Reconciliation

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:45:39

Good Monday evening to you.

I'm really happy to be able to teach again. As most of you know, I did Monday night teachings for more than thirty years, every week. And now, as I am in my eightieth year, I've cut back and I'm teaching once a month so that I could do other interesting things. But I still miss it, and it's such a pleasure to see you all.

What we do Monday nights is usually quite simple. We start with a meditation, which we'll do tonight, and then have a break—five minutes or so to stretch or relax—and then that's usually followed, as it will be, by some teachings, and maybe a brief meditation at the end of the teachings before we do some question and response.

Whatever brings you, just take a pause for a moment. I'm really glad we get to connect, because the invitation of this space, more than anything, is to remember—to remember what really matters, to remember what your heart knows, to remember the wisdom that was born in you that you carry.

So with that, let us begin with twenty minutes or so, maybe a little more, of meditation with a bit of guidance tonight. And I'll start us off with a bit of a story or an image.

During the years that I lived at my teacher Ajahn Chah's forest monastery, which is in the province of Ubon in Thailand that borders both Laos and Cambodia, it was during the period of the Vietnam-Cambodian-Laos War—the American War, anyway, with them. And there were warplanes that flew overhead, bombers and fighter jets. There was an air base in the province, not that far. And if I went to one of the monasteries right along the border, you could even see flashes at night of the fighting.

We had visitors. I remember a friend who came from Vietnam. He was part of a Quaker group doing peace work in the middle of the war. And he said, "How dare you stay here when there are all these people suffering?" He asked Ajahn Chah about that. Doesn't Ajahn Chah want to do something about it?

And Ajahn Chah's response was this. He said, "Wars come and go. They're a terrible thing. They cause tremendous suffering. And the Buddhist teachings are to see suffering and to find the path to free ourselves from suffering. And that means to make our own hearts a zone of peace. So this monastery is a zone of peace. In the war zones, people steal, they rob, they kill. Here, if you lose something, it's returned to you. If you're in trouble, someone reaches out. It is a completely safe and generous and kind and compassionate community. And we're at peace with the animals and the beasts of the forest. Come and taste it. Because we want to be a living library of what's possible for humanity, so we don't forget."

William Butler Yeats puts it this way: "We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather around us, that they may see their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even a fiercer life because of our quiet."

So with these words, let your eyes close gently and invite yourself to become a zone of peace.

If it's helpful, settle on your seat. Let yourself sink into the earth and feel the support right under you, fully supported. Take two long breaths. Let the eyes and face be soft. Loosen the jaw. If you like, roll your head in a little circle to release your neck, and let it find a simple upright. Let the shoulders relax. The arms and hands rest easily. Let the belly be soft, the breath natural, and let the heart be soft as well—to receive whatever arises with kindness, with compassion.

And as you begin to quiet, invite a sense of peacefulness to arise. Yes, there will be thoughts that come and go, sensations of pleasure and pain in the body, emotions, memories. And there is a deep peace to be found in the midst of all of these, just here. Not an absence of thought.

but a spacious, peaceful heart, peaceful presence. Deep down you know this.

Let yourself remember or picture a time in your life when you were quite at peace. A moment, a day. You remember. You can feel it.

May I rest in peacefulness. With each breath, may peace arise. The out-breath returning to peacefulness, each breath. Steady.

May I become a zone of peace. May I have peace in my heart amidst all the things this heart carries. May I have peace amidst it all. May I have peace in my body. Let the body come to rest and ease, softening into stillness. May my mind be at peace. May I have peace in my mind.

Let the sense of peace expand like space, vast and open. Like the sky or the galaxy—boundless space and peace. And yes, there will be thoughts and troubles, pains and joys, emotions, all the parts of life rising and falling like waves in the ocean. And you are the vast space of peace. Relax into it. Trust it. Vast space and peace, timeless and open.

And sense now how you can move through your life with a peaceful and loving heart in the midst of it all. Feel it. Picture it. This is who you are.

And when you're ready, gently allow your eyes to open, carrying that spirit of stillness. May you have a peaceful heart.

Tonight I'd like to speak on a topic that I feel to be compelling at this time, because there's so much cry or call for compassion and dharma understanding in what's happening in our world. And this is the theme of reconciliation.

Now I know reconciliation also sounds like a Senate procedure, but it's a more humane procedure than that. And so, as I teach, it's not so much for you to believe or even learn, but perhaps to reflect and be reminded.

