A Temenos Exercise (in threes)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:23:34

Setting again, really grounding in the sense of sitting—the sensations of sitting, the sensations of contact with the floor, with the earth, the backside, the sacrum, the legs. Even that grounding, even that connection with the earth can be multi-leveled at times. There's the simple mindfulness of sensations in their so-called bare actuality. There is the energy body connection. There is the imaginal sense of the body—this body, how it's perceived sitting on the earth.

Opening up the awareness to the whole body, a little bit larger—what we call energy body awareness, which really means the whole range available of what that space might feel like. It doesn't mean any particular kind of experience—bright, sensitive presence through the whole space of the body, a little bit larger. Again and again it will shrink, it will collapse, and again and again just inhabiting that whole space, opening up again the awareness, the presence, the aliveness through that whole space.

When you're ready, move the eyes open. What happens to the energy body awareness when the eyes open and you take in that you are with two fellows? What happens to the energy body awareness? What happens to the attention? Does it go all over there? Does it withdraw? Does it go somewhere else entirely? Just noticing.

Is it possible to have both in the awareness—both the sense of one's own presence, one's own space of energy body, and these other beings, these two beings? A sense of an attention that can hold and embrace both particularities.

Let yourself make eye contact. You don't have to. Sensing each other, opening to the presence of each other. Beginning to wish well, to radiate towards your two companions goodwill, blessing. May you be at peace. May you be happy. May you be at ease.

There's so much about you I don't know. So you've got your energy body, the sense of the others, and this goodwill, this repeating of the intention of metta—just the intention, perhaps the energy of metta. Awareness has all three: energy body, other, and metta, blessing, wishing well.

Again, in this moment, you know you are being wished well. You are the recipient of metta, of loving-kindness, of goodwill. Can the attention hold all of it—the energy body, the heart, the other, the giving and the receiving in loving-kindness? You are bathing others in loving-kindness.

There may be eye contact or there may not be. You can actually do this with the eyes open, with the senses open, sensing other. Sensing when we get lost in the other or in ourselves by withdrawing. There may be eye contact or there may not be, but the senses are open to the other—giving and receiving.

Really just letting that intention for metta flow, the awareness of the metta flowing. It remains as a foundation for everything, in the background, always ready to be activated consciously if necessary, but it's a basis—energy body awareness and the sense of other, others, and the sense of the senses in relationship.

Similar to what we did last time, the first stage of the exercise is just someone's going to go first and we'll go around.

And this time you have somewhere between two and three minutes. Somewhere between two and three minutes each to express or share: What's happening in your energy body right now, in this moment?

In those three minutes, it's going to change. Some of that might be quiet, some of it might be "I don't know," some of it might be "I feel numb." Some of it might be "I'm tingling" or "I feel electric" or "something's tight in my belly" - whatever it is. It will go through its own journey in the three minutes.

So you can be tracking that inside and expressing it. Again, you can express it in conventional descriptive language. You can express it in poetic language. You could express it in movement or in sound.

Sometimes the sense of the energy - we're opening up the meaning of this word energy - sometimes it actually involves an image of the body. We're sensing the body as image. So if that's there too, you can find a way to express that perhaps in words, describing not just the feeling in the body, but the image of the body, if that arises.

Does that make sense?

The job of the other two in the group, while one person is speaking, is to bring all your senses into engagement with the other, with the one who is speaking. So you're looking and you're listening. And what is it to bring your whole energy body to know the other with your energy body, with your whole body? Not touching, not intruding in any way, but my whole body might be sensitive, open to the other.

Is that clear?

So perhaps someone in each group could volunteer to go first. It will be somewhere between two and three minutes, and the witnesses remain silent. You're not saying anything or feeding anything back. Your job is to track your own process and your emotions or your mind as you're witnessing and opening, sensing the one who's communicating.

Do you understand? So you have a job too. You're receiving, but you're also tracking your own process.

Someone asks: "Can we still stay with the metta while we're listening?"

You can if you want, but if it feels like "Oh, it would be really good to go to the metta now," I wonder if it can be there in the background. Otherwise, your job as witness is to really just be as fully present in all the expanded meaning of what we mean by fully present on this retreat. Sometimes it might be "I need to do

metta," but I would probably view that as just - we're setting it up, and then we're letting it go, and it's the basis.

