The Most Basic Truths: Gateways to Freedom

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 53:46

So what I'd like to talk about tonight—and we'll see how it goes—is the most basic truths in Buddhist teaching. I've come to it in part because in these last months I've been talking about the war in Ukraine and the pandemic and the collective anxiety and all these other things. And it feels like it's time to come back to the basics.

I'll start with a poem that answers a kind of question for us as human beings, as human incarnations. What kind of world did we incarnate into? So this is a poem from Brigid Lowry that I often read. It is, by the way, a meditation poem:

In the strange early morning half-light we sit. In the cloudiness of our questioning we sit. In our madness and our clarity we sit. In the midst of too much to do we sit. In the warm arms of our shared sorrow we sit. In community and in loneliness we sit. In sweet exhaustion we sit. In the blazing energy of being alive we sit. Here with the singing of the coyotes and the crickets. Here with each electric bird song. Here with the rippling of breezes and the great trees and the dry grasses. Here with the cobwebs and the clouds and the teeming masses. And the dusty road upon us, us in the sound and the sound in us. Us in the world and the world in us.

So here we are with this human incarnation, given a human life. And of course, at this time—maybe in all times, but right now—there are things that are quite difficult. Especially if you're here where I am in North America, there's the growing fire season. And then we look at the images in the news and there's floods and refugees and climate change. And of course the wars: Ukraine and Myanmar and Libya and so many other places. So there's all those kind of difficult images and troubles of this human realm that we're born into.

And then last night there was the eclipse, the blood red moon. Really kind of magic to watch the eclipse, because you could see the shadow of our sphere moving across the face of the moon. And at least in North America, there's spring and blossoms. It's the plowing season in some places. Maybe that would be at the beginning of the rainy season for others. There is in California this year a renewed migration of monarch butterflies—not so many had been seen for a long time. So there's the troubles and there's the springtime and the music of the spheres.

When I was first taught in the monasteries in Thailand and Burma, the key to the basic nature of life was repeated over and over again. Everything is anicca, or impermanent. Look at it. Everything is dukkha, which means unsatisfactory. And everything is anatta. Anicca, dukkha, and anatta. And anatta means emptiness, selflessness. We'll talk about all of them. The reason that these were repeated over and over is

they were saying: if you see these, you see with the eyes of wisdom.

Zen Master Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim, the Korean Zen master with whom I studied, said: "Once a great man sat under the Bodhi tree, saw the morning star and gained enlightenment. He saw the sky was blue, the earth was brown, and all things were rising and passing. Things were just as they are." And then he really knew the nature of things and his enlightenment was complete. He saw things the way they are: arising and passing, blue sky, brown earth.

Or Krishnamurti, the great sage, said: "It is the truth that liberates and not your efforts to be free." It's seeing the way things are. And of course, to survive—because we have this very complex human brain—the brain, besides seeing the way things are here in the present, also tries to anticipate, keep you safe, fix and stabilize and imagine.

So the first of these basic truths is anicca, impermanence. And you say, well, what's the big deal? Of course things change. Why is this news? The stock market's gone down and it will go up sometime. It's just what things do.

The phases of the moon change. But there's something deeper to feel and know. The point of it is seeing with the eyes of wisdom—it brings a kind of liberation.

Here's a phrase from the texts: karma changes, or karma can change, like the swish of a horse's tail. That is, at one time everything seems hunky dory and fine and going along. And then in a moment—an accident, or a diagnosis, or an opportunity, or an asteroid, or who knows what, a pandemic—and everything gets turned topsy-turvy. Karma can change like the swish of a horse's tail, and then all of a sudden you go, "Oh yeah, whoops, anicca." Things are not as stable as we thought. Not so solid.

And we're watching the contests of empires—the Russian empire trying to get back, the Chinese empire trying to get big the way it was a thousand years ago, and the US empire. What did Chief Seattle say? Tribe follows tribe and nation follows nation. Even empires come and go. And wars arise for a time and then they end. There's always an end to a war, however horrific and terrible and sad it is—then it ends. Then of course there might be a new war and a new conflict. This is anicca. It's where we live, where you live, where I live.

