Buddhist Psychology

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 6:39:27

Good morning. Welcome to this day-long retreat at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. If we've not met before, my name is Jack Kornfield, and it's a pleasure to welcome you here.

Spirit Rock has grown in this beautiful valley, which came from the Nature Conservancy, by the way. Our agreement was that we would steward more than 400 acres and keep our profile kind of low and down in the valley, letting the rest of it be for the bobcat and the deer and other wandering species. It's grown through the collective support and care of a whole community of people dedicated to the twin principles of compassion and wakefulness—or inner freedom of heart—that are core teachings in the Buddhist world, but they're really part of all wise spiritual life. Whatever brings you here, it's a great pleasure to welcome you.

The day is going to be divided in a certain way. For the smaller subset, perhaps twenty percent of you who are more experienced practitioners and somehow decided to come back—which I'm very welcoming of and happy about—we will go through during the course of the day the teachings of the four foundations of mindfulness: mindfulness of body and feelings and thoughts and movement and walking and loving-kindness. This is a systematic way of going through the teachings that can profoundly change your life. Those who are more experienced students, I will invite you to go out and begin to walk while I do some of the teachings for newer practitioners, and then in the afternoon I'll try to address and work with you particularly, so that you'll have a quieter day. You'll get to sit and walk without hearing all the same teachings again.

This is also being live-streamed, so hello out there, whoever you are on your flat screen. We welcome you. And in fact, we welcome everybody. One of the beautiful things about the teachings of what's sometimes called the Dharma, or the teachings of awakening, is that whoever you are, whatever your background, whatever your race, whatever your culture, whatever your sexual orientation, whatever your ability, whatever your humanity—this enormous variety of beauty that makes up our human family—you are welcome. The Dharma gates open and say: this is your place and you are one of us. And "us" meaning humanity connected together through the heart and the mind.

There is another event here upstairs, a smaller one for twenty-five or thirty people, happening at the same time. There's also our winter-spring two-month silent retreat. Past the wooden circle gate, which we ask you not to go past, is the residential retreat area. There are about a hundred people here in silence for two months. If we're lucky, their vibrations will come down the hill a little bit. We can sort of draft behind them like on a big truck on the highway. But please leave them in silence. The rest of the campus and

trails are open for you.

I'm really happy to be here with you today and to have your company in this retreat. Also know that there's a whole coterie of high school students joining us today and other next-gen folks.

It's a tough time in our culture and in our world. Perhaps one could say that often, over many cycles in the last centuries. But here we sit, coming to meditate in the middle of these fraught and very divisive conversations—about DACA and DREAMers, about school shootings and guns, about what happened in Parkland and the tragedies we carry, about immigration, about who we are as a culture and a society and as human beings. Whatever your political persuasion—and I'm not going to assume anything about that here—we gather together in practice.

These things weigh on our hearts, and the divisiveness is so difficult. The solutions are also hard to find, particularly when we look outwardly.

It's quite obvious that no amount of technological development—and I just came this morning from a conference called Wisdom 2.0 in San Francisco, which was a meeting of Silicon Valley people and technologists with a group of people trying to infuse technology with both human and spiritual values, with compassion, sort of open source compassion as part of the project—no amount of computers, no artificial intelligence, no smartphone that has the great library of Alexandria in your pocket along with every cat video ever made, no amount of biotechnology, nanotechnology, space technology, all this extraordinary stuff, is going to stop continuing warfare, continuing racism, continuing tribalism, environmental destruction.

The outer developments of humanity, which are now remarkable, have to be met with an inner development of our consciousness and our conscience and our sense of interconnection. Otherwise, the politics of the world plays on the amygdala and the reptilian primitive brain. That's where you get people's attention. There's a snake, there's a tiger. Oh my God, the terrorists are going to come get you in your home. And we let the terror come inside, instead of actually seeing the world with its unbearable beauty and magnificence, with a good heart.

As Nelson Mandela said after twenty-seven years in Robben Island prison, it never hurts to think the better of someone or think the good in someone. They often act the better because of it. Because he was able to see the potential and the beauty in humanity, he was able to walk out of all those years of prison. They can put your body in prison, but no one can imprison your spirit. He changed not just South Africa but the imagination of the world of what's possible.

And the beautiful thing is that it's not Nelson Mandela—it's you and me and all of us. We each have that potential, no matter the circumstances. The measure of suffering that you have, which we all do because it's part of human incarnation—anybody not have that? Raise your hand, you can have your money back—and the measure of beauty and joy that you have.

So we come with this mysterious human incarnation to take our seat in stillness, in the midst of it all, and begin to listen and tend with loving awareness this body and heart and mind that we have. And it's a beautiful thing. Every wise culture knows that there are times to walk in the mountains or walk by the ocean or go out into the desert or go to the cathedral or someplace and just listen for a time—and not check things off your to-do list. As Albert Einstein reportedly said in Scientific American, if you can drive safely while kissing someone, you're simply not giving the kiss the attention it deserves. We live in this wired world, but we have to step out of it, whether it's for the kiss or for the fruiting and flowering of the plum blossoms that have come in this springtime.

Let me share a little story. In the early 1980s, I started a rigorous six-year academic medical program in Boston that required me to work during the day in part and take extra classes at night, with more work on the weekends. The first summer off, I wanted to get away from the studies and work with my hands, be close to the earth. So I went to live with an Amish family in Pennsylvania. The experience renewed me, and I decided to do it again the next summer.

That year I drove from Boston to western Pennsylvania on a holiday weekend—terrible traffic, hours and hours of driving, and I was already exhausted. My Amish host had delayed their dinner for me. During the meal I tried to act calm and natural, but I felt full of nerves. My Amish host could clearly tell something was amiss, because at the end of dinner he said, "Come with me."

I followed him to the backyard, which bordered an alfalfa field. Although his faith discouraged smoking, the farmer lit a cigarette. Three of his children gamboled around while two others clung to him. The farmer stood without saying a word, looking out over the alfalfa. I did the same. The dark green field was becoming harder to see in the fading light. And then out of the alfalfa rose fireflies—a few at first, but soon there were hundreds. Their pinpricks of light mingled with the stars. Heaven and earth meeting in this humble man's backyard. I felt my nervousness leave me. The farmer turned and said, "That's for you."

And being here together in some way is for you—to come to this beautiful valley. What we'll do is sit in meditation for periods, twenty minutes at a time or so with some instruction, then do some walking practice, twenty minutes or more, thirty minutes, then come back and sit again alternately, so that you can integrate this in your body.

One more thing to say, and this is actually a passage from Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. He says: Your mind is like a piece of land planted with many different kinds of seeds—and this connects to that lovely Amish image that was almost a poem. Seeds of joy and peace, of mindfulness, understanding, love. And seeds of craving, of anger, fear, hate, and forgetfulness. These healthy and unhealthy seeds are always there, sleeping in the soil of your mind or your heart. And the quality of your life depends on the seeds that you water. If you plant beautiful seeds, they will grow.

If you water a seed of peace in your mind, peace will develop. When the seeds of happiness in you are watered, you become happy. When the seeds of anger or fear or hatred are watered, you become angry or

fearful or hateful. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow.

This starts to describe both our human condition and the possibilities for us in this human incarnation. We can all hear that truth. And the beautiful news is that we can water different seeds. We can choose where to direct our attention. We can quiet the mind, steady our attention, tend and open the heart. This is really the game. This is really the offering and the practice that we'll work with.

Now, it's not always a pretty picture. I do have to say that. My dear friend Annie Lamott, the great writer and humorist, says, "My mind is like a bad neighborhood. I try not to go there alone"—which is why we've got you all here together, right?

So as you sit, you will also feel the tensions you carry in your body. You'll feel the unfinished business of your heart. If there's grief or tears or longing, love that isn't expressed, fears—all of that is there. What you will find is your own life presenting itself to you without distraction. And then you think, "Oh my God, but I'm getting distracted in here."

Meditation becomes like a mirror, and the synonym we use for mindfulness is loving awareness. The point isn't to have a particular experience today, not even a quiet one where you're just with your breath and everything goes away. May that happen for you for a little bit. But that's not going to be your main experience. Your main experience is going to be sitting with a loving awareness and finding a wise relationship to the measure of pleasure and the measure of suffering, to the beauty that you carry and the fears that are in your heart—to allow them actually to be met and held with respect and understanding.

And then there comes a kind of shift, a shift of identity where you're not lost in each one of those experiences, because they all tell a story. As you may have noticed, those stories are, if not completely untrue, usually rather partial. And some of them don't have your best interest in mind.

To be able to step back doesn't mean you're not present. To actually be more present, not on automatic. This isn't self-hypnosis. This is called de-hypnosis. Because we're sort of hypnotized by our habits. To step back and say, "Oh, this is the doubting mind. This is the fearful mind. These are the tensions in the body." Let me find a relationship with these emotions where I'm not lost in them, and let me water the seeds of presence, of calm, of steadiness, of loving-kindness or compassion.

Does that all make sense to you? That's really the charge, the direction, the value of what we'll do today.

We're going to start quite simply. In the first couple of sittings, we'll primarily be working with mindfulness of the breath and the steadying of attention. This is a little bit like cleaning the lens on your glasses so you can see more clearly. It's hard to pay attention when our awareness and our focus is scattered. So one of the first steps in the art of meditation, or even in watering seeds—you've got to be able to direct the water—is to steady the attention a little bit.

We use the breath because it's the most universal of all practices and meditations across traditions. Every

tradition—in Africa, in Latin America, in shamanic cultures, in all kinds of Eastern practices from the martial arts in Japan to the yogis in India—uses breath. In the Jewish and Christian mystical traditions and the Sufi tradition, the breath becomes a vehicle to tune ourselves, to bring body and mind together. And it's always with us, at least while we're in the body, and available.

The spirit in beginning meditation is not one of grim duty or struggle, but much more one of tending and discovery, of openness. I have a birthday card that was given to me from the drugstore. It's called "The Dalai Lama's Birthday Party." It shows him opening a giant box, looking inside, with ribbons on the ground and these little smiling monks around him.

You don't see anything in there, and he's exclaiming, "Wow, nothing! Just what I always wanted!"

So this actually isn't the place to get something. This is more like the dump, really. This is the place to let go of stuff. Or in another way, it's the place to bring a kind of openness to what you discover. And that is really much more fruitful in learning the art of mindful presence or loving awareness—with everything in your life—and also in learning the deep transformative art of compassion: to let this openness be with you.

So let's begin with a formal meditation. If you've been sitting for half an hour or more, do you want to stand up for a second? Just let your body stretch for a moment. See which way it wants to bend or move. Take a few deeper breaths without knocking into the people around you. Let it wiggle a little bit. If you're shy, you can close your eyes so nobody can see you.

And then when you're stretched, let yourself sit back down in a chair. Let your feet be flat on the floor and sit upright so there's some sense of dignity. You take your seat halfway between heaven and earth in this human form. If you're on a cushion up front here, whatever posture is comfortable. You don't have to sit in some weird posture. You're weird enough as it is without adding to it from your spiritual practice, right? It's so fun for me with all these new students—I get to use all my old jokes.

All right, so you settle yourself on the earth here. And when you feel settled and both present, upright with some sense of dignity but also graciousness, a kind of ease, let your eyes close gently. And notice if there's any obvious tightness or tension in your body that you can easily release, and do so. Let the eyes and the face soften, and loosen the jaw. Allow the shoulders to relax and the arms and hands to rest easily. Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. And let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with the spirit of kindness, compassion.

And as you sit and begin to bring a loving awareness and attention to this life, this moment now, there are these sounds of words and soft sounds around you. There are the sensations of your body, ever present. And there's, of course, a stream of thoughts and feelings, ideas, memories, plans, commentary. Emotions—feeling calm or nervous or excited or happy or sad. Let all of these things be as they are. Let them just be present.

And underneath all the waves of thoughts and sounds, feelings, sensations, become aware of the wave of the breath. How the body is breathing itself in the midst of it all. And bring your attention to wherever you can sense the breath most easily. Coolness in the nostrils, swirling, tingling in the back of the throat, or the rise and fall of chest or belly. And if it's hard to feel the breath, take one hand and put it on your belly and feel the rise and fall in the palm of your hand. You can leave it there for the whole meditation if you like.

And this is your life breath. And the first subject of the training of steadying attention. So as each breath comes in and out, or each rise and fall, let yourself feel it, sense it. If it's helpful to you, you can make a little acknowledgement, a whisper—oh, in, and rising, or out, or falling. But mostly just sense it: the beginning and the middle and the end, and then that little gap between the breaths and the next breath.

And with each breath, rest your attention in it gently for three or four or five breaths until the attention wanders away. And then as soon as you notice, without any judgment—oh yes, here we are—come back to the next breath. And the attention will wander over and over again. And as soon as you notice, whether it's a few seconds or a few minutes later, it doesn't matter, gently return back to the breath. It's the very coming back, each time you notice and come back, that starts to establish and train a steadiness of presence that connects body and mind together.