What do we do when there's conflict? Conflict is natural, you know, at times. It's just built into this kind of incarnation as animals on this earth. I mean, all you have to do is go and volunteer in a preschool, as I used to, and the kids would get in conflict. "It's my toy." "That's not fair." "He got more cookies." "She did." One is hitting the other with a block. And then you get down on your knees and you say, "Use your words instead of the blocks." I wish we could say that to our global politicians. Use your words. And you ask, "What upset you? What hurts? What scared you?"

It happens—conflict—to all humans, including, shockingly, in spiritual communities.

I have seen that in the last fifty years. But when we pause and when we reflect, especially in these divided times—the political divisiveness and the longing for racial justice and the climate disruptions and all the other things that we might care about, now heightened in conflict—it invites us to pause and reflect on our values. On what matters.

In the Dhammapada, those verses of the Buddha: "One who seeks happiness by hurting others will never find happiness." How about that as a message to the world?

And today, of course, is also October 7th. It's the memorial day of that horrific violence that happened from the attack of Hamas on the Israeli settlers a year ago this day. And more than that, the beginning of the horrific war that has caused immense suffering on all sides and continues—and really tears at the heart if you look at it, as does the war in Ukraine and Sudan and Myanmar and so forth. But this one is right here somehow, in our screens and our laps and people we know. What are our values in the midst of this?

Here's Robert Kennedy—the other one, the one who ran for president in 1968 before he was assassinated, just to keep it straight. He was talking about our gross national product. He said it's measured to count prisons and nuclear warheads and advertising and cigarettes and the logging of our forests. "Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate, or the integrity of our public officials"—that's a kind of quaint phrase, isn't it? "It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to one another in the country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

So we really have to reflect amidst all the conflict: What really matters?

Thich Nhat Hanh—one of his first books was *Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. He talked about building the school for youth and social services and clinics during the war, not taking a stand between North and South

Vietnam. Lots of the young people who were working with him were killed. And still he was a beacon of peace. That's what Dr. Martin Luther King uplifted him for, nominated him for the Nobel Prize.

I remember talking with Thay Thich Nhat Hanh. At one point I asked him why he has people smile and talk about joy so much. I see him holding hands and working with children, the new generation. And he said, "Because I'm so sad. Because I've suffered so much, I have to choose joy. I have to water the seeds of peace. This is what I've chosen to do with my life—to water the seeds of peace and joy."

There are several accounts of the Buddha trying to stop conflict in his time in northern India. There were battles and warfare between the Sakyas and the Kosalas and so forth. At least a couple of times he went out and stood in the middle of the marching armies on the battlefield. At one point he stood in front of one of the armies that was going to go and sack the other kingdom. The conflict was over water—which we will have, alas, more of those in our climate change time. And he said, "I need to ask you a question. Which is more precious, water or blood?" And somehow he asked it with so much concern and compassion that at least one time the army turned back. Not every time. But it did.

So where are you with conflict? What are the conflicts in your life? What are the conflicts around you that touch you? And how do you navigate the conflicts in your life? Human beings have struggled with this question of conflict for thousands of years.

And our brains are wired, tuned toward the things that are conflictual—the negativity bias, what's scary, what might cause trouble, what we might lose, all of those kinds of things.

There was an organization started in the sixties or seventies in Palo Alto called A Better Game Than War. The notion of it was—I think Joan Baez was a part of it—that conflict is natural, competition is natural. Think of the Olympics. How can we get human beings to use the impulse of competition and conflict in a healthier way? Of course, the Olympics are an example. Maybe at best the space race was meant to be this. But it posed a question for us as human beings: How do we do this? We need a new model or a new set of values.

And of course, it's interesting to see in this highly politicized moment, certainly in the United States, that politics are in some way ritualized warfare. The Democrats and the Republicans don't have tanks and fighter planes to go to Washington and take over the Capitol. It's being done in other forms, but it is a ritualized way of trying to deal with conflict and come to a resolution—or come out on top. Let's pay attention to it and what we might do to steer our humanity in a healthy way.

When I was some years ago in Palestine and Israel doing peace work, I met with the bereaved mothers. I met with the former combatants for peace, and they were on both sides—Palestinian commandos, Israeli officers. I had the most moving time being with the Sulha. It was part of a group that brought teenagers from Palestine and Israel together, starting when they were young, when they were nine or ten, and continuing as they became teens, to learn about each other. After five years, they became so bonded. They

would say, "Why would we fight each other?" And their parents came at the end, kind of shocked to see what their children had found. It's hard to hate up close. And that's what happened.