Now in psychology 101, there's an experiment that's often done in which three buckets of water are placed at the front of the room. One bucket has hot water, quite hot. One bucket has room temperature. And one bucket has ice water with ice cubes in it. The unsuspecting student who volunteers to come up for the psychological experiment is invited to take two hands and place one in the bucket of ice water and one in the bucket of quite hot water and see how long they can stand it—usually thirty seconds or a minute or whatever. It's not that easy.

Then the next instruction, when they take their hands out, is to put them in the bucket of room temperature water and let them touch each other. And in that moment, there's this funny expression that

comes over the face of the psychology student, because to one hand the water feels really cold—the hand that was in the hot water—and to the other hand, touching it, the water feels really hot—the hand that had been in the ice water. Their perceptions are warped somehow. Which perception can I trust?

You know, my dear friends—and I have to include myself in this—we get pretty attached to our perceptions of things, and yet they're not really quite certain, are they? The Buddha said at one point, "People who cling to views"—the wise ones, he said, don't cling to views—"but people who cling to views go about the world annoying others." That's one of the passages that I think is a little bit of humor from the Buddha—or maybe he was just experiencing that.

So what changes our perceptions? You're a libertarian or a Republican or a Democrat or a whatever for a certain portion of your life, and then it might change. Your views change. What else changes?

It's said in the Buddhist texts that who we are are the five skandhas, sometimes translated as the five aggregates, or the five rivers—which is how I like to translate it. A river of physical experience and sensations of the body, a river of feelings, a river of perceptions and views, a river of thoughts and images, and the river of consciousness. And they're always changing. You could see it when you sat in meditation. Nothing stayed the same for a moment as you paid attention.

Now here's why anicca is important to understand. Because everything is changing, the more you cling and hold on, the more you suffer. Holding on is called rope burn. You try to hold on to things and they're changing—whether it's the views or the world or the empires or your emotions.

I remember the story of a couple, two men who got married, and part of their celebration in their life was to take a road trip to Montreal, to the biggest bonsai tree garden in North America. Amazing bonsais imported from Japan and China and grown there. So they got in a car and they drove a long way up into Canada from where they lived in New England. And they got there—one of the guys had arranged the trip and was really happy because he loved bonsai, they both did—and they arrived at the gates of this huge garden and it was padlocked shut. And this was before the pandemic. "Sorry, we're closed on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. We're open these days of the week."

And his partner looked at him and said, "Didn't you check on this?" And got all upset and frustrated. "We drove all the way here!" And the guy who'd done the driving and

brought them there, just got quiet and said, "Let's see, let's take a little walk here. Maybe we can figure something out."

And what's he going to figure out? He's going to call somebody? Is there a way to get in? Can they open it? He just started walking along the huge—this is a giant botanical garden—along the gate and along the front wall, a high wall. You could see the beautiful fruit trees and amazing trees inside. He walked and walked, just trying to get quiet, figure out, well, what should we do next? He went around the corner at the end of that long front part of the garden and started to walk further.

And then all of a sudden, to his and their surprise, the wall stopped. It was a facade on the roadside of the garden. But as they walked along the side, there was no wall. And they could walk right in, which they did, whatever day it was, closed or not. One of them smiled and the other sort of apologized—you know how it is being a couple.

But the idea was that instead of saying things are or aren't possible, instead of getting so frustrated, to be open and say, "Oh, I wonder what's going to happen next"—to have that spirit.

