A Rudder in Turbulent Times

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:40:00

This Monday Night Sitting group was started forty years ago in a friend's living room in San Anselmo, and then moved to the Fairfax Community Church for about thirty years, every week, more than thirty years. Recently I've been doing it once a month, with others filling in. And I'm still really grateful to have you attend, to be connected. I see you in your little squares, at least some of you, many of you who I know. And it feels like a really important time to have community and to be together.

What we do on Monday night is really very simple. We have a meditation period, twenty or thirty minutes or more, then take a break for five or ten minutes to stretch or relax. And then usually, as there will be tonight, some teachings and some time for questions and dialogue afterward.

It is both a pleasure to see you, and at the same time, I'm also missing the live Monday nights and how sweet and connecting it is to sit in the community hall at Spirit Rock and be present with one another. And maybe that will happen, but not for right now.

In these rather turbulent times, the theme for this evening is a rudder—a rudder for crossing the wild stream, for navigating the times. I was reflecting on what would be a good practice for us this evening, and so I'd like to guide, for those who wish, a loving kindness or metta practice.

How many of you already do sometimes a metta practice? Basically all the hands go up, because it's part of the tradition and one of the practices that has spread most widely, along with mindfulness, here in the West.

What's true about metta practice is there are a variety of different ways to do it. One of the ways you may have practiced is closing your eyes and systematically reciting certain phrases, picturing yourself or people you care about: May you be safe, may you be well, may you be happy, may you be peaceful—things like that.

Another way of practicing metta that's also ancient and traditional is to invoke or invite the feeling of love to be in yourself without the specific words or images—more that you become a carrier of, or a beacon of, kindness. Whatever arises—thoughts, people, images, concerns—the response might be held in kindness. This too, held in kindness, about yourself, others, the world around you.

And of course, the ideal as you practice is to find your own way, to find what most naturally resonates with yourself as a gateway to open the heart. To feel not just the loving connection with the world, but more deeply, to feel the state. And that, in the deepest way, is who and why.

So with this very small introduction, let yourself find a way to sit comfortably and at ease. In doing metta and loving kindness practice, it's really helpful to sit in a way without a lot of pain. It's very hard to do loving kindness when your knees are killing you. Let your body actually have a sense of care and wellbeing, and rest in that sense of wellbeing.

When you're ready, allow your eyes to close gently, and first bring kind attention to your own body. Take a couple of long breaths. Let the eyes and face be soft. Loosen the jaw. If you like, you can roll your head in a little circle to release your neck. Let it have a simple, upright ease. Let the shoulders relax, the arms and hands rest easily.

Feel the weight of your body and let yourself sink down or settle into your seat, so you feel completely supported by the seat and the earth below. You can rest just where you are. Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. Let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with a spirit of kindness, compassion.

Only in the space of presence and stillness.

Let me read to you the one-page version of the Metta Sutta, loving kindness, that has been recited for thousands of years. As you listen, let the words invite an opening of the heart and mind and body to the field of love and the field of kindness.

This is the work of those who are skilled and peaceful, who seek the good.

May they be able and upright, straightforward, and easily supported, unburdened with their senses calmed. May they be wise, not arrogant, without desire for the possessions of others. May they do nothing mean or that which the wise would reprove.

And resting in this simple goodness, let them reflect and share in this way: May all beings be happy. May all beings live in safety and joy. All living beings—and this is your well-wishing going out to beings in trouble, beings in every form. May all living beings, whether weak or strong, tall or stout, average or short, seen or unseen, beings near and those distant—may beings everywhere be happy. May they have wellbeing in every form.

Let no one deceive another or despise any being in any state. Let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another. But as a mother watches over her child, willing to risk her own life to protect her only child, so with a boundless heart one should cherish all living beings as your children, suffusing the whole world with unobstructed loving kindness. Above and below, around every quarter, pervaded with loving thought and care. Sublime—standing or walking, sitting or lying down—during all the waking hours, may one remain mindful of this heart of kindness. This way of living is the best in this world. And may your loving kindness, with love-filled thought abounding beyond measure, reach beings in every dimension and every direction.

