Be Joyful Though You've Considered the Facts

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:50:49

Hello, dear ones. Welcome to Spirit Rock Online, Monday nights with Jack Kornfield and friends.

Spirit Rock is located in the San Geronimo Valley of West Marin County, California, on unceded Coast Miwok territory. We name the history of this beloved place as a gesture of respect and reparation toward the indigenous residents of the colonized land we now call home.

We welcome you all, all parts of you—your color, culture, beliefs, gender, orientations, abilities, ages, education, and economic status. Please fully take your place in this circle.

We've been meeting, some of us on Monday nights, for forty years. Most of those years were on the land at Spirit Rock—thirty years there—some before, and now a bit more infrequently online. It was every week for about thirty years. All during this time, it's really been a way for people to come together to quiet the mind, tend to the heart, reflect on teachings and values of compassion and loving awareness and mindfulness, and to share in this.

The format tonight, as usual, is very simple. There will be a guided meditation to start, followed by some quiet meditation time—probably about thirty minutes. Then we'll take a break to stretch or relax for five minutes. After that, as usual, there will be some teachings, followed by a period of questions and responses or dialogue.

Whatever brings you here, welcome. As Ileana suggested, all parts of you are welcome. The Dharma doors, the Dharma gates, invite you to take your seat—this place halfway between heaven and earth, in this extraordinary human form—and to remember the capacity we have to awaken, to be present, mindful, alive, and also loving and compassionate in the midst of it all.

So let's begin with some meditation. Part of it will follow the theme of this evening's talk. The great farmer-poet Wendell Berry wrote, "Be joyful, though you have considered the facts."

Let yourself settle for this time. When you're ready, allow your eyes to close gently. Take two or three long breaths. Let the eyes and face be soft. Loosen the jaw. Roll your head in a circle if you like, just a little bit, to release the neck, and let it find a simple upright posture. Let the shoulders relax. Let the arms and hands rest easily.

Feel the weight of your body and sink down into the seat. Sense how you can be completely supported by the seat, the chair, by the earth beneath you. You can relax and settle into just here, taking your seat halfway between heaven and earth in this meditation of awakening.

Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. Let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with the spirit of kindness and compassion.

Now, with this embodied presence, establish the quality of mindfulness—mindful, loving awareness. Begin simply by noticing the body breathing itself, without trying to fix or change. Notice if the breath is soft or shallow or deep or irregular. Let it breathe as it wishes.

As you sense the breath—the coolness in the nostrils, the swirling tingling in the back of the throat, the rise and fall of chest or belly, or the whole body moving—relax and sense that it is the earth that's breathing you, the ocean of the air. You're being breathed by life.

As you relax, you can invite a sense of ease and calm to come with this kind attention to the breath. Breathing in and out, inviting a sense of ease. Noticing the breathing rhythm, inviting a sense of calm and quiet. Breathing gently, let the mind quiet and the heart soften into presence.

Naturally, as you sense the breath, there will be all kinds of other experiences that arise. Thoughts and plans and memories, images. Other sensations in the body, warm or cool, pleasant or unpleasant. Sounds that come and go. Emotions—sad, happy, worried, excited. Let them rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath. No need to stop them or fix them. Feel how the breath moves quietly in the midst of them all.

Sensing the breath invites you to become the loving witness, the mindful, loving awareness that notices the moods that come—sadness or fear, longing, love, joy, connection—that lets you notice the streams of images or thoughts that pass by. And like the breath itself, you quiet, feel its rhythm, and you witness the rising and passing like waves of the ocean.

You rest in the middle, breathing quietly, still. You are the awareness itself, noticing the arising of experience. You are the quiet, steady witnessing. Timeless, present. Allowing for all things, all the waves to rise and pass. Quiet in the middle, undisturbed, spacious presence.

As you sit quietly, notice how the thoughts and images, as Rumi puts it, come trooping out of emptiness from nowhere. Let the sense of wonder arise—amazing, the breath breathes itself. Images and appearances arise and pass. Let yourself sense the wonder that was born in you.

Remember your best adventures as a young child. Call upon the child of the spirit that can wonder at a flower or pebble or the mystery of a tree. Mary Oliver's line: "I was a bride married to amazement."

With a sense of wonder, allow there to be joy. The child of the spirit rolls down the grassy hill, plays with whatever is here. A joyful heart, inviolable, still within you.

You carry within you the gift of awareness and a profound joy just to be alive, to see and touch and taste. May your wonder increase. May your joyful spirit shine even amidst it all.

Keeping the sense of mindful, loving presence and the spirit of wonder or joy, when you're ready, let your eyes open gently. Notice how you feel. Stillness, presence, kindness.