Van Jones, the commentator on CNN and a social activist and a brilliant, wonderful friend—he did an interesting thing. He was very much involved with the problem of the fentanyl and opioid deaths, this huge epidemic that's still ongoing. He got a grant and brought a group of people from Southern California—liberal parents, immigrant parents. This was a group who had all lost children to the epidemic, whose children had died. And he flew them to West Virginia and invited them to sit in a room in a big circle with a number of folks from West Virginia who were culturally much more conservative—religiously, politically, in all kinds of ways.

They sat together, kind of looking at each other with whatever they were thinking. And then he asked everyone to take out the one thing he made sure they brought with them: the picture of their child who had died. Place it in front of them or hold it up and say their name before anything else happened. And of course, everything changed. There weren't conservatives and liberals and immigrants and old families. There were just parents looking at each other's eyes saying, "Oh, my daughter, my son—me too, us." And the profound care we have for one another.

I tell these stories because stories make our future. As the poet Muriel Rukeyser wrote, "The universe is made of stories, not atoms." And what are the stories that we carry of what's possible?

Even in spiritual communities, it happens, as I said, that there are wee bits of conflict—or more. Once, a long time ago, the Buddha spent a rains retreat with the monks in the forest at the Kosambi Monastery, and a conflict arose. The story is told that it was between the Vinaya master, the master of decorum, and the master of recitation, two of the leaders in the community, about how people were supposed to behave. They became really heated. Many took sides, though some refused. But it got more and more heated, and the lay supporters were upset and beseeched the Buddha to call them in. He heard them describe all the ill-used words and the wounds and so forth—a serious blow to the harmony of his community.

And you know what happened? The Buddha sat with them and tried to work with them. They didn't listen. If you're a parent, you know this, right? They didn't listen even to the Buddha. He tried, and the conflict continued, and they were fighting. And finally he said, "I'm leaving."

He told no one. So I just contradicted myself—he absented himself. He turned away and walked into the forest with a couple of monks who were close to him and spent three months away. He said they were really happy months. He was out with the animals, the elephants, with the phases of the moon and the movement of the leaves and the wind and the quiet of the forest, meditating.

Three months later he returned and asked, "How is it?" And they said the conflict was worse, if anything. They continued to argue. And the lay disciples got really angry. They were so upset. They said, "You drove the Buddha away. We're not even going to offer you food anymore. You've got to get it together."

So how to do so? As the story is told, the Buddha called them all together, but he said, keep them separate, one side from the other. And here are the teachings of how to resolve, how to bring some resolution—the seven steps that are needed for reconciliation. As I talk about them, you can more than anything feel what they speak to in your life, or the life of the people around you, or the world around you.

The first step in this seven-step process of reconciliation is called face to face—bringing people all together so that it undercuts the private conversations where everybody builds up their legal case and makes it worse, and instead brings people together. They actually have to be in the same place because something happens when you're actually there face to face.

I was reading recently in a book on forgiveness, a story of parents who were going into the court for the sentencing of a man, a drunk driver who had a history of drinking and driving, who crashed and killed their two daughters. He was a young man. The mother walked into the court and she saw the family of the young man who had driven the car that killed her daughters. She saw the sorrowful eyes of his mother and she couldn't help herself. She just walked right over to her and wrapped her arms around her and they both wept. Because they all suffered. Face to face—hard to hate up close.

When I was doing couples therapy, there was a couple in considerable conflict, you might say, who came to see me. We were sitting there and I welcomed them and they told me a tiny bit about what was happening, just a tiny bit. And I said, "Well, we need to make a space where there can be some real listening to each other. Why don't you get in a position where you feel safe to talk about what's going on?" Immediately the woman stood up, walked out to the other end of the room, and slammed the door shut. I had to smile. Okay, that's safe. And then she opened the door and you could see her eye peeking in through the little crack. But that's where we began. I said, "Stay there. All right, you can talk from out there if that's what makes you safe."

The first step is to bring ourselves together in some way where we feel safe. And then the next step is called deep listening. This is also called remembering with clarity and curiosity. Instead of being in your position in conflict, you lean in with mindfulness and interest and care and say, "I want to know exactly what it was like. Tell me—what did you feel? What did you think? What did you do? What did you see?" There's something about the listening, and each person speaking their truth, whatever it is, that has an enormous power to release the ways that we're caught.

