Tending Yourself, Tending the World

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:04:46

So welcome back from the break.

When you come and listen to teachings, there's no quiz at the end and no grades. And you don't even have to remember anything. Rather, the invitation is to make the listening its own kind of meditation—not in some weird formal way, you're weird enough without adding to it—but rather to listen and notice if anything resonates in you as true. And if it does, if it reminds your heart or your spirit that this is something that matters, then there's some kind of moment of shared understanding that you can take with you.

Because you already have the wisdom of the ages within you. And of course people hear that and think it's a kind of nice platitude. Unfortunately, it's true. But the other unfortunate thing is that we often don't take the time to really listen to our hearts and listen to what is most important to us, because we all get caught up in the thousand things of the world. So to meditate in some way is an invitation to come back and listen more deeply.

I was thinking what I might say tonight, especially given that it's the first presidential debate—or whatever you call it, bread and circus in Rome—and I want to talk about tending ourselves and tending the world. We'll see if it's helpful or useful or makes sense to you.

I'll start with a story from the British writer Bernard Hare. This happened a couple of decades ago. He was then a young student living on very little money in London.

"The police called at my student hovel in the early evening, but I didn't answer as I thought they'd come to evict me. I hadn't paid my rent in a couple of months. But then I got to thinking my mom hadn't been too good, and what if it was something about her? We had no phone in the hovel and mobiles hadn't been invented yet, so I had to nip down to the phone box. Rang home to Leeds to find my mother was in the hospital and not expected to survive the night. 'Get home, son,' my father said.

"I got to the railway station to find I'd missed the last train. That train was going as far as Peterborough, but I would miss the connecting Leeds train by twenty minutes. I bought a ticket and got on. I was a struggling student, didn't have the money for a taxi the whole way, but I had a screwdriver in my pocket and a bunch of skeleton keys. I was so desperate to get back to my mom, I planned to nick a car in Peterborough or hitchhike or steal some money or something. I knew from my dad's voice that she might die.

"'Tickets, please,' I heard. I fumbled for my ticket, gave it to the guard. He stamped it and stood there

looking at me. I'd been crying, had red eyes.

"'You okay?' he said.

"'Of course I'm okay. Why wouldn't I be? What's it got to do with you in any case?'

"'You look awful,' he said. 'Anything I can do?'

"'Get lost. Mind your own business,' I said. 'That'd be a big help.' I wasn't in the mood for talking. He was only a little bloke. He must have read the danger signal in my body language and tone of voice, but he sat down anyway.

"'If there's a problem, I'm here to help. That's what I'm paid for.'

"I was a big bloke in my prime, so I thought for a second about physically sending him on his way, but it somehow didn't seem right. He wasn't really doing much wrong, and I was going through all the stages of grief at once—denial, anger, guilt, withdrawal, fear, everything but acceptance. I was a cauldron of emotion, and he was in my line of fire. The only thing I could think of to get rid of him was to tell my story.

"'Look, my mom's in the hospital dying. She won't survive the night. I'm going to miss the connection to Leeds at Peterborough. I'm not sure how I'm even going to get home. It's tonight or never. I won't get another chance, so I'm a bit upset. Don't feel like talking, okay? Be grateful if you leave me alone.'

"'Okay,' he said. 'Sorry to hear, son.'"

I'll leave you alone then. Hope you make it home in time." And he wandered down the carriage, taking tickets.

I looked out the window. Ten minutes later, he was back by the side of my table. *Oh no*, I thought, *here we go again*. He touched my arm.

"Listen, when we get to Peterborough, shoot straight over to Platform 1 as quick as you like. The Leeds train will be there."

I looked at him, confused. "Come again?" I said. "What do you mean, is it late or something?"

He said, "No, it isn't late. I just radioed Peterborough. They're going to hold the train for you. As soon as you get on, it goes. Everyone will be complaining about how late it is, but let's not worry about that. You get home—that's the main thing. Good luck and God bless."

And then he was off down the train taking tickets. "Tickets, please. More tickets."

And I suddenly realized what a top class, full-fledged ass I was. Some of us have had that experience in our own lives. I chased him down the train. I wanted to give him all the money from my wallet, my driver's license, my keys, name my firstborn child—but I knew he'd be offended. I caught up and grabbed

his arm.

"It's okay," he said. He had a warm smile and real compassion in his eyes. He was a good man for its own sake.

"I wish I had some way to thank you."

"Not a problem," he said. "If you need to thank me, the next time you see someone in trouble, you help them out. That will pay me back amply. Tell them to pay you back the same way, and soon the world will be a better place."

I was at my mother's side when she died in the early hours of the morning. Even now I can't think of her without remembering the conductor on that late-night train, and to this day I won't hear a bad word said about British Rail.

