Sharing Soul Sense (A Temenos Exercise)

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I'm certain you have gained a vivid sense of how much refinement of awareness and sensitivity and subtlety of attention and discernment is both necessary and a fruit of these kinds of practices—both a basis and a fruit. And that's part of the ongoing possibility of expansion. It grows in us. The more we intend to work in these ways, those capacities, those sensibilities grow.

Some of you may not have been there, but there was a question in one of the Q&A sessions a few days ago about whether it's possible to do this in relationship with another person. The answer is yes, and in quite a few different ways. There's a range of possibilities. So we want to do an exercise now, to play a little bit, that exercises our sensitivities and our skills with some of the elements of the soul-making practices in relationship—together.

This comes in three or four stages of exercise, but any part of it is optional. If you feel like you don't want to do something, you can just pass.

We're going to break into groups of three, and I'm going to ask that these groups of three be, as much as possible, with two people that you didn't know well before the retreat.

There will be a few stages, but I'll talk us through it. If you want to pass on a stage, you can, but you probably won't. Basically, we'll be exploring in the moment, in real time, the experience of energy body, the experience of the heart, and if you want to, sharing or expressing something that has touched your soul while you've been here. It could be in this moment or this week—an image or something you've sensed with soul that has touched your soul. That's basically what we're doing.

So find a posture that's comfortable. Begin with your eyes closed, and grounding. Sense of grounding—connecting with the sense of sitting, with the sensations of sitting, with the floor, the feet, the legs, the backside. Grounded. In contact.

Then, keeping that sense of contact, open up the whole space of the awareness of the energy body. You're really very much in your space, whatever is happening there right now, just in touch with the flow, the ebb and flow and movement, what arises, what passes, in the energy body, and also in the heart and the mind right now.

When you're ready, begin offering metta, offering the intention of loving-kindness to your partners. You can move between eyes open and eyes closed. You may make eye contact, you may not. You're just getting a sense of them, their being. Wishing them well. May you be peaceful. May you be filled with happiness. May you live at ease. Just returning to that intention, the gentle intention of metta over and over again, to

these beings with you.

Is it possible, at the same time as you are giving, intending the stream, the flow, the bathing of metta towards your partner or partners here, that you recognize, that you become aware too, that at this very moment, you are the recipient of well-wishing? There is metta flowing towards you—goodwill, bathing your body, your being. You are wished well. A gaze of kindness focused on you, intentions of goodness and kindness. Aware of giving and receiving both—flowing in, flowing out, bathing all around and inside.

Now, the first round of this exercise will be that you take turns, and each person has roughly two minutes to in some way express or share—it could be in words, it could be in movement, it could be in gesture, it could be in sound that is not words—in some way to express what is happening, what the experience is in the energy body.

at the moment, as it's happening. And what you'll find is that in two minutes that might even change quite a lot. The fact of you communicating something in whatever medium or form actually has an effect as well. So you're simply somehow expressing out loud what is happening in the energy body through those two minutes, as much as you would like to.

What happens in the energy body can be anything at all, and there's no better or worse, no right or wrong. So it might be tracking into the energy body and discovering, "Actually, I don't even know. I'm not quite connected. Okay, give me a second." Or finding that it's numb, that there's not much going on there. That's simply what's happening in the energy body—it's neither right nor wrong, just what's present. Or perhaps going in and finding there's a lot of nervous excitement that's kind of unpleasant, but when I stay with it, I see that I can open to it and it becomes quite pleasant, like a fizzy fountain.

You can speak in conventional descriptive words, as accurate as possible, to describe what's happening in the moment. You could also speak in more poetic language, drawing on our expanded sense of the energy body that now includes the imaginal dimension. Perhaps the energy body right now is a volcano in the moment of its eruption, boiling luminescent lava erupting through the central channel out the top of the head. Or maybe the energy body feels like a cool stream of clear, pure water flowing in spring sunlight, this movement through the body. It could even be sensing that you're growing wings—huge, powerful wings that move the whole energy, whatever it is. No good, no bad, and you can describe in all kinds of ways.