In India, there is a saying or a practice called the act of truth. When you're in real trouble, you can make a ritual act of truth. And when you make that ritual act of truth, it will change things. The story is told of a family where their young child was very, very sick. The doctors had come and they could do nothing. This child, this daughter or son, was in a coma, and the parents were, as parents could be, terrified and lost. And there was a traveling yogi, a sadhu, who came through, and they said, "Well, maybe he has some mantras, some magic that can help our child."

And he came and he tried his mantras, and nothing happened. And finally he said, "Well, I'm afraid the

only thing that will work is an act of truth. Do you agree?" And they agreed.

And as he got quiet, he said, "My truth is that I'm not a very good yogi, that I cheat on my vows, that I've not kept them. And by telling this truth, may your daughter be healed." And her eyes opened. She started to awaken.

Then he looked to the father. And the father said, "You know I have a business. But my truth is to tell my wife that it's not a very good business. I'm not doing well. I haven't been so honest. And by this act of truth, may my daughter be healed." And she sat up.

And then his wife turned to him and said, "My act of truth is that I've not been happy in this marriage. We need to change things radically. I pretended to be happy, but not in my heart."

And then the daughter stood up and looked at them like, whoa, what's been happening here?

It's called an act of truth. Face to face, telling the truth, deep listening.

The next principle is called non-stubbornness. I would know nothing about this except for that little part of me that loves to be right. You know how it is, all of us—my opinions, how I believe things, how I've seen them. And the Buddha talks a lot about this. He talks about clinging to views. Those who cling to views, he said, go around the world annoying other people. It's one of the vaguely humorous phrases you find in the texts. "Moi?" says Miss Piggy. Yes, you too. Those who cling to views annoy one another. It's not about being right. It's about whether you want to listen and connect and love.

Bryan Stevenson, the great activist in the South who worked in prisons, who helped build the memorial to all the lynchings that happened—an extraordinary being—he talks about something called undeserved mercy, that even those he worked with who've done the worst things, they too deserve mercy.

This is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "If only it were so simple. If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who among us is willing to destroy a piece of their heart?"

And the wild thing is, when you do the work of Byron Katie, that kind of inner questioning, one of her most important four questions is: What if the opposite were true? She'll ask what you believe, what your story is, and then she says, try it on. What if the opposite were true?

Non-stubbornness. The valuing of others' perspectives. The valuing of their experience. And the valuing of their pain. Even the undeserved mercy.

Then comes voluntary confession. And it has to be voluntary. But it's really, really important. It's that sense of acknowledgment of someone's part in it. And it's really the basis for restorative justice that we'll talk about.

There's a book called *A Human Being Died That Night* by the South African leader Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. She was very much involved in the South African truth and reconciliation process, quite an extraordinary woman.

And she wanted to understand how it could have been so terrible, how people could have treated each other, killed each other, tortured each other, burned their villages, their homes, their children. How could they do this?

One of the things she describes was going into the maximum security prison where Eugene de Kock was held—the mastermind of the apartheid killings, the worst of them. She wanted to meet with him, and she did over some months, sitting there with him, simply asking him to talk, and listening.

The denouement of the book comes on the day she went in and found him with his head down. He had obviously been reflecting, carrying his own karmic burden. He looked at her and said, "We killed so many. What for? They killed a lot. What for? We fought for nothing. We could have all gone out and had a meal. If we put the politicians and their children on the front line, they wouldn't do it. Why did we do this?" He lowered his head in grief.

And I think for her, as she wrote about it, that was one of the great moments she needed for healing. A voluntary confession.

Restorative justice is this remarkable movement in which people who have been victims of violent crimes—mostly—choose, with proper support and training and understanding, to sit down with those who perpetrated those violent crimes. And often it's actually young people who are caught up in it. So there's a whole movement of restorative justice. San Quentin is one of the models of it, but there are many other places. My friend Sujata Malika is one of the mainstays of it.

In San Quentin, I believe it was, there was a woman named Radha. She couldn't speak to the young man who killed her son because he was killed, but she was trying, like Pumla, to understand how human beings could shoot or kill or destroy another life. And so in the restorative justice process, she asked to meet with some of the men on death row, lifers in San Quentin who had killed young people, who had committed murder.

She was taken in by a guide, someone who understood restorative justice. And she talked about her son, Chris, and how he had been shot at age twenty-one for nothing. She talked and they talked. And they made a connection. She started to visit them and listen to them and understand the tragedy of their stories, which in many cases were immense—just like most of the women in maximum security prisons who committed murder are there, almost all of them, because they were terribly abused. And she heard all these stories.

