The Generous Heart (Drop-in at Spirit Rock)

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:02:14

So, let yourself quiet down. Sit at ease and let yourself listen.

There's a lot of excitement in the room tonight. It's wonderful.

And as you listen, again, as I said before, it's not particularly that you have to remember anything. There's no quiz, no grades. You really want to listen to see if something rings true in your own heart, in your own experience, that's of value. It's really a reminder of something. And it gives you, as you listen, just as we sat together in silence for a bit, a chance to do your own inner reflection.

Tonight I'd like to start a series of teachings over this year by talking about the generous heart.

In these demanding times there is, in a simple way, a call for medicine—medicine of healing. Healing of the spirit and the heart, healing of the community, and healing of the earth. Just as Spirit Rock offers itself as one form of sanctuary, the deeper sanctuary, of course, is the inner sanctuary that we find, the inner garden.

It's an interesting thing, actually. I was teaching, working with some peace groups in Palestine and Israel some years ago. I did a whole big benefit and raised a bunch of money for teachers to be offering these teachings in Arabic, in the Arabic community. One of the teachers, a new teacher that I was counseling and working with—I talked about how there's this wonderful tradition of going up in the mountains or going out to some holy place, and it must be beautiful. There must be some tradition where you can speak about going out in the desert and listening in some deep way.

And he said, no, no, no, I tried that. That's actually a kind of banishment. He said when he tried to talk to people about going out in the desert and listening, apparently that's considered more of a punishment. So he was not sure what the right image was to use for meditation.

As we talked further, what came from him was the walled garden—you know, in the Sultan's court or at the oasis. There's this beautiful walled garden that everyone has within them, a beautiful garden that they can tend and listen to. That was the language. You have to find your language for what is your own sanctuary.

The medicine of the Dharma—Dharma is a Sanskrit word that means truth, the path of awakening, teachings; it has multiple meanings. One of the most fundamental descriptions of Buddhist teachings is *da na sila bhavana*, which is the Buddhist recipe for human happiness. *Dana* means generosity, which we'll talk about tonight. *Sila* means virtue or honesty or living a life of integrity. And *bhavana* means the

cultivation of the mind and heart in a wise way. So it's outer and inner.

Yesterday I went with my daughter to the airport to join in with a couple of thousand people at the international part of SFO. She's a young immigration lawyer, an asylum lawyer, so she was part of a group of young lawyers making themselves available to families of people who'd been detained or other people who were worried. There was a group of them, some who spoke Arabic and Farsi and all kinds of translators, and that part was great. Then there were these different demonstrations with, as you can imagine, very creative signs of all different kinds, and lots of chanting—literally a couple of thousand people.

My favorite, actually—there would be groups of three hundred or five hundred people here or there in the terminal—was one where people were chanting. There was a whole series of different chants. One of the chants was: "No ban, no fear, refugees are welcome here."

My favorite one had a really good jazz band in the middle, a brass jazz band, New Orleans style, with trombone and trumpet and saxophone. They'd start to chant, "No ban, no fear, refugees are welcome here," and the drummer would kick off, and then the sax would come in. Even the cops were smiling. They were trying to contain it, but the police were actually very good. There were some rowdy people too, as there always is. But there was some feeling that it wasn't just a demonstration against something, but that there was some love in it, some artistry, that there was something bigger, some joy that was being carried—that this is who we are.

The signs and the things that were most moving were not against something, but they were proclaiming that which we know to be noble and beautiful.

Now, I don't want to continue tonight to talk about politics. One could, but one wants to turn off the news as well. Nor do I assume that everyone in this room has a particular political view. People voted all kinds of ways and in all kinds of directions. So I want to talk about something deeper that I believe comes from the teachings of the Dharma, or the best of the Buddhist teachings, something that nourishes the heart and the community, whatever your particular political view or your particular orientation—something that's more universal.