Happy to be with you.

I'm seated here at my desk in San Rafael, California, looking out across a bit of green grass to a crab apple tree in full bloom. It's still before sunset, so it's beautifully lit. One of the things about crab apple trees is that they have these amazing, gorgeous pink and white blossoms and their green leaves at the same time. You get this contrast of green and white and pink all together in a kind of magic form. And then in the black acacia tree on the other side of our house, near the water, lives a very big owl that hoots—might even hoot during our talk—that I get to hear outside my bedroom window, especially when it flies about at night.

It's spring, you know, here at least in the Northern Hemisphere. And I was reflecting on what to talk about tonight because the last couple of months of teachings really had to do with politics and wise society and how we respond to all the craziness happening around us. It felt important to complement that with a teaching on joy—and what the Dalai Lama calls having a positive attitude.

Joy is different than hope. It's a deeper knowing and a bigger thing than pleasure or happiness. In fact, it's one of the essential factors or qualities of enlightenment—necessary for enlightenment and an expression of enlightenment. Joy as a factor, a necessity for enlightenment. How's that?

And it's so fitting in the spring. I think of the great poet Pablo Neruda's line: "You can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the spring." There's something that wants to renew itself and bring beauty into the world no matter what crazy human beings—us—do.

Now a question, of course, is how can we have joy in these times? When we've defunded USAID and there will be hundreds or thousands or millions of people, many children, who won't have medicine for malaria or HIV. When we've defunded education and scientific research. When I read that the National Park Service took down the webpage about the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman, took her picture off, and simply said something like "the Underground Railroad is one of the most significant expressions of the American civil rights movement"—taking about a whole page describing leading people out of slavery and that entire transformation, all gone, as if it didn't happen. But of course it did.

So how do we have joy when there's chaos, disruption, suffering in so many ways?

What I've seen in going into refugee camps is that they don't really want you to be depressed. They have enough of that on their own. They're not looking for people to come in frightened and worried and depressed, but actually to come in with an uplift, with possibility and joy.

I think about my dear friend Wavy Gravy, the cosmic clown, who half a century ago at Woodstock, after a rainy night following a lot of the great rock bands, got up on stage early in the morning and said—in the

mud of it all—"What I'm envisioning is breakfast in bed for 450,000 people." And their tents began to pass out food to as many people as they possibly could.

Wavy Gravy, as a clown wearing his red nose and his big clown suit and shoes, spent a lot of time going into children's hospitals. He specialized in going into burn units—if you can picture children who've been badly burned. And he would go in and, as he said, "I would lead with bubbles. Before I even went into the room, I would blow the bubbles and start to laugh. And I'd get the attention of the children who'd been suffering so much. And then I'd hit them with jokes and playful things."

We need each other. We really need to remind each other, as we did in that meditation at the end with joy, that there's something immense that we're a part of. And that suffering is not the end of the story—it's the beginning of the Four Noble Truths. We don't have to be so loyal to our suffering.

I went out for demonstrations on Saturday in Marin. There were 6,000 people. In San Francisco there were tens of thousands. And the feeling was so warm-hearted and joyful and peaceful at the same time. There were, of course, amazing creative signs, things like: "It's so bad, even introverts are here." Or "I'm not a sign carrier, but holy fuck." Or "History teacher against bad history." Or "I didn't grow up saying liberty and justice for all every damn day to accept anything less." "Jesus would be deported" was one of the signs.

And I've been giving out red cards—in Spanish and English, or in Tagalog and English, different languages—for those who are undocumented, as a kind of protection. You can order them online. I've gotten some thousands of them. They explain your civil rights: "I do not wish to speak with you or answer any questions or hand you any documents based on my Fifth Amendment rights in the Constitution. I do not give you permission to enter my house based on my Fourth Amendment rights under the Constitution unless you have a signed warrant with my name on it. I do not give you permission to search any of my belongings."

I choose to enjoy and exercise my constitutional rights. These cards serve as a kind of protection.

So here we're talking about some of the difficulties that are happening. And then you have Howard Zinn, the great historian, who says to be hopeful in bad times 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 of benefit. But if we remember the times and the 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 positive direction.

So is joy okay? As I again quoted from Wendell Berry, our great farmer poet: be joyful though you have considered all the facts. And I love looking at the Book of Joy with the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu. There they are in their conversation, these old friends meeting together. They said, "We laugh more easily and we cry more easily and we connect more deeply." When they got together with all the cameras there,

Tutu said, "It is so joyful to see you," but then added to the Dalai Lama, "Hey, remember the cameras are on—we have to act like holy men." And they both broke into gales of laughter. Then Tutu started teasing the Dalai Lama: "All these people come to see you. You get more people than me. They come to see you and you can't even speak English properly. What's the story?" And they tease each other.

