

## Making Space for an Abode of Metta

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The word in the ancient language is *mettā*, M-E-T-T-A, and it's related to the ancient word for friend, which is M-I-T-T-A. And so *mettā* sometimes is translated as friendliness, the tendency to be friendly, amiable. And I think that's really nice. One of the time, I didn't really care for this *mettā* thing once upon a time. And because I came from another Buddhist tradition before I was introduced to this practice, and there was just a direct pointing to the truth, you know, and none of this kind of sentimental, nothing sentimental. Right.

And love is kind of sentimental and this thing of friendliness, this cultivation of this goodwill I was suspicious of is that it was kind of artificial. It was kind of a little bit forced and kind of a saccharine overlay on top of our experience that was maybe a kind of a bypass. And so then I went to practice, I was practicing in this Vipassanā insight tradition and the teachers would sometimes do these guided meditations on loving kindness, *mettā*. And so I did the reasonable thing, was I just tuned them out. And then one day I was sitting feeling quite good, quite nice and wonderful, settled, nice place. And they started to do this guide, it was a three-month retreat, and they started to do this guided *mettā* meditation.

And I said, oh, that's what they're talking about. Yeah. Oh, this is nice. And since then I've liked it. And what changed for me in that three-month retreat was two things. One was that I began to have a very friendly relationship with my mind. That it was, it was a, you know, we're friends, you know, and my thinking and the way my mind operate. It was now and now a very nice kind of supportive relationship, rather than being contentious, or rather than being filled with shame, or, you know, somehow feeling angry, or all kinds of complicated things that went on with me before. But something shifted there, and I became friends with my own mind. And now we keep each other company pretty nicely.

And so in that friendliness, there was also a peace, a kind of ease, that where the mind felt more open, and the heart felt more open. And that I then began to associate with some

kind of experience of ease, of peace, but also of kindness, goodwill, love, something that was warm-hearted or warm-minded. And that was kind of a treasure. I thought that was delightful to have that experience. And so that has just grown over time. And it's one of, I think, one of the great kind of byproducts of doing this mindfulness practice, is that the forces inside the mind to the opposite of ill will, opposite of goodwill, such as ill will, they actually hurt. They actually limit. And things like *mettā*, have a natural kind of way of growing into something that's more unlimited.

Because being limited, being measured, being contained, takes work. It's tiring. It's stressful. It's tense. It feels constricted. And the heart doesn't want to be constricted. The heart doesn't want to be limited. It doesn't want to be held in check. Right. And so there's a, as we do this practice, we become more and more sensitive in how we, how are these rather unfortunate tendencies of the mind that few of us have. That it just feels like, wait a minute, I don't know. It's one thing to be caught in the middle of them and believe them. It's another thing to step a little bit outside of them and with the mindfulness see the effect they have on us. See how they're limiting to us and harming us. And we can kind of maybe start questioning whether, do I have to really go along with this? Do I have to really be complaining all the time? Do I have to always be feeling that, you know, feeling guilty for just being alive, ashamed just for being alive, or always angry at something, or always wanting something more and more and more?

And so mindfulness kind of lets us step outside of the, being caught in these things, and we start seeing something very important. We start seeing there is actually an alternative. There is, we don't have to be, you know, even if you have really good reasons to complain, and there's no requirement to complain, and you don't have to be locked into it, and in fact to be locked in is not such a good deal. But I have to complain. I'm justified. Yes. It's like someone who's, you know, has locked themselves into their room and says something like, you know, you know, this is not right that I'm locked in my room. And they spend their time kind of having a campaign about how this is wrong. Okay. And they go to their computer and they write the emails and editorials to the newspaper, being locked in the room is wrong and it shouldn't be this way. And there's a, you know, and this is arguably a problem. And people start agreeing with you. Yes, being locked in your room is horrible and it shouldn't be. And then you have a whole movement going of people who feel like it's wrong to be locked in. How terrible it is to be locked in your room. And those people who lock you in your room are really bad people. And then you forget that you did it to yourself. Right? You're the one who locked the door. You have the key, too.

And so this way of getting caught, locked into these mind states that we do, is one of the things we start seeing. It's not an easy thing to see, first of all, to see it at all, because it means you have to somehow step out of the orbit of these mind states we get caught in. And to see it sometimes is not so... you know, it's not like seeing the best, most wondrous parts of yourself. And so some people feel, then feel even worse. You know, I'm complaining all the time. And then you complain about, I can't stand it. I shouldn't be complaining all the time. I should be doing something else. Or I'm feeling so much anger. And now I'm angry for myself being angry. You know, I'm so needy, and now I need someone to help me out of it. Let me go find them. You know, so this idea of discovering, they say that sometimes it's said that self-knowledge is seldom good news. Maybe. Maybe. But so that's the kind of a step you have to take, this very radical honesty. We really see ourselves and see what's going on. Without that kind of honesty, it's hard to step out of its orbit, step away, and learn how to gaze upon it with kind eyes. Learn how to see it. Oh, look at that, that poor mind of mine. And, you know, someone has to befriend that mind. Why don't you?