Because the truth is that the body produces one hundred billion new red blood cells every day. That's fifty thousand in the time that I read these few sentences—your body's making that. There are a trillion living creatures in your gut and in parts of your body, little ones that live in your eyelashes and your eyebrows and so forth, all having their little bacteria, virus, buggy little life, being born and dying. You are this walking—my friend Wes calls it a walking feedlot for this entire cornucopia of life. You lose six hundred thousand particles of skin an hour and it's replaced in that hour. You get a new stomach lining regrown every five days, and all the major parts of your liver are recreated every six weeks. Your eyebrows take four months. But who you are is this river of change that's constantly changing and opening and evolving. And as we become wise, we step back and see the mystery of it instead of how it's supposed to be.

I had a friend who was the hospice director of a very big hospice for some years. One day he went in—he'd been working with a lot of the patients who were dying. There was an old Italian man there whose family kept coming in to attend to him, his children and so forth. They came in one morning and said, "We need to talk to the hospice director." They said, "We have a problem, a question. Our father is here"—it was three of the children—"and he's very close to dying. But his younger brother was killed yesterday in a car accident. We don't know whether we should tell him because he's so close to dying himself. Maybe it will agitate him and make him feel terrible. Maybe we should just leave him and let him be in that state of loving his brother and not knowing about the loss. What should we do?"

My friend, the hospice director, said, "Well, let's go in and see your father and see how he's doing. Maybe we'll understand better when we do that." Here's this kind of open-minded response—not exactly this is right or that's wrong.

They went in and sat with the father, who was pretty weak but still conscious and could speak. They said, "We're so glad to see you, Dad. How are you?" He said, "Well, I'm getting weaker and my time is coming." Then he looked at them and said, "Don't you have something to tell me?" They said, "What do you mean?" He said, "About my brother. Don't you know he died?" They said, "Well, how do you know that?" And he said, "Oh, I've been talking to him all morning."

There's a little bit of a mystery for you. I could tell you fifty more stories like this. Who are we, born into this body, this human incarnation? Who do you think you are?

Things change. I remember a retreat that was taught by Michelle McDonald. She was teaching on the East

Coast at our center in Barre, and she also worked in the family program.

So she liked to work with little kids. And she brought this group of little kids—I think they were like kindergartners or something—and said, "Let's talk about things being born and things dying." And kids are interested in that. So they talked about it some, and then she said, "I'll tell you what, let's learn more about it. You go out in the woods"—which was around where we are—"and bring back whatever you find that's died, and we'll look at it together."

And the kids ran out excitedly and they brought some dead leaves or some sticks. And one kid found a little bit of a skeleton of some mouse that had died. And somebody else found a bone, or they found something else that had died. And they brought them all back together, made a pile, and said, "Wow, all these things in the forest have died."

And then she said, "Well, what do you think about this?" Trying to understand how it looked to these five-year-olds. And one of the kids said, "Well, it looks like everything in the forest is there for a while and it dies." And another little kid piped up and said, "Yeah, it's a good thing. Because if the trees and the branches and things didn't die, then there'd be more and more and more of them. They'd get so close together and then there'd be no room for us."

They knew somehow that change actually is the opportunity for something new to come. And that death isn't something wrong. It's natural. As Emily Dickinson said, "Because I did not stop for death, he kindly stopped for me." It's just part of an incarnation. So you might as well relax and become the loving awareness, become the sky of awareness and see how things are changing.

But then there arises all our anxiety—the emotions of being anxious and worry, the stories we tell ourselves, the body. What about COVID? What about the stock market? What about whatever it is that worries you? What about family? All these things. And the mind kicks in, trying to protect you from change.

The practice is not to resist the anxiety and the thoughts, not to judge them, but to bow and say, "Thank you. Thank you for trying to protect me. I'm okay just now." And not let the voices of anxiety take over the heart. You can name them. "Oh, here's worry. Here's anxiety. Thank you." And then ground yourself and become part of the earth, or feel the openness of the sky through which the birds and the clouds and everything come and go, or the trees of the forest renewing itself.