The next year was to be the anniversary—the fifth anniversary or whatever it was—of the killing of her son. And the men she had been meeting with in San Quentin asked her to come in on that day. They had

all cut pieces out of their blue prison uniforms and stitched them together, making a quilt of atonement and love. They stitched with their hands his name and the date, and then peace doves and flowers and prayers.

When she came in, they said, "We have something to give you." They unwrapped it and wrapped it around her and said, "Not only do we who have been killers ask your forgiveness, but we ask your understanding."

And this is the Holy Grail, really. This is what allows people who have been in conflict to see each other with the sacred eyes of humanity.

A voluntary confession, then decision by consensus. In the monastic context, that meant all the other monks or nuns around in this process, but here it means the support of your family, your teacher, your therapist, your community, the exemplars who nod and say yes. Turning toward peace is exactly what is needed. We support you. We uphold you. We have your back. We are with you with all the courage that you take to do this.

And then there is accepting the verdict. The elders are asked for their view on how it should be resolved. And it is always the verdict of compassion. Can you feel the compassion? And are you willing to change?

You can reflect on this in your own life. Can you feel the great heart of compassion for all?

Are you willing to let go and change and reconcile in your heart—to not put anyone out of your heart?

And finally, there is the stage of covering mud with straw. All the mud and the blood and the pain is now covered by straw. In that formal process, the elders, the most respected monks and nuns, speak. And in your own life, you can imagine: What would the Dalai Lama feel? What would Archbishop Tutu or Aung San Suu Kyi on her best day say to you in your conflict? What would they whisper in your ear, remind you of, tell you?

Again, it's like a woman who came to see me who was in the midst of a terrible divorce. The husband who was divorcing her, who'd had a number of affairs, was not only trying to keep the money but lying about her as a mother and trying to keep the children. It was one of those really painful and messy situations. We talked about her getting the best lawyer she could, which she did, and protecting herself, which she also did.

And then she came in one day and said, "My ex is telling my children all kinds of bad things about me." And she said, "I will not retaliate." She sat up and declared, "I will not bequeath a legacy of bitterness to my children." It was like an act of truth. It had such courage and power in it. She simply would not play that game, would not go into that conflict to cause harm. "I will not bequeath a legacy of bitterness to my children."

So some questions for you who are listening. Where are you in this story? In your own life, where are

you? Are you in that position like the Buddha where no one will listen to you? It could happen. Are you one of the stubborn monks? Are you one of the bystanders, the disgusted lay people who don't even want to feed the monks anymore because they're so lost in their conflict? Are you one of the few who didn't take sides? Think of conflict in your life. Are you listening deeply with your heart, not putting anyone out of your heart? Are you willing to cover mud with straw?

I was the peacemaker in our family. Four brothers—we each had different roles. My parents fought a lot. My father was abusive and violent, a wife batterer. I tried to make peace. I still do it for a living.

And I remember being with my father when he was in the hospital toward the end of his life. Talking to him, he mentioned something about my mom. They'd been divorced for probably fifteen years, but they were married for thirty. And I shook my head and said, "You know, it's still hard for Mom because of the way you treated her." And he said, "Treated her?" And I said, "Yeah. The times you hit her and got really violent with her." And he looked at me—it was a kind of amazing moment. He couldn't even remember. He couldn't even let himself see.

But whatever he remembered or didn't, I'm not going to carry the legacy of bitterness. I had my reconciliation with him. Grief and pain. And then what? It's not the end of the story.

Reconciliation is hard. It brings us close to where we're truly vulnerable. But we need it—in our families, in our communities. More broadly, you know, the USA is still fighting the Civil War.

It really is. Fear, laws, white power, supremacy—all of it. Fear of immigrants. We're still fighting the Civil War, with all the racism and tropes that came from that, still acting upon us.

We need reconciliation. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process was so remarkable. Twenty-two thousand victims came forward and spoke. Seven thousand hearings for amnesty were held for people who agreed to say what they had done, who were willing to face up to it. It didn't fix everything, but it was a start. It was the beginning of asking: What does it mean to see each other with the eyes of compassion for the life that we carry?

And the amazing thing is that repair is possible. "He beat me. He robbed me. He threw me down," says the verse in the Dhammapada. Perpetuate those thoughts and you live in hate. "He beat me. He robbed me. He threw me down"—let go of those thoughts and live in love. We have all suffered. Hatred never ends by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law.

