The Essence of Buddhist Psychology - Daylong, Part 2 Afternoon

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 3:30:33

I hope you had a good lunch break. And I'm also grateful that the air has cleared compared to earlier this morning, so you could go out.

How are you doing after all this morning's meditation and teachings? Any comments or questions before we start?

One in the back.

"Jack, I've always wondered—this is the second one of these that you've taught that I've been to—and it's not a great question, but I'm just curious. In my reading of the sutras, and by the way, I'm no scholar, I never saw anything about the Abhidhamma mentioned. And so I wonder where that comes from. Is that a result of the 500-year period after the Buddha's death of the flowering of Buddhism? Is that something that Nagarjuna was involved in? Is it something that's written about somewhere else? I never understood what that was exactly, except for the chain of dependent origination."

So for those who might not understand that question, because it comes from an understanding of Buddhist history and texts, sometimes the word "Buddhist psychology" has been used to describe one part of Buddhist teachings called the Abhidhamma or Abhidharma, which is the third of three sections of the ancient Buddhist texts.

One section concerns the lives of the monks and nuns and the way they should live—the whole thing about community. A second, which is the biggest section, the sutras, are either the teachings that were given by the Buddha or, in greater majority, are records of dialogues where the Buddha would be wandering and someone would come up and say, "I just lost my business," or "I met this yogi who said that if I practice in this way, I'll get enlightened," or "My child just died, help me." And in those dialogues—or "I'm a prince, the kingdom next door wants to make war on us, what should I do?"—a good part of those texts are his responses to people's concerns or sufferings or possibilities.

And then the third group called the Abhidhamma or Abhidharma is a very complex mapping of the different possible states of mind. Remember what I read from those 500 feelings? Well, the Abhidhamma has 108 different states of mind, 52 mental factors, and 28 different kinds of experiences of elements in the body and the senses. It maps all these out and then does quite complex maps of the relationship in one moment of how a moment of perception arises with feeling and intention and consciousness and history

and response.

So my best understanding is that that third section was not written down until the third great council, or one of the great councils of the Buddhist following, that happened several hundred years after the death of the Buddha. And the story that's told is that those were teachings that the Buddha gave by going up to heaven when he was still alive and teaching his mother who had died, giving her all these special teachings. And then she later recited them to the monks who were in that third century after his death, and they wrote them down.

Could be. But it could also be that they combed through the teachings and said, "Let's make this more systematic." And they all liked to make lists—the three characteristics and the four noble truths and the five spiritual faculties and the six paramitas and the seven factors of enlightenment and the twelve links of dependent origination. They were list makers. And it was an oral tradition, so it made it easier to write down. So this was like list makers gone berserk, basically, with huge numbers of complex lists. Apparently it was written down several centuries later.

And in some places it's considered the highest teachings. In others it's not; in others it's considered derivative of the earlier teachings. But of course people always have opinions about things. And so when you go into the Buddhist temples and among the scholars, they are—shocking to say—sometimes rather opinionated. They have their views about when and where and what's more important. Not unlike the rest of us.

So that's the historical record as far as I know. What we're working with today is a very different meaning of the word "Buddhist psychology"—taking the compass of the teachings as a whole and looking at what are the essential principles as a science of mind or psychology, and how we might employ them and use them in human happiness and human suffering.

So thanks for that question.

And one of the things that's true in China, certainly on the coast, which is the wealthiest part—I was in Shanghai and Beijing and a couple of other places in Jiangxi province—is that now many parts of China have become much wealthier and quite prosperous. It's kind of extraordinary to see in one generation, from primarily bicycles and little low buildings to high-rises and skyscrapers, a road system that's really the equivalent of our superhighways around the country, people driving great big SUVs and their Mercedes and BMWs and fancy cars. It's become very modern in a very short time, with a tremendous amount of wealth in parts of China.

And people are recognizing that, all right, I have money—what else is there? I'm not so happy in some cases. There's a kind of stress, both in the society and especially among young people. I was in Singapore and then talking with people from Korea. There's a lot of suicide among young people, because with one child, parents are pushing them to succeed and do well. And the poor kids feel like they're being

oppressed in some way by expectations.

So what I found in China was, just as we talked about at the very beginning, that the outer developments now aren't enough. And there are at least some seeds of growing interest in reclaiming these traditions. The little project I have is called Returning the Treasure, bringing things back to temples and places like that.

Your question points to the fact that we could use this here in this culture, and certainly in the online world from all those big companies. They're interested. I've done trainings for the top executives at Salesforce, for example. Google has Search Inside Yourself, and I've done work with Meng, who's one of the people that started a big program of mindfulness through Google. I've done training for the very highest level of people at Apple.

I think there are two things to say. One is that it's actually hard to bring these values and principles fully alive in an intense business environment. The way capitalism is currently constructed, the way the markets are—there's an enormous pressure to make money as fast as you can, bottom line. And if you don't, you're thrown out, basically. The shareholders or someone will throw you out. I've found, working with the CEOs of some of the top companies in America, that they're actually much more amenable to this when they retire. But when they're actually doing it, it's so intense.

It's not so for all of them. Some of them need it in the middle. There's a YouTube video if you're interested in this. I had a conference and a long conversation with Bill Ford, who runs Ford Motors. He called in 2008, when the economy was melting down for the Great Recession, and he said, "I can't sleep." He'd been doing Buddhist practice for quite a while. "I'm afraid that we're going to lose the whole industry, including my grandfather's company on my watch. Do you have anything that could help?"

So he began to do much deeper mindfulness training, and it helped him a lot. He describes this in that YouTube video. But that's kind of unusual—that he's really still in the saddle. So one thing is that people are so at the mercy of market forces in business that it's a little bit... yes, they put mindfulness in and it's a nice little gloss on things, but to have it really be incorporated is going to take longer.

And I think the big change is taking place because we now have social and emotional learning and mindfulness training in schools. As kids learn this from early on—yes, the business schools are doing it. I got a call from Stanford Business School some years ago from one dean and a senior professor, who said, "Could you come down and help us?" I said, "What do you want?" He said, "Well, we get the most accomplished students in the country, really fantastic students, but they're also very ambitious. They come here and immediately they're trying to figure out what company they'll work for and what their internship will be. They're envisioning how they're going to get paid, how it's going to grow, how they'll make a fortune in Silicon Valley—people's dreams. And by the time two years are over, they've kind of lost touch with themselves. They're so driven."

I listened and I said, "So what you're asking for is something like soul retrieval?" He said, "Yeah, yeah, that's right. That's what we need."

So I went down to Stanford Business School and did a training for a weekend with some CEO friends and others. They're beginning to put it in, but it would have to be really woven into the curriculum. And I think the place it really matters is with younger children.

The other thing I'm involved with is a group of neuroscientists, and we are looking at ways to actually develop technological products—virtual reality, augmented reality experiences—that train people in compassion. Looking at the research, this seems possible. So it's very early in the game, but what's true is that we have this technological world, and it's rewiring our children's brains. Two-year-olds don't read a book anymore; they swipe a regular book to see if the pictures will change, because they've had their iPad since the crib. In some ways this is very creative, and in other ways... well, when we have our teen retreats here—I'm going on about this because it's such an interesting question—one of the most important rituals, one of the most transformative things, happens as the retreat starts.

We have a big basket and a particular special chant that we do, a kind of ritual. Then the teens will each place their smartphone into the basket for a week. It's a little like surgery. Some anesthesia is needed because it's so wired into them. They sleep with it under their pillow. It's so much a part of their lives. And what does it mean to have a week's experience where you're not online all the time?

Your question points to many interesting things. I do think that with all the research, mindfulness is growing and will make a difference in our culture. And it's up against some very big forces. But these are interesting developments.

One last question. "I work with people with depression. Most have a sitting practice. What they describe to me is more of a resistance, like a dissociation practice—staying on the breath so they don't have to feel. When you were talking about the feeling foundation of mindfulness and tolerating, what do you suggest when they're so afraid of feeling?"

Well, there are a couple of things. First, which you probably know, it would be worth reading material from folks like Zindel Siegel, who has written extensively about using MBCT, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, with depression. The stories people tell themselves are really critical, as you would know working with this.

For me, when somebody comes who can't tolerate their feelings—and this really connects to what we'll talk about shortly—in part what we're addressing is trauma. That's the origin of most of those feelings. Good trauma work requires considerable intelligence, because there's bad trauma work out there too. But good trauma work recognizes that trauma is carried in the body and in the nervous system, as well as in emotions and stories. Before you can approach it without re-traumatizing people, you need to help them find resources of well-being.

The very first thing, whether for depression or trauma, is helping them find whatever gives them even a little glimmer of well-being. It might be physical—your feet on the floor, what's the safest place in your body, what posture works for you, how can you calm yourself a little. Or if they can't do that, it might be asking: can you remember a time in your life when you felt safe and loved? Maybe at your grandmother's house, or at your uncle's farm, or somewhere. Let that image and that whole scene come to you. Feel what that's like in your body.

All right, now let's approach the anxiety that's there with the depression, or the grief—but only a little bit, so it doesn't overwhelm you. And then go back. Okay, you felt a little, a few tears came. It's scary. Let's do a little bit of it. Name it. All right, now come back. Feel your feet and ground yourself, or remember your grandmother, whatever it happens to be. Feel the well-being and go back and forth, so there's a basis for approaching what's difficult. You can do it a little step at a time. This is part of training to increase that window of tolerance.

I also think, you know, people are smart. We're also fools—Zen Master Ryokan, Japan's most beloved poet, wrote: "Last year a foolish monk, this year no change." So we're both. But people are smart in the sense that you can explain to them that part of what keeps their depression locked in is the inability to tolerate certain feelings—loneliness, anxiety, emptiness, unworthiness, whatever it happens to be. You can tell them it's possible not only to learn to tolerate these feelings, but that in holding them, they can transform. And then: here, let's do a little practice to learn to do it step by step.

So I'm very respectful of resistance, which relates to other questions we've had. It's there because it's trying to protect us.

And so you want to say, this has been a value, and it's helped you. And now you can say, "Thank you for trying to protect me. And let's see if we can expand who we are beyond the fears of it." I don't know if that's helpful.

Alright. So why don't we sit for five minutes. And just kind of let the words pass and reconnect with the stillness. Come back gently to your own breath and body, just here and now.

As you sense the breath, let the sounds and sensations and other experiences that are in the background rise and fall like waves of the ocean. And when one of the waves becomes strong, then turn your loving awareness toward that as if to bow to it, acknowledge and name it gently, and feel it move through the body and mind as a wave. And when it's passed or you're at ease with it, then again feel the breath.

So we will do some other practices this afternoon—an equanimity practice, perhaps a forgiveness practice, a couple of other practices. Just to start here.

