The Dharma of Climate Change

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:18:32

So maybe take a breath or two and let things quiet down, if you will. I hope you got some cookies or met a friend or took a little walk. I'm glad we're back together.

This evening I want to do some teachings on climate change. And you know how it is as a teacher, or as a human being—we teach what we need to learn, really. So I'm talking to you, but I'm also trying to understand in myself how to hold this. And it's not that easy.

I have a new grandson. His name is Desmond, and last week he turned six months old. He rolled over three times on his six-month birthday. In India, it's a very special thing. They call it rolling over day when the baby first rolls over. It's a holiday. Baby Krishna, in the mythology—that was the day he first rolled over and then opened his mouth, and his mother peered in and there were all the galaxies and stars, and she said, "Oh, this isn't a regular baby I had." So rolling over is a big deal.

I'm going to try something different tonight, and hopefully it will be helpful to me anyway, and maybe to you. Over the course of the last number of months, I've been telling some big stories and using the stories as a way to open the mind and the heart to some greater understanding for all of us. One was the story of Sir Gawain from the Arthurian legends, and the theme of it was what women want. You'll have to listen to that to see if you can find the answer. One was about the Bodhisattva Vimalakirti. One was a great story from Tolstoy that's used by Thich Nhat Hanh about an empress. Stories are really powerful. Barry Lopez is a wonderful writer about the Arctic and the North especially. One of his books is entitled *Sometimes a Person Needs a Story More Than Food*. There's something about stories that nurture the heart.

So let me begin and have some stories to weave in with this. And it's really a reflection. It's not like there's a quiz or an exam at the end. If anything, it's just a reminder, a meditation for you to sense what you know, what is true for you in this that has some value.

When my teacher Ajahn Chah, who was a forest meditation monk and master from Thailand, came to visit—his first visit to the U.S.—we picked him up at the airport in Boston. He'd never been here. Then we put him into a big van with a couple of the other monks that came with him to drive him out to our center in central Massachusetts, buried in the hills of Massachusetts. We drove down Memorial Drive and showed him MIT and the towers of Harvard and so forth, showing him the Boston University sites and things like that. Then we got on the Massachusetts Turnpike and drove for twenty minutes or so until we got outside the belt of the city. Then we started to pass not just fields, but woods. And of course, New England has a lot of forests and woods in it.

We're driving along and his eyes got bigger and bigger. He said, "What are these woods? What are these forests?" We drove a little. He said, "Pull over, pull over." So we pulled over on the turnpike. He got out and walked up to the fence at the edge of the turnpike. There were all the pine trees and some of the maples and oaks and all the trees that one has in New England. His eyes were wide and he said, "Wow, who lives in this forest?" He was smelling it. He's a forest monk, you know. "What does it smell like in this forest? What kind of animals? Do you have bears? Are there lions or mountain lions? Who lives in here?"

Then he turned to me and said, "How far do these forests go?" I said, "Oh, maybe a thousand miles north up toward the Arctic, fifteen hundred miles. They go a really long way." He got very excited. Forget Harvard and MIT. Let's go for the real deal.

Because if you look at the Buddhist tradition archetypally, the Buddha was born under a tree. He practiced his meditation under a tree. He got enlightened under the Bodhi tree. He taught under the trees for years and lived among them. And then he died under those two beautiful sal trees which burst into flowers, as the story goes—you know how those stories are—as he was dying. There's this very deep connection with our inner opening, with our own well-being, and the well-being in connection to the natural world around us.

I remember going to visit another great forest master, an Ajahn named Buddhadasa, after I'd been teaching for a few years, and saying to him, "Ajahn Buddhadasa, students in America have a lot of trouble with self-compassion. Not to speak of kindness for the people around them, but especially for themselves. There's so much self-judgment and criticism, shame, trauma—all these things. Do you have any advice for us?"

And he said, "Yes, it's simple. Take them out into the woods and the forests and the great trees and the rivers. Bring them into the natural world and teach them the meditations of loving-kindness." He said, "After they've been out there for a while, they'll get better." It was that simple for him.

When we lived in the forest monastery, as I did as a monk, it was beautiful because we got to watch and live in the seasons, see the phases of the moon, feel the heat of the hot season and the rains of the monsoon—all the while sweeping the paths with great care, surrounded by the critters of the forest, the wild birds, occasional wild cats, and cobras at a couple of the monasteries. At night where it was dark, we'd have these little walking sticks, and you'd tap the path to let the snakes know you were coming. Everybody has to use the path, but you want to have a little traffic pattern there so you don't step on somebody.