But I do have to remind you: last year in the spring, when there was all this talk about the fear of refugees from Syria, I asked in a Monday class, a couple of times actually, how many people would seriously consider taking a Syrian woman, or a woman and children, into their home for a year to help them get settled here. A hundred hands went up, and I took a picture of it.

And I sent it to President Obama and Secretary of State, and to a whole bunch of them, to Dianne Feinstein and so forth, saying, you know, I want you to understand that there are people who aren't afraid.

I also need to let you know that the NSA now knows who you are. But they've known who you are for a long time, so you don't have to worry about it.

But whatever your political point of view or your orientation, what I want to speak about tonight as the beginning of this series is the teachings on Buddha nature. They're sometimes described as the inner perfections. And what they talk about is what is innate in us—that we can awaken to, that we can carry and honor the life that we've been given.

And so I'll tell some stories, which are stories of human possibility and the great possibility of happiness and freedom and generosity and liberation and joy for each person, no matter what your circumstances. And maybe in a way, the stories and the teachings also can help break the spell of fear, the small sense of self, the sense of separateness—that when we feel really separate gets guided by fear or rage or revenge or those kinds of things.

And this is in that way a really radical teaching. It shifts us away from me first, or us first, or greed or hatred—not because those things are bad, it's not a judgmental teaching—but simply because those don't lead to happiness. And the teachings of the Dharma, Buddhist teachings, fundamentally are teachings of the possibility of human happiness for us individually and for us collectively. On this earth.

So here's an old story. Long ago, when you were much, much younger than you are now, there was a Buddha previous to Siddhartha Gautama named Dipankara Buddha. He was supposed to have been a being of great radiance and beauty and tremendous generosity and love, and he affected everyone that he encountered. And so the Buddha that we teach about or talk about, the historical Buddha of 2,500 to 2,600 years ago, in this story met this previous Buddha and was so taken by the beauty of this heart and this being that he said, "I will do whatever it takes to become like him, to become like this." And he made a vow that however long it takes, he too would come to this great possibility of liberation and love that he now saw human beings could embody.

And then it took him, as is true for Buddhas in these stories of mythology, a while. The description of "a while" is called 100,000 Mahakalpas and Four Immensities. And a Mahakalpa, one Mahakalpa, is this: there's a mountain as high as Mount Vepula, a little higher than Mount Everest. And every hundred years, a bird drags a silk scarf across the top of the mountain, wearing it away a tiny bit. And when that Mount Everest-sized mountain is worn down by this silk scarf, that's one Mahakalpa. So we're talking time here.

And over those 100,000 Mahakalpas and the four immensities, the Buddha-to-be—all of us as Buddhas-to-be—practiced generosity, compassion, patience, steadfastness, wisdom, loving-kindness, truthfulness, all the great virtues of the heart, again and again and again, until they had become fully realized.

There are two wonderful huge volumes of stories of the past lives of the Buddha. Whether one believes them or not, they're kind of the mythological tales, like the fairy tales of India—when the Buddha was born as the king of the deer, or as an elephant king, or a tiger. Many of them are animal fables, and they're extraordinary ones.

The ones about generosity, which I'll talk about tonight—there was the Buddha who was born as a rabbit. There was a great yogi in the mountains who was practicing, about to achieve some deep enlightenment but who hadn't eaten for a long time. The rabbit felt so moved by the dedication of this yogi that he threw himself into the fire to offer food for the yogi. That's the kind of excessive generosity of these stories.

I remember being at Mother Teresa's in Calcutta several times to volunteer. There was a sign in one place that the younger nuns had put up. The sign said, "Mother says, let them eat you up." And it's kind of stunning, because when you're in circumstances of great difficulty or great suffering, often the inner protective part wants us to pull back—which has its place. I'm not saying you should all get eaten up, not yet anyway. But this was like the tales of the Buddha: Mother says, let them eat you up. No matter what is needed, you offer yourself. So that's the kind of tales these come from.