In Western psychology, there's so much emphasis on psychopathology and the medical model—what's your diagnosis and so forth—certainly in clinical psychology. And you know where clinical psychology came from, perhaps worth saying. Before World War II, most of psychology was research psychology. But

then when all the troops came back who were shell-shocked and with trauma, there weren't enough psychiatrists to go around, and the field of clinical psychology grew actually in response to the veterans coming back. And again, it's been mostly oriented toward pathology and diagnosing people and so forth.

One of the things that's noteworthy both in psychiatry and psychology is that while it's called the mental health field, there's almost no focus on mental health. It's all on mental disorder. You go in and you train and learn about all these disorders, and that's really the emphasis of it.

So you have handed out to you today a paper that has a map from Buddhist psychology of mental health. Here is how to understand it.

On the left hand side are all the things that make up our human experience: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, bodily perceptions, and mental perceptions—thoughts, feelings, and intuitions. There are six senses. The mind is considered a sixth sense door because it knows thoughts and feelings. Does anybody have anything other than this in their life? Raise your hand. You can have your money back.

This was actually taught in relationship to a kind of famous dialogue the Buddha had with somebody about the world. The Buddha said, "I'll teach you what the world is made of. What your world is made of." And it's made of these six things: sight, sound, taste, smell, bodily perception, and mental perception.

Then along with these six things, if you look on the right hand side, are the six flavors of consciousness that arise with them—eye and ear and nose, tongue, body consciousness, and so forth. Which is to say, for us to experience something, there's both the sense experience and the consciousness which knows it. Consciousness is called the knowing faculty.

So if you have somebody who just died and you're there with their body, it's still warm, their eyes are open, light hits the retina, probably neural firing going to the visual cortex in the brain—but there's something missing, which is consciousness. They're not seeing anything, even though all the physical things are happening. What's needed for us to have our human experience is sense experience and the consciousness which receives it. That's pretty clear?

Okay. Then it turns out that between the sense experience and the consciousness is a whole array of mental states. And if we take them from that question that was asked before about the Abhidharma, Abhidhamma, and so forth, this list comes from the fifty-two most common mental states.

And what the mental states are is that they determine the relationship of consciousness to experience. There are some common ones that are present in most every moment—feeling tone and so forth. But most of them, of the fifty-two, are divided into two halves: the healthy side and the unhealthy side.

The unhealthy side is described as the three roots of greed, hatred, and delusion—which is somewhat old-time Victorian language. What it means is that we have a sight or a sound, and with greed, we attach and we want more of it and we grasp it. With hatred, there's aversion, fear—we push it away, we don't

want to experience it. And with delusion, we don't see it clearly. We space out or we're somewhere else.

When we're reacting to experience from these three roots, they give rise to worry, envy, rigidity, agitation, grasping, self-centeredness, fear, avarice, shamelessness, dullness, closed-mindedness, confusion, misperception—all these kinds of unhealthy states. And the stronger they are, the greater the mental distress.

You could read the whole DSM listing of mental problems, and they are when worry turns into paranoia and fear, or delusion turns into whether it's delusions of grandeur or seeing things that aren't there. Psychiatric problems of great delusion, where greed gives rise not only to avarice but then to addiction, shamelessness, sociopathy, confusion, and so forth. All the things that we consider mental problems grow out of our inability to be present with our experiences, and then we're either pushing them away or grasping them in some unhealthy fashion.

Now, these states are reciprocally inhibited by an opposite set of states, which is to say that there's a whole variety of healthy states. When the healthy states arise, the unhealthy ones disappear. The three roots of the healthy states are these: instead of delusion, there's wisdom or clarity. Instead of hatred and aversion and fear, there's love or a sense of connectedness. Instead of grasping, there's generosity or gratitude—instead of trying to hold on to things, there's a sense of appreciation.

This means that experience arises and we can appreciate it. We see it clearly. There's a sense of love and well-being. And from those roots, which get fostered through mindfulness, there grows graciousness, modesty, insight, flexibility, joy, equanimity, kindness, adaptability—a whole variety of other healthy mental states.

In a certain way, all of Buddhist psychology is to help us see what mental states are present, and if they're unhealthy ones, to see them clearly and release them by holding them with compassion or forgiveness, letting them go, and cultivating healthy states of mindfulness, generosity, gratitude, love, and clarity. Those then give what neuroscientists have shown is adaptability, emotional resilience, pliancy of mind—all kinds of good things come from this.

So this is really a map that says: if you want to know what mental health is, it is the ability to be present for life experience with mindfulness and graciousness and ease, neither resisting nor being caught up in fears nor lost in confusion, but with clarity and presence. If you want to know what mental illness and mental difficulties are, they are rooted in our inability to tolerate and be with experience without either grasping and getting addicted or pushing it away. And the most important thing is that there are a whole variety of trainings and ways to move us from unhealthy to healthy states.

Sometimes people will ask, "This is nice for meditation, but what about when there's much more severe pathology?" If you're interested, there's a book by Ed Podvoll called *Recovering Sanity*. He was a psychiatrist who used these principles with psychotic patients and developed what are now a few centers

called the Windhorse Centers. The basic gist of his approach is that even when somebody is delusional or psychotic, there will be moments of clarity there. He said you have to wait for those moments when you can really connect with that person and let them know what's going on, and expand those moments until they start to begin to trust the sanity of their mind as well as the insanity.

Part of how his places were started—I had some folks come and visit me to talk about founding these centers—involved a few people whose names I won't use, but they're enormously wealthy. They had children in their family who were psychotic or had psychiatric problems. They said, "We gave them medication. In some cases the medication didn't help. The side effects of obesity, or drooling, or just losing their soul were too draconian. Can you help?" Ed was really a founder of this work, creating places—it took a lot of resources—to be with these people and help them find themselves again. That was pretty interesting.

Or, as I mentioned, there's DBT—Dialectical Behavior Therapy developed by Marsha Linehan—that works with mindfulness and builds the capacity to be with distress for borderline personality and other quite difficult conditions.

But even in the simplest way, when I teach with Dan Siegel, a colleague and neuroscientist from UCLA, people will come to him with depression. And he listens. Sometimes it's situational depression because someone died or circumstances changed. Sometimes it's a kind of ongoing depression that's been there for a while. He'll take out his prescription pad and write a prescription that says: "45 minutes to one hour of strong aerobic exercise, six times a week. Come see me in three months."

And more than half of the people who are depressed and come see him three months later are fine—because they've been sitting at their desks or their computers, moping or unable to work, unable to move in some way because of how their life has been organized. When they actually get their body moving—no meditation, just pay attention a little bit—for more than half of them, that changes everything.

This also says something about our culture and our mental health system, that we've forgotten some really basic things. And all of these approaches, like the RAIN practice we just did, are ways of recognizing and appreciating or understanding, then investigating and not identifying—moving us from what's unhealthy to what are healthy states.

Now this is especially important in trauma, which was brought up by the question just a little bit ago. Trauma is a very complex thing. It's held in the body. There are all these emotions. There are stories and social needs woven into it. All of these are present together.

So good trauma work begins—and you can look at the work of Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing or EMDR—by tracking how trauma is held in the body. But even before that, by establishing some resource for that person so that they're stable enough to approach the trauma without getting re-traumatized. Then

they can begin to tell their story, they can begin to activate those emotions. Because what happens in trauma, basically, is that something terrible happens, you go into fight, flight, or freeze, and you can't bear what's happening to you, so you dissociate from it to survive and get through it. But if it's not released, it remains in your body. It can stay there for years or decades.

We see this with veterans who come back when they haven't had good trauma work. That becomes their demons. I remember talking to a vet who'd come on a retreat. He sat and relived the firefights, the battles—while sitting on his cushion. The things that used to be in his nightmares and wake him up every night. But now he was reliving them consciously. And he said, "Because I did, I could come to terms with them in an entirely different way."

So there's the body part of unlayering. There's the tolerance of the emotions, little by little. And then there is often the storytelling.

I think of this woman who came here on a retreat, who'd been in the war in Kosovo. She'd been injured and she'd seen terrible things. And she said, "Nobody has really heard my story. People don't want to hear your war stories." I said, "Well, I'm interested, but we're on a silent retreat. Could you do this for me? Could you write some of your stories? I'll read them and then we'll talk."

Okay.

Three days later, she comes in and hands me eighty pages of handwritten material. I think to myself, "I hope she can write well, because I've got to read all this." It turns out that not only did she tell the stories of suffering and pain from that war zone, but she had fallen in love with someone, and half of it was a love story woven between the firefights and battles. I'm up at night turning the pages to see what's going to happen next.

Or when I've worked with vets coming back—done some of that work with my colleagues Michael Meade and Luis Rodriguez, retreats for returning vets, especially combat vets—one of the things that happens is that we create a safe enough place and do some rituals to make it feel really safe for them to tell their stories. They can't tell them to their families. Because here's the issue, as they would say in their language:

First, I can't tell you what I saw. It was so horrific. How can you talk about dismembered bodies and blown-up children? Nobody wants to hear that.

But then there's something worse. I can't tell you what I had to do.

And that is what the Irish call a *geis* on your soul—a weight that you carry because you were in a certain position as a warrior.

where you had to do things that are really inhuman. And you need somehow to find forgiveness for that.

The fact that these warriors coming back can be together is powerful. We start by telling myths of

warriors returning—in Africa, in Tibet, the Mayan warriors—because every culture has stories about how to bring warriors back and reconnect them with their lives. This isn't just a modern problem. And then these men realize, "Oh, it's not just me. This is the archetypal dilemma of a warrior. How do you come home?"

I could tell you some very powerful stories. But here's how it works: they tell their stories. Often we have them write a little story or a poem. And in the end, we invite their families to come in after a week. The men stand up and read or tell some of their story. And we have a ritual. We say, "We have heard your story. We bear witness to your suffering. And now, as a warrior, we welcome you back—not into the life of a warrior, but into the life of the home and the life of the land." We do a whole ritual. "We welcome you home. We see who you are. We see what you've suffered."

To be able to do that is an extraordinary thing. It's a kind of redemption for them. When you think about Iraq and Afghanistan, there have been at least a couple million people who were in the "theater of war" there. And mostly they come back and are disgorged by a bus onto a street corner—"Okay, go home"—without any place to understand what they still carry in their lives.

So this is giving you a sense of how trauma work holds and works. You need the stability and grounding so they don't get overwhelmed. You need a sacred or safe container. You need to allow for the emotional release, the storytelling—but more than anything, what's there needs to come out of the body.

It's like this story I use of the man who wrote to the IRS and said, "I haven't been able to sleep since 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."

And that's how we are. We do things a little at a time. For good trauma work, you have to understand that kind of gradual ability to release trauma. It grows as the capacity for presence comes—resilience and regulation, expanding the window of tolerance. All of those things.

But it's not just people coming back from battle. Here, let me read you something:

"Am I gorgeous?" my child asks, drawing the word out like pulled taffy. "Yes," I say, "you are." The pink and teal dress is probably made of some highly flammable material, an 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, as all children, is the epitome of childhood 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 play 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 are already disturbed by the dresses and utter 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.

