The Bodhisattva Leaves a Retreat

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:05:53

So here you are, you've been talking. Between the world of silence and the world of talking, do you have a preference? I see some nodding heads. What's your preference? Silence? Isn't that nice? I mean, they're nice people and everything. And how does it feel in your body after the days of silence to be talking? Hard? It's resonating a lot, isn't it?

Now we live in the sea of this out there, but here you got a bit quieter and still, and you've become more sensitive. We'll talk about it in the morning as you leave—that you have to respect this sensitivity over these next days. But I think more deeply, you have to respect that you're sensitive beings. We armor ourselves and we learn to navigate all of this. But in fact, we're also organisms that are tremendously sensitive and tender. And we've created a world where that's not so well supported, is it? You know, in our society.

So tonight I want to talk about the ideal of the bodhisattva. Bodhisattva is a compound word most of you have heard. Bodhi means awakening or free. And sattva means a being committed to liberation or awakening. The notion of the bodhisattva—the ideal of both embodying freedom and then bringing it to all you touch—is there from the very beginning in Buddhism, in every one of the schools, and from the earliest time. The Buddha himself was called the Bodhisattva for lifetime after lifetime of training and practice and developing these capacities of awakening.

After his awakening under the Bodhi tree, his bodhisattva activity is very simple. People say, well, is this passive? He sat, he had his deep revelation of wisdom and freedom. And then he stood up and he walked for forty-five years the dusty roads of India. Before he walked, before he stood up, it occurred to him: What should I do right now that this awakening is so clear? And with his mind so clear, he surveyed the world with what's called the eye of wisdom and compassion. He saw beings everywhere creating suffering out of ignorance and misunderstanding. And he knew that there was a way to teach them that they could live with greater happiness and freedom.

But as he saw the suffering that humans create, tears rolled down his cheeks, and when they touched the earth, they turned into the goddess Tara or Quan Yin, one of the bodhisattvas of compassion, as the myth goes. He saw the possibility in the midst of the suffering of the world for awakening. And then he got up and he said, let me walk through the roads of this world for as long as I live and invite others to this freedom and to this understanding.

So that's where you will be returning to—the dusty world of Fresno or Los Angeles or Albuquerque or wherever it happens to be. And it's not actually going to be that easy. First of all, we live in an addicted

society where the best adjusted person is somebody who's not quite alive but just consuming and working all the time and not questioning too much. We're taught not to question.

And we live in a world, the human world, where there is dukkha, or suffering—the first noble truth. One of the Buddha's first teachings is that human incarnation involves suffering. Anybody not have that? Raise your hand, you can have your money back. And it's serious. It's loss and illness and aging. So there's that kind of suffering. And then there's the human-caused suffering of climate change that we have to deal with, and continuing racism and warfare.

Somebody was asking why we have groups for POC or white allies or white awareness groups and so forth. One of the dedications in our community now is especially around this, because there's so much visible pain around racism in our culture right now. And it's there in the political campaign.

The Buddhist teachings are a medicine for this. From the very beginning, the Buddha said that the Dharma gates welcome every single human being for their fundamental dignity, their beauty, their spirit—whatever your race or caste or creed or orientation or gender, the Dharma gates welcome you. He was really radical in that way, especially in that time.

But now we're in this culture that has racism as one of its wounds—maybe the core wound of our culture. A lot of the economic problems and disparity, and many other kinds of suffering, come from seeing people as other. And so it becomes really important to use our Dharma to awaken and see the dignity of every single being.

You'll be out there, and first of all, you'll see and hear in the conversation that racism—this is James Baldwin—he writes, "One of the reasons that people cling to their hate and prejudice so stubbornly, I believe, is that they sense that once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with their own pains." And so if we can project it on the enemy du jour—whether it was the communists or the gays or the Muslims or the blacks or the immigrants or the Mexicans or whatever—it's like the insecurity. We are insecure. We're vulnerable. It's true as human beings. This is our lot. Things change. When we can't bear this, then we project it on others.