Every time you recite these words or hear them, know that in other parts of the world just now, there are people reciting these same words and evoking the same spirit of metta. Always—twenty-four hours a day, every hour and minute—someone is reciting and practicing loving kindness. And you can feel it. You join in the stream of kindness. You can rest in the field of loving kindness.

Or if you like, you can add the words of loving kindness in the systematic way that many have done, and picture loved ones and friends and neutral ones and beings in every quarter, each time wishing: may they be safe and protected, happy and well, filled with kindness. Or you can rest in the reality of the present, and whatever arises, whisper from the heart: held in kindness, held in kindness. The thoughts, the feelings, the people, the memories, the sensations—held in kindness. Whatever floats your love boat, follow that. And if the attention wanders, as it will, when you remember, just the simple phrase: held in kindness. Wherever it went—held in kindness. Staying in the loving heart. Held in kindness.

If you wish, you can direct the field of loving kindness to parts of the world, spreading loving kindness especially to those who are suffering, struggling. And to those who are causing suffering—may their hearts too become peaceful and loving. Omitting none, it says. Omitting none. And to beings in every shape and form, beings of the waters, beings of the earth—well-wishing to be held in kindness.

And finally, bring the loving kindness back strongly to yourself. If you'd like, you can even put a hand or two on your heart, on your belly, and hold this mysterious life you've been given with loving kindness. With care. And feel yourself as a field of metta, loving kindness. When you're ready, gently open your eyes. You carry the light of this loving kindness in your being for all you see and touch.

Welcome back from the break. Let yourself get settled again in some way where you can listen as a kind of meditation and reflection. Not so much that you have to believe what I say or talk about—it's a contemplation. A reminder, perhaps. If there's something that touches you as true, let that inspire you. And if there's something that feels wrong or awful, let it go.

So to begin with, on this Monday in February 2025, I recently returned from a pilgrimage in Southeast Asia—Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. It was quite wonderful. I got back the day after the Los Angeles fires started, returning to LA with Trudy. And it was, of course, very difficult. We now have many friends who have lost their houses, homes, and livelihood. The fires were very close to our houses. Trudy's daughter lived just a block and a half away from the edge of the Palisades fire, where everything else had burned—other dear friends too. So that was really difficult to come back to.

It seems like our life goes along, we know what's going to happen, we have our plans. And then—in the Buddhist texts, there's a phrase that karma can change as quickly as the swish of a horse's tail. Part of the nature of samsara, this world of birth and death, is the nature of uncertainty. Everybody had their certainties about their life. And then for thousands, it was an enormous upheaval.

Then we went from Los Angeles to lead a retreat in Costa Rica. I love being in Costa Rica and teaching there because the greeting and the culture uses the word *pura vida*. It's a kind of hello greeting, like aloha—*pura vida*, pure life. There's such a warm and friendly culture. It's probably the only country of its size that has no army. It's also a warm and caring culture because it was never heavily colonized. They were fortunate—they didn't have gold or oil. So in other ways, they were left more alone.

It was a reminder of the Buddhist teachings of wise society. That if we live with care for one another, without an army but with mutual care, things can be quite beautiful.

But now I'm back, as we are in the US, in a kind of maelstrom of change and cultural anxiety—at least for many.

I want to read a poem that was sent to me by my friend and fine poet Alison Luterman this last week. Because when I read it, I wept at the end. It describes some of the kinds of changes that are happening or being proposed. And if we think about how we navigate these wild waters, how we have a rudder—the first part is just to wake up to what's happening.

It's called "Praise the Broken Promise of America":

Praise deep mineral veins under the rich dirt and fossilized remains of dinosaurs turning themselves into gas for our benefit. Praise the exhausted earth, miles and miles of subsidized corn, and cattle lowing from their hell holes in automated milking barns.