This is the world. And I didn't know that much—my upbringing was quite suburban. The outdoors to me was like the camping store at the mall, basically. Pretty pitiful. So this was very moving and wonderful, to live in this way.

What was clear is that the training of mindfulness was not just mindfulness of our breath or our emotions

or the different thoughts that we have, learning to hold them in compassion and find a place of equanimity or peace in the middle of all that. The word mindfulness—*sati* and *sampajanya*—is a compound word with two parts: mindful presence and mindful response. It's not just passive, eyes closed, navel gazing. That's a very limited understanding. You quiet yourself, you tend the heart, you bring in the quality of compassionate presence—that's one part of it, mindful presence. And then from that you respond to the world. They say there are only two things: you sit, and you sweep the garden. And it doesn't matter how big the garden is—the garden of the world.

The monks and nuns where we lived in these forest monasteries, in the wilder parts of the borders of Laos and Thailand and Cambodia—still pretty wild in those forests—they could see from very early on the destruction of the forests, because it's been happening for decades now. When my teachers were traveling in the forests and jungles, there really were quite a few tigers. And the word for Laos, one of the descriptions of the country, was the land of Lang Xang—the land of a million elephants. The forests were filled with wild elephants, and with gaur. You know those little cans of Red Bull? A red bull is actually a wild bull in the forest. They had them—not so many left, but they had them all.

What the monks and nuns saw is that as modernization came, the forests were being cut down and the natural world was being decimated. One of the responses, which is quite famous, is that some of the abbots and famous monastics would go out into the remaining stands of forest and take their own robes, remove them, and wrap them around the biggest trees—the great old teak trees and the antique trees—ordaining them as abbots of the forest with all the chanting. Because there was such reverence and belief in the sacredness of the robes and of the monastics, that part of the forest would remain untouched. They understood, they could see this in some way.

That was thirty, forty years ago. I was there starting a long time ago—let us say almost fifty years ago. What a trip it's been.

So now we hear about and see the effects of climate change. It's becoming much more of a compelling and important question for us. And the question is: How do we live with this? How do we practice with it? How do we respond to it?

You know, out of fear, heartbreak, despair, denial, anger. What do you do with climate change?

One map that may be helpful—one model from the inner world of practice—is the Four Noble Truths of the Buddhist teachings.

The first of these Noble Truths is the Noble Truth of Suffering. It doesn't say life *is* suffering. It says life *has* suffering. Anybody not have that? Raise your hand. You can have your fifteen dollars back. It doesn't matter how successful you are—you're going to have it. You're going to have loss and aging and conflict and difficulty. And if you get more successful, you'll also have more problems. Try it out. You'll see.

But the First Noble Truth, which says that this is how it is, might also be the First Noble Truth of climate

change itself. The level of CO2 in the atmosphere is now higher than it's been in three million years. Every year we're burning enormous amounts of carbon, and we're only beginning to feel the impact of that change in the atmosphere. The blanket of CO2 is being joined by enormous releases of methane gas, especially in the Arctic and in the tundra. They talk about huge methane burps or belches coming out as the permafrost starts to melt, or from some of the lakes in the Arctic. Methane is eighty-six times more volatile in its environmental impact than carbon dioxide—huge amounts.

In both the Arctic and the Antarctic, there is two-thirds less ice than there was in the 1970s. Glaciers are disappearing, and billions of tons of methane are starting to be released. The polar ice caps are part of what keeps the world cool—not just like a refrigerator with ice, but because they're white, they reflect sunlight back into space. As they start to disappear, and the sea ice sometimes now is ninety-five percent less than it had been, everybody's waiting eagerly—the shipping industry, the military—to have no ice in the Arctic. Now we can do all this exploration and send our ships. But what does that mean for us as a planet?

Every day, the extra heat that this carbon dioxide envelope creates, absorbed by the earth, is the equivalent of 400,000 Hiroshima nuclear bombs—enormous amounts of heat being absorbed. And then there is the sixth great extinction, as you know, with a thousand plant and animal species going extinct every week from the biosphere that we're a part of. Each degree Celsius of climate change also reduces the agricultural output of grains by six percent. The deserts get more arid. Wild storms and floods happen. Ocean currents shift. And our children and our grandchildren are the inheritors of this.