I sweep him into my arms and plant a kiss on his cheek. "Always," I say. "Always."

You can feel the tenderness when you hear that story. You know what it's like.

In the years of leading men's retreats, we'll do a council in the evenings where men listen to each other. Sometimes in the middle of the retreat, we'll make a theme of fathers and sons, and people will hold a talking piece and tell a story about that. The father wounds come out then. But usually we'll also take an evening and ask men to tell their sexual history. Just for those of you who aren't men in the room—men are really confused. There's quite a bit of suffering. It's not "Whoopee, let's talk about sex." It's more like, "Oh my God, here are the mistakes, here are the difficulties, here's my confusion about it." And then when the gay men talk, the level of suffering that has been in many people's lives is enormous.

So there's that story, just telling you what might happen to those human beings. They just come out as a baby and say, "Here's who I am." And the culture says, "I'm sorry. Your skin is the wrong color. Your orientation is wrong." And then you get mistreated, sometimes in really terrible ways. Yet we come with this original innocence.

So here we are, training ourselves in a deeper capacity to be present for the ten thousand joys and sorrows of the world. Acknowledging what's here, making the space of loving awareness so that our awareness is bigger than the experience itself. Noticing where it is in the body, being able to name it. If fear comes, you name it: "Oh, fear. Anxious. Fear. Fear." Maybe it takes you fifty or a hundred times, but at some point fear will come and you'll go, "Oh, fear—I know you. Yeah, okay, fear. Let's see what happens." And you lose your fear of it.

Or maybe, as I said, you're restless or you're bored or you're lonely. And so you want to tolerate your loneliness. "Don't abandon your loneliness," writes the poet Hafiz. "Let it cut more deeply. Let it season you as few ingredients can."

So you sit here and you're lonely or bored. What to do? Be bored. Be lonely. Let it cut more deeply, so to speak. Let yourself think, "Okay, I'll die of boredom. I'll die of restlessness." Because if you don't, you know what happens? You're home and you get a little bored or a little lonely. What do you do? You open the refrigerator. You go online. You do anything because you can't be with yourself.

To be able to tolerate your loneliness or boredom or your grief or your desire—and desire isn't a bad thing. There are healthy and unhealthy desires. It can be addictive, but it also can be healthy. The thing is, it's part of you, part of being a human being. It's like the poet Alison Luterman wrote—it's kind of like, "I hid the chocolate chip cookies because I'm on a diet. Meanwhile, I'm the only person in the entire galaxy

who knows where those chocolate chip cookies are hidden." That's how desire is. You can't remove it from your body, but you can see it and you can understand it.

And grief is really important.

We talked about how Malidoma and the Lakota Native Americans see grief as a doorway to what's sacred or holy—that people who are grieving are said to have more powerful prayers because they're connected with the sacred in the world in some way.

I think about retreats I've done with kids coming out of street gangs, again with Luis Rodriguez, this wonderful Latino poet, Michael Meade, a mythologist, and Malidoma. We're going to teach them meditation, do poetry, mythology. And these guys come and they sit in the back with their hoods over their heads and their hats turned back, and they're like, "Man, you're giving me a poem? I'm out on the street. People have got nine millimeters. You got something better than that?" This is tough.

So we'll say, "You know, we can't even begin to have a conversation because there are too many people in this room who haven't been acknowledged, who are with us. So would you go out in the parking lot and pick up a stone for every young person you know who's been killed?" We light a candle and put it in the middle of a table—it's a very simple ritual. And when you put the stone by the candle, just say their name. "This is for Tito, and this is for RJ, and this is for Homegirl," and so forth.

Some of these kids come back and their hands have lots of stones. No young person should know that many dead people. And they'll put them down, and there's a reverence when they say the name of their homies who were killed. Then we sit back down and all of a sudden the hoods come off and their eyes are open. They say, "Okay, this is a place where we can talk about what happened. These people aren't afraid to talk about it."

In a way, this is what we're learning in meditation—a kind of equanimity and balance, an ability to be present for what is here, to make the space in heart and mind with loving awareness that says, "Yes, we can do this."

As we practice, the research from Alan Wallace and Cliff Saron shows a growing ability to be in balance with all things. Cliff is at UC Davis, Alan Wallace at Santa Barbara. There grows a kind of equanimity, an ability to be at ease with birth and death, joy and sorrow—maybe even with the mystery of things.

The image that's used is this: if you put a spoonful of salt in a cup of water, it will taste very salty. But if you put that same spoon of salt in a pond or a lake, the water still remains pure and clear. In the same way, you can make your mind more spacious like sky, like time and space. And when you do that, when your loving awareness expands, it gives you a kind of great freedom.

Here's a story from a woman named Maria who works as a nurse in the emergency room of a local hospital. She describes how she's learned to use the art of resting in spacious or loving awareness:

"Sometimes it's not too busy and I can work on automatic—check on a patient or do the paperwork while my mind drifts off to think about a million other things. Then we might get a whole crowd of incoming patients: accidents, heart attacks, asthma emergencies. I do my part, but I'm also tuned into the whole of what's going on. I've learned to open the awareness. It's as if my mind gets spacious and still, present, sensitive to what's needed, yet kind of detached at the same time. I guess it's like that flow state that athletes talk about. I'm in the middle doing all the right things, yet some part of me is just watching it all, silent.

"It happens more these days, not just at work. And when I do my meditation practice, it gets stronger. I had a big fight with my teenage son. In the middle of it, I could feel my body tightening, how right I thought my view was. Just feeling that, I relaxed, shifted to the space of awareness, and things opened up. I was saying no, but I could also feel all the love underneath, and how these were just our roles and we had to play them well. And behind it, it was all spacious and all okay."

When we learn to rest in awareness, there's both caring and silence. There's a big space to allow life, to respond in the dance of life. And yet there's all this freedom that starts to open up as well.

And so this is the growth of equanimity.

A few lines from Mary Oliver, where she writes, "For years and years, I tried just to love my life." That line alone is about half of spiritual practice. "And then the butterfly rose weightless in the wind. Don't love your life too much. And she vanished into the world."

And so this is kind of that balance. T.S. Eliot says, "Teach us to care and not to care." To both be present for life in an intimate and a caring way, but also to realize, like Issa wrote of his daughter, that it is like dew, that it vanishes. And that this is also the truth of our life.

Thich Nhat Hanh puts it this way. He said, "When the crowded Vietnamese refugee boats met with storms or pirates, if everyone panicked, all would be lost. But if even one person on the boat remained centered and calm, it was enough. It showed the way for everyone to survive."

And so you know who that one person is. As Miss Piggy would say, "Moi." But you become that person as you train in this capacity. And it also allows you then to not just be caught in the current drama, but to have some vast perspective, the turning of the seasons.

You all know that phrase from the Ojibwe: "Sometimes I go about pitying myself when all the while I'm being carried by great winds across the sky."

And it is really so mysterious. A friend of mine who's a hospice director was also trained as a teacher in Buddhist meditation. He said one morning he had an old guy from an Italian family who was in his mid-eighties and close to dying from cancer. And the family came in and said, "We have a dilemma. We've got to go see our father." They were in their fifties. My friend said, "Well, what's the dilemma?" They said,

"Well, his younger brother, who was seventy-nine, just died yesterday in a car accident. And our dad is so close to dying that we don't know whether we should tell him or not. Maybe it will disturb him. We want him to be peaceful. What should we do?"

And my friend said, "Well, let's go and visit your father and maybe we'll get a sense of what's right." This is a very good mindful move. Let's not make up our minds. Let's actually go and pay attention to what's happening.

So they went in the room. "How are you today, Dad?" Very weak, you know, close to the end. They're talking to him. "Nice to see you again," whatever. And then he says, "Don't you have something to tell me?" They said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, my brother—he died yesterday." They said, "Well, how do you know that?" And he said, "Oh, I've been talking to him all night."

What do you make of that, folks? This is our life. It's really mysterious. And the spaciousness of awareness says, "Oh, human incarnation. We're going to have some pain. We're going to have gorgeous beauty. We're going to have love."

We're going to have fear. This is what human incarnation is. And we can make something magnificent of it.

Equanimity is that capacity to be present for praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, fame and disrepute—and to know it's all part of the game in vastness. But it's not who you are. You are the space of awareness itself that witnesses it. And that connects you with everything when you get quiet.

As Alice Walker wrote, she said, "One day I was sitting there like a motherless child, which I was. And it came to me—that feeling of being part of everything. And I knew if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried. I ran all around the house." In fact, when it happens, you can't miss it. And we all know it—making love, or walking in the mountains, or listening to an amazing piece of music, or taking some sacred medicine, or sitting there with someone when they die or when they're getting born. And you go, "Whoa, this is pretty wild."

I was talking with my wife, Trudy, who had a huge mystical experience when her daughter was born. She was alone for hours in labor. It was back in the day when people were not all that careful—a while in medicine when babies were thought to not have any feelings, so you didn't have to anesthetize them. Animals don't have any feelings. Give me a break. You do meditation, you can go back and feel what it was like to be in the womb when you get very quiet. All the way back, those memories are in your body.

But there she was, all alone, 21 years old, long labor, tremendous pain, frightened some. And then she said, "Something remarkable happened. All of a sudden, my mind just exploded and it became vast like the sky. And I felt not myself giving birth, but that I was women. I was all the women on the earth that had given birth and that always had and always will, and that it wasn't personal at all." And then she said, "I

was shocked. That means walking down the street, everybody I saw came out of a woman's body." They kind of forget that, right? I mean, it's wild. You were this little thing and you grew up in there. Okay, I'm here. It's pretty insane. And she said, "All of a sudden, I felt like I was part of something so enormous and vast, and it wasn't personal at all. It was the game of life which we are born into."

So this is the basis for a practice called equanimity practice.

The equanimity practice, which is like the compassion training or perhaps the loving-kindness practice many of you have done, is a combination of envisioning and using certain phrases that invite a quality of equanimity.

The phrases are: *May I see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance. May I be spacious, balanced, and at ease. May I live with a peaceful heart.*

And then there's one more. A tough one.

And this is when you're doing equanimity for other people as we expand the practice. Equanimity serves as a balance for compassion and loving kindness. When you do the practices of compassion and loving kindness, they can sometimes fall into attachment. "I love this person, and I really want them to get better, and I really want them to get their act together, and I'm really compassionate for them, but I want this or that." You feel not only love or care, but also some hope that there'll be some way or something for you. And it can go to the level of codependence, where you do everything for somebody that they need to learn to do for themselves.

So the last phrase of the equanimity practice, as you picture people who are close to you or others, is: "Your happiness and suffering depend on your thoughts and actions, and not my wishes for you."

