A Temenos Exercise (in fours)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:04:41

Feeling rooted in the moment, in the body. And then from that sense of contact, that sense of connection with ground, with earth, opening up the space of awareness to fill out with that bright sensitivity, that delicacy of attention to the whole of the energy body experience.

Whatever that is right now. Just noticing what's happening in the energy body experience. Whatever it is, it doesn't need to be this way or that way—dramatic or remarkable or unremarkable. Filled out with presence, pervaded by bright sensitivity and awareness.

When you feel ready, you can keep your eyes closed if you want, or you can open your eyes and look at your fellows in the group. A bit of both is fine too. Just spend a little time wishing them well, including yourself in there. You're wishing the other three well, wishing all of you well, directing metta to your companions. You may know them—some of them very well, just a little bit, or not at all. May you be well. May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you be at ease.

Wishing them well-being, health, peace. It's really fine to make eye contact or not, to look at them and get a sense of being in loving relationships. As you keep intending loving-kindness towards members of your little group, as you keep wishing well and emanating metta towards them, recognize—if it hasn't dawned on you already, if you're not already aware of it—that at this moment, while you are giving metta, you are also the recipient of metta from your fellows in the group. You are giving and receiving.

Again, you can make eye contact or you can just look, or you could sense somehow the presence of the others. They are wishing you well, looking upon you with kindness—at least the aspiration, the intention towards unconditional acceptance and goodwill. Sense yourself both giving and receiving.

Then gently, when you're ready, let the metta go—the awareness of the metta, the intention of the metta—and just be in your experience, in your energy body experience, with a sense of the others and the togetherness there, the connection there.

This exercise has three stages. I'll explain at some point later on why we're even doing this, in case it's not obvious. So again, I have to explain a little bit of the choreography. You stay still—well, actually, you may not. What we're going to do is Catherine will ring the bell when we start, and then ring it at every minute interval for eight minutes. So there'll be eight rings of the bell, starting at zero and then at one minute, two minutes, and so on.

What you can do in that minute—you go around the circle, you can decide who starts—and all you have to do is the person whose turn it is for that minute checks inside, feels inside, and the question is: what's

happening in the energy body right now, right now in this moment? So you can express that. You're sharing it with the others in your little group. You can express that very briefly in a few words. So most of your time could be spent just feeling inside and trying to connect and developing that sensitivity. And then maybe you express it in words.

Maybe at first—I don't know, actually. I'm not sure. That's part of the experience. I don't know what's happening here—and it's fine. Or maybe I look and I say something like "agitated," "fluttering," or "fizzy." Or I might look inside and look and look and get a sense and then maybe say "warm" or "soft" or "velvety." So it could be really anything. It's not like it should be like this or like that. One's just expressing it. Or there's a contraction in the solar plexus area or the throat area. That's fine. That's what's going on in the energy body right there.

So you can express it in simple, descriptive words like that. You could have quite a lot of words or very few words, but you have a minute to do it. You can also express it, if you want, in a more soul sense or in imagistic or poetic language. "There's a spiraling of golden light. My body is a spiraling of golden light." Or "My body is an endless spiral staircase." Or whatever. So you can express it in very simple, descriptive, conventional language, or you can express it poetically, if you want.

You can express it with your voice, but not with words. How would I express what's happening in the energy body? What does the energy body sound like when given voice? It could be a grunt, a moan, a sigh, a roar. And the last option is you can express it in movement, nothing to do with your voice.

So in the eight minutes, basically what's going to happen is we're going to go around twice. Each person has a minute. Remember, some portion of that minute could just be checking inside and tuning in, seeing what's there, and then expressing it in some way. It doesn't have to be verbal, and it doesn't have to be rationally verbal if it is verbal. Do you understand?

I might just offer a few words as we're doing this to help and support. When it's your turn, the others' job is simply to witness and to notice what happens for you. A person is speaking and sharing their experience, and the others are silently witnessing—but with their energy body, with their sensitivity, with their heartfulness, and with that kind of possibility of soulfulness.