Catherine will ring a bell to start us, and then we'll ring a bell to stop. Again, it will be just a short pause, and then the next person.

Eye contact can come and go. For the witnesses, what I'm asking you to do is really bring your senses into relationship with the other, which means eye and ears, and actually - what does it mean to bring my whole body into knowing, my whole energy body into knowing the other? We don't really have that in our culture; we don't think of that, but I'm suggesting that as much as possible too.

The person who's speaking sometimes will probably want to close their eyes to track something and can make eye contact or not, or look away. That's just natural in human psychology.

Is that good?

So just in the pause between turns: What's happening in the energy body? What are the echoes, the reverberations? Having spoken or expressed and having listened and sensed and seen - it doesn't need to be anything at all. Then the bell will ring for the next person.

Perhaps go around clockwise as if you were looking from the top.

And just to add, if it wasn't clear - as the person's speaking, you might say something, but do you notice there's an effect of speaking? There's an effect of speaking and being seen, and everything's dependent arising. So part of what you can track and then also express somehow is this very process itself.

The effect of having said what I just said, or shared or expressed, or of saying it right now. Do you understand?

So that's part of what you can include in your awareness and in your expression—this kind of rolling dynamic of sensitivity and expression. Checking out the echoes and the reverberations, whatever they are. Whatever they are.

Again in the silence, in the pause, noticing any reverberations, whatever's moving in the energy body, also in the mind, in the emotions—the sense of things.

Let's return to the metta. So again, taking in with your senses. Don't do this just with your eyes closed. Take in each other. See who you are offering metta to. Sense their presence, their beingness. Wishing well, emanating kindness, goodwill to your two companions.

With your energy body awareness. Maybe eye contact, but it doesn't have to be. It might come and go.

And know—be aware, recognize—that you are receiving that stream of kindness and loving kindness right now. You are giving and receiving the blessings. What is happening for self in the body, in the emotion, in

the mind? Whatever is happening for other—wishing well, being wished well, however transient this flow of experience, just wishing well, bathed in kindness.

And then gently letting the active intention and awareness of metta go. Letting that form a basis or background, and aware again of yourself sitting and aware of your two companions.

Is there a kind of attention that can embrace both self and other in the particularities of each?

Again, for the second round, I will include emotions. Emotions are the primary thing now. Any mode of sharing or expressing emotions could be through gesture, through movement, through speech, through conventional use of language, through sound, poetic language, image language.

And again, the witnesses—just witness, bringing the fullness, as much as possible, of the being, of the attention, of the senses into taking in the other, receiving the other, attending to the other with the fullness of one's body and senses. And the witnesses track what's happening in the emotions and in the energy body—in their energy body.

And the person sharing is sharing or expressing what's happening emotionally right now. And again, it could be that now having said that, or as I'm saying that, I notice this—and sharing that. So is it possible to track the effect, both in the emotions and in the energy body, of the one who's speaking? Energy body and emotions are very connected, of course. But to share mostly about the emotions, but to notice all of that. Does that make sense?

Catherine will ring the bell again, and we'll have three minutes to go around.

Pausing again and, of course, sensing the heart, the emotions—what's there right now? Actually, the whole energy body is implied in the emotions as well. Whatever it is, whatever is reverberating in the emotions.

The heart is right now, over the gentle intensity, that knowing—inform and pervade the energy body, letting the energy body and the heart be involved in that knowing, be touched by that knowing, be shaped.

Gently letting the metta go into the background to form a basis.

Again, with the third round, each turn will be a little longer—about five or six minutes perhaps. You may not feel you want to, and it's okay to just say, "I'd rather not."

But the same as the other night, if you want to, and if it feels okay—so check in—is there something that has touched my soul? Something that feels soulful, something that has those resonances, feels deeply meaningful? It could be an intrapsychic image, could be a sensing in the soul, could be a relationship, could be something happening in this moment. It could be the very fact of sitting here, the very fact of sharing this way, the very fact of being together, the very fact of what's passing, what's arising in the senses right now.

If you want to, and if it feels okay, share that similarly, expressing it in any of those ways we've described.