Be gentle and patient and come back again and again to this breath, this moment. This breath, just now, arising, passing away.

And with each breath, invite a sense of calm or ease. Breathing in and breathing out, invite the sense of calm with this breath, a sense of ease, deepening and growing breath by breath. Let the thoughts and feelings and sensations be as they are. Let them rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath. And feel this breath in the middle of it all. How the breath breathes itself in its own natural rhythm. Relax with this breath. Ease. Calm. Invite the sense of presence.

There can be a mistaken sense, just out of habit—because basically we are control freaks in some fashion or other, almost all of us—that the idea is to have the right kind of breath, to calm it down, to steady it, to do something, make it longer, slower, whatever your idea is. Let it do what it wants. Your task is simply to notice: this is a long breath or a short breath, a deep breath or a shallow breath. You're actually in the presence of your life breath.

And what's also true is that this breath you're breathing was breathed by her and him just a minute before. You're actually exchanging breaths with one another and with the badger that I saw that lives on the land here, and the voles and the field mice. This breath dusted the tops of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa as it came over the Pacific and went through the lungs of the dolphins and came to you. It also dusted the Fukushima nuclear reactor. Your breath actually is this universal movement that connects you with life itself.

Now as you do this practice, the attention will wander all the time, and you bring it back. We're trained to

have a fifteen-second attention span—basically the length of an advertisement is our training for attention here in this culture. So it takes a little while, and you come back again and again without judgment. You don't have to do anything about it a minute later, five seconds later, three minutes later. You just come back gently, and the point is gently—without some idea of how much improvement you have.

Florida Scott Maxwell, the novelist, writes: "No matter how old a mother is, she looks to her middle-aged children for signs of improvement." We've internalized that mother and father in some way, but that's not the art or the game of meditation. Instead, it's an invitation to presence where you are, to live more fully present.

Now as you feel the breath, sometimes it makes you tight. Try to soften with it. Sometimes it will be tight anyway. Then just let it be tight and notice that. Sometimes it pauses, sometimes it's deep or shallow. It can help to pay attention to the space between breaths, because that's often when the attention drifts off. Or again, you might put your hand on your belly as you're practicing.

I have a friend who some years ago gave birth at home out in the country, and her son died. He was born with the cord wrapped around him and quite blue. They breathed a little into him and then held him and waited to see if he was going to start breathing or not. She said, "That's when I really learned what it meant to pay attention to the breath." And it wasn't even her own. There's something mysterious about being with your own life breath that connects the body and mind together.

It's a little bit like a mirror. As you sit with the breath, you begin to see yourself more clearly. Mullah Nasruddin, the Sufi holy fool, went to the bank one day and tried to cash a check. They said, "Could you please identify yourself?" So he reached in his pocket and pulled out a small mirror and said, "Yep, that's me, all right."

This is what the mindfulness of breathing does. It actually becomes a mirror, because you're there with your breath and then all the stuff of your life starts to show itself. But the breath helps you actually become present where you are.

So, a question or two, or a comment—how was it? Anyone?

"I just thought it was really hard."

That's excellent. What made it hard? I'm interested.

"Trying to keep returning to the breath and trying to stay patient when I just want to—I don't know, it was hard to get back."

When you just wanted—can you finish that sentence?

"Oh, to get up and move. Run away."

Yes. This is beautiful, thank you, because what you're describing *is* mindfulness. You're actually starting to

see. We sit down to try to quiet ourselves, and then, like a flywheel, all the thoughts and all the restlessness and all those things—they're all in us. Now, if you can't stay with it, and you did, which is beautiful, then it will never quiet down, because every time you get a little bit restless or something, you're going to move or go somewhere or start a new adventure or buy something or whatever—all the things.

So by sitting and feeling that, which you did, and it's not that easy—we're going to work later on with how to really examine and be present for restlessness and sleepiness and all those energies that arise. Right now I'm just going to name that they're there. It's not that they're not supposed to happen. The fact that you felt it and it was so strong means that this training is actually starting to work. It's like, okay, can I sit in the middle of this and still do it? And you did. So you're actually learning, even though it's hard. I salute you. Thank you for that.

"It was very hard for me as well, and I was wondering if there's ever been a time for you where you couldn't sit with it, where you yourself had to get up, or where you would even recommend getting up and moving."

Yes, there have been times. After the death of a friend I was really close to—there was just a lot of grief. To sit with it was too hard. I got up and I walked. But for the most part, I've learned what we just talked about, how to sit in the midst of it. And sometimes there's really deep trauma that comes and it's better to go walk or do something. So I'm not saying it's always the right time to do it.

But I also have a trust that you all came here wanting something, wanting to learn something. And you are not the first restless meditator. You're not the first—to use Sanskrit, *uddhacca*. You're not the first bored meditator. This is par for the course. You're not the first meditator to weep, or to feel the kind of pain or trauma you carry. And those are actually part of the game. It's actually what lets you become both more compassionate, but also somehow a more courageous presence for yourself and others.

In the next sitting, another tool you could use as you work with the breath—something some people find helpful—is to count your breaths. You can count one to ten, or ten backward to one. But the main thing is to let the numbers be a whisper, perhaps 5%. The other 95% is feeling the breath. It goes: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. I know you know how to count—that's not going to help you a lot. But sometimes it just helps the thinking mind to also notice, "Oh, number three." And then when you lose it, you start again.

Now I want to talk about walking meditation, because you're going to go out and join the other folks. In every spiritual tradition—pretty much in every great spiritual tradition—there are both practices of sitting quietly, tending and deepening, but then also practices of movement that help you engage in the world. Because mindfulness is not a passive thing. It's not, "Oh, I can sit quietly and I'm just quiet and a passive person." In fact, just as there's an in-breath and an out-breath, you quiet the mind and tend the heart, and then you get up and tend the garden of the world. That's called a mindful response. But if you

don't have some mindful presence, then your response is just out of reactivity or habit. When you actually center yourself, you can really respond to the things that need your care, or the injustices of the world, or the people around you that need your attention—you can do it from a much deeper place.

So walking meditation is this. If you were to go to a temple in China, you might learn qigong or tai chi. If you were to go to Japan, there would be meditative martial arts. If you went to India, there would be yogic, physical, hatha yoga practices. In the Sufi tradition, in the Christian mystical tradition, in the Jewish tradition—they all have movements, or traditional shamanic training.

This is the very simple practice. It's simply the practice, instead of being aware of your breath, of letting your steps become the place of attention, to develop presence while your eyes are open and you're moving around.

What you'll do is go out and find some place where you can walk back and forth, twenty steps or so—longer or shorter as you like. First, just stand there and open your senses. Feel the sunlight on your skin, the morning breeze—because it's a bit cool right now. Notice the scent of the bay trees. Notice what it's like to feel your feet standing on the earth. Notice the people around you. And when you feel quite present in the environment, drop your attention down to your legs and your feet. Put your hands wherever they're comfortable, and begin to walk, being aware of lifting your foot up and putting it back down. Not in a particular way, but just lifting and placing, feeling each step. Lifting and placing. Lifting and placing mindfully, until you've walked maybe twenty steps or so. And then you stop. Pause. Center yourself. Turn around. Lifting and placing. Lifting and placing. Mindfully. Then you stop and center yourself, and you walk the other way.

Now, the good thing about this—why you're not doing a nature walk—is because even the most ambitious meditator gets it after a little while: you're not going anywhere. You're just going back and forth. So the point isn't to get to the end. The point is actually to be with the step that you're taking and be present. You leave your eyes open. And if you're walking along and something happens—a deer runs out of the woods or something—just pause. Give that your attention. The pleasure of seeing the deer, the fawn, whatever it is. When that's done, feel yourself here, begin to walk again.

Now in the background, there will be lots of thoughts. Let them come and go, and you mostly keep your attention on your feet. But once in a while—or more often than that—you may be walking, and all of a sudden you think, "You know, I like this walking better than sitting. Sitting is really hard. Maybe I should do more walking, or take up tai chi or qigong. It's going to take me a while to settle down. I think, gosh, maybe I need one of those ten-day retreats. A day is not enough. But for the same price, I could get a ticket to Bangkok..." And pretty soon you've divorced your spouse and you're living on a sailboat in Koh Samui in Thailand. And then you wake up and you go, "Oh yeah, right, right."

Spirit Rock, yeah, here I am, right? Pause, stop. Let the whole fantasy go, thank you. Okay, here we are. Lifting and placing.

Now, one more thing to say that's important. As you go out, there'll be other people walking around. And it is a little weird, okay? My daughter used to call it the night of the living dead—the zombies or something like that. Don't worry about it. They come back to life later. It's all right.

In one contemplative Christian monastery, a young novice went to the novice master and said, "Master, when I go out in the garden to meditate, would it be all right to have a smoke?" And the master said, "Absolutely not. When you go out to meditate, just meditate. None of that smoking stuff."

The novice goes out in the garden a couple of days later and there's another novice out there puffing away. Our young man walks up to him and says, "Listen, master said we're not to do that." And the second one said, "Oh no, he told me it was fine."

"What do you mean he said it was fine? I asked him, 'When I go out to meditate, would it be all right to have a smoke?' He said absolutely not."

And the second one said, "Oh, I went to master and I said, 'Master, when I go out for a smoke, would it be all right to meditate?'"

Meditate when you sit, when you walk, when you eat, you know. So the idea is that this formal practice isn't meditation itself—this is like training wheels. This is the beginning of practice. But to be aware as your body stands up, as you get your shoes, as you go out—you take it as an experiment. Let me try walking back and forth and feel my steps.

As you come back in, let yourself get settled. Even though others are going to be moving around you, you can begin to settle yourself and come back to the quality of mindful presence. If you like, you can close your eyes and begin your attention back to the breathing even as others are coming around you.

So again, let yourself get settled. Find a way to sit that is stable and comfortable. Through the day, we're really going to be weaving together the qualities of mindfulness or loving awareness, loving kindness as we practice. Sitting, walking, moving—they're all an opportunity to pay attention and to be present in this retreat.

Find your posture. Let yourself sit upright in a way that's stable and comfortable, with some sense of dignity. Maybe take a couple of deeper breaths just as a way to release any tension and collect your presence with the breath. Let your eyes close again gently.

Reestablish now the attention, the awareness of breath breathing itself, carrying from the walking practice back the same steadying, careful attention to this breath. Naturally, you can notice the state of your body having done the walking, moving about—how it feels to sit back down. And then feel this breath in the middle of it all. This breath, a sense of calming with the breath in the midst of all the energies of life. This breath, just now.

I'd like to invite the more experienced practitioners to go out and do some walking while the rest of you stay and we talk about mindfulness of the body and how to include that in the meditation.

For the rest of you, what we will now begin to do is to expand the field of mindfulness, having started with awareness of breath, mindful presence with this breath, and mindfulness of steps.

Now we'll open the field of mindfulness to include all the energies and sensations of the body.

What this means is that as you sit, sensing your own breath and minding your own business more or less, your body will call to you. Often with pleasant sensations—you might feel lighter, or some delicious sense of pleasure, or even bliss. More often with tension or pain.

People say, "Well, why should it hurt when I sit and meditate?" It's not the meditation that's making that happen. It's the fact that you've stopped and you're paying attention to your body and being present. Over the last weeks and months, every time you got into a conflict or a tight situation, there was a kind of bodily response if you weren't mindful. The jaws clench, or the shoulders tighten, or the stomach does. And now you close your eyes, and that tension that's gotten held in your body starts to release. Sometimes it's from literal physical problems that you have, but even more often, it's from the patterns of holding that we carry.

So the question is, how do we work with these in meditation?

Just as you brought mindfulness or loving awareness to feel each breath, now as you pay attention to the breath, let the sensations of the body and the sounds be in the background. But periodically, one of the waves of sensation—or maybe a loud sound at your ear, which is a different sensation—will become really strong and pull your attention away to that strong experience.

At that point, let go of your awareness of the breath and turn your full attention to receive this tingling, throbbing, heat, cold, hearing, pleasure, whatever it is that's getting quite strong in your body. Turn your attention to it as if to bow to it. You can name it gently. The acknowledgment helps to deepen the sense of mindfulness—"Oh, throbbing... tingling... pain... fire... hearing"—whatever that particular thing is that's strong. As you name it, make space for it to be present and held in loving awareness.

Now, one of three things will happen, especially if it's painful. It might, if you give space for it, move, disperse, and go away. Great. Pleasant sensations the same. It might stay the same. And it might get worse.

That's not your job. Your job isn't to start doing body work and loosen your shoulder and fix the cramp over here and work your way around your body. Your job is to be the field of loving awareness that can allow the body to heal and regulate itself. That means sometimes really deep energies need to come and be felt, and they move around, and you can name them—"Oh, throbbing, throbbing... painful, pain, pain, pain." And once you've allowed it some attention and you're either more at ease with it or it does

diminish, then you go back to the breath for a while.