And whoever dedicates themselves in the way that this great being, the Buddha to be, did, is called a Bodhisattva. Someone dedicated to bringing awakening to fulfillment in this world. Whatever happens, no matter the political changes, the civilizations that rise and fall, the empires and so forth, this is the dedication to generosity and truthfulness and compassion and wisdom and loving kindness that is timeless.

Now, you might hear about this and even though it's a recipe for happiness, it seems a little daunting. How am I going to make myself perfectly generous? It's called perfections—perfectly truthful or perfectly compassionate and so forth. And perfection is really not a good word for it. How am I going to perfect my personality? You've tried that. It didn't work very well. Perfect my body. You've tried that too. It doesn't really work. How about a perfect cleaning job, a perfectly clean car or apartment? Then what happens? A little while later it gets dirty again. Perfection can't be found in that way, in that very limited idea.

And so when you hear these stories, because they're archetypal or mythological—they're not a therapeutic story or a psychological story or a literal story—they don't exist in time. This is really a story about that which is timeless and universal, in all times and in all places. It is available when you step out of the small sense of fear and you step into another reality. Extraordinary powers and extraordinary capacities. The mothers who lift cars off their children. The Chinese man with the shopping bags standing in front of that whole long row of tanks. That is there in us. And as Martin Luther King said, everybody can be great because everybody can serve. Everybody has it in them to offer something that's beautiful.

Robert Johnson, who was a Jungian analyst and writer, now deceased—he wrote books, little books like *He*, *She*, *We*, Jungian mythological books—he writes about being in India. He says, "I was in India and I got very sick with a fever and great pain over my body, and I could hardly walk. I kept falling down. They took me to a hospital. They must have seen my apprehension as they tried to assure me that they were a very modern facility. 'We have a thermometer,' the nurse reassured me. I found out their one thermometer was passed from one patient to another. In between, they held it under the water faucet just to be safe. My temperature reached 105. And somehow after ten days, I survived."

"While I was hospitalized, I had made a new friend. He came every day to visit me and slept each night on the floor under my bed. Of all my experiences in India for twenty years, this was the most touching. When I was sick, my friend came and slept near me. He said, 'So you wouldn't be frightened or lonely.' Now in America, if I get sick, I can't get anyone to stay with me very long—not to speak of being under my bed—but he slept on the mat there and tended me."

"One day when I was so sick, my new friend Shankar stood at the foot of the bed and said to me, 'Robert, I want to tell you a story about Baba and his friend. Baba's friend got very sick, and Baba came and stood beside him and said to him, only you say the word and I will go to die so that you can live. Robert, for you I am Baba.'"

You have only to say the word and I will die, so you will live.

"Now, that floored me," said Robert. It was like something out of the tale of a thousand and one nights, some fairy tale. How can you hold this? I was shocked by this story. But at least I had the presence of mind to say, "Thank you, Shankar, for this great gift. But please don't do anything rash now. I think I have enough life force that we'll both make it through." And we did. But this was the most astonishing thing that happened to me in all my twenty years of coming and going in India.

There's something in this story, and something in us, that resonates and goes, "Wow." We can really be there for one another. We can be there for this world in a generous way—not because you're supposed to, not because it makes you a better person than somebody else, but because it makes the heart sing, because it makes life come alive, because it brings a deep kind of happiness.

Sometimes these teachings are described as a cultivation or a development or a nurturing, but more deeply they're an invitation to step out of the body of fear, the small sense of self, and reclaim your place, your nobility, of shared compassion in this vast universal heart of ours. "O nobly born," begins the Buddhist text. Remember who you really are.

I have another story, a true story about a man named Sasha Dichter who worked for a large international fund. He was driving home with his family one day—they used to give money to homeless shelters and things like that—when he was struck by a kind of lightning bolt. He realized he'd been making the wrong choice. People would ask him for things, beggars asking for money, people needing help this way or that, and he would give sometimes, and sometimes he wouldn't. In that moment, his heart opened. He said, "I wanted to stop saying no. I needed to break the habit. I decided I was hiding behind some discrimination."

