Energy to Awaken

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:01:24

God bless you.

Please let yourself get settled as we begin. Listening to teachings is its own kind of meditation or contemplation. You sit, you listen, and part of the response is not so much to take notes—there's no quiz or grade at the end—but more to listen and see if something resonates as true in your own understanding and experience. It's really a reminder of something that you already know. And if something doesn't seem useful, then simply let it go.

People come to a temple or a meditation center or a sacred place—although in a truer sense every place is sacred—but to the places we create for this purpose: to quiet the mind and listen to or tend the heart, to find some kind of balance or inner peace, or release conflict and stress that we might be carrying, or find some sense of renewal or compassion.

Today seems like a very good day for teachings. First of all, it's just a day or so before the summer solstice, and there's this beautiful glow of light still after eight o'clock, the hillsides illuminated.

A couple of years ago I went to the top of Mount Tamalpais during an afternoon to watch the transit of the planet Venus across the face of the Sun. There were a number of people up there who had big telescopes. One man had a large telescope you could peer into, with all the appropriate filters to make it safe. You look in and there's this enormous glowing orange-yellow disc of the Sun, and it's very lively when you look at it through a big telescope—this glowing fiery thing, quite fantastic. And then for an hour or so, progressing across the face of the Sun was this little black marble, basically, which was the planet Venus. We were seeing the backside, the shadow side of it, as it slowly moved across.

In looking, I could feel not just the planet Venus but somehow ourselves in space, because we're on another one of those little marbles going around in our solar system, this huge, vast, erupting luminous ball of sunlight. And here we are, doing our dance around the sun. For me, it's just about seventy-two years now—seventy-two turns around. It gave a sense of vastness and perspective and mystery. How did this all happen? Usually we're kind of checking off our to-do list, what we have to do tomorrow. But meanwhile, we're on this great ride around the sun, and also in the spiral arm of the Milky Way galaxy—that's a little bit longer, 250 million years or so.

There's something so beautiful about just taking a pause and noticing the turning of the seasons and the changing of the light and having some sense of that which is outside of time.

Aldous Huxley wrote that an idolatrous religion is one in which time is substituted for eternity. Future

time, in the idea of endless progress, is the devil's work, demanding human sacrifice on an enormous scale. He's really talking about what it means if we're always living in the doing mode rather than having a sense that we're living in eternity as well—that we live in the reality of the present with a greater sense of mystery and appreciation.

So it's a beautiful time to come to the temple and find some balance. The outer world is now coming to balance of light, and in its way, all the light, then turning toward the equinox, the true balance, and then back to the winter solstice. And we get to be part of this cycling dance.

Today is also Juneteenth. For those who don't know or remember, it is a celebration on June 19th of the last emancipation of slaves in the United States. That happened in Texas about two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Some of the states that weren't in the Confederacy still had slaves after Lincoln, in theory, freed slaves in other parts of the continental United States. The last proclamation for the freeing of slaves in this country came in Galveston, Texas, when General Gordon Granger announced on June 19th—there were 250,000 slaves in Texas, a quarter of a million people enslaved, just so we don't forget the reality of this—and on that day, in Galveston, he said all who are here are now emancipated and equal as human beings under the law and in our community.

This is celebrated in different parts of the country, and it too is worthy of acknowledging as we come together. Because we also come together seeking in ourselves a kind of freedom. But in fact, as Martin Luther King and others have said, we can't be truly free unless everyone is free. Somehow our freedom is tied up with everyone else's.

What's also true is that the vestiges of slavery persist. In my experience having done some work in our enormous prison system—where we have two and a half to three million people incarcerated and eight million people in the prison industrial system—this is in part a vestige of slavery. Our prisons are in some ways giant poverty and racist poverty prisons. So it's not over, really. May all those who are enslaved be freed, in all kinds of ways.

We come here in the midst of the turning of the seasons, for whatever our personal motivation is—to quiet the mind and the heart, to find some inner freedom. And as Martin Luther King said, the arc of the moral universe may be long, but it bends toward justice.

May it be so.

We go through some very hard times in different ways—politically, economically. But somehow also the goodwill of humanity may bend us in the long run toward greater justice, outwardly and inwardly.