So for now, your meditation is awareness of breath or awareness of the sensations or sounds at the ear, naming them gently and letting them open.

The question for us is, how do we touch these experiences? Do you do it with "I've got to fix it," with aversion, judgment? Or can you let it be received with some tenderness and some compassion? Because the essence of healing in the body is first to get here. There's that line from James Joyce where he wrote, "Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body." The first step is to get here, and then to actually receive the energy and experience of your body with a kind attention. Very often, just that kind attention alone begins to allow a deep healing to take place.

But something more happens with it. This is from Tamara Engel, who was part of the New York Insight Meditation Society. She wrote as she was dying of cancer: "My days are short, and as I grow weaker, I experience so much gratitude for my meditation. Not only the joy and ease it brought, but the hard parts—for every bored and restless sitting, and every fearful fantasy, and every pain and ache I sat through, and every itch I didn't scratch. It was a training for kindness, a training for the muscle of bearing witness, for the trusting spirit that carries me now even as I face my death."

There's a way that your ability to become present for your own body and all that wants to open in it gives you a kind of steadiness and courage, and also allows for a deep kind of release and healing that takes place deeper than any massage or body work could do—although those are very good things. It's the body itself knowing how to open and regulate itself in some beautiful and deep way.

When you approach painful or throbbing or difficult tension in the body, an image to use is as if you were holding a crying child. The child has been diapered and fed, so there's nothing more you can do. And still children cry. So what do you do? You hold them. And as you hold them with kindness, they begin to settle down, and things soften and open in their own way. Maybe you first pick them up and they cry louder. Okay, they want you to know something and they're not giving up yet. Your body may want that from you too.

But if you use the image of holding the pains or the throbbing with kindness, and then curiosity—what's going to happen when I do? Will it move? Will it soften?

Does it deepen? What is it that wants to open in this body? And how can I find the place of loving awareness and an inner freedom of mind that says, "Yes, I can be with all of this and keep my heart tender and open."

So that's the next instruction. Now it's time for you to go and walk.

How was the walking? Did that work for you? Some people are saying yes, some are nodding.

A couple of things to keep in mind. It too can get boring. It can feel weird. Did anybody feel like they were

losing their balance? If that was so, walk a little faster. It's true. If you walk slowly—and you don't have to do this slow zombie walk—you can walk faster if you want as well. Find the speed that keeps you most present.

Some people find it very distracting to be walking. So then stand there and close your eyes and take three steps with your eyes closed, or four if you're brave, and that will help you drop in—it really gets your attention to feel your feet. Then open your eyes for a few steps, then close them again. This is an experiment of learning how to be present for your body as you walk. So play with it.

Go out and walk for a bit. We'll ring the bell in fifteen or twenty minutes, and then come back promptly again. And if you have questions about walking, you can come up. Standing up, stretching, noticing even now the movement of your body mindfully. Turning, getting ready to walk out. And please stay in silence. This day really is supported and helped by your being in what's called affectionate silence. So stay as quiet and silent as you would be in a temple or cathedral. Let yourself be present, but without words.

Sometimes as the day retreat goes on, you can begin to feel yourself settling a bit—sitting and then walking again, sitting and walking again. The breath gets a little easier, or the mind starts to come more into the present, not quite so much in its stories. Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes instead you get a little quieter, and then in that quiet there's an upwelling of anxiety or worry about your life or someone you care about or the world. Black Lives Matter, or immigrants that you know, or the economy, or the polar bears and the creatures of the world that we share this beautiful planet with. So it can be outer, and none of those is wrong.

One of my favorite books over the last decade or so is called *Tattoos on the Heart* by Father Greg Boyle, who started Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles thirty years ago to work with kids coming out of gangs. I know him, and I've actually worked with some of the guys in his program, doing retreats for young men coming from street gangs. Astonishing stories in here—very moving and beautiful.

Anyway, he's also the priest for some of the Catholic churches in the barrios in Los Angeles. And he said one day he was going to do a mass at one of the churches—I forget the name of the church—and he got there and he saw that overnight some person or people had spray painted across the front of the church in big letters: "Wetback Church." A kind of slur, because the church had also been a sanctuary for people who were coming from Central America and other places. It was really an attack on the church.

He went in, and he said his heart sank. He felt really bad that that had happened. He got the congregation that was there together before Mass, and he said, "You know, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry for the ignorance and pain of our separation in this world, and the blame that people give to those who are vulnerable." And he said, "One of the things Homeboy Industries does—we got a contract with the city to remove graffiti. I'll get the homeboys over here, the homegirls—we'll get rid of that right away."

And then a woman, Rosa Saldana I think her name was, stood up and waved her hands. He said he'd

never heard from this woman. She was a very faithful churchgoer. She waved her hands, and he said, "Yes, Rosa, what is it?"

She said, "You will not remove that."

And he said, "I beg your pardon. Excuse me." And she said, "If there are people who are cast out, who are judged, who are despised, who are rejected because they are mojados—wetbacks—" and she paused, then said, "then we should be proud to call ourselves the wetback church. And our doors are open for everyone."

There's something in this story that really speaks to what it means to learn the art of meditation, which is more about the doors of your own heart getting open. Whatever is happening for you right now—sleepy, bored, restless, happy, joyful, excited, critical—a few of you are critical of yourselves. I noticed that. I could see it.

The outer forms of religion are what the great mythologist Joseph Campbell described as an inoculation against the mystery. We'll cover it—we're the church or the temple or the mosque. We've got the mystery covered. Now you can relax and go back to business. But the truth is that when you sit, you are face to face with the mystery of your own life, your own incarnation. And how do you deal with it? With all the energies of joy and sorrow, as Thich Nhat Hanh said, all the seeds that are in our consciousness. Can you find the spaciousness of true consciousness, of loving awareness—which is what you are—to hold all of this with graciousness and an open heart?

So that's really the game. Yes, we've started with the breath and now we're including body sensations. We'll move on to working with emotions and thoughts. You take your seat in the middle of the mystery, and it's not a problem to solve but a presence. Somebody said the question is not the future of humanity, but the presence of eternity—the presence of that which is timeless and sacred, which is our life itself.

So again, let yourself sit back up in whatever way brings you this sense of stability. It's a funny thing because here I talk about mystery and all these grand poetic things, and then your back hurts. And you're worried about paying that bill or that person who insulted you at work. That's also your human incarnation. You have to remember your Buddha nature and your social security number. You have to kind of put it all together in some mysterious way. And the way you do it is through your heart and through your presence.

Let your eyes close gently when you're ready. Come back to be just here—exactly where you are. To be here now. Because there actually isn't any other place but where you are. Compassion is found here. You've got the perfect ingredients to learn compassion. Wakefulness is found here.

Come back to your breath at the center of it all, just as a way to steady and come into the present. This breath breathing itself in the midst of your human experience—whatever is present, the breath breathes itself in the midst of it all. You can let them both be present: the waves of experience and the breath in the

middle.

If there are strong sensations in the body, let go of the focus of attention on breath and receive the strong sensations with the same loving awareness. Name them gently: tingling, tingling; throbbing, throbbing; fire, fire; pleasure; lightness, lightness. Let them open, let them move as they will, and you become the field of loving awareness. Let the body open in whatever way it chooses. And after you're at ease with it, made your peace with it, or it dissolves, come back again to the breath.

Just here and now. This breath, this moment's experience. Receive with loving awareness, just as it is. You are the awareness itself, noticing the movement of sensation and life.

But before that, a few minutes—any questions, things coming up?

"So my question is, I can sit where it doesn't hurt, and I can sit a little straighter where it's really intense and it kind of hurts. Which one's better, and does it matter?"

So you can sit where it doesn't hurt, you said, or you can sit really straight and it hurts. I think sitting where you're comfortable is mostly better, but there's something deeper in your question, which somebody will say: well, why should I sit with pain at all? You know, it hurts a little. I move, then it doesn't hurt. Now it hurts there, if I move, it doesn't.

So there are two different tasks. One is somehow to become comfortable in your body enough so that you can do this with some ease. And therefore you can change your posture in the middle if you need to, if it starts to hurt a lot, so that you can be present. Just do it mindfully.

But the other task is also not to be afraid of the range of your human experience. So sometimes—you don't have to make it stiff—but sometimes there'll be pain or hurt that just comes. And yes, you could move away by getting up and getting tea or something like that. But as that poem I read from Tamara Engel says, there's also a power in learning how to sit and be present for what's joyful and what's painful.

And we live in a comfort culture. It's a little cold, you turn up the heat. It's a little hot, you turn on the AC. Your car seat is heated for the cold morning, right? It massages you, and now it asks you, "What else do you want? Can I order your latte?" It'll be driving you shortly, you know? And so we get afraid in some way culturally of how to open to experience.

So mostly sit comfortably, and don't worry—pain will find you in its time. And then it's also valuable to sit with it some of the time. Don't make it your devotion. And for those who have chronic pain, you really need to find ways to move away from it because it wearies consciousness. But some of the time, if it comes, it's also important to sit with it. You don't have to make it, I promise. It'll come on its own.

"Presence when I start to fall asleep."

Yes, you're in the presence of sleep. And I'm going to talk more about sleep at the beginning of the

afternoon and how to work with it. But just know that it's really common that you sit and you're quiet, and then your body in some way also reflects what's going on. Sometimes it's like, "Gosh, it's so quiet, it must be bedtime," right? Because we're not used to the lack of stimulation, or other things which I'll talk about.

Because it's completely natural, the main thing is just to notice the sleepiness. And then if you want, you can sit with your eyes open rather than have them closed. Or you can even stand up and meditate. It's harder to fall asleep standing up, although it's been done. And just learn that it's possible sometimes to bring a little more energy, but other times you just go through sleepiness and it's fine. It won't hurt you.

"Sometimes I come up with an image, like I'm on a magic carpet or I'm in a boat, and it's easier for me to not get lost or distracted because I just remind myself."

So there you are in your image. You're floating on your magic carpet. Where's your breath then?

"Well, it's easier to breathe because I'm..."

Because then you're aware of your breath, but there's also a sense of floating. You can use that. That's fine. I mean, people get very creative in meditation. Sometimes when I was first learning walking meditation, I would imagine I was walking on the edge of the Grand Canyon, you know, and I didn't want to fall off or something. And it was playful and it just kept me more present.

If it helps you to stay present, it's okay. But the thing about images is they can then often drift off and—okay, now I've got a magic carpet, where should I go? If it helps you actually to be more present, you can use it some. But the idea is really to feel your own breath in your body. So if it helps a bit, that's fine. Just make sure that you're actually present for your bodily experience. Enjoy it.

One more question, maybe.

My apologies, as I know you said you're going to talk about sleep later, but my question was actually the complete opposite—tips for falling asleep at night when your mind is restless.

For falling asleep at night? Besides counting sheep? Yes, that's its own whole conversation. It's actually hard for us to wind down very often, if we pay attention, because we live at such a fast pace and our screen habits interfere. There are a lot of really good basic sleep hygiene things that you may well know—dim your lights, don't go on your devices for an hour or two before bed, have a regular time.

And then when you finally do lie down, if you can't sleep, then you can meditate. Follow your breath as we do. It's boring. And the fact that it's boring is actually good—it can lead you to sleep. I might talk about this a little more later. We're a bit of a sleep-deprived culture, of course, as people have read about.

So your question points to something more important and beautiful: How do we attend to our lives? Because the speed, the advertising, the capturing of your attention—this is now what's out there with all the screens and devices and news. They want you. They want your attention. And so to meditate is

actually a radical act, first for yourself, and then as you participate as a citizen in voting, as a teacher, as a member of society, as a business person—to step out of that unconscious state of grasping that capitalism has, in part, turned into.

So it's not just your problem. You're experiencing something that's really culture-wide. Therefore, you don't want to blame yourself. You just say, "All right, how can I manage and do this?" And you become more the steward of your own life that way, which is both a big responsibility but also tremendously liberating. A little bit scary, but tremendously liberating.

So, a story that those who've come more often will have heard from my friend Fran Peavey. She was a great activist in her day, before she died.

One day she writes: "I was walking through the Stanford University campus with a friend when I saw a crowd of people with cameras and video equipment on a little hillside. They were clustered around a pair of chimpanzees—a male running loose and a female on a light chain. It turned out the male was from Marine World Africa, one of the local zoo parks, and the female was being studied for something or other at Stanford. Who I thought were spectators were mostly scientists and some publicity people trying to get them to mate.

"The male was eager—you know how they can be. He grunted and grabbed the female's chain and tugged. She whimpered, backed away. He pulled again. She pulled back." This is like the modern Me Too movement, right?

"Watching the chimp's faces, I began to feel sympathy for the female. Suddenly the female chimp yanked her chain out of the male's grasp and, to my amazement, she walked through the crowd straight over to me and took my hand. Then she led me across the circle to the only other two women in the crowd, and we all joined hands together. The four of us stood in a circle. I remember the feeling of that rough palm against mine. The little chimp had recognized us and reached out across all the years of evolution to form her own women's support group."

