

## 2\_25\_26 Talk\*

\*This is an automatically generated transcript, so there are errors.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:01] I'm going to talk tonight about metta, about loving kindness, and particularly a bit about the somatics of loving kindness. Loving kindness as a bodily or embodied or felt. Practice, cultivation, discipline, state, magic spell. So I'll talk for a bit. We'll leave some space for questions and reflections at the end. So be comfortable, be at ease. All of the Buddha's practices, all the practices that we call the Dhamma, in a certain way are crafted to interrupt patterns of unskillful or unwholesome energies, habits, forces that move through us that solidify as craving and hatred and delusion, grasping fear. The Dhamma is crafted to interrupt unwholesomeness. And this is why the quality that we sometimes call renunciation is really forefront, right? How do we resist the unwholesome? And it's phrased this way more in the negative than the positive, right, it's not just how do we cultivate the wholesome, yes to that, big, big yes to, but it's very often phrased in the Buddhist teachings as how do set down. Or not give into impulses that cause harm to ourselves or others, that which we'll call the unwholesome, the unskillful. I think this is because the Buddha recognized how profound the past is in influencing our states in the present, how strong what would come to be called our karmic inheritance is. And what we now could sometimes call inherited or generational or ancestral traumas, what we might call, you know, cultural. Biases, you know, forces that move through the culture that we inherit, whether we want to or not, the way that we are raised into racism, patriarchy, sexism, ableism, you know, all of the ways that histories of oppression center one group of people over another. We didn't do that intentionally. We didn't intentionally decide to be. Bound by these Ghosts. But here they are.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:18] And so at the heart of the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, this training, is this two-fold cultivation. One is how do we resist unskillful or unwholesome patterns from continuing to play out through us. And then how do cultivate their replacement, the skillful, the wholesome, the beautiful, and strengthen. That in ourselves.

[00:03:49] And so in the eightfold path, the first limb is right view, right or wise view, the basic foundation of sincere engagement with the world. How do you understand yourself in the world? In the Buddha's teaching this most centrally is understanding our experience in relation to the Four Noble Truths, right? To say, there is. The particularly distressing, emotionally distressing you know, existentially haunting aspect of that pain is a kind of resistance. To the way the world is, and that resistance we call craving, this kind of fixation or solidification of who I am, who they are, what this is. Beginning with this, beginning with this and then the promise that this can be released, changed, matured out of, seen clearly, that's the third noble truth and the fourth truth is the path. With this foundation of right or wise view, the second limb is right or wise intention and intention is framed as renunciations. What are we resisting or letting go of? And one of the things that we resist or let go of as part of right intention is hatred, ill will toward others. And so sometimes we spin this in the positive and we say, I have an intention toward loving kindness. I have intention to lead with love, to lead compassion, to lead appreciation, to hold everything in the spacious view of equanimity. But part of doing this is to understand what it is we are trying not to continue to bring into the world. More hatred, more judgment, more constriction of the heart against others. Why do we hate?

[00:06:15] Besides that we are taught to hate. Why is it so easy to hate? To judge, to fear others. One way we can understand this is as animals, as soft mammals, as prey animals, in relation to some of who's out there. Blessings to, you know, whatever your local

predator is, the mountain lions around here. Part of having the nervous system of being a prey animal is that we are attuned to threat, right? You have the kind of nervous system that looks around your environment for like, where's danger, where's the threat nearby? And we do this unconsciously, it's always happening. That's why, you know, when the door behind you opens, you scan the room for people who seem creepy. We are social beings who scan our environment for threat. Because our nervous systems are so good at this, they generate the habits long term of vigilance and boundedness. And there's so many places in our lives and in a dangerous world, which this is, where that's appropriate, right? Where that's necessary for safety. And so then that reinforces the pattern, right. And there are all sorts of behavioral symptoms that come out in response to this vigilance, including the classic physical action responses of fight and flight, or the immobility response of freeze, or the social response of fawn, or the social responses of tend and befriend.