But in the end, their message is to say: do not let the heart be colonized by fear, by hate, by confusion. All that's happened to the people of Tibet, in apartheid in South Africa—they had enormous suffering. "Why should I let them take my happiness?" says the Dalai Lama. "Why should I let them take over my heart?"

I love that image I carry of Vendran Smailovich, who played his cello in the bombed-out National Library of Sarajevo. During the war, when Sarajevo was besieged, wherever there had been mortar and bombing, the next morning he would put on his tux from his time in the National Symphony, bring his cello, and play music so that people would not give up hope.

Part of this is that we catch joy from one another. We can bless each other. We can heal each other from our hearts. Joy—Rumi tells us—do not sit long with sadness, my friends. When you go into the garden, do you look at thorns or flowers? Spend more time with roses and jasmine. And on Rumi's tomb it's written: "Ours is not a caravan of despair. Welcome, lover of life, wanderer, worshiper. Even if we have broken our vows, ours is not a caravan of despair." Something bigger.

And this is really what joy is. It is the joy of life renewing itself, even though it takes a long time and wanders through some pretty dark places. You remember this passage from the Dhammapada: "Live in joy, in love, even among those who hate." Here's the Buddha giving you mainline Dharma. "Live in joy, in health, even among the afflicted. Live in joy, in peace, even among the troubled. Look within, be still, free from fears and attachments. Know the sweet joy of living in the way."

Joy is a radical understanding of our human spirit and possibility amidst it all. I think of my teachers—Ajahn Chah, whose forest monastery was in the province next to Cambodia and Laos where the wars were happening and the bombers and fighter jets flew overhead. I think of Maha Ghosananda going back to Cambodia after the enormous genocide and loss. I think of the Dalai Lama after fifty, sixty years, unable to return to Tibet, watching the destruction of the culture. And they're some of the most joyful people I ever met. Loving, present, joyful. It's a radical thing.

Yes. There's guilt, there's doubt, there's unworthiness.

There's fear that maybe if you're joyful or loving, somehow there's not enough goodness to go around. Or in some ways we've learned to be loyal to our suffering. We all have a certain measure of suffering that's given to us—cosmically, if you will—by human incarnation. And we're called upon to meet it with compassion and a loving heart and joy.

You know the great poem that I read so often from, called "A Brief for the Defense" by Jack Gilbert. I won't read the whole long poem, but these lines: "If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction, we lessen the

importance of those living in deprivation. We must risk delight—not pleasure seeking, but deep delight. We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world. To make injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the devil." In defense of joy.

So there are joy meditations. And spontaneously in deep meditation practice, when the mind gets very still and concentrated, light begins to arise. In the texts, there are twenty-five kinds of joy: bliss and thrilling joy, and cool joy where the body feels like a vastness of silent coolness, and joy of illuminated colors, rainbow joy—so many kinds of joy.

I remember when I was a new monk at Ajahn Chah's monastery, learning to meditate. I was practicing walking meditation. I'd been there for maybe a month or two, trying to find my breath and concentrate with my crazy mind, learning how to go out on alms round with my bowl and not drop my robes in the middle of the street—which happened to me once. Just trying to be a good person, a good young monk.

I set a candle by two trees in the forest next to my hut, a candle by each tree. There was a little walking path that I'd swept on the forest floor. I was walking slowly and mindfully, really concentrating. And then all of a sudden, I felt my body grow taller and taller, like I had taken a bite out of Alice's mushroom in Wonderland. My head was up in the limbs of the trees and I was filled with this lightness and joy. I paused and said, "Wow, this stuff really works." It was the first experience of that kind of meditative bliss. Of course it didn't last, but it gave me something to realize—okay, you're on the right path.

Now, having a joyful heart is not about not caring, but something bigger. When you read the history of the years of the Buddhist teachings, there was injustice. There was a tremendously oppressive caste system, which the Buddha stood up against. There were people being enslaved. There were lots of wars, and he did what he could to help stop some of those wars. But that wasn't his main thing. His main thing was, as Ajahn Chah would say, to teach people to step out of the battle, to find in their hearts and their consciousness an embracing of life that's steady and loving and peaceful and joyful.

I once asked Thich Nhat Hanh why he taught so much about sitting and smiling, because sometimes he seemed kind of sad to me, and I said that to him. He said, "That's why I teach smiling." He said, "I've seen so much suffering. People killed." In his school in Vietnam, all these young people came to the school he created for peacemaking, and it was attacked by both the North and the South Vietnamese. Young people he brought together who were killed, bombed, shot. So he said, "I've carried so much grief and suffering. I have to smile. I've had to find joy." And you become, even in spite of the suffering of the world, you become a lamp—as he was.