There is something about our culture—magnificent things and also some really terrible things, the kind of unconsciousness and fears and racism and divisiveness and clinging and greed. And so it becomes important to understand that the things that happen to us are not just personal. They are personal, but they're also conditioned in some way by the sea of culture in which we live.

Therefore, to step out of culture a bit, to take your seat as the Buddha that you are and say, "Let me see all the energies, the beautiful ones and the painful ones. Let me step back and not just be reactive, not just be caught by it, but start to be the steward of my own wellbeing"—and therefore being able to be the steward of the wellbeing of others—this becomes not just a personal act but in some deep way also a political act. Because it allows you to attend to the world from a place of consciousness and openness and freedom, which is really where the change has to come from.

So you've been sitting and walking for the morning now. There's sleepiness, there's restlessness, there's this mind telling its stories, there's achiness in the body, breath. There's also coming back over and over. There's a kind of calming that often begins to take place, although not always. Sometimes, as I said, the tears will come or the unfinished business of the heart will arise. But you, in a way, get a chance to be present for it—present, allowing it, and at the same time, more spacious than your experience, which is what loving awareness invites you to do. And that becomes healing. It actually becomes an act of love.

A student asked about sticky forms of thoughts, the insistent visitors, as she put it. The to-do list and the psychotherapy chair—things that keep coming back and are really persistent.

These will come. And it's really interesting. You're also describing paying attention to our attachments. I don't want to make any judgment about it because we get attached and it's part of being human.

But I remember going out on alms round with my teacher Ajahn Chah as a monk, early morning with our alms bowl. We were walking through the rice paddies, along the little dikes in the fields. And there was a big rock, like Spirit Rock, a boulder in the middle of the field that you could see. The master turned and said, "Is that boulder heavy?" And being a bright young monk as I was, I said, "Yes it is, Master," because boulders are heavy, right? He smiled and said, "Not if you don't pick it up."

So that's a little bit at the root of your question. And there's a kind of art to this, because when you get things that are insistent, they come for a reason. You don't want to just push them aside. Whether it's your to-do list or the psychotherapy chair, when something keeps coming back, it's actually driven by some feeling.

So drop below the to-do list into your body and notice what's the primary emotion with it. What do you think it is? Fear, anxiety, right? Usually that's future planning. And so then you can shift your attention from the list and note the fear, which we'll start to do with emotions this afternoon, and note "fear" or "anxious" or "worried," and hold that with kindness. And as you do, the thoughts start to quiet down because that's really what's driving it.

Similarly, psychotherapy can be really valuable, and it's a great complement with meditation. But you're not doing therapy as you sit here. And it's cheaper this way, right? So when the therapist comes in, you can say, "Thank you, I have an appointment next week," basically. And imagine taking the therapy chair and putting it up here next to the Buddha or Quan Yin, the goddess of infinite compassion. "You hold this for a while, I'm meditating, thank you." Yes, there will be psychological insights and they're valuable. But if you go down that road a lot, as you know, the stickiness, then it just takes you over. So in some way you're learning how to navigate your inner experience and noticing what needs to be tended to. If it keeps coming back, it wants to be felt in the body, in the emotions. And then you also can learn how to say, "All right, I felt you. Let me put you on the altar for now. Let me just go back to my breath and not get completely caught in it." So there's a few little hints for a very helpful question.

One more.

"Hi."

Hi.

"It's good to be here and to see you in person because I've read a lot of your books and have gotten a lot of wisdom from them, sir. My question relates back to what you were talking about earlier, before you answered this last question, about the beauty of the world on the one hand and the ugliness of it."

Hmm.

"And I work in a social justice field where I see a lot of ugliness. That's kind of like the point of the work. We're trying to help heal. We're trying to help make people whole. And I was wondering if you had any guidelines or wisdom to share about when to accept reality as it is, the ugliness, and when to fight, because I think I really constantly struggle with trying to make things better, trying to help people, but not having good boundaries about it."

I may talk about this a little bit more later, but let me begin to answer your question. Do you know who Somerset Maugham is, the author? He's quite a famous writer. He says there are three rules for writing the great English novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are, right? And I'm telling you that in some way because you're asking the kind of question that someone might ask: How do I know what job to take? Or how do I know who to marry? Things like that. And no one outside you can answer that question.

What you learn in meditation—and are you part of the Palo Alto group? No, okay. You could be, but you're not—what you learn in meditation more than anything is how to pay attention. And one of the great markers for how to live a wise life is the state of your body. Now it's true there will be certain circumstances. You're a parent and your child's in trouble and you say, "Forget my body. I'm going into the flames. I'm just going to do what I have to do." And there are moments like that where we have to do it. But it's not a good way to live. And we get lots of burned out activists here who are functioning on fear and adrenaline and anger and rage and so forth. And it's neither sustainable nor actually a good place to come from. Because you're trying to put out fire and you're carrying the fire.

So the main thing that I would say is, in due season, to take some time to tend your body and ask. Your heart will answer you if you listen to it.

Your body will answer and say, "How much should I take on?"

I remember Thich Nhat Hanh, who talked about this question. He started in Vietnam during the war with the School for Social Activists, and half the young people he brought together were killed. It was really tragic. But he still had such a passion for justice, as it sounds like you do. And he said, "Every spiritual community should take in people who are in trouble—mental illness or homeless. You should take in people who need help." And then he looked up and said, "But not too many, or they'll sink the ship."

And it's really the ship of your own body and your well-being. So I can't answer you, but what you're learning here is actually the way, the invitation to listen to yourself. Does that make sense? Your body will tell you. And don't let it get sick to tell you. Take a little time before that.

Now I want to do an eating meditation practice. While the raisins are being passed around, I'll talk about eating meditation and then we'll break for lunch.

Here's the instruction and the reason for it. When you're in the temple, here in the meditation hall, everything becomes part of your practice. Life is no longer divided. We live in a very divided culture—the gym for you to work out, business to make money, entertainment over here, and the sacred is relegated to the church or the temple or the mosque.

We live in a society where everything is divided, and the invitation of mindfulness is to bring things back to the center, which is here and now, where you are, to not exclude things. So there is walking meditation and sitting practice, there's breath, there's body. We're going to start to work with emotions. There's mindfulness of relationship and there's mindfulness of eating.

Now, how to do it? What does it mean? Because we spend a lot of time on food, especially with all the foodies nowadays. You go to the market, you buy it, you shop, you bring it home, you put it in the cabinet or refrigerator, you take it out, you chop it, you cook it, you season it, you eat it, then you clean the dishes, you put stuff back away—two, three times a day or more. Or you go to restaurants and sit with people. It's a big part of life, and it's very mysterious.

Here you are in this human body with a hole in one end in which you stuff dead plants and animals regularly to glug them through the tube and make it work. I don't know how you got in there. It's weird. Then you move bipedally by falling one direction, catching yourself, then falling the other way. And the little vestigial claws and tail you have—this is a weird thing, to get a body! But you have to feed it.

Usually we do it on automatic pilot. As Geneen Roth, one of our friends and colleagues, wrote in her book *Feeding the Hungry Heart*—half the time we're eating and it's not really about the food, it's something else.

So eating meditation is an invitation to actually pay attention to this mysterious act of feeding yourself. Here's how to do it: When you go out for your lunch, sit down somewhere, take out your food, and the first step is to sit in the presence of your food and not eat for thirty seconds—or if you're a killer yogi, for sixty seconds. There it is, and you're just in its presence, and you notice what happens. Maybe you're hungry. Where is the hunger? Is it your tongue that's hungry? Your eyes that are hungry?

Is it your belly that's hungry? Is it your mind that's hungry? The world works on hunger and desire, but we don't stop to pay attention to it.

So you sit and you notice what it feels like to be in the presence of food, of hunger, if it's there. You can

name it: hunger. And you begin to notice with loving awareness—can I be present without being quite so caught in it?

Or maybe you're sitting there and you're looking at your food, and instead of hunger, there's gratitude. Gratitude for the woman in the bandana in the hot field who picked the strawberries. For the person who drove that truck and brought it to Safeway or wherever it was—or Whole Foods, where they doubled the price for you. And all those people, not to speak of the rain clouds and the earthworms and the farmers and everyone who's made it possible for you to eat that food from all over the world. You feel gratitude. Or maybe, you know, whatever it is—you start to notice what's present there.

And then when you feel really quite present, you also ask: what's right for your body right now? Because your body will answer. Is this the right food? Is this the right amount? You kind of start to listen.

And now you have your food. And then you begin to eat mindfully—reaching your arm, taking a bite of it, raising your arm, lifting, tasting, chewing, swallowing. You make the process of eating as mindful as your breath or your steps.

So let's practice with the raisins. Put a couple of raisins in your palm. And first, just pay attention, knowing you're about to eat. Notice what happens. Here are these poor little raisins about to be devoured. And what's there? Is there hunger? Saliva? What's happening? Is there liking, disliking? Maybe there's anticipation and pleasure. I don't know—maybe you hate raisins and there's hatred arising. You just be mindful of your experience. The dried grapes, the grapes of the vine.

And then when you're ready, maybe take a couple of raisins in your fingertips and bring them up to your nose. You can even smell them. Ah, what's that like? Amazing. You're about to eat these things that came out of the earth and someone picked them.

And then in slow motion, for one bite, let your eyes close gently and place them on your tongue. Chew and taste and swallow them, all mindfully. Notice all that happens, all the way till they go down your esophagus to your belly. See what you notice. Take your time. Whenever you're done, you can let your eyes open again.

What did you notice as you ate the raisin?

One person shared: "I think for the first time—and I've done this exercise many times—I kind of equated the flavor to yet another sensation. And I really enjoyed that sensation of the raisin flavor filling my mouth, kind of being present with what that felt like."

What was the flavor like? Was it sweet?

"Yeah, it was a sweetness that I kind of brought my attention to."

So lovely. These particular raisins, these meditative raisins, are very sweet because you're there to taste

them. We can have all these meals—we go out to Italian, Thai, Vietnamese, Ethiopian, fabulous cuisine. And we're talking to each other and so forth. At the end, you're still a little bit hungry because you didn't actually taste it. But this was tasting that raisin.

And in that raisin, there's a whole world. Your teeth bite into it, and then all the wine that was ever made kind of floods across your tongue. There's something mysterious in it.

What else did people notice?

Someone shared: "Surprisingly, I noticed an instant burst of regression to my childhood. The raisins."

Yes, unexpected. That's like Marcel Proust's seven-volume series *Remembrance of Things Past* with the madeleine. Our senses—our smell, our taste—are really avenues to memory. And this again shows us that when we pay attention, all of time is actually here with us. So beautiful. Thank you.

Someone else shared: "I just noticed a curiosity. One raisin was small and very, very dark, and one was large and plump and a lighter color. I was turning them over and just noticing a desire to get to know these raisins that I was getting ready to eat."

That's actually a beautiful comment, because again, we take it all for granted, and it is so mysterious. The amazing thing is that nothing can ever be repeated—those two raisins are different. If you do this exercise a hundred other times, you'll have a different experience, because life is always showing you something new. And that curiosity you spoke of is really beginner's mind, opening to it.

So now you put your raisins in your mouth, you start to chew, there's a burst of flavor, you notice that. Then I could almost hear—you get the elements, the saliva sloshing across the room. Did you notice that? You're chewing, and then the salivary glands start to work. You get all the earth element: the hardness gets softer as you chew it. And the temperature element, the fire element—it's cool, and as you chew it, it warms up. And then the water element sloshes in. You get the primary experience of life in one bite of raisins.

And then you swallow it. But what I noticed—I always notice this—is that people are chewing and then sometimes they stick more raisins in their mouth even before they've swallowed. I saw you. And that's a really instructive moment—Buddhist psychology written right in that moment. There's sense experience. It's pleasant. There's grasping for more. It's like the kid with a cookie in their mouth, one in each hand, wanting more, wanting to keep the pleasure going rather than just being with the actual experience. There's that grasping for more.

And without any judgment—the point isn't that you're supposed to do it a certain way, or that you're supposed to eat in some magnificent Zen way. What's beautiful is the curiosity that was mentioned. You can learn all these things. You watch your tongue. The tongue is amazing—it's moving around and shifting things. Everything we take for granted. And then life becomes more alive. It's not a grim duty.

You know who Maurice Sendak is—the author of *Where the Wild Things Are* and *In the Night Kitchen* and all those great children's books. He wrote that the children used to send him lots of letters. He said, "I try to answer them all, usually hastily. But I got a card from a little boy named Jim, and I just loved the drawing that he sent to me."

So I wrote him back and said, "Dear Jim, I loved your card," and I drew on it a wild thing holding my message. Two weeks later I got a note from his mother, and she wrote, "Dear Mr. Sendak, my son loved your card. In fact, he loved it so much he ate it."