My meeting with the conductor changed me from a selfish, potentially violent hedonist into a decent human being—but it did take a little time. I've paid him back a thousand times since then. I tell the younger people that I now work with in juvenile hall and so forth. And I'll keep on doing it till the day I die. 'You don't owe me nothing,' I say to these young people. 'And if you think you do, I'll give you the same advice the conductor gave me. Just pass it down the line.'"

So—an opening story about a personal moment of kindness and connection. And of course it is personal, but it's more than personal.

Yesterday I met a couple of people who had just flown back from the celebration and the opening of the new African American Museum in Washington, D.C., which from all accounts that I've read is absolutely magnificent. They were standing there telling me about it—they'd been involved in the building and support for it—and they were weeping as they talked. They said it is filled with such amazing art and literature and the sense of beloved community, but also the artifacts of tragedy and pain: Emmett Till's coffin, Ku Klux Klan outfits that have blood on them, pictures of lynchings—all those kinds of things—but also uplift and magnificence of the art and the literature and the things that were created in pride.

And I thought about the story of one of my favorite reads of these last decades, a book called *Bury the Chains* by Adam Hochschild. He describes a group of a dozen folks who met in a tea shop or a printer shop in England in the 1780s and '90s, when slavery was still the major economic engine of the British Empire—that and sugar in the Caribbean and Latin America. Sugar was the oil of the time, and that was where all the money was coming from.

They met—some of them were Quakers, some weren't—and the head of this was a man named Thomas Clarkson, who ended up riding on horseback thirty thousand miles around England, bringing some ex-slaves who were well-spoken and articulate about the terrors of the Middle Passage, about what slavery actually was like, into the living rooms of English people around the country. After thirty years,

this small group of people, which grew into a movement, were able to effect in the British Parliament the law that outlawed slavery in the British Empire. Starting with twelve people.

And the Quakers who worked a lot with Thomas Clarkson—they wouldn't take their hats off for the king. "We only take our hats off for God."

But when Thomas Clarkson died, all the Quakers in England took their hats off.

So there is the momentary tending of another person on a train, of someone in trouble. And there's the tending of the injustice and the justice that's needed in the world.

And you might have hoped you were coming here tonight to escape from politics. Veronica Shoffstall, the poet, has written a charm for you called "A Charm Against the Language of Politics":

After you've compared the candidates' slippery platforms, say over and over the names of things, the clean nouns. Weeping birch, tanager, damask rose. Read field guides, atlases, gravestones. At the store, bless each apple by kind: Macintosh, winesap, delicious, Jonathan. Enunciate the vegetables and herbs: okra, cilantro, calendula. After a speech on compromising the environment, recite the tough, silky structure of webs: tropical stick, ladder web, mesh web, filmy dome, funnel web. Chant the spiders: comb-footed, round-headed, garden cross, feather-legged, black-faced. Remember that most short verbs are ethical: hatch, grow, spin, trap, eat. Dig deep, pronounce clearly, pull the words in over your head, and hole up until it's time to hatch.

But you really can't escape politics any more than you can escape death or taxes. You'll see—it's coming. Because underneath, in human incarnation, there is suffering. And there's also our care for one another. Both are true.

When we look at the political world, there are so many lenses we can use. One of them is that it's a way to tend to people's fears and desires and suffering. How do we tend to our suffering?

I just got a book called *I Wish My Teacher Knew*, filled with handwritten letters, mostly by second and third graders:

I wish my teacher knew that I don't have pencils at home to do my homework.

I wish my teacher knew that my mom doesn't sign my reading log because she can't read.

I wish my teacher knew that after my mom got diagnosed with cancer, I've been without a home three different times this year.

I wish my teacher knew that my dad works two jobs and I don't see him much.

I wish my teacher knew that I get worried when my little brother gets scared and wakes me up every night.

I wish my teacher knew that I love animals and I would do anything for my animals. I would love to work at

the SPCA so I could help animals get adopted.

I wish my teacher knew that I'm smarter than she thinks.

You hear the spirit of these little kids. And you also know—I remember teaching at an education conference—yes, it's great to teach STEM: science and technology and engineering and math. But you can't learn math when your parents are in the middle of a terrible divorce, when there isn't money to pay the rent, when you're worried about the health of somebody in your family and there are no resources.

Part of what politics speaks to is really what we have to tend to as human beings: the suffering that each person carries. No one in this room is exempt from it. And the care that's there in our hearts. Because you hear those stories and you think about that child, you think about the teachers in that child's classroom, and what it means not just to see the papers that are submitted, but also somehow to see both the tears and the tender heart and the possibility in that human being.

Now, mostly politics is driven by fear. H.L. Mencken, who was a great political commentator, said a hundred years ago that the whole aim of politics is to create a continual state of alarm—to frighten and menace the populace with an endless series of hobgoblins, almost all unreal, as a way to gain power. That's one assessment of politics.