Here you've been doing compassion—"May you be held in compassion"—and loving kindness—"May you be held in loving kindness"—and so forth. But then, to balance that so you don't get lost in it, you realize you can care for them, you can love them, but you can't be happy for them. You can't let go for them. You can't live for them. And so then you say, "Your happiness and suffering depend on your thoughts and actions and not my wishes for you." And you can feel the truth of it. It places the responsibility, the capacity to awaken, in the hands and heart of that person.

It's actually quite helpful in difficult relationships. I remember teaching this—I ran a group, or was invited to run a group, for women of color at Alice Walker's home for about a decade. Very accomplished women: a professor at Berkeley, the head of HIV services for the city of San Francisco, Alice as a Pulitzer Prize winner, and so forth. When I taught this, I was a little nervous, thinking they might feel it was cold and uncaring. But in fact, when we finished, it was really important because they said, "In our community, especially a community of people of color and target communities where there's been a lot of suffering, a lot of racism, a lot of difficulty, those of us who were accomplished in some way—many people will come and say, 'Help me. Help me publish my book. Give me money. Fix my family. Do something for me because

you have power and money and I need it.'" They said it's very easy to get overwhelmed by the need. And so to hear this and be able to say, "I can love you, I can do what I'm able to do, but your happiness and suffering depend on your thoughts and actions and not my wishes for you," was actually important and liberating for them.

You understand? So, are you ready?

Let your eyes close. As always, we'll begin by just coming back to feel your breath and body as you sit here. Relax with each breath. As you sit quietly, you can reflect on the value of a peaceful heart—the value of moving through all the changes, praise and blame, gain and loss, and living with a sense of balance.

Let yourself acknowledge that all created things arise and pass away. Joys and sorrows. Pleasant and unpleasant events. People, animals, buildings, nations, whole civilizations rise and fall. Let yourself come to rest in the midst of it all.

May I see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance. May I be spacious, balanced, at ease.

Feel the vastness of the turning of the seasons, the changes of life.

May I move through the world with a peaceful heart.

Let your loving awareness open like the sky, as big as this room or as vast as the sky beyond. And within it arise feelings and thoughts and experiences.

May I see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance. May I be spacious and balanced and at ease. May I move through the world with a peaceful heart.

And now let yourself think of someone for whom you want to wish this same quality of peace and equanimity. Picture them, remember or envision them. And as if you could share the field of spaciousness and peace with them as you envision them:

May you be spacious and balanced and at ease. May you see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance. May you move through the world with a peaceful heart.

Your happiness and suffering depend on your thoughts and actions and not my wishes for you. You can love them and care for them, but you can't be happy for them. You can't live for them. Your happiness and suffering depend on your thoughts and actions and not my wishes for you. May you see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance.

Now think of another person for whom you want to wish a peaceful heart. Picture them too.

May you see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance. May you be spacious, balanced, and at ease. May you move through the world with a peaceful heart.

And in the end, your happiness and suffering depend on your thoughts and actions and not my wishes for you. I can love you or care for you, but it's in your own heart and mind, your happiness and suffering.

And feel that the circles of peacefulness can extend to everyone seated in this room around you. May all of us see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance. May we live with a peaceful heart.

And imagine or sense or feel that you could extend the well-wishing of equanimity and peace out from this room, across the landscape—to the firefighters and the people who are losing their homes, to all the communities around them, to all the people of the Bay Area, to the animals, birds of the sky and beasts of the fields, fish in the waters.

And that the sense of peace could spread far and wide across the continents and the nations and the world.

May beings everywhere learn to see the arising and passing of all life with equanimity and balance. May beings everywhere be spacious, balanced, and at ease. May beings everywhere live with a peaceful heart.

So again, these are practices, and there are many of them, and some may work for you better than others. You might find compassion is good and equanimity feels too detached or dry, or you might find being with your breath and body is a great way to practice, but then this feels very mechanical. So don't judge yourself, but rather respect and listen without judgment to what serves you.

But what's also true about these kinds of practices is you don't just take one piano lesson, you know, or one tennis lesson or one lesson in coding. That's why it's called practice rather than perfect or something else, right? So you do it and you do it a number of times. And as you do, more and more of the states that you're inviting, or the perspective, start to become available to you.

A participant shares: "When I was seven years old, I watched my mother die in a car accident. I was in the accident. And it took me sixty-two years—I counted it up—before I could grieve. Thanks to this wonderful therapist who introduced me to mindfulness. And I guess my point is that it's never too late."

Hmm.

And now, ironically, we're having difficulty locating her. She lives in Santa Rosa, so we're hoping.

Thank you for that. It's really, really important what you say. First, the loss is great—for a seven-year-old, grievous. But to say it's never too late, and that these things can be held for so long and then released, it's really, really important. So thank you.

Yes, please.

Participant: So Jack, I want to acknowledge that you said this in your teaching, but a cautionary tale for me is that when I first came to Spirit Rock, I was told to practice like my hair was on fire.

You don't have a lot of hair, I noticed.

It burned off. It all burned off. And it was a club that I used to attack myself. Then over the years, Spirit Rock changed and there was a lot more about equanimity practices, wisdom practices, joy. And again, in my hardheadedness, they were all ways that I used to attack myself. I remember I went to a talk at the Zen Center by Ajahn Sumedho, and somebody asked him about these, and he said, "You know, I never did them. They didn't work for me." And it shocked me because I had never heard anybody say that before.

Never did what?

These kinds of practices—the equanimity and the loving-kindness. And I read a poem by a Japanese priest that said to trust your practice. It's like water flowing downhill; it will find the best way down. And I've come to understand that—I don't know how this happened—but I've learned complete faith in my practice. It'll take me where I need to go. It will teach me the equanimity I need to learn. I don't do that. I can't do that. I've already learned that. But my practice is not me. It's something that happens to me. And I've learned to just really trust it. It knows. I don't have to.

Thank you. Really important and critical things that you say. The first, with a lot of respect to you, is that you do have to be steward of your own practice. And if you read the old Buddhist texts, there are actually a lot of practices in there. Some are fitting for a certain person and some are not, which is part of what you're pointing out.

And here's a little note about Ajahn Sumedho, who's an old friend that I've known for fifty years. I could show you something that he wrote back in the 1970s or '80s where loving-kindness meditation was really important for him. So I need to say that only because it's also true that some of these practices may be helpful for you at a particular time and may not be helpful at another time. You either outgrow them or they don't fit. And so that follows just what you're saying about respecting and paying attention to yourself.

And what I've seen now over these decades of both training teachers and being with people in our community, just as you say, is that the work of the heart and mind that's dedicated—each in your own way—to attention and kindness, however you practice it, changes us. And I really see it.

I have this passage from Tamara Engel, who wrote this in the last weeks of her life. She says, "My days are short, and as I grow weaker, I experience so much gratitude for my meditation. Not only the joy and ease that it brought, but the hard parts. For every bored and restless sitting, and every fearful fantasy about my illness, 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."

And so that was her description, like yours, of trusting practice in the way that worked for her. Thank you for that beautiful comment.

One more in the back, please.

Participant: I'm glad you just said there are different practices for different times. I remember there have been times, especially when I was falling in love, when I was trying to have equanimity and I just couldn't do it. And I was just reflecting that you do need to have different practices at different times—but how do you know? How do you know when to do what?

It's a great question. And I would say, how do you know who to marry? How do you know which job to pick? Nobody can answer it for you. Sometimes it's some intuitive knowing. Sometimes it's based on trying things.

Trial marriage? Well, maybe. Done that. With this, you don't have to get a divorce from your meditation, fortunately. But I think you try stuff. Maybe you say, I'll try it for a bit because it feels like it might be helpful. And if you try it for a while and it doesn't feel helpful, maybe this isn't the right thing or the right time. So it really is a deep listening to yourself, more than anything else.

After a break

Let's take a few more questions or comments before the next section because we're covering a lot of different material and approaches today. Anything anyone would like to raise as a comment, question, experience?

A participant speaks

Earlier in one of the sessions, you mentioned the river of thoughts.

Yes, I mentioned the river of thoughts.

It comes through, and I noticed in one of the trainings you did earlier, naming the thoughts seems to make the river of thoughts slow down a little bit. And then I also seem to notice that there was a space between thoughts.

Beautiful. And what's in that space? What is that? What a great question. Or maybe—who's in that space? That's a fabulous question.

It's true that when you turn your attention to thoughts, there comes a kind of shift from being inside the thought—where you're in Chicago now doing a business deal, or dealing with your long-lost brother or sister and their family, you're right in the middle of it—to noticing, "Oh, there's a thought about Chicago,"

or "There's a thought about whatever it is." It's like you step outside of it. And if you name it—"planning" or "remembering" or "envisioning"—very often it will kind of dissolve, like fog under sunlight. Which is what you described: sometimes it will dissolve or disappear.

And then you notice, whether you do that or not, that there are spaces between thoughts. And the spaces between thoughts become very interesting, because we usually are so identified with our thoughts that the spaces between thoughts start to show us who we are—or what we are—when we're not thinking, when we're not taking that as an identity.

I'll say a few things about it because it gives an opportunity to talk about three levels of mindfulness. The first level of mindfulness is the level of being able to be present for the content of experience. As we're practicing and training, we're able more and more to acknowledge: this is fear, this is longing, this is the planning mind, this is anxiety, this is love.

This is the memory of conflict or the memory of great pleasure. This is sexual desire. This is some spiritual ideal or ideas that we have. This is physical pain in the body or pleasure. We become able to notice the content—this is sort of recognizing and accepting—and become able to be present for it. Already that gives us a great deal of freedom, because we're not afraid of that bigger range of experience.

The second level of mindfulness is mindfulness of the process. As we pay attention more and more, we notice that nothing lasts. Every thought and every sensation and every mood and every feeling, if we track it and name it, arises for a time and passes away. We start to see the river of thoughts, the stream of emotions. When we pay attention to the body, it too has all these changing sensations. Even something that feels stuck and solid and painful—when you pay really close attention, it has lots of little sensations that make it up. Some pain actually has fire and needle pinpricks, or vibrating, or something like that.

The more closely you pay attention, experience gets pixelated, the way those little pixels are on a screen. Nothing is solid. It's all created in solidity by the mind. The eye isn't a camera that just looks at you and you and you. If you look closely at the eye, you would see that it's actually vibrating a little bit, picking up experiences on the retina from different angles. Then it goes up through the optic nerve and it's your little brain that organizes it and says, "Oh, that's a man and that's a woman and that's a cow." But the eye isn't seeing it stably that way. Our brain creates—our mind creates—the solidity of the world.

As you become more closely attentive, that solidity starts to dissolve. You see that there are not only thoughts but spaces between thoughts. One feeling follows another. Sensations are really a field of vibrating sensations. You start to realize that you can't hold on to things in the way that you thought you could, because they're always changing. If you try to hold on, you get rope burn, basically, because they're not going to stay still.