This year, in these monthly Monday night teachings, I'm doing a series of talks on what's called the Buddha nature, or sometimes the paramitas—the innate perfections in human beings and our capacity to manifest and live from our Buddha nature. In the course of previous months, we've talked about generosity, integrity, wisdom, renunciation, these qualities. Each invites a shift of identity from a small

sense of self, a sense of separateness—sometimes it's called the body of fear—to open and live from a greater possibility: greater generosity, greater wisdom, greater integrity, greater connection with all things.

And it's both individual, but we can't separate the individual from our interdependence with everyone else and everything else. Here you are paying attention to your breath, the breath that was breathed by other people in the room and by the deer and the raccoon—and I once saw a badger here near the stream. Badger breath. Sounds like a bad ad on television, actually. But it's the same breath that dusted the tops of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa as it came over the Pacific, and it also dusted the Fukushima nuclear reactor. We're all in it together.

And so we also recognize, as I say so often, that the outer developments we have so remarkably surrounded ourselves with—electronics, our smartphones, the internet, computer technology, biotechnology, space technology, nanotechnology—no amount of that will save us from continuing warfare, continuing racism, continuing environmental destruction, continuing tribalism, and continuing addiction in our society. It has become, if I read the statistic right, the number one cause of death for adults between ages twenty and fifty: drug overdose. So something is happening that needs tending.

What this tells us is that the inner world of humanity now needs to be developed to match the outer world. We can't rely on outer development to save us in some fundamental way, or to live with love and wisdom in a beneficial way, without also cultivating the inner. And that becomes both a personal endeavor, but it also in some way becomes our collective task.

So tonight, the next step in these teachings on Buddha nature is traditionally called right effort, maybe right endeavor. I try to figure out how to translate this in a way that's meaningful to us in our own lives. We have an innate amount of energy. We have an innate life force. And the question is: How will we use it? How do we direct it?

There are stories—all these ancient stories with these paramitas or teachings. The main story connected with this particular quality of energy and effort is the story of a great ox who could do anything. In agricultural times in India, oxen were considered the most powerful animal that you could tame to do things with. What do you do with the ox of your own life, and its energy?

So, just a little task as we sit here. You don't have to move or anything, but I'd like you to put your attention—as you're listening to me now—shift your attention to the doors on the left that lead outside. You don't even have to turn your head, just sort of your eyes and your attention. Put your attention over that side of the room. Now put your attention back up here. And now, even without looking, put your attention up above, like the space above your body. Now put your attention in your feet. Now put your attention in your hands. Now bring your attention to your heart, to your chest. Notice both the physical sensations and perhaps any feelings that are present.

So what's true is that you can direct your attention. You can put it all over—in your body, outside your body, to physical sensations, to the emotions that are present. We were doing it in our meditation practice as we sat here. And so the question of right effort really is: Where and how will you direct your attention and your energy? What is right effort?

There are several dimensions of it. And as you listen, perhaps something will serve as a reminder for you in your life.

The first dimension of right effort—and I think I'd like to translate it as wise effort—particularly in spiritual life, but it turns out actually in all of life, is simply the effort to be mindful, to be present with loving awareness. From Alan Watts: "The art of living is neither careless drifting on the one hand, nor fearful clinging to the past or anticipation of the future, and consists of being sensitive to each moment, regarding it as utterly new and unique, and having the mind and the heart open and wholly receptive."

So the first and most central training and capacity that we have is actually to be present. I remember teaching with Houston Smith, this wonderful old professor of religion who had been at MIT and wrote that book on world religions that sold millions of copies. He was really elegant—one of the great gentlemen that I ever met.

We were doing a panel at UCLA or some similar grand event, in a great big auditorium. Houston was already in his nineties. He had these enormous hearing aids. And he stood up, a little bit shaky at ninety-two or ninety-three, and said, "Well, I can't see you that well, and I certainly can't hear. My body's a little shaky. But I'm here." And everybody applauded—okay, way to go, Houston!

There was something so touching in that moment. All right, his body may not have been able in the way it once was, or in the way one might wish for, but the disability was not the question. "I'm here," he said, "and I'm really here with you." There was this beautiful sense of what it meant to show up for life however it was.