So he made this decision on the spot: for the next month, he would only say yes to whatever anybody requested. Beggars, nonprofits, street musicians, mail solicitations—they would all get a yes. Now it happened to be December, so he got an endless stream of year-end appeals. Friends warned him he'd better be cautious, giving money to strangers who might use it on drugs or alcohol. But for the month, he resisted employing this careful scrutiny. Instead, he said, "We can't know the results of what we do." And

he learned that the smartest philanthropists lead with generosity.

He soon discovered that his experiment was never really about donating money. It was a chance to test what it felt like to live with a totally different orientation. It was a commitment to take a door that had been closed by his own taste and open it to whatever came. And it changed his life after that. He's written about it in different ways.

So this is really the invitation, O nobly born, to discover the first of these ten qualities of your own Buddha nature: the generous heart. And it's universal. There's pleasure in it. There's gratitude that you have things to offer. And we have so much, really.

I remember a friend years ago who'd come out of the Soviet Union when there still was a Soviet Union—those of you who are old enough to remember that—with long bread lines and not much in the stores under that stark communist economic system of the time. They'd come to Marin, come to San Francisco, and a friend took him into a supermarket. He looked around and his jaw dropped. Oh my God, he couldn't believe it, the abundance. And he said, "What is this place? Is this special?" The friend said, "Come with me." They got in the car and drove three blocks away and went into another supermarket. And he stood there and wept.

And he said, "I had no idea that there could be this kind of abundance."

And of course, we take it for granted. You live in enormous abundance, whoever you are in this room. An enormous kind of privilege. But it's not only that kind of abundance—it's also the sunlight and the warmth and, in this case, the safety that you have. You also live with the protection of so many others and goodwill, because they all stop at the red lights when your light is green. They really protect your life. They do. And you protect their lives. They don't go into the market and just grab the goods or grab your money—not very often anyway. You live in a sea of protection and graciousness and tremendous abundance.

So to be generous really means that you begin to feel that already the universe is generous with you. The poet Rumi says, "Walking out of the treasury building, I feel generous. How can anyone be sober in this weather when we've been given so much?"

And you can begin to understand the power of generosity as a practice of liberation. Not because you're supposed to be a good person or something, but because of what it does to the heart and mind. It's really a practice of letting go, of expanding who you are, of trusting in some deep way.

Reflect for a moment, if you will, on someone who has been generous to you. With money or time or love—some benefactor. Someone who's really been generous. Picture them. Think of the ways they've cared. Feel whatever arises.

How does it feel? I experience delight when I think of this person, and gratitude. What does it feel like for

you? Love. Warmth. Joy.

Those who are generous are loved. You could feel the love, the joy, the delight—those qualities that come when you think about someone who's been generous to you.

Now, the next reflection is to think of the times that you've been generous to others and how it feels to you. Whether it's supporting another or offering your love and care, in whatever way it was—your assistance, your money, somebody that you really served generously. And generosity means there's a little stretch to it too. Not that you don't want to do it, but that you expand.

And then remember one more thing. Remember or sense the opposite. Sometime when you felt fearful, worried about money, stingy, hoarding, grasping—fess up. You've all done it. We have. I have too. Frightened about it. And what's that feel like in your life?

It's said that there are three levels of giving in the Buddhist teachings. The first is called tentative giving. "Oh, I've got this coat in my closet, I hardly ever wear it anyway. Maybe I should give it away, it takes up space. But yeah, I kind of like it, but I never wear it." Fine, you kind of give it away to somebody. It's still a beautiful thing. It's actually a lovely thing that you did. Even if there's reluctance, that's fine, it doesn't matter.