Another way to understand it is that politics is ritualized warfare. In the old days, the Republicans and the Democrats—and maybe the Libertarians or Greens would chime in, the smaller armies—would get in their tanks or on their horses and pull their knights out and see who gets the power and who gets to run the country. That's how it worked for a very long time among human beings.

Even though it is painful to watch at times, our political system, and in certain ways still quite problematic, at least it's done as a ritual kind of warfare. It is warfare, and you can see people approaching it as a battle. But it's not literally enacted.

So then when you see what happens and how messy it is, it's not so surprising. Because politics has become our way of solving the question of who gets the power, who makes the decisions for us in government. And there's a lot of conflict in it.

Now the sad thing is that, because of what Megan said, politics is often driven by fear. And we end up forging bonds of hatred rather than bonds of love. James Baldwin writes, "I believe one of the reasons that people cling to their hate and prejudice so stubbornly is they sense that once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with their own pain."

And so we project our pain or our fear or insecurity—because we are insecure. Anybody in this room not insecure? Come on. As Rilke the poet said, ultimately it's upon our vulnerability that we depend. Because we're vulnerable to the people who are driving the other way on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, and somebody could just turn their wheel and crash into us in a moment. We're vulnerable to the air that we

breathe and the Fukushima nuclear reactor and how many particles of cesium or whatever are in our air or water. We're vulnerable to one another. Human life is tender and vulnerable as well as being robust. This is a reality for us.

And so instead of understanding that the human lot is also insecure—that security is a superstition—we project it on the communists. They're our enemy, the enemy du jour. Or the Mexicans, or the immigrants, or the gays, or the Muslims—whatever the enemy du jour. They're the ones we have to be afraid of. And if they weren't there, then everything would be hunky-dory. That kind of whipping up of fear as a way to solve our problems doesn't lead to much happiness for us.

But it turns out that there are other ways to meet insecurity, which is partly why we meditate. From Martin Luther King: "Now there's a final reason that I say love your enemies. It's this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there's a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep loving them and they can't stand it too long. Oh, they'll react in many ways in the beginning. They'll react with guilt feelings and sometimes they'll just hate you more at that time. But you just keep loving them and by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That's love, you see. It's redemptive. There's something about love that builds up and is creative, and there's something about hate that tears down and is destructive."

When I was at the first Buddhist White House leadership gathering last year and gave a teaching to sum up what we were doing, there were all these beautiful, wise teachings that the Buddha had given to kings and ministers of his age, where he said: If you want to have a wise society, a healthy society, then answer these questions. Do the members of that community meet regularly in harmony, discuss things in harmony, and depart in harmony? If so, they will prosper and not decline. Do they follow and honor the wisdom of past elders? They will prosper and not decline if they do. Do they tend and care for the natural world around them, the environment? Do they care for women and children and the most vulnerable among them? When they meet, do they treat all community members with respect and dignity? If so, they will prosper and not decline. And do they cultivate their own personal mindfulness and loving-kindness? So then they can be expected to prosper and not decline.

These are ancient teachings. And you hear them and they resonate. They're beautiful. But here's the interesting part: they're not really a big surprise. We kind of know this, right? But what I was able to say after talking about this and many other things at the White House is that these are not just ideals. The best news is that there are ways to develop them for human beings. All the ten thousand studies and papers in modern neuroscience in the last couple of decades on compassion practice and mindfulness training show that through the power of our attention, through the cultivation of compassion in a systematic way, of forgiveness, of loving-kindness, mindfulness of body and emotions—whether it's in little kids or grown-ups, whether it's in medical settings or business or education—these trainings rewire us. They actually give us the tools to learn how to be in the presence of conflict and difficulty and fear in a centered and kind way.

So the beautiful news is not just that these are great ideals, which they are, kind of universal across wise cultures, but that you as a human being have the capacity to grow and develop in these just as surely as you could plant a seed in a garden and water it and tend it and let the sunlight and all the nourishment of that, whatever you put to amend the soil, and beautiful things will grow. It turns out to be true for the human heart.

Now, what does the Dharma—the teachings traditionally of Buddhist psychology and the kind of practices that we do—actually have to contribute to all of this? Well, first of all, underlying it is the deep wisdom that what we need in the world, especially at this time, is not more technological advance, although that's marvelous.

Nanotechnology, biotechnology, greater computers, the worldwide web, space technology—all of this is very cool, astonishing actually. But as one of the chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, we are a nation of nuclear giants and ethical infants. The outer development of humanity now has to be matched by inner development—by the cultivation of understanding interdependence, by developing the capacity to attend and listen, by the growth of compassion and all these qualities.