Gandhi put it this way. He said, "I believe in the unity of all things. And therefore I believe that if one person gains, the whole world gains. And if one person falls, the whole world falls to that extent." Thich Nhat Hanh was one of those who gained and passed it along. But it's each of us—we become a make-weight.

I think of that photo I had on my refrigerator for many years, of the line of tanks in Beijing around the Tiananmen Square time. That Chinese man—you all know that photo—standing in front of the line of tanks with two shopping bags of groceries, just gazing at them. And them unable to move further because of his presence, his courage, his dignity to stand there and say no.

So when I speak of make-weight, it means in the old days—still now when you go to many markets and you buy rice or mangoes or asparagus, whatever the vegetable—there are the two pans. They put the goods you want in one and then the weights, half a kilo or a quarter of a kilo, and they come close to balancing. And then there's this little line of tiny weights.

Sometimes they're in the form of little animals, little turtles or little birds or something. And they put a couple of make-weights in, and finally the scales balance. It doesn't take much, these make-weights. And yet the whole scale can tip—just like that man in Beijing with his shopping bags, stopping the entire roadway filled with oncoming tanks.

Doesn't always happen quite that way. In war and in difficult times, sometimes that doesn't work, and it's too dangerous. But if there's a shred of morality, a shred of decency, it's an extraordinary thing. Non-violent standing up has an incredible power.

So there's a kind of inner courage that you have as a human being that no one can take from you. That child of the spirit, the original wonder and innocence, amazement, and that care and courage—because you know what's right. You absolutely know it.

Pause for a moment. I'd like you to reflect: What is it that brings joy, even in difficult times? And what is it that brings you joy? You can think about it—walking in the woods, time with people you love.

Here are some of the Dharma teachings that point to a deep level of joy. One of the things that brings joy is our integrity. From one of the Buddhist texts:

Others will be cruel. We shall be kind. Thus shall we incline the heart. Others will be greedy. We shall be generous. Thus shall we incline the heart. Others will speak falsehood. We shall speak truthfully. Thus shall we incline the heart.

Not very complicated. Reflect on it. We know this. Integrity.

I love this story from the Christian Desert Fathers, translated by Thomas Merton. The holy Abbot Anastasios had a very fine Bible on refined parchment with a jeweled cover. Once a certain brother came to visit, and seeing the book, made off with it. That day, when the abbot realized the brother had taken it, though he was sad, he didn't send after him for fear that the brother might add perjury to the theft.

Well, this brother went down into the town in order to sell the book. He asked sixteen gold pieces from the buyer of antiques, who said, "Give me the book that I may find out whether it's worth that much." With that, the buyer took the book up into the desert to Anastasios and said, "Father, take a look at this book

and tell me, is it worth sixteen gold pieces? Should I buy it?" And the abbot said, "Yes, it's a fine book, worth at least that much."

So the buyer went back to the brother and said, "Here's your money. I showed the book to Abbot Anastasios, and he said it's a fine book, worth at least sixteen gold coins." And the brother replied, "Was that all he said? Did he make any other remarks?" "No," said the buyer. "Well," said the brother, "I've changed my mind and don't want to sell the book after all."

He hastened back to the monastery and begged the abbot with tears to take back the book. But the abbot wouldn't accept it, saying, "Go in peace, brother. I make a present of it for you." But the brother said, "If you do not take it back, I shall never have any peace. For I found here what I was looking for." And he joined that community around Abbot Anastasios and lived there for the rest of his life.

It's your integrity, unshakable integrity, that brings joy of heart. Think of the situations in your life where it really matters.

And how you get boosted up and strengthened.

It's also generosity—taking time and love and care, serving, being there for others. We get happy when we can give. If we can't give, it's a really impoverished life, because we are knitted together. And the heart knows this. Our joy comes when we find our ways to give.

Father Daniel Berrigan, an activist and of course a spiritual leader, said: "Sometime in life, hope that you might see the look on the face of a starving man when the bread finally arrives. Hope that you might have baked it or bought it or even needed it yourself. For that look on his face, where you're meeting his eyes across that piece of bread—you might be willing to lose a lot, or suffer a lot, or die a little." But that is what brings joy. Generosity, offering, serving makes the heart grow open. We know it and we can do it, especially in these times.

Integrity, generosity—what else brings joy in our life? Gratitude. There's a beautiful website for Brother David Steindl-Rast, all these teachings on gratitude. Gratitude of seeing the beauty of life itself so much.