And then the politicians of the world—this is from H. L. Mencken, a great political commentator of a hundred years ago—he says, "The whole aim of politics is to frighten and menace the populace with an endless series of fearful hobgoblins, almost all of them unreal," simply as a way to gain power, to try to make you afraid in some way or other.

So I'm just giving you some little hints about what's out there. And for those who are interested in the presidential campaign, my advice is part of the time just turn off the news and turn on Mozart, please—or somebody else, Lady Gaga, anybody. You'll have enough information. It's just for information's sake to know that the race is now between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump and that's been settled. Nobody else is in it. So we live in interesting times.

These energies that I'm talking about in different ways are out there. And so how do we deal with that? And more than that, how do we, as the Buddha did, walk through this dusty world with its enormous sufferings and its unbearable beauty? Which is what human incarnation gives us.

Now, what did we learn here that is important to carry and to take with us? One of the first things is that our states of mind, our spirit, the way we approach the world means almost everything.

Who is your enemy? Ask the Buddha. Mind is your enemy. Who is your friend? Mind is your friend. No one can hurt you more than your own mind untrained. You know this. Talk about being in trouble—the biggest trouble you can make is your own damn mind, right? And who is your friend? A trained and awakened mind and heart can carry you anywhere. Through the dusty world, the world of the ten thousand joys and sorrows.

What you've started to learn here is that there's a way to sit and walk and be in this human incarnation of its ten thousand joys and ten thousand sorrows with wisdom, with a loving awareness or mindfulness that sees the play of experience.

And you've learned to actually see deeply. I like to talk about the Vipassana facelift at the end of the retreat. I look at some of you and honestly, you look a lot younger. It's beautiful. Look in the mirror. Your eyes are brighter, your skin smoother. It might have been a tough retreat, but something happened to you. You can tell—you walk in the desert and in certain moments you just feel so much more open and connected. We all know this. It's like we're cleansed a bit and we can see deeply.

And you see deeply anyway at certain moments—when you listen to sacred music or enter a great cathedral, or there at the birth of a child, or that mystery when you're with someone as they die and that spirit leaves as silently as a falling star and something mysterious happens. Who are we? We have this life and then it disappears. Or making love, or sacred medicine—all kinds of ways that you touch something that's so much greater than the limited sense of self. Walking in the cathedral of the redwoods, and then that small sense of self opens up and you realize, as Wes talked about, it's not me, the separate self, but this is—I am life.

Alice Walker writes, "One day I was sitting there like a motherless child, which I was. And it came to me, that feeling of being a part of everything."

And I knew if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and ran all around the house. When it happens, you just can't miss it.

And so you get to see more deeply here the human lot that you were born into, with greater wisdom. And that deep seeing allows you to attend to the world and see what's called its secret beauty—the dignity of each person that's there.

Dante, back in the late 1300s, was standing on the edge of the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, this marvelous

medieval bridge. And he saw a young woman standing on the bridge—Beatrice—and he was so smitten by her beauty and her spirit, he was just swept away. Not just how she looked, but somehow how she touched him. And he got to know her a little bit. And then she died; she died in the plague. But she didn't die to him. She became his muse in some way. And he then went and wrote one of the most magnificent poems and works of art, certainly in Western literature—the Divine Comedy, the Inferno and Paradiso, all of that extraordinary work. And it was the vision of Beatrice that carried him through all that.

So in the Second World War, toward the end of the war, when the Allies were going up the Italian peninsula with their tanks and bombs, and the Germans and Italian army were retreating, the Germans were blowing up all the bridges over the rivers so that the Allied forces couldn't use them and couldn't advance. But the German general was a literate man. And he was just north of Florence. And he contacted the main general of the Allied forces and said, "I don't want to blow up the Ponte Vecchio. But I need you to promise that if I don't blow it up, you won't use it for any military purposes." And the American general contacted him back, made radio contact, and made a promise that they wouldn't use the bridge—which held. The bridge wasn't blown up. Not one single American soldier or piece of equipment went across it. And it's still there.