Are eyes open? Yes. You want to take in the other person with your senses. You're sensing—at least we're opening the door for the possibility of sensing with soul in every way. You may want to experiment with different ways. There are endless varieties and possibilities. We have quite limited time, but there are endless possibilities.

So the people listening or witnessing, when it's your turn, you're also asking: How does this resonate? This person has just expressed this, whatever it is, and how does my energy body resonate with that? What do I notice in my experience, in my energy body, in my emotions, in my sense of myself or sense of them, sense of the world? You understand? But you don't share that. It's just one person sharing. Is this clear?

Oh, one last thing. What is the intention? We're not trying to impress each other. We're not trying to entertain each other. We're not trying to get it right. We're not trying to make sure that we don't make a fool of ourselves. I mean, all these are very normal human intentions, at least in our culture, so that may well come up. Can I just let go of that?

This is an exercise for the possibility, towards the possibility of soul relationships. So it's very much the beginnings, the preliminaries of opening and setting the supports for that kind of thing. You might notice thoughts arising like, "I just want to say something so I don't look like an idiot." And see if you can just let that go. It's just an exercise. Can I just let that arise and pass?

I've talked for a bit, so why don't we just take another moment to settle. Again, grounding, connecting. The whole energy body changes—energy body changes, moves from moment to moment. And then just touch in again on this metta, giving and receiving metta to your fellows. You're the recipient of goodwill. So that connection through metta.

Just letting that gently go. Come back to your energy body. And is there a way of deciding amongst yourselves who's going to start?

Continue beautifying this talk (part 3/5). Maintain the same tone and style as previous parts.

Someone will volunteer from each group to start, and then we'll proceed clockwise from there. Catherine will ring the bell to begin, and then every minute to signal transitions into the second round. Is that clear enough?

Take the full time you need within each minute. Remember, the others are witnessing—taking you in, receiving you, being sensitive to your presence. Whatever is there is perfectly fine. It's simply what exists in this moment.

Thank you. Take your time, there's no rush. And if you're witnessing, if you're hearing, engage all your senses while noticing what's happening in your energy body in the process of listening, of receiving, of sensing.

That was stage one. Stage two will happen by tomorrow morning—there are three stages total, so this is the second of three.

The choreography remains the same: rounds in two circles with one-minute intervals, just as we practiced. But this time, what you're sharing—what you're expressing in some way or another—is what's happening emotionally right now. Remember, it could be descriptive adjectives or words, a poetic phrase, movement, gesture, or non-verbal sounding.

This connects to the energy body, but it's another level—what's happening emotionally in this moment?

Again, take your time. You can express in these different ways. And the witness—at times looking directly

at the person sharing, truly taking them in and observing what happens through all your senses. Sometimes you can simply keep your eyes open, sensing their presence. Other times, you can fully engage all your senses with the person who's sharing.

So again, take time to settle. We move through these stages quite fluidly now. There's the grounding, the inhabiting of posture, the releasing of rigidity. There's the whole energy body. And there's the sense of connection—kindness, well-wishing, goodwill—both giving and receiving with your fellows in the group.

Just touch into that metta feeling, that metta intention, for a few moments. Then gently let that go. We'll begin when Catherine rings the bell.

Some of it can be silent time, just feeling. It can be simple conventional language, poetic language or imagery, gesture, movement.

If it's not too much while you're speaking, sharing, expressing—consider: Who is listening? Who are these beings witnessing me, receiving my expression? Who is listening?

Can you play with the idea that these are angels listening—angels of witnessing? If it's not too overwhelming, if it's not too strong.

Now, I'm aware of time, so let's make this final stage optional. Let me describe what it involves, but perhaps not everyone feels called to be the person sharing. It might be that in every group, only two people want to participate while the rest witness. It might be that everyone feels drawn to it—in which case we'll see what we do with time.