Every experience starts to show itself as impermanent, as tentative, as insubstantial in some way, because whatever it is, it dissolves. The strongest feeling, the best thought, the worst thought—they come and they

go. This is what happens. And there's a certain kind of unsatisfactoriness to it all, in that none of it can be a place to rest. None of it gives you lasting, stable happiness. Even with the great pleasures, which are wonderful to enjoy, they change. And when you're in the middle of them, you think, "How much longer? How can I hold on to this? How do I get more of this?" Even in the middle, there's that little worry, because you know that however cool and wonderful that experience is—oh my God, it's so great—it's not going to last forever.

And so there comes a kind of wisdom. The first level of wisdom is just that you can be with all of human experience. The second one is you realize, "Oh, it's a river. It's changing all the time." So you learn how to be with changing experience and ungraspable experience. That's from content to process.

Then, as we go further, the third level of mindfulness—which your question points to—is to begin to become aware of consciousness itself, of awareness, and to turn your attention back to the space between thoughts, to the knower and the knowing. Who is it that's noticing that everything's impermanent? Who is it that's noticing the arising and passing of things? I'm not going to go into that further for this moment, because in half an hour or so, that's going to be the next piece of what we talk about. So you're kind of leading us to that. That's a great question.

Question from audience: I have a question about equanimity. I've heard it described as the love that allows.

Yes.

When I'm by myself at home, I find that I often feel the need emotionally to...

It's almost to have permission or to be allowed to come through.

"Wait, so there you are, you're home alone, and you feel the need to... to allow myself to open."

Permission to open.

"Yeah. I mean, I feel the permission, say, when you were just talking about equanimity, and it's just lovely. It feels wonderful. And at home, I probably don't even realize how clenched I am. So to begin to unclench, to allow myself equanimity, you might say—what would you suggest?"

Sounds good. I mean, you know, part of what's true is that our organism always expands and contracts. And sometimes people get the idea that if I'm successful in meditation and spiritual life, I'm going to become spacious like the sky and allow all things. And that's how I'll move through life—just so expansive, open, everything always open.

But you have to breathe. Your body breathes, and your heart pumps, open and closed. The cerebrospinal fluid pumps. And it turns out the heart opens and closes too—the psychic level of the heart. And the mind opens and closes too.

So the point isn't to get to some state and say, "Now I have it," but to be respectful and compassionate with

opening and closing. When you notice that things become tight or contracted or attached, with mindfulness you notice that. And sometimes just in the noticing, that's enough. Or sometimes you might say, "Let me bring in a little kindness or compassion or just an invitation to open."

I think that quality of invitation that you described is a lovely way to describe this practice—which is, when we've gotten lost in some way, to repeatedly invite mindfulness to be present. One of the translations of *sati, sati sampajañña*, the word for mindfulness, is "remembering." So that's what you're doing. You're remembering: "Oh yeah, I can breathe, I can make space." That's lovely.

Someone asked where to find the different meditations we're doing. There are written versions in many of the things I've done. A lot of them are in *The Wise Heart*. There's even more of them in *The Art of Forgiveness, Loving-Kindness, and Peace*—about fifteen meditations in there. And then there are many online—my own, and Sharon Salzberg, Tara Brach, Joseph Goldstein, and various teachers who offer versions of loving-kindness, compassion, or forgiveness. YouTube has lots of this.

Now I want to move on to a few more sections. The next has to do with forgiveness. In terms of self-care and care in the world, there are so many liberating tools. There are the tools of wise speech—sometimes translated as "right speech"—and how to pay attention to our words and have them connected with our best values.

With compassion, one of the things that's really central is understanding that it always has to include ourselves. If you feel like you're being compassionate for someone or some circumstance, which is lovely—caring, feeling their difficulty—the question to ask is: Is this action compassionate for them *and* for this one sitting here, for me? That's the completion of the circle. If it's only them, that falls into codependence or burnout. If it's only yourself, of course, it can fall into separation or self-absorption or narcissism. So compassion is really a circle that includes care for others and care for this one.

Now, one of the things that is both a practice and an understanding of Buddhist psychology is the power of forgiveness. Or as someone beautifully said, "It's never too late to start over again."

And I remember working with this mother whose teenage daughter was really angry at her. She felt as a mom she couldn't do anything right since her husband, the father of this child, had died. And of course, the anger was really part of the daughter's way of grieving—not letting go of her father, holding on. So there was all this struggle between them.

One day they were in the kitchen, and the daughter was complaining, saying she wasn't doing it right. And the mom said to her daughter, very simply, "You'll have to forgive me. I'm doing the best I can since dad died." And that's all. Really, really simple.

Here's a story from my friend Frank Ostaseski, from his book called *The Five Invitations*. He was the founder of Zen Center Hospice, which has been there for twenty-five years. He tells many different stories, and this is one about Jillian, whose mother was in the middle to late stages of Alzheimer's disease and had

lost a lot of her memory and was pretty confused. Jillian had brought her mother home to live with her.

Jillian worked in the publishing industry as an editor, and she came home to her living room one day to find all her beloved books—she had a great library, including her Buddhist texts—scattered across the floor. Her mother announced, "I'm tired of all these dusty old books. I'm going to give them to my dentist." So you can sort of hear a little of the delusion in that, right?

Jillian became really angry right away, scolded her mother's assistant who had come to tend to her and live with them, saying, "How could you let this happen? How could you let her do this?" And the attendant, who wasn't caught up in the whole drama, replied, "Madam, today I pack the books up and tomorrow I will unpack them. And if this gives a sense of control to a woman who has lost so much, well, then it's fine with me. It doesn't matter so much. I just like being with her."

And you can hear how forgiving and gracious that is. That that's just the way it is. The books are down and we can put them back on the shelves, and she won't even notice a little bit later whether she took them down or not. Our ideas about how the world should be and our reactions are very different than the way the world actually is.

So forgiveness, in large ways and small, is a really critical thing for human life. It's necessary, or we are chained to the past, both personally and collectively. As you know, if you have the Northern Irish Protestants and Catholics saying, "Your people marched through our neighborhood three hundred years ago, and did this to our people—we're never going to forget it," then they just keep it going from one generation to another. Am I right?

My dear Irish friend Michael Meade said where he grew up in Brooklyn, people were having a fight and you could walk over and say, "Is this a private fight or can anybody join?" It was like that was part of their sport. But this pattern has created a tremendous amount of suffering in Ireland. Or the Palestinians and the Israelis, or the Bosnians and the Croats and the Serbs, or the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda. And we could go on and on. If there isn't forgiveness, then the next generation continues the cycle. It doesn't have an end to it. And somebody has to say, "It stops with me. It stops with me."

Again, there was a woman who came to see me who was in the middle of a divorce. She had married a very high-powered lawyer. He was the one who had the affair, but nevertheless, he was trying to take the children, turning them against her, and trying to keep all the money. He wasn't all that nice of a fellow. So we started to work together. I said, "Get yourself a killer lawyer. You need something good to protect you." And I told her she'd have to deal with all the suffering with good compassion and so forth.

She came in one day—because he was trying to turn the children against her to get custody, one of those very painful, messy divorces—and she said, "I've come to a realization. I will not bequeath a legacy of bitterness to my children."

No matter what my husband does, I will not speak badly of their father to my children. Whatever

suffering there is, it stops with me. I will not pass it on.

There was so much courage and dignity and beauty to that state of consciousness, even though she was suffering terribly.

Forgiveness is necessary, or we get locked into the past. And the beautiful thing is that it can be taught. But you need to understand some things about it first as you practice it or teach it.

Many of you have heard this practice or done it before. But the first thing is that it doesn't condone what happened. It doesn't say it's okay—forgive and forget. In fact, the opposite. You can say, "I see it clearly, and I will never again allow this suffering to continue. I'll do everything I can to stop it." It doesn't mean you have to speak with the person you're doing forgiveness with. You can stand up and stop whatever is causing suffering. Forgiveness simply means that you're not going to carry the hatred in your heart. That's all. You do what you need to do to protect yourself and others. It doesn't condone it, but I simply am not going to carry hatred.

And who is it for in the end? You know, the people who betrayed you—I'm talking personally now—they could be on vacation in Maui right now, snorkeling. And you're sitting there thinking, "I hate them, I hate them." Who's suffering?

In the end, it's really for yourself. It's like the two ex-prisoners of war that I always mention, who've been in terrible situations—prisoner of war camp and tortured and all those things—and they meet twenty years later. One says to the other, "Well, have you forgiven your captors yet? Those guards?" And the second one says, "No, never." The first one says, "Well then, they still have you in prison, don't they?"

It's not really for anyone else. They may or may not accept it, and that's not the point. It's so that you don't carry the suffering into the future in your life and pass it on to others.

It also is not a papering over. "Okay, I've done a little forgiveness practice—ha ha, it's all done." You know, sweet, loving Buddhist nonsense. You might experience rage and grief and outrage and anger for a year or two, or however long it takes. But at some point, you realize, okay, it's too much to bear. It's too hard to carry this. And like that IRS check I talked about—that guy—maybe you do it a little step at a time. But finally you realize that you've got to give up all hope for a better past. It's done. It's over. You can't change it. And you don't really want to put anybody out of your heart.

So you realize that the forgiveness is not for them, but it's the quality that you live with. And it's not weak or naive. Like the woman who said, "I will not bequeath a legacy of bitterness to my children." It said in the Bhagavad Gita, if you want to see the brave, look to those who can forgive. If you want to see the courageous, look to those who can return love for hatred.

And of course there's Martin Luther King, after his church was bombed and children killed, who said, "We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, but we will bear the suffering that you

offer us, and we will so bear it with so much love that not only will we change ourselves, but we will change your consciousness at the same time."

That's really powerful and tough. So it's not weak at all. It's actually tremendously courageous.

I think about a friend who was working in San Francisco, doing chaplaincy hospice work. There was a man there who was a prisoner who'd been brought to the hospital. He had HIV and Hep C and he was dying. She asked, "Do you want to talk to your family?"

He said, "No, no, no. Since I was put in prison fifteen years ago, I have not talked to my mother."

I think it would break her heart. I just couldn't do it.

"Do you have other brothers and sisters?"

"I have one sister. I haven't talked to her either."

"Well, maybe your mother would like to see you."

And they talked for a while. Eventually he agreed to let this chaplain call his mother. She came some days later—this little old, shaky, older woman who came around the door and just stood and looked at her son. He didn't want his mother to see him shackled to the bed, which he was, still a prisoner.

And my friend said it was like watching the Madonna. It was like watching Mother Mary walk around the corner of the door and look into the room—because she was still his mom. This is my baby. And she stood there and just looked at him with so much love and began to weep out of care for him.

Yes, he was dying. He was dying of HIV and Hep C. But instead of having pushed her away, by somehow inviting her to come in, she began to see him with a kind of forgiveness he couldn't give himself. And that transforms us.