Repair is possible. I think of an old acquaintance from years ago, Jane Middleton-Moz, a psychologist and community ritual organizer. She's part Native American, Anishinaabe. She told the story of working, I think in Southern Canada, with a Native community that had been decimated—the children stolen and taken to boarding schools, forbidden to speak their language, beaten, abused. The parents who lost their children.

She said, "We need a council." And she brought them all together. The council had three rings. In the middle were the younger generation, children now living in that community. Around them sat their parents—the ones who had been taken to those terrible schools. And around the outside ring were the grandparents.

She asked them each, in turn, to tell their stories. The grandparents told what it was like to have their children taken from them—the sorrows they carried, how it completely upended their lives and community. The parents told what it was like to be torn from their families and carried off, beaten, mistreated. And then the children in the middle said, "Oh, now we understand better what happened to you."

As is true in that Native community, when there is this kind of reconciliation, this coming together, there is gift-giving. This was the telling of truth, the acts of truth. And from the outside of the circle, one of the grandmothers spoke: "Since my daughter was taken, I have never woven our sacred blankets. But after these stories today, I speak to you children—I will teach you how to weave."

One of the parents said, "You know I don't come out of my house because I only drink. I drink since I came back from when they carried me away and took my language and my life. You know I'm a drunkard. But I look at you, next generation, and now that you know what happened to me, I pledge to you—I will never take another drink. This is my gift to you."

Elders and parents in the circles gazed at their children, telling the acts of truth and then offering: "I will teach you to make baskets again, the baskets that hold our people together." And the children drank it in. They could hear it. They could feel it, because it was the medicine that was truly needed.

Repair is possible.

Reconciliation is possible.

Leymah Gbowee, who along with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won the Nobel Peace Prize—these women from Liberia—they said that Liberia used to be known for its child soldiers. Now it's known for its women leaders.

Human beings can learn. We can grow. We have the capacity to see one another with compassion. This is what all of our practice is about—in your family, in your community, in the political world, in the world of war. Remember. See it. Feel it.

The Hutus and the Tutsis have somehow come to live together. The Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants, after years of conflict, have come to live together.

True love, says the Mahabharata, is not for the faint-hearted. The Bhagavad Gita explains: if you want to see the brave, look to those who can forgive. If you want to see the heroic, look to those who return love for hate.

No one knows how old humanity is, but we can all agree we're old enough to know better.

It's time. It's time to become wise. It's time to carry something deeper—something we can offer one another to plant the seeds of reconciliation in our lives, in politics, in community, in family, in the arts that we're a part of.

Oh nobly born, says the Buddha, remember who you really are. Remember the Buddha nature within you, the capacity for profound compassion.

Others will be cruel. We shall be kind. Thus we will incline the heart.

Others will kill or harm living beings. We shall not do so. We shall care for them and cherish them. Thus we will incline the heart.

Others will take what does not belong and steal. We will not do so. We will be generous. Thus we shall incline the heart.

Others will speak maliciously or speak false words. We shall tell the truth. Thus we shall incline the heart.

Others will be arrogant. We shall find humility. Thus we will incline the heart.

Others will be careless. We will be mindful and attentive. Thus we will incline the heart.

Others will lack wisdom. We will cultivate and awaken our wisdom. Thus we will incline the heart.

It's there in the world. Through the struggle that they have endured, Northern Ireland has found some part of this. We can too. Liberia has found it.

You, each of you—you and I—we carry the seeds of a new world, of a possible world. This talk doesn't give an answer to what and how and exactly what you should do, because the answer lies in your heart. Reconciliation—in your family, in your community, in all that you touch.

You carry beautiful seeds. Water them.

May all mothers and daughters be reconciled. May all mothers and sons be reconciled. May all fathers and sons be reconciled. May all fathers and daughters be reconciled. May all sisters and brothers be reconciled. May all partners and lovers be reconciled. May all husbands and wives be reconciled. May all family members be reconciled. May all employers and employees be reconciled. May all community members be reconciled. May all men and women be reconciled. May all religions be reconciled. May all races be reconciled. May all nations be reconciled. May all creatures be reconciled. May all beings in every form find reconciliation and peace.

Thank you. Thank you for your reflections and your sincerity. This was not one of those talks filled with jokes and humor, but it feels like a teaching that the heart needs to remember and inhabit and carry in

these times. There is a possibility of love and redemption, and it is one of the most beautiful things that can happen.