The bridge was spared in this terrible, ruthless modern war because Beatrice stood on it. And Dante had a vision of beauty that changed everything for him. And that kind of vision—seeing the secret beauty of the world—is really what's offered to us in this practice.

So I want us to do a little practice now, instead of just talking to you. This is the practice side. See, you have your habits, and some people are already kind of putting one foot in the stirrup and getting in their meditation saddle. It's so interesting to watch, right?

This is going to be a paired meditation for about ten minutes or so. And what I want you to do is stay silent. I'd like to invite you to turn to someone near you and sit opposite them so that you can just face them kindly, with no words. And then we'll do a little guided meditation practice.

So settle yourself for a moment, and let yourself be ready now, in a silent way, to attend with this open-mindedness—to see deeply this other being. Take a deep breath or two. Relax. Release any tension that's present. And then, when you're ready, gaze into each other's eyes. And if you're introverted or shy, which is also fine, and you feel a little discomfort or the urge to laugh or look away, just note that embarrassment with patience and gentleness. And come back when you can to your partner's eyes.

For you may never have the opportunity to see this person, the uniqueness of them, in this way again.

And as you look into this person's eyes, let yourself see the beauty behind these eyes, the beautiful spirit that was born there, the original goodness, the capacity for love. Open your awareness to the gifts and strengths behind these eyes. Behind these eyes are unmeasured reserves of courage, intelligence, patience, wit, and wisdom—so many gifts born into this human being, some of which this person themselves may

be unaware.

As you see their beautiful spirit that was born into them and carried to this day, and all the kindnesses they may have offered the world, and all the possibilities of this amazing being, sense the natural goodwill you have for them—how you would like them too to be free from fear and confusion, to be well. And know that what you are now experiencing is the great, natural loving-kindness.

As you look into these eyes, stay connected. Continue to look and take a deeper breath. Looking deeply, let go of the loving-kindness. Let yourself also become aware of the measure of pain that is there behind these eyes—the measure of sorrows accumulated in this life, as in all human lives, that you can only guess at. There are disappointments and losses, failures and loneliness, hurts beyond the telling.

Let yourself sense that pain, the hurts this person may have never told another human being. You cannot fix their pain, but you can be with it with a spirit of courage. As you let yourself simply be in the presence of their measure of sorrows, as you see them, you might see a frightened child. Imagine what your response would be—a hurt child, how you would reach out to comfort. Know that what you see now is giving birth to the great heart of compassion. It is essential for the healing of the world.

Take a deep breath as you continue to gaze. We are going through the four divine brahmaviharas, the awakened heart. Can you continue to look and let go of the compassion and the seeing of sorrows, and look even deeper?

As you look into these eyes again, you can also see the secret beauty and joy that is there—the child of the spirit that was born into this body. Imagine their happiest moments as a child, their best adventure, their laughing and running, their zest and joy. Let yourself sense the delight they take in collaborating with others, in playing and creating in the world—how they learned first to run and catch and play, and then read and grow, and bring this world alive with their joy. As you see in these eyes the child of the spirit born there, know that what you are now experiencing is mudita, the joy in another's joy, the delight in the joy of another. The true nature.

And finally, take one more deep breath, staying connected with these eyes. Let your awareness drop deep, like a stone sinking below the level of words, to see that consciousness which underlies all life, the web of life you have both taken birth in. See the consciousness behind these eyes and the face before you as one who, at another time and place, has been young and old, awake and asleep, lost. Who has been your son or daughter, your mother or father, your friend, your enemy, your student, your teacher.

Who are you really? Look deeply now—not the body, not the thoughts or feelings, not conditioning. Let yourself see the timeless spirit. And who is it that is seeing? Is this who I am? The timeless awareness, mystery, pure knowing. Rest in it. Trust it. It is your home.

Let your eyes close for a moment. Just rest. And again, let them open. Acknowledge your partner and take literally just one minute to thank them in any way you wish.

Okay. It's been great this year. We'll talk. I'll see you soon. I hope to see you. Thank you.