This is not an easy poem.

Praise farm workers rising before dawn, their sore backs and aching knees. Praise the myth that drew them here, stories eagerly consumed when there is nothing to eat but faith. Praise the courage of the reverend to look the dragon in the eye and preach mercy. Praise whatever hidden waterways are still pristine.

Praise music that refused to play at the funeral of democracy and the killing cold that swept through Washington when a fake pope took power. Praise drag queens and lipstick lesbians, boys who were girls and girls who were lions, butch women wearing tool belts, and all the music theater nerds who are even now building new passageways, mapping the next underground railroad, and suiting up to be conductors.

Oh, everybody, get on board. This train will chug quietly across the Great Plains and over rocky Sierras into the desert where people still leave bottles of water and packets of food for the desperate who have always been the lifeblood of this nation. It will stop in obscure hamlets to pick up fugitives with tears tattooed on their cheeks and fraying backpacks overspilling with contraband books.

Praise the weirdos because if anyone can save us, it will be us.

And praise all the glittering illusions we gawked at, ignoring our own neighbors in favor of a 24-hour peep show on the internet. Praise the conflict firefighters on the front lines in LA battling the insurmountable for

ten dollars a day. We gambled our future for a hot air balloon with a hole in it. Praise our reckless hubris and the infinite distractions of the hall of mirrors we find ourselves in now.

And bless our overwhelmed brains scurrying like mice for shelter. Bless our collective rage and protect the officers who stood up on January 6th and now see their attackers roaming the streets like rabid dogs.

Oh, bless the animals we have always been in our coats and shoes and clumsy language. Bless our willful ignorance, so enormous, so world-altering, that like the Great Wall of China, it can be seen from outer space, where the gods are shaking their heads even now, in pity and in awe.

Now, mind you, I'm aware that poem comes from a person with a liberal persuasion. But it's also heartbreaking.

And it doesn't mean that there isn't value, which I see in conservative points of view—in simplifying government overreach or other things that we can do to simplify and straighten our society. Because the benefits of the Dharma are useful and universal, and it doesn't choose which party to support.

But I also see that the rapid pace of change brings an enormous potential of suffering falling upon the vulnerable, which is what the poem points to. I have a call from a friend who works at WHO, and another who's been one of the main leaders in USAID, saying, "You don't understand. For less than half a percent of your American budget, you saved millions of lives—starving children, HIV transmission stopped, polio you're ending. So many things you've done as the richest nation in the world. We still look to you."

So how to navigate? And this is, if you will, a hard talk and a serious one. How do we respond? What is the rudder, if you will—what teachings, whatever your political persuasion, might be kept in mind?

First, remember your best values as things change. I was in a meeting with several of the heads of the biggest AI companies in the world and a world-famous historian who looked at them and said, "You know, you're like the Bolsheviks." And they sat back. He said, "Yeah, you look at what happened in Russia. They tried to change the whole society very quickly. How did that work out? Look at how the Maoists did it. 'Oh, we're going to have AI and we're going to get new jobs.' Look at how it worked out in China. How about Cambodia? You all have to stop for a moment and reflect."

It was kind of an amazing moment because they were taken aback being called Bolsheviks when they thought they were capitalists. But it's where we are.

So for you and me and those around, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta begins: If a society meets in harmony and treats one another with respect, it will prosper and not decline, says the Buddha. If a society takes care of the vulnerable among them—the children, the women, those who are vulnerable—it can be expected to prosper and not decline. If the society reveres the wise teachings of past generations, it can be expected to prosper, not decline. If society cares for the natural world around it, it can be expected to prosper and not decline.

So these are the values of wise society taught by the Buddha: respect, care for the vulnerable, care for nature. Remember your best values.

Then in this time, ground yourself and steady your heart. Do you remember Thich Nhat Hanh's line about when the crowded Vietnamese refugee boats met with storms or pirates? If everyone panicked, all would be lost. But if even one person on the boat remained steady and calm, it was enough. It showed the way for everyone to survive.