My good friend and colleague Wes Nisker says he's buying beachfront property in Arizona right now to deal with this rising sea level. You've got to laugh at something.

So this is the First Noble Truth of climate change. It's the way it is right now for us as human beings, and worthy—as the Buddhas that you are—of seeing clearly.

Then the Second Noble Truth is the cause of suffering. And the causes are really straightforward. Greed, hatred, and delusion or ignorance are the main roots of suffering. You may have noticed them in the modern world. Greed—the rapacious way that we treat the natural world. Hatred—the arising of conflict and war, racism. All of that falls under hatred, and it falls under delusion as well. The big delusion is the delusion of separateness, where you actually think you're separate from this. When the truth is that every breath you take dusted the tops of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa as it came across the Pacific. And it also dusted the Fukushima nuclear reactor. That's what you breathe. Because we're in it together.

So this is the Second Noble Truth: that there are causes, and the causes are rooted—yes, in the behavior of corporations or governments or groups of people—but really they're rooted in the human heart. In greed, in hatred, and in the deepest delusion, which is the delusion that we're separate, that we can get ours and it's not going to affect anybody else. A kind of denial of this.

And then there's a path. Fortunately, suffering isn't the end of the story. It's the beginning of the story, along with its causes. The third noble truth tells us there is an end to suffering. And the fourth noble truth reveals a path to that end. This ending means waking up from the trance of separation, from this false sense that we're separate from the rest of life. It means releasing the small sense of self that is sometimes called the body of fear, where we really believe that somehow we're not part of life itself, which we came out of.

And the path? It begins with clear seeing—what's called wise understanding, wise intention. Then it moves into integrity: seeing the truth, telling the truth, acting with integrity. Based on that foundation come wise effort, wise mindfulness, wise focus. All these qualities that we learn inwardly—how to be loving and present for this human life, how to be present for another being with care and respect and love, that kind of dignity that each human being deserves—this is the same quality we must bring to the environment and the earth around us.

Now, this asks for our response.

Some months ago, we had a climate day here when Jerry Brown was part of the host of the San Francisco Climate Action. People from all around the world came. One of the people who came to Spirit Rock was a woman named Christina Figueres. I was sitting up here in dialogue with her. She was very cool—a diplomat from Costa Rica, I believe, who was later transferred to Europe and became the UN representative for climate change. She helped organize the Rio climate conference and was the key figure in the Paris Climate Accord.

As we were having our dialogue, she told me that her work in climate—tending to the climate—had left her with a kind of disabling depression and despair. She didn't know what to do. This was leading up to the Paris meetings. Someone said to her, "You need to go and see Thich Nhat Hanh," the Zen Master who has his place in Southern France at Plum Village.

So she went there, she said, feeling a lot of despair. They taught her to meditate. They taught her the practices of the great heart of compassion, to feel that you're part of everything. They taught her the practices of empowerment. And she said, "It turned my life around. It changed me to realize that I could work with my internal climate and bring a quality of love and compassion to what had otherwise been too much anguish. I returned to Paris in a different place."

She said that what she learned there—Thich Nhat Hanh's beautiful teachings of interdependence, of how we are connected—transformed her perception when she arrived in Paris. "I saw that everybody there was acting from the place of victim and perpetrator," she told me. "You're doing it to us," or "You're blaming us for doing it to you." She said, "We weren't going to get anywhere with victim and perpetrator. So I began to teach them what I'd learned: that it's not victim and perpetrator, but that we're part of a big family and we're all in it together."

She said the language that she brought from the Dharma teachings, from Thich Nhat Hanh, her new understanding—it changed the climate of the climate groups. And they were able to get those 186 nations to sign on.

When people exclaim "Oh my God" upon seeing flowers, it means those blossoms have made them present. The beauty connects with their soul, and that is transformational.

"Oh my God. What did he say? We're going to pollinate the earth with love?"

This teaching comes from Thich Nhat Hanh. He said the mind and heart is like a piece of land planted with many different kinds of seeds—seeds of joy, peace, mindfulness, understanding, and love, but also seeds of craving, anger, fear, hate, and forgetfulness. These healthy and unhealthy seeds are always there, sleeping in the soil of the heart and mind. The quality of your life depends on the seeds you water. If you water a seed of peace in your heart, peace will grow. When the seeds of happiness are watered, you will become happy. If the seeds of anger are watered, you will become angry. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow strong.