The meaning of the word *Dharma*, which means truth, which means the teachings, has many dimensions. My teacher Ajahn Chah said Dharma means the heart. That was his translation. And it means that when we approach the world through the Dharma heart, we live not with fear but with trust. It doesn't mean that fear doesn't arise—it does—but there's a deeper sense of trust underneath it. As Nelson Mandela said, coming out of twenty-seven years in Robben Island Prison, "It never hurts to see the good in someone. They often act the better because of it." And Mother Teresa's words were, "If we have no peace, it is because we've forgotten that we belong to each other, that we're family."

So the first thing that the Dharma teaches us is how to quiet the mind and open the heart and begin to listen more deeply—to connect with ourselves, to connect with our deepest values, and to connect with one another. Without something like this, we can flail around like a boat without a rudder. Everything that comes, whether good or bad, knocks us around each day. But as you learn to practice, as you undertake this training of presence and centeredness, of loving awareness, as the Tao Te Ching asks: "Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving until the right action arises by itself? Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate in action and thought, you reconcile with all being."

There is something offered to us in these practices, in the contemplative dimension of humanity found across the world, in so many traditions that remind us there is a different way to live. When Mahatma Gandhi took one day a week in silence, he was doing so in the middle of deconstructing the entire British Empire. There were huge demonstrations and marches with hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people in India—battles and all of this. And Gandhiji would say, "Well, Thursday's my day off. I have to be quiet that day." They would say, "But we need you." And he would reply, "You may need me, but I need to

listen to something deeper and bigger." He would get quiet for that day every week and listen—like a Sabbath that we all need—to what he could do that was the purest, the most genuinely helpful, the most honorable with his life. What a beautiful set of questions to ask ourselves.

In the Dhammapada, the ancient verses from the Buddha's time: "Meditate. Live purely. Be quiet. Do your work with mastery. Like the moon, come out from behind the clouds. The one who awakens shines with the radiance of spirit." Come out and shine like the moon. But first, quiet yourself. Quiet the mind. Tend the heart. Come back to yourself. Let what is beautiful in you—what is beautiful in each one of you—have space to be heard and listened to, to blossom and grow.

Because who you are, in the end, is spirit, consciousness. There are all kinds of words for it—loving awareness. How did you get into that human body? You don't even remember very well, do you? Your parents did something, but whatever. They did a lot of things, but that one made you. Who you are is the spirit that was born into this body. And that's what will leave the body when you die. You think you're the kale and pasta that you eat? That's just not who you are. Vegetables and yogurt—that's not it. All right, well then maybe I'm my feelings and thoughts. I hope not, really. They change. You feel one thing and fifteen seconds later you feel something else. Feelings and thoughts are beautiful things, but they're not who you are. You are the witness to this. You are the consciousness that was born into this body. Who you are is loving awareness itself.

When my teacher went to talk to his great master more than fifty years ago, he said, "I've had all these great meditation experiences."

He found this great master. The master said, "Oh, you missed the point. Those are just like movies on the screen. The only question is, who's having those experiences? Who are you really?" Turn your attention back and become the one who knows—that was his expression—the witness to it all. Rest in loving awareness.

And then you'll see joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame. Anybody not have those? They keep changing. But there is a space of knowing that is always present and available, that can allow for and contain and hold all things with a tender heart—with compassion and love and awareness together.

A new book just came out a couple of days ago that friends of mine helped create, called *The Book of Joy*. It's a week-long dialogue between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu. They're old buddies. And the principal question in the book is: How can you two, who have suffered so much—Tutu under the apartheid regime and the kinds of suffering in South Africa that were enormous, all those deaths; and the Dalai Lama with the destruction of Tibetan culture, being in exile for more than fifty years—how can you two laugh? How can you two be joyful? What do you have to teach us about this?

As you read it, you just feel their spirit. I say very often, I think people go to hear the Dalai Lama not for all

those great teachings that he does—those fantastic Tibetan teachings that no one quite understands but they seem really cool—or even the fact that he's this Nobel Peace laureate, this wise political figure. People go to hear him laugh. That he can sit up there after all that he's been through and giggle and laugh this deep belly laugh and love life.

So they're talking about their age—they're both in their eighties. "Yeah, I went to see a German specialist for my knee," the Dalai Lama said. "He found my physical condition pretty good, but then he told me my knees were the problem. He said, 'You're not eighteen years old anymore, you're eighty years old, so nothing much can be done.' I felt that was really a great teaching. It's very important to think about impermanence. He reminded me I'm eighty years old. That's wonderful. But my friend, you're even older than me."

"Are you showing off?" the Archbishop says.