Same format: one person speaks in descriptive words, poetic words, or through movement—body posture, gesture—or sounds, vocalizes, to express and share in whatever way feels called for something that is or has been soul-making for you. Something that has touched your soul and spoken to your soul.

So it might be you're sharing an image. It might be the very sense of what's happening right now, sitting in this little group and perceiving the others as angels. It might be anything whatsoever—the sense of what's coming through itself, something that happened before the retreat, something from earlier in the day. Something that feels like it's spoken to your soul or moves through your soul in a soul-making way. And if we're still not sure what that means, then just something that has filled you with a kind of resonance with beauty.

Does that sound okay?

There might be constriction of time, we can be flexible, but it also might be that, sorry, I'm not quite ready to do that. Not in an order. We could start with maybe two volunteers in each group, and the same thing—the others will witness and listen and take in with their senses and the possibility of sensing a soul, the other whom they're witnessing and hearing and regarding.

The person has five minutes if they want. Again, a lot of it could be quiet to share. And everyone tracks in themselves what's the experience when this person is sharing and I witness them and I sense them as soul. What happens in my energy body? What happens with my heart, my emotions? What happens with my sense of me, my sense of them, my sense of this, and my sense of all of this?

Basically, noticing what happens when I'm speaking, when I share, and when I witness. Do you understand? So it's just the same thing taken to a slightly richer or more involved level.

So let's do this. Three minutes each, and we'll do all four. We'll go round again. But this time, instead of ringing the bell after one minute, Catherine will ring it every three minutes, and that's the next person.

Let's again just root, sensing the contact, sensing your sitting, your body sitting. Sensing the connection with the earth, opening up to the whole energy body. Just noticing what's present in the energy body right now. What's present in the emotions right now. Connecting again to that intention of well-wishing, the emanating of kindness to your fellows, your group. Aware that in this moment you are the recipient of metta, of kindness. Giving and receiving. Touching into that as a foundation.

Energy body, experience, presence, sensitivity, as much as possible. And then, again, I'm thinking about three minutes. So you can voluntarily start to go in the same order.

So let's just pause now, and before we go on to the next person, just take your time. How does it feel to have shared that, to have expressed whatever it was? What effect does that have in your sense of things, of these others, of this room that we're in, of yourself? Perhaps it's even possible, it's not too much of a stretch, to actually be aware of that as one is sharing. So I'm not just explaining or recounting.

Again, if it's not too much, who is listening? Who is listening to me with so much interest, so much delight, so much celebration? What passes through the emotion, the energy body, the sense? Sensitivity is multidimensional. It's a possibility of multidimensional sensitivity. This possibility is possible. Just gently expanding into that possibility.

Just again, pausing, coming into a little bit of silence together. Noticing what moves in the being, in the energy body, in the heart. Listen to your sense. Listening or sensing—take your time. It's fine to have a lot of words; it's also fine...

So again, just taking a few moments to notice the echoes, the reverberations in the being, in the body, in the heart, in perception—in the sense of self, other, even in our world. It doesn't have to be anything in particular.

Everything is dependent arising, everything has an effect. So again, all we do here is just taking those few moments to pick up on the after-echoes or the resonances, reverberations in your being of having expressed, having shared, or having witnessed or heard what has been shared.

In this part, you may want to open your eyes, because it's about both the self and the other, and the world.

You might not notice anything, or it might be something difficult that you're noticing. Whatever it is, it's completely fine. Totally fine. It doesn't have to be this way or that way. But it's interesting.

Whatever is the experience, whatever is the sense of things, come back to that foundational intention for kindness to the others in your group. Wishing them well. Wishing them ease, joy and peace. Right now you are a recipient of that, as well as a donor, a keeper.

Catherine will join us in that chant again together. Feel free to harmonize or whatever. This is Pali, and it really means "may all beings be happy." So it's a metta chant. It's a blessing, a blessing with the sound, a blessing with the voice and intention. Just for a couple of minutes. To your group, to all the beings in this room.

Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu
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May all beings be happy. May all beings be well. May all beings be free.

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