[00:08:06] These are all behavioral responses to the nervous system's autonomic self-protective impulse. But because this is our impulse pattern, we can... Habituate states of aversion, fear of others, hatred of others judgment of others. Because that's part of what keeps us safe, you know, if you need to, if you, if it's more important for staying safe to know who are the people to avoid than who are people to get close to, right? Then you're going to have to keep some thread of fear of other's present for you, right. So it's not unhealthy to do so, it's okay. I mean, that's how we are. That's the nature of living in samsara, the world of birth and death, in tender bodies, tender hearts that get broken easily through betrayal and trauma of so many kinds. So with this as the ecosystem of our bodies and our communities and our families in the world that it is, the Buddha's teachings come in with this radical, and he would call it against the stream, intervention.

[00:09:28] And one of those interventions in relation to the quality of hatred and ill will, which again I'm saying is a natural somatic response to threat. The Buddha comes in with this. Response that says we want to understand that that much of the hatred and ill will that we've habituated is actually not needed in this moment to keep us safe. Occasionally it is, right, when there's a creep coming too close and you need a boundary. But in many moments, like here in your nice room in a nice dharma meeting with kind people speaking to you and being around you and your families nearby. Wherever you are, you're safe enough that you could tune into a Dharma call and do some meditation. That means you don't actually need your habitual hatred in this moment. And ideally, if we are doing our work as community tenders well enough, you don't need to be on the alert for oppression. If you're a queer identified person, I hope as a queer person myself, that this place is safe for queer folks, where that someone isn't going to say something or do something that would make me feel under threat or another queer person or a trans person in the room feel under threat. Or a BIPOC person feel under threat. We want to create a space where those appropriate responses to ancient patterns of harm, where they can be set down temporarily. This is the point of safe spaces, safer spaces, affinity spaces, well-tended community spaces. Because when we can do that, we can do this non-intuitive thing where we can invite this quality called metta. The word translates as friendliness.

[00:11:36] You could also translate it as benevolence, sincere, open-hearted warmth. We bring in this quality of metta and then we say, I am willing to hold this quality in the foreground for everybody. In relation to everything. And sometimes we're doing systematic practice and we work through metta for myself, oh, that's hard, metta for people I like, that's a little easier, metta for neutral people, that kind of strange, but I can get into it, metta for difficult people, I don't want to do it, metta for all beings, okay, and the abstract, that easier. That's a process to work through. But the heart of metta is not just the all beings metta, but is actually this thing that is itself a somatic intervention. And that is something like, can you

tune into this quality of love, loving kindness, benevolence, warmth, that you know, you have access to it. You're a social human being who has not been so deeply traumatized that you do not know how to feel love. You can find it. Can you then find that quality and let it pervade your being? Let it fill your mental and emotional and bodily space until it feels like it's shining out in all directions.

[00:13:04] That's the instruction for metta, for loving kindness that the Buddha gives. He says, the practitioner radiates the quality of loving kindness in one direction, and a second, a third, and a fourth, and above, and below, and all around, and to all as to oneself. Unbounded, limitless, without hostility and without ill will. This is the kind of language that's used in the texts to describe a state that's clearly a full body state. It's not a mental wish, it's not prayer. It can be those, you can ride on those, but it's really a somatic intervention. And so if hatred is part of our somatic response to threat, and then it gets calcified or stuck in us. Metta comes in to say, there's a whole different way of existing in the world, and it involves letting this quality pervade your being. And as we practice in that way, part of what it's doing is not just working through our habitual aversion to certain kinds of people or political parties or family members or whatever, predatory beasts of any species, or, you know, challenging parts of ourself. All of that's part of it.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:30] But more deeply, it says, what would it feel like to be a different kind of animal, or to inhabit my animal nature really differently, to trust completely in this moment? And let's just say first... In this moment of meditation, in a safe, protected space with other good people, right? Because the Buddhist practice is, even for someone who goes off into solitude in the forest, it's always communal. You were always together. Sangha is always present. We learn from each other. We share the Dhamma with each other, even when you're practicing in your room alone, you know. And this is part of the beauty of the sort of the strange deva realm that is the internet. That like, here I am in Northern California on a relatively secluded ridge in the Redwood forest. There's not that many people. Within 100 yards of me. I could probably count them on a couple of hands, my family and a few others. And then there's the foxes and the bobcats and the squirrels and all of them. The frogs singing in the rain soaked night, I can hear them. But then there you are in, you know, like other parts of California and Washington and Canada and England and Australia and you know. Wow, we're in like a heaven realm here, each alone in our room and stitched together in this wild. Local. So you're never alone practicing, and you come to something like this, and I hope you can feel that you're not alone.