"Oh, yeah," he says. He goes on: "Something else happened. The media at the airport said this was a special occasion. They said, 'You must be very happy to have Archbishop Tutu visiting.' I told them, 'Yes, indeed, I'm happy. I'm very happy. I'm receiving one of my very good friends. Firstly, on the human level, he's a very good human being. Secondly, he's a religious leader, a serious practitioner who respects different religious traditions. And then thirdly, and most important, he's my very, very close friend.'"

"You are flattering me," said Tutu.

"So then I told them that you often used to describe me as a mischievous person. So I said, I also consider you a mischievous person. And the meeting of two mischievous persons is wonderful. So happy reunion for us, and happy birthday." And they laughed.

"Thank you very much," the Archbishop said. "Thank you for welcoming us. Thank you for this great lunch. And thank you for putting out all those people along the road to welcome us."

You just get the spirit of these two world figures having a good time with one another, and how happy it makes you.

So what the Dharma has to offer first is a reminder of who we are. And this leads into a kind of equanimity.

It offers equanimity. You know the Ojibwa saying that's so often spoken: "Sometimes I go about pitying myself when all the while I'm being carried by great winds across the sky." There is a reality that is vast, that we are a part of, and we can tune in to this mystery, to this vastness.

And we know it again when we sit quietly, or we take a walk in the hills, or we walk by the ocean, or watch that harvest moon that rose last week in such an amazing way, or we sit with someone giving birth. Give birth ourselves. Or sit with someone who's dying. Or make love, which is a wonderful, mysterious, wild thing to do, actually. Kind of strange, isn't it? But cool. Yes, we like it. It's just—you know, these bodies

are really weird. But wonderful at the same time. Or we listen to an amazing piece of music and all of a sudden we remember that we're connected with something so vast.

And we also sense the ephemeralness of it all, the emptiness of it, which is mysterious. I drove by the house that I had lived in, in Woodacre, for almost thirty years, that we sold a couple of years ago. And I looked at it—there's a new younger family in it. My daughter's thirty-two now and married and off working as a lawyer doing asylum and human rights law. But I looked at it and they'd repainted things, and I thought about all the things that had happened. We got this little bungalow and we put on all kinds of other parts, a new floor and all these gardens, and the people who'd come over and the adventures we'd had. No one remembers it. It's all gone. Except for me, and I'm just barely remembering it, right? It was there. And my daughter a little bit. But that's it. And my ex. It's gone. It's empty. This whole life and all that seems so real—and then what happens to it? It disappears and vanishes into emptiness. Because everything does. It's back there with the dinosaurs and the pharaohs and, you know, Y2K—remember that? Things appear and then they vanish.

And having a vast vision is such a beautiful thing. Because in the vast vision, you can see the turning of the seasons and the turning of the spheres, the magic of the earth making its way around the sun. Now we just came through the turning of the seasons and the last day of summer and the equinox. And it makes things become—they're ephemeral, but they actually become more precious.

What is life, says the Crowfoot elder? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It's the breath of a buffalo in wintertime. It's the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.

And things appear, and they're very tender, and we love them, and then they change. And to have equanimity means that we can see the seasons of change. Civilizations come and go. Political parties come and go. Sometimes there's a lot of suffering in it, which is very sad, and we have to tend to it and try to prevent it. But we can't really prevent change, and we can't really prevent the changing of cycles of how human beings act. But we can take our seat somehow in the midst of it all, in all of the turning of the world, and remember our place in it so that we can plant beautiful seeds wherever we are.

Now John Muir, one of the greatest naturalists ever in the Western world—perhaps not counting the native naturalists, who were many—John Muir, who convinced Teddy Roosevelt to start the National Park System and make Yosemite the first park and all those good things, one of the things he used to do, and there's a fantastic description of it, was to go out in the middle of a storm. You know, when a big storm is coming, we tend to batten down the hatches. But he said:

"On a particular day, one of the most beautiful and exhilarating storms I ever enjoyed in the Sierras occurred in December 1874, when I was exploring one of the tributaries to the Yuba River. The day was pure and balmy, but a bracing wind began, and I lost no time pushing out into the woods to enjoy it, for the danger to life and limb is hardly greater than one experiences crouching deprecatingly beneath a roof. I took a long, tingling scramble through the copses and ceanothus and gained the summit of the highest

ridge in the neighborhood. And then it occurred to me it would be a fine thing to climb one of the trees to obtain a wider outlook and get my ear close to the Aeolian music at its topmost needles.

"I made a choice of the tallest of a group of Douglas spruces that were growing close together like a tuft of grass. Though comparatively young, they were a hundred feet high, and their lithe, brushy tops were rocking and swirling in ecstasy. Being accustomed to climb trees and making botanical studies, I had no difficulty reaching the top, but never before did I enjoy such a noble exhilaration of motion. The tops flapped fairly in the wind as I lashed myself, and the widest sweeps in my treetop described an arc from twenty to thirty degrees. I felt sure of its elastic temper."