You know, after the Buddha's enlightenment, as the stories are told, and they are told often, one of the first things he did was to move a distance away from the Bodhi tree and sit for seven days and gaze at it in gratitude for sheltering him. Garden and nature feel the gratitude of the trees that are breathing oxygen, taking your carbon dioxide and feeding you, working for you, loving you, all around you. They're loving life by transforming carbon dioxide into oxygen. Look at the things in your life that you have. Look at the relationships. Look at the mystery around you. How can you not feel gratitude?

One of my favorite books, and I've been rereading it lately, is Father Greg Boyle's *Tattoos on the Heart*. If you haven't read it, it's an astonishing book of stories of Homeboy Industries and who he's worked with over the years and all the suffering in the community—how many young people were thrown in prison,

how many were shot, the gang wars. And Homeboys in the middle of them showed another possibility: come join us, step out of the gang, come back when you're out of prison, we'll get you a place in the community.

One of the stories he writes about is an eighteen or nineteen-year-old young man named Spider, who he said was raised in the village there with his sister, abandoned by his parents. And somehow they managed to get enough food and eat somehow. And then he came to Homeboy Industries. He'd been part of a gang and they were shooting at one another. And he said, "I can't do this anymore. I want a family." He had this girlfriend, they got married. He came to Homeboys, and Father Greg helped secure him a job as a hospital orderly moving patients and equipment. And he felt so proud of himself. They moved into a little apartment and they had two small boys.

So Father Greg was driving and he saw Spider out on the street, not so far away. And he said, "Here, I'll give you a ride home." And they talked for a while about his life, and he was thanking Father Greg for helping him get the job. "How's it going?" And he says, "I'm okay." He said, "You know what I'm going to do when I get home right now? I'm going to sit down to eat with my lady and my two boys. And well, I don't eat. I just watch them eat. My lady, she gets crazy with me, but I don't care. I just watch them eat. They eat and eat. And I just look at them and thank God they're in my life. And when they're done eating and I know they're full, then I eat." And the truth, sometimes there's food left and sometimes there isn't. And he smiled and he says, "You understand. It's a father thing."

Gratitude—you can feel the tenderness in this, just to be able to watch his boys eat and feel that he could care for them.

What else brings joy?

Trust.

The moral arc of the universe may be long, said Dr. King, but it bends toward justice. Trust means a long view. "Enlightenment," says one of the great patriarchs, one of the founders and ancestors, "enlightenment is one with a trusting heart." To be without anxiety about non-perfection.

And even as things get taken apart around us, even with concerns about widespread suffering, there is another image that's important to keep in mind, and that is the imaginal cells.

When a caterpillar spins a cocoon and goes inside, we usually think—I certainly did as a kid—that it's in there and then it grows its wings and comes out and sprouts as a butterfly, which looks like it has a little caterpillar in the middle and these huge wings. But that's not how it happens at all.

Inside the chrysalis, there's this extraordinary dissolving in which that caterpillar becomes a mass of fluids and cells, completely unorganized. And then among those cells, as it divides and dissolves, there's a handful of cells that scientists call the imaginal cells. They're the cells that know that they can fly, that

know within them and within the brother and sister cells there is the possibility of creating this amazing being of a butterfly. And they start to organize all the other cells, sometimes apparently with some resistance from the other cells, as the scientists watch. And the imaginal cells build the butterfly.

Trust. Trust that it's possible, and not only that it's possible, but that in your heart, you can make a difference.

"Tell me the weight of a snowflake," a tiny mouse once asked a wild dove.

"Nothing more than nothing," came the answer.

"In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story," the mouse said. "I sat on the branch of a fir tree close to its trunk when it began to snow. Not a blizzard, no, just like in a dream, without a wound, without any violence. And without anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs. When the number was exactly 3,741,952—when at that moment the 3,741,953rd snowflake dropped onto the branch, nothing, as you say, nothing like nothing—the branch broke off."

And having said that, the mouse went away. And the dove, an authority on this since the time of Noah, thought about this to herself and said, "Perhaps there's only one person's voice lacking for peace to come into this world."

Trust that you make a difference and that each one of us makes a difference.

And then mindful presence brings joy. The awakened heart, knowing that we can hold all the things of this world in awareness, in mindfulness, and in love. To become fearless, to turn toward that which is difficult with a vast and open loving awareness.

And we help each other. That's why sangha, community, is one of the great refuges, one of the three refuges—our connection with each other. We need to remind each other that we're in this together, that we can awaken together, that we can support the beautiful heart and mind and the beautiful world that we can be. It is here and it's in us as part of our own imaginal selves.