But then the next level is called brotherly or sisterly giving, in which you say, "They're like me. I have this coat. I have something really nice. You need one? Sure, let's share." And there's a bigger open heart with brotherly or sisterly giving. Let me just offer to you as if you were part of my family—which you are. Since, again, Mother Teresa says the problem is we draw our family circle too small. So you take them into your family.

And then there's what's called royal giving. The giving of the empress or the emperor, the king or the queen, in which you take the best of what you have and you say, "Here, I give this to you because I know what delight it will bring to you." You're so full of well-being and benevolence, you've got the treasure inside that you can give away anything because you're full of abundance. And it's a really beautiful thing to do kingly or queenly giving.

I remember watching the level of generosity when I was a monk living with an alms bowl in some very remote villages in Laos and Thailand and Southeast Asia, parts of Burma. In the dry season, the villages would be very poor out where I was. There wasn't that much to eat. There was rice, and then there was fish that was stored away with chili peppers and things, what they could grow a little bit, but not very much. We used to get curries that were made even from bats or field mice and things like that because that was the meat that had nourishment in it.

But anyway, we'd go through the village. You had to be silent. And people would come out and they would put some of the food that they'd cooked that morning into your bowl. And you couldn't say thank you or anything. You couldn't say, "Oh my God, you gave me a mango! That's like the best thing of the week." Or

thank you for whatever you get. You just receive it in silence.

And of course, I was thinking I could always wire home to my mom if I got really hungry, and she'd send me a couple hundred dollars, which was the annual income of a family in this village. These were villages that still weren't wired for electricity, so people wove their own cloth and very much sustained their own lives. Very poor, but they would give with so much love.

And I thought, how can I receive this? How dare I take this from somebody who's hungry when I come from a culture where there's so much abundance? But then I realized how much delight they had in giving it. And also that they weren't just giving it to me, but they were giving it to what I represented—the other monks and nuns who came through. We represented something that they so valued in their culture, which was awakening and compassion and loving-kindness and the liberation taught by the Buddha for thousands of years. They said, "Of the little we have, we want to make sure to support this because it brings joy and light into our whole culture and our whole life." And so here we give this to you.

It wasn't really personal. And yet at the same time, I had to receive it and say, okay, I actually better do this stuff. I can't be a slacker, exactly, because their generosity somehow made me rise to the occasion of being maybe a slightly better monk than I might have been otherwise—best as I could on a good day.

So you can begin to hear not the necessity or the judgment or the duty of generosity, but rather the beauty of it and the joy of it, and why it fits into the mandala of an awakened life, why it is actually central to the teachings of living with a liberated heart and liberated mind. What makes us happy, says the Buddha. Generosity is the first of these aspects of Buddha nature.

And it's a practice, as well as an awakening in you, like the story I read. I took a kind of inner intention, a vow, twenty years ago or so, that if I had a thought to give something, I would do it. Because you think about it, and then there's, "Oh, wait a second, that's too much," or "Maybe I shouldn't," or "I should give to other people," or all the kinds of things our minds do. And I said, if I have a thought to give something, I just do it. There may be an occasion I can think of in these years where I haven't, for whatever reason. But most of the time I've done it, and it's been fantastic. I don't even have to think about it. If the thought comes, I just do it.

I also love to give things to homeless people and people on the streets. If somebody is a vet, somebody who's mentally ill, somebody who's lost their home, somebody who can't make it, whose body is hurting—maybe they're an addict or whatever, and they use my money for a bottle, a drink. If I were in their situation, I'd probably want a drink too. It's not about judging what they do with it. It's just saying, I see you, I look at you, and I offer you what I can.

So here we are in this human life, with a measure of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, unbearable beauty and an ocean of tears. And this month, this week, there are personal struggles with family or work or divorce or illness or suicide—all the things that make up the troubles of our lives. But

also there are the collective troubles we face. How do we live as a country and a wise culture in a time when what's being put out, often in different ways through the media, is that which tries to frighten us? Do we let that colonize our hearts? Do we let that take us over? Or is there another way?