This was like a great wave of grain, these huge trees in the wind. "And my eye rolled over the valleys, ridge to ridge, shining foliage, and the sounds of the storm's exuberance, the base of the naked branches and the boles booming like waterfalls, and the tingly vibrations of the pine needles. And I kept my lofty perch for hours, closing my eyes to enjoy the music of life itself."

So whenever you're having a hard sitting in meditation, or you're in the midst of one of those no good, terribly bad, difficult days, think of John Muir and say, "All right, I'm going to lash myself to the top in the middle of this huge storm and feel the movement of the seasons"—the tears that come through you, the grief that comes, the loss, the anger, the fear, the longing, the love, the joy, all the things that make you human. And remember that underneath all of that, there is a possibility of equanimity, of balance in the midst of it all.

That's really part of what the training of the Dharma gives you. Because otherwise, with climate change right there in our midst, or our concerns about elections or the Supreme Court or whatever it may be, we can get lost in a kind of reactivity. This doesn't mean you don't work for what you care about. But when Wes Nisker, a good friend and colleague here, went to talk to Gary Snyder a couple of years ago—Gary was eighty-four at the time, this renowned environmentalist for the last half century, author of *Earth House Hold*, Pulitzer Prize winner—Wes said, "Gary, climate change, the oceans are rising, species are being lost, all kinds of disruption happening. What do you say to us as an environmentalist for all these decades?"

And Gary looked back and said, "Don't feel guilty. If you're going to save it, don't save it out of guilt or anger, because those are the very things that cause the problems. If you're going to save it, save it because you love it. Save it because it's you. It's part of you. It is your heritage. It's your body of the earth."

And so with equanimity, it's not that you can't act, but you have a sense of the storms coming and going—political, climate, whatever—and you find that vastness around it that says, "I can rest in a peaceful heart and I can tend this from a place of understanding rather than a place of fear." Because politics is trying to make you afraid, and you don't have to go down that road.

What's also true is that equanimity has to include suffering. Dina Metzger, friend and poet and activist,

writes: "Give me everything mangled and bruised, and I will make a light of it to make you weep, and we will have rain, and we will begin again." Because even though there is suffering, it turns out that suffering isn't the end of the story—it's only one part of the story, just as the seasons turn.

And so here are the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu together. At some point in their conversation, Tutu says, "How come you're not morose? How come you're not a sourpuss with all that's happened to you?" The Dalai Lama had never heard the word "sourpuss" before. They'd had a couple of conflicts as they were talking about different ideas about God, with their very highly developed intellects, and they were arguing about it in a very friendly way. And then at some point, the Dalai Lama pretended to reach over and choke Archbishop Tutu with his hands. And the Archbishop turned back to him and said, "Hey, the cameras are on us. We have to act like holy men. Come on."

There's something in this, in which he goes on to say, "Don't be a sourpuss." And they've kind of figured it out. There's something in equanimity that says you don't contribute to the world through your fear, through your depression, through your anxiety. You actually contribute to the world by bringing your steadiness and your love and your good heart.

The other thing that makes equanimity possible, and that the Dharma contributes, is laughter. It's called the laughter of the wise. I remember one night I was teaching here with a Tibetan Lama, and I was going along like I am with you. And he said, "Oh, I see what you do." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Yeah, you get them to laugh. And then when their mouths are open, you can pop the pill of wisdom in."

And so here's Tutu again, talking about laughter. He says, "It's so important to be able to have a sense of humor no matter how difficult things get. I remember one time we came to a township just outside of Johannesburg where the apartheid forces had provided weapons to one group and they had killed quite a number of people. We were having a meeting of bishops close by, and I was part of those leading the funeral of the victims of that massacre.

"So imagine: here you are, there's been terrible killing in the community. The people were obviously extremely angry, and I didn't know what to do. Yes, I cared about their grief, but then I remembered a story that had been told about how, at the beginning of creation, God had molded us out of clay and then put us into a kiln, like you do with bricks. God put one lot in and then got busy with other things and forgot about those he'd put in. And after a while, he remembered and rushed to the kiln, where the whole lot was burned to cinders. They say this is how we Black people came about."

Everyone laughed a little.

"And then I said, 'Next, God put in a second lot. And this time he was overanxious and opened the oven way too quickly. They weren't well baked, and this second lot came out completely underdone.'"

And that's how white people came about, and you can see it to this day.

But what's true in this is that you can always start again. Here they are in the middle of the suffering of the world, and yet the Dharma reminds us that it's possible—that suffering isn't the end of the story, that it's possible to take the suffering that we're granted or given and use it to develop the great heart of compassion. And that becomes the next gift of the Dharma: that compassion and wisdom can be the response to suffering and conflict.