Now, the witnesses are simply witnessing. You don't comment. But the job of the witness is to bring all your senses to the witnessing—eyes, listening, but your whole energy body. What is it to bring your energy body into openness to what you are witnessing and hearing? Your job is also to track what happens in your energy body when you are witnessing what you're witnessing, when you hear what you hear.

The intention here is purely for exercise. As I mentioned at the beginning, there are many skills involved

in this work. We're developing these skills now in relationship. It's not that this or that should happen. I'm not trying to entertain or impress or prove myself in any way. It's purely an exercise. So check what happens in the intention sometimes when we come into relationship.

Take a moment now to decide the order you'll go in your groups. Remember, there's a range here. There's nothing one needs to impress. If I look inside and find there's just a knot in my heart and the rest is numb, and it feels really contracted, that's what's happening. That's what one expresses and shares in whatever way one wants. One could express that in grunts or any other form. Really, it's open. The experience is open and the range of expression is open, staying in your place and not touching each other.

Let's take a moment before we start to gather ourselves again. I probably should have done the explaining before—apologies. Just take that moment, connection with the earth, the grounding, and the whole energy body right now. Tap into the metta again, giving your partner or partners that flow of well-wishing, knowing that you are at this moment the recipient, the object of goodwill and kindness, of metta.

Then gently let the metta take its place as a kind of basis—not so much a conscious intention, but just a basis of everything that we do when we're in relationship. Just let it settle as the ground floor.

When you're ready, the first person has two minutes to speak, grunt, vocalize, move, express what's happening in the energy body right now. Both witnesses and communicator are tracking the effects of communicating in the energy body as well.

After each round, take a couple of moments to come back to your energy body. What's reverberating there now? What's the experience of either having witnessed or having communicated, shared, expressed? It doesn't have to be one thing or another. It's simply an exercise in developing awareness and sensitivity, in this case, in a certain relational context.

So that will allow other possibilities.

Again, just momentarily touching on the metta, bringing that up more consciously—the goodwill, the knowledge, the assurance, the recognition that you are receiving the intentions of loving-kindness right now.

And then the second person beginning in the same way, the witness completely open with the whole energy body and tracking their response at the same time.

And again, coming with the fullness of intention into your own sphere of experience of your own energy body. Just seeing what ricochets around there now, what reverberates, whatever it is.

In a minute it will be the third person's turn. But for those of you working either in pairs or alone, the pairs can just divide this time in half, if you like, as well as you can judge a half minute each, and just do that a bit more rapidly. And for those working alone, there's the possibility, if you like, of almost letting the soul come into two—a witness part of the soul and yourself as image, if you like, tracking the energy

body.

Just again, just touching on, just opening the taps of metta, opening the waters, the flow of metta, just for a few moments—bathing the other in this stream of mercy, kindness, goodness, knowing that you too are right now likewise being bathed, gazed on with mercy, with well-wishing.

Letting that take its place as a quiet, tacit foundation, and the next person beginning.

Lovely. So that was round one, or stage one. The second stage actually adds a dimension, and the dimension that it adds is that of the heart, the emotions.

Pretty much the same thing, but what happens this time is each person expresses in whatever manner they like. It could be moving, it could be vocalizing without words, it could be descriptive, conventional use of language, it could be a poetic use of language. The energy body can become image, the emotions can become image. So all that is available as manners of expression.

And again, the witnesses are just silent with as much receptivity of their energy body.

So the person who's expressing expresses what's happening in the heart, in the emotions right now. And then the witnesses track in their body what's happening in the energy body and what's happening in their heart as they're witnessing, but they're not commenting. So the whole energy body, the whole being is really open and in relationship to what's happening. And you're just silently tracking your process as much as you're in relationship.

If you're a witness, maybe something like sixty percent with the person listening and forty percent tracking your own inner reverberations. So you're actually really quite aware of the reverberations inside you of what's being expressed or communicated. But for the expresser it's probably mostly inside, but really aware that this is happening in a relational field—I'm being seen, I'm being witnessed, opened to, listened to, very probably empathized with and gazed on with love and care.