We have a bit of time for reflections, observations, questions.

Was this helpful? I see Linda's hand. Linda, if you would like to unmute and speak.

"Hi, Jack. As I was listening tonight, I was thinking about a number of conflicts in a number of different categories and capacities—family members, politics, countries. And I was wondering, is it possible for us to keep our heart open and to look for reconciliation if it's not mutually accepted? I mean, I can't resolve the conflicts in Ukraine or in Israel-Palestine or other places, but I can hold my heart open. What would you say?"

First, I'm listening to you and appreciating that you can hold your heart open, because there's so much suffering in Ukraine and Russia, there's so much suffering in Israel and Palestine. How could we not see it? And then it's not up to us to be able to have the wand to make it go away. Some people won't even agree with that—they say you have to hate that side or that side. But I hear you saying that's not what you're doing. Is that correct?

"Yes, yes."

So then you're asking, is it possible to hold that openness and not have people agree that they should follow your wishes and do it? They don't necessarily follow what you're saying, but you feel it. So close your eyes for a moment and just tune in. Let yourself answer your question, because you know. What does your heart wisdom say?

"My heart wisdom says that I feel like I'm holding the sadness for so many in so many different areas. And I want to keep my heart open and not be taken in by one perspective or another. But the sadness is that the suffering continues. And it's not just frustrating—it's something that's so heavy on my heart. I don't always know where to put all of the emotion of that."

Yes. So first, the wisdom that you're holding it all and not getting caught up in one side or the other. And now what's asked of you is to embody the great heart of compassion.

You have to become Dr. King. You have to become Gandhi. You have to say, "I let this be. I look this in the eye. I see it. I feel it. And who I am is bigger than this."

Because even as you feel the great heart of compassion which holds all the tears and suffering, it's not the whole story. Today there are a billion people making love and planting gardens, and billions of people feeding their children, and billions of people doing beautiful things. You can forget it, and then the heart can get kind of colonized by just the tragedy. But actually, the great heart of compassion knows both.

"Oh, I loved your answer. Thank you."

Another practitioner shared: "Thank you for tonight's talk. It's like my thoughts exploded all over the screen. Having been on this planet, meandering into putting one toe into the next decade—the eighth one, I'm not there yet, but I'm in there—I know that the same thing happens over and over and over. People are always making gardens and feeding children and making love and building, and people are always fighting and tearing down. And it is what it is.

"The only thing I can do is live in a state of hope, keeping my heart open, my eyes open, my ears open, and living with the knowledge that there's nothing I can do by myself. But if I join a sangha, a program, a group—there's always love. There's always love. There's always the people that are going to burn crosses on my front lawn perfectly happily, but I don't have to speak to them. I can just smile and acknowledge their presence and say, thank you for sharing.

"I just know that if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten. And I believe that we're okay. We're okay. And I know that there is so much sorrow and so much joy. To live in the balance of it all is the best I can do."

It's good to see you. I feel myself in this very tender space tonight, hearing you speak, the conversations we've been having, and the tenderness of your heart that's open to all this, and the wisdom you spoke. I couldn't imagine it being said better. That's as good as it gets. You've just given a beautiful gift to us.

Another practitioner raised his hand: "My story is this. I live in Berkeley, California, which is a liberal enclave. All my friends are other progressives and liberals. And I've had it in mind for a while to try and have an interaction with a Trump supporter. About twenty miles up from my town—a place called Lafayette, if you're in the Bay Area you know where I'm going—there's a bridge across the freeway. Typically a lot of Trump supporters will be there waving flags and Trump signs. I plan on going out there, and after I get through what I'm doing, I was thinking about just walking up to one of the people and saying, 'Gee, I'd like to talk with you.'"

I don't want to argue. I don't want any conflicts or anything. I just want to ask: How come you believe this? How come you believe that?

So that's all well and good. But what I got from your talk tonight is that I have an underground intention of fixing them, of changing them, and somehow making them awake to what's going on. The Berkeley consciousness, of course.

Well, it's not just Berkeley—there are a lot of us. Progressives, yes.

So I think it might be a little difficult for me to walk up to some of these people and just come from a pure place of really wanting to know. To ask questions like, "Suppose you deport eleven million people—who's going to pick the crops?" But not from a place of wanting to change them. From a much more open place. I'm going to have to work on that. I'm going to have to play around with that during the week. I'm going on Friday, actually. So I want to thank you for that.