I'm going to do a whole teaching another night on anxiety, but we're swimming in it—a cultural anxiety. And so to steady yourself, do your meditation. And breathe. Imagine as you sit that you're a great tree with roots that go down into the earth. Breathing in air. Buffeted by storms and winds and change of seasons. But underneath, let your core be steady.

When anxiety arises, acknowledge it. Name it. "Anxiety is like this. It feels like this in the body." Acknowledge the stories that it tells. Say thank you. "Thank you for trying to protect me. I'm okay in this moment. You can stand down. You can rest."

Maybe change the story. You'll hear the story anxiety tells. Change that story to one of challenge. Wade Davis, the great explorer, said, "Despair is a failure of imagination." Change the story to one of imagination and possibility, to one of challenge. Shift your chakras—go from the fear place to the heart, to the place of love that we just did. Walk out in nature.

All these things to ground yourself. Steady yourself. Because we human beings have been through huge upheavals many, many times, and we know how to do this. Remember your best values. Ground and steady yourself. Don't be afraid.

This is what H. L. Mencken, the great political commentator of a hundred years ago, said: "The whole aim of politics is to keep the populace alarmed and hence clamorous to be led to safety." And so the zeitgeist and the media are almost designed to activate fight, flight, or freeze, to colonize the nervous system and make you afraid and worried. Don't buy it. It's not who you are. It's not what we are as human beings.

When the terrified monks and perhaps nuns who were practicing out in the forest around the Buddha came running after a night of wild animals and howls, they asked, "What should we do? Please give us a protection—we're so alarmed." And he said, "I will give you the protection." That was the first time the Buddha formally taught metta and loving-kindness as a practice. He said, "Develop this and embody this metta, and you will be protected wherever you go." In the name of ancestors who have practiced through hard times, up and down and around, with a loving and compassionate heart.

Here's a puzzle for you. Belief means just this: who is right and who is wrong. The sutras say the wise do not cling to views—not "who," but rather take your stand on principles, on what is to be valued. Support what's good on every side.

I loved reading Rahm Emanuel, who had been Obama's chief of staff and mayor of Chicago and many other things as a kind of stalwart, famous liberal, writing in the New York Times or the Washington Post about how he was cheering for Donald Trump to get the Nobel Prize. He said this man has the opportunity to revision what's happening with Iran or in the Middle East or Ukraine or North Korea. He said he deserves a Nobel Prize. Rahm Emanuel said, "I'm cheering him on. May he solve one or more of those and bring peace in the Middle East and Ukraine and with North Korea." Support what's good wherever you see it. Take the long view—I'll talk about that in a moment. Live with integrity and the virtue of non-harming.

So this is the Sallekha Sutta. When asked how we live in a society where there are difficulties, this is the practice: "Others will be cruel; we shall be kind—thus we shall incline the heart. Others will speak falsely; we shall speak truth—thus we shall incline the heart. Others will exploit and steal; we shall be honest and generous—thus we shall incline the heart." What it is really asking and saying and inviting us to do is to live with integrity and virtue, more than ever in this time.

After becoming president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela recounted: "I asked some of my bodyguard members to go for a walk in town. After the walk, we went to lunch at a restaurant. The waiters asked what we wanted, and I noticed at a table nearby a man sitting alone, waiting to be served. When he was served, I told one of my guards to ask that man to join us. The man stood up, took his plate, and sat next to me. While eating, his hands were constantly shaking, and he didn't lift his head from the food. When we finished, he waved without even looking at me and walked away. One of my guards said, 'Madiba, that man must be very sick. His hands wouldn't stop trembling.' 'Not at all,' I said. 'The reason for his tremor is another.' They looked at me and I went on: 'That man was the guard of the jail where I was locked up.'"