So primarily it's emotion, but because that energy ties in with the energy body, primarily you're just sharing, again, in the moment—not "yesterday I was a bit down," but what's happening right now. And again, the effect of speaking itself, of communicating—everything's dependent arising. So you're just tracking the flow and expressing it.

One thing to look out for: In terms of patterns and tendencies, is it my pattern when sharing about where my heart is at to only describe what is lovely and the good feelings? Or is it my pattern to only share the dukkha and the difficult stuff? Just noticing that and seeing—maybe I want to experiment again with range. No force, no pressure, but just something gently to be aware of as well.

Is that clear enough for this round?

So again, starting with the connection—simple sensations of contact, grounding, earth, feet, legs, sitting

bones. And again, opening the stream of metta, letting it flow—the gentleness, the well-wishing, the kindness flowing to your companion or companions, flowing to self.

And again, can you open up the dual awareness, recognizing that you are receiving right now? Right now these waters of mercy, the gentleness, the well-wishing, the radiance of kindness is washing over you, through you. Giving and receiving both, opening both ways.

And letting that metta rest as the background basis of what we're doing, not so conscious. And then the first person again beginning.

the stream of mercy, the eyes of mercy on the others, on self, on what you have just witnessed, on what you've just expressed.

Letting that recede to the background, the ever-present background of our intention, and then the next person beginning.

So as much as possible, what's happening now in the flow of the heart right now?

Again, taking just a few moments sensing your energy body, what reverberates, allowing, allowing, and gently supporting the flow of an intention, intentions of kindness. The beauty of metta, to flow from you to your companion or companions, and from them to you. Feel yourself give and receive, know yourself giving and receiving.

And again, if you're in a pair, you can try and roughly divide this into two, and the next person beginning.

Again, just settling, opening up the energy body, the awareness, the sensitivity to what's reverberating there and the intention of kindness in and through the energy body, out of the energy body and into the energy body, giving and receiving.

Eyes of mercy, the ears of kindness. It's a privilege to hear, to see, to share, to express.

Now in this part, stay for now with the eyes closed and with your own energy body, with your own energy body experience, and settling in the body, the openness of the whole body awareness.

And if you can, somehow bring into your awareness, bring up for your soul, remind yourself of what your heart longs for, what your heart may burn for. What brought you here? What brings you here? What brought you to this retreat?

That's what brought you into existence, to this life, in whatever way works for you to bring that up for the soul, in the soul, for the soul to behold, allowing whatever responses in the energy body, in the heart, in the soul.

Opening your body, opening the energy body to the effects, the reverberations of this that your heart burns for, longs for, loves. And then feeling yourself touched by this.

When the mind wanders and it slips away or it goes numb, sensing your devotion to this that you burn for, your alignment with, your desire.

Maybe it becomes image. Maybe you become image as the one who is devoted to that, the one who serves that, who wants to serve that. Maybe it's just energetic or emotional. Again, the awareness and the effects can be at any level, in any arena of our being, domain of our being.

And if you feel in contact with this, and if you want to, what is it then to stay in contact with this soul desire, the image of this soul desire, the image of yourself as lover of this, as seeker, as one who burns and serves, burns for and serves this?

To gently, if you feel ready, if you want to, to begin to open your eyes and sense from that place, from that longing, from that love, from that devotion, sensing self, your companion or companions.

Who are these who sit with you now, with your soul aflame, with your heart of devotion? Who sees you now? How do you see the world, this space, this moment, yourself, the others?

So at some point in this you may want to just at least make just a tiny bit of eye contact and see what the effect is to see and be seen. And by who? Who are these mysteries? Who are these angels that behold your fire, protect the burning of your love?

As much as possible, close to the fountain or the flame of what brought you here, what sent you here, what called you here to this retreat, to this life, to these difficulties, to these gifts.

When you're ready, gently letting that recede and again just coming to an awareness of whatever's happening in your experience right now. Your sense of energy, body, emotion, thought, also in the sense of what's around, who's around.

