Compassion

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 58:41

Compassion

Balancing care with detachment. Balancing compassion with equanimity.

The very first lines of the Dhammapada start like this: "Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief. They are all mind wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows one like the wheel that follows the foot of an ox." The next lines are: "Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief. They are all mind wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts, happiness follows one like a never-departing shadow."

The Buddha taught that our happiness and our sorrow originate within ourselves. They are all mind-wrought. All beings who take birth want to be happy. The Buddha's teachings were meant to relieve suffering at the deepest level. Learning how to balance opening to suffering, caring about suffering, and having understanding or wisdom developing detachment—this balance is actually how we learn to relieve suffering at the deepest level.

Finding some context for understanding the suffering and the pain in our lives and in this world means facing this world, facing reality just as it is, accepting it with unconditional acceptance, and then coming to understand it. The process will then happen on deeper and deeper levels of reality, and hence deeper and deeper levels of wisdom or understanding.

There's a play called *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, written by Jane Wagner. Lily Tomlin plays the role of the person speaking these lines: "I made some studies, and reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it. I can take it in small doses, but as a lifestyle, I found it too confining. Reality was just too needful. It expected me to be there for it all the time. And with all I have to do, I had to let something go."

Facing reality—it's not easy. That's why I read that. What we usually do is let it go. And that's why we're here at this retreat. And as you can see, it's not easy.

I was sitting a retreat in Australia last year for about five weeks. We were all pretty quiet around, I think, about a month into the course, when a high school band started marching through the retreat center where we were sitting. We were all quiet, doing walking meditation, and the tune they were playing was "When the Saints Come Marching In." It was really loud, just going right by where I was doing walking meditation. And it seemed really funny to me. I had one of those laughing fits that you can't control when you're doing vipassanā, but you hope nobody's around when you're having it.

And then I thought, well, this is a great song for a vipassanā retreat. It could be a theme song. "When the saints go marching in"—a saint is someone who has totally let go of control of life through this complete surrender to how reality is, how life is. Life is this constant stream of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings. Learning to open to life, to open to reality, to care about life, but also to be detached from it—to not have to hold on to pleasurable feelings, to not push away unpleasant feelings. This is the life of the saint. It's like the mind becomes like water. It just flows with life, with reality as it is. This takes a tremendous balance of care, openness of heart, and detachment.

Coming to terms with the suffering within how reality appears for us in this world, opening to it, understanding it, and then responding in any way that we feel is appropriate—this requires the balance I'm talking about, of compassion and equanimity.

There was so much pain in my childhood. It was so overwhelming that the only refuge I had was nature, my sanity. I learned that if I just went out in nature and waited—and sometimes I had to wait a very long time—there would be this stillness and quiet, and I would have this rest, this calm, in which I could face another day of my family life.

I didn't learn how to open to pain in that process. What brought me to the practice was really seeing that that wasn't enough. It was a lot to learn how to be quiet and peaceful, to have the energy to face another day, but I wasn't really able to open to the suffering, to care about it while also being detached.

When I went to college, I found a professor who was a naturalist. He was one of the first environmentalists in this country, and he was like my first guru. One of the projects he gave me was, for a whole winter and spring semester, to find a bush and spend at least thirty minutes to an hour every day with this bush.

That was my project for six months. Every day for six months I would go to this bush and I would draw it or meditate by it or just stare at it or read about it—whether it was snowing or raining or very sunny, and in many different swings of moods from very difficult moods to very happy moods to very neutral moods. I would just go to this place I called my spot every day. And when spring came and the bush flowered, it was one of the most ecstatic moments in my life. I had become so connected to this bush and so caring about it. It was a very wonderful teaching.

This teacher kind of hooked me because he understood my love of nature, but he also understood my total aversion to study. So he lured me into this world of studying nature by first letting me love it. That was my direct path—that was my predilection, actually—just the loving it. And I ended up taking twenty-three credits studying birds and plants, botany, all kinds of things.

What struck me about him is that he had developed in his world this extraordinary balance of loving nature but also having this ability to keenly, very precisely study nature, to observe nature. And he taught me that I could get to know anything in nature—whether it was a bird or an insect or a plant or

animals—in many different ways. I could write stories about them. I could spend time with them. I could learn their scientific names, and by learning their scientific names I could get to know their family, their habits, their conditioning, their history.