Is there the way of Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi, when she walked out after seventeen years of being imprisoned by the military, or Nelson after twenty-seven years on Robben Island—with such magnanimity and graciousness and compassion and forgiveness? No one can put you in prison and take over your heart. They can do what they like, but no one can take your spirit from you. And so this becomes the invitation.

Now what's also important in it is that you don't have to sacrifice yourself to do it. Compassion, generosity—all these qualities are circular. And the circle isn't complete if one person is left out. And you know who that person is. As Miss Piggy would say, "Moi?" Yes, that person.

So you can ask, is this compassionate or generous to her, to him, to them, to whoever? And is it also compassionate to this one? Because somebody has to tend to this one, and guess who that person is. So there's a balance that's necessary.

Since I'm talking about Mother Teresa, I remember going with a colleague here, Wes Nisker, who for many years was on the radio doing extraordinary newscasting. He was kind of like The Daily Show, only twenty and thirty years before. He would tell the truth on the radio. It was extraordinary. He would say, "Here's what happened," and people would say, "Wow, he actually said it." It wasn't all obfuscated.

Anyway, he was working on a show for National Public Radio on spirituality and social responsibility. So we went to interview different people—we interviewed the Dalai Lama, we interviewed the president of India, somehow we got to see him. We interviewed yogis and various teachers. And then we went to visit Mother Teresa. I thought, how are we going to get to see Mother Teresa? I had told people I was going, and so people collected money. I had an envelope with ten thousand dollars to give her, from churches and others around here.

I thought, all right, we'll go, because I sort of knew her schedule, and I'd been there before. In the morning, she goes to chapel at five o'clock and prays with all the young novices and nuns, so we would catch her after that.

She came out, and Wes and I greeted her. "Mother, we're here for just a little while. We're doing this show. Would you mind if we asked you a few questions?" He pulled out his big reporter's microphone, and she said okay and sat down. I said, "Also, here's a gift from these churches," and she took that. Then I said, "By the way, Mother, would you mind if we filmed this?" I pulled out my camera and turned on a light.

She got pissed off. "It's five in the morning. I just did my prayers. Come on, you guys. What are you trying? I want to go and serve people, and you're trying to make your film or something."

I thought, I've come all the way to India and pissed off Mother Teresa. This is just not... But there was something in it as well. The point isn't, again, some kind of ideal of how you're supposed to be. The point—and she was the exemplar of service in many ways—is to serve in the way that truly rings true and feels true to your own heart.

Of course, we live in times of homelessness, racism, environmental destruction. It's easy to feel overwhelmed or lonely or isolated, to feel that you don't know what you can do. I don't know if you've seen it, but one of the short documentaries nominated for the Academy Award is called *4.1 Miles*. That distance—4.1 miles—is the span between one of the Greek islands along the Turkish coast and the Turkish shore itself. It's a short film, elegantly done, very few words, mostly images. It follows a Coast Guard captain in his Coast Guard fishing-type boat, going out to rescue refugees day and night on those floating boats—those who live, those who die. This little island and the islands nearby have had 600,000 refugees arrive on boats from Turkey, crossing into Europe. They're overwhelmed, but they keep doing it.

It's really extraordinary. The captain said, "I have a boat and there are children out there." And so you see them going day after day. It makes you weep to watch it, but it also wakes you up to a reality we can become inured to when watching images on television or reading about it. You can't deny it when you see it.

We live in this kind of time, and you might feel, well, I can't do enough. What can I do? But the point is really just to start to listen, to know your limitations and your capacities, but also to know that you are greater than you think. And that is the beautiful thing of these teachings: to say, "O nobly born, whoever you are, you have a capacity to serve. You have a capacity to give." As Gandhi said, "What I do, I don't do for India. I do for my own joy."

Just as you did that reflection on what it means to receive generosity from another or to offer it, you have this possibility in you. O nobly born, remember it.

