Meditation: Loving the World | Monday Night

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 23:16

I'd like us to do a little loving kindness practice before we do the blessing cords.

As you gaze at the image of this earth—earth rise—and all the beings on it: the ones who are suffering, the ones who are happy, the ones who are causing happiness, the ones who are causing suffering. And they change around. They're not always the same, you know. And the animals and plants, the life that makes up this earth. All of what Chief Seattle calls the beasts. He says what happens to the beasts happens to humankind.

Begin to do the practice of loving kindness, which is to open your heart. First, as you see this globe, think of the people you love the most, living their lives on this mysterious earth. And wish them well. May they be safe and protected. May they be healed and well in body and mind. May they be filled with the tenderness of compassion and loving kindness. May they live with a loving heart. May they be happy.

Feel your well-wishing for those you love, those you're close to, moving around on this mysterious earth.

Then realize that all the others—all the other humans and all the animals, the non-humans—they all have mothers, fathers. Most have sisters and brothers. They have their struggles and their hopes and their wishes. They're actually part of your family. Needless to say, some parts of your family don't behave so well. That's part of family. But they're part of our family, all of them.

And wish, as you look at this beautiful globe: May you be free from hatred, all of you. May you be free from fear. May you remember the heart of compassion and kindness, whoever you are. May you plant seeds of goodness and happiness.

The phrase in the text on loving kindness says: spreading the spirit of loving kindness and compassion to beings everywhere in all forms, omitting none—the great heart of compassion and kindness.

Here we are, floating through the vastness of space and time. "For we must laugh and we must sing," says Yeats, "for we are blessed by everything, and everything we look upon is blessed." Send your good wishes and your blessings to beings in every form.

The last thing of the evening is this, again quite optional. I'd like us to make or create what are called blessing cords. Sometimes they're called protection cords. Somebody asked this great lama, "What do they protect you from?" He said, "Why, yourself, of course"—the main protection that we need as human beings.

But in order to make them, first you have to set an intention. Sometimes it's called a vow in Buddhist practice. In Zen you might sit and say, "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all." I've talked about this often here. The problem being that when you get home, the people you live with don't want to be saved by you, right? So it has to have some other meaning than that.

And the meaning really is that you set the compass of your heart for each situation and each circumstance.

The vow in Diane Ackerman's poem: "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."

I read this to one of the great lamas that teaches together with the Dalai Lama. He said, "Oh, where did you get that Bodhisattva vow? I want that." It's nice to see it all going back and forth across traditions.

So in order to create these blessing cords, I'd like you to close your eyes for a moment. Very simply, in the quiet, in the darkness of this time of year, you get to listen to the light within, to your heart. And if you were to make a vow or set an intention—a long-term vow, an intention of the heart, a direction—what would yours be, this day in December? And it can be very simple.

I vow to be kind. I vow to see the beauty in every being I meet. What would yours be?

Now, letting your eyes open. Later on, I'd suggest that you write this down, or put it in your phone, or wherever you keep your treasures. But before you do that, the next step is something quiet that will take words. If you're comfortable or willing, turn toward a person next to you and listen to them—not a conversation, no commentary. Simply listen to them speak out loud the vow that they just made or the intention they set. And then speak yours. This is a conversation of the heart. It's a different kind of conversation than we usually have. Pay attention to what it's like.

How was that—to listen to somebody else's intention or vow? Was it okay? It's kind of not our usual conversation, is it? It's actually something special in a way, to hear and listen and be touched by another person.

As the red cords are being passed around, let me talk about them a little bit for those of you who are going to do this.

They're part of an ancient ritual that goes across most of Asia, where a thread—a cotton cord—is used in marriages and healing ceremonies and blessings and all kinds of rituals. It's considered to be the thread that symbolizes that we're woven together in this mystery, that we're living on that planet you see, woven in the field of life with all the rest of life. You breathe with it and you eat with it. It is you. This is who you are—you're woven with it.

Its particular color also signifies that it's one thread from the robe of a monk or a nun, so that you wear your robes into the marketplace. You're really a monk or a nun—a monk or a nun in drag, maybe, going into the marketplace—but this is your real garment. I have this one I got from the Dalai Lama. It's a reminder of that intention you made and of your true nature.

So to activate your blessing cord, we have to tie three knots in it.

The first knot is called the knot of refuge. It's really the knot of your connection to that which is holy or sacred. For some, in the Buddhist tradition, it's the Buddha, or Buddha and Dharma, the teachings of awakening. For others, there are a thousand names for that which is holy and that which is the source to which you turn, that which inspires and reminds you.

Hold your cord and reflect on the deepest connection to the sacred in whatever form that is—the refuge or support you have. And when you're ready, let yourself tie a knot in the center of the cord to remind you of this connection that you have to the vastness and to the sacred, in whatever form touches you.

The second knot is the knot of compassion. It starts simply by holding the cord and making the intention to not harm yourself and others as best you can—not to add to suffering. This is the basis of compassion. Yes, to alleviate suffering, but first not to add to it in your words, in your deeds, in your actions. To have a reverence for life and a care for one another. To not cause harm out of compassion, and to respond by caring for yourself and others.

This is the knot of the great heart of compassion: May I help alleviate suffering, and may I not cause harm to myself or others. Reflect in your own way on what that means to you. Then tie the second knot, which is the commitment to that heart of compassion and kindness.

The third knot is the knot of the intention or vow that you just made and spoke aloud. You set the compass of your heart in this direction. You set a deep and beautiful intention or vow. Remember it now, and tie the third knot in the cord to carry this.

Now your blessing protection cord is fully activated. If you wish to wear it—again, all optional—if you want it around your neck, as mine is, you can put it around the back of your neck and let the two ends hang down. If you want it around your wrist, wrap it two or three times and let the two ends hang down.

As our way of closing, I'd like us to do a very simple chant. In the greetings you find across much of India, people will put their hands together and say namaste. The root of the word namaste is in Sanskrit probably the word namo, which means to honor or bow to. I want us to chant namo for a time, and you can feel as we chant it, or sense, what you want to bow to. You can turn and inwardly bow to this beautiful blue pearl that's floating, to the people you love, to the things you care about, to the people who are in trouble, to their helpers—to whatever it is.

Namo

These aren't really teachings. They're reminders of something you already know. Whatever nourishment, whatever reminder touched you tonight in some way, something that you got or wear or carry—take it out into the world, sprinkle it around.

Have beautiful holidays. Thank you. Good night.

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