Finish up. And if we had a lot more time, I'd just let you talk to one another in this way. I know this can be difficult at times when you feel shy or embarrassed. But also it can open something—to see the beauty of another being this way. I've had people raise their hand and say, "I was married to this woman or this man for twenty-nine years and we never looked at each other." Wow.

And you can begin to feel how natural loving-kindness and compassion and understanding are when you attend in this extremely simple way, when you bring your gaze to the mysterious being in front of you.

How was that? Kind of wild, isn't it?

So what do you learn when you do something like this? It really amplifies what we've learned in the practice—that there are two different dimensions you get to see. One is the timeless nature of consciousness itself, that spirit behind these eyes that's independent of their body or their history or their family or any of that. There's something so universal. The Buddha nature, the true nature in that being, so beautiful. And you also see their uniqueness—their particular face and eyes and hair color and history. All of that sometimes flashes, and you see things about them by looking so deeply.

And so there's this paradox in which you have to remember your Buddha nature and your social security number, basically. You don't separate these, but you hold this mystery of human life with its uniqueness and its universal and timeless truth. And it's not one or the other. If you only see the universal, then you're not a very good driver—they'll lock you up basically. You're not attending to what's here. On the other hand, if you're just a materialist and only focused on what's here and you don't see the spirit behind it, you're also lost.

So what you saw was a kind of wedding.

Trudy and I had this experience. I had the opportunity to visit Thich Nhat Hanh, who's had this major stroke. He was in San Francisco. We went together on the last day, especially the last day before he went back to France. He's eighty-nine. And he can't talk. He can raise one hand. With speech therapy, a few words he can now say.

We went early in the morning to sit with him before he was to fly back to France. After the sitting—six-thirty, we went and we all sat together. They rang the bell and helped him walk in. He was in a wheelchair and they sort of sat him up. And he looked around, and Trudy actually had the most beautiful description of what it was. Because there's one way he saw each of us. I've known him for many years. He saw the small group of people that were there and kind of bowed to us. That was the particular.

But as Trudy noted, the other eye was looking into infinity. It was like there were these two different eyes—one that was the most beautiful personal recognition, and the other, him on the verge of death, really, at the end of life, seeing, which he's always seen, something that's timeless.

And that's what you just got to see in some way—the beauty of this person and the timelessness of it. And you also get to see that the heart is big enough to hold the ten thousand joys and sorrows.

You can see the measure of tears and the suffering, which is not a mistake. It's part of human existence. You get to see that, and that seeing brings awake in you the great heart of compassion. And that's what you've been learning here as you sit.

Enlightenment—it's not a word I use so much. I like the word awakening better. I think it's a better translation. Enlightenment was a Victorian translation that has a lot of overlays of misunderstanding. Awakening, enlightenment, is not far away. You don't get from here to there, practice long enough and then travel to Burma and India and the Himalayas. It's not a journey from here to there. It's a journey from there to here.

As the poet Kabir says, "Are you looking for me? I'm in the next seat. My shoulder is against yours." If you're looking for something holy, all you have to do is turn around and gaze at the person beside you. And something starts to become clear.

I've looked at many of the different spiritual scenes in America because I'm in the industry, basically. The lamas and swamis and mamas and papas and whatever. Some are better and some aren't. Some have sila and virtue, and some forget about that part, which is pretty problematic. A lot of them say, "We have the best, fastest way. Tantra is the best way. Zen is the emptiest. Advaita is more non-dual than your practice." All that stuff. You see all that, right?

I haven't seen any place where it's faster than any place else. Because it's not going somewhere. And it's not about some state. You've had beautiful states here sometimes. Instead, it's about the growing capacity of the heart to be present and free in the midst of all the things that rise and pass. To become the one who knows. And that's not fixing yourself in some way. It's simply being present.

Did I have a good retreat, you might ask. What's a good retreat? Maybe you had a lot of suffering, maybe there was joy, maybe there was both, maybe you had it and you lost it, and then you lost it and had it again.

Go ahead, light your incense, ring your bells, call out to the gods. But watch out, for the gods will come and they will fire up the forge and put you on the anvil and beat you and beat you until they turn brass into pure gold. This is an Indian saying.