As Abraham Lincoln said, "I've always found that mercy bears richer fruits than seeking strict justice." What a thing to say in the middle of a civil war that cost millions of lives and tore the country apart, where there would be so much cause for bitterness. "I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than seeking strict justice."

You remember a few years ago the terrible thing that happened to the Amish community when a shooter went into a schoolroom in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania and kept ten girls in there and began to shoot them, killing five little girls and wounding others. The extraordinary thing was that within hours the Amish community forgave the killer and his family. News of the instant forgiveness stunned the world almost as much as the incident itself. Many lauded the Amish, but others worried that hasty forgiveness was emotionally unhealthy.

In dozens of interviews with Amish people, this writer discovered something else. Members of the community began offering words and hugs of forgiveness when the blood was barely dry on the schoolhouse floor. Her grandmother laughed when asked if the forgiveness was orchestrated. "You mean that some people actually thought we called a meeting to plan forgiveness?" As the father of a slain daughter explained, "Our forgiveness was not our words, it was what we did."

Members of the community visited the gunman's widow at her home with food and flowers and hugged members of his family. There were few words, but it was primarily their hugs, gifts, and mere presence that were acts of grace communicating Amish forgiveness. Of the seventy-five people at the killer's burial, almost half were Amish, including many parents who had buried their own children just the day before. The Amish people contributed to a fund for the shooter's family.

So what is our response to suffering in our own life and in the world around us? "Hatred never ceases by hatred," says the Buddha, "but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law."

And so we have forgiveness practice. Many of you have done it, and there are beautiful books on it in the bookstore. We have compassion training, and we have the training to see the noble truths—that there is suffering, there are causes to suffering, which are hatred, fear, greed, and ignorance, and there's an end to it, which is the opposite: the cultivation of love and courage, of generosity and clarity, and of gratitude.

The roots of suffering are a false sense of separate identity. We're different than them. We have to protect ourselves. The roots of love and wisdom are interdependence. "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, woven together in a mutual garment of destiny," says Martin Luther King. To see with the

heart, which is the Dharma, we see that it's us together. And there comes then tenderness and compassion. Whatever we value, whatever we celebrate, whatever we enforce in our lives, in our words, in our deeds, and in our politics is what will grow.

Here's the Dalai Lama again. What do you do about things that really need attention in this world? He says, "If something can be done about the situation, what need is there to be dejected? Let's just do it. And if nothing can be done about it, what use is there to be dejected? Because we can't change it."

The Archbishop said, "People know it in their head, but it doesn't help them. They still worry."

And the Dalai Lama went on, "Many of us have become refugees. There are a lot of difficulties in my own country." He cupped his hands into a small circle. "When I look at that, then I worry. I worry about the Tibetan people and all that I care about." But then he widened his hands. "But when I look at the world, there are a lot of problems everywhere. Other parts of the People's Republic of China, for example—the Uighur Muslim community has problems and suffering. And then outside of China, there are many more problems and more suffering, and refugees streaming across borders everywhere. Refugees like me."

When we see these things, we realize that not only do we suffer, but so do many of our human brothers and sisters. And when we look from a wider perspective, we reduce worrying and instead are motivated to tend to the world because it is our brothers and sisters. It shifts from being your personal suffering to becoming the pain of the world. This is part of what you're given, but it's not the end of the story.

The Zen teacher Karlfried Graf Dürckheim writes: "The person who, really being on the way, falls upon hard times in the world will not, as a consequence, turn to those friends who offer them refuge and comfort and encourage the old self to survive. Rather, they will seek out someone who will faithfully and inexorably help them to risk themselves, so that they may endure the difficulty and pass courageously through it. Only to the extent that a person exposes themselves over and over again to annihilation can that which is indestructible be found within them."

And in this daring lies dignity and the spirit of true awakening.

So trust, equanimity, a steadiness of heart. A wisdom that sees that suffering is caused by greed and fear and hatred and confusion, ignorance—and that suffering is ended by love and clarity and understanding and generosity. We know how to do this.

The development of compassion, especially in conflict. When you're in conflict, the question to ask of the other person in your heart—you don't have to say it out loud—is: What are your fears? What are your needs? What are your longings? What's behind this? Listen from heart to heart.

In kindergarten, when kids start hitting each other with the blocks, you say, "Put the block down and use your words," right? Could we not do that in other parts of the world for larger kids? Could we not do it in Syria? I could name fifty countries. Come on, use your words. Could we not begin to listen to what each

other is afraid of? Because that's what's underneath a lot of it. And tend one another. Listen deeply.

