Monday Night Meditation Class with Jack Kornfield

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 2:18:33

So, please let yourself come back in and get settled. Sit at ease, and let yourself listen—not so much to remember what's said, no quiz at the end, but more to listen in a way that if there's something that resonates as true, that's a reminder of what you know in a deep way, let that nourish you and let the rest go by.

As you will understand, I want to start the evening by reading a list of names. These include Amanda Alvier, Martin Torres, Luis Daniel Wilson, Daryl Roman Burt II, Deirdre Drayton, Alejandro Barrios Martinez, Anthony Luis Loren de Loza, John Carlos Mendez, Kimberly Morris, Stanley Almodovar, Luis Omar Capo, Juan Ramon Gutierro, Eric Ivan, Peter O. Gonzalez, Luis Villalma. Average age, twenty-three, twenty-four. There are fifty-three candles here for those whose lives were taken.

And then a little story, a letter in their honor. Some of you will have heard this in the past.

"Am I gorgeous?" my child asks, drawing the word out like pulled taffy. *Gorgeous.*

"Yes," I say, "you are."

The pink and teal dress is probably made of some highly flammable material, some chemist's approximation of satin. Pudgy fingers decorated with pink polish trace the sequins on the bodice. "I love this." A giant pair of bubblegum pink wings flap slowly. Little feet dance in sparkly red slippers. "I'm just like a real princess."

"Yes," I say, "you are."

Curly hair, joyful smile, flawless skin. This child is the epitome of beauty. This child, my son. He's four years old and prefers to wear dresses. Maybe it's a phase, maybe not. Even as I wonder how I produced such an angelic looking creature, I wish he would put on some pants and go back to playing with toy tractors. Not because it matters to me—it doesn't—but because I'm already hearing in my head the name-calling he'll face in kindergarten. Many adults already seem a bit disturbed by the dresses. Strangers utter awkward apologies when they realize he's not female. This culture wants little boys to dream only of baseball, trucks, and trains. This culture has no room for little boys who want to be gorgeous.

He picks up a parasol a neighbor gave him and opens it jauntily over his shoulder. "Am I beautiful?" he asks. And I sweep him into my arms and plant a kiss on his cheek. "Always," I say. "Always."

There is something full of tears and holy about being torn open, about remembering those who are young who are killed. The Lakota Sioux say that those who weep and grieve, their tears bring them closer to the gods. And so we start tonight with a vigil. You sat with these candles and with your own breath and your own humanity. We remember and we hold them. Wherever they are, may they find peace. May they rest in an ocean of love. And may those who love them find peace. So difficult.

In building this new community center, we knew it would be used for all kinds of things. I didn't expect the first Monday night I would teach here would be in part a vigil. But it is, because we're human beings and there's birth and there's death and there's joy and sorrow.

In our previous community hall—many of you had been there—the trailers that were all hooked together twenty years ago were falling apart, and the county wouldn't let us use them anymore. They were also inhabited by many other four-footed creatures. We calculated that there had been 2.6 million meditation hours in that building, so it had a very cool vibe, even though it was kind of funky.

I came into this hall last Saturday to teach a first daylong, one of the first events in this beautiful space. And I thought, okay, I'm supposed to say something really special. But actually, I was a little disoriented and uncertain. What's special to say? I don't know. And so I welcomed people and talked some about the core principles of Buddhist teachings—of transformation of the heart and awakening.

And then we sat together. The minute we got quiet and still, like tonight, I thought, "Oh, that's what this is for." And I felt wonderful. It wasn't blah, blah, blah. It was, "Ah, thank you."

What we've created—and it's really collectively from many, many people in our community—is a place of peace. A place of stillness amidst the tragedy of Orlando, amidst the weekly political tornadoes depending which direction you turn, amidst the mystery of birth and death, and the Warriors playoff games.