Often after the torture I was subjected to, I screamed and cried for water. He came to humiliate me. He laughed at me. And instead of giving me water, he urinated on my head. He wasn't sick. He was scared and trembling, perhaps fearing that I, now the president of South Africa, would send him to jail and do the same thing he did to me—torturing and humiliating him. But that's not me. That behavior is not part of my character, nor my ethics. Minds that seek revenge destroy nations, while those that seek reconciliation build wise societies.

Live with integrity and the virtue of non-harming. Others will be cruel; we shall be kind. Others will speak falsely; we shall speak truth.

And from the teachings: Do not be afraid to stand up and speak for these values. From the text again: "Truthfully will I speak, with good intention will I speak, for the benefit of all will I speak." Don't remain silent.

A couple named Carrie and Laurie Riding came home to find their rainbow flag on their front porch had been stolen and their house egged. Anti-homosexual vandalism wasn't what they expected in their close-knit Massachusetts neighborhood. As it turned out, it also wasn't what their neighbors expected. They got together and said, "Why don't we all have flags? They can't take them from all of us." As one of

the neighbors explained to the Boston Globe, within days, the rainbow flag—the symbol of gay pride—was flying in solidarity with the Ridings on over forty other homes in this family-friendly area. One person's act of fear and maliciousness created a powerful statement of love, said Laurie. Love wins.

Do not be afraid to stand up and speak for your values.

"Oh nobly born," begin the Buddhist texts. Remember the fundamental dignity and nobility of every single being, and treat them that way—with respect.

Another story for you. In the early years of the Iraq War, this is a story from the New Yorker, a small unit of American soldiers were assigned to go to the holy city of Najaf. It was a delicate mission, as the presence of Americans in uniform was seen as a potential desecration of their faith and sacred sites. When the soldiers approached one of the revered mosques, hundreds of Iraqis poured out of the buildings on each side, fists waving, throats taut. They pressed in on the fifteen Americans, who glanced at each other in terror. The reporter witnessing it said he felt afraid that a shot would come from somewhere, or someone would open fire, and it would turn into a massacre.

And then, quite suddenly, in the middle of it all, the American officer in charge stopped and held his rifle high over his head with the barrel pointed to the ground. He stood there against the backdrop of the seething crowd, now almost a thousand deep. It was a striking gesture, almost biblical. And then he took a knee. The officer held his position and told his men to follow. The soldiers looked at him as if he were crazy. And then, one by one, swaying in their bulky body armor and gear, they knelt before the crowd and pointed their guns at the ground in the same position as their officer. The Iraqis fell silent. Their anger subsided, and the officer ordered his men to withdraw.

The writer of the story said it took him months to track down Lieutenant Colonel Hughes. How did you learn to tame a crowd in a war zone in a distant country? Hughes offered a shrug. It's not part of army training. The problem, you know—people start shooting for real, said Colonel Hughes. The Iraqis felt that the armed Americans had disrespected their mosque and their culture in this holy city. The obvious solution was a gesture. And this is what makes wise society: to offer the gesture of respect to everyone—those you agree with and those you disagree with.

And take the long view. As I said before, here's Gandhi saying: "When I despair, I remember that all throughout history, the way of truth and love has always won. Yes, there have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible. But in the end, they always fall. Think of it. Always."

How long?

As long as it takes.

In the great cycles of existence, there's a wisdom that we know and carry. Hatred never ends by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law.

And we human beings—we've been through wars and depression, and we will again go through global crisis. We may be in the middle of one now. To be hopeful in bad times, writes Howard Zinn, is not just foolishly romantic. It's based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something good. But if we remember the times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act and the possibility of sending the spinning top of a world in a fine direction.

Take the long view, because it's your intention and your heart and mind, in all the cycles of birth and death—it is that deep intention of wisdom that creates what's possible.

The word Vipassana means to see clearly. Look with clear eyes. Believe in your own observations, your honest wisdom. Believe in science when it's good science. Believe in art. As it says in the Kalama Sutta, do not follow what others say. See for yourself: this is harmful, and this is of benefit. Have the clarity and courage to not avert your gaze. Yes, times can be difficult. Did it never occur to you, it says in the text, that suffering will come to you as well? We're in this together, this human realm, subject to joy and sorrow, gain and loss, praise and blame.