This is his invitation.

Now, a story for you—a Taoist story. I'll read a bit of it and then tell the rest.

This story was told to me by Li Peng, who's now an old man with a thin gray beard who sweeps the path to the Taoist temple outside the prosperous village of Fengshui. The village was not always so prosperous. Indeed, it stood on barren land with only a few of the most rudimentary huts for the four families who eked out a living grazing a few scrawny animals and planting seeds in the dry, bony soil with a prayer for their growth.

This desolation is not new to China—oh, it's a sad story and an old one. You who have a chance to know what is befalling the last forests of our modern times should consider it well, for China was not always bereft of forests. Forests hold the soul of the land, and the greenness of their trees breathes life back into the air that we breathe together. Those among us fortunate enough to have entered a great and beautiful forest even once in our life cannot forget such a memory—the spring in our feet, the vibrancy of our breath, the joy of the cells of our body.

But now most of the forests of China are dead. They've been dead for five hundred or a thousand years. There are so many of us. We've cut them down to build homes, for cooking, for warmth, to clear the land for yet one more field. And the land has become barren, and the rivers yellow with the soil that's run off. Even young children know something is wrong, never seeing a great forest or hearing the cry of birds in its treetops, stopping for the noise of unseen animals. They know something is missing. They hear the stories of wolves and bear that lived in the forest, of wild pig and mountain tiger. And their hearts too must long for a time when the forests were alive, when human life was more fully alive.

But all is not lost.

Li Peng, who is telling this story, talks about how it is to live in this village, Fengshui Li, and how it's become a beautiful place filled with bamboo forests, streams with clear water, glades, sweet and porous.

He says at the end of the previous century, there was a Taoist elder, a dragon named Tam Yang Boon. Dragon is the name for a great master in the Taoist temples. Li Peng was born himself nearby. Tam Yang Boon was born by the Lochi river bank, and as a young man, almost more than a hundred years ago, he was a dutiful student who took the Confucian examinations, passed them, and became a well-known figure there. He married a lovely young woman and they had the beautiful village ceremony that they'd celebrated for a thousand years. The pigs were offered, people danced. And here was Tam Yang Boon, now a successful member of the community, graced with a child named Most Precious Gift.

And then the sorrows came. His child got pneumonia and died. His father also died in an influenza epidemic, and his wife began to grieve so much that after time she too lost her life. His mother went into a Taoist nunnery, and he didn't know what to do. He couldn't return to his village.

He lived there and learned the secrets. Tam Young Boon taught him how to care for the forest, how to soften the shen tree pods for planting, how to create a small orchard for hundreds of new saplings. And wherever the forest was replanted, new hillsides were covered with trees, the streams filled with moisture, and the young forest began to fill with wildlife that could sense, "Ah yes, here is a beautiful place to live."

Now Li Peng, living there with Tam Young Boon in the forest as it was growing—it had covered ten thousand rai—he began to realize that his own life as a scholar, his own life as a teacher, didn't mean anything when the land was desolate as it was. And so he asked if he might stay with Tam Young Boon for longer. He trained with him and learned how to tend the forest.

But then he got news that there was difficulty in his own family, and he had to go away for some years to tend his aged parents, to do what he could back where he was born. But in his heart, he longed to return to the mountains.

After some years, he walked from that temple back up into the hills, and now the forests were great and wild and more vast than ever. He knew he was on the right trail when he heard the sound—*ching, ching*—amazed at how beautiful the Chinese maple had grown, at the tracks of wild animals everywhere.

And remarkably, Tam Yang Boon was planting the very day he came back, now decades after he had first met him. Tam Yang Boon said, "Come stay with me and eat the herbs of the forest and learn how to live in the cycles of the Tao." And so he learned from the teachers—the wind, the rocks, the trees. He learned the harmony of life.

But then Li Peng fell ill and couldn't remain in the mountains. Even the Tao has its seasons and difficulties.

He returned to the monastery. And now again, ten thousand rai had been planted and reclaimed. In the villages, goats and pigs squealed under the houses, and the dikes between the rice paddies had clear flowing water. The children were already accustomed to a diet of good food and white rice from the paddy.