And Sendak went on to say, "This is the highest tribute an artist has ever received." The boy didn't care that it was an original Maurice Sendak drawing worth thousands of dollars. He saw it, he loved it, and he ate it.

So the point isn't to turn you into a zombie or something. It's rather to invite the same quality of care and attention we talk about bringing to the breath, to the body, to emotions—to bring all of that to this mysterious process of feeding ourselves. And with it comes a kind of communion with your own life, and all kinds of things that we can learn from it.

I hope you had a good lunch, in or out. One of the things that's interesting to pay attention to in eating meditation is at what point you stop eating. Because your belly will say, "Oh, nice and full," and your tongue will say, "Oh, that was really great, let's have a little more of that." And then your eyes will say, "Yeah, and I saw cookies over there, let's go for it." And then your mind will say, "No, no, no, you'll be sleepy this afternoon." And then your mother will say, "Yeah, but you should finish everything on your plate."

You get the entire committee. And basically, what mindfulness helps you with is to hear all the different voices and then to quiet yourself and say, "Well, what's actually good? What would serve this body? What would serve this moment well?"

Before we go on to the next step of mindfulness instructions—which will come at the end of this next period of sitting, how to include feelings and thoughts and so forth—I'd like us to shift the practice for a time to the practice of loving-kindness and compassion.

Because in the most fundamental way, it's not possible to pay attention to this life that we have honorably, spaciously, without being entangled in it, without getting lost—it's not possible to pay attention without kindness, without love. Otherwise, there sneaks in right away ambition, judgment, "I wish it were a little bit different," "Could this be bigger or smaller?" "Could I change it?" When we pay attention, even just as a mirror looking at things, there will come in—because we're conditioned to do so—ways that we want to fix it, ourselves or the experience, or change it or make it different, rather than just receiving it with understanding.

And of course, in a deeper way, there's this famous dialogue that I've written about, and others have too. We had with the Dalai Lama years ago, a group of us teachers meeting, asking about how to help with the degree of self-judgment, self-criticism, and self-hatred that's endemic in our culture. When you close your eyes and you sit there and that judging voice comes—you know that voice.

And he said, "Self-hatred?"

I said, "Yeah."

He was really confused, because there's no word for self-hatred in Tibetan. He went back and forth with his translator: What could this mean? It took a while. Finally, he looked up and said, "But this is a mistake. Why would anyone do this?" And then he said, "All right, how many of you in this room"—it was the teachers—"have experienced this yourself?" All the hands went up. He said, "Okay, I see we have a new problem here to solve."

So it becomes really important to pay attention to the quality of love, because otherwise the meditation can get amplified with judging. Not only am I not really a great person, or I'm worse than that, I'm a horrible person—I'm also a horrible meditator. You know, I failed, F minus or whatever. We can do all of that.

But to heal your body, to heal the relationships you have between people, to heal your heart and all the things that are unfinished in you—the only way to do it is through love. Yes, sometimes there needs to be truth-telling and deep listening.

It's not that those things aren't important too. But if they're not done with love, they don't work, really. You're not really deeply listening to another person or to your own body or your own heart.

Now, the complementary practice to this formal establishment of mindfulness—we're calling it loving awareness of breath and body, of walking and eating, and as we'll see, of feelings and thoughts and the relationships we go along—is the formal practices of loving kindness and of compassion.

How many have not done a practice like that before? Raise your hand. Good. I'm glad you're here. So that means also that a lot of you have, and there are many, many styles of it. You can find my recordings online and in my books, but also Sharon Salzberg and Pema Chödrön and the offerings from Stephen Levine and Joseph Goldstein and many, many other versions—Trudy Goodman, Tara Brach, and so forth.

But even though many of you have a practice, a few things to say before we start. First of all, it's called a practice as opposed to a perfect, right? Because you're actually practicing it. And what we practice, the seeds we water, said Thich Nhat Hanh, is that which grows in consciousness.

Second, it can bring up its opposite. You sit and do a little bit of these intentions of being well and safe and loving and compassionate, and then that person arises and you're like, "I'll never forgive them, I hate them." Or it can just feel numb and mechanical. "Oh God, this is like one more meditation I have to do and

I feel nothing. I'm a real failure." It can bring up everything.

So what do you do when that other stuff comes up as you do it? You bow and you say, "Oh, you too. I will hold you with love." "I hate this person." I'll hold that with love too. "I can't do this. I'm no good." I'll hold that thought, that belief that I'm no good, with kindness and compassion. You shift.

Actually, it's interesting because the four most principal states of the awakened heart in Buddhist psychology are love—but when love meets pain and suffering, it turns into a different state, which is the state of compassion. The tenderness of the heart. "Oh, this hurts," and it holds that. It's not "may I be happy and joyful" but rather it turns into a compassionate care. And then when love meets well-being and happiness, it turns into what's called shared joy, a really beautiful quality. And then when not a lot is going on, or when love has been present and you're now just awake to the world, there also comes a very deep quality of peace or equanimity of balance. "Oh, I know how to be here and hold this world in my heart," and things become peaceful, which is the fourth of these qualities. There are other ones like forgiveness and gratitude and so forth, but these are the central ones.

So you can feel as we do this, even though we invite loving kindness and I'll invite a little compassion as well, that with the difficulties, the heart turns a bit toward compassion.

Now, normally when these practices are done, they're done over and over again. And sometimes they feel mechanical, sometimes they help a little, and you do it and do it. It's like the guy who wrote to the IRS and said, "I haven't been able to sleep because I cheated on my taxes last year. So I've enclosed an anonymous cashier's check for $3,000. If I still can't sleep, I'll send the rest." This is how we are, basically, as people. You do a little at a head. So you don't skip over it somehow. You just do it as best as you can and see what grows.

Now, it's also true that in the beginning of the practice or training of loving kindness and compassion, which involves expressing inwardly some intentions of kindness as you hold yourself or the image of another person and inviting those feelings—they may or may not come, feelings come in their own way—before doing it, it's often recommended that one recite or reflect on the benefits of a peaceful and loving heart. I mean, how do you want to live in the world with its joys and sorrows, with its troubles and its beauty? What would it be like to live with a peaceful heart? What would it be like to live with a really loving heart? And how is it to be with people that you know who express and offer and have a lot of love?

You know, it's sort of like we're drawn to them, like bees to honey.

And so there's a list. The Buddha was a list maker. The three characteristics, the four noble truths, the five spiritual faculties, the six paramitas, the seven factors of enlightenment, the twelve links of the nidana chain, fifty-two mental factors, and so forth. There's a different list of the benefits of loving kindness—a short list and a long list. This is the list of forty. I won't read them all.

But as you grow in loving kindness, your dreams become sweeter and you fall asleep more easily. There

was a question about sleep before, someone asked. And you waken contented. Your body becomes stronger and your health grows. Angels and devas will love and protect you, whether you believe in them or not. And men and women will love you, should you be interested. As you grow in loving kindness and compassion, weapons won't harm you, poisons won't work, and things like that. If you lose things, they'll be returned to you, it says. People will welcome you everywhere. Your thoughts become more pleasant. Animals will sense this and love you. And elephants will bow as you go by, slightly. You can try it in the zoo, see if it works. Your voice becomes sweeter and your babies are happy in the womb and growing up. And if you fall off a cliff, a tree will always be there to catch you. That's right. The world becomes full of beautiful beings around you because you see through the heart. You see with the awakened heart of love. And so on. There's a lot more in the list, but you get the gist of it.

So you reflect: What is it like to be with people who are connected with one another in love? Because that's really what we are in essence. And what is it like to plant the seeds to nourish the qualities of love?

We'll do a little bit of loving kindness practice, and you can sense the pedagogy here, because for a lot of people, wishing themselves well—"May I be well or safe, may I be happy"—they go, "Ew, how could I do that?" It feels very dystonic to the way we hold ourselves. So we're going to start with someone that you love, which opens the doorway a little bit. The point in the practice is to start where it's easiest. When you start where it's easiest and you allow that, then little by little you bring in other people—dear friends, then neighbors. And finally, after you've learned to do it for a while, you can bring in difficult people, if you should know any, or difficult figures beyond the ones you know personally. That stretches the heart.

What happens is you start to get open, and then you bring in that difficult person or figure and your heart goes, "I'm never going to love them. They're just not worthy of it." But then you feel the pain of having a closed heart. It doesn't feel very good, and you say, "Okay, all right, I guess I even have to love them just because it hurts too much to not be open to the world."

And then you can wish well in a really wise way. "May you be free from hatred." Who don't you want to say that to? I think of the dictators in the world—Bashar al-Assad in Syria, or you name them. May you be free from hatred. May you be free from fear. May you know some sense of love. I wish that for everybody. Period.

Anyway, all right. So let's start with a little loving kindness practice and then we'll shift to the mindfulness vipassana, paying attention to our experience. Let your eyes close gently. You want to sit comfortably to do metta practice. It's very hard to establish that sense of love when your back is killing you.

So you want to be somewhat at ease. Let your eyes close gently. I know it's the afternoon and you've just eaten, so there's that little sleepiness that comes in. But pay attention as best you can. Come back, with your eyes closed, to feel your own body and heart and mind—with kindness, with loving awareness.

Now let yourself, as you sit quietly, think of, remember, picture, reflect on somebody that you love a lot,

somebody that you care about. As you remember them, see them in your mind's eye, picture them, envision them. Feel that loving connection you have, how much you care for this person. And if there isn't any individual that comes, maybe it's your dog who loves you when you walk in the door and wags the tail no matter what's happened. This being, this one that you love—as you picture them and feel the deep care and affection, then like a soft whisper in the mind, add in the phrases of well-being, these traditional phrases. You can change them in whatever way expresses your own care.

May you be filled with loving-kindness. This dear friend. *May you be held in loving-kindness. May you be safe and protected. May you be strong and healed. And may you be happy*—wishing for them happiness.

And again, with these words or similar ones, as you visualize them: *May you be held in great loving-kindness. May you be safe and protected. May you be well, healed, strong. And may you be happy. Truly happy.*

Now picture a second person that you care about. Bring them to mind, thinking, imagining, remembering them. And offer the same well-wishing. *May you too hold yourself with great loving-kindness. May you too be safe and protected. May you too be well, be healed, strong.*

And to bring in the element of compassion, let yourself become aware of the measure of sorrows in this person's life—their struggles, as in all human lives, their difficulties. Feel that tenderness that comes when you open to their struggles. *May you be held in great compassion, in all your difficulties. Safe and protected. And may you be happy.*

Now imagine these two people that you care about gazing back at you. Picture, envision their eyes looking at you with the same kindness. They wish this loving-kindness and compassion that you've offered back to you. They look at you with the same love. And as they look at you, they say, *May you too hold yourself with great kindness, be filled with love.* They gaze at you so kindly. *May you too be safe and protected. May you too be well and strong.* They wish this for you very genuinely.

They gaze at you and see your struggles, your fears, your physical problems, your difficulties or sufferings or losses. With so much compassion: *May you hold yourself with compassion,* they say. *May you hold yourself with tender compassion. May you be safe and protected.* And then they wish you, *May you be happy.* They gaze at you: *May you be happy*.

Take it in, their wishes. And as you do, if you're comfortable, put your hand on your heart. Receiving their care for you—they want this for you—you can also offer it to yourself. Just as these loved ones want it for you: *May I hold myself with great kindness and love.* They wish for you to do it, and you can take this in and learn to do it for yourself. *May I be safe and protected. May I be strong and healed.*

Become aware of your own measure of sorrows, your struggles and fears and losses, as we all have. Your measure of tears or sufferings. May I hold myself with mercy and compassion. This human life. May I be safe and protected. And may I be happy. The loved ones want this for you, and you can accept this. May I

be happy.

As you invite tenderness, compassion, mercy, and loving kindness to grow in you—as you've offered it to these other loved ones—now breathing gently, imagine that your heart could open. If we had time, we could bring in other friends and family and community and people. Imagine your heart could open to this whole room around you, all these people seated around you, come for a day of loving awareness and mindfulness. Wish them well. May you all be held in great loving kindness.

Let it spread out from you across the room. Let it go out from the room, out across the land, across the trees and the gullies and the streams, to the mountain lions and the gophers, to all the children in the Bay Area, to the fish and the whales in the seas and the Bay, to humans and non-humans, so that this radiates from your heart out to surround this room with kindness and compassion. Like a beacon, a lighthouse shining out in every direction, you are sending the good wishes of loving kindness. May all those in this room together, and all that we touch, and all beyond, be filled with love and loving kindness. May all those around us in this room and far beyond—those we love and know, and those we don't know, and beings everywhere—be safe and protected. May they be well and healed and strong, all of you around. And may you be happy. A true happiness. May you be happy.

