Climate Change / Ram Dass | Monday Night Talk

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:02:14

So here we are in the temple. And again, hello to you who are on the live stream as well, at the beginning of the Roaring Twenties yet again—a new decade. We come together to get a little quiet, and with it we also contemplate this beautiful and troubled world and our place in it.

When we come to sit together to meditate, to quiet ourselves, sometimes it's for a little spiritual uplift or new perspective, or sometimes it's just to get in touch with our own bodies or our hearts. Sometimes it's to remember, as you sit quietly, that there's a bigger picture. You remember the famous Ojibwe saying: "Sometimes I go about pitying myself when all the while I'm being carried by great winds across the sky."

Our lives are really mysterious, and we actually don't know where they're going and what will happen. You have some ideas about it, but you can't be sure what's going to happen tomorrow. Really. For you or the people you love or the people around you.

So here we had a baby blessing, and I also want to talk about my dear friend Ram Dass, who died in December.

There's a woman named Margo Weiss who created what's called the Salt Monument. In Colorado, she had this beautiful wooden temple room built, and in the middle of it is a lucite transparent crystal suspended on its points that rotates every twenty-four hours in a circle. It's filled with 7.83 billion crystals of salt—one for each person on earth. In the morning, she adds a little cup of approximately 350,000 crystals of salt for all the people who will be born that day. And in the evening, she draws off a smaller cup of 200,000 crystals of salt for all the people who died that day. Each day, when she adds the new births and takes the deaths, she does this beautiful prayer and mantra and blessing for those coming in and those going out—which, by the way, are you at some point.

So here we are, kind of in the middle between the beginning and the end of this particular incarnation, in this beautiful troubled world. What do we know?

This poem I like from Juan Ramón Jiménez:

I am not I. I am this one walking beside me whom I do not see, whom at times I manage to visit and at other times I forget. The one who remains silent when I talk, the one who forgives sweet when I hate, the one who takes a walk when I am indoors, the one who will remain standing when I die.

It's a reminder that there's some part of you—you know this—that's bigger than your to-do list and your accomplishments and your plans and your personality and your emotions. There's something that's bigger than that, that can take a look and say, "Wow, we're kind of in the middle of this life, aren't we? How's this incarnation going for you?" And step back. Because who you are is not your body—tacos, Big Macs, kale—that's not your identity. You're not your emotions, because they come and go. I hope you're not your thoughts. That would be tragic.

So who are you? You're the spirit, the consciousness that was born into this body and will also leave it. You'll see at the end, and then she'll take out that little cup of salt, and you'll be one of those crystals.

My dear friend Ram Dass died in December. I was with him the week before he died, teaching a retreat. Trudy, my wife, my beloved, and I were teaching together with Ram Dass. Ram Dass was the Harvard professor and the LSD proponent with Tim Leary for a long time as Richard Alpert, and then became his spiritual teacher, a friend and a colleague and a mentor for me, and also the author of the best-selling book *Be Here Now*, which changed a lot of people's lives. So many people would come up to him when we would travel or be together and say, "Ram Dass, I just need to tell you—you changed my life."

Have read this and had some effect from *Be Here Now*? Yeah, maybe a third or so. It's in the bookstore if you're interested. And then there's another book there called *Walking Each Other Home*, which is a conversation about dying. Ram Dass was eighty-eight and in a wheelchair after a major stroke, really preparing to die. This is a beautiful, heartfelt conversation about preparing to die—Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush.

Be Here Now, which came out at the end of the 1960s—he wrote things like: "When we awaken, we watch the entire drama of our lives. We watch the illusions that we get caught in with unbearable compassion. For you are all form, you are the breath, you are the river, you are the void, you are the desires and fears and illusions, and you are the enlightenment that sees it all. When you understand, you realize I am beyond space and time, for I am nothing and everything, and everything is in me." When you see it all form an eternity as a miracle, then what's left? You chop wood and carry water—the famous Zen phrase. Once you've gotten enlightened, what else is there to do? You go back into the world and tend it in some fashion.

So he was quite ready to die. He suffered a lot in the wheelchair, and his body was frail and full of puncture wounds from tubes and shots and things like that. And he died very peacefully.

When we practiced together at the December retreat, there was a big picture of his guru, Neem Karoli Baba. Ram Dass once asked his guru, "How do I get enlightened?" And his guru answered, "Love people." He said, "No, no—how do I get enlightened?" And his guru said, "Feed people. Love people and feed them." That became a big part of his life.

His guru sent him back to teach in the U.S. Ram Dass said, "I'm not ready to do it." He'd been there doing

yoga and meditation and austerities, learning all these things. And his guru said, "Now it's time for you to go teach." He said, "I'm not ready. I'm too uncooked. I'm too impure. You want somebody who's wiser, like you. I have too many imperfections to teach others."

So his guru got off that little wooden seat where he would be resting and very slowly, taking a couple of minutes, walked around Ram Dass—one side and his back and the other side—looking him up and down, looking at his hands and his feet. Then he sat down, looked at Ram Dass, and said, "I see no imperfections."