And so to see it, oh, this is what it is. This hurts. This is painful. And this begins separating ourselves and begin creating space, creating opening for something else to happen. And something to relax, because it's tense to hold that everything is locked in place. It's tense to be tense. It's tense to be stressed. And so to learn to relax and open and then see what's there. One of the teachings in the teachings of the Buddha is that things like love, compassion, appreciative joy, being able to really feel delight and joy and the goodness and the success of others, and a certain kind of love, a certain kind of equanimity, is not something that you have to do, not something you have to accomplish and kind of bump yourself up, but rather is a natural outcome if there's no ill will, no hatred, no clinging, no envy and resentment, that the things that we get locked into, the mind gets tight and caught, that if those can relax, it's the nature of the mind, the heart, to have these positive social emotions.

And that was my surprise when that three-month retreat was that I didn't have to be, you know, building up this friendliness, this *mettā*. I didn't have to, I didn't have to listen to the teachers during the guided meditation. I didn't have to, it wasn't something an overlay of experience. It turns out it was the underlayment. It was the core that was there waiting to be expressed. And we find in this ancient teachings that it's beautiful, amazing teachings that if you've managed to release your mind enough from its locked room, if you've managed to clear the air, clear the space of ill will, hatred enough that then there's a natural arising of this amazing experience of goodwill. And it's so amazing. It's not meant to be like a little back corner of the mind that kind of sets, you know, way back there. Yeah, it's a good idea to have

some kindness or friendliness. It becomes the disposition. It becomes the whole sense of where we're abiding. We're abiding in friendliness. It's not like one thing we're doing.

And this totality of it is then represented by calling these four, friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity, calling it the abode of the god Brahmā. The Brahmā is kind of one of the highest gods in the, back then, in the ancient Indian pantheon. And so it's kind of like saying there's a divine abiding, there's a divine abode, a heavenly abode that we can live in, like that god. Because it said in the ancient mythology that Brahmā lived in this high heavenly realm and his karma was so good that being born in this wonderful kind of chief god, he dwelt, he abode, his whole, his kind of a place where he lived was in loving-kindness, was in compassion, was in appreciative joy. And it wasn't just a small thing he did, it was the whole atmosphere of his, how his experience was. And so it can become for us. And we can be not just a little activity of the mind, it becomes the atmosphere of the mind and heart. It becomes the emotional state that we're in. And that is quite remarkable. That that's possible, that we can do this. And it's quite remarkable that it doesn't have to be cultivated as much as it needs to be allowed. How is it allowed? But not living in the opposites. And the opposite is what causes harm into ourselves and to the world around us. Ill will and hatred, it causes harm in the world. Cruelty and violence causes harm. And so when the tendencies towards violence and causing harm go away, that makes room for compassion. When the movement towards ill will and hatred go away, that makes room for this capacity for friendliness to be there.

And I think it's a wonderfully leavening, inspiring state for our society. I read the news regularly about how much hatred there is, how much harsh speech there is, how much threatening speech there is. And, you know, one school district recently, I read, got 3,000 hate mails from around the country for something that happened in the school that was not kind of ambiguous what actually happened, but people jumped on it. And I mean, imagine a school getting 3,000 pieces of hate mail, including death threats. I mean, wow. The people doing that from the Buddhist point of view, they're hurting. They're in pain. You can't be but in pain to do it. And the people who receive that, it's very difficult. It's frightening. It's challenging. What about a society where we're friendly? We disagree in friendly ways.

Some years ago, I was doing a teaching a retreat outdoors. It was kind of more like a workshop retreat. And I wasn't there that day, but we invited someone to come and lead a grief process, grief rituals. And the way it ended up being, it was rather very loud grief. And you probably know that some people grieve very loudly, some cultures grieve very loudly. Well, everyone was encouraged to do that. So we're in this oak grove of trees outdoors and... And