And again, the witnesses—your role will be to take in through the senses, to be clearly present with whole body and heart, and track what's going on in oneself, in the energy body, in the emotions, in the sense of things.

If what we're sharing isn't six minutes worth, can you share more than one? Share whatever you want about what nourishes your soul, and it might evolve in real time.

The person sharing might also—it might feel like too much of an ask, but it might be possible to, as you're sharing, again notice: How does this sharing affect me now? What do I notice in my energy body as I share this? What do I notice in my heart and my emotions? What do I notice in my mind, perhaps in terms of commentary or thought or perception of this very situation, of my sharing right now? What's my sense of myself and how it is to sit here right now? There's quite a lot there to be open to and sensitive to.

If I could add one more small element—it's nothing new: Who are these witnesses? Who am I sharing this with? Who am I voicing this with?

If you don't feel like participating, you can just sit quietly. Otherwise we'll go round again. It could be whoever wants to go first this time.

So again, perhaps begin with that real fullness of being, and everything that has come to mean for you over these days with these teachings. Take your time so you can track what's arising—you don't have to be speaking all the time.

Whatever is arising, whether you are the person expressing or a witness, notice what is arising right now in the energy body, in the heart, in the emotions, in the mind. Whatever you notice in your sense of self, sense of others, sense of how it is to be here right now with these companions. What does it look like? How does it feel? How is it sensed?

Catherine will ring the bell in a moment and we'll move to the next person around the circle. Again, how much can the senses and the sensitivity and the awareness be engaged, be involved, whether you're sharing or witnessing?

Whatever is reverberating right now in any of the aspects or dimensions of being—including the sensing—whatever it is, it's fine. Whatever it is teaches us something, something to learn. It's not to be judged, not to be dismissed or ignored or improved. It's something to learn from—all these things: emotion, thought, assessment, perception, inner and outer.

As we ring the bell to move to the third person, if that person doesn't want to share, then just hold that silent space, either with the intention of metta, or simply with the senses open, seeing what arises in the senses.

Bring the whole of the being, the whole of the attention, the whole of the body into relationship, into engagement with what is arising right now. What is arising includes what's happening in the body, what's

happening in the heart, what's reverberating, what's arising in the mind, and the sense of this moment in this place right now. Where are we? Where are we?

Where are we? Where is the energy body, your awareness of your own experience, and also the sensing of your companions?

Beginning again to resume conscious active intention and metta—wishing well, wishing well-being and ease. Include your senses. Sense the moment as well as yourself, embracing both, knowing and recognizing that you too, again, are receiving right now. You are the recipient, the object of well-wishing, of kindness, of benevolence, of mercy. You are being looked upon in this moment with eyes of mercy.

Who sees me? Who listens to me? Who celebrates?

Before we finish this session, we'd like to do one more thing together. You can stand up if you want, or sit down, or even move. You can move if you want while we're doing it.

It's a really simple chant: Om Ah Hum.

These are seed syllables—magical, mantric syllables that have, as usual, multi-dimensional, multi-aspected meanings and resonances. One of the levels, or one of the multi-levels, is that they're the Om Ah Hum—body, speech, and mind of the primordial cosmic Buddha.

Soul makes things manifold. You start with one Buddha, you get more. The Buddha starts getting more complex with more aspects, more and more and more, in the realization, in the liberation through soul-making.

These primordial Buddhas have every possible aspect, every possible feature, every possible demeanor, every possible expression—light and ethereal and wrathful and dark and raging with holy rage. They include suffering, and they include bliss, and they include equanimity. They're still and they loom. They're silent and they sound. Everything is in there.

The actual basic chant is very simple, but you are free to stand up, sit down, move, and sonically embellish in any way you want. Sometimes when we chant, we all try to find the same pitch or we find nice harmonies, so harmonize to your heart's content—make little trills and counterpoint and all that. Sometimes we always go for the pretty harmonies. If you feel moved to and you want some dissonance—Om Ah Hum. Because it's the primordial Buddha, it's everything: including the dukkha, including the light, including the dark, including the pretty, including the seemingly ugly, including the rub, and including the smooth.

Om Ah Hum...

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