So many stories of forgiveness I could tell you. One good friend of mine, a woman named Sujata Baliga—her story was written up in the New York Times Magazine—is one of the most important figures in the restorative justice movement in America, which brings together people who committed crimes of different kinds with their victims in a very delicate dance over a year or two, preparing them to meet each other and maybe to offer forgiveness.

She grew up abused, sexually abused in her family by her father in terrible ways—all kinds of grave suffering. She was very smart, went to Harvard, and was about to go to law school. She said, "I'm going to get those guys. I'm going to go to law school"—which she did eventually—"and I'm going to prosecute them and throw them all in prison."

But as she started her law practice, she got more and more sick because the anger inside was eating her up. Because her family had come from India and she had grandparents there, she went back to India.

Somebody said, "Let's go visit the Dalai Lama and listen to his teaching." They went up to Dharamsala. She left a note at the gate of the Dalai Lama's home saying, "I don't know if it's possible to ask a question, but my anger is eating me up. I graduated Harvard. I'm now doing law. I've been abused, and I don't know what to do."

The next day, a little message came: "Please come Thursday morning. His Holiness will see you."

So she went in to see him. He listened to her story compassionately, as he does, and said, "Two things for you. You have to learn to meditate, including doing some forgiveness practice. And then you have to work with the perpetrators."

She said, "Okay, meditation I think I can handle, but I can't work with those people."

But eventually she did. She tells a story of being in a room with twelve men in a prison who had all been abusers of girls mostly, maybe boys too. She said she was shaking; it was so painful, so difficult. Then as she began to talk to them and listen to them over some weeks, she went in one day to the group and looked around. She didn't see twelve men. She saw twelve abused children—because every single one of them had been abused, mostly sexually abused too. All of a sudden, she said, "I could see the generations of suffering." It didn't justify what they did in any way whatsoever, but it made her able to see their humanity. That changed her heart. She became a real advocate for restorative justice and does all kinds of wonderful work. Sujata Baliga is her name.

I remember standing at the Lincoln Memorial and reading those last lines carved in the stone. It really is a temple, a great temple, where it says, "With malice toward none and charity toward all." That's a remarkable phrase after a civil war that killed literally millions of people. With malice toward none and charity toward all, let us bind up the wounds of this war.

This is also what's asked of us, and what's possible for you. Remember, we started the day talking about inner nobility and dignity for a human being. This is what's possible for us.

So there's a beautiful practice of forgiveness which we'll do now. It serves as a kind of warm-up for loving-kindness, though I'm not sure we'll get to loving-kindness today since we already practiced compassion, and we have a couple more things to do.

Let your eyes close gently. Sit quietly, and we'll practice three directions of forgiveness.

The first time I was taught this, the teacher said, "Do this a couple times a day for ten minutes. Try it out for six months and come back and let me know how it's working." And what that meant was—I thought about it and figured it out—"Oh gosh, he means do it three hundred times." Sometimes the practice brings up the opposite: "I hate them. I'm never going to forgive them." Sometimes it just feels numb or dead. All kinds of things arise.

And what do you do with that? You hold all of it with forgiveness and compassion. Wherever you are is

exactly where you start. Maybe all you can say is, "I'm beginning to learn to incline my attention more toward forgiveness, that it might be possible." And that's the move you can make. That's totally fine. You don't want to use any of these practices to judge yourself. You're already too good at that.

So sit quietly and come back to your breath.

The first direction of forgiveness: There are many ways in which I have hurt and harmed others, knowingly or unknowingly. We've all betrayed people, caused them pain and suffering. Every one of us has. Abandoned them, betrayed them. I remember these now, and feel the pain I still carry. Choose one person in particular to ask forgiveness from. "In the ways that I've hurt or harmed you, betrayed you, abandoned you, caused you suffering—out of my own confusion and fear, out of my own pain or anger or hurt—in this moment, I ask your forgiveness. Please forgive me. May I be forgiven." Sense that you can be forgiven. May I be forgiven.

The second direction is forgiveness for yourself. Just as I've hurt or harmed others, there are many ways I have betrayed myself, abandoned myself, caused myself harm or pain, knowingly or unknowingly. I remember these now too, and feel the sorrows I carry. Let yourself choose a particular thing you want to forgive yourself for. "In the ways that I have betrayed myself, abandoned myself, caused myself pain or hurt—out of my own confusion and fear, out of my own ignorance or anger or hurt—I now offer myself forgiveness. I forgive myself." Hold yourself with mercy and tenderness. If you wish, you can put your hand on your heart, whatever allows you to feel that you can be forgiven. I forgive myself. I hold myself with tenderness and mercy. I offer myself forgiveness.

The third direction is to offer forgiveness to those who've hurt you. There are many ways that others have hurt and harmed me, abandoned me, betrayed me, caused me pain and suffering, knowingly or unknowingly. I remember these now too, and feel the sorrows I carry.

And now choose one that it's time to forgive. In the ways that you have hurt or harmed me, abandoned me, betrayed me, knowingly or unknowingly, that you caused me pain, suffering, out of your ignorance and confusion, out of your fear and anger and hurt and pain—I now forgive you. I offer you forgiveness to the extent that I'm ready. To the extent that I'm ready, I forgive you. Feel how liberating it is, how it's possible to let go and forgive. To live with a forgiving heart. To the extent that I'm ready, I offer you forgiveness.

Asking forgiveness of others, offering forgiveness to yourself, and extending forgiveness to those who harmed you. We've all been betrayed and harmed, and we all can forgive. As we do these practices, each one, again, might bring up its opposite, might feel mechanical, might or might not be easy. But they all point to a vast possibility of human freedom, no matter the circumstances of our life.

I saw it with my friend and teacher Maha Ghosananda, who was the Gandhi of Cambodia. Nineteen members of his family were killed. He went around teaching: "Hatred never ends by hatred, but by love

alone is healed. This is the ancient eternal law." In spite of all that happened, that was what he did. Nominated for the Nobel Prize a number of times, he led people back to their villages and towns, singing, chanting the chants of loving-kindness and forgiveness. This is the way you reclaim your life.

So the question is not the future of humanity, but the presence of eternity—the sense that we're part of some vast mystery. Human incarnation is a really wild thing, you know. I don't know how you got in there. One hole at the end of the body into which you stuff dead plants and animals and grind them up with these bones that hang down. These weird orbs that you look out of. And you ambulate by falling one direction, catching yourself, then falling the other direction. These bipedal things—it's weird. Wiggly things at the end with little bits of claws and a vestigial tail. I mean, come on.

And if you want to really look at it, pay attention the next time you're making love. It's a great thing to do. It's quite wonderful. But it's weird. It is. I mean, come on—no matter what kind of love you make, it's a strange thing. And then the fact that sometimes a little squirt here and a little egg somewhere there, and a new person. This is completely wild. How did that happen?

My teacher Ajahn Chah practiced as a monk in the jungles and forests for about ten years, doing deep meditation trainings—concentration and samādhi and lights. He had all the difficulties that one would have. In those days there were tigers, certainly still lots of snakes and things like that. The inner difficulties of his own fears. But he was very determined, and he had all these wonderful insights and great meditations. He went to another ajahn, the most famous teacher of the time, bowed, and said, "I want to tell you about my meditation. I want some advice." He bowed, paid his respects.

The master listened to him and said, "Chah, you missed the point. Yes, you dissolved your body in light and you had some bodily experiences and you had grief and you had all these experiences." He said, "Those are just experiences. It's like being in the movies. There's a war movie and a romantic comedy and a documentary and a children's movie and so forth." He said, "You've seen a lot of good movies, but the only real question is: to whom do they happen? Otherwise, you're just lost in the movies. Turn back and look at the projector, look at the light."

And his words were, "Become the one who knows." Instead of identifying with all the content or even the changing process, this is that third step of mindfulness, which looks back at awareness itself. Become the knowing itself. Become the awareness. Who you are is loving awareness itself.

Spirit was born into this body; it will die. When you die, it will leave. Anybody who's sat with a number of people dying knows—it's very clear because they'll drift out. They'll describe it: floating, coming back, ocean of light, or whatever. You're not your body.

I was sitting with one of our teachers, Marlene Jones. She had heart failure. A long time passed before the paramedics got there, and she was brought to the hospital, iced, put into a deliberate coma for a while, then brought back. Flatline—fifteen, twenty minutes of no oxygen. No response. Touch her, speak to her,

put the monitors on her—nothing.

After about a week, sitting with her daughter and family, it became clear: it was time to unplug her. I held her hand, did a little chanting, and I said, "Marlene, I'm really going to miss you. You're a wonderful woman and a wonderful teacher. I'd hoped we'd have a lot more years together, but you died too quickly. Come on. The least you could do is give a sign—now or later—something, so we know you're all right."

The minute I said that, two tears rolled down her cheeks. They'd gotten nothing for a week, every possible way of trying to stimulate her brain, her body. But I said that and two tears rolled down her cheeks, and then she died, not many minutes after.

This is one of many stories I could tell. You're not your body. You rent it—from Avis or something like that—and you have to turn it back in. Mileage is over, okay, time enough.

You're certainly not your thoughts—I hope not, given the way most people's minds go. You're not your feelings because they're always changing. So who are you?

Well, maybe I'm the awareness. Maybe I'm the witness. But then the interesting thing is you look and you discover there's awareness, but it's not attached to a self. You can't find yourself in there.

Who am I? Neuroscience. There was a Time Magazine neuroscience issue that said, after more than a century of looking for it, brain researchers have long since concluded that there's no conceivable place for a self to be located in the physical brain, and that it simply does not exist. That's the neuroscientist version of it, which means that the idea of self is an idea. It's constructed by our thoughts and our identification.

When you look into the mirror—and you can try this; for some people, it's interesting—you notice you've aged, right? Your body doesn't look like it used to. In my case, it loses its fur. It wrinkles. Our teacher Wes Nisker, who's sort of a humorist, says the hard parts become soft and the soft parts become hard. The body does all these weird things. But the thing that's very common is you don't necessarily feel older. You know that experience? Okay, I've aged, but I don't feel that.

That's because it's only your body that's aging. The awareness that's looking says, "Hmm, how are we doing in this incarnation? Well, it looks older. I don't feel any older." The awareness itself exists outside of time. It's not in time. The body is temporal—it goes from little to medium to big, and then it shrinks again. That's what plants and trees and mammals do. But the awareness is timeless.

We are creatures of paradox. We have these bodies, but they're not who we are—and yet you have to honor them. There's a Serbian proverb: "Be grateful, for you are made of stars. Be humble, for you're made of mud."

Ram Dass puts it this way.

He says, "Remember your Buddha nature and your zip code." That you need both. Or your social security

number. You have to live in these two worlds—the world of eternity, which is true, from which you come, and also this human incarnation. You need to honor both in this paradox.