"I tell you this story," says Li Peng, "with some sadness, because after Mao's great triumph, there are only a handful of the five million monks and nuns of the Taoist and Buddhist temples that were there. Li Peng remained in the temple, and somehow I, as a young boy, was called there too. My heart went to join him and learn the ways of the Tao. So I lived with him as an old man for the last eight years and heard the stories of Tam Yang Boon and practiced the Eight Treasures.

"Several times I climbed to the forest to look for the immortal dragon Tam Yang Boon, but there was no sign of him. I thought perhaps he had died. But then one day in the far distance, I heard that sound—*ching ching*—of the immortal mountain way, the dragon. And now I've decided to go into the mountains myself, for it is also my way. I write you this story so you remember as I leave.

"Li Peng taught me the secret of soaking the shen tree pods and showed me the fire herbs that warm the body in winter. Sometimes I feel there's not much honor left for the Tao in our temples, and I'm called to these mountains, to the animals that roam there, to the sweetness of the forest valleys.

"I know there's desolation where you live also. I know that your forests have been lost and that many of your friends do not know who they are. But the earth will not always be desolate, and the Tao has its cycle of return. Perhaps one of you who reads this story will know the spirit of the immortals in your heart and go off to the mountains and replant the forests of the earth."

That story is based on a tale called *The Man Who Planted Trees*, written by Jean Giono. This is a different version that I wrote in a Chinese style, and I called Jean Giono's wife to ask if that would be acceptable. She said yes, it would be fine to tell this story.

What was important for me in sharing it with you, just as I read Thich Nhat Hanh's passage about seeds, is to remind you that wherever we are in this dilemma of climate change, it is not the end of the story. The seeds that you plant and the possibilities of these seeds are what will renew the earth.

As Henry David Thoreau has said, "Though I do not believe a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

So what does this mean for us? How do we respond to this enormous threat to humanity and to the animals and creatures of the earth?

I have this page my daughter gave me, in her third-grade handwriting. I treasure it. She said, "Daddy, I think you could use this in your talks." It's a quote from Chief Seattle: "What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men and women would die from great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens

to the beasts also happens to man."

You hear it, and it's the same principle as this story. How do we respond to this great threat?

Notice in yourself. Here you come to meditate, and you have your own spiritual inclinations. Notice with mindfulness: what is this touching in you? For many of us, it will evoke fight, flight, or freeze. Let's speak in terms of trauma, because this is a collective trauma of humanity and the earth. Flight—"I'm going to move to New Zealand. I'm going to Idaho. I'm going to get out of here somewhere."

You know how that one goes. Far away, as if it's really going to help. That's flight.

Fight. Fight against it. Fight against those people.

Or freeze—denial, hopelessness, distraction. "There's nothing I can do." As if there really was nothing you could do. Or just the desolation.

What was talked about in that Chinese story is the desolation of a materialistic society, where we could almost describe much of our society by the absence of the sacred. What it means to have a sacred relationship with one another, with this beautiful earth that we live on. In a way, that's why we have Spirit Rock—to remind us of this, to have such places as this.

But the real question is: what is possible for us? Here's Tom Young Boon, going through a hundred years planting seeds, and forests are coming back and new villages are growing.

Gary Snyder, one of our greatest environmentalists, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, the visionary of bioregionalism for fifty years, was asked by our colleague and friend Wes Nisker: "Gary, you see the oceans rising, species disappearing, climate getting hotter and hotter, all the refugees pouring out. What advice do you have for us?"

And Gary looked back as the great Zen teacher that he is, as well as an environmentalist, and he said: "Don't feel guilty. If you're going to save it, don't save it out of guilt. Don't save it out of anger. Don't save it out of fear. Because those are the very forces that are causing the difficulty. If you're going to save it, not as an act of war—save it as an act of love. Save it because you love it. Because that's the only power that has the force to match what we're seeing as difficulty. It's the force that lets mothers lift cars off their children. It's the force of love."

And then it's not a sacrifice. It's not a sacrifice if your foot is injured or your hand is injured in some way. You don't think, "Oh, that poor foot, I wonder if I should help it. Oh, that poor hand, I wonder if I should take it out of the fire." You know it's part of you.

Once, wrote this Tibetan lama, "I was staying with friends in Colorado, and I was a great horseman. I took my favorite horse, Rocky, on a trail ride through the back country high mountains. I'd ridden Rocky before, mostly in the arena. He was very intelligent, but he didn't know how to walk a high mountain trail.