In whatever way this invitation of kindness and compassion has grown in you—even if it's difficult and you hold the difficulty with compassion—now weaving this together with your mindfulness, come back to feel the movement of your breath, your life breath. Feel a kindness toward yourself as each breath comes in and goes out. A loving awareness of this breath, this moment. Feeling the breath with a loving awareness, letting the sensations of body, when they're strong, be met with the same loving awareness and kindness. Noticing the other waves of experience with the same kindness. This too, the play of our human life. And you sit in the middle with a great heart of kindness and compassion. Sense each breath, the experiences of the body sensations—these sensations, this moment—receive with loving awareness. This breath, this moment's experience, just now.

For some people, the loving kindness or compassion practice is natural and easy, and it just opens the heart. For others, it feels like an unfamiliar landscape—more frustrating or mental or something. Be very kind with it. Find your own language, your own way. For some, it may not be the words at all. For yourself at night, you might just be sitting and putting your hand on your body or your heart, without any words, just realizing that you can offer yourself some respect and care or tenderness. Or it might be that you stay with someone that you're worried about and love, and that's the place that opens the gate. Be really patient with it. But it's quite transformative.

I love the story of Sharon Salzberg, my dear colleague and friend. She was teaching over in Oakland when Jerry Brown had that center near Jack London Square called We the People, before he became governor. She did a day of loving kindness, and there was a woman who raised her hand and said, "This stuff just feels so mechanical and dry." Sharon said, "Well, why don't you just go out and walk, and as you walk and

you see people going by, offer them a little loving kindness"—which is the instruction for walking now as you go out in a minute. The woman said, "Okay, I'll go try."

So she went across the street to Jack London Station where the trains come in, and she was just walking back and forth doing her metta, feeling like it's dry, nothing's coming, no good feeling. And a train pulls in, and a guy toward the end of the train in a business suit with a briefcase walks down the long platform. He walks right up to her and says, "Excuse me, ma'am. I've never done this before, but I'm facing a really tough situation in my life, and you look so kind and peaceful. Would you offer a prayer for me?" She said, "Maybe this stuff works, you know."

So play with it. Explore. Experiment with it.

perspective of what to do with the different energies that arise as you're sitting here minding your own business, and all of a sudden the whole storm of thought or anxiety or some unfinished memory or guilt or grief or longing or love—all the things that make you human—all that stuff comes up.

So some years ago, I hate to say how many years ago, at the early stages of the American-Iraq war, a small unit of American soldiers, Army and Marines, were walking along a street in the holy city of Najaf when hundreds of Iraqis poured out of the buildings on either side. Fists waving, throats taut, they pressed in on the twenty-four Americans, who glanced at one another in terror. The journalist was afraid a shot would ring out and some great massacre would take place. This was written in the New Yorker magazine, by the way.

And at that moment, an American officer stepped through the crowd, now nearly a thousand, shouting at them. He held his rifle high over his head with the barrel pointed to the ground. Against the backdrop of the seething crowd, it was a striking gesture, almost biblical.

"Take a knee," the officer said. Behind his sunglasses, the soldiers looked at him as if he were crazy. And then one after another, swaying in their bulky body armor and gear, they knelt before the boiling crowd and pointed their guns at the ground. The Iraqis fell silent. Their anger subsided. And the officer ordered his men to withdraw.

It took me two months to track down Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hughes. And when I found him, I asked him who had taught him to tame an angry crowd in a distant country in this way. He assured me that it wasn't part of the Army Manual of Instruction. "But warning shots," he said, "couldn't work. Problem is, the next thing you know, you actually have to start shooting people." And then he paused for a moment. "The Iraqis who were there in their holy city in Najaf felt that our presence was already disrespecting their mosque and their culture. The obvious solution," he went on, "was a gesture of respect."

And so when I talk about sitting with the sensations and bowing to them, or when the different emotions and experiences come, offering a gesture of respect—to say, "Oh yes, you too are part of this human life, this human incarnation, and I can include you in my loving awareness, in my understanding."

So what will come, as you've already noticed, sometimes it's sleepiness, and you think, "Oh God, I'm no good at this." If you were to go to Kyoto, to the great Zen monasteries, or to India to these wonderful ashrams, or to Burma, in the afternoon after lunch, you'd look at these great Zen students and these great yogis, and they're nodding like this. One will nod and the other will straighten up and then somebody else will start nodding. It's because you're human. And you're particularly tired. You know why? Because you've been running around, and you get quiet, and your body says, "Hey, remember me? How about a little rest, please?"

So you don't want to judge it. It's just an energy, and sometimes you're sleepy, and that's fine. You notice it with mindfulness. You can open your eyes. You can even stand up and meditate if you're really sleepy, or keep your eyes open while you stand. And that might help, might not, but you can try it. Or you can go out and walk a little more briskly. But mostly you just see: this is what's happening. Sleep is like this. And you don't judge it.

Then the opposite comes. You're sitting here and you are restless. You're bored. "Oh my God, I'm so restless. I've got to get out of here. Got to get out of here." What to do when that comes? Just as you can acknowledge sleepiness—you can name it, "sleepy, sleepy"—you can acknowledge restlessness or boredom. You sit here and you feel restless. And what's it like in your body? "Oh, I've got to get up. Restless, restless, restless, restless." And often just by acknowledging it, things start to settle down, because that's what happens.

They come in waves. But the thing is, if you don't pay attention to these states and you get restless or bored or lonely, and you're worried or afraid about it somehow, then it kind of takes you over. You're home and you get a little restless or bored, and what do you do? You open the refrigerator. You go online. You do all that stuff. You know what I'm talking about, right? Because you can't be with yourself.

If you're lonely, be lonely. Do it right. The poet Hafez says, "Don't surrender your loneliness so quickly. Let it cut more deeply. Let it season you as few ingredients can."

If you're bored, be bored. Okay, I'm bored. I feel like I'm going to die of boredom. I'm restless. I'm dying of restlessness. When it gets really bad, here's what you do. You say, "All right, I'll be the first person in 2018 to die of boredom and restlessness at Spirit Rock. Take me." Let me see what happens. And the minute you say, "Okay, take me, I'll die of boredom or restlessness"—you know what happens? It gets easier, because most of the problem is your resistance to the experience. "Oh, bored, but dying, dying, dying... Restless, dying, dying, dying... Dying, okay... Gee, I wonder where I should go for dinner." Because the mind has no pride. You die and then it's making plans, right?

Or you notice that there's fear that comes. And as Hafez, the great poet, says, "Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I'd like to see you in better living conditions." So what you do is name it: fear. You feel those sweaty palms, the tightness. Fear, fear. You just acknowledge it. If you do it twenty, thirty, fifty, a hundred times, at some point it comes to, "Oh, fear. I know you. Yeah, this is just fear. Thank you. Fear is like this."

And you become bigger than the fear.

Or maybe it's wanting and desire. You think, "Oh, I read those spiritual books. You're supposed to get rid of desire, right?" How weird. How could you live without some healthy desire? There's healthy and unhealthy desire. It's kind of like, as my poet friend Alison Luterman writes, you're on a diet and you hide the chocolate chip cookies. Meanwhile, you're the only person in the whole galaxy who knows where those chocolate chip cookies are hidden, right? Desire is part of human incarnation.

So instead you sit and you say, "Desire, desire, desire... Oh God, I hate feeling desire. Hating, hating. I wish it would go away. Wishing, wishing. More desire, desire. Longing, longing. I'm going to die of this. Dying, dying. But I'm doing pretty good. Oh, pride, pride." And you just see the states as they come and as they go.

Or the judging mind.

I don't want to judge. I hate myself for judging. I judge myself so much. I should stop judging. It's no good to judge. I'm a terrible person. And I judge all those other people. But what's that? It's more judgment, right? I've got to get rid of this judgment.

So what can you do? You bow and you say, "Oh, judging mind. That's what it is. Thank you for your opinion. Thank you for trying to protect me. I'm good for now." And you know whose voice is in there—we won't talk about them—but somebody taught you that and recorded that judging in there. "Thank you for your opinion. I'm good for now. Thank you." And then you go back to your breath.

Or the doubting mind: I can't do it. It's too hard. Everybody else—all 398 other people—are sitting like they're awakened masters. And I'm sitting here restless and tired and sleepy. I can't do it. Maybe I should do Sufi dancing. It's more fun. All those thoughts, that's the doubting mind. "Oh, doubting mind is like this." Because if you don't know how to deal with your own doubt, you can't actually marshal your energy and direct it, can't plant the seeds and water the seeds that Thich Nhat Hanh talked about.

So you gradually learn that all these are energies of life.

The same with thoughts. You're sitting there and planning comes. Planning mind. If you name it—"planning, planning"—it dissolves like fog under sunlight. Remembering. You name it "remembering," and you don't have to go into the memory. You don't have to go to Chicago and relive that bad family reunion. You just note "remembering," thank you, and let it dissolve for now. Later you can work that out in therapy, but for now you just let it go.

As Hafiz writes, "The mind is ever a tourist wanting to touch and buy new things and toss them into an already filled closet."

So you let these come. You acknowledge them, you let them dissolve as they do. And you become the space of loving awareness that's there with your breath. Then when a strong sensation arises, or a mood of sadness or excitement or love or longing comes, or it's the planning mind or the doubting mind, you name

it. Let go of the breath. "Oh, doubting mind, doubting, doubting." It dissolves and you feel your breath for a while. And then, "Oh, but I'm so sad about it." And you notice, "Sad, sad, sad." But then the sadness turns into tenderness maybe. "Oh, tenderness now. I like this."

Oh, liking, liking. Thank you. Bow to it. Then back to your breath for a time.

And you become the space of loving awareness. You become the Buddha, or the Bodhisattva of infinite compassion, that can sit with the energies of your life. And because you learn to do this, you can then sit with the energies of others' lives. You can tend the world differently.

As you walk, these energies will come. When they do, you can just stop and name them—sad, or excitement, or longing, or love, whatever it is—and let that be part of it, then walk again. Or if you wish, as you walk, you can do a little metta, loving-kindness, and wish well for those bipedal beings walking around you, or other beings that you see, for a little bit, and then back to your steps. You get to play with your attention—being present to your body, acknowledging the waves of experience as the loving awareness, and then offering little blessings of metta and kindness to people.

Alan Watts says, "The art of living is neither careless drifting on the one hand nor fearful clinging on the other. It consists of being sensitive to each moment and regarding it as utterly new and unique, in having the mind open and the heart wholly receptive."

This art of living is supported by, held in the field of mindfulness, of loving awareness that we're practicing—to be present for our own breath and body, for our thoughts and feelings. In that way, we can sit, walk, do our loving-kindness, and then bring that same caring attention to our relationships with others and to our relationship with the whole vast world around us.

But this step that we're doing today especially—of quieting the mind, tending the body, listening to the heart—boy, the world needs this. I just hope it goes up the chain of command somehow.

So let's continue sitting with this spirit of mindfulness, including the strong feelings or states of mind as they arise, with the same care and attention you've given to the breath or sensations of the body.

While in some ways you may be getting a little weary—okay, it's a long day of meditation—let yourself notice the moments where there's some peacefulness or some well-being. Notice the moments where you feel like, oh, there's some balance coming. Even if it's just for a breath or two or three, they will come. Dwell in them a little bit. Let them buoy you up. Rest in them. Start to feel that you can inhabit the sense of well-being as you sit here, when it comes.

This breath, this moment's experience, just now.

Make sure the mindfulness has the spirit of loving-kindness with it, in it. Bring in the practice and quality of loving-kindness and compassion, tenderness for the last part of this sitting—especially to yourself, and those you care about.

There is something about the stillness that grows that is worth tending to, and in some cases preserving or staying with.

For those who are more experienced practitioners, I'd like to start with a two-line chant that's part of the morning and evening chanting in the monasteries and temples where I practiced. The line goes: *Svakato bhagavata dhammo sanditiko akaliko ehipasiko opanayiko pachatangve titapu vinyuhiti.*

The translation is: "Honoring of the teachings of the Dharma, of the truth, which is open-handed, immediate, visible to the wise, bringing benefit here and now, offering liberation to all who turn their hearts to it—with nothing kept back, nothing hidden."

It's a kind of celebration of the possibility of freedom for us.

I love reading poems when we get quiet, because there's a way in which poetry is the music of language. William Carlos Williams wrote, "You can't get the news from poems, but men and women die every day for lack of what is found there." It's not like turning on the news—it's hearing something much deeper and wilder.

From Carl Sandburg, "Wilderness":

There's a wolf in me—if you haven't noticed in yourself—fangs pointed for tearing gashes, a red tongue for raw meat, the hot lapping of blood. I keep the wolf because the wilderness gave it to me, and the wilderness will not let it go.

There's a fox in me, a silver gray fox. I sniff and guess and pick things out of the wind and air, and nose in the dark night, and circle and loop and double cross.

There's a hog in me, a snout and belly, machinery for eating and grunting, machinery for sleeping satisfied in the sun. I got this too from the wilderness, and the wilderness will not let it go.

There's a fish in me from salt blue water gates. I scurried with shoals of herring and water spouts with porpoises. There's a baboon in me, clambering, clawed, dog-faced, yapping a jealous hunger, harrowing under the armpit.