And we all know this again. When you're walking in the mountains or listening to an amazing piece of music or sitting with someone who dies or making love, you remember that you're not this small sense of self. As this sense of self, which is fluid, starts to open in meditation, and you become more and more able to become the awareness that witnesses things, then you turn back and realize there isn't even someone there. There's just awareness. This is what you are. You are loving awareness.

Joy comes, luminosity. In Buddhist psychology there are—because they're list makers—twenty kinds of joy. Thrilling joy and tingling joy and dissolving into light joy, all these great kinds. And eighteen kinds of silence.

Instead of that loyalty to your suffering, identity begins to shift. You rest more in the timeless. You see the play of life. And you're comfortable with mystery. Because it is mysterious—no matter what any scientist might say. The best scientists, like Einstein, they say it's all mystery. And you become what's called "the wisdom of insecurity." You become wise enough to see that you don't have to hold on to things.

It's like Somerset Maugham, who wrote all these celebrated novels. Somebody asked him about it and he said, "There are three rules for writing the great English novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." And that's pretty much our predicament.

From this, there comes an ease and a graciousness and a joy, like Gary Snyder saying, don't feel guilty. Being angry or guilty is not what the world needs. It needs a sense that you love it, that it's part of you, that you're connected. That's the power that will save it.

And so there starts to grow a sense of joy.

Here are instructions from the Buddha: "Live in joy and love even among those who hate. Live in joy and health even among the afflicted. Live in joy and peace even among the troubled. Look within, be still, free from fear and attachment. Know the sweet joy of living in the way."

Because your unhappiness or depression and your fear does not help those other people. Actually, the spirit that you bring—whether you go into San Quentin prison or whether you go up to help in the fire area or whether you serve in a thousand other ways—if you go in moping and depressed and upset, it doesn't help anybody.

That's one of the beautiful things. There's a great book published last year, I think it's called *The Book of Joy*. It's a dialogue between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu, and they laugh a lot. It's this whole week-long dialogue, and people ask them, "How can you have lived through so much suffering in South Africa and apartheid and Tibet and the occupation and the loss of your temples?" And the Dalai Lama says, "Listen, they've taken so much from me. They've taken the temples and our ability to practice our

religion and all the sense of what was sacred in our culture. Why should I let them take my happiness?"

So you don't allow that to colonize your heart in some very deep and important way.

As Guillaume Apollinaire says, "Now and then it's good to pause in your pursuit of happiness and just be happy."

And so the idea in meditation isn't to make it a grim duty. "Okay, now I go to the gym and I work out, and now I've got to meditate." It's actually to find a way that nourishes you. Even if it's for three minutes a day that brings a sense of well-being, rest, tending yourself, capacity to be present. And then more than that, becoming the witness, becoming the loving awareness that says, "Hmm, today has joy and sorrow. Let me be the loving witness of it all."

And there are all kinds of beautiful practices that increase joy. Just as there's a compassion practice or an equanimity practice, there's a joy practice. The way you start is to envision—you might start with another person that you care about, to picture their best adventure as a young child, or to do it in yourself. To think back to that day, one of your best adventures, your most joyful day: tickled, laughing, rolling around in the grass, playing tag, enjoying being with others.

I like to start it where you picture somebody else you care about, and imagine their best day as a young child, and how they were. Because there's a youthful spirit. Raccoons and otters and baby chimpanzees—they all like to play when they're little. They delight in life. And that was born in you too, even if you had a very difficult childhood, which some of you clearly did. There were moments where you could do that.

I've been in refugee camps, and these kids make little cars out of old cans of milk that were brought by the UN or something—an empty can, and they put a couple of them on a stick and go racing around. Kids are kids. And there's a child of the spirit in every single person, sometimes buried in there a bit.

The joy practice begins to see that in each person you meet and to invite: may that joy increase, may their happiness grow. And more and more you begin to allow yourself to tune yourself to well-being. Of course, you'll have people who say, "Well, this isn't possible for me. My suffering is too great." But if you see it in them, then sometimes they start to see it in themselves.

So this is another of the many possibilities in Buddhist psychology: who you really are is not limited to your history. Consciousness is actually free to create itself.

And another Ram Dass story, just because it's kind of fun to tell them. He was going to come back from India. He actually wanted to stay for much longer with his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, practicing. And then at some point, his guru said, "Now it's time for you to go back and share this with people in America."

Ram Dass thought about it. He said, "You know, I feel so uncooked, and I feel really impure, and I know about my imperfections. I think I should practice a while longer before I go and try to teach anybody else."

His guru looked at him and got up off the little wooden bench where he sat. He took a couple of minutes and walked over to Ram Dass. He looked him up and down, turned around the side and looked, went around the back and looked him up and down, and around the other side. He spent a long time looking at him, then sat back down and peered into his eyes. And he said, "I see no imperfections."

There's something in India that's called the glance of mercy, where a teacher looks at you with so much affection and love that it just rewires your brain. It just changes your life—because they see something so beautiful in you that you haven't let yourself know that you carry. "I see no imperfections."

And so, yes, all the trainings—we can direct ourselves toward more love or compassion or healthier states of mind. But even those are not the deep level. The real level is that you are free, and you've always been free. And that's what's true. And then you get to create, with this amazing human incarnation, what you will do.

So one more principle—central principles, there's so many things we could do. The last one before we do a meditation and a ritual to end the day. And this is to talk about the power of intentions. Or cause and effect. Sometimes talked about as karma.

A description. A psychological description of how the world works. If you're really angry and you treat the world with anger, guess what will come back to you? Anger. Other people will respond in kind. If you're really loving and you treat the world lovingly, guess what will start to come back to you, much more anyway? Love. It just works that way.

And the key to it is intention. If you get in your car and you crash through your neighbor's fence into their living room because you are really pissed that they cut down all the great old trees right on the lot line between yours and theirs, and then they let their dog run on your lawn and poop on your lawn and blast loud music, and you hate your neighbor and you get overcome with it and you drive your car through the hedge and into their house—well, the little blue police lights will come and they'll haul you away for destruction of property and illegal things and lock you up.

Now, if you get in your car and you crash through their fence and their hedge into the living room because your accelerator stuck, bad model, and you can't stop it—exactly the same activity. You're in your car, you crash through the hedge and the fence, you crash into their living room. The only difference is your intention. And that intention then changes everything. "Oh, you know, he may be upset, but I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for you. We have to call the insurance." "Yes, let's call people to get it fixed." They don't call the police about it, like you've done something wrong. The source of karma is the intention behind your actions. And that's how the world treats you and how it will respond.

So to understand intention is extremely important in Buddhist psychology. And there are two forms: short-term and long-term intention.

Short-term intention comes with a great practice called the mindful pause. You're in the middle of a little

conflict with someone, or you're going to return a text or an email, or respond to somebody. Or you're in a meeting or whatever, and you're about to react and get back at somebody. And before you do anything, you take a breath or two and you pause—the mindful pause—and then you ask yourself, "What's my best intention?" Or, "What's my highest intention?"

And there you are. Let's take a couple, since some of you are in a relationship, and you're having a little conflict that could happen in your marriage or in your life. Normally when somebody says something that triggers us, we often will want to respond to say how we're right and how they're wrong. Get even, show what we know or something like that. You take a breath, you do the little mindful pause. And instead of doing that, you say, "All right, what's my best intention?" Well, it's not to get even. It's not to show that I'm right. It's really to connect or to love this person, or to open in some other way, to understand. And the minute you ask, "What's my best intention?"—usually it comes very clearly—the tone of your voice changes, what you have to say changes.

Even if you read that text you're about to send. Okay, you pause before you press send. You're upset with that person. "What's my best intention?" Oh, I think I need to change the language a little bit. Let me go back and edit that thing or that email, and make the tone more appreciative or more understanding or more inviting of learning rather than being right. And people actually appreciate that a lot.

It's like what I said about anger. If you say to somebody, "I'm angry at you," you get a particular response. But if you pay attention and notice that underneath your anger you feel hurt or you feel afraid or you feel worried or disrespected, and you can say, "I'm afraid. I'm worried about this," or "I feel hurt"—they listen to you better. They want to hear what you have to say.

So you pause in the midst of communication. What's my highest intention? Oh yes, I'm going to change this a little because my intention is really to connect, or to love, or whatever your intention is. And it changes everything. You don't even change very many words. But the tone and the intention creates a very different karma. You know what I'm saying? This is a really, really useful practice.

Now in another form, there is long-term intention. Viktor Frankl, who was the founder of logotherapy, was in the concentration camps in the Second World War, and he said that the people who survived most successfully were those who had a sense of meaning and a deep intention for their life. And so what this means is you can, at some point, quiet yourself and sit and try to sense an inner direction of the values for your life.

Sometimes in the Buddhist tradition, this is described as reflecting and taking the vows toward awakening—the bodhisattva vows. They're how they start the sitting in a Zen monastery: "Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them all. Desires are inexhaustible. I vow to transcend them all." These kinds of vows. Little vows like that.

The Dalai Lama says them in the morning when he wakes up—the ones from Shantideva: "May I be a

bridge, a raft, a boat for all who need to cross the flood. May I be medicine for the sick. May I be food for the hungry. May I be a lamp for those in darkness. May I be a resting place for the weary. And may I do this for beings everywhere, as long as earth and sky and galaxies exist, until we all awaken together." Some little vow like that, right?

But of course there are modern versions of it. And I love to read Diane Ackerman, poet and friend—her school prayer version where she writes: "In the name of daybreak and the eyelids of morning, and the wayfaring moon, and the night when it departs, I swear I will not dishonor my soul with hatred, but offer myself humbly as a guardian of nature, a healer of misery, a messenger of wonder, and an architect of peace."

And if we take time to quiet ourselves and listen, there's a kind of inner nobility to most human beings. You can start to listen to: if I were to make my own vows, what would they be? What would this be like? Because then when you go through times in your life of problems and struggles, or when the world around you is having a hard time, you can pause. And you can say, well, what really matters to me? It's like setting the compass of your heart.

Sometimes it's an activist expression. This is Barbara Widener, who founded Grandmothers for Peace. She says, "I began to question what kind of world am I leaving for my grandchildren? So I got a sign—a grandmother for peace—and stood on the street corners. And then after a year I joined others kneeling as a human barrier at a munitions factory. I was taken to prison, strip searched, thrown into a cell. Something happened to me. I realized they couldn't do anything more. I was free." And now Barbara and her organization, Grandmothers for Peace, works in dozens of countries around the world.

That's the activist side. That's a really beautiful thing. Thomas Jefferson said, "One person with courage is a majority." If one person stands up with that kind of courage—again, it's like Aung San Suu Kyi, or Nelson Mandela, or Martin Luther King, or Gandhi. I think of Kenya and the woman who won the Nobel Prize for planting trees...

And she was thrown in prison. I think you need to get thrown in prison to win the Nobel Peace Prize. It's sort of part of your curriculum. But anyway, she started by planting trees along the desert for people whose villages were losing water and life. In the end, she ended up planting fifty-one million trees in Kenya.