This was a new situation. I was leading the group, and that also made him a bit nervous.

"I coaxed him over certain rocks, shifted my weight to indicate to him to go around certain others, but he kept stumbling. We came to a narrow place in the trail. On one side was a steep shale cliff up, and on the other a long drop—a thousand feet into a river. Rocky stopped and waited for my direction. We both knew that one wrong move would plummet us into the river below.

"I guided him toward the gorge. Subtly shifting my weight toward the high wall of shale, I thought that if he slipped, I could jump off and save myself. The moment I shifted, Rocky stopped cold and craned his head around to look at me. He knew exactly what I was doing. I could tell that he was shocked and hurt that I was planning to abandon him. The look in his eye said, 'You and me together, right?'

"I took a breath, shifted myself back into the center of the saddle, and we began to walk together."

This is the movement that's needed. It's not to separate ourselves from the world, but to quiet the mind and connect with heart—our own heart—and rise to meet with the greatness of heart the dilemma that we carry. The problem isn't refugees at the border or immigration.

Much of the crisis at the border stems from climate change and its effects on Central American crops and farmers. People are fleeing the devastation. Climate drives poverty, drives conflict, drives death and loss—and people are running for their lives. This is not a small thing. And we have to let ourselves feel it.

Gustavo Barajaño Lopez, a teacher, writes: "Each day I open my class with a morning circle. Nineteen seven and eight year olds sit on a colorful rug, talk about their favorite color, their ideal superpowers, how they feel, or who they'll be when they grow up. At recess, I read about a seven-year-old who died in Border Patrol custody after navigating the New Mexico desert. Her name is Jakelin Caal Maquin.

I begin to wonder—did she make walking through the desert a game? Count the number of cacti? Make messages with stones in the sand? I wonder if she went to school. Did she have to leave midway through the year to work picking strawberries, like my father? Would she color a picture in desert sunrises?

I wonder if she knew where she was going. What was America to her? I wonder if she spoke K'iche' or English or Spanish or Mam. What would she write about?

My students are learning math multiplications. I wonder if she knew her times tables. What is 15,000 children times two parents in different detention facilities? What is a number of bottles of water times border patrol boots? Did she know the definition of terror, or did she call it fear?

This not knowing brings tears. I wonder who she was. I see her now. I wonder who she would have become."

The thing about all of this is that it's really one person at a time. As William Blake said, "If one is to do good, it must be done in the minute particulars. General good is the plea of the hypocrite, the flatterer, and

the scoundrel." You actually have to see the people, the animals, the beings involved who are part of your family.

So there's another story. We're still wending our way through this problem that we all carry, and I know you hold it as I do.

Once—even longer before Tam Yong Boon was born—a long time ago, before the Buddha was the Buddha, when he was still practicing to become enlightened, there are these volumes called the Jataka Tales that recount his past lives. In one of them, years ago, the Buddha was born as a friendly little parrot in the forest. He lived happily and delightedly there. He loved flying through the branches. He made friends with so many other creatures. And his spirit was one—since he was the Buddha to be—of joy and happiness in life, of care for others, of the gift of flight.

One day, the skies over the forest turned dark, and there was a huge storm, a lightning storm. As the storm ended, flashing and roaring, the wind began to howl. In the days that followed, the atmosphere grew turbulent, and lightning struck and crackled across the sky. A seed of fire was born in the heart of one of those trees that lightning had struck. As the forest dried out, that blaze began to spark a huge conflagration.

We know about this, don't we, here in California?

Terrified, as the smoke began to rise, the animals ran wildly in every direction, seeking safety from the burning flames and acrid smoke. When the little parrot smelled the smoke, he flung himself bravely into the fury of the fire, crying out, "Fire! Fire! You must run! You must run!" Many of the animals fled to the safety of the river, but many others were trapped by flame and smoke.

Rather than flying to safety himself, the parrot continued circling over the raging fire, seeking some means to help all those he knew on the forest floor. A desperate idea came to him. Darting down to the river, he soaked his small bird body in the water, then flew back into the inferno. Unaware of the flames, he dropped down low to find anyone he knew from that forest—a squirrel or a badger—and would shake the drops of water from his feathers to give them some moments of cooling, like little jewels of something precious falling through the fire.