And people will call me—friends, people I've taught over the years and worked with—"I'm going into surgery." "My teenage son is dealing with addiction, he's in trouble." And we talk about the specifics: what you can do, how do you resource yourself, how do you support yourself? And then often I'll say, "Make an altar. Put a little altar with a picture of your teenage son on it and surround that picture with Quan Yin or Buddha or whoever you value. Let yourself reflect on who carries the spirit that most matters to you in this world, whether they're alive now or whether they're an archetypal being—the Buddha or Mother

Mary. And make a bow, maybe light a candle, and say to Mother Mary and Kuan Yin and the Buddha and so forth, 'Will you please hold my boy? Will you hold him so that I don't have to worry quite so much?'"

I am traveling at great speed toward a star in the Milky Way. My heart's a little fast. Otherwise, everything's okay. The voice of a poet.

With anicca, we step back and say, the galaxy is turning, things change. And we learn the trusting heart. The practice of sitting in meditation is to learn the trusting heart. "Oh, nobly born," it says, "remember your true nature." Become the loving awareness—the shift of identity from that small worried person to the Buddha that you are.

And I see it in my cohort. I'm about to turn seventy-seven. I know a lot of dead people, lots of friends who are sick, many people in my address book—I used to have an address book.

Now it's electronic. Half of them aren't here in this incarnation anymore. It's happening. They're moving off stage. We're in the queue, so to speak.

And then there are all these new grandchildren, you know, and what follows. Just reflect for a moment, because life is renewing itself through you, around you—you're a part of it. You are life renewing itself. Even as you age and die, you're in the recycle process.

Here's a reflection. Quiet yourself. Maybe even let your eyes close. What is changing in your life? What are the big things that are changing? And what would the wisest part of you say in response to this change? What would the wisest part say? Here's how to hold this. You can know. You already do. It makes us come more alive, more trusting—this impermanence.

I think of my old friend and colleague, Stephen Levine. We taught retreats together, taught and practiced together. I remember he would ask people—he was teaching death and dying retreats—he would say, "If you only had a short time to live, who would you call? What would you say? And why are you waiting?"

This is the wisdom of impermanence, of trust and living fully just where we are.

Then anicca goes to dukkha. And dukkha is this complicated term. It has a lot of meanings, but mostly it means things are insecure and uncertain. It's also translated as suffering. And if we look with the eyes of wisdom—well, all we have to do is turn on the news. The conflict, domestic terrorism in Buffalo, and the continuing scourge of racism, as if some people are better than other people. It's kind of crazy that here's a little child born, and what particular color they are—whether they're green or brown or black or white or yellow—what color you are determines your value. It's kind of insane. But the suffering from it is enormous. This is dukkha. Just like the wars are dukkha. These are the big ones in the news—the pandemic, the climate change. This is your human incarnation, folks. Mine too.

So the Buddha, under the Bodhi tree, when he attained enlightenment at the time of the morning star, like that poem said, he sat quietly for a time, as the story is told. And then he turned his eye, his wisdom eye,

toward the world of living beings across the whole world. And he saw beings everywhere wanting to be happy, yet often doing the very thing that made them unhappy. And the tears of the great heart of compassion rolled down his cheeks. It's said in one of the myths or stories that those tears turned into Tara, the goddess of infinite compassion. She was born out of those tears. He saw the sufferings of the world, and immediately that great heart of compassion that was also the Buddha nature began to shine in every direction.

To understand dukkha, there are three kinds of dukkha. There's anicca dukkha—the dukkha of change. Joy and sorrow, praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute. However wonderful, you know, that incredible meal, that great vacation, that sexual ecstatic experience—I hope you had one at some time—and that delicious spiritual awakening and so forth. There's that little voice inside that says, "God, I wish this would last." But it doesn't. The dukkha of change.

Now, the good thing is that when things are terrible, they don't last either. But this is one kind of dukkha—that nothing lasts. And seeing it with eyes of wisdom, the heart goes, "Okay, I have to really get this. You can't hold on."