The Buddhist texts begin: "O nobly born, O you who are the sons and daughters of the awakened ones, remember who you really are. Return to loving awareness. Return to the spirit of awareness that is free no matter the circumstances. Learn to quiet your mind. Learn to open your heart. Let the heart be still amidst all the turnings of the world."

St. John of the Cross says, "Disquietude is always vanity." Kind of interesting—it's sort of that old Victorian language. But there's something in it to reflect on. Disquietude is always vanity. You're upset, it's an ego trip. Somehow you're caught. I'm not sure how you would translate it in modern jargon.

But there's something as we sit together and quiet ourselves amidst healing and tears—our own healing, not just the healing of the rents in the fabric of the world. Almost everyone who sits quietly has something that needs to be healed in their bodies, in their history, in their psyche, in their hearts—and if none of the above, in their families. We can be sure of that.

And tears—they're called the tears of the way. They're the tears that come because you're paying

attention. If we don't have a nation that can weep, then we're really in trouble. If we don't have politicians who can go on television and say, at the same time they're going to start a war or send our military or do something like that—if they're not weeping when they say it, they're not really paying attention.

So you sit among the tears and the healing and the beauty and the sacredness. All of this. And as you quiet yourself, the laws of human life become obvious to us. They're very central to the Buddha's teachings: that as long as greed and hatred and ignorance operate in us and in others, the result will be suffering. As long as dishonesty operates, as long as there is a lack of standing up for what's true and speaking what's true, we'll continue to suffer.

The people you have to lie to own you. The things you have to lie about own you. When your children see you owned, then they are not your children anymore. They are the children of what owns you. If money owns you, they're the children of money. If your need for pretense and illusion owns you, they're the children of pretense and illusion. If your fear of loneliness owns you, they're the children of loneliness. If your fear of truth owns you, they're children of the fear of truth. This is Michael Ventura. We pass these on to one another.

And yet that's not the only way to live, and we also know that as deeply as we know our own name. So we sit quiet and we see the contractions and the fear and the confusion in the heart, but we also see another possibility—that it's possible even in this uncertain world to make the heart a place of peace, to bring our mind to a greater steadiness, to practice forgiveness and compassion in our lives and with one another.

And it doesn't mean everything's going to be okay. It will be okay. Absolutely. It is okay. It just depends on your reference point for it. And it won't be okay. And that's okay.

As Helen Keller says, "Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do children as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."

And so we sit in our vulnerability and in not knowing and in the mystery of our life. And in the times that are really beautiful.

I'm about to get married in ten days. My fiancée, Trudy Goodman, with whom I've been together now for the last four or five years—she's just my age. We're both about seventy-one. We've known each other for forty years. We have a great time together. And we look at each other... We're going to go to Hawaii in about ten days and Ram Dass is going to do a little private ceremony and sprinkle some fairy dust, and we'll be married. That is, as long as neither of us changes our mind and gets talked out of it.

But what's true is that we look at each other and say, here we are, seventy-one. We love each other. We have a beautiful life in many ways. And dot, dot, dot. And dot, dot, dot. Things can change in a moment. Our lives can change, says the Buddha, as quickly as the swish of a horse's tail. Our lives, the people we love—and they will. Our lives and their lives will change.

So how do we steady our heart in the midst of this? And it turns out that it's possible to do so. The first step is simply to stop, to listen deeply, to remember what matters.

I'm going to read again a piece that I shared this last Monday night, just because I'm enamored of it right now, and it reflects something about stillness that I love.

A letter: "Years ago, I started a rigorous six-year academic program in Boston," this man writes, "that required me to work all day during the day, take my classes at night, and do homework on the weekends. On my first summer off, I wanted to get far away from these studies and work with my hands and 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 next summer.

"That year, a good friend had died, and I drove from Boston to Pennsylvania on a holiday weekend. It was crowded, and what was normally a six-hour trip took more than ten hours. By the time I arrived, just before dusk, I was tearful, anxious, and exhausted. My Amish hosts had delayed their dinner for me. During the meal I tried to act natural but felt full of nerves. My Amish host could tell clearly something was amiss because at the end of dinner he said, 'Come with me.'