So you've had a tough retreat? Terrific. As I said, in Tibet they pray for suffering. May I have enough suffering to really open the heart of compassion. What is a bad retreat or a good retreat?

To awaken is to become—Zen Master Dogen used this beautiful phrase, as Trudy was talking about in his teachings—to awaken is to become intimate with all things. To become intimate with life. And so you become intimate with your measure of sorrows. You become intimate with your body, its pains, and then

when it opens and there's bliss and joy, and then the trauma that you carry.

But you are not your trauma. You need to tend it, and sometimes there must be healing and forgiveness. But you don't want to be too loyal to your suffering. How did Nelson Mandela walk out of that prison after twenty-seven years on Robben Island with so much magnanimity and graciousness and forgiveness and compassion? He had to work it in the prison—when you read his autobiography, you see this. But they can put your body in prison. No one can imprison your spirit.

Not your parents, not the police. Nobody can do that to you.

And so the practice is to see the dignity in each being you meet and to find it in yourself.

A woman who works as a Buddhist chaplain in a hospital likes to go around twice a year, and as she moves through the hospital, she blesses people's hands. She blesses the hands of the surgeons and the nurses. Then she goes down to the basement and finds the people who are cleaning the toilets, serving the food, washing the pots, and she makes sure their hands get blessed too. Last year one of them said to her, "This is the most meaningful thing that happens all year." Some of these people are not valued as they should be. She goes around and finds them and blesses their hands, and they're often startled and deeply touched—as is she.

It's so simple, that kind of intimacy of bringing your attention and your care. And yet when you do, your life changes, and the life of those around you begins to change, because you've learned this presence and a certain kind of fearlessness—the ability to gaze at the measure of sorrow and not turn away from it. As James Baldwin says, not to project it on somebody else, but to feel your own vulnerability and your own tears, and to see that in another and say, "Yes, I've sat under my tree of enlightenment. And I know that this is what makes up life."

There comes a fearlessness and an understanding—I guess you could call it wisdom.

I have this story from a woman who was working, as I have at times in the past, in Palestine and Israel with different peace groups. I found it very moving because one of the things that happens is you only get the bad news from there. Anybody throws a bomb, a suicide bomb, teenagers being shot, all the terrible things that happen—that makes the news. But not the hundreds of groups doing real work: the former combatants for peace, the bereaved mothers—Palestinian, Israeli, Lebanese—the teenagers making connections across the lines. Really amazing, beautiful things.

Anyway, this group was working in Palestine—Israelis, Americans, and Palestinians together. They got permits to come into Israel for a special gathering. They brought one Palestinian man with them who was going to be a speaker, a beautiful guy who'd gone through a lot of difficulty. When they got to the checkpoint, the soldier—a woman in uniform—checked everyone, then saw the man and said, "Give me your ID. Get off this bus. You can't cross here. This isn't a crossing for Palestinians. You have to go back that way." The other crossing point was an hour and a half away. If he could even get a taxi, very

expensive, maybe he'd get there, maybe not, and an hour and a half back. He would miss the meeting. He was, of course, very disappointed.

The woman accompanying him wrote about what happened next. She said, "I looked at the soldier and I saw, under the uniform, a beautiful woman. Under her military hat I saw her long black hair tied in a ponytail behind her. Repeatedly, with sharpness, she said no. But I watched her hair, and it was swishing back and forth. She moved one way and her hair moved differently. I got confused by her presence because she was saying no, but something else was going on.

"I tried not to judge her. I just looked at her and saw this woman, and I said, 'This is really important. It's peace work. Is there any way you can find to help us? We really need him there. I can see that you want to help.'

"She looked at me and moved her gun aside a little, and her keys, and she said, 'Well, see that gate over there? If he crosses it quickly and goes calmly to that other gate, in five minutes I can meet him as a guard and let him through.'

"I saw this opening and I wanted to honor it. And there it was, and she went through with it.

"I became curious about this woman—this dark, slender, young woman in front of me, young enough to be my daughter. I wanted to ask her about her hair. What's the story? I was convinced her hair had its own language.