Suzuki Roshi invited a few great up-and-coming Zen masters from Japan to help him—Katagiri Roshi and Kobun Chino Roshi. They were senseis in those days. Katagiri came but didn't speak English very well. Suzuki Roshi kept saying, "You need to take the dharma seat and give some teachings. You can't just come here." Katagiri protested, "But I can't speak English very well." Suzuki Roshi replied, "It doesn't take a lot of English to teach the dharma. Here, I'll show you."

So they rang the bell and Suzuki Roshi went in, bowed, and took his seat. Everyone gathered for the dharma teachings. He looked out and said, "Today is today. Today is not yesterday. Today is not tomorrow. Today is today." Then he bowed, got down, and said to Katagiri, "Okay, six words, right? There's a dharma teaching for you."

This was really his amplification of that famous teaching: the goal of meditation practice is to keep your beginner's mind. To actually come alive and see with the eyes of children playing on the floor in your

room, to watch the fading of the light as you walk in the fields or along the road, to see the people you work with, to tend your garden, to taste the food you eat—to actually be alive where you are and see what's happening around you.

So this is the game, really. The first and most central capacity of your Buddha nature is that it's possible to live in an awake way and not be lost, as much as we usually are, in plans and memories. Plans are useful. Remembering has its place. But we've got it reversed—we live mostly there and not here. The invitation is to live in the reality of the present.

And the gift is that attention can be directed, as you just experienced. It can be steadied. It can be trained. In doing so, there comes an intimacy with life, with the people you're with, with the work you're doing, with the things you care about, with the wondrous nowness of experience.

There also comes a kind of authenticity. When we live in our past and future so much, we're not really connected with ourselves, or with others. But when we become more present, we know more clearly what we feel, what we sense. We find ourselves in a deeper relationship with life instead of living so many moments ahead. We see the colors, taste the textures and flavors of life in all their richness.

You walk out here on the land and smell the bay leaves from all these bay trees. I've walked this land enough to have seen a number of bobcats. One of my favorite memories involves the little path that goes up to a cottage in back. I was walking up to this cottage one day in spring—April or May—after the little fawns were born. I've seen lots of fawns around here. I walked up just a little ways, paying attention. Then all of a sudden, in relatively low grass, right at the edge of the path, there was the body of a little spotted fawn, all curled in on itself.

I thought, well, maybe it died. So I stood very, very still. I couldn't see it breathe. I wondered if it was still alive. Okay, I'll just meditate.

I'll just stay here. And then, all of a sudden, one dark eye opened like that and shut very quickly—like it had seen some monster. Okay, it's in there. So very slowly I crept away and went some considerable distance. I spent about five or ten minutes there, and then I went back to see. Of course, its mom had come and it was gone and it was fine. But it was a beautiful moment. It was like we were there in this stillness between life and birth and death. Okay, I'm here. Oh, whoops, all right, I'll leave you alone.

There's something about being willing to quiet ourselves with one another, with the things that we have to do, with the tending of the world as a whole, that is part of the invitation of mindfulness or loving awareness. It's a different way of being than just being on a kind of inner treadmill. Does it make sense to you? This is why people say, "Okay, I sat." And even though sometimes meditation is pleasant and sometimes it's distracted or not so pleasant, there's something about just quieting ourselves or coming back into center, into presence, that's empowering, that gives us a connection with life.

So that's the first meaning of wise effort—to train your capacity to be present, to develop it, to sense it, and

to embody it.

Now the second dimension. In Pali or Sanskrit, the word for mindfulness is *sati*, but it's sometimes a compound word: *sati sampajañña*. The second part of the word is sometimes translated as "clear comprehension." I think a more useful translation is "the mindful response." Mindfulness has two different dimensions to it. One is to see what's so—to be connected with the present with clarity and kindness, loving awareness. And the second is the mindful response. What do we do?

In that case with the fawn, I stayed still, then I saw its eye, then I backed away. How do we respond mindfully to the circumstances of our life?

In the traditional descriptions of wise effort, there are four dimensions. One is to prevent unhealthy states—greed, hatred, ignorance, the causes of suffering in our life and others—to do what you can to prevent them from arising in yourself. Pay attention to your life so you see with clarity what it is that brings those states to be, and try to prevent them in whatever way, to live in a way that diminishes greed, hatred, fear, ignorance, confusion. Prevent them.