Some years ago, on a sunny Sunday afternoon in Seattle, a young mother stopped to talk with a local priest. Her five-year-old daughter, Carmen, had a new jump rope and began to demonstrate the intricacies of the jumping rope. While at first she began to jump and the priest and the mother clapped for her skill, the priest said, "Let me show you." He gave her a little more instruction and she became able to jump quite well on her own. With all the new skills, she went off with her rope quite happily.

The mother and this young priest chatted for a few minutes until Carmen, with the saddest eyes, returned dragging her rope. "Mommy," she lamented, "I can do it, but I need lots of clapping."

Here we are in our meditation where we started—remembering your best adventure as a child, the child of the spirit, feeling the loving connection that we all long for and how much we uplift each other.

And then there's the mystery along with this amazing connection. The mystery that life exists. Where did it come from? How did we appear? You think you have to fix it and make it your way. But there's something so much bigger that breathes us, that brings life into being. Consciousness arising.

A poem from Malachi Moran:

I tried to explain to the flowers on the banks of the river that they honestly had chosen an awful time to sprout. I detailed all the nuance of international tariffs and suggested they wait a bit to see how things shake out. They swayed with polite attention as I outlined my position.

on the effects of the weakened dollar and the day's stock market rout—but I do not think they listened, as they lifted their heads defiantly, and their azure petals did not display any doubts as they stood up.

You can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the spring. They come again.

It's a kind of fearless joy. It's the joy I saw in Maha Ghosananda in the refugee camps. It's Molly Ivins, the great activist, saying: "So keep fighting for freedom and justice, beloved, but don't forget to have fun doing it. Be outrageous, rejoice in all the oddities of humanity and freedom, and celebrate the sheer joy of a good fight. And when you get done, be sure to tell those who come after how much fun it was to fight for what really matters—to stand up for it."

The world is a holy place, and you get to live in it and love it and celebrate it.

And one of the really remarkable poems of our modern history, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, ends with a footnote or coda that begins: "Holy, holy, holy, holy—the world is holy, the soul is holy, the skin, the nose..."

And he goes on: "Holy the solitude of the skyscrapers and the pavements. Holy the cafeterias filled with the millions. Holy the mysterious river of tears under the streets. Holy the vast lamb of the middle class. Holy the crazy shepherds of rebellion. Holy New York and San Francisco. Holy Peoria and Seattle. Holy Paris and Tangiers. Holy Moscow and Istanbul. Holy time in eternity. Holy the clocks in space. Holy the fourth dimension. Holy the sea. Holy the desert. Holy the railroad, the locomotive. Holy the visions. Holy the hallucinations. Holy the miracles. Holy the eyeballs. Holy the abyss. Holy forgiveness. Mercy. Charity. Faith. Holy our bodies. Our suffering. Holy magnanimity. Holy the supernatural, extra brilliant, intelligent kindness of the soul."

We sit. We quiet the mind. We tend the heart. We see as a Buddha on this amazing, astonishing planet. We see with the eyes of tenderness and wisdom and compassion. And we bring our joy, our love to this world, which so needs it.

Reflect for a moment on what it's like when you meet someone wise, strong, who brings joy into this world. And reflect now on what it's like when you are that being—on those days and times when you carry a joyful spirit amidst it all.

What a gift.

Nancy, hello.

Hello.

I had this book in my purse today.

Oh, you do? Have you read it?

I read it a couple of years ago, and I had it in my purse to reread it.

It's worth rereading.

It is. And one of the things—I had mentioned a couple of times ago with you that I had just been to Homeboy, and I had *Cherished Belongings*, his latest book. And I know that one of the things he says is that the two principles of Homeboy are: we are all unshakably good, no exceptions, and we are all connected to each other, no exceptions.

And I guess my question is, when you read from the Dhammapada about "others may be greedy, but we can be generous," something along those lines—I feel like if we keep saying that others can be greedy and others can be this or that, maybe we're not quite understanding the pain that the others have to be that way. Which is something that Father Boyle just points out so well.

Yes, he's remarkable and honestly kind of saintly consciousness. And he does point out that underneath all the rest of it is really pain and suffering. And so there's a huge compassion in it, which is what I see with people like the Dalai Lama or Maha Ghosananda too. And they might name it. The Dalai Lama said the Chinese are his favorite enemy. He doesn't say they're his favorite buddies and friends. He even uses that word *enemy*, but he talks about it because they are in a way in that role.

So you make a beautiful point about how we see one another. And even in that text, maybe it should say: when we see others being greedy or fearful or dishonest, we can remember—because this is a translation—that we can be honest, we can be generous...

And compassionate for them.

And compassionate for them. Yeah. Does that work for you?