I trusted this teacher because he cared about what he was learning, what he was studying, and I needed that love before I could trust him. What he was learning about wasn't a cold, detached study but a very connected and caring, intimate experience with nature. It wasn't separate, because he cared.

There's a great saying that I think exquisitely expresses this balance of care, love, and understanding. This is a quotation from Nisargadatta Maharaj. He said that love tells me I'm everything, wisdom tells me I'm nothing, and between the two my life flows. To me, that's all we need to know.

I wanted to speak a little bit about compassion. Sharon will talk more about compassion tomorrow night. You've probably heard this already—compassion, the Buddha taught, was the quivering of the heart in response to suffering. It's an openness to the suffering, not a feeling of being separate from the suffering.

The near enemy of compassion or caring is pity or grief, because we are feeling in those moments of pity or grief a separation from the suffering. Near enemy means that it can look like compassion. It masquerades as compassion. But we're really feeling sorry for someone or ourself. There's this aversion to the unpleasantness of the suffering. We're not open to the unpleasantness of the suffering.

The far enemy of compassion is cruelty. There's this harming, actual harming of ourselves or another. And the reason why it's the far enemy is because we can't feel this care or compassion and cruelty at the same time.

Compassion isn't sorrow. It's actually a very wonderful feeling of just caring. The heart is very tender. I remember when I was doing the compassion practice this spring, there were so many times when I would fall into grief or pity when I was doing this practice. And I learned slowly, by noticing when it would shift to this very pleasant feeling of care, that that's what compassion was.

But you'll find that when you do it, you'll have a lot of grief come up, a lot of sadness come up, because you're facing the suffering, you're facing reality, and you're touching the unpleasantness. And I kept thinking, well, I want to be compassionate all the time right now. But you'll actually learn about the near enemy a lot if you practice it a lot. And eventually you'll start to see the difference between that pleasant feeling of care and the grief or the sorrow, which includes this aversion to the unpleasantness.

This openness of heart that's required for us to be able to touch the suffering and not feel separate needs to be balanced with equanimity, understanding, or detachment. If the heart is overly engaged and not balanced with understanding, usually it will start to want to get rid of the suffering. We want to get rid of the pain in ourself or others from this aversion to the unpleasantness. Our hearts can so easily be overwhelmed or broken by too much suffering, too much pain, when we don't have this balance of understanding that makes the heart strong. And this is when sorrow happens, when we get overwhelmed

by the suffering.

If you consider how much suffering there is in this world—I don't want to go into the morbid details, but if you just look at hunger on this planet, just hunger. Or if you look at any kind of violence, war, how children are treated, disease—there's so much suffering in this world. And it's actually possible to transform our awareness of suffering into compassion.

It takes practice, but we can do it. Compassion doesn't mean avoiding the pain. It means allowing it, accepting it, understanding it.

When I first came to IMS to be on staff, I was a cook here, and I also had the job of taking care of the garden and all the plants in the building. I grew very attached to the plants here. A monk named Taungpulu Sayadaw came, who was a very powerful teacher. I was having problems because the plants had a lot of bugs in them when I arrived, and I was trying very hard to keep this precept of not killing, which I was just learning about. I hadn't really been familiar with this precept before. So I was doing my best, but I was getting very frustrated. I went to Taungpulu Sayadaw and said, "Can I kill the bugs on these plants? I can't stand it anymore." And he said, "Do the best you can to save the plants, but don't kill the bugs. Whatever you do, don't kill the bugs." It was really hard for me—a really hard teaching. I was very new to the practice. I had only done one retreat. I didn't really understand.

There was a gradual process for me, with certain events helping to deepen this teaching of care and wisdom. When I was on staff, I was driving to Amherst one day, and there was a huge snapping turtle in the road that had just been hit. I pulled off to the side and went out to see the turtle. It was still alive, but the whole shell had been smashed. It was obvious that it wasn't going to make it. Again, there was this sense—that thought: I want to put it out of its misery. I should kill it. But then there was this monk's voice saying, "Whatever you do, don't kill." So I scooped up the turtle and went under a pine tree. I did metta with the turtle until it died.