"I followed him to their backyard, which bordered an alfalfa field. Although his faith discouraged smoking, the farmer lit a cigarette. Three of his children gamboled about 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. The sky was peach at the horizon and deep blue higher up. Stars had begun to appear. And then out of the alfalfa rose fireflies. At first a few, 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 tears and anxiety leave me. The farmer turned and said, 'That's for you.'"

And here we are sitting with these golden hills and the last bit of light. And it's for you. It's for all of us.

Now when we still ourselves, when we sit quietly at ease or at peace, quiet the mind, it doesn't mean that we can't act. As it says in the Tao Te Ching: "Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate in action and thought, you reconcile with all beings. Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?"

And so in some way meditation is healing and attending of ourselves and a return to a sense of presence. And in some way it's also like the in-breath that comes before we breathe out. It is a stillness between the waves of the sea, as the poet says. And then we rise up, but somehow with a

a quieter mind and a clearer vision, and more than anything, a listening or a connection to what matters in our own heart. We can respond to the world rather than react. We can tend our world from a place of tenderness and wisdom rather than the body of fear.

Here's a text from the Buddha that I also put online for people in response to Orlando as part of it. Twenty-five hundred, twenty-six hundred years of repetition of these words in the temples:

Others will be cruel. We shall not be cruel. Thus we should direct the heart.
Others will kill. We shall not kill living beings. Thus we should direct the heart.
Others will speak falsehoods. We shall speak the truth. Thus we should direct the heart.
Others will be hateful. We shall be compassionate. Thus we should direct the heart.
Others will be fraudulent. We shall be honest. Thus we should direct the heart.
Others will lack wisdom. We shall cultivate wisdom. Thus we shall direct the heart.

And what it says is this: in this world with its homophobia and racism and environmental crisis, with the kind of troubles of humanity and continuing warfare that are so great, there is a deeper truth. Hatred never ceases by hatred, it goes on, but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law. And we hear those words and they ring in the heart as something that we know, that we've known for our whole life.

I'm so pleased because on a Monday a few weeks ago, and again a couple months ago, out of concern for all those images of the Syrian refugees—of women and children on the boats arriving on the shores of Lesbos—and our kind of fearful political climate, I asked how many people on this Monday night would be open to taking Syrian refugees, women or children, into their home for a year to help them get settled here. There were three hundred or more people present, and a third of the hands went up.

I took pictures of it. And I sent it to John Kerry and Nancy Pelosi and President Obama, to Dianne Feinstein and a bunch of others, even Paul Ryan—just to float his boat. I haven't yet sent it to Donald Trump. I wrote a few things, but mostly I said: please know that many Americans want to offer their hearts and homes to refugees. Do not let a climate of fear speak for the goodness of the people of this country.

That's really what we also come together for, whether it's in vigil or whether it's in support of one another—to remember what's possible for us as human beings. And now, when things are difficult, is the precise and exact place to do our meditation practices of compassion, loving kindness, steadiness of heart, awareness.

I remember after 9/11, I was getting gas at one of my favorite local gas stations where I know the folks, and they were freaked out because one of the owners was Persian, from Iran, and the other was from Sicily. People were driving through the gas station and shouting racist, anti-Arab, anti-Middle Eastern things, even though they didn't happen to be Middle Easterners. But they looked like them to somebody—some kind of crazy parody of what people were frightened of.

And I went in my attic and I found the one big American flag that I've owned for many years, which had been on my father's coffin because he was a vet—all folded in that triangle that they do. I unfolded it and brought it down and said, "Hang this in your station," which they did. People stopped driving through and

shouting things at them. I didn't know why I'd kept that flag exactly, but I was really happy to have it.

So this is the time for us, as much as any time, to quiet ourselves first and then to stand up for our values, to stand up for what really matters.