Yeah, it does. And I was just listening to one of your videos, and you said the exact same thing, I believe. I even wrote it down. I believe there are no evil people—that evil people are carrying... I don't remember your exact words, but are carrying a burden of hurt.

Yes.

And abuse, the family abuse, goes from generation to generation.

So let's just pause a second because I'm so appreciating what you're pointing to, Nancy. And it's really deep. And I love you correcting the Buddhist text too. Thank you. That's chutzpah. I really appreciate it.

I want to pause and I want you to just quiet—and people who are listening—and feel what it's like in yourself to see, in the eyes of Father Greg, who sees a tremendous amount of suffering and violence, people shooting at one another around him and killing and dying, and what it means to see with the eyes of compassion, to see that we're all in it together, as you point to, that we're all connected, and in the end, we're all good.

You're pointing us to this: that we might live this. What an extraordinary consciousness you invite. How does it feel?

Yeah. It's very moving, isn't it?

It's very moving.

Well, thank you. Thank you for the teachings.

And I'll correct the text as necessary.

You know, one of the things that I keep thinking is: if punishment really worked, we wouldn't be punishing people anymore.

Well put. Yes, it's love alone that heals in the end. And understanding—understanding the pain that people go through.

A new participant joins the conversation.

So the first thing I wanted to point out is that there is a force greater than love or hate or jealousy or anger. And that is the deep, deep desire we all have to edit the texts. I'd rather edit than eat.

Laughter. Well, there have been thousands of years of people editing the texts, so you have a long tradition behind you.

The other thing was in relation to the woman who was speaking just before me, and to a broader view. A few years ago, the Dalai Lama spoke at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles and took questions. I only heard this on tape—I was not present. One of the questioners was an LAPD police officer and a practicing Buddhist who said he had constant difficulty because he had to deal with people doing horrible things. Sometimes he had to act forcefully to make them stop. And the Dalai Lama's answer was, "Think of the good that you are doing—stopping them from further ruining their karma. You give them the chance to be reborn."

I don't know if that exactly says anything to anybody, but when I'm faced with my own anger and hatred and resentment towards situations and the people that cause them, I remember that. Okay, we don't try to make them disappear—we try to contain them so they have the opportunity to reflect and perhaps change.

This is a compassionate reflection that is adjacent to, related to, what Nancy just talked about—seeing the suffering and then responding with compassion rather than with our own hatred. How do we contain the harm and then hopefully make the possibility of something good come out of it eventually?

These are the hardest situations. Somebody asked the Dalai Lama at one point—one of those typical moral quandaries—"You're there and there is a person with a gun who's going to shoot a lot of people. You could stop them by shooting them. Would you do it? Should you do it?"

The Dalai Lama said, "Maybe it's the right thing. I couldn't do it." It's very interesting. He just said, "I couldn't take a life. And maybe it's the right thing." That's part of our human dilemma. Solzhenitsyn said the line dividing good and evil exists in every human heart. How do we find our way through this with compassion?

Who knows? There's no set answer. I remember Joan Baez responding to someone who said, "Well, what would you do if this happened, then that happened?" And she said, "I only respond to realities."

and not to made up examples of what might happen. It's impossible to know what you'd do given extreme circumstances. For me, hopefully I wouldn't take the life either.

Here we are with some of the big human questions. How do we hold suffering? How do we hold those who are causing suffering? How do we find compassion for the pain underneath it all? What Allen Ginsberg called "the mysterious river of tears underneath the streets."

Someone is asking if I could share the website about gratitude. The website is from Brother David Steindl-Rast. It's a whole beautiful training on gratitude that he has offered. I think he's like ninety-eight or ninety-nine years old and still out there offering these gorgeous teachings of a grateful life. For him, for Brother David, who's an old friend, the practice of gratitude is the central spiritual practice—to say thank you, thank you for it all, even the difficulties. Those are the ones that make the heart grow deeper and more compassionate.

One participant shared: "I just wanted to say what brings me joy is babies. Even just looking at a picture of a baby, it can soften the heart so easily. Saturday, after a lot of contemplation—my husband is not in town, and it was a big undertaking for me—I finally decided for the first time in my life I would stand up and go stand in the protest.

"Going to the protest wasn't such an easy decision, I realized. And I looked at the fear and how much fear there is that I never, ever had to experience before. It just really made me feel very humble and recognize

how much suffering there is on both sides. It is all coming from fear. I just got up in the morning and I said, okay, what is the worst that is going to happen? Am I going to get arrested? Okay, let's go see what this feels like. Made a copy of my passport, put it in my pocket, picked up a friend who was also brown, and we went to whatever was happening in our town.

