



## A Bouquet of Dhamma

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I'm always deeply touched when we gather like this—to practice together, to sit in stillness and sincerity. And today, I was especially moved by the expressions of metta we shared at the beginning.

Each time we meet, I feel so vividly that we are an incredible, precious *bouquet of Dhamma*. No matter how you feel about your practice, no matter what arises within it, you are part of something truly beautiful.

One of the amazing things about flowers—beyond their uniqueness and beauty, whether big or small, bold or quiet—is that not a single one is perfect. And perhaps that's exactly what makes them so beautiful.

Perfection, if it existed, would lack the kind of natural, heartfelt beauty we cherish. In fact, artificial flowers that appear real often do so because they mimic the slight imperfections of nature—an asymmetrical petal, a variation in color. These "flaws" are what make something look real, natural, alive.

So, rejoice in your asymmetry.

Each of us is perfect, just the way we are—precious in our own way. And yet, it's true: we are not perfect. We *want* to be. We want full enlightenment. Preferably yesterday.

But that's not real—not unless you're already a Buddha. (Some of you may be! I know I'm not.)

It would be nice if we could all meet here and be enlightened, but even momentary glimpses are enough. A simple moment of kindness, a moment of clearly seeing how things are, even if we don't like them—that's good enough.

Truthfulness is at the heart of this practice. To see clearly means to see things *as they are*. And the imperfections of heart and mind, that beautiful asymmetry—that's what makes us interesting. That's what makes us real.

Sometimes we cling even to these traits. We compare ourselves—our personalities, our tendencies. "I'm a dosa type," or "Oh, I'm the greedy type." As if that defines us, or gives us something to prefer or regret.

But truthfulness in the Dhamma means *not clinging*, even to the stories we tell about ourselves.

The essence of a metta-attitude is to meet whatever arises—not judging, not preferring, just receiving. It's so simple, and so difficult.

Of course, we have preferences. Of course, we want the practice to go a certain way. We want to suffer less. Who *prefers* suffering? We want to be balanced in a world that often feels so chaotic. And when we're not, it can be distressing.

But the real way to freedom from suffering is to receive it. To know it. To let go *into* it.

I love the flowers you brought today. They don't compare themselves to each other. They just bloom. That's one of the things I love about being in a garden. So many different kinds of flowers, each just being what they are. Some are showy, some not. Some have scent, some don't. Some smell bad! I don't know of any ugly ones.

But even the most common ones don't sit around thinking about how they wish they were different. They don't compare themselves to the flower next to them. They just bloom. That's enough.

So can our practice be like that? Can it be good enough, just as it is?

When we bring a metta-attitude to our lives, other beautiful qualities arise alongside it—patience, truthfulness, interest, non-distraction. We drop into this natural awareness that has no clinging to "I," "me," or "mine." There's just experience, and the knowing of it.

This is daily-life enlightenment.

When we can rest in the flow of what is happening—without identity, without comparison—that's a profound state. And the trick is: it doesn't have to *look* like anything special. Enlightenment moments don't need to be shiny or dramatic.

Metta, as you know, is the wish for the welfare of all living beings. All beings—good or bad, difficult or kind. The ones we like, and the ones we struggle with. May they all be happy. May they be free.

And if we can bring that same openness to all *moments*, without exception—then that's metta too.

Whether a moment is pleasant or painful, the awareness of it is the same. Understanding doesn't come from liking the moment. It comes from *knowing* it. From meeting it without preference.

This is what the Buddha asked of us. What our teachers ask of us—whether we're on retreat or living our messy, busy lives.

Yes, life off retreat looks different. We move quickly, we multitask, we're immersed in relationships and responsibilities. I know I am.

But every moment, no matter how full, can be a moment of letting go. Of meeting ourselves exactly where we are.

We don't have to fix anything. We don't even have to stop comparing—we just need to *know* that we are comparing.

To totally embrace life—to bring a beautiful balance of heart—is the practice.

Recently I was reflecting on this, especially as I celebrated a birthday. And it struck me how many lifetimes we live in just one life. The lifetime of a child. Of a student. Of someone in one career, then another. Of a parent. A seeker. A teacher. A beginner again.

We fall from one lifetime into the next, and each phase flows into the next with its own causes and effects.

And all of it—every part of your life—has brought you to this moment. This practice. This breath.

Even the parts you think were wasted or mistaken—they are not. They were the seeds of this moment.

We can't control how things unfold. Flowers bloom in their own time. I've been here in the Hawaiian Islands for about six weeks, gardening again. Seeds I planted in June are almost ready to harvest—but I won't be here to see it.

Things grow in their own time.

And in practice, too, we plant seeds moment by moment. We cultivate the garden of the heart. We don't know when the flower will bloom. Sometimes, it's years later. Sometimes in another lifetime.

But *everything* we've done will come to fruition. It doesn't have to look spiritual, or even successful. All of our past moments have brought us here.

So we keep planting. We keep showing up. With metta. With compassion. With patience. With insight. Every seed matters.

Even if this moment doesn't look enlightened—even if we're not free—still, the seeds are growing. The path is unfolding.

And when the flower of insight blooms, it always surprises us. It's never what we expect. And it's always deeply beautiful.

Just like each of you.

Whether you're a tight bud, a flower beginning to open, or one struggling to bloom—your form is beautiful. Not because it looks perfect, but because it *is* what it is.

You are a light in this world.

And I cannot express how touched I am by each of you. By the way you show up, practice, and care. Together, we are cultivating something rare and precious.

Thank you—for being here. For being in this world.

**Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.**