But the turtle never left me. The turtle kept coming up in my sittings from then on. At a certain point, I discovered that this was all on the surface of an experience I had as a child of watching my mother dying. As a child, I didn't understand that there could be that much pain in this world. And I think that with the amount of suffering in this world, we have very hard lessons in learning what compassion really is.

I saw a movie recently with Stephen called *The Doctor*. It's a great movie about a doctor who had been trained very well technically. He was a great surgeon, but he had no idea what it was like to be suffering, what it was like to be a patient, what it was like to be a patient in a modern hospital, how it was to be treated in a modern hospital. In the course of the movie, this doctor gets cancer—he's diagnosed with malignant cancer. And the story is this transformation of a person from being, I would call, almost nearly uncompassionate. They kind of made it extreme in the movie, but you didn't see a trace of compassion in him at the beginning. Then he slowly starts to open up, because he was treated just like he was treating people, and his heart started to open.

The movie was very hard for me to watch at times, and I wasn't quite sure what was going on for me. But when I left the movie, I started to see: here's this difficulty I had as a child, because my mother was in and out of hospitals, in and out of nursing homes, and she was treated very coldly at times. So I had to—again, for what seems like the millionth time—sort out: there was the way she was treated that I didn't understand at the time, and I had a lot of aversion for it. There was her actual death. There was the loss for myself. And then there was the way she died, which was so lonely. I think that's the most painful thing for me, that she really didn't have anybody. Death isn't really so bad, really, if there's somebody supporting you. And also, what it felt like to touch her corpse—this warmth of the body to very cold. It really hit me like lightning when I touched her body and it was so cold.

I was very different from other children after that. I had a different way of seeing the world from that experience at a very young age. I was searching so deeply for understanding because of it. So much of it was because of this thing I'm talking about—being able to open to the pain and also understand it. I was trying to understand it, but I couldn't even open to it as a child.

But it was just always pushing me to search for that understanding.

So we all have to learn over and over the difference between compassion and aversion. It's not like you get it once and then it's over. That's not how it is. We get these lessons over and over.

When we wish someone to be free from suffering, it doesn't mean that we're wishing them to be free from suffering out of aversion to the unpleasantness. It's very critical that compassion has this understanding with it—that we're just caring for the person, or caring for the pain in ourselves. Just caring. And we wish that it ends, but we can't control that it ends. So the wish is important, but we have to let go of control. The way that we learn how to let go of control is through detachment and equanimity. We learn to open and care with compassion. The understanding comes through detachment, through equanimity.

There's a saying attributed to Kuan Yin, who is the bodhisattva of compassion: "The winds of circumstance blow across emptiness. Whom can they harm?" This is a great one if you're having trouble. The winds of circumstance blow across emptiness. Whom can they harm? And this is all about learning this understanding, this detachment.

If there's sadness, we can start to see that there is no one sad. There is just sadness arising and passing away, like a cloud moving through the open, vast blue sky. There is no solid self behind the process. Sadness can be seen like emotional waves rising up on the seashore and then passing. We can learn to open to pain and not identify with it. That not identifying with it is the detachment. We can learn to be with it and let it go.

Some of our greatest teachers are the unpleasant feelings that actually arise in our life, because they teach us how to work with aversion rather than wanting to get rid of it. If you're having knee pain or back pain, any emotional pain—or if maybe the sound of somebody snoring drives you crazy, or somebody coughing,

or perhaps we're having aversion to aversion itself, or aversion to fear—whatever it is, these are actually the things that help us learn how to work with aversion. They are the teacher.

Say we're having difficulty learning how to experience grief or anger. I'm talking about this in relationship to pain because that's what this talk is about: How do we open to suffering? Say we're having difficulty with experiencing aversion to pain, whether it's inside or outside ourselves. This has to do with unpleasant sensations. It's not that we want to get rid of the anger, because that keeps reinforcing the anger. But when aversion or grief arises, we can learn to accept it simply because it's happened.