Gandhi says, "I believe in the unity of all things and therefore I believe that if one person gains, the whole world gains, and that if one person falls, the whole world falls to that extent." He said, "I believe in the power of each person to affect this world."

So don't think that how you live and how you tend your heart doesn't matter. It matters a lot.

I have this handwritten letter that came to me some years ago as part of a whole series of prison projects that I've been connected with—San Quentin and elsewhere. And it says:

"Today I started my 28th year in here. I laughed very hard when I read that you wrote, 'I might as well be a monk.' One of the nicknames they call me is the Monk of Trenton. I wasn't always this way. For the first ten years, I was mean and dangerous. In 1985, I was in ad seg"—which means I was in solitary.

for stabbing a man, and my mentor appeared in the form of a hitman for the Irish mob who was also a yogi. You know, you want your hitman to have some yogic powers, right?

He gave me a copy of the Anapanasati Sutta, which is the mindfulness of breathing text of the Buddha, and convinced me that I could not live my life out of anger and rage. He put me on a hatha yoga routine in place of my martial arts and had me do pranayama and sitting meditation.

My journal records: "When I was young, I wanted to be accepted. After I was accepted, I wanted power. After I had power, I realized that power without wisdom leads to sorrow. After acquiring a small amount of wisdom, I no longer desired to be accepted. I desired solitude. All life is change from within."

And then I had a dream, my journal records. I had a dream of violence so bad I woke up. Upon remembering the dream, I asked, "Is this me? Where did this violence come from?" I'm creating my own suffering. That night I closed the page of that journal with the words, "So ends this part of my life."

Except for the next two years, I didn't come out of my cell except to mop the whole block and all the tiers once a day. I gave away all my property except my law books and my yoga books. I gave myself to pranayama, yoga, and meditation. I followed the breath for a long time and practiced mindfulness. Nothing seemed to be happening.

And then I realized that the objects of my mindfulness began to have texture. By this I mean depth. This texture is deceptive because it arises from memory or imagination at first. And soon the texture reveals clarity. This is a movement to present awareness without the distorting effects of memory or imagination. I don't know if you understand that this is what's supposed to happen, but it's what happened with me.

It was during this period that people started calling me the Monk of Trenton. And for the last fifteen years,

he's been a mentor to lots of young men in his prison in New Jersey.

So no matter how bad off you are, don't think that you can't make a difference.

I think of what happened in Orlando. Terrorism is a lack of imagination. And war is a lack of imagination—as if violence is the answer to solve our global problems or our problems with one another. I mean, we know it. I say it often. If you work in preschool or kindergarten, you say, "Use your words," right? "Don't hit that kid with a block." Don't we think maybe some of our world leaders could try the "use your words" thing, that it might work somehow?

But there are cycles of trauma. There are acts of depression and desperation and mental illness. And there's also a kind of despair that people have in areas of depression, or they feel like there's nothing really noble to do with their life. And we all have some calling to do something beautiful.

The greatest peace army that ever existed on earth was in the 1930s in what was then known as the Northwest Frontier of India, but actually is what's now called Afghanistan. It was organized by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Over one hundred thousand men, all devout warriors, all devout Muslims, many from warrior families, vowed to resist British rule without weapons in their hands or violence in their hearts. And they kept their vows despite many being killed, many imprisoned, in great provocation.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was this great big tall Afghani leader who became a really close partner of Gandhi in making peace. And he said, "We have all the warriors in our culture." And Gandhi said, "Good, let's use them. But let's use them in a different way and with a different imagination."

For us too, we have to set our hearts on what really matters in this life. It's so short. Unless you're young, and then it seems forever. But you'll see.

And actually, I'm hopeful. Even though there are many terrible things in the world, there are also, every day, hundreds of millions of acts of goodness—in families and communities, people caring for one another in extraordinary ways. But the bad stuff hits the news, right?