"And I did ask, and she said, 'It is a reminder that I'm first and foremost a woman. I'm born into life to love. I tend to forget this under the uniform. I've forgotten how to smile. I've seen so much suffering. And then my hair slaps my face. It blows and reminds me I'm a woman. No one can bury this fact under any kind of uniform. And when I'm out of here, I will work for peace like you.'

"And now we were speaking the same language, her and her hair."

There's something about our willingness to see the beauty in another.

As Nelson Mandela said, it never hurts to see the good in someone—they often act the better because of it.

So you've learned that your heart is big enough to hold all the joys and sorrows, to see both the universal and the personal, to bring a kind of intimacy of attention that awakens beauty and presence and understanding. That intimacy is not just with another person; it's also with yourself.

Of course, you've been intimate with yourself here. You know the socks of the people near you and such things. But you've also watched your own mind, your own heart, as it opens and as it closes. You think, "Oh, I should always have a big open heart. I should just love all the time." That's the ideal, right? "Oh God, I'm just going to love everything."

But you have to breathe. And it turns out the heart also opens and closes. The lungs breathe, and the

cerebrospinal fluid breathes, and the tides move to the moon, and the stock market changes. Menstrual cycles. It turns out the heart opens and closes. You can't force it open and simply be loving on demand. You've sat here and watched the heart open and close. You've watched the mind open and close. Everything that's conditioned is impermanent.

And then underneath all that, as you get quiet and allow your own uniqueness to be met with loving awareness, you begin to sense—like the Buddha getting up from his seat—that it's time to take your understanding into the world. In Zen they say there are only two things: you sit, and you sweep the garden. And it doesn't matter how big the garden is—the garden of the world.

So you quiet the mind and open the heart. You remember who you are. And then you go and give your gift to the world. It might be as an artist, or a conscious businessperson, or a parent, or a person working for social justice, or someone working in the crazy, insane criminal justice system, or a person planting trees. You each have a cargo to deliver.

That's what my African friend, a shaman, says. It's a beautiful West African metaphor: we're all born with a cargo, and the only thing that matters in your life as you awaken is that you deliver your cargo.

You say, "Well, what the hell is my cargo?"

Puanani Burgess, who is a Hawaiian teacher, says: "I try to work in the schools in a process called Building the Beloved Community. The exercise I work with these kids involves first telling three stories. Story number one: tell us all your names. The second is the story of your community. And the third story I ask is: tell us your gift."

"So one time I did this process in our local high school. We went around the circle and got to this young man, Kele. He told the story of his names well and the story of his community well. But when it came time to tell the story of his gift, he asked, 'What, miss? What kind of gift you think I get, eh? I stay in this special ed class and I get a hard time reading, and I can't do math. Why you make me shame for? Asked me that kind of question, what kind of gift I have. If I had gift, you think I'd be here?'"

"Kele just shut down and shut up, and I felt really shamed. In all my years of teaching, I've never done that. I've never shamed a student."

"Two weeks later, I'm in our grocery store and I see him down one of those aisles. I see his back, and I'm going down there with my cart, and I think, 'Nope, I'm not going there.' It was too painful. So I start to back up, trying to get away from him. And then he turns around and sees me and throws his arms open and runs toward me. 'Auntie, auntie! I've been thinking about you! Two weeks I've been thinking—what my gift, what my gift?'"

"I say, 'Okay, brother, what's your gift?'"

"He says, 'You know, I've been thinking. I cannot do that math stuff and I cannot read so good. But auntie,

when I stay in the ocean, I can call the fish. And the fish, he come every time. Every time I put food on my family table. Every time. And sometimes when I stay in the ocean and the shark, he come, and he look at me, and I look at him, and I tell him: Uncle, I'm not going to take plenty fish. I just going to take one, two fish, just for my family. All the rest I leave for you. And so the shark, he say, Oh, you cool, brother.'"

And I tell the shark, uncle, you cool. And the shark, he go his way and I go my way.

And I look at this boy, Kali, and I know what a genius he is. And I mean it. But in our society, the way the schools are run, he's rubbish. He's destroyed, not appreciated.