again, I wasn't there, but there was wailing and anger being expressed and all kinds of things that people can do in loud grieving. So I came back the next day and we were sitting there in the first morning session and the owner of the property came down and joined us in the circle and listened to what was going on for a while and just was there calmly. Yeah. And then he said, I want to tell you a little bit about this property. And he told a little bit the history of it and how his relationship to the natural world there was a big part of why he was there to care-take it and be with it. And he was in a very beautifully forested area. And he talked about he had this relationship with the ravens, that he knew the ravens on the property. Apparently he fed some of the baby ravens. And they kind of knew each other, and he was very interested in raven language, how they speak and communicate. And he was friends with a local university with a bird specialist, a biologist there, who was actually studying bird language, like raven, how ravens communicate and how they do that. So there was a real specialty of his. So he had this deep relationship with raven. And then he said to us, so it was very nice. He was very friendly and warm. He said, you know, and so he told us all this, and then he said, and what were you guys doing yesterday? What were you doing that you were all, you know, making so much noise that you wanted to hear? And so he asked and people explained to him, and he listened in a friendly, nice way. And then in a very kind way, he said, well, I want to tell you something. When you did that, that was really hard for the ravens. That frightened them. It disturbed them, agitated them for several hours afterwards. That's what he did. He didn't come down to us to yell at us, to kick us off the property. How could you do this through my friends, the ravens? He didn't come down to complain, but he had something to talk to us about. He said, And he came down in a friendly way, in a kind way, in a receptive way, open. He then first asked about us, what was going on with you guys? He didn't come immediately with his judgment. And then he just said this simple thing. You know, that was hard for the Ravens. We all got the message. We all felt like, uh-oh. And he set up this whole context of discussion. It was like all of us, oh, okay, well, we didn't have to be told anything else about, you know, we didn't have to be yelled at, we didn't have to be punished, we didn't have to be anything. We got the message really deeply. And more important than the message around the ravens, what we did is At least for me, I got this inspired example of how we can work with differences, how we can come together and meet and talk, rather than using harsh language, violent language that so often happens.

So the movement in Buddhism, Buddhist practice, is not this direction, a direction of living so that we see others as friends. Right? To be friends with ourselves, friends with others. And that process goes hand in hand like it did for me in that three-month retreat. I didn't realize it at the time, but the very time when I was starting to become friends with my own mind, my

mind was friends with me, was the same time that I was then discovering how marvelous it was, how profound it was to have this friendly, open... feeling, attitude to the people around me. So I was walking down the street today from my home. And, you know, I was very happy walking down. I need to be here. And I kind of, for a moment, I kind of marveled that I was not on a device. I was not on my phone. Of course, I could have been on my phone because... I wasn't on my phone, so of course you could be on the phone, you know, on my device, something. But I wasn't, I was just walking, and I wasn't home writing about anything or something. I was just happily walking. And I thought, wow, this is sometimes a rare event for people in our society. Right. And so I just appreciated walking. I could feel as I did that, my mind kind of opened. It was kind of like, maybe it's a metaphor, I don't know, but I live in metaphors sometimes. My mind kind of felt more expansive. And in that expansiveness, it just felt very friendly. And it felt so nice to walk down the street, sidewalk, in this very open, friendly state. And I kind of appreciated a lot. And then I thought about this talk I was going to give on a different topic. And instead of thinking about the talk, my mind went to all of you, the people coming. And then that friendliness kind of just kind of just felt so happy. I think I started smiling. I was just, oh, how nice. Yeah. Just a friendly feeling of goodwill, well-wishing, just happiness, kind of friendliness that maybe is not even goodwill. Maybe goodwill is right next to it, to right behind it. But just happy, delighted, appreciating just people, appreciating people. Thank you.

Sometimes I get the sense that there are people who walk around the world, and appreciating others is not their default. Their default is the opposite. The default is to be afraid of people. The default is to avoid people. The default is to be critical of people, to find out what's wrong about people. The default is to overlook people, and to see people through the lens of me, myself, and mine. Right? It's a remarkable thing to live with a friendly, appreciative mind, where we are delighted by people. So that's what *mettā*, a life of *mettā* is, life of loving-kindness. And it's one of the fundamental principles in Buddhism, or states, or backgrounds, foundations, for living an ethical life, which was going to be the topic today. Okay. So, but you got something else. So those are my thoughts. Loving kindness, kindness, friendliness, goodwill.

So let me give you a few. So friendliness, goodwill, amiability, well-wishing, kindness, love, loving kindness, benevolence, Those are some of the words that people have used to translate the word *mettā*. So we're going to have the tea today in a little bit, and it's often nice then, especially those days, where you have a chance to say hello to each other. But how about if you want to stay, and you're welcome if you don't want to have the talk, but you want to stay,

just sit and meditate. It can be quite nice to hear the happy discussion. But if you can kind of... partner up with maybe one or two people next to you, and maybe look around, make sure that no one is left alone, because if two parties move and they look and they go in the opposite direction, and they're in the middle, then sit there alone. And that's not nice when we're supposed to be friendly. And then introduce yourself, and maybe you could say something about what word would you like to use to translate *mettā*? Do you have a favorite word or word that you like a lot? And what do you think about all this? What I said today and what do you think about friendship, friendliness and the value of it? So, and then I'll ring the bell in about maybe five, six, seven minutes. And we can spend a couple of minutes together as a whole group. And then we can have our end or have our tea time. So please.