When I was visiting and doing a bit of teaching in Israel and Palestine for peace groups in different places, the thing that was most striking was how many wonderful acts of goodness and groups there were that I met with. The bereaved mothers and the former combatants for peace and the teenage *sulha* gatherings of Palestinian teenagers and Israeli teenagers meeting together. All kinds of groups doing things that never make the news. One bombing or rock throwing or act of violence and the newspapers are filled. But there are hundreds of groups of people with good hearts working quietly, persistently.

I'm also hopeful because just a few days ago we had a transmission ceremony, a ceremony of empowerment, for twenty-six new teachers trained by Spirit Rock and our sister centers—Insight Meditation Society, Insight LA, New York Insight, and others. It marked the end of a four-year program. Many of them had been practicing for ten, twenty, thirty years. Beautiful, wise people, many from the

younger generation as well.

We put up all these silk banners, and we spoke to them about carrying the banner of the Dharma, the banner of truth and compassion, into the world. In the ritual, each one came up one at a time and lit a candle—not candles of vigil and mourning, but candles lit from the Buddha or from Quan Yin, the goddess of compassion and wisdom. They held the candle in their hand and then recited whatever their vow was as they became a teacher.

And their vows were beautiful. "I vow most of all to do my own practice, to keep my virtue, my kindness, my heart tended and pure, so that whoever I encounter and whatever I do, it comes from the deepest place of understanding I can." Many of them included that in their vow. I was really relieved, because you can get kind of intoxicated—"Okay, now I'm a teacher." Yeah, right. Try that at home with your spouse. See how that works with your teenage kid.

So that was part of it. And then there was this quality of refreshment, where people would say, "I will do this with a beginner's mind. I'll remember that the freedom I found can be found by everyone." In Zen they write, "How refreshing, the whinny of a pack horse unloaded of everything." As a poetic image, it's really an image of meditation—of putting down the worries and the burdens. Not that we don't have to tend to them, but finding a spaciousness and an openness that's bigger than the small sense of self.

Some held their candles and said, "I will carry patience and generosity through this world." Others said, "I will teach that the mind is the source of difficulty and also the place of understanding—that the mind and the heart can be trained, that the heart can be awakened." And to have one after another stand up there, their families gathered around—it was a little graduation ceremony; they didn't have mortar boards, but they had other beautiful garments—it was very special.

As they spoke their words, "I will teach that the mind can be trained, the heart can be awakened," I remembered these words of the Buddha: "Who is your enemy? Mind is your enemy. No one can harm you more than your own mind untrained. Who is your friend? Mind is your friend. No one can benefit you and help you more than your own heart and mind well-trained—not even the most loving members of your family."

And so here we come and practice together. We sit, we walk, we begin to pay attention. And it's actually not that easy. You were sitting there and you looked good, I have to say. But I know that in there—sleepiness, restlessness, worries, plans, imaginings, distractions, judgments. A few little judgments of yourself and others. You know how it is; the mind has no pride.

My favorite YouTube videos, if you want to look them up, are the videos of Professor Walter Mischel's experiment with young children and marshmallows—that famous psychological experiment you may know. They take a little child, bring them into a room, sit them in front of a table, and place a small plate before them with one marshmallow on it. Then they say very sweetly to this three or four or

five-year-old—let's say four—"This is a marshmallow for you. If you can wait for a little bit and don't eat it, then when I come back, I'll bring you a second marshmallow, and you'll have two of them. But if you eat it, you just get one." Then they say bye-bye and close the door. And of course, the camera is on.

You watch these children, and they're looking really closely at the marshmallow. One kid picks it up and smells it, licks it a little bit, puts it back down. Another child looks around, takes a tiny bite, and puts it down—oh no, no, no. They're hysterical to watch. And it's really meditation, you know. It's really what you're doing. You're sitting here, and part of the time you want to go screaming out of the room. But you sit with your desires and your fears, your longing and your love, your hopes for things and your difficulties.