So the last part of this exercise - again, it's all optional, so you may feel like you want to leave this part, but please stay in your position. You can just wave with an eye, wave your part if you want.

There's a chance to, again, express in any way or combination of ways that feels appropriate or the right way for you - vocal, verbal, different kinds of verbal or movement or gesture - to express, share, communicate something, actually anything, that has touched your soul, has felt soulful to you.

It could be an image, it could be a way something here has been sensed with soul, has spoken to your soul. You can share, describe, communicate in some way or another.

And again, the witness is just witnessing, open to their experience, the whole range of their experience, which means, again, energy, body, emotion, heart. And also image. So what happens when soul hears image, when soul hears soulfulness or witnesses soulfulness?

You don't have to necessarily express or share the thing that feels the most intimate necessarily, but you might, absolutely. And if you don't want to do this at all, that's really fine too.

Does that make enough sense to you?

All of these exercises involve sharing, communicating, expressing, grunting, whatever it is, always has an effect. Everything has an effect. It's always a dependent arising.

And if you find that what you're sharing actually opens into something deeper, where this present moment is suddenly sensed with soul—this being here, this way, with each other, touched with soul—that's perfectly fine to share as well. Or it could be something from the week. Again, it doesn't have to be the most intimate thing, though it could be.

Each person will have around five minutes. Take your time.

What we call this exercise is a relational temenos exercise. Temenos means a kind of safe space or protector of what is sacred. So you're with good people, there's this soul gaze and metta gaze, and you take your time with all the sensitivity and care around what you want to communicate or express and how that feels as you do it.

You have around five minutes each, and you can move with a rhythm that allows you to be sensitive and respectful, noticing what's happening as you share.

It can be absolutely anything at all. As a piece of theory, anything can touch your soul. If that's what moves you to express, then let it be that. It could be an object, a thing, a person, a tree, an image—internal or external—an idea that's really soulful for you. Anything that touches you in this way.

Is that clear enough to begin?

Now, again, just that momentary connection—body, earth, energy body, presence, openness of sensitivity, and the love. When we speak soul, we are angels. The witnesses are beholding the angelic in one way or another, so there's the gentleness and beauty that goes with that, and the reverence.

When you're ready, the first person beginning.

Again, taking those moments in the silence to open that awareness, that sensitivity to the soul resonances and reverberations—sharing, witnessing, giving, receiving, beholding together. And all of this in love, in metta. The mystery of other, the mystery that you are.

When you're ready, the next person beginning.

Again, just allowing the attention to tune into awareness, noticing what you notice of what reverberates in actually receiving the gift, the privilege, the honor of witnessing soul. And what reverberates from sharing, from expressing what is intimate in a soul way. Kindness and metta for all of it.

Let those waters flow, let them bathe you in awe.

In just a moment the third person will take their turn, or if you're two, you can divide it again.

Remember that there is the possibility of witnessing at many different levels—energy body, heart, and also soul. What does it mean to sense with soul that which is being shared, or the one who is sharing, or yourself as expressing and sharing? So many things are possible. This moment, too, and this sharing can become image. All is possible. Nothing has to happen. You're just opening to the possibilities.

When you're ready, the next person beginning.

Hold that delicate poise of openness, of sensitivity, a certain stance of being open to your experience—what's moving, resonating in your energy body, in your heart, in your mind, in your soul. Whatever it is, we touch each other at so many levels, in so many ways. We touch and we are touched.

And then again, to end with metta—just opening that gate to allow the streams to flow, cool and gentle, bathing, touching, permeating self and other. Recognizing yourself in this very moment, bathed and touched and permeated by those very waters. Giving and receiving both.

Now opening your eyes if they're not already open, to thank and honor your partner or partners, or yourself if you've been doing this alone. Honor the privilege to share in this way, to be together in this way, opening up the dimensionality of what it means to be a human being, what it means to be together—who sees and who is seen.

Taking leave of your partner now, and returning to the call as it was, or to your places.

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