The second is this: if they do arise—which they will, because we're human beings—when you notice them arising, release them. Let them go. Do not follow them. Just as you can direct your attention to your feet or your hands or the door or your heart, you can direct your energy to either follow certain things or not follow them. We all know this. This becomes part of the inner art that gives you a sense of how to navigate. Instead of the boat without a rudder, it gives you a rudder to steer with in the waters of the stream you're navigating. To release that which is unhealthy.

The next two of these four wise efforts concern doing that which fosters love, that fosters awareness or attention, that fosters wisdom, that fosters generosity—inwardly and in the circumstances of your life. Do those things that foster your well-being and the well-being of others. This points to the inner states, but also to how we act.

And then the fourth: when wholesome states do arise, when you have a sense of love and connection and generosity and well-being, do that which sustains them. Dwell in them. Inhabit them. Invite them in some way to become more the way that you move through the world.

This is possible for us. My teacher Ajahn Chah used to say it's a little bit like being at a mango tree when the season is ripe. You go to the mango tree, maybe even shake the tree, and some mangoes come down. Then you sort through: Is this an old rotten mango, or is this a fresh good mango? It's not that complicated. You take a look at which mango is good. Those go in your basket. These ones, leave aside. To have that capacity of attention to see: this is healthy, this is skillful, this brings benefit. And this one—this is not one I want to pick up.

One of our great philosophers, along with all kinds of other dimensions, was Albert Einstein. He said, "I think the most important question facing humanity is: Is the universe a friendly place? For if we decide

that the universe is an unfriendly place, then we will use our technology, our scientific discoveries, and our natural resources to achieve safety and power by creating bigger walls to keep out the unfriendliness and bigger weapons to destroy all that which is unfriendly. But if we decide that the universe is a friendly place, then we will use our technology, our scientific discoveries, and our natural resources to create tools and models of understanding. And because power and safety come together with understanding, we will understand the workings and motives of the universe, and it will be a benefit to all."

Here's Einstein offering us, in a way, a wise way to approach the world—whether it's out of fear, building weapons and building walls, or seeing the possibility of benevolence, seeing the possibility that we can do something beautiful with our human incarnation and our human life.

Whether it's your meditative or spiritual practice, your personal relationships and family, your community, or the globe—how do you direct your life energy? Direct it toward that which is wholesome or healthy. This isn't about judgment, saying you're good or bad. It's just knowing that we contain all these energies. And the first thing, of course, is to recognize it. Okay, here's one I get caught in.

Anger or fear or addiction or anxiety or compulsion—whatever arises in ways that don't feel healthy. Maybe with attention, I don't have to follow that.

I was out walking with Ajahn Chah on alms round, my teacher in the forest monasteries of Thailand. We passed a field, and there was a great big rock, a boulder in the middle of it. He said to us who were with him, "Do you see that boulder over there?" We said yes. He said, "Is it heavy?" We said yes. And he smiled. "Not if you don't pick it up."

That's the game, you know. You're going to see this stuff in your experience, but you don't actually have to pick it up. And if it arises, you can release it.

Here's a story from my book *No Time Like the Present*. Sandra, a woman I worked with during one of the retreats here, needed a great deal of compassion to face her lifelong demon of binge eating. She described years of struggling with the compulsion and of wandering—she called it wandering like a hungry ghost—with so much self-hatred.

"I believed that food had an unparalleled capacity to bring satisfaction and free me from suffering. Time and again I reached for the food, looking for it to do its magic, only to have it turn on me, to fail me, to bring me untold physical and emotional suffering and shame. I became hypercritical of myself and my situation and then despaired.

"Freedom has come as I've become more mindful of my body and the intense discomfort I was trying to escape from. I started to find that I could recover more quickly and less painfully from bouts of compulsive binging if I could stay even a little bit kind to my body and present with my pain."

This is what loving awareness trains us for—to open our capacity to be present for the measure of pain

and sorrow and beauty that we all have.

"If I could stay even a little bit kind to my body and present with my pain, instead of eating even more just to try and avoid the effects of having eaten too much and the remorse of having done it again, I could actually watch myself start down that sad old path. And as the loving awareness grew, I realized, oh, I don't have to do this. And self-compassion would grow. I'm deeply grateful for the compassion that has rescued me from the realm of the hungry ghosts."