There's an eagle in me and a mockingbird. And the eagle flies among the rocky mountains of my dreams and fights among the Sierra crags, the cut crags of what I want. And the mockingbird warbles in the underbrush of my Chattanoogas of hope. And I got an eagle and the mockingbird from the wilderness.

Oh, I got a zoo, a menagerie inside my ribs, under my bony head, under my red valve heart. And I got something else. It's a man heart, a woman child heart. It's a father and mother and lover, came from God knows where, going to God knows where. For I am the keeper of the zoo, and I say yes and no, and I sing and touch and love, and I am a pal of the world. For I came from the wilderness, and the wilderness will not let me go.

If we could put a little speaker on the side of your head for what went on while you were looking so calm and peaceful over the course of this day, people sitting near you would at first turn their heads and say, "Really?" And then they'd start to move their chairs over to one side. Because the zoo is in there. We contain it all. And as Thich Nhat Hanh said, from where we started: What are the seeds that we will water? Where do we get lost, confused, caught in hatred and ignorance? And what are the seeds that we will water?

One of the earliest descriptions of the Buddha's teachings, from the first years of his wandering: In the morning on alms round, he took his bowl and came by a field that was being plowed by a very wealthy Brahmin. At the end of the plowing, they gathered everyone to offer them food. The wealthy Brahmin looked at him and said, "Hey monk, I plow the land, I sow the seeds, and having worked in this way, I eat. Why don't you do a little plowing and sowing, and then you would eat too?" Like, "Stop being a beggar and get a life."

And the Buddha replied, "I too, oh Brahman, plow and sow, and having done so, I eat."

Now the Brahmin landowner got interested. He said, "You claim to be a plowman, but I see no plow. Tell me, what kind of plowing is it you do?"

And the Buddha replied: "Trust or faith is the seed, compassion the rain. Wakefulness, my plow and yoke. Conscience, my guide. My own mind is the harness. Clarity is the plow blade and goad. Well guarded in action and speech, I use truth to weed and cultivate release. Wise effort is the oxen drawing the plow toward freedom without regret. This is how I plow. And it bears the fruit of the deathless—a freedom that can be touched by nothing. Whoever plows in this way becomes free of entanglement in all sorrow and distress."

Well, he was convincing. The Brahmin said, "Let me offer some milk rice to you," and poured it into the bowl. But as the myth goes—you can think of this mythologically—the rice wouldn't stay in the bowl. The bowl hissed and it all splattered out. And one wonders, why did that happen? Why was the bowl hot like that, so that the milk rice would splatter out?

Have any of you ever plowed a field? So interesting—we're so far from our roots. A few people have. Tell me, what's the plow like at the end of a long furrow? Just one word.

It's hot. That steel of the plow cutting through the earth—by the end of opening the earth in that furrow to plant the seeds, it gets really hot. And so this image is that the bowl was hot because the Buddha had been doing his plowing. It's a really lovely, poetic play with language. "I too have done my work, and you don't even have to bother to feed me."

I'm beyond all of that, you know, beyond judgment of what you have. But there's something really beautiful in it.

Like that verse I read from Thich Nhat Hanh at the beginning of the day—that we have all these potential seeds in our fields. And which ones will we water?

Another little text for you, just to follow this thread:

Others will be cruel. We will not be cruel. Thus we should incline and direct the heart.

Others will kill. We will not kill. Thus we should incline and direct the heart.

Others will take what's not given. We shall abstain from this. Thus we shall direct and incline the heart.

Others will speak falsehoods. We shall speak truth. Thus we should incline and direct the heart.

Others will be fraudulent. We shall be honest. Thus we should incline and direct the heart.

Others will be hateful. We shall be compassionate. Thus shall we incline and direct the heart.

Others will lack wisdom. We will cultivate wisdom. Thus we should direct the heart.

This is another language for the sowing of seeds, for the watering, for the directing of consciousness itself. Because we have a choice as human beings. We can get caught by the reptilian brain—you know it very well. The fight, flight, or freeze. Fear and separateness, what's called the small sense of self, blocked off from the world. Or we can say: This is us. This is our family. This is our planet. This is life. We are part of it, and we're all in it together.

We can blame others. It's their fault. But I remember, again, being in the monastery. There was some big wedding in a village, the closest village to the temple, and loudspeakers with music were blaring while we were trying to be peaceful. Mostly we were in this remote forest, but there were a couple of little villages nearby. And somebody complained to the teacher, Ajahn Chah, about all the noise.

He said, "I have a question. Who's bothering whom? Is the noise bothering you, or are you bothering the noise? Where does the difficulty come from?"

Or if somebody was angry, he said, "Hmm, you're angry. Who's bothering whom in that?"

Because the one thing we have the great capacity to do is to tend our own heart. And you will have praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, birth and death, sweet and sorrow. There will be tragedies and there will be suffering, and there will be beauty and love. That's what makes up your incarnation, your human life.

Now there's something deeply political again about all of this. James Baldwin writes: "I imagine one of the reasons that people cling to their hate and ignorance so stubbornly is because they sense that once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with their own pain."

And because we can't bear the insecurity of being human—is anybody really secure? Raise your hand,

come on, fess up. You're not. Life in its nature is uncertain, isn't it? What's going to happen tomorrow? No one knows.

How long will you live? No one knows. What is consciousness? Life is really uncertain. The only thing you know for sure is that you're going to die. But the big question is when. A long time away, a short time, and then all of a sudden—oh, surprise—it's your time.

What Baldwin says is that if we can't bear uncertainty, if we can't bear our measure of the grief or the tears that's given to every human being, then we project it onto others. And so it's the enemy du jour. It's the immigrants. It's the Mexicans. It's the Muslims. It used to be the communists when I was a kid—now they're coming back around again. It's a new popular meme. Let's hate the communists, or whatever. It's the black people. It's the brown people. It's the yellow people. It's somebody else who's different than us. And so we project our insecurity because we can't bear our human condition, our human incarnation.

Your ability to sit as you have in practice over the time that you have in this way gives you a great strength or power, a capacity, which is a kind of freedom and an ability to love in this life. Because who are you really? Your consciousness. Your spirit that was born into this body. You're not your body. I hope you know that. You're not made of brown rice and Big Macs. It's just not who you are. And you're certainly not your feelings, because they're always changing, right? You're happy and sad and angry and loving. Maybe you're your thoughts. Come on. You know the cartoon in the New Yorker that shows a driver going across the vast Utah desert, with a roadside billboard that says, "Your own tedious thoughts next 200 miles." It's like meditation, right? The mind just streams thoughts, secretes thoughts like the salivary glands secrete saliva. So you're not these. Who are you really? You are spirit, you are consciousness. And consciousness contains all things. It's connected with all things. When you remember this, then those prejudices and fears and confusions—all those things—they drop away.

One of the stories that I love—I'm reading some very classical Buddhist texts for this more experienced group—is about Ananda, who was the cousin and attendant to the Buddha, at least as all these stories are told. Ananda, having been sent by the Blessed One on a mission, was returning past a well near a village. Seeing Bhakti, a young untouchable woman, an outcast, he asked her for a drink of water.

Now, if you think about prejudice, which we have plenty of in our own culture, it takes the form—or did, and still does—of Indian caste. If you're born into a lower caste, it used to be that even if your shadow passed over the food of a high caste person, it would pollute it. Imagine a child being told your shadow will pollute something.

So Bhakti says, "Oh, venerable monk, I am too lowly born to give you water to drink. Do not ask anything of me, lest your holiness be contaminated, for I am an untouchable."

And Ananda replied, "I ask not for caste, but for water, please."

The woman's heart leapt joyfully, and she gave Ananda water to drink. He thanked her and went away.

But she followed him, and hearing that he was a disciple of the Buddha, she went to the Blessed One and said, "Help me please live and dwell near where your disciple Ananda is, that I may see him and tend to him, for I have fallen in love with Ananda." It happens, you know.

The Blessed One understood the emotions of her heart and said, "Bhakti, your heart is full of love, but you do not understand your own sentiments. It is not Ananda that you love, but his kindness. Accept then the kindness you have seen him practice toward you, and practice it toward others."

Follow this path of justice and righteousness, and your good heart will outshine the royal glory of kings and queens.

This story really goes back to the original founding of Buddhist teachings, which welcomed everyone from every caste and race. All were called nobly born. You who are the sons and daughters of the awakened ones, remember who you really are.

So then, what is freedom in this? Freedom is not to be trapped by the emotions and perspectives and prejudices, not to water the seeds of judgment and hatred. But to encounter each person and see somehow their secret beauty—to see, "Born in this person, wow, I wonder who's behind those eyes." And that one, and that one, and that one, living this mysterious life. Then it allows for a kind of deep kinship to arise.

And of course, it's not going to be how you want. Some people will like you, some won't, some will leave you. Human beings are an unpredictable lot. But you get to tend your heart.

There's a story I heard recently from Frank Ostaseski, a good friend who started Zen Center Hospice. His book, *Five Invitations*, is in our bookstore—it's a great book. It was about a woman whose work was in the publishing industry in New York. Her mother had lost more and more of her memory through Alzheimer's and become unable to care for herself well. So she moved her mother in with her in her apartment and got a caregiver.

She came home from work one day and all her precious books—she had a great library of precious books—were spilled out on the floor, tumbling out of different boxes. She walked in and her mother looked at her and said, "I'm tired of all these old dusty books. I'm going to give them to my dentist." That was the state of mind she was dealing with.

Jillian, the woman, got really upset at the caregiver and said, "How could you do this? My precious books, and my mother's taking them away!" Really angry. But the caregiver was not in that state at all. She said, "Madam, today I pack the books up, tomorrow I unpack the books. If this gives a woman who has so little sense of control even a moment of some satisfaction—that she can direct something—well, I will go along with her. Because this too is important, and I just like being with her. It's fine, thank you."

And you can hear how much love there is in that response.

Oh, we think the world has to be the way that we want it to be. And I don't mean that you don't stand up

for justice or protect those who are vulnerable. But there are different ways to do it. You can do it out of your anger or out of your fear. Or you can do it out of love. And that love comes from this inner sense of freedom that you always have, because consciousness in its nature is free. You can get identified with things and get caught in them, but freedom remains available.

Consider this story of a woman named Sarah, a single mom with two kids. Her eight-year-old daughter Alicia had leukemia. Of course, Sarah got incredibly anxious and terrified and worried, already grieving what might be the loss of her child's health, scared that she would lose her. For the first whole year, Alicia went through the long rounds of chemotherapy and hospital stays and doctors, and her mother and the whole house were filled with sadness and fear and anxiety coloring the days.

Then one afternoon when they were out on a walk, Alicia said, "Mama, I don't know how long I'm going to live, but I want them to be happy days."

It was like a splash of cold water on the mother's face. She realized she had to step out of the drama of leukemia, the melodrama and all her fear, and meet her young daughter where she was. She grabbed her and they started to dance outside, and she said, "Yes, we will do this."

And of course, Alicia is now twenty-three years old. She graduated from college. She made it. She's okay. But even if she didn't, what kind of days would you have wanted for her? And what kind of days would you have wanted for her mom?

When I was eight or nine years old, just around that time, my twin brother—whom I loved very much, who died last spring, also from blood cancer—he was much bigger and much more robust than I was. I was kind of very skinny. Here's the comparison.

He played football quite successfully, and I played oboe in the orchestra. But at that time we were eight years old, and we were living in Buffalo, which has a lot of snow coming in off the lakes. We had this big, wild winter storm. It was very cold. We all wrapped up like boys do and went out to play in the snow. I was shivering—I was so skinny and just shivering and shivering. He looked at me and said, "You're cold." I said, "Yeah." He said, "It's not cold." And he took off his hat. "It's not cold." He took off his scarf. Then he took off his jacket. "It's not cold, it's just in your mind."

Pretty soon he was stripped to the waist in the middle of this blowing windstorm, dancing around and saying, "It's not cold, it's just in your mind!"

That's who he was as a person. He was a great adventurer, a world explorer. He was a member of the Explorers Club—those people who walk to the South Pole and climb different mountains. He actually explored the underwater lakes of the world: Lake Baikal, Lake Titicaca in the Andes, Lake Malawi in Africa. He spent a year there doing the underwater genetics of that lake. He was a geneticist and environmental biologist.

And it was so beautiful because it was the teaching of what kind of spirit do you meet your life with. What does it mean to have a free heart? To love another person? As Ananda's story showed, to be able to meet and see the beauty in every person you encounter, or to at least meet them respectfully, even if they're lost in themselves or operating in some other way. As Nelson Mandela said, when you imagine something better about people and treat them with respect and dignity, often they act the better because of it. Not always—you don't get to choose that. But you get to choose your spirit.

So yes, we sit and meditate with breath and body and emotions, all the things that you've been practicing for some years, things you've learned in your life and in your years of retreats and meditation training. But what interests me is: What is your experience of freedom like? What moments have you learned where you thought, "Oh yes, I really have the choice, the possibility of living freely"—whether it's in your meditation or in your relationships or in the things that you tend in this world?