I have a friend I'm in touch with, just tried to reach him yesterday, who's down in Colombia as part of the peace agreement. He's been working there for twenty-five years as a peacemaker, for the signing of the deal between the FARC and the Colombian government—to stop the last major war in all of South and North America. And it's really, hallelujah, it's an amazing thing because it's been fifty years. Reconciliation is possible. It is possible, but it requires us to pay attention in a different way—not from our small sense of self and our righteousness and all those things, but to quiet ourselves and say, what really matters?

I received this letter from a friend who sits here:

"My father was not able to communicate his love for his children, even though I found out later that he did love us. He just expressed it in ways that children couldn't necessarily understand. After my mom died, I told my dad I wanted a relationship with him, and we had many good years, but none of my siblings did this. My brother died at forty-eight of brain cancer. In his last few months, his wife called me and said Jay's one missing thing was that his father had never told him he loved him. I got on the phone and told my dad to say something on his next visit, but according to Daddy, the subject never came up.

"On Jay's last day, his wife Kathy called to say Jay would probably die within an hour. At that point, he was blind and paralyzed and hadn't spoken for more than a week. I had Kathy hold the phone to Jay's ear and told him that I loved him. Then I called my father. I said, 'Daddy, you have one more chance. Jay will probably die today. Pick up the phone and tell him that you love him.'

"And my father did just that. He called Jay. He told him that he loved him. And Jay, who hadn't spoken for more than a week, started talking and talked to Dad for more than an hour. Jay didn't even die that day. He rallied and lived for another month and spent a lot of time during that month talking often, enjoying his new relationship with his father."

It's possible. It's possible for us as human beings. And it's never too late. It's never too late to love.

So we set the compass of our heart in the best directions that we can. We incline ourselves to what's beautiful. And in this text the Buddha says, "Others may be cruel. We shall not be cruel. Thus we should incline our mind. Others will take what is not given. We will abstain from this."

Thus we shall incline our mind. Others will kill living beings. We will protect living beings. Thus we will incline our mind. Others will speak falsehood. We shall speak truth. Thus should we incline our mind. Others will be uncaring. We shall be compassionate. Thus we shall incline our mind. Others will be greedy and envious. We shall not be greedy and envious. Thus shall we incline our mind. We shall be generous. Others will be arrogant. We shall not be arrogant but humble. Thus we should incline our mind. Others will lack wisdom and compassion. We will cultivate wisdom and live with compassion. Thus we should incline our mind.

And it really speaks to the possibilities of us as human beings. What intention do we set our heart upon? What integrity do we most value? Others will slander. Others will cause harm. We will not do so. We will live in a different way. We will live with nobility and dignity. Thus we shall incline the mind. Others will be uncaring. We will be compassionate.

Now it doesn't mean when you're compassionate that you therefore have to go out and do everything for everyone. That would be a violence against yourself. For some of you it will be to raise a mindful and beautiful child. For some it will be to create art that redeems the world, that lets people see the wonder of it anew. For some it will be to run a conscious business. For many it will also be to become activists and work to heal injustice and to care for those who need their basic life to be valued. Put down the guns, bandage the wounds, carry the water, share the bread. These are all the works that you might do from a place of stillness, from quieting the mind and opening the heart.

And it's never been done before by somebody like you in the vast universe of a trillion stars, billions of galaxies. There's never been one being exactly like you. It's kind of wild, isn't it? That's the kind of abundance of life itself. "I'm going to make a new person that we've never seen, even though we've had billions of them before. Look at this one, try this one out." And you're one of them. It's never been done before.

There's a story of two acquaintances who drove up to the botanical garden in Montreal, a very special temple garden that had been moved from China to the West, home to the largest bonsai collection outside of Asia. They approached the massive gate and discovered that day it was locked. One of them panicked, ready to demand entry after driving four hundred miles from another country to see this. His husband Robert, like an Asian sage, simply treated the situation as a koan, a riddle to be solved. He stood quietly for a time, and then he began to walk the outer wall of the garden, which was high, insurmountable. His partner was frustrated, but Robert kept slowly walking along the high wall. The garden stretched for two hundred acres or more, and his companion wondered, "Are we going to walk its entire perimeter?" The thought made him cranky, yet Robert kept walking mindfully and slowly. And suddenly, when they'd walked farther than was originally in their view, the walls disappeared. In fact, the garden itself had no walls, save for the façade at its entrance. They simply walked through the open grass to a path that welcomed them. What had seemed like an impenetrable barrier, a locked threshold, was actually a symbolic gate waiting for their patience and understanding.

I hope somehow in these words and in our sitting together, you sense the invitation extended to each of us—not to storm the gates of awakening, but to walk patiently along what appears to be an insurmountable wall until we discover, with wonder, that it was never really there at all.

The threshold awaits. Not locked, never locked—simply waiting for our patience, our understanding, and our willingness to take the next step.

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