[00:16:30] And so, all of our practices, and particularly the renunciate side of these practices, the side that says I'm gonna interrupt the pattern of hatred. I'm going to interrupt the pattern of overwhelm or shutdown through mindfulness. I'm to interrupt the pattern of fixating on my own story by remembering that I'm interconnected, or even looking for the self and not really finding it, you know, just finding patterns of relationship. I look for myself and I find a story, and that story is entirely composed of relationships with other beings. So what am I, you know? There's no me to pluck out of that story and say without that story, I would still be me. I have a particular special insight into the. The, you know, uncertain nature of identity. We all have our particular doorways into understanding selflessness.

[00:17:39] One of mine is that I was adopted at birth. And for the very first day of my life, I was provisionally named Matthew by my birth mom in Peoria, Illinois, blessings to Catherine, a teenage girl in an Episcopal family in Illinois in 1971, who said, I'll name my kid. And then one day later, I was adopted by some Catholics who were moving out to California, and they were like, we'll name him Sean. I have to say that like Wallace and Gromit, right? We'll call him Sean! And so I grew up thinking I was Sean. And at some

point, I meet my birth mom and she was like, oh yeah, I was gonna name you Matt. You were Matt for a day. Had the karmic winds blown slightly differently, I would have grown up. We could even say, like, maybe I would have had the same body, but who knows, right? Like, its ecosystem is mysterious. I would've grown up named Matt Pierce in Peoria, Illinois. And instead, I grew up Sean Fite in, you know, Livermore, California, and became a Buddhist teacher. Who would I be? Who would be? I have no idea, actually, right. Like, it's all so conditioned and dependent. And so, you know, insight and vipassana and seeing clearly and asking, who am I really, interrupts the ancient patterns of who I think I am. I was also adopted by white people. And I'm close enough to white, especially because we all got a little tan in the California sunshine, that no one told me that I was actually Puerto Rican until I met my Puerto Rican people when I was in my 30s. And when I did, you know, my partner, who's now my wife. No one ever told you that you're brown. She's like, look at your childhood pictures. I'm so obviously Latino compared to my very white German family. And she was like, did anybody ever say anything to you about not being white? And I was like no. So I thought I was white my whole life.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:10] And anyway, what does white even mean? Now that there's a census category that's like non-Hispanic white. I'm like, what do you mean? What does that mean? Yeah, I don't, I have no idea. But I see Bad Bunny singing on top of a white pickup truck and I'm like, that guy kind of looks like me. I don't know. It's so empty. Even the category of white is just a category that was invented when a bunch of rich landowners wanted to cause a rift between poor working class whites and poor working-class African descended people in the American South. There was no such thing as white. They created it because the working class people were organizing together, and the working class. Irish and the working-class ex-slaves, freed slaves after the Civil War, they were organizing. And the rich people were like, can't have that. Let's give the working class whites some privilege. And let's give them an identity. Let's call them white. And suddenly, they're like, oh, we're not the same as our Black neighbors. It's so empty. And so our practices interrupt. All of these streams of conditioned story. Psychological constriction, social and cultural constrictions, and one of the most powerful of these. The one that it cuts through the patterns in every religion. You know, I mean, love your neighbor, speaking of, you know, that is a radical teaching and I wish more Christians practiced it, right? Because love your neighbor means you can't hate them for being different, you know, you have to actually cut through the pattern that has taught us to fear each other, to hate each other.

[00:22:17] And so meta and this practice of suffusing your whole body with this quality that cuts through natural somatic protectiveness and constriction, and it says, I'm willing to relax, I am willing to soften my shoulders here and my body armor and my learned fear of you. And you have to do it even though it's scary because the patterns are still there. You face someone and they're different from you and you have look across the gulf of oppression and say, I'm willing to love you even though I'm afraid of you. Or even though my people have been the oppressor of your people or my people had been the victims of your peoples oppression or all of us are the victims of violence. From power in so many ways, I'm willing to love you. And particularly when I don't even if I don't agree with you, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Right? The whole like, how can I love my family because they've all gone full Trump, like whatever blessings to your politics, whatever they are. But like, from the from the lens of deep meta, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. All of that is oppressive forces pressing upon us. And of course it matters as individuals with psychology, like yeah, it's hard when people are annoying or violent. But Metta is this extraordinary intervention in the bodily pattern of armoring. To hatred and separation. Just inviting us.