That was a moment that really changed Ram Dass's life—to be seen in that way. Because we have all these judgments about ourselves, how we look or sound. Here I am, quite sniffly tonight. I'm not actually sick; it's allergies. But all the things that we have, all the judgments that we carry—and the guru looks at you and says, "I see no imperfections. You're perfectly yourself. You're perfectly as you should be." How's that?

So then he came back and taught meditation and the liberation that was there in *Be Here Now*. But he also served the world, chopping wood and carrying water. He did hospice work. He started the Living Dying Project and all kinds of other hospice endeavors. He did prison work.

He said, "When I go into death row"—as he did at San Quentin—"when I go in the prisons, if they're short-timers, there for a year or five years, they don't want to meditate. They just want to get out somehow. But when I sit with the men on death row, oh, then we get real. Because they really want to look at: Who am I? What is this?" He said, "I love going into death row, because we have a conversation from the heart that really matters."

I think about this because Trudy, my beloved, runs a center in Los Angeles—InsightLA—that does all kinds of social action, dharma in action, compassion in action projects: homeless shelters, work with refugees, and so forth. One of the things they've done is work in children's hospitals, and they do retreats for the

staff who work in the NICU, the neonatal intensive care unit. They make retreats for the nurses, doctors, and other caregivers. They sit quietly, do practices of compassion, and form a circle where they can talk.

The thing is, if you do that kind of work, you can't really talk to other people about it. Because every week you have these babies that you're tending, these early preemies, and every week one or two of them die. You have to go talk to the parents and say, "I'm sorry, this beautiful child was born too early. This child didn't make it." You can't go home and say, "Oh yeah, another baby died." It doesn't work that way. You have to in some way hold it. But that's also a terrible thing to have to hold in your heart.

So like Ram Dass, they make a space where those who do this work can sit in the company of one another and tell the stories that weigh on their hearts and find a way to hold it—with ritual, with practice of compassion, and more than anything, in a community of those who hold it together.

This is what Ram Dass did. He worked in business, social ventures, bringing business leaders together to do it in a humane way. He started Seva Foundation with a number of other people. They said, "Well, what

can we do that's of value in the world? There are a lot of blind people." So they started a project to restore sight using very simple cataract surgery, relatively inexpensive, starting primarily in India and Nepal and then spreading around the world. So far they've helped four and a half million people who were blind, who a day later walk out able to see.

So when his guru said "love people and feed them," he did it.

But he also had a field of great emptiness and detachment. I was there when a colleague of mine who had a whole spiritual community was going through a hard time with their director and other teachers. You think spiritual communities are nice places, right? And they are, except for one small problem: people. So this person was wrestling with how to straighten things out. "This person acted badly, and that one undermined this one, and this is going on." All this stuff. Ram Dass listened to it all very sweetly, and then he gazed back and said—because the teacher was all up in arms, asking "How can I fix this?"—Ram Dass just looked and said, "Hmm, attachment, huh?"

And that was all. Everything kind of dropped away because he pointed to how attached that person was to it working out or being a certain way. Like, okay, it is the way it is. How about if you love it the way it is, and maybe something better will happen?

People would come to him with their fear and their agitation and their depression, or even judgments, or even deeper things—with their cancer, or with a child who died. And he would gaze from this place of vastness and say, "Maybe this was the time they were supposed to die. Maybe they've done their work on this earth."

To hear it in a space where nothing seems to make sense when a child dies—it's so terrible—and he'd say, "Well, maybe actually it was supposed to happen this way. And we don't know. We don't know the vastness and the reasons for a human being to be born and to live through what they do."

The vastness that he held was such a field of love that people realized, "Oh, okay, I can do this. I can hold even this difficulty."

At the end of the retreat—Trudy and I have taught with him over quite a few years now—he does a little blessing ceremony where those three hundred fifty people or so would come by and receive a little wrist mala of beads with one thread from his guru's blanket tied into it. He would give them that and do a blessing. This year he was quite weak and couldn't speak very much. He was pretty frail. So he blessed all the beads and malas, and then one of his students stood there and gave them to each person as they passed. Ram Dass sat there and blessed people as they walked by, just gazing at them, offering a blessing.

He looked at people with so much love. In India, they call it the glance of mercy—when a teacher looks at you with so much love that it changes you. People would walk by, get their beads, gaze at him, and they would start to weep. I was weeping.

It was extraordinary. It was like Thomas Merton, that I've talked about other times, walking down the street in Louisville where there's that plaque for his mystical experience. The government put a plaque up there where he saw the secret beauty of everybody going past him, and he realized, "What am I doing in the monastery? Everybody's shining like the divine walking down the street, and now I see it."

And that's what it felt like sitting there, everybody going past Ram Dass with this field of love, weeping. And I thought, "This is how I want to live. I want to live being able to see in that way." I aspire to that.