Of course, there are seasons to it. There are times when you want to give to someone, but at the same time, if you look at a mother lioness or a bird or a wolf, they nourish, they provide, they sacrifice for their offspring. And then one day, it's the day to fly, baby, and they kick them out of the nest. Or it's the day you've got to go hunt, and they disappear, and you're hungry, and you're on your own, and you have to learn how to get your own food.

So it's not that it's simply, "Okay, let's take care of everybody like the mommy of the world." There's both a dignity in it and a kind of attention that's beautiful—one that says, "What can I serve? What do I understand? And how can I bring this to others?" Sometimes what you have to offer is your tears.

You know, how do I serve in the greatest difficulty? The Dalai Lama and Tutu had this conversation about joy and how they keep their spirits up in terrible times in the world. What do you do when things are really bad? They had an interesting answer. Part of it was service and generosity. But then the question

was asked again: What do you do when things are really bad? And they said, "You show your humanity."

that being the greatest gift in many ways that you can give.

There's a beautiful story in Ram Dass's book called *How Can I Help?* If you don't know it, it's one of my favorite books ever. It tells of a woman who was a Maryknoll sister working in Peru as a schoolteacher at a very high altitude—13,000 feet. She became quite sick and had to return home for surgery. She could no longer work at high altitude and actually became crippled. She wondered, will I go back to Peru? Can I do anything? But she decided to go back and see, settling this time in the lower altitudes.

She said, "Everything changed, especially my attitude toward people. I could feel their poverty and pain in a new way, as if I was seeing it for the first time." And the affirmation she received was: "You're the same person you were before. Even if you can't teach or do anything, we want you to stay."

Her ministry changed. It became the ministry of walking together. She found others with physical disabilities—because she couldn't walk so well, having been crippled by her illness—and they were just trying to be together, being with them in love.

Of course, she said, many of the Peruvians they encountered with handicaps were deeply ashamed. Some hid, or they would hide their children. She thinks of Juan, a polio victim at three who had been hidden by his family behind their little house until they discovered him at age eight—five years hidden away. His brother Julio took them home one day, and there was Juan, twisted legs under him, scooting around the dirt patio on a circular piece of rubber. His mother was suspicious—a handicapped child meant she was being punished for something, in her belief system. Think of the child. Think of the mother.

They returned on several occasions to visit him. One time they found him alone. His family, with the rest of the town, had gone on a religious procession. Of course, he had never seen one. So they borrowed a bicycle, put Juan on it, and joined in the procession. It was his first time outside the house, the first time he had looked at people from a level higher than the ground, his first procession. His parents were initially annoyed, but their attitude changed.

When the time seemed right, they asked at the next town meeting if they could raise money to send Juan to Lima for physical rehabilitation. The townspeople liked the idea, and he went off. After a long, hard struggle—a year of pain—one day he returned to the village. He was using braces and a cane. It was really hard for him, but as he began to walk down the street toward his home, people came out from their houses. They appeared from all over, cheering and clapping, following him all the way home. It was so wonderful. It was Juan's second procession.

Sometimes what you have to offer—and anybody in twelve-step work knows this—is your truth, your own suffering that you've been through, your own humanity. That too can be a tremendous act of generosity.

If you think you are too small to make a difference, if the problems in the world seem overwhelming and

you don't know what you can add—well, if you think you're too small to make a difference, you've never been in bed with a mosquito.

It's the small acts. One of the things that touched me at the airport was a three-year-old girl with a sign on her, this beautiful little girl. It said, "My mom was a refugee." And then you could see her mom with her own sign. But it was just this little girl who wouldn't have been here, who wouldn't have been safe, but there she was. "My mom was a refugee." Refugees are okay. This country is made of refugees—except for the native peoples who are, unfortunately, refugees from what the invaders have done to them here, the genocide.

But in some way, we're all refugees. And then the question becomes: Can we become not only refugees, but can we find refuge?