**Speaker 1** [00:24:21] Let our practice of metta, of loving kindness. Grow and spread through all of the, be like mycelium through all the soil of our being so that it's not just a psychological practice and it's just a social practice of trying to care for more people. But it really becomes like the whole body shining with the feeling of being willing to try to be relaxed and open and kind as our baseline. And we just come back to it again and again and again, even though hatred presses on us and through us from beginningless time. It is possible to rest in the field of loving-kindness. May we do so more and more. We'll pause there. And we have a few minutes for reflections, questions, responses. You can drop stuff in the chat. But if you wanna ask a question, raise your electronic hand. Elaine, jump on in.

**Speaker 3** [00:25:32] Um, and I'm afraid I can't put the video on because they have a wonky connection. And it would just shut off. Um, I, I'm so, and thank you so much. That was so beautiful. And the meditation was so and I could just, I felt this bodily calm and I, I'm, so glad you're talking about this somatic because you know, my, my mind can say, I want to be calm. I want you to practice meta. And yet the body response in any particular situation. Almost happens first. And I'm just wondering if, I mean, I know there's yoga, and there's Tai Chi, and there are various physical practices. It's almost as if maybe at least I would need something more than sitting in a practice. Although that particular meditation you did had a lot of body effect of calming. But it's so instilled, like my shoulders will go up. There's just almost this quote unquote automatic response that's, you know, stuck in my nervous system. And that it's like, oh, that feedback mechanism, the shoulders are up, there's a threat. Even if like my intention is I want to be open and loving.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:00] Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And you're using exactly the right kind of language for it. It's automatic or automatic or unconscious. And it is often the first response because that's what a self-protective response does. And there's another question in the chat, how do you relax as the baseline? And it's, it is totally tough. So here's a couple hints toward that. Somatic practice is... Can be very much supported by movement practices, but it's not by itself physicality. It's really the presence of a sensate attention throughout the body. So it's really grounding attention and presence in the body is the somatic side. So it is not so much what I do with my body. If what I'm looking for is to begin to habituate this state of a more felt connection to non-hatred is how the text would say it, right? The intention toward non-hatred. It's easiest to do this not in stressful situations. So you might start by doing it through all of the ordinary, like whenever you remember to, in-between moments in your day. So when you get up from your desk and you walk to the bathroom, you might come out of whatever thought stream you've been in, pour your attention down into the body and just feel yourself walking across the room, right? So this is just embodiment anytime. Is the foundation of this. As I'm walking anywhere, as I reach for a doorknob and touch it to open a door, and I'm in a kind of transitional moment, you know, just do that with my whole body. You can bring in metta or loving-kindness as a kind, you know, okay, as I come into my whole body in an ordinary in-between moment, can I do it with a kind of warmth? And you just have to remember it, really, you remember to do it. Pausing, before you transition across any threshold, so you go through a door, let's say, is a fun moment to do it. Before you cross the threshold, you practice this little sequence that goes something like, remember the body, drop in, relax, and brighten. And that could go along with a verbal kind of wish, like, may everyone that I'm about to meet or encounter, may they all be well.

[00:29:38] So you can use the phrases if you want. But there's something really like, can we just be differently than we habitually are in the body? And so start by just giving the reminder in the in-between moments again and again, and let it begin to filter in. And then there's a little question here on just like, how do you do that when you get startled? Like

something happens and, oh, the shoulders come up, or I feel suddenly, ah, I'm overwhelmed. If you're not under direct physical threat, or you can pause, you're in a board meeting or on a dangerous street corner, or your partner is staring at you with flames in their eyes, whatever the situation, if you can, pause, pause. It's almost like you don't have to respond to this email in this instant. You can take 10 seconds, 30 seconds, a minute, to just like... And just do the same thing, come out of the threads of story, come into the body, brighten the body with energy and sincerity. And then just being real, you know? Sometimes I will just talk myself through a moment. I'll just say, okay, I'm overwhelmed. I'm getting a lot of information in a bunch of different ways. I'm not quite sure how to respond. I'm standing in the middle of the green rug and I'm gonna breathe. There's a question about the breath being the connection. The breath is always moving your energy. So yes, pour it in. And you try to pause and you say, okay, and then you can just say, what would be a skillful action now? What's the right thing, what's the best thing I can come up with to do in this moment? And it's often gonna be something like slow down, take things, you know, one thing at a time. What's just the next necessary action? And sometimes you have the space to do that and other times you don't.