The river of thoughts goes by with so many opinions and views. You remember that cartoon in the New Yorker I mentioned, with the car crossing the Utah desert, vast landscape, and the roadside sign that says, "Your own tedious thoughts next 200 miles." So you see it, and the river of thoughts goes by. And the river of feelings and emotions flows.

I have this list of 500 feelings that I read on retreat sometimes, starting with the A's: affectionate, ambitious, aggressive, anguished, ambivalent, angry, amused, amorous, aversive, antagonistic, antsy, apathetic, apoplectic, anxious, appreciative, argumentative, adamant, addled, amazed, blissful, brokenhearted, bonkers, bored, bad, belligerent, brave, bottled up, bouncy, buoyant, calm, cheerful, claustrophobic, compassionate, contracted, concerned, curious, crestfallen... it goes on and on and on. And you're sitting there, and that's what's going on—the river of thoughts, the play of feelings.

And you become the one who knows. You become the mindfulness itself, the loving awareness that sees the ten thousand joys and sorrows that make up your life and all human life. You take your seat amidst birth and death, sometimes violence and sometimes peace, sometimes what's beautiful and sometimes what's painful. Because we have it all. You reincarnate as a human being—this is it.

I actually do believe the world is getting better. One of my favorite books is *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, a wonderful recording of the last few centuries examining the levels of violence, the levels of oppression of women and children, the levels of slavery, and the amount of warfare. And even though it's bad, it's actually getting better. Steven Pinker is the author, a professor at Harvard. Slowly, slowly...

So what are we to do? Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian writer and humanist and visionary and sage, said, "If only it were so simple. If only we simply needed to round up the evil people and get rid of them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through every human heart, and who among us is willing to get rid of a piece of their own human heart?"

So instead we practice, and we become the witness to it with loving awareness, with compassion. We become gradually more fearless. And fearless doesn't mean you don't have fear—you will flunk the course periodically, as I do. It doesn't mean that. It means that when fear comes, you can bow to it and say, "Oh,

this is the fearful mind. This is the doubting mind. This is the judging mind. Thank you for your opinion." But you don't have to follow it.

And you more and more trust—not getting rid of the evil in the world in that way, but trust that there is a deeper place of steadiness and peace and love that you can inhabit in your work, in your family, and in the family of the world.

Then you look around, and ask: what to do? This is from a dear friend, Naomi Newman. She wrote this at the end of a retreat she sat up the hill. We now have about 100 people on the LGBT retreat this week—I don't even know if they've been told yet what happened. But this is Naomi at the end of a retreat. She said, "A few days ago, late in the evening, I was sitting quietly in the back of the meditation hall,

And it was raining. And the room was dark except for candles on the altar. And it felt like we were all camped out around a sacred fire. And everyone sat so still, and my breath almost stopped. And I wondered what it was, the feeling. And then I realized, ah, this is contentment. There was nowhere else on earth I wanted to be, no one else I wanted to be with. I was peaceful and deeply silent, and all my struggles had dropped away, and I was content. I felt truly blessed.

And all of a sudden it felt like the blessings couldn't contain themselves, and I began blessing everyone in the room one by one. Their backs or the backs of their heads. And even the ones I couldn't see so well, I would shoot some blessings around a chair or into a leg or a hand until I got everyone in the room. And we sat in a sea of blessings until the bell rang, and I've been smiling since then.

And so you sit, and in the quieting of the mind and the opening of the heart, you come into community and connection with yourself and all those around. And then you get up. And as she said, I've been smiling since then.

It doesn't mean—she was on a long retreat, it may have taken her a while. It's just like when you read Nelson Mandela's autobiography and you see this magnificent human being coming out of 27 years of prison with such graciousness and forgiveness and compassion, changing the imagination of Africa and the world. But it wasn't so for all 27 years. Like the monk of Trenton, he had to work out some things too.