There's something very tender in listening to that, because you can feel her suffering and also the wisdom in it—that this is what's possible for us in each of our own lives and in our own dimensions.

We can let things go.

I think about a story Sylvia Boorstein told. She and Seymour had a little house in southern France where she would go for quite a long time. They decided they needed to change the bed they had, needed a new bed. So they went to the local town and saw this beautiful antique bed, but it had to be fixed in some special way and the mattress refitted. They arranged to buy it. First of all, it didn't come on time. Then when it finally came, the mattress didn't fit right, and the woman charged them considerably more to fix it and make it right.

Sylvia said, "I started to get really upset and angry with her because she wasn't doing what she said and was charging more. But I didn't know what to do with it, so I decided I would go and tell her how I felt." She went in to see Madame Verdon and thanked her for the beautiful bed, but said she was upset because of the way it had gone—charging extra money, not doing it right, not doing what she'd promised. "It caused the arising of *mauvaise émotion*," she explained, "of bad feelings."

Madame Verdon's response was to look at her and say, "Oh, these *mauvaise émotions*—they are not good for you. You should let them go."

Nothing about the money, mind you. "They're bad for you. You should let them go."

Here's a poem from an eight-year-old: "I want to tell the fish, eat only the bait, not the hook. When you eat the bait, start from the edge and slowly gnaw bit by bit. Never, ever gobble it in one go."

There's your meditation instructions.

You can pay attention and reflect in yourself: What fosters well-being for you?

What fosters love for you? What fosters a sense of well-being? What fosters generosity? What fosters some centeredness and calm? Is it sitting in meditation? Or walking in nature? Maybe it's some kinds of reading that you do, or community. Maybe it's hanging out with children. Maybe it's avoiding children—I don't know. Maybe it's quieting yourself. Or maybe it's taking action about things that you care about, so that you actually don't foster well-being until you stand up for something that matters. That may be what

brings this kind of energy of life and presence alive for you and brings a greater clarity. But these kinds of reflections in yourself—what turns you toward well-being and health—are part of these teachings.

So wise effort, wise endeavor: the effort to be mindful, to bring loving awareness to this world. The effort, as you do, to not only notice what's here—mindfulness—but also to respond to it in a way that fosters that which is healthy, and to let go of that which isn't, personally and in your relation to others.

Two more dimensions. Wise effort asks for a kind of steadiness or willingness. And if you want to integrate your meditation or your spiritual ideas and perspective into your life, it's not that easy—because we have gain and loss and praise and blame, and painful days and pleasant experiences. It goes back and forth, joy and sorrow. Everybody has this, right? So you say, all right, I want my life to be this beautiful, happy thing. It doesn't work that way. That's not human incarnation. Human incarnation has ten thousand joys and ten thousand sorrows.

So what's asked of you in this dimension of wise endeavor or wise effort is to say, yes, this is the place I will practice. To be willing to turn toward your experience, whatever it is, and say, this is the place of practice.

Frank O'Connor, the Irish author, tells in one of his books how, as a boy, he and his friends would make their way adventuring across the Irish countryside. When they came to an orchard wall that seemed too high and too doubtful to climb over, too difficult to permit their voyage to continue, they would take off their hats and toss them over the wall. And then they had no choice but to follow them.

There's something in that spirit of adventure—to say, all right, things are this way, sometimes very painful, sometimes beautiful. Let's see what comes next. Let's open ourselves. Let's see how we can work with this, how we can respond to what's here. Because you don't actually know where you are. Even looking at that little marbled black, beautiful round black, perfect circle move across the face of the sun—we don't really know where we are. We're somehow in the midst of the universe unfolding.

Zen Master Dogen said to meditate is like being on a boat on the ocean, where you can't actually see the shore. What you have is where you are. This is where we are.

And so you come into the present and you notice what's skillful and healthy and foster that, and what's unhealthy you let go. But you stay steady with it and you say, all right, let's see then what happens. You experiment, you explore—let's see what happens next.