And then we can start learning how to have the perspective of anicca—that it's impermanent. We can have the perspective of dukkha—that we can't control it, but it's arisen. There's this uncertainty, insecurity. And then we can have the perspective of anatta with it—that there's no solid separate self behind this process.

Wisdom and the detachment that comes with wisdom involves seeing with these three perspectives, or from one of these three perspectives at any given time. Dukkha is the understanding that we can't control that it has arisen. Anicca is that sense that it's just coming and going. Anatta is not taking it as me or I or mine. And if we have one of these three perspectives, or all three—which is when wisdom is really strong—we see that there's no need to repress the aversion or grief, and there's no need to indulge it. We can just let it come and go. We welcome it just like you would a wave on the seashore, and it will pass.

Equanimity is that very sweet, deep balance of mind when we're not at war with things, when we're not fighting the unpleasantness that comes with life. It's so sweet because it's the opposite of the reacting mind. It's this deep, unconditional acceptance. When this is strong, when we have the strength to actually let these unpleasant things in life come and go—to feel them fully and let them come and go—there's no more fear of feeling the unpleasantness, no more fear of feeling the anger, no more fear of feeling the grief, no more fear of opening to suffering. And it doesn't matter what kind of suffering it is, whether it's a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, a thought, an emotion.

The true test of whether we're free is if something comes back. If our reaction is, "Oh no, I thought I got rid of you"—that's not quite freedom. That's not equanimity, it's not understanding. We're not seeing it clearly.

When we take birth in this human realm, on this planet, the given is that there's this great mixture of pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Freedom isn't opening up the body. Freedom isn't getting rid of emotions. Freedom isn't working anything out. Because all of that involves something in the future—it means we're not okay just where we are.

The transformation in this practice, this very deep transformation, occurs whenever we're fully present now and when we're not identified with what's happening now. The only possibility for freedom is now. Freedom doesn't happen in the past and it can't happen in the future, and it doesn't depend on what's

happening. It can only happen in one moment—when we aren't identified with what's happening. This non-identification is only possible in the present moment. This is where understanding is, this is where detachment comes from, this is the real freedom. And it's the only possibility of balancing the suffering that happens in our life. It's the only possibility for freedom.

With this detachment, it helps us to face any kind of pain without drowning in it. We learn how to swim in it. We learn to live in life and grow from what's happening rather than to shut down or drown. We learn to open and let go. Understanding gives strength to our heart. In some ways you might see being here as exercising your heart. There's so much emphasis on exercising the body in this culture, but what you're doing is really stretching the heart. Sometimes it hurts.

True compassion, when we're open to suffering, means we don't turn to mush in the face of suffering. And we also don't turn to indifference. We're not shut down and we're not drowning.

The equanimity that I've been describing is the equanimity that comes with the Vipassana practice. In the Brahma-vihara practice there's also an equanimity practice that develops equanimity, but it's a different kind than what develops in Vipassana. In this equanimity practice, which you'll be doing a little later after compassion and mudita, the phrases that one says are: "All beings are the owners of their actions. Your happiness and your sorrow depend upon your actions and not upon my wishes for you."

I remember when I got to this part this spring, I thought it had a little punch in it. There's the most understanding in this Brahma-vihara. When you're saying it to someone, you can imagine the power of that: "All beings are the owners of their actions. Your happiness and your sorrow depend upon your actions and not my wishes for you." This is a great healing of a codependent heart. Basically, you're saying: I'm not responsible for your pain. It's very powerful. It's amazing.

I think that the way this heals is that if the heart is very open, there's a tendency to want to control with it. There's a tendency to want results. We want the pain to go away, or we want to see results. I might be wishing some of my family members happiness for the next fifty million years, but I can wish it—I can't control with it. And I think that with family members particularly it's very poignant. This equanimity from the Brahma-viharas is really important to balance an open heart. It's not just the understanding that there's no solid separate self behind the process; there's also the understanding that a person's actions are what will bring them happiness and sorrow, not our wishes for them. Our care will help influence somebody, but ultimately it's one's own actions that bring us happiness or sorrow.