So it's not that all your sittings are going to be happy and blessed. You take what you get. It's your humanity that you work with. But it is possible for us. As the Buddha said, if it were not possible for you to awaken the heart and mind, I wouldn't teach you to do so. But just because it is possible for you, I offer these practices and trainings.

So you quiet yourself. You listen. And then you go back and find your way to express—those who held their candles up and said, I vow to practice patience, or compassion, or to listen deeply. That's my vow.

Here is Laurie Anderson, kind of a poem:

In the Tibetan map of the world, the world is a circle. And at the center, there's an enormous mountain

guarded by four gates. And when they draw a map of the world, they draw the map in sand, and it takes months. And then when the map is finished, they say some prayers, erase it, and throw the sand into the nearest river.

Last fall, the Dalai Lama came to New York to do a two-week ceremony called the Kalachakra, which is a prayer to heal the earth. And woven into these prayers were a series of vows that he asked us to take. And before I knew it, I had taken a vow to be kind for the rest of my life. And I walked out of there and I thought, for the rest of my life? What have I done? This is a disaster.

And I was really worried. Had I promised too much? Not enough? I was really in a panic. They had come from Tibet for the ceremony, and they were walking around Midtown in their new brown shoes, and I went up to one of the monks and said, can you come with me to have a cappuccino right now and talk?

And so we went to this little Italian place. He had never had coffee before, so he kept talking faster and faster. And I kept saying, look, I don't know whether I promised too much or too little. Can you help me, please?

And he was being really practical. He said, look, don't limit yourself. Don't be so strict. Open it up. He said, the mind is a wild white horse, and when you make a corral for it, make sure it's not too small. And another thing: when your house burns down, just walk away.

When I read that sentence and I think of Tibet—when your house burns down, just walk away.

And another thing: keep your eyes open.

And one more thing: find the right road, because it's finally time to go home.

So I'm grateful for your attention, and that we got to sit together as we did tonight—to sit in vigil and to hold all those named and all those unnamed in our hearts. Yes, there are these fifty-three, but there are also the ones in Syria and Chicago, in Burma and New York, and in our own communities. The world really asks of us that we become citizens of this world in the deepest sense—citizens of the world of interdependence with the trees and the oceans and the animals, the other animals beside us that share it, and the peoples of this world.

It's time for humanity to develop inwardly, just as we've developed the great outer gifts of technology—to develop the technology of the heart. It's really come to be time. Nobody knows how old humanity is, but we know it's old enough to do better somehow.

And as we move through this blessed and beautiful and troubled world, may we each find our own vow to be a beacon of peace, a fearless carrier of respect and loving kindness for all that we meet, a teller of truth, a voice of justice, a protector of those who are vulnerable or targeted. And may the wisdom and integrity and compassion that is your true nature be your guide—be our guide—to how we live with one another.

I have one more little story for you before you go. We entered the Mayo Clinic for an evaluation of my husband's ALS—Lou Gehrig's disease, which often can happen pretty quickly, in the course of a couple of years: paralysis and death. As we did, we heard a pianist playing in the crowded atrium and realized it was the first song we had ever danced to, and the song we danced to at our wedding. My husband Randall put down his briefcase filled with doctors' reports and test results and took me in his arms and danced me all over that floor.

When it was over and folks were applauding, we became aware of how many people gathered there were in wheelchairs or walkers. We suddenly realized that in that spontaneous moment of celebration, we had been dancing on behalf of the life and love that lived in each person gathered together in that place. From the moment we looked around the room, lined with wheelchairs and walkers, we found ourselves thinking of the pool of Bethesda. We imagined Jesus asking us, "Do you want to be healed?" And we thought we then heard him say, "Then pick up your feet and dance."

It's beautiful to sit in this new space with you as it gets dark on the summer evening, and to share both the vigil and the practice of compassion and hope and loving awareness in the midst of it all.

Thank you for coming. I'm really grateful.

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