With this, you start to understand that mindfulness or loving awareness—and it's in the very first teachings in the Buddhist texts on mindfulness—is developed inwardly and it's developed outwardly. And then finally it's developed inwardly and outwardly together, so that the two really can't be separated. You attend to your own inner freedom and you attend to the freedom of others. You attend to your own well-being and you tend to the well-being of others.

I was recently at a conference with Elissa Epel. She works as a scientist in a lab with Liz Blackburn at UC here in the city. Elizabeth Blackburn won the Nobel Prize for her discovery of telomeres, the little caps on the end of chromosomes that protect chromosomes—and when they get frayed or reduced, they reduce your life expectancy and so forth.

And Elissa has done some fascinating research. One of the most striking findings was a study showing that for people who had meditated for some weeks—not a huge long time—the frayed telomeres actually got better, extending themselves. So you're going to live longer, right? There is that benefit if you practice, though I know that doesn't matter to you.

But here's what was more remarkable, and I really want to read the full analysis of the study. They began to discover that the telomeres were affected not just by what you did for yourself, but by the community and place around you.

And here's the truly wild part. If you were in a community where there is a great deal of disparity between rich and poor, the people who are poor—who generally have a lot of stress, wondering how they'll pay the bills, how they'll feed their kids—their telomeres were shorter and frayed. Stress, pretty straightforward. But the people who lived in that same community, even in a gated community separated from those in poverty, their telomeres were also frayed and shorter.

It's as if your cells are listening and connected to one another. Isn't that interesting? We know interdependence, but now, with sophisticated science, we're seeing new levels of it.

So steadiness, or willingness, means saying: all right, I'm going to tend inward and outward and make this life that I have—whatever comes with it—a place where I bring attention and loving awareness, a place where I cultivate that which is beneficial. Rather than just measuring success and failure, whatever comes becomes a place for practice.

And it can be tough.

Since today is Juneteenth, I thought I would read something fitting in honor of it. I found this children's book while looking through a bookstore. It's called *Extraordinary People*. I thought it was funny because the central person in the middle of the picture is Evel Knievel, the daredevil. Next to him is Marie Curie, and on the other side is Bruce Lee. I said, okay, this is a pretty interesting book. When I started to flip through, I found a whole bunch of people I'd never heard of, or maybe just vaguely heard of.

The one I want to read represents this quality of steadiness, of willingness to tend both inner and outer. Her nickname was Stagecoach Mary.

Born in Hickman County, Tennessee. Died in Montana in 1914. Stagecoach Mary—six foot tall, 200 pounds. Mary smoked cigars, packed a pistol, kept a jug of whiskey at her side, and made certain the mail got delivered. She was the first African American woman to be employed as a mail carrier in the United

States, and only the second woman to work for the US Postal Service—a job she took on at age sixty.

She was born a slave, grew up as an orphan, and after emancipation, she was taken under the wing of an Ohio nun named Mother Amadeus. When Mother Amadeus suddenly got sick, Mary nursed her back to health. She also took it upon herself to protect all the nuns in the convent with a gun strapped under her apron. Of course, this sort of toughness, while it may have been appreciated, doesn't necessarily fit in a nunnery in the long term, and ultimately she was dismissed from her duties.

But the nuns felt bad, so they provided her with enough money to start her own business. Mary opened a café, but because she was kind and generous, she gave food to everyone who stepped in, and her business didn't do very well—ran into the ground several times. Eventually she closed down the café and began working a mail delivery job. She and her mule, Moses, never missed a day of work for a decade. Even if it was snowing and the wagon was frozen in its tracks, Mary would make the deliveries on foot, carrying the sacks of mail on her shoulders.

Cascade, Montana loves Stagecoach Mary, and every year on her birthday, the town closes its schools to celebrate.

So there's a little bit of right effort, of willingness. But we have it in us. You each do, in your own way. And what's possible is to remember that you carry this capacity to direct your attention and to direct your energy. And it's not like some little battery that's going to run out. Love doesn't run out. When you open the channel, you get more love. Attention doesn't run out. When you bring more attention, attention grows. You become a channel for something that's already a part of you.

Steadiness and willingness to be here for the ten thousand joys and sorrows.

And then the last dimension is balance.