The second kind of dukkha is the dukkha of pain—physical and mental pain. Part of what we learn in meditation is to sit when your knee hurts and your back hurts, when you're having physical pain. We live in a culture that basically wants to sell you a prescription, a painkiller, the moment you're a little uncomfortable. We live in a culture that fears discomfort. You have to do anything to stay comfortable. Good luck. It doesn't work that way.

But when you take your seat with some dignity and allow the itches and the pleasures and the pains, the tightness and the release and the opening, when you allow all the energies that are stuck in the body, there becomes this opening of trust, of loving awareness, and a deepening capacity—expanding the window of tolerance to hold it all in compassion.

And it's physical pain, yours. Sometimes it's harder when it's the physical pain of someone near you. If you haven't learned to sit with it, you can't hold somebody else's hand when they're in the hospital or at an accident or dying, because you don't know how to be with it. You don't know how to rest in loving awareness and say, "Yes, this too."

My friend Vivek Murthy, the Surgeon General of the United States, said that more than half of what comes into the hospitals and clinics across America is really based on emotional pain and suffering. It's not even the physical suffering. So this is the second kind of dukkha, physical and mental pain. You all know it because it's part of incarnation. We have it.

And then the third kind, which is called sankhara dukkha. Sankhara means all the different things that arise and make up the whole world, the form of the world of duality. Sankhara dukkha is just the nature of things. To have a globe and a world and a moon and a solar system and galaxies, there's light and dark.

There's birth and death. There is unbearable beauty, amazing beauty, and an ocean of tears.

The Buddha said at one point that you've been born and died so many times that the bones of even one person's incarnations piled up would be as high as the great Mount Vipula, taller than Everest. That's how many times you've taken incarnation. Now, it may or may not be true, but what it was pointing to is that built into this human life is this birth and death—born and dying and born and dying. Each day, each moment, it's what we are.

And then the text goes on: Did you never see a man or a woman aged, bent down with blotched limbs, walking with a cane? Or sick and lying in bed? Did you never see a corpse after their life energy has passed from the body? And did the thought never happen to come to you: "Oh, this will happen to me too"?

But we live in a culture that says get more money, more power, more things. Consume. Travel. Get these things—all of which are fine; I like some of them too. But the message is: if you do it right, there won't be dukkha.

I'm sorry. I am really sorry. It's not how it works. And I know people who have very little who are insanely joyful and happy, and people who literally have billions of dollars and anything you could buy who really struggle with sorrow and unhappiness.

I could just ask: How many of you have dukkha? Raise your hand. But you don't have to bother, because we know.

Just as impermanence gives birth to trust when you really see it deeply—you realize that just as things are dying, as the kids saw in that forest, it makes room for something new to be born, and you begin to trust the process of turning—even as you sit and the emotions come and you make space. There's sadness and fear and you allow it, and it rises in a big way. And then if you stay with it, it passes. And there you are, still the loving witness of it all.

So just as anicca, impermanence, is the doorway to trust, dukkha gives birth to compassion. They come together. They make a courageous heart.

Thich Nhat Hanh was asked not so long ago about climate change, before he died. A student asked him, "Should I sit and meditate and go on retreat and somehow purify my heart? Will that help? Will that make the difference? Is that what I should do? I'm worried about climate change. Or should I go out on the barricades? Should I protest? Should I get politically involved? What should I do?"

And Thich Nhat Hanh got quiet, looked back, and said, "Just listen until you can hear the sounds of the earth crying."

He didn't tell the student what to do. He just said: Let yourself open and hear and feel and listen and sense the truth.

Your grief becomes a doorway. As Rilke says, if the drink is bitter, then turn yourself into wine. So you sit and you quiet the mind and open the heart, and you listen until you can hear the sounds of the earth crying.

There's a story of an old Hasidic rabbi who used to talk about the practice of prayer and meditation. He always used a strange phrase. He would say, "When you meditate, when you pray, when you offer these prayers, recite them, feel them, and place them on your heart." One day a student said, "Rabbi, Rabbi, why do you always use that strange phrase, 'place them on your heart'? Shouldn't we put them *in* our heart?" The rabbi got quiet and said, "It's not us who can put them in the heart." Perhaps he said it's God that puts them in the heart, or the divine, or something deeper than our own will. He said, "Our practice is to recite them and place them on the heart, so that someday when the heart breaks, they will fall in."