What you're saying underneath it is about something much deeper—trying to understand. "Help me understand how you see it." I don't even think the specific questions—"you're going to throw out the immigrants"—that almost sounds like an accusation. "Help me understand how you look at immigration. What do you think should happen? Help me understand."

With that kind of open-hearted curiosity, people will feel it. On the other hand, you're quite accurate. If you go in with a little edge, really wanting to convince them—that's not going to get you very far.

And who knows? They might have some things you can learn from, because you don't hear that side. "Tell me, how does this affect your family, your children? What's your vision? Tell me. Let me listen."

Yes, learning to phrase it in a much more open and connective way rather than my underground wanting to fix them.

And then what's your intention in doing it? That was a very good question, because what came up all of a sudden was wanting to help myself let go of some of the anger and ill will and resentment.

Well, if you're honest with that and say, "I want to talk because I've been afraid or resentful, and I realize I don't understand. I need to understand better"—that's a beautiful intention. It makes you vulnerable, but it's honest.

Good luck. No—it's not good luck. It's good skill.

Yes, it's good skill and good heart.

When we approach each other with our minds already made up—which of course I would have no experience of, but people like you do that anyway—it's a little like when you sign up for something online and you can't go any further until you read all the fine print. There's like four pages of fine print with a little accept button at the end. And you just scroll down and press accept. But you've never actually read it or listened.

We can listen to each other that way. Like we're just going to press the accept button. Okay, and now I have my case.

But there's something that happens if we get quiet, like Ernie did for a moment, and ask: What's our best intention? What's the intention underneath it? For him it was to undo his resentment and his anger and the distance he created—which is another way of saying learning how to love. But that's the question for us: What's our real deepest intention?

A participant named Toby raised a question: "I feel so deeply about the sadness that's taking place in this world at this time. And I think like everybody else, I feel hopeless or at least helpless at times. Is it a conceit to feel that if we treat each other—because I feel we're so deeply connected—if we treat each other individually with kindness and openness, that it has an effect that will ultimately make some changes, if

not as global as we might wish?

"Because in my experience—and I'm older than you, so I've had a lot of experience—I've met very many different kinds of people, and yet I have found they have all wanted the same thing. They have wanted to thrive. They have wanted to be seen. And when that happens, nobody says, are you Jewish or Palestinian? Are you conservative or liberal? Because in that moment, that connection is more profound than the differences. So my feeling is: if I can do this as much as possible on an individual basis with a true heart—not to be altruistic, but because I see it and feel it—is that enough?"

You posed the question two ways. Is it enough? Enough for what? I don't know. "Will it make a difference?" was a different way you framed it.

What you're talking about, I really respect. Close your eyes for a second. Just do a little reflection. Imagine that you're in a school system where all the children are being instructed to fight and battle and be angry with one another. That's how they're being taught—we should always fight and be first and be the best and put other people down. And this starts to grow in the community.

Would that affect the world if people have those kinds of instructions and thoughts?

Yes.

You're sure, aren't you?

Yes.

So your question kind of reversed it.

Now you're picturing, all right, suppose in a society there are a number of people who foster respect and connection, people who make others feel like they're being understood and cared for—will that spread? Will it grow? Will it change things? We don't know how much or how long, but does it make any difference? I think so.

If you put a violin on a table and have a violin in your hand and you play it, what happens to the violin on the table? The strings resonate, you know, the very same notes. You can't not make a difference because they're part of you. Now we have all these different parts, as Solzhenitsyn said—our heart contains all these. But if that's the seeds you water, if that's what you bring into this world...

I love what you said. You've seen people over all these decades and they all want to be seen and respected, to feel a connection. The beautiful thing tonight is people are just speaking wisdom and we get to drink it in.

One of the most amazing things I've seen is that it's true whether a child is five or somebody is eighty-five—there's that moment when that look comes and that brightness in the eyes that says, "Ah, you saw me." And you approved, or at least did not disapprove. It's a hope that it spreads sufficiently, and I

don't know. We can't know. But at least you feel it has enough value that in its own self, it's something to pursue.

When you look back at your life, that's what you'll be glad you did. That's really what mattered.

This is a beautiful way to end tonight. Quite lovely and uplifting. May we all carry this spirit and illuminate. It is a little bit of a tough time, and we are tender and we need a big heart of compassion. What Toby said was wonderful—such beautiful medicine.

Let's just sit quietly again for half a minute. And remember how powerful it is to be seen and loved. That's really the great power in the world. More than any. The power of love. And you have it and carry it. And can live it.

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