**Speaker 3** [00:31:58] Thank you so much.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:00] Yeah, I know for sure.

**Speaker 3** [00:32:01] That was super valuable. Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:05] Great time you're here, blessings always.

**Speaker 4** [00:32:07] We have Marilyn. You're unmuted, Marilyn. Yes, thank you. Sean, it was great talking, very timely for me. It's something I've been working on a lot lately. So I just wanted to ask a question. I'm trying to move from experiencing meta as a trait, especially when I meditate and do meta. But to make it a state, that's what you're talking about. And I. I love your pointing out this notion of the habitual patterns that we've developed. I don't really have a problem with fear or hatred, but I have developed over my life a habitual pattern of anger, like lashing out when I see behavior. And then it's hard to interrupt that habitual pattern, slow down, you know, and kind of separate the behavior from the person. And all of that. So I'm assuming you're going to say it takes practice. But since your bio pointed out the fact that you're involved in integrating semantics and philosophy and with social justice issues, do you have any other offerings for this notion of when I see behavior that is cruel or mean or. Angry or hurtful to other people, it just makes me angry and I can't slow down my response. Anyway, I'd appreciate your comments.

[00:33:32] Absolutely. In brief, absolutely yes to it's a practice, but also yes to slowing down. So just pause. But I want to support you in being able to do that. And one piece that comes, if this is helpful, is not on the action level for you, but really on the view level. And this I think many of us can have the unconscious view that a person who's doing something terrible is being either willfully evil... Or somehow is doing wrong out of like on purpose in a way, you know, they are doing something on purpose, right? They're saying a cruel thing or they're doing a cruel If we want to think about it somatically, one shift we can make is we can understand all unskillful behavior as a trauma symptom. This is the hurt people, hurt people thing. Nobody would be cruel, hateful, horrid unless they were afflicted by hatred, fear, delusion in themselves. And in the Dharma, we understand those to be poisons, right? Part of those ancient patterns. People are not hateful on purpose. People are hateful because they're afraid. People are painful because they've been taught to be

hateful. This is also, you know, the Christian way of saying this would be love the sin or hate the sin, right? It's hard to do.

**Speaker 1** [00:35:13] And so, you know, a Buddhist way of saying that would be like, hold compassion for the person in the foreground, because that's your practice. Other people So often, something that we think of as hateful, someone else might feel as like an appropriate self-protective response. There are some folks who are honestly afraid that there are too many violent immigrants in this country. And I'm gonna be political, fully abiding my own bias here in favor of a very pluralistic society. But there are folks who were honestly afraid of that. And if you get into a real conversation with someone who has a very different political view than you, and you manage to not calcify in judgment, what you'll often hear is fear, right? Confusion. The world is so different now than it was when I was growing up. And I'm just afraid that something good is being lost. And not everyone's able to find that or say that or be in touch with that, but you as a practitioner, we as practitioners, we can each hold quietly for ourselves. And you're not gonna go up to someone who has an opposing view or is being cruel and say, oh, I see you acting out of your trauma. Like, don't say that, right? But in your heart, you can say, oh, this person is suffering. People don't hurt other people unless they are suffering, unless they're afraid or caught in cruelty. And you can't convince someone to not be afraid. Except by being a safe person for them to be around. And so it's absolutely our practice to do the difficult task of seeing the world through the eyes of compassion. And one way to do that is to see everybody as afflicted by dukkha, afflicted karma, afflicted trauma. Everyone's been hurt. And so people that are being very unskillful have been hurt and you can just use that as a lens to defang your own judgment of them, right? Because if you can see them as, everyone around me is traumatized, why I see your five question marks.

[00:37:42] It's time for us to close. So I could say any number of things. My social justice voice is gonna say patriarchy, capitalism, ancient oppression, big oppressive forces of money and power. And my Buddhist self is gonna to say that the Buddha said that greed, hatred, and delusion have no perceivable beginning. This is the world. The world is saturated in. Impact of greed, hatred, and delusion, and also beauty, but you have to see suffering for what it is, and it's not a temporary, you know, glitch in the matrix.