And this is how grief and dukkha becomes the doorway to compassion.

A poem for you called "Everyday Grace" by Stella Nasanovich:

It can happen like that—
meeting at the auto repair, buying tires
amidst the smell of rubber,
the grating sound of jackhammers and drills.
Anywhere we share stories, grace flows between us.
The tire center waiting room becomes a healing place
as one speaks of her husband's heart valve replacement,
bed sores from complications.
A man speaks of multiple surgeries,
notes his false appearance as strong and healthy.
I share my sister's death from breast cancer,
her youngest only seven.
A woman rises, gives her name, Mrs. Henry,
then takes my hand.
Suddenly, an ordinary day becomes holy ground.

This is how we connect. We hold hands. There's something so innate in us when there's suffering. You can look at Ukraine and see all the terrible things, but you also see nations and Doctors Without Borders and World Central Kitchen and people from every direction pouring in their love and help and support. That is also us. Suffering brings us the deepest compassion.

Impermanence, yes. Dukkha, part of this incarnation. It's here, baby. It is us. And yet it connects us in compassion and love. It does.

So quiet and close your eyes again for a moment. What is calling to you? What suffering, what loss, what

difficulty in your life, in the world? What is calling to you and saying, "Yes, don't avert your gaze. Let your heart open, see, feel"? And then—what courage is asked of you? You can know. When compassion arises, compassion is a verb. It also says, "I must. I will. I find a way to make a difference."

Now, Thich Nhat Hanh from the Mahayana tradition of Vietnam teaches these three characteristics. He calls them the three seals. And instead of teaching dukkha, he teaches nirvana—because knowing dukkha is the gateway to nirvana, to freedom or peace.

As Zen Master Suzuki Roshi, who founded San Francisco Zen Center, said: "When you realize the fact that everything changes and find your composure in it, there you find yourself in nirvana." Nirvana isn't someplace else. It is the freedom and the peace that's available to you with a quiet mind and an open heart, when you become the loving witness of it all. Pain is inevitable, but suffering is not. And you can rest in loving awareness and joy.

We can get so loyal to our suffering and forget that joy—that joy I like to talk about from the books of the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu, laughing and joking together in *The Book of Joy*.

So dukkha gives birth to the great heart of compassion.

And then the last of these three is anatta, which is translated sometimes as emptiness, no self, no separate self. This is the hardest one to understand, but you could sort of feel it when we were meditating together and I said, "Now, who are you?" toward the end. Look—and you look and you don't find yourself. There are sensations and thoughts and experiences, and there is awareness, but it's not *your* awareness.

In fact, you're not even there exactly. There's just awareness itself. Nothing separate.

Wes Nisker, my colleague and friend at Spirit Rock, puts it this way. He's a humorist as well. He said, here's the three characteristics: Life's hard. It'll put you through changes. Don't take it personally.

And this is the third—anatta—that it's not yours. The profound reality, the invitation to step out of the fiction of separateness, what's called the small sense of self or the body of fear, where we get frightened or selfish or self-centered or cut off.

Alice Walker wrote, "One day when I was sitting there like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me, that feeling of being a part of everything. And I knew if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed, and I laugh and I cry and I run all around the house. When it happens, you just can't miss it."

And we know this—walking in the high mountains, or making love, or being there at the mystery of the birth of a child, or the death of a human being silent like a falling star. All of a sudden we step out of the time-bound consciousness, the separateness, and feel ourselves part of the turning of the seasons of life. You feel it on retreat. You're doing walking meditation and all of a sudden you realize you're not doing it. It's all just doing itself. It's amazing.

No self, as one of my teachers said—no self, no problem. More self, more clinging, more self-centeredness, more problem.