I have a nephew that I raised for most of his young years, and then around when he was five I started drifting away. He's been a great teacher for me since he joined the Marines when he was seventeen. When he joined the Marines, I felt like I'd been slapped really hard across the face, because it was the opposite of where I had hoped he would go. It's been an incredible teaching for me, but also incredibly painful. He was sent to the Gulf this year when the war started, and my heart just felt like it was breaking. It was just horrendous. He was in all the action that happened. And he hasn't recovered. I don't know if he'll ever

recover.

And it's very hard for me. And I think that we can do and say what we say with other beings, and especially with the beings we're very connected to and very close to, but then we have to let go. And it's often the people we care about the most that we have to practice this openness of heart and still care, but also have that detachment.

I have to understand that he chose that in whatever conditioning brought that about, and that I can do what I can, but that's his karma. And if you think about all the people you care about so deeply, we need this understanding of karma. We care and we do the best we can, and then we have to let go of control.

Often we feel like there's this immensity of suffering in the world, and that we have to do so much. It can seem overwhelming. Yet it's really the little things that we do that have a lot of power.

This is a quotation from Mother Teresa. She said, "We feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop were not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop. I don't agree with the big way of doing things. To us, what matters is an individual. To get to love a person, we must come in close contact with them. If we wait until we get the numbers, then we will be lost in the numbers, and we will never be able to show love and respect for that person. I believe in person to person."

One moment of care, one moment of genuine mindfulness and care, is so powerful. And it might be rare that we can actually have that one moment of openness and detachment and really respond with care to suffering. But in that moment, there's this great transformation that takes place.

And it's important to remember that it's okay to be closed. It's okay not to be compassionate. Sometimes we just don't have it in us to open. We have to be okay with having a closed heart. That means that it's too painful. We just have to wait. We rest the mind, rest the heart. That might take five years, it might take two minutes. It doesn't matter. What matters is that we trust the process of closing when it's too much, and then opening when we can.

Often we feel like we have to know everything before we can do something, or that we have to save the world, or that we have to figure everything out. But just one moment of care balanced with detachment will really make a difference.

There's an experience I had my senior year in high school that for me touches this. I hadn't had a history of any adults taking much interest in me. And I worked at this outdoor theater the summer of my senior year where all these groups came—Jimi Hendrix, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, all kinds of groups. A musician named Hugh Masekela came. I'm not sure if you've heard of him. He's a musician from South Africa who lives in the United States.

I used to stand where all the performers would come down to the stage and wait there and talk. Most of

these people didn't take much interest in me, to say the least. And this man Hugh Masekela, who I didn't know from anybody, came for a week, and every night he would spend about an hour talking with me. He was really interested in me, and there wasn't anything weird about it. It was very natural, just sitting down and having a ginger ale and talking.

It had such an effect on me that there was this person who was actually interested in me. I consider him a benefactor. I only had those very brief moments in time with him, but they mattered. He cared. Later on I heard that he has a very strong interest in teenagers and actually sets up productions in New York where he trains teenagers musically and in acting. And I think, what a great being. It's not like he did a lot, or studied psychology for fifteen years to figure it out. It was so simple, yet had a transformative, very deep effect on me.

More and more Stephen and I are trying to encourage people to take an interest in someone. And it doesn't mean that it's a big commitment. That's sort of the C word in our culture—there's the F word, and then there's commitment. But it's not like you have to make a heavy commitment.

It can be that on a train you simply take an interest in somebody. Or it could mean a slightly longer commitment—maybe an hour, whatever it might be. But these little things make a difference for people. This is how metta and compassion are going to start coming into our culture more. Maybe not from elders in our culture. Maybe from us.

The last aspect of balancing equanimity and compassion that I wanted to talk about is humor. It doesn't seem to be on any of the lists in Buddhism—I don't quite get it. I keep looking for it. Maybe it's in some sutta we haven't discovered yet. But then I thought, well, maybe it's because it's understood. Maybe it's just so important that it's understood to be in all the lists in Buddhism.

It's important not to take ourselves too seriously. Humor—a little bit of humor, at least—brings lightness, buoyancy to us. And in the face of suffering, we need that lightness.

This is another quotation from *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*: "You can't expect insights, even the big ones, to suddenly make you understand everything. But I figure, hey, it's a step if they leave you confused in a deeper way."