With all of these things, you become what's called a make-weight. In the old days, when you went to the market, they'd hold up one of those scales and put the papaya or the rice or whatever it was in one pan. In the other, they'd put metal weights until they balanced. The make-weights are the name for the tiny little weights added after they put in the one pound or two kilo weight. Often they're quite beautiful, created in the form of a series of little animals—little ducks or little whatever they are. And they get added until that last make-weight tips the scale, makes it go down.

It doesn't take a lot at some times for us to add our goodness—to serve, to care, to support, to awaken. You can be that make-weight that tips the scale.

Join with others. Taking refuge in the Buddha, taking refuge in the Dharma, we take refuge in the Sangha, the third of the refuges. Especially in difficult times, I can't tell you how important community is, because we can easily get isolated. And there are a thousand ways to find others—to create affinity groups, to join service organizations in your neighborhood and around you, to stand up, whether you're political or social, whether you join with artists. Reach out and say, let's do this together. Let's support one another. There are a thousand small ways to do it.

And now is the time.

Twelve-year-old Matthew Flores of Sandy, Utah approached the mailman, his postal worker Ron Lynch, and asked if he had any extra advertisements or random newsletters. Matthew explained that he loved to read, but he couldn't afford books. Even the bus fare to the library was too much most of the time. So he'd take anything the mailman had that was extra. Ron Lynch was floored. He didn't want electronics. He

didn't want to sit in front of the TV playing games all day. The kid just wanted to read. Lynch told the local newspaper and asked his Facebook friends for reading material.

Soon, Flores was getting books sent from all over the world—the US, England, India, South America. For his part, Flores said he plans to read all the books and then share them with other book-starved kids.

It's simple. And that's maybe the last teaching for how to live like a Bodhisattva.

Now is your time. We're all survivors, you know, and your ancestors brought you here—they survived. We know how to do this. You've been training for this for a long time in your life: how to stay steady, how to keep your values with integrity, how to care for one another.

The Bodhisattva enters the realms of the hungry ghosts, the jealous gods. They happen to live in Washington DC these days. The Bodhisattva lovingly enters all realms, deliberately, to bring support and loving-kindness, compassion, to help alleviate suffering. Dear Bodhisattva, I vow to bring benefit—or however you want to say it. What better thing could you do in life?

Now is the time to draw on your moral strength, your courage, your creativity. It's almost like the world has orchestrated this because the globe needs a reset. We know this with climate change and warfare and racism and AI and all these things happening. We need a new set of values to really come forth. You know this as well as I. And it happens when we get quiet and remember what our deepest values are. Then amazing things can happen.

I was just reading about José Andrés, the world-celebrated chef of El Bulli who started World Central Kitchen after the hurricane in Puerto Rico. He got volunteers, and thousands of people came and served tens of thousands of meals. Now World Central Kitchen has served a hundred million meals in Ukraine and Sudan and places where people are hungry. That's a kind of grand thing—kind of fun to talk about and inspiring. He's got people who know how to cook from all over the world with him.

But it doesn't have to be that big. It's the kid who said, "Do you have any books or anything I can read?"

The Bodhisattva's reflection: How can I live and contribute to a wise and healthy and compassionate society? How can I be part of us meeting in harmony and respect? How can I support protecting the vulnerable and the natural world around us and respecting the wisdom of generations before?

And for me, it's the same. I'm listening. I don't even know what to do. I was touched by the image of the Underground Railroad. I live in a neighborhood full of immigrants, some documented and some not. And I will talk to them. How can I help? What do their families need? I talk to CEOs also. But you can lobby, educate, create art, sing songs, serve in the community.

Underneath, you get quiet. And you remember that you're here for a beautiful purpose, O Bodhisattvas. What better thing to do with your life?