But it's like this. When I look at my daughter, she was born of an egg carried by her mother. But the egg that was carried by her mother was actually there in her grandmother's body. When her mother was an infant in her mother's womb, the grandmother's womb carried the egg that became my daughter. And then my daughter grows up as a woman and she has a child. Maybe she has a daughter—she has a son now. Maybe she'll have a daughter, we don't know—who becomes a mother and grandmother. And the eggs are there a couple of generations before and after. We are not ourselves. We are the whole chain of beings.

And in one apple is the mystery of life. That tree doesn't grow without the rhizomes underneath it in the forest floor, the sunlight on the leaves, the wind, the turning of seasons, the planting and the harvesting in an apple orchard, or before that in the wild apples. And the chlorophyll that turns sunlight into sugar—now, how's that for a miracle? We live on a planet where light turns into sugar so you can be happy. The biosphere, the genetics of an apple, and all of it's just happening, baby. This is selfless. This is the form of life coming out of consciousness itself and expanding and opening in all these remarkable multitudinous ways.

A man came up to the Buddha—his name was Mogarajan—and he asked him a question three times. When you ask three times, then the Buddha has to answer, as it's said. He said, "Tell me, oh Blessed One, you are supposed to be wise. How can I live so that I will not be seen by the king of death?"

And the Buddha responded, "O Mogarajan, do not cling to anything as being yours alone, as being self, or I, or mine. And if you do not cling to anything as self, you will not be seen by the king of death."

So this is the invitation Thich Nhat Hanh talked about—the seal of nirvana, of freedom. The timeless freedom that is who you really are. When you don't cling to your body, your feelings, your relationships, the things around you. And understand, when I say don't cling, I don't mean don't care. You know the difference. You'll feel it in your body between attachment and love. They're really different. And you can live in the timeless present, the consciousness of loving awareness itself.

I remember my time with Nisargadatta, this great guru in Bombay, where he said at one point, "My consciousness can enter into anything, and I can feel the experience of it, because it's all consciousness."

He said, "Wisdom sees that I am nothing. Love sees that I am everything. And between these two, my life flows."

I loved watching Ram Dass in the last years of his life because he was there in that wheelchair, in a broken body where he couldn't move one arm and one leg, where he had aphasia and couldn't speak fluently, grappling to find words. He had multiple infections and physical traumas and bedsores at times and all these things. And he was about the happiest person I'd ever been with. Really joyful amidst all the

paralysis and aphasia.

"How can you be so joyful, Ram Dass?"

And he said, "I am loving awareness. I love it all. I love it all. The joy, the sorrow, the birth, the death, the spring and the winter."

So when you understand, there comes this beautiful sense of freedom. This is our incarnation.

And then from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in *The Little Prince*, he says, "First thing in the morning, you look after yourself. You brush your teeth and wash your face, don't you? Well, the second thing you must do is look after your planet." It's not that complicated.

And the heart changes when we come to terms with change and impermanence and realize we can trust that life wants to renew itself. And we come to terms with dukkha and say, "Yes, that's part of incarnation. You don't get out of it." Loss and change and pain and suffering and gain and pleasure—all are woven together.

I don't know whether nice people tend to grow roses or whether growing roses makes people nice. And I don't know the answer either. But I do know there's a kind of joy that comes when we see with the eyes of wisdom and the great heart of compassion and trust.

Oh, nobly born, remember this teaching for now and forever.

And as you know, when you touch this, it spills out of you—your joy, your peace, your acceptance, your flexibility, your non-rigidity, your openness, even with your own foibles, all held in the great heart of compassion. And you become like those people in the tire store waiting room. You become part of the communion of us, of the open heart of life.

And this is possible for you.

Alice Walker says, "War will stop when we no longer praise it or give it any attention at all. Peace will come wherever it is sincerely invited. Love will overflow every sanctuary given it. Truth will grow where the fertilizer that nourishes it is also truth. And trust will be its own reward."

Teach yourself peace. Pass it on.

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