Now that should be on the brochure. Insight meditation: leaves you confused in a deeper way.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "If I didn't have a sense of humor, I would have committed suicide long ago." We need it. Dukkha land is hard. You know what dukkha land is like. You just wish you were in anicca land or anatta land, but dukkha land is hard. And there's a lot of it.

When we were teaching in Yucca Valley this past spring, every night a group of us would go out a side door. Most of the yogis would go out one way, but a group of us in the front would go out the side door right after the talk ended. One particular night toward the end of the retreat, we were all walking out the

door, and some of us noticed that our sandals were missing, our shoes, our sneakers.

It was quite interesting to watch what happened. At first people were just saying, "Where are my shoes? Where are my sandals?" Then there was this immediate search for the sandals and shoes. And then there was this sense of being upset—really upset. They were gone. It turned out later that we found out many yogis' Birkenstocks were missing as well. Some vandals had taken the sandals. Actually it was something like fifteen hundred dollars worth of stuff that had gone missing. It was really serious.

But what happened that night is this: people were walking out getting upset about their sandals being missing, and the last person out the door was a monk. He walked out, and he just looked. Very mindfully—you could just see it happening—he just saw that his sandals were missing. They were just gone. That was it. There was nothing extra. No upset, no looking for them. They were just gone. And he just started laughing and walked off in his socks.

It was great. The practice works, you know. That's equanimity. It was so wonderful to see. And then a collection was taken up later to get him some sandals.

I began this talk by speaking about that professor I had in college. I consider him one of my greatest teachers. The college was in a city that was very polluted. He had a small greenhouse and gardens on the side of a dormitory. There was a lot of alcohol being drunk by students at that particular time, and many bottles would be thrown out of the dormitory windows into the garden. Sometimes the window of the greenhouse would get smashed.

Sometimes when he was working in the garden, he would actually get hit in the head by a bottle—really severe, really hard. Very few people that he was teaching had the slightest interest in what he was trying to teach. He was way ahead of his time, so deeply caring for the planet and for anything alive. He had such a deep care for the earth. He was considered very eccentric.

There was the naturalist side of him, but there was also a very deeply contemplative side. When all the Vietnam War demonstrations were going on, when the Black Panthers took over a dormitory on our campus, when there were ghetto riots and all those turbulent times—there were a lot of professors leaving or getting fired, a lot of students getting violent.

I remember one particular day when a dorm had been taken over and there was growing violence happening on the campus. He was so angry, so disturbed. I'd just never seen him like that. He was so upset. I'd never seen him take a day off, and he just left. He went out into the woods for the day, for the whole day. And the next day he came back, and I'd never seen anybody so quiet.

That quiet that he brought into my life had more of an effect than anything at that point in my life. I saw the possibility for being touched by that much pain but also having balance. I had been feeling quite violent at the time, and I really felt like it had saved me.

If you think about those years back then, how very little awareness people had of the environment—and of all the things I saw him go through—it would have been very easy for him to get discouraged at times. But he kept going. I never saw him stop what he was trying to get across. And I saw that he actually had a huge effect. There's such a growing awareness of the environment now. At that time there was so little.

I think also that if you consider the state of the earth and what's happening environmentally, we could get very discouraged at times. It's not looking so good for us. From one perspective, that's true.

Yet every time we have this compassion, this equanimity, this balance, and we take an action—every time we speak, every time we save a bottle, every time we turn off a light—whatever we do has a huge effect. We don't know what will happen. We don't have any idea what's going to happen with this earth. So we do the best we can, and then we let go of control.

This ability to see very clearly what's happening, to open to the suffering, and then to respond in whatever way we can—doing the best we can and letting go of control—takes this tremendous balance of care and detachment. Which, luckily, you're working very deeply on.

There's a poem by Chief Seattle. I read recently that someone said of Chief Seattle that he could be heard from three quarters of a mile away—his voice was so powerful. I'm really impressed by that, because nobody can even hear me if I don't have a microphone on. Three quarters of a mile.

Anyway:

Teach your children what we have taught our children—that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. This we know. The earth does not belong to us. We belong to the earth. This we know. All things are connected, like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life. We are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

Let's sit for a few minutes.

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