The traditional metaphor, which most everyone has heard in the Buddhist texts, comes from the Buddha himself: in your spiritual practice, in your meditation, in your meditative life, wise energy and wise effort is like tuning the strings of a lute or guitar. You don't want it too tight and you don't want it too loose. You want to tune it in a way that brings harmony.

This is something we need to learn, and we experiment with it—like riding a bicycle in some way. And again, my teacher Ajahn Chah would sometimes teach in what seemed like contradictory ways, telling one person to do this, then telling somebody else to do something entirely different.

When I asked him about it, I said, "Wait, you contradict yourself." He just laughed. He said, "This is how I teach." He said, "There's a beautiful road to go down, and I know it well. But I look down and I see that somebody's walking and they're about to fall in the ditch on the right-hand side, or get lost in some little sidetrack. So I say, 'Hey, go to the left a little bit.' And then you see that same person, or another, about to fall in a ditch on the left-hand side, or get off on a little sidetrack. And I say, 'Hey, now go to the right a

little bit.'" And he said, "That's really all I do—I try to bring them back to where they are and not get lost."

This takes a kind of attentiveness to our lives, to see with loving awareness what is the right way to marshal our energy and to use it wisely. What is a mindful response? And of course, as Martha Graham says, you are unique in the whole vast universe. There has never been—in galaxies and hundreds of millions of galaxies—there's never been anybody as weird as you. This is it. So either you're going to do it or not, but this is what you've got. You might as well flaunt it, because this is your life.

Sometimes what's needed in balance is to be tough. In education, you know, there are these different fads. Grit is fashionable now, right? Teaching children grit, among other things. There's a lot children can learn from being tough.

It used to be that in the Zen tradition, if you wanted to practice in a Zen temple in Japan, you had to go and sit tangaryo first. They didn't let you just knock on the door and say, "I want to come and do a retreat," like Spirit Rock where you just sign up online and pay your money. No. You had to go and sit outside the gate and show that you were sincere. And to show that you were sincere meant often you would go in the winter and sit in the snow, sit outside the gate all day and not move. Somebody would kind of open the gate a little and say, "We got one sitting out there, let's see how long they last." And after two or three or four days of sitting in the snow and not moving, you come back the next morning—"Okay, I'm ready"—and go through it again. They'd say, "I think we got a live one. All right, open the gate, we'll let him in and see if they're any good."

There's something in the training, and you all know it, that asks a kind of strength and courage in you. There are times in life when this will be demanded of you. Sometimes it's some great endeavor that you really have to throw yourself into—you started an enterprise, or a school, or a business, or a family. "Okay, we have twins." Ha! Now you don't have to go sit in front of the gate of the Zen temple. You have two live-in Zen masters. You just gave birth. All right, that's your training.

But also I think of the times when people have come up to me and said, "My child has a very serious cancer," or "My child has died." And then, all right, what do you do with that as a spiritual practice? Because it's one of the great sufferings, one of the greatest sufferings to be visited upon us, to lose a beloved child. And yet you have to go on living. You carry it. You can't say, "I'll get over it." You don't get over it. You take it and it cracks your heart and it changes you as a person. And then you have to live with that fire. It becomes part of who you are. And maybe the spirit of that child says, "All right, dad or mom, now you really have to live, because I'm not here to live it. You've got to live my part too."

So there's a toughness that's asked of us. You will have it come upon you, and at times that is what's needed.

But sometimes what we need in order to really be present for this mysterious life is much more delicate. We need to stop and pause and listen more deeply, slow down.

This is a poem about approaching things in a more tender way:

Think of those Chinese monks' tales, years of struggling in the zendo and then the clink while sweeping up of one stone on another and enlightenment like that.

Emily Dickinson's wisdom: truth in circuit lies, in circles. Or see Grant's book, *Common Birds and How to Know Them*, New York, Scribner's, 1901. And here's the instruction: "The approach must be by detour. Advantage taken of rock, tree, mound, and brush. But if without success this way, use artifice. Throw off all stealth appearance, watchfulness. Look guileless, a loiterer, purposeless. Stroll on, not looking directly toward the bird, avoiding any gaze too steadfast. Or failing still in this, give voice to sundry whistles and chirps—your quarry may stay to answer."