Again and again, he would return to the river, soak himself, and look for any creature in danger, dropping as many droplets of water as he could upon them. His lungs ached.

He was dizzy from the flames. But he thought, what else can I do but fly? I must do this to help.

Remember, this is the Buddha as the parrot. You've got to get the story here.

Now, it happens that up in heaven, some of the gods and goddesses who dwelt in their gorgeous deva-like palaces looked down and saw the forest fire. They saw that something interesting was happening, because their seats become very hot when something really cool is happening down on earth. Okay, something's

happening—what is this? And they looked down and they said, "Look at that little parrot! How completely foolish, trying to put out a raging forest fire with his own little wings. Whoever heard of such a thing? Why, it's absurd."

But one of the gods looked closer and found himself somehow strangely moved by the parrot going into the river and coming out and shaking the water on another creature. He found himself so moved that he turned himself into a golden eagle and flew down from heaven to have a little closer look.

The little parrot was nearing the flames again when this huge golden eagle with feathers of molten gold appeared at his side and said, "Go back, little bird. This is a forest fire. You can't stop this. What can a few drops of water do?"

But the little parrot, of course, wouldn't listen. He continued to fly doggedly into the river and back into the flames.

"Stop, stop," said the great eagle. "Save yourself."

And the little parrot said, "I don't need a great shining eagle to give me advice, thank you. My mother could have told me that, you know. I just need someone to help."

And the great eagle, seeing the parrot flying so steadily through the searing flames, thought with shame about his own privileged life. He could see the carefree gods looking down on the earth as if life was just a game. He could hear their laughter, but he could also hear the cries of the creatures in the forest, crying out in fear. And all at once, he no longer wanted to be a god or an eagle or anything. He simply wanted to be brave like that parrot and to help.

"I will help," he said. And flushed with the feelings that arose in him, he began to weep. Streams of tears poured from his eagle eyes. And one of the interesting things that happens is when the gods weep, it turns into rain. As the great eagle began to weep, the clouds opened in the skies and rain poured down, cooling the fire, cooling the entire forest.

Deluged with the shimmering tears of the gods, the flames died down and the smoke began to clear. And the little parrot, washed and bright, rocketed into the sky above and laughed. He said, "Now that's more like it! Thank you to the great eagle."

Tears dripped from all the burned branches and scorched buds, but the water began to remind them that they could flower again. And all the animals looked at one another in amazement. Against the blue sky, they saw a little parrot doing loop-de-loops above the forest as the fire had stopped.

Or so it is told in the old ways, this story.

Now why do I tell this story? I think about the California fires. Some of you may have lost homes in Santa Rosa and other places. I tell it because I think that the only thing that really will motivate us to do what we

have to do are those tears. We actually have to let ourselves feel, as that golden eagle did—the god who came down. The tears of that seven-year-old walking across the desert. The loss of the animals in the forest. The people who are trudging around the world as millions of refugees. Something has to be touched in us to say, it's not enough to be a bystander in this one. It simply is not.

And those tears become the tears of your loving care. As Gary Snyder said, if you're going to save it, there's only one way: you save it because you love it. And it's not just about recycling and using fewer shopping bags.

It just ain't at that level at this point.

I have a good friend, Paul Hawken, who wrote a book, a New York Times bestseller called *Drawdown*. How many people know this book? Great, twenty of you. There's another few hundred that will know it in a moment. Paul is a Marin visionary who's written many other things—a serial entrepreneur of different kinds, wrote *Blessed Unrest* about organizations changing the world.

What he did was to get a whole group of climate scientists and environmentalists and economists together. Let's make a list of the hundred things that are most likely not just to stop but to *reverse* climate change. Then he crowdsourced that list of a hundred and sent it out to graduate departments and think tanks and people around the world, each group taking one solution and working through the economics—what will it cost? The practicality. How many gigatons of carbon will it take out of the atmosphere? How long will it take? After a year, he brought all of that back together and made a list, a summary of the solutions that are most effective, not just to stop but to reverse climate change.

First thing is, they're all things that we already know how to do. It's not something new. Second, all kinds of new understandings came from this. For example, the first technological thing is not wind or solar, although they're in the top fifteen. The number one technological one is to create or distribute the small devices that will take the CFCs, the chlorofluorocarbons used in every old ice cream maker and air conditioner in Jakarta and Buenos Aires and around the world by the millions. Those gases are enormously destructive. And when they're drawn off, when they're retired and neutralized, that would do more for the atmosphere than all the solar power and wind power we can build.

