence in Burundi and Rwanda. He had come to believe that the misery of the people, while not the sole cause of the mayhem, had been a primary cause, a precondition too often neglected by scholars. There was little or no education for most people. Many people had lessons in brutality, toil and deprivation, hunger, disease, and untimely death, including rampant infant mortality. As an example, Deo said, "Almost everyone has got worms. They're there since they were born, and worms will be their friend—intestinal worms—until they die. Can you imagine that kind of life? It's terrible. So how are you going to think right with pain everywhere?"

He continued, "It's been really hard for me to blame the people who have been slaughtering each other, although I do blame people all the time. They were not themselves. They were something else."

Tracy Kidder says his stance is remarkable. How many people in his place would have divided up the

world into good guys and bad guys, Hutus and Tutsis, and left it at that? But somehow he had found a way around the self-poisoning of hatred. He kept his mind flexible. And in that flexibility, you see more clearly. That's an aspect of mettā. It's not just loving—it's seeing deeply, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, and not creating anything extra around it.

The second example is from John Lewis, who was a congressman from Georgia for over twenty years. He was an African-American man who was in the early days with Martin Luther King in the Civil Rights Movement. He was one of the young college students in Nashville in the late 1950s and early 1960s, one of the early Freedom Riders, one of the founders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and deeply committed to nonviolence—not just "you don't fight back," but nonviolence as a very deep and profound way of life, internally and externally.

This passage is from his autobiography. He was beaten many times when he was on the Freedom Rides. He's not talking theoretically here. This is a man who put himself on the line over and over and over. They trained the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee with a man named Jim Lawson, another African-American who had studied in India and absorbed Gandhian principles.

I want to read this passage from John Lewis, because to me this is mettā. He's talking about suffering—the suffering of being beaten and the suffering of racism and violence.

He writes: "The suffering is nothing more than a sad and sorry thing without the presence on the part of the sufferer of a graceful heart, an accepting and open heart, a heart that holds no malice towards the inflictors of his or her suffering. This is a difficult concept to understand, and it is even more difficult to internalize, but it has everything to do with the way of nonviolence.

"We are talking about love here—not romantic love, not the love of one individual for another, not loving something that is lovely to you. This is a broader, deeper, more all-encompassing love. It is a love that accepts and embraces the hateful and the hurtful. It is a love that recognizes the spark of the divine in each of us, even in those who would raise their hand against us, those we might call our enemy.

"This sense of love realizes that emotions of the moment and constantly shifting circumstances can cloud that divine spark. Pain, ugliness, and fear can cover it over, can turn a person toward anger and hate."

It is the ability to see through those layers of ugliness, to see further into a person than perhaps that person can see into himself, that is essential to the practice of nonviolence.

One method of practicing this approach when faced with a hateful, angry, aggressive, even despicable person is to imagine that person—actually visualize him or her—as an infant, as a baby. If you can see this full-grown attacker who faces you as the pure, innocent child that he or she once was, that we all once were, it is not hard to find love, compassion in your heart. It is not hard to find forgiveness.

And this, Jim Lawson taught us, is at the essence of the nonviolent way of life: the capacity to forgive.

When you can truly understand and feel, even as a person is cursing you to your face—if you can understand and feel, even in the midst of critical and often physically painful moments, that your attacker is as much a victim as you are, that he is a victim of the forces that have shaped and fed his anger and fury—then you are well on your way to the nonviolent life.

This is to me one of the best expressions of the incredible power of a commitment to continue working towards metta, towards compassion. Only wisdom can give us that strength. But there is wisdom, and we can really trust the depth and the power of this force in our heart and mind.

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