With this opening reflection, I'd like to ask those of you who are experienced practitioners to answer the question: Can you describe moments of freedom, of awakening, of that understanding that came to you? And what's that like?

"Wow, I get to start answering this question. Very nice. So my practice has led to the saying: 'This is all there is, and this is a miracle, and I'm a miracle connected to all these miracles.' I really deeply connect to that by feeling the life force in my system and being very present with this miracle that's unfolding in front of me right now."

Thank you. I'm very grateful to you. Beautiful. Can you think about a time when that was particularly clear to you or helpful, when you were in the middle of something?

"Well, that's my daily practice. I regularly come back to that. I thought you were going to ask about a time when it was very difficult to practice. I try real hard—like if I'm sick—to find that connection still to something inside of me that can bring forward a connection to the life force."

Lovely. So there you are sick and you say, "Yeah, but that's not the whole story. There's some life force or something greater than that." There's also a beautiful move that one can make, which is to realize that you're not the only one that's sick. As you're sick, there are lots of other people in the world who are being tended and cared for by so many others. And this is also part, as you say, of—what was your phrase?

This is life. This is a miracle too—health and sickness both. Just being alive.

Thank you, thank you.

Somebody else—moments of freedom, what you've discovered.

"First, I want to thank you for everything that you've shared, not just here today, but all over everything. I'm deeply, deeply grateful for everything that you've done and shared. I had a really interesting moment at the beginning of this most recent meditation. All the books that you wrote are at home, so all I had was

a paperback Tara Brach with me. I was waiting in line to have you sign it because I saw you do that for someone else. And when it came to be my turn, you turned away. You may not have seen me, or maybe it was time to start—whatever the reason. And I immediately went to this place where I was telling myself the story: *Oh, look, you're invisible now. You don't matter. You're subhuman. You're not worthy. You were born lower caste.* So I sat down and I really felt that sense of being despicable. And then I sat with it, and I realized that this is a story I tell myself sometimes. And the freedom for me came with the realization that I was able to recognize this as a story—that I was able to understand I could sit with it and just be with it and not have to fix it or change it or run away. And that was beautiful."

Thank you. Thank you for all of that. Sorry I didn't see you. But you know what? I see you now. And it's really a pleasure.

Thank you. That's great.

"Hi. I had a moment yesterday that took me through the whole gamut of emotions. I have an elderly mother and father, and they live quite far away. We had a little health scare yesterday. My father sounded panicked. He said Mom wouldn't come out of bed. I started having all these stories of her demise, all kinds of terrible things that could be happening—how powerless I was, how I wasn't going to get there, and even if I got there, I wouldn't be useful because I've been so far away. And then I felt shame and terrible and sad, all these things. I sat with that for most of the day.

Finally I called my mom at, I guess, four-thirty her time, and she'd finally gotten out of bed. She was very cheerful. She said, 'Oh, hello! How are you?' I said, 'Oh, I'm really, really good.' We're planning to go to this wedding in two weeks. And she goes, 'Are you going to the wedding?' I've told her like a hundred and fifty times that I'm going to the wedding. 'Yes, yes, Mom, I'm going to the wedding.' 'And your children, are they going to the wedding?' 'Yes, Mom, they're going to the wedding.' 'Oh, that's so great!' She goes, 'I'm sorry, I forget.' And I said, 'You know what's wonderful, Mom? I am so envious of you. You get to be delighted over and over again with the same news. And I'm just happy to tell it to you, because every time, you get to have the same amount of delight.'"

And then I thought, she's the Buddha.

Anyway, that was my story. Thank you.

*Thank you.** Yeah, so much in that. All the ways in these last two stories that we tell ourselves stories about things as if they're real, and they're just thoughts. And to be able to step out of that as you describe—oh yeah, that was an interesting story, wasn't it? Beautiful.

Next, please.

Sure. Over the years, I've struggled with becoming really agitated and aggravated in the workplace with

my coworkers. Sometimes it's gossiping, saying mean-hearted things, saying harsh, negative, critical things. In the past, I used to say something that would qualify as gossip, mean-spirited, and afterwards I would kind of have a rush of pride. But then I would feel ugly.

More recently, that's really changed. Now, before I say something, I have that sensation. And for me, that's given me a lot of freedom.

*Beautiful.** Yeah. I mean, there's a way in which we do talk about one another and there's something meaningful in it. But to be able to sense your best intention, to sense what you're doing and ask yourself, "Is this healthy? Is this helpful or not?" That freedom you just described. Wonderful. Thank you.

Next.

Hi there. I've had a mindfulness practice for several years, thanks to Spirit Rock. And I'm very grateful to you, so thank you. It's been particularly—and very, I should say extremely—helpful to me as a mother of three. Something you shared that I want to share with the rest of you who are parents, something you shared with me that I use from time to time. There are several antidotes that I use as a parent. In moments of chaos with my kids, I say to them, "This is a moment of suffering, and this too shall pass." And it diffuses whatever chaos is happening, and they look at me like I'm crazy. But it really helps. There are many things that you've shared with me over the years. I just thank you, Jack. Thank you.

How old are your kids now?

Now they're fifteen, eleven, and nine.

*Good luck.** Teenagers are supposed to be a little bit chaotic—that's their job, you know. They're trying to learn all these things, and their brains are just sort of opening to enormous creativity and vision and things like that. We kind of want to organize them, and they're saying, "No, no, look at what's possible!" Some of it's messy, but it's also natural. Great.

Please, who's next?

So before I thought about the question, "What gives me moments of freedom?" I first started thinking, "What are the moments where I feel like a prisoner? What are the things that take me away from my freedom?" And I believe fear is the major one that gets to me.

So I believe the moments of freedom come when I have faith that there is something more powerful than myself, and I'm not running the show. Whenever I'm meditating, instead of sometimes saying "not now," I put it in someone else's hands, not mine—in my higher power's hands. And if the fear comes twenty times, I twenty times just put it in someone else's hands. Exactly. Until all of a sudden it quiets down, and that's

when I have the freedom—knowing that I'm here just learning, someone is running the show, and I'm just doing my best. When I feel that I'm in control, that I'm in charge, fear is with me.

But when I let go of that control is when I feel the freedom.

Thank you. Beautiful. Thank you so much.

Hi, I'm really happy to be here. First of all, Jack, I've been listening to your recordings on Dharma Seed for a while and I practice with some of your students, so it's just really wonderful to be here.

Thank you.

I don't know about anybody else, but I find that intimate partnership is a space of great beauty and great challenge.

Even the Buddha and Jesus had trouble when they went home to their families, right? So you've got to understand that this closeness brings certain challenges, yes.

Well, and even despite knowing that, being a practitioner for a few years now, I've put immense pressure on myself in my practice. Like you said earlier, it's called practice, it's not called perfect. But I can understand that intellectually, and then still that's kind of the go-to.

I've found that when I'm in really tense moments with my partner, my go-to is—like one of my teachers said—I'm like a warrior. I've got weapons hidden everywhere. In a sleeve I've got a knife, then I've got a gun. I'm really sharp with my words, so when I'm in an unconscious place, they can really hurt somebody. And afterwards, historically, I've felt really painful after I've said things and been hard on myself.

But I had a moment recently where my partner and I were in a very tense argument situation, and I just had this moment where I felt the knife ready to come out. I was quiet for a second and I just breathed and said, "You know what, I'm feeling a lot of anger in my body right now, and I want to say something but I don't want to say it, so I'm just going to take a second and breathe." Right after I said that, my thought was, "Wow, good job." That was such a moment of freedom—instead of the inner dictator or the inner scoundrel, as Matt Kahn calls it, there was this loving presence. That felt like the fruition of everything. That was worth everything, basically.

Thank you. Beautiful.

Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed coming here. It's only taken me twelve years to get here—I was in Berkeley with the Zen Center for a long time.

I'm sort of riding on the coattails of the other mom, and something I've found that has been very liberating with my teenage daughters has been when they expect me to do something that I kind of can't believe they're asking me to do, or can't believe they're upset about something after I've done so much. I just say, "Oh my queen, all I want to do is please thee." And it diffuses the situation. They're like, "Oh, really, Mom?" and they don't know what to say. Because it is true in one sense, rather than "I can't believe you're asking me to do that" or "I can't believe you're unhappy with this." I just say, "I'm here to please you." And it seems to diffuse the situation.

Great. Thank you.

A couple more.

"Some of the pieces that have really helped me over the past maybe two years since I really started my practice—one was initially the mind-like-sky meditation, being able to realize that I didn't have to be a prisoner to the thoughts that would stream in and stream out. That just opened a space for me to start going deeper in meditation.

One of the other pieces that's helped me is in my daily devotional—just the reminders of how much joy is important to bring into your life in the midst of darkness. The example it gave was that fire is a reminder of how much it can bring pain, and joy is also a good reminder that this is what is meant to be in your life.

These pieces have been really helpful for me as I've gone through a dark valley in the last year and a half—custody struggles, not being able to see my children. And through some guidance from you, being able to have compassion and forgiveness toward an ex-partner where there was anger, lots of anger, that was blinding me. Joy was not even present in my life. Being able to get to the point of having compassion and realizing there's a story going on, probably for generations on that side—to open my heart and forgive allowed me the space to bring other parts of joy into my life. That's been through music and song. So I'm really thankful."

Thank you. So difficult, and yet you've learned so much in it.

One more.

"Thank you so much again. Thank you, Sangha, all these beautiful beings. I have a sense that what we all aspire to is less glimpses of freedom and more abiding liberation. And I've noticed that through loving-kindness practice and my practice of ahimsa as extreme sport—"

Can you say that again?

"Ahimsa as extreme sport."

Beautiful. It almost appears that way in our current world—even to take a vow of non-harming puts you a little bit out of the mainstream, we'll say.

"But through these practices, particularly loving-kindness, often poetically referred to as 'the kiss from within,' there reaches a point where discriminatory mind itself loses its hold and relaxes its grip. There's a sort of Laughing Buddha element to this. I think it was Papaji—someone said, 'What about liberation? How do we get liberation?' And he said, 'Who told you you were bound?' So excavating the story of what we believe has made us feel unfree—interestingly enough, the experience of being able to just drop discriminatory mindset, to not believe that my purpose or any of our purposes here is to continuously evaluate creation, each other, our fellow beings, in terms of 'this is good, this is bad, I like this, I don't like that'—was incredibly liberating."

So it's not your job to continuously evaluate and judge, huh?

"It's rather exhausting, quite frankly. Although I hear you have to become exhausted by samsara."

Beautiful, beautiful again. And I love hearing these because some of them are so practical—"Good job" to yourself, "I did that, I was able to not get so caught in that." Or "Oh, my queen," you know—just being playful about it and not getting so identified.

And some of them carry such depth. "I'm going through a custody battle. I can't even see my children. How do I do this? Do I let myself get sick? Do I carry that anger and fear? Or is there some way I can still have my own life?" Or whether it's with work, or with my mom who's lost her memory—but then she gets to have the delight over and over and over again. So that's a whole other way to hold it.

This capacity to be free lives within us. And as we begin in our meditation to learn to be present for the whole zoo that Carl Sandburg described, for the whole of our humanity, that sense of freedom grows. You become the loving awareness itself, and you then have the ability to be with difficult things and joyful things alike—to both enjoy what's beautiful, to water those seeds, and not be captured by that which otherwise would habitually take you and cause tremendous suffering.

There is a book some of you may know called *The Book of Joy*, written as a week-long dialogue between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu, both of whom have amazing laughs. The Dalai Lama has a sort of deeper laugh, and Tutu giggles a lot. They're old buddies, both in their eighties, teasing each other. The Dalai Lama was trying to take Tutu's hat off, and Tutu says, "What, you're a thief? We're supposed to be holy men. You're stealing things!" They're just delighting in each other.

The premise of the book is to explore how these two people, who have both been in the fire of so much suffering, can carry such joy. For Tutu, it was the years of apartheid when people around him were being burned and killed and shot. For the Dalai Lama, the loss of his country of Tibet—unable to go home for more than fifty years, temples burned, sacred texts destroyed, monks and nuns thrown into prison.

Someone once asked the Dalai Lama, "How can you be happy?" And he said, "They've taken so much from me. They've taken my freedom to walk my own land. They've burned our temples. They've tried to take our sacred places and texts away. Why should I let them take my happiness?"

That sense of freedom they each carry is truly remarkable. I think that's why people go to see the Dalai Lama. Yes, they go because of those great Tibetan teachings, half of which we don't understand. Or they go because he's the Nobel laureate, this amazing political figure. But I really think people go to hear him laugh. Someone who can carry the weight that he does and still have such a joyful heart and a beautiful smile says, as so many of these stories we've just heard from people say, that your spirit is given to you. It is free. And that is really the great choice. From that freedom, then you can do all kinds of things in the world.

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