Then in the top dozen is food waste. Pay attention to this. And agricultural practices. Synergies. Further down is methane from cows—cow belches and cow farts. You've heard about it, and how to mitigate it. But the synergies are fascinating. There's rebuilding kelp forests in the ocean. And I'm part of a company from friends who are doing that. It turns out if you put five percent of kelp into cattle feed, they don't fart. So there are all these things that were learned.

But the most important thing is it's not just the technological solutions. The number one solution, if you take two in the top ten and combine them together, the very number one intervention is the education and empowerment of women and girls worldwide. Not just for family planning—in Nigeria or in Kenya,

fifty percent of the economy is done by women and smartphones. And they understand how to live and how to trade and how to grow things and how to educate their children in whole new ways when they are educated.

You can look at this. You can get the book. But even better, you can go to the website drawdown.com, because there's all kinds of things that you can do from this.

What's the point of all this? The earth wants to renew itself. It doesn't take that much—a little bit of water, a few seeds planted here and here and here, and then all of a sudden something happens and the earth knows, in some way. It's alive. It's part of you. When the governments tried to suppress the truth of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the wind told the story. The wind carried the truth across the nations. The wind was a poet, a scientist, and a prophet. The earth wants to work with us to renew itself. And we get to, like Tam Young Boon in that story, plant the seeds.

Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Prize for the green belts in East Africa—fifty-one million trees planted. She started one tree at a time. She spent some time in prison, like all good Nobel laureates, right? That's the way it happens. Fifty-one million trees, one tree at a time.

Or you look in Liberia, and Leymah Gbowee and Ellen Sirleaf, who said, "Liberia used to be known for its child soldiers. And now it's known for its women." Things can change. We have the possibility of changing this. And that's why *Drawdown* actually has a lot of hope in it. To raise your voices. To vote.

To teach people. To support. As your practice.

Because there's some way in which the culture—the consumer, misguided side of capitalism—wants to put you to sleep. It wants business as usual. It wants you to actually feel that you can't do anything, that you can't make a difference.

It's a lie. It's untrue.

Every one of us makes a difference on this earth. A significant difference. And your practice of awareness, of loving awareness and compassion, will lead you as you get quiet to reflect and choose a few things. I don't know what those actions will be. Some of you will be political. Some of you will plant. Some of you will support organizations. Some of you will do it in education. But when you feel empowered to make a difference, it will not only change the earth as you plant those seeds—it will also change your heart.

Because what else are you going to do in this time? You don't want to die feeling like you didn't do anything. You don't.

And how you do it matters. Yes, you want to act. But how you do it also matters—not out of anger, not out of fear, not out of hatred or aggression.

This from Molly Ivins, the great commentator and activist. She says: "So keep on fighting for freedom and

justice and what's good, beloveds, but don't forget to have fun doing it. Be outrageous. Rejoice in all the oddities that humanity and freedom can produce together. And when you get through celebrating the sheer joy of standing up for what matters, be sure to tell those who come after you how much fun it was."

It's really a different spirit. It is. And it's what the earth wants of us as well.

Thank you all for coming and going on this ride, this adventure, as I try to deal with this—and I think as we all do together.

I end with a few words and a poem from Deena Metzger, an activist and friend. She writes: "Give me everything mangled and bruised, and I will make a light of it to make you weep, and we will have rain, and we will begin again."

There is in this world of trouble and difficulty—the First Noble Truth—and of its causes of fear and separation. But there is another possibility. We know it in our hearts. We know it in our relationships with those we are closest to. We know it in our home of this earth. There is a possibility of love and compassion. And we can be emboldened and courageous with it.

It doesn't take a lot. Thomas Jefferson said, "One person with courage is a majority." And you look at Greta Thunberg—this one young teenage girl standing up in front of the British Parliament—and it's very clear who has the power. We have that in ourselves.

So maybe if you weep some of the tears like that parrot, maybe that's needed for us. But it's also needed somehow to go to the river and get the water and come back and plant the seeds. To carry this as part of your spiritual practice. You sit and you sweep the garden, and it doesn't matter how big the garden is.

So let's sit for a moment.

Thank you. Thank you so much. Drive politely out there—there are lots of cars. Take care with one another, and take care of this beautiful earth.

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