So let's pause for a moment. Just be quiet. It's a confusing time in some ways, and also a time that calls for us to speak out or to make a difference.

I want to ask if anyone—there are a lot of you on the screen—just for the fun of it, who might be willing to be a conductor on the Underground Railroad, if it's called for. Just to see if any hands go up.

Yeah. There are.

It's not right for everyone. But it might be right for some of you.

Let's open the community space for comments, questions, and dialogue for a little bit before we end the evening.

Nancy shared something beautiful. "You know, it's so interesting because today I live in Los Angeles, and today I went to Homeboy Industries. I'm sure you know Father Boyle."

Yes, I do.

"Well, he has just written a book called *Cherished Belonging and the Healing Power of Love in Divided Times*. I just got it today—I'm only on page twenty-seven. But he is so heartfelt about seeing the goodness in everybody. One of the things I love so much that he says is, instead of focusing on punishment—you know, he works mainly with gang guys who've been in prison—what he encourages us to do is see the pain instead of the behavior. I feel like that could be very helpful. I don't know how to work with it when you see the pain in the people who are calling the shots right now. But those guys are in pain, you know. And I think that's kind of where you were saying the Buddha comes from—that we have to understand that people really, if we treat each other with kindness and loving, won't be cruel. If we can understand each other a little bit more, understand the pain that causes this behavior."

Thank you, Nancy, because I can feel the inspiration. Homeboy Industries and Father Greg Boyle is a real inspiration for me, from his first book, *Tattoos on the Heart*. I can't recommend it highly enough. He takes people who would be thrown away—not just some of them undocumented, but people who've been in prison for murder, for shooting one another—and he loves them. And they change. He sees their pain, and he also sees their goodness. And he has a word I wouldn't usually use—Father Greg has a wicked sense of humor.

"Oh, he does."

And that's another power we have: to make art, to make this into humor, to turn where we are into something different, which is really what you're saying. So I feel your inspiration, and I thank you for sharing it.

It's funny because I get so inspired reading Father Greg's books. We've done a few events together, and Trudy and I have both gone down to Homeboys. I said to him, "So where do you get your inspiration?" He

said, "Oh, I listen to podcasts from this guy, Jack Kornfield." And it was like, oh my God, I admire him so much—but I guess you take it wherever you can find it.

Then our Teamster poet spoke up. Those are two words that are not often put together, I understand.

"First, thank you for this—as usual, the treasured moments that we spend together, even online. You're a great inspiration for me and many others. Although, if you want to start up the live gigs again, I'd totally drive up to Spirit Rock. And thank you for shouting out World Central Kitchen. As a practicing Buddhist, I cannot support any militaristic action. But you still want to do something for people who are suffering. And World Central Kitchen does that."

Yes. I have friends from Ukraine, and they have said to me that outlying villages away from the cities would have starved to death were it not for that work. Excuse me—it chokes me up a little bit.

And then I wanted to say something about taking action. Because of the pandemic, a friend of mine, Miguel, who had been doing some work for me—he's legal—said to me, "Man, it's really tough. All these people, you're getting checks from the government to stay at home. But these immigrants who don't have the papers have no support. There's nothing coming in."

So I started making phone calls and we got together a few projects in the neighborhood and in other cities. I live in Martinez. These people mostly came from a place called Bay Point. And we got some work together for these folks and put some money in some pockets.

Well, you know, maybe recently you noticed that there was a march on immigrant day, when every Hispanic business, practically speaking, in the Bay Area shut down for a day. The Mexican restaurants were down. The corner stores were down. People just stopped. And better than that, some of the South Asian owners, recognizing that although they had some advantages that the Hispanics did not, they shut their liquor stores too. They shut their corner businesses too. And they had a march out in Bay Point.

My friend Miguel said, "You want to come?" And this is what I'm suggesting to everybody that's gathered on the screen now. Find out where that march is. Having old white people with gray hair standing with them says something to them and to the broader world around us. That needs to be said. Let them lead. But do your walking meditation in a march supporting what you believe. And believe me, you'll never run out of tamales—they came over the bag like this, you know.