And the refuge is really the refuge in care for one another. The refuge is in our generosity. The refuge is in the nobility of your heart and your care for one another. And it's an individual act, but it's also a call to the society at large. Who will we be? Who are we really? We have always taken in refugees. This is who we are.

I've been going back and forth to the East Coast because my twin brother has been quite sick with blood cancer—myelofibrosis and leukemia. The last year and a half has been a long series of treatments and chemo and different things, and it's been getting more and more difficult. I'm not sure how much longer he'll be alive.

As I said last time I was here, part of what's so moving to me is the time spent in the hospital or at the Dana Farber Cancer Center. I'm there with the kids with bald heads, the families holding somebody who's coming in with a walker, the people with masks because their immune systems are gone. And I see all the people who are tending them, the family members who bring them. There's so much tenderness—the nurses and doctors and staff. It's an amazing thing to watch how much we actually take care of one another. It's a beautiful thing.

My youngest brother Kenneth, who's eight years younger—he's now sixty-three—has been donating platelets. He was the one who donated a stem cell transplant, which worked for a little while and then stopped working. Other blood donations haven't worked for my twin brother, except from this one matching brother. I tried, but it wasn't a match. So for the last number of months, every five days Kenneth gives blood to my brother. He lives here, flies east, hangs out for a couple of days, then comes back. He just does it. He doesn't think about it particularly. He said, "It's my brother. Of course I'll do it."

It's like the story of Joan Schmidt, I believe her name was, who was a first grade teacher in Wisconsin. She had a little girl in her class who was on dialysis because her kidneys had failed, and it looked like she wasn't going to make it. And her teacher said, "Oh, I'll give her a kidney." This is different than giving her homework, right? And she did. She donated her kidney to this little girl who's now—it's five years later

since that story—in middle school and thriving.

I just see how much care there is in the world. For every act of brutality, for all the fear that there is, for all the terrible things that happen, there's a nobility to humanity that is your birthright.

And to meditate is not so much to have some meditation experience, although they come and they're quite wonderful, along with insights. It's really to quiet ourselves, to listen to the heart, to still ourselves a little bit in the midst of all the noise of life and politics and demands and possibilities. And to reflect: what really matters? At the end of the day, or the end of the year, or the end of the month—what do I wish that I'd done, intended? How can I live? How can I offer myself to this world?

It's not just the rabbit throwing himself into the fire in that remarkable Buddhist tale. We humans really care for one another. That's why we're here. Your ancestors were all survivors, and they did all kinds of things to care for their children and their grandchildren and made it possible for you to be here.

So it's not helping others in the sense of "I'll help you." It's us. It's our family. It's our brothers, our sisters. And in this way, you step beyond the small sense of yourself to feel something beautiful, which is your brotherhood and your sisterhood.

My teacher Nisargadatta in India said there is really no separateness to self. There is no separate self. And in this open space, in this vast space, there's only one movement—the movement of love. What else really matters to us?

Well, I think if you play music and you can bring your band down to the airport, that would be a fine thing too. Somehow I think that whatever redemption we bring alive to the problems of the culture is best done with a beautiful and joyful heart. Your anger, your fear, your depression—all the things that we also have as humanity—you need to hold with compassion. That's not the game. The game is actually to be like the Dalai Lama or Aung San Suu Kyi or Nelson Mandela, or whoever you want to name—to carry your beautiful spirit into whatever needs tending and plant your seeds and play your music and offer yourself.

So let's sit for a moment. When you come to the temple, the sanctuary, to sit together, may you carry the spirit of nobility, generosity, the treasure, the treasury within you. May you carry your own beautiful heart back out into the world.

Thank you again for coming, for your good behavior as you listened.

Drive politely out there. There are lots of cars and it's dark. We're still in the winter season. We might have more rain coming. Isn't that a beautiful thing?

And just as the rain comes down, may you offer your rain of love and care to the world.

Thank you.

The Generous Heart (Drop-in at Spirit Rock)

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