More briefly: try, but stymied, give it up. Do something else. Leave the untrappable thought. Go walking. Ideas buzz the air like flies. Return to work. And when you get quiet, outside the window the cream-dipped tail and red fire legs, doused with watery brown, emerges from the wood's dark margin, stopping all your thoughts—and briefly squats. Not fox, but vixen. And then moves along, out of sight.

Enlightenment, wrote one master, is an accident, though certain efforts make you accident-prone. Take your time.

And so there's something also about delicacy—in your own life and in your attending of one another. No one can tell you, any more than with riding a bicycle, how to come back to balance. This is another part of loving awareness: to listen in this way.

Laurie Anderson—poet, performance artist, musician—writes:

"In the Tibetan map of the world, the world is a circle. And at the center there's an enormous mountain guarded by four gates. And when they draw a map of the world, they draw the map in sand. And it takes months. And then when the map is finished, they say some prayers and erase it and throw the sand into the nearest river.

Last fall, the Dalai Lama came to New York City to do a two-week ceremony called the Kalachakra, which is a prayer to heal the earth. And woven into these prayers were a series of vows that he asked us to take. And before I knew it, I'd taken a vow to be kind for the rest of my life. And I walked out of there and I thought, for the rest of my life? What have I done? This is a disaster.

And I was really worried. Had I promised too much? Not enough? I was really in a panic. They had come from Tibet for the ceremony and they were walking around Midtown in their new brown shoes, and I went up to one of the monks and said, can you come with me to have a cappuccino right now and talk?

And so we went to this little Italian place. He'd never had coffee before, so he kept talking faster and faster. And I kept saying, look, I don't know whether I promised too much or too little—can you help me please?

And he was really being practical. He said, look, don't limit yourself. Don't be so strict. Open it up. He said, the mind is a wild white horse. And when you make a corral for it, make sure it's not too small. And another thing: when your house burns down, just walk away. And another thing: keep your eyes open. And one more thing: keep going."

Because it's time to go home.

So here we are. We don't quite know where we are on the boat in the ocean, and we're on this little marble going around our beautiful star. But we do know some things. 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. You quiet the mind and tend the heart, and then you get up.

And the garden is the garden of your life, the garden of the world. You plant seeds wherever you are, in whatever your situation. You plant seeds of love, of compassion, of care for yourself and others. You stretch your arm out and mend the part of the world that you can touch. Because you can't mend the whole world, but you can mend some part of it.

There's a beautiful account of Alan Chadwick at the University of Santa Cruz, who was one of the pioneers of biodynamic gardening and all kinds of amazing things. Chadwick took his class in the 1970s looking for a place to do a garden, and went and found a junkyard lot filled with rusted-out cars, broken glass, chunks of cement, sand, abandoned trash. He asked the owner if his class could use the lot for an experiment to grow flowers and vegetables. And the owner said, sure, but you're crazy—that soil is dead.

And so the students put months into revitalizing the soil. This garden has now become famous for its extraordinary delicious vegetables and gorgeous flowers. And in the same way, you can both tend the garden of your heart and of your life, and you can plant beautiful seeds. That's what's given to you.

This is really the gift of wise endeavor, wise effort. To step out of the body of fear, the small sense of self—those fearful thoughts will come—and rest in something bigger, in the sense of your connection with the vastness and with the people you meet and the work you do. Whether it's a business you're starting, whether it's the raising of a child, whether it's a spiritual endeavor, whether it's an artistic endeavor—what moves through the stars moves through you. This is what's given to you. And the qualities of the Buddha can awaken in you.

As it says: one hand on the beauty of the world and one hand on the suffering of all beings, two feet grounded in the present moment. And then as you walk through the world, plant those seeds that bring beauty where you are, inwardly and outwardly.

You've been given the energy of the stars, this life energy, and you have the capacity to do all kinds of things with it. May you use this energy to plant beautiful seeds, to work for justice, to plant seeds of love, to care for yourself and those around you and this earth, each in your own way. And may you use your meditation, your spiritual practices, as a way to cultivate and remind you and open your heart and your

being to this possibility.

Now in Texas on Juneteenth they have a lot of parties. So feel free—even in California we can celebrate emancipation. Thank you so much for coming. Enjoy this beautiful almost-summer-solstice evening. And see you again, perhaps. Good night.

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