Give it a thought. A lot of us are living on Social Security or in retirement. It's not a long drive. These neighbors are not too far away from you, and they're waiting for you to help them.

Jeff, what you say—what was said before by Nancy—you're both just putting your heart out there and saying, this is what matters. This is where I went to Homeboys. I went to this march. You're expressing that care from your heart and your life. Thank you for doing it. Thank you for reminding us. We all need

to hold hands together in difficult times. And I feel you reaching out with your hands and your heart. And yes, World Central Kitchen is extraordinary—to feed one hundred million meals. It'll get you out of the house, get you some exercise. Away from the TV for a while with all the nonsense. Be well and happy.

Padma. Lotus.

"First of all, thank you so much for being the elder, reminding us to let go of fear and stand in solidarity, and also to stabilize the mind and not let it go a thousand places. When Nancy was speaking, what came to me was that in spite of doing all the things I do at work—seeing people from where they are, being able to do that—as soon as she said we should be nice to each other, the first thing that comes to my heart is, 'Well, let them be nice. Then we will be nice.' I hear that tone inside me. And at this point, I have to acknowledge that this is where I am. This is how I feel. It's not like I can deliberately go and be rude to anyone. But even when I'm driving, I'm suddenly thinking, 'I wonder if the car in front of me is a Republican car or a Democratic car.' And I'm very sad that this is what it has come to. But I also appreciate that I am on this path. I'm not letting go. And I'm very grateful that I have met you."

I'm touched, and I thank you. Also, you've said some things that are really important. First of all, you've said you have some not completely loving and charitable thoughts. No one else listening would have that problem—you're the only one among us. But the fact that you fess up to it is itself actually rather comforting to other people, because I myself have had at times what one might call un-Buddhist thoughts toward people.

But then, because we've learned to practice, I see them. Even in traffic—it's a small thing, and it's not who's a Republican, but who's driving in a way that's cutting people off. And I can feel the reactivity, and it's become really a practice for me. If I feel myself being reactive, whether it's that or something on television, I picture them as a five-year-old kindergartner going into school. And here they are—wide-eyed and innocent as kindergarteners. Yes, they can get in fights and a whole lot of things, but basically there's still an innocence of heart in almost every child who goes in. And I see them that way. They're in the big adult body driving or running something or speaking, but underneath is that child of the spirit. And when I do, there's a kind of metta that comes, a softening of, "Oh yeah, this one too is in there. Let's figure out how we do this together."

So I'm glad you brought it up so honestly, because that's also important for us. And if I remember, your work is as a physician, is that correct?

"Yes."

So you never really do anything of use. But the thing is, I'll tell you, that if any of these people—even the ones that you might, how we say, judge—were to come to see you as a doctor, you would love and care for them. And I want you to feel that even right now, that that's really who you are. All that other stuff comes, that conditioning—we have it. But who you are, feel that. It is that person who would care for anybody

who came to see you as a doctor. And that's your pledge, but it's really your true nature.

So thank you, Padma.

That could be a good place to stop. What I hear from Nancy and Jeff and Padma is our good hearts. We admire whether it's going to Homeboys and seeing the transformation of people that you would think would be thrown out—and Father Greg doesn't throw anyone out of his heart—or Jeff and his work, or Padma. This is actually who we are. And we need each other to remind each other to stand up, to be honest—

And with that honesty, also to be really loving. It's so funny talking with Padma—it's as if her mind has no pride. It'll do anything. It does all these things. But you can feel her good heart in evoking her work, her care as a physician. That's really true, as it is for Jeff, Nancy, and you.

So may these teachings that have been carried for thousands of years to this time give you sustenance and reminder and courage, strength, and love.

Thank you.

Good to have a moment of quiet. I'll see you out there. Wherever we are, we'll do it together.

Good night.

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