"Looking at all the people that were there—really, really elderly people showed up in their wheelchairs. It was just impossible not to have compassion. I don't even recognize what moment I forgot about fear. There was just so much joy to see all the people around. I didn't see myself as anybody different. I didn't see the fear of the non-white person that everybody describes in these days. I was just able to stand there, smile at everyone, look at everybody's banners, just connect—really, truly, without even trying, connect. And that was very joyful. It doesn't need to be that we are standing and screaming. It can be just standing there and smiling. So it was just really good."

You are spreading the joy. Even as you speak, I start to smile, and I imagine others who are here online, listening and witnessing. And it's so interesting for you to say that you had a lot of fear, which is understandable. You could get arrested, you could get thrown in jail or prison.

So let me know. But something happened where that fear became much smaller than the joy and that connection.

Close your eyes for a second and just let yourself feel the joy and the strength that came from seeing all these people together, and how you and they were carrying this beautiful quality. It wasn't fearful at all. In fact, it was a kind of triumph. You could really feel yourself part of it, all that you're describing so beautifully. And now you know it's there in you, so you can use it anytime. What does it want you to remember?

Remember that we are all one. Forget the separation.

Yes. The little kids and the ones in the wheelchairs and the ones in the middle, all together.

I also recently got to hold a baby that was born prematurely and finally came home. This little bud was like a loaf of bread—four and a half pounds, this little boy, very handsome. And it was so cool. It was just like, oh wow. Such an amazing thing. All of us, we were all those babies. You and me, we used to be one of those little ones.

Beautiful. Thank you, Padma. This is beautiful, what you shared.

Hi, Jack. You spoke about what brings joy, and one of the things I realized is that part of it is your expectation. When I was growing up, I was always told that when you get married, you have a honeymoon phase and then you're living real life. I always felt that was backwards. I thought, wait a minute—if I have a long marriage, I could get to know that person. I could find things that they don't even know exist and I don't know yet. Perfection wasn't in the imagination. But I realized that the more you have that closeness, that

connection to somebody else—that trust, that integrity you talked about—that is such a joyful thing, something to be so grateful for.

As I've gotten much older, not only do I find this to be true, but I find it in so many relationships. The more I get to know people, the more I understand where their fears are coming from, where their anger is coming from. Perfection is not on the agenda. The idea is to find out who that person could be and would be if only they—who they want to be.

And as we're going through all of these things now, because of the people I've begun to see that way, I have great faith that we will not allow what is happening to continue, that we will not settle for less than the goodness I see in so many people. It doesn't mean I'm not angry. It doesn't mean I don't get scared or disappointed. But there's something there that is so much greater than what's happening right now.

When people think it's romantic to imagine perfection, I don't think that's it at all. I think what's real is that when a person is unhappy, you can be the thing they trust. When they're happy, you can be the thing that makes them even happier, and vice versa. There are so many things in this world to be joyful about. Like Padma said—a child, or being in a group where you suddenly realize you're part of something.

I don't think that's going to be destroyed. I don't think it can be destroyed, because I think that's the stronger thing. It's almost pure energy. What we're looking at now, the destructive part—it's not pure, it's all mixed up and not in the right place. I really believe that as a group, we will not only triumph but bring people along with us who've fallen into this, and they'll be part of it too. Because it's what you said: when you bring something to somebody and open it up to them, often you see in their response the joy they get just knowing it exists and that they could be part of it.

This is just a long way to say I think the more we know and the deeper we go, the stronger we are. There may be things to be afraid of, but I don't think it's our own goodness that we should ignore.

I'm just sitting with you.

The depth of our goodness.

And the point is not to perfect anything except maybe to perfect our love. To be present. And the closeness you described in relationship, how in some ways we get to know the unfolding of another being. What a mysterious invitation that is.

Well, you've said so many beautiful things. It feels like in some way a great place for us to end the evening. There was Nancy teaching us about compassion behind everything from Father Greg and her understanding. There was Jeff speaking about not editing—enjoying editing the text, yes, but something much deeper than that, really, of connection and the good that you do for one another. And Padma going way beyond her fear to realize that there was a joy in her heart saying we're all one. And now you. These are all such beautiful teachings. I thank you all who offered them.

So sweet to listen, to feel, to sense the genuineness and the shared wisdom and the shared compassion.

So maybe let yourself look at all the little squares on the screen for a moment. You could even unmute if you feel like it and just offer your blessings. Send joy and wellbeing to the hearts of everyone you see on the screen, all these beings in so many forms.

Thank you, Helga, for the "we shall overcome" sign.

All right. Take care. We're in this together, baby. Let's make something beautiful out of it all.

See you later.

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