So you do it a step at a time. And it's not that you do it in some kind of heroic, special way. You know, "Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them all." One of the weird things you notice if you take that vow is that the people around you don't want to be saved by you—like the ones in your family. They're not interested in you saving them. So it has to mean something different than that. And what it means is that you dedicate your life, you quiet yourself, and you dedicate your life to life itself in your own version and in your own way.

And then no matter what happens, you get quiet and you say, "What is my deepest vow? What is the thing that most matters to me?" For some people, it's just as simple as "I vow to be kind." And it won't go well all the time. Somebody said, for somebody who's truly committed to changing the world nonviolently, you never need weapons, but you may need bail.

This from Thomas Merton, who was responding to a young activist. We get lots of activists who come here, often burned out activists, because you can't sustain it just on anger over the years. And he wrote: "Do not depend on the hope of results. You may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no result at all, if not at times bringing about its opposite. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, and the truth of the work itself."

And so here's the secret. Everybody's waiting for the secret at the end of the day, right? The secret is to act well without attachment to the fruits of the action. Because you don't get to determine how it will turn out. To act well without attachment to the results and the fruits. You can learn from the results. You can tune yourself. But in the end, that's not what's given to you. What's given to you is to act from your deepest values and from your great love.

And it can be small things as well as large. A gesture, a smile. After the Haiti earthquake, I was reading this thing from the American Red Cross, and one of the most touching things that came in, among all these millions of dollars, was an envelope with fourteen dollars and sixty cents from a homeless shelter in Baltimore with a little note that said, "We're worried about our brothers and sisters on the streets of Haiti." It can be just that moment, just that gesture. That can change somebody's life as much as anything else that you care about.

And in Zen they say there are only two things: you sit, and you sweep the garden. And it doesn't matter how big the garden is. You quiet the mind, open the heart, become loving awareness in whatever way you can. And then you get up and tend to the garden of the world, and you sweep—not because you're supposed to, but because it's your garden and it's your place. And you go back and forth between these two.

Here we are in the realm of mystery. You come to the temple and it's a reminder of this. You watch the sun—actually the sun doesn't move but the earth turns. But it looks like the sun is moving to the west now over the day. The air fortunately got clearer, at least for a time. Hopefully the fires are getting contained a little bit more. And you are here, born into the human realm with unbearable beauty and an ocean of tears. And this is it. This is how it is.

And the beautiful thing is that it's possible to awaken in this midst. All the science and neuroscience shows it—to heal, to transform, to live with a kind of nobility and dignity, to offer that to others and to offer it to the world.

passage I read not so long ago. In one of history's more unlikely acts of totalitarianism, China banned Buddhist monks in Tibet from reincarnating without government permission. According to a statement issued by the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the law, which went into effect a few years ago, strictly stipulates the procedures by which one is to reincarnate and is, quote, "an important move to institutionalize management of reincarnation."

So that's one approach to the mystery of life, right? Not necessarily a successful one. But there it is.

But there's another possibility. And all of these teachings of mindfulness, compassion, loving-kindness, joy, equanimity, forgiveness—we've done a lot today. They're really all invitations to return to that original goodness, to express it, to know it, to discover it in yourself and transform in some beautiful way.

I have two poems. They're both kind of wonderful. This first one is from Naomi Shihab Nye, a Palestinian poet, wonderful poet, called "Wandering Around at Albuquerque Airport Terminal."

After learning my flight was delayed four hours, I heard the announcement: If anyone in the vicinity of Gate 4A understands Arabic, please come to the gate immediately.

Well, one pauses these days, but since Gate 4A was my own gate, I went there. An older woman in full traditional Palestinian dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor wailing loudly. Help, said the flight service person. Talk to her. What's her problem? We told her her flight was going to be four hours late, and she did this.

I put my arm around her and spoke haltingly. The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought our flight had been canceled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for some major medical treatment the following day. I said, no, no, we're fine. We'll get there just late. Who's picking you up? Let's call and tell him.

We called her son. I spoke with him in English. I told him I'd stay with his mother till we got on the plane and would sit with her. Southwest. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. And then we called my dad, and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out, of course, they had ten shared friends. And then I thought, just for the heck of it, why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her?

This all took about two hours. She was laughing a lot by then, telling her life, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade mamoul cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—out of her bag, and was offering them to all the people at the gate. To my amazement, not a single person declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the young man from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar and smiling. There are no better cookies.

And then the airline broke out free beverages and the flight attendants served us apple juice and they were

covered with powdered sugar too. And I noticed my new best friend, whose hand I had been holding, had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing with green furry leaves. Such an old country traveling tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, this is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person at this gate, once the crying of confusion had stopped, has seemed apprehensive about any other person. They all took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other people. This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

There's something so both tender and revolutionary in that poem for these times—outwardly in our world that's troubled. And we become the carriers, like that person on the boat that Thich Nhat Hanh speaks about. We become the carriers of our best intention, in our actions and our voice.

To not let the fires and the floods, the fears and confusion, take over your heart. To be that person who carries that wisdom.

So with that, I'd like us to do a little ritual to end. Several people have these little red cords. Take one and pass them around the room. When you get one, don't do anything with it yet—take one and pass the rest to other people seated near you, so pretty soon everybody will have one. And while you do, I will explain about this.

The sacred cord is used all across Asia, from Afghanistan all the way to Japan—in rituals, in weddings, in celebrations, in healing practices—because it is the symbol of a thread that connects all life. We are woven together in what Martin Luther King called "a single garment of destiny." We are all woven together in the mystery of life. We are life expressing itself in our form.

Now, the reason these are colored this reddish color is that they are considered one thread from the robe of a monk or a nun. If you choose to wear them around your wrist or your neck—I have one that I've been wearing for a long time from the Dalai Lama—it's like these are your robes, and you go into the marketplace. Your real home is in the temple. You're kind of like a monk or nun in drag. You go into the marketplace wearing your secret robes and pretend you're an ordinary person, but actually your home is in the infinite, in the vastness. Your home is in loving awareness.

To make these—they're also called protection cords—I was doing this ritual with a very famous Lama at one point, and somebody asked, "Well, what exactly do these protect you from?" And he said, "Well, yourself, of course—the main protection that human beings need."

So to make them or activate them, we have to tie three knots into them in succession. Hold them up. The first knot is called the knot of refuge. For those who are Buddhist, it means refuge in Buddha, which is to see the Buddha in every being you meet. Refuge in Dharma, which means truth and all the practices that lead you to freedom and truth. And refuge in Sangha, or community—that we never do it alone. Every moment of your practice and all the development and awakening that happens affects your friends and

your family and community and spreads out across the world. It is never done in isolation.

But for those who are not Buddhists, the knot of refuge is to take refuge in that which is sacred or holy, by whatever name you give it—all the different names in all traditions—and to realize that by taking this refuge, you remember that within you is this possibility of living with nobility and freedom and care.

So reflect for a moment on that which is sacred or holy, that which is a refuge for you. And when you're ready, tie a knot into the center of the cord, which is your reminder to live your life connected to this sense of the sacred.

Then there is a second knot to tie into the cord. This is the knot of compassion. It is, in your own way, a vow to minimize harm to yourself and others. You could call it a reverence for life—for your own life and the life of others. To not cause harm through your speech and actions, as best you can. To hold yourself and other beings with compassion.

So reflect on your own dedication, your own vow—whatever is true to you—to live in a way that does not harm yourself, that does not cause harm to others, and what that means to you. And when you're ready, tie the second knot into the cord, which is a reminder of this practice and commitment to compassion.

And the third knot will require a little bit more reflection on your part. If you were to set an intention for your life, a long-term intention—some people make it very simple: "I vow to be kind." Others, it might be more complex. But take a minute or two to reflect on what your highest or best intention might be.

Like Diane Ackerman's beautiful poem: "In the name of daybreak and the eyelids of morning, I swear I will not dishonor my soul with hatred, but offer myself humbly as a guardian of nature and a healer of misery, messenger of wonder, architect of peace." That's her poetic version. But for you, if you were to have two or three sentences, or one, of what is your heart's deepest intention...

And when you're ready, tie the third knot in your cord, which is a reaffirmation of this vow or this intention. I would recommend that when we end, you perhaps write it down. It's very useful to have put it on paper, if you wish. Or put it in your smartphone. Sometimes when we do this, if we have more time, I'll invite people to actually read it to the person next to them, because to say it out loud is a very beautiful thing, and to have someone else read theirs.

But I would like to ask us to do something else as you finish this up. If you want to wear your blessing cord on your wrist, you can wrap it around two or three times and let the ends hang down. If you want to wear it around your neck, put it around the back of your neck and let the two ends hang down—don't tie it yet. Then, should you choose to do this, you can turn to the person sitting next to you, and they'll tie yours on and offer you some blessing, maybe silently or with a few words. Then you tie theirs on and offer them a little blessing. Turn to a person next to you or near you, or behind you, and tie on their protection cord.

Kind of nice to give a little blessing to another person, isn't it? And they need it. You know they need it.

So now as you finish up, it's five o'clock, and you've been basically patient and well-behaved today, which I appreciate. Considering the state of the world, it's not always what you get. And more than that, I hope that these teachings, which really opened a window or opened the treasury to give you a little bit of the principles of Buddhist psychology—more than anything, I hope they reminded you of what you already know. It's not like they're all that new. Somewhere in your heart you already understand this.

Whether you're a healer or a business person, an educator, an artist, or whatever your work is, a scientist—you also can understand that these are universal principles for human well-being and human happiness.

The poet writes: "Sun drapes a buttered scarf across your face. Rose opens herself to your glance, and rain shares its divine melancholy. The whole world keeps whispering or shouting to you, nibbling your ear like a neglected lover." It's time to pay attention. It's time to listen deeply. It's time to care in the ways that we really want to do, ways that our culture and speed somehow takes us away from.

And coming to the temple for a day as you have—those who are new here particularly, we welcome you, and you're welcome to come back. All kinds of other programs and trainings are offered here. Those of you who are some of our old friends for a long time, it's a pleasure to share the day. May you carry what's been a benefit out to the world.

And let's do just one minute of meditation. Last moments. Let yourself envision from your stillness and presence that you can extend loving-kindness and care out across the world, out from this room like a beacon in every direction, like a lighthouse of loving-kindness and care, so that all that we've done today becomes a source of illumination, care, and kindness that spreads across the world to everyone you touch and all whom they touch, visible and invisible. May they all be held in great loving-kindness, every one. And even the ones that are difficult—may their hearts too find peace. May they too be free from hatred and fear. May all beings benefit from the transformation and care and the seeds of goodness that we are able to offer and plant in this world.

It's been a pleasure. I thank you.

Travel safe. May your friends in other parts of the counties nearby be safe and protected. And please come back again.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you for listening.

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