So when I talk to his teacher and the principal, I ask them, what would his life be if this curriculum were gift-based? What if we were able to see the gift in each of our children and taught around that gift? What would happen to us as a society if we saw the gift in every human being?

And so you become intimate with yourself and you listen for what your gift is and what your cargo is to deliver. And it's never too late, you know. I mean, here Trudy and I, we fell in love, we're seventy, right? And we're having a great time. It's never too late. As someone said the other night—whether it was George or Noah or Trudy herself—even people at the end of their life, sometimes there's a moment when they see in a new way. But you don't have to wait to be wise.

It also means that you don't want to be too idealistic about it, thinking you're supposed to be some special way. When I read Shambhala Sun or Tricycle, I wonder who these people are. They admit to an occasional random thought, but it's clear they're all becoming enlightened, or at least able to dwell in clear and empty space. Or those Yoga Journal people, where everyone is thin, composed, and bends in all directions. Or Fortune, where everyone's a millionaire, a captain of success.

So where, I ask, is the magazine for failure? For thirty years of falling and recalling, oh yes, be here now again. For the continual recovering from the storms. For the endless repairing of the ship and the broken sails. For this thick and heavy middle-aged body, barely bending. For the immense gratitude in meeting once again next week's payroll, next month's rent.

It's not about—I said it in the first talk—it's not really about perfecting yourself, but perfecting your love. That's what matters in this life. And love, or loving awareness, which we've been teaching, becomes the gateway to freedom. If the freedom doesn't have love, or the love doesn't deepen into a sense of openness, something's missing.

And it's very simple. What we have learned here is not only to sit and walk in the midst of the joys and sorrows—we've seen the First Noble Truth. Anybody not seen dukkha? Mara not come to any of you? So we've seen that that's part of our life.

But that's the first noble truth. We've also seen the second noble truth: the cause of our suffering and the suffering of the world is greed and hatred and fear and reactivity and judgment. You see all those

suffering forms of mind.

And then you see the third noble truth, which is there's an end to that suffering. There's a balance of peacefulness, a joyful heart, a loving awareness. Becoming the one who knows, there's a witnessing of it that says, yes, this too, and this too, and this too—with graciousness and compassion. And you start to realize that your suffering is not the end of the story. It's just the beginning of the story.

Now people have asked, in these previous question periods, what about the need for ambition or anger? Where do you get your power from if you're just this nice loving person? Because the world is tough out there and it's full of both conflict and greed and hatred and ignorance. What do you do? How do you move through the world as a bodhisattva?

Wes interviewed Gary Snyder, one of our great Pulitzer Prize-winning poets, a few years ago. Gary's in his eighties. He was one of the original visionaries for an ecological consciousness in this country.

50 years ago, he won the Pulitzer Prize for *Earth Household*—an amazing environmentalist. And Wes said, "Gary, you see global warming, loss of species, rising oceans, environmental disasters. What advice do you have for us?"

And he looked back and said, "Don't feel guilty."

Amazing thing—don't feel guilty. Because if you try to save it out of guilt, or anger, or fear, those are the very forces that have made the problem: the anger and the fear and the guilt. If you're going to save it, save it because you love it.

And the only force that can actually meet aggression and ambition, that can possibly match it, is the force of love. It's Martin Luther King saying after the church was bombed, "We will meet your physical force with soul force," using Gandhi's words. It's the power that makes mothers lift cars off their children.

And it's the quality that allows the Dalai Lama, whose country has been taken over by the communist army, whose temples burned, so much lost, to still have a joyful spirit. He said, "They've taken so much from me. They've taken the temple and the land. Why should I let them take my happiness as well?"

I think people go to see him by the tens of thousands not so much for those Tibetan teachings—half of which are incomprehensible anyway. They're cool, but you don't quite know what he means. They go to hear him laugh, to witness that somebody could carry this much suffering and be so joyful.