Well, I was reluctant to... interrupt your conversations. There were so many smiles. So who am I to stop that? But we also kind of, also I thought it would be nice to have quieter before we end because after sitting and then all that's energy and just sometimes it's nice to get a little bit settled again. And see, does anyone have any questions or comments they like to have on this very important topic of *mettā*? Yes, please. Thank you.

So I'm Kathy, and I have found that my thoughts are from conditioning, of course, and usually underlying those thoughts is a feeling. And I have found that a lot of the thoughts are trying to protect me. So how do you, but it's hard sometimes to figure out what feeling is underlying the thought, you know, except when they're good, of course. Yeah. So, yeah. How do you make friends with your mind? Nice. I love the question. And I think the answer is usually right with what's obvious. So it's quite significant that you saw that a lot of these difficult thoughts are your attempt to protect yourself. Yes. Protecting oneself is a wonderful thing to do, to have that instinct. And so the question is, not so much to stop doing that, but maybe if you learn more appropriate ways, healthy ways to protect yourself, that feel good. Yeah, sometimes the protecting myself is not skillful. I mean, it's not, you know... In and of itself, it might not be skillful the way you do it, the strategies, but the fact that you have that desire in you, that might be actually quite a wonderful thing. You know, not to have that could be really dangerous. It's like there are people who, a few people apparently are born without any pain nerves, and they usually don't live very long because pain actually protects us from harming ourselves and... And so you have a survival instinct, and that's good to have, but maybe it's not being used well. Okay, thank you. So does that give you something to do to find another? Yes. Find a better way that you, to protect.

And so Scott. Thank you. Thank you, Gil, for your talk. I don't know if my question is... the same question, it might be, but I phrase it differently in my head. I think sometimes it feels to

me virtuous in a way to be mean to myself and have ill will towards myself. How do I deal with that? Oh, well, that makes me, I would suggest maybe the good way is to do what I'm doing right now is get really curious, right? How does that work? Because, I mean, virtue makes me smile. So what is it about virtue and is it a misunderstanding of what's virtuous? Or is there some deeper virtue going on there that's actually quite healthy? But maybe it's gotten a little bit wonky. That being mean somehow to yourself somehow is a good thing. I'll have to think about that. Yeah. And I don't know about, I don't know you, of course, but there are people who have a religious background where somehow it's considered virtuous to deny oneself, to be critical of oneself. And, you know, there's quite a heavy burden to carry around some religious conditioning. So it might be useful to get curious and see, where does this come from? What's going on for you? And... But at the root of it, maybe that's with Kathy's question. Maybe there's something really good in you. Thank you.

We have a question over here. Okay, please. Thank you, Gil. There was quite a lot packed into the talk you gave us. It was something that resonated on many levels. Something I personally have experienced is before coming to this tradition here, I belong to a different, I mean, I mean, I don't know if I do not belong to it anymore. Kind of I have been with a different spiritual tradition based out of India. And there was... kind of like a theoretical understanding of being compassionate, etc. But there's this concept of a guru and everything is focused outward towards this guru. But, you know, coming here, I'm really pleasantly surprised by how it seems more natural, you know, in our everyday life to follow these. And I really liked what you said about when we... let go of the clinging or the stress, then the natural thing underneath is compassion and these other *mettā* and the other states. So all those things make a lot of sense. But something else also struck me about the tale you related. You see, and also related to the questions that were asked, because I think that our brains, our minds, they go on this default... loops of thinking, which we've been conditioned to, the default mode network, right? And I, you know, along with everyone else, trying to become slowly more conscious and let this go. But what I found in my own personal experience, and also in the story you relayed about the ravens, right, that sometimes being around these animals and building a bond with them It's like a cheat code, you know, because they're not conditioned like that. They're not conditioned by our society with, you know, hating so much. And I wonder if we spend more time in the company of these creatures and trying to build friendship with them... Can we be less conditioned and find these natural states more easily than, you know, getting up every morning sitting at 7 o'clock? I'm just, you know. Yeah, yeah.

Well, I do know that I know a Buddhist monk who loves doing this *mettā*, this loving-kindness



meditation. And in order to get it going for him, he lived in Sri Lanka for a long time, and there were apparently some very cute monkeys there. There are small monkeys. And so all he has to do, he brings to mind these monkeys, and then his loving kindness is there. And then he's off and running with it. So if animals is what does it for you, please. So we should stop. Because it's time for stop for the tea. And so those of you staying, wonderful. And those of you going, wonderful. And thank you for being here. And if you're unsure whether to stay for the tea because maybe you're kind of new here, it's a kind of friendly group. So please stay. Thank you.