Or you look at somebody like Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Prize in Kenya. She planted trees. She was thrown in prison for her activist work. But she got out of prison and gathered her people, and she ended up planting trees until they planted 51 million trees. One tree at a time. Tremendous courage. And she just didn't give up. She was quite positive: "If they throw me in prison and I come out, I'll plant some more trees on government land. I don't care where the land is. We're just going to plant trees." And she began to change the country.

So love gives a different kind of courage and a different kind of power—and it's yours.

And then this third noble truth: yes, there's suffering in the world. And remember where we started—who is your enemy? Mind is your enemy. No one can harm you as much as your own mind untrained. And who is your friend? Mind is your friend. No one can bless you and support you more than your own mind, not your most beloved friends or parents—your own mind.

And so you begin to realize that amidst all of this life that we experience—like the Dalai Lama or Wangari or whoever—there also is joy. The instructions from the Buddha are this:

Live in joy, in love, even among those who hate.

This is instructions in the hatred, political season, injustice. Live in joy and in love even among those who hate. Live in joy and health even among the afflicted. Live in joy and peace even among the troubled. You become the one who carries the peace. Look within, be still, free from fear and attachment. Know the sweet joy of living in the way.

These are instructions.

And so we could be loyal to our suffering, but that's not the end of what we're doing. Len Bergantino, a well-known psychologist, writes about a series of frustrating therapy sessions with a patient who was disconnected, detached, or else trying to please him all the time. "The feeling I had on this particular day was I just didn't want to say one more word to him about anything. So to his surprise, I took out my mandolin and in the most loving, beautiful way I could, I played 'Come Back to Sorrento.' He broke down in tears and cried for the last 40 minutes of the session, saying only, 'Bergantino, you sure earned your money today.'"

And I thought, to think, I wasted all these years talking to people! In good therapy, yes, there are skillful means, but a lot of it is just that you love people, that you really see who they are and you love them. You see their beauty, their dignity, you see their measure of difficulty, and you love them through all this.

So when we talk about letting go, there's a confusion—non-attachment, I'm going to be detached from the world. It's not that.

Detachment means I don't care. That's called indifference. Instead of grasping, what arises is love, commitment, dedication—whether in your relationships or in your practice. If you don't have dedication, you can't meditate. You'll simply run out of the hall the first time it gets unpleasant. If you don't have commitment, you can't do it. If you don't have that in a love relationship, how can it continue?

So it's not about attachment and needing things to be a certain way, but rather to love this other person with dedication and commitment and care. And that's part of what Gary Snyder was talking about. If you want to save the world, save it because you love it—out of your dedication and care and commitment.

"Give me everything mangled and bruised," writes Dina Metzger, "and I will make a light of it to make you weep, and we will have rain, and we will begin again."

Or Pablo Neruda, who writes, "You can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the spring."

There's something in life that wants to renew itself. And you've come here to renew yourself and to learn an equanimity in the midst of all things. To remember that joy is possible. And that it's possible for you.

Even if you're feeling depressed today. Even if the retreat is ending and you're thinking, "I have to go back. I have troubles." Yes, that's okay. Depression is like this. Worry is like this. But who you are—you could see it in the eyes—is so much bigger.

And then you go back and you carry this. There's a piece from Laurie Chapman: "I like nothing more in this world than just listening, sitting on my ass, being happy, doing nothing. And it's not my fault that I have this attitude, because I happen to have an amazingly comfortable ass. It may not look like much, but if you could sit on this baby for two minutes, you'd realize that getting up off this ass would be a crime against nature."

So when you go home and practice, the point isn't to suffer. The point is actually to find some way to sit that reminds you that you can be present under your tree of enlightenment with the joys and sorrows of the world. And then you get up from your seat, as the Buddha did, and walk the dusty roads for those years. You get up from that seat and you bring your blessings to what you touch. And the world needs it.

Isn't the silence sweet?

It will help regulate you. And you've learned so many important things this week. Now it's a beautiful time to stay with it and not abandon the practice that you have.

We have teachings in the morning for you about going back—daily sitting, community, sangha—things like that, that will be very helpful as well.

But right now, enough words. Let's return to silence.

Thank you.

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