Now, of course, what's true is the heart opens and closes. You can't just decide, "Okay, I'm open all the time. I'm just going to be like this and never change." You have to breathe. You know that. And love, and so forth. But there is a way to see where everybody you look at is kind of like the person you love most in the world—your beloved child, or your beloved partner, or your beloved friend, or whoever. I know you have complicated relationships. We won't talk about those. But you've got somebody that you love. You know you do.

And I do this: I look at somebody and I say, "Well, suppose that were my daughter or my son. How much would I love them and wish them well?" We have these lenses, this dimension of consciousness, where we can look at someone and then switch into love. How's that? Try it. Okay, right now. It's nice to talk about it, but take a look around and pick somebody. I mean, you're weird enough, so it doesn't matter what you do. And just imagine that they're somebody you really love, that they're like the person you love the most in the world. That's your daughter or your son or your partner or whoever it is. And you look at them and think, "Oh, how much you want them to be well, how you care for them, how you hope somehow that there's joy in their life"—all those things.

I do this on public transportation. And it changes things. I don't look them in the eyes—they'd arrest me, I know that. But then you think, "Well, what stops you from doing that? What stops you from loving everybody?"

I remember Ram Dass was teaching in Oakland. He did a whole long series of classes some decades ago about meditation, about quieting the mind and opening the heart, and then getting up and serving the world. And that included taking care of the homeless, among many things, which is one of our major problems now. At one point during that six- or eight-week series, where he was teaching people to pay attention in a different way, a woman raised her hand and said, "I have a story to tell, Ram Dass." She said, "Every day when I go to work, I take BART. And near the BART station for the last year has been this homeless man, this person who's been living on the street. And while I drop coins or money into his cup, I realized I never really looked at him. And coming to your class and kind of taking this in and gazing at people, I thought, 'Well, maybe I'll really look at him.' And then I got quite afraid. And then I realized what my fear was: that if I ever really looked at him, he'd be sleeping on my living room couch next week."

You understand? So it's really something for us to look at—what is it, what are the obstacles to our love and how we might express them?

Now, somebody asked me who's here: who's going to replace Ram Dass for the community of people that do love him? You know, Krishna Das, the great chant master, Jai Uttal, and so forth. I was sitting in San Francisco when Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh was here. Mark Benioff of Salesforce, who is one of his students, after Thich Nhat Hanh had a major stroke, brought Thich Nhat Hanh and a number of his monks and nuns to live in San Francisco so he could get really great medical treatment for about six months.

So we would go and sit in the morning. He couldn't speak, but he would be wheeled in in a wheelchair and he would sit with us anyway. And after we sat one morning, I was in the kitchen there with one of his teaching partners, Sister Chen Kong. She said that there was a big retreat at his temple in Southern California called Deer Park, near San Diego. I said, well, he's not going to be able to be there. Will many people go? And she smiled and she said, "Oh, it's full, hundreds of people." And she said, "That's because Thai"—as he was called, Thich Nhat Hanh—"has taught us that he's not his body and that we are him. So whether he's there or not, we are him. We get together and we are those beautiful teachings that he offered."

I think that's true for Ram Dass as well. I get quiet and I talk to him, and sometimes he answers—or it seems to. I also talk to my teacher, Ajahn Chah, who died decades ago, but he still has some opinions about how I'm living and what I'm doing. You know what I'm saying. We don't just live in this limited reality. There is something bigger.

Now, in all this is a hint for how to practice in these hard times—refugees by the millions, climate crisis, racism that's in some places growing, war, divisiveness. Mind is the forerunner of all this, says the Buddha. All of that really comes out of the human mind. Mind can either be—well, he says, who is your enemy? Mind is your enemy. No one can hurt you, harm you more than your own mind untrained—or the world, really. Who is your friend? Mind, heart is your friend. Nothing can help you more, not even the most beloved of you, than your own heart and mind, well-trained and tamed.

There's a text called the Fire Sermon. I'm thinking about Australia now, but I'm also thinking about all the fires that we had last summer and may well come around again. There the Blessed One addressed the company of a thousand disciples and said, "This world is burning. Monks, nuns, you have come together. And with what is it burning? It's burning with greed. It's burning with hatred. It's burning with ignorance, fear."

When we see the causes of the fire and then bring our loving awareness to those causes, it becomes possible to release greed and hatred and delusion and turn ourselves toward wisdom, toward love, toward connection. And this is the redemption of the world.

Now, that was 2,600 years ago. The world is still burning. And if we look at climate change or other things, it's the same causes, isn't it? Greed, hatred, illusion, delusion, separateness, ignorance.

So what do we do? The secret is that we have to tend the inner as well as the outer. The problems of the

world, as I've often said, are not going to be solved by technology—not the most magnificent space technology, AI, nanotechnology, biotechnology, computers. None of that is going to stop warfare, going to stop continuing racism and climate disruption, because those come from forces of greed and fear and hatred.

Yes, we need to tend the outer world, we need to chop wood, carry water, do the things in the world. But we also have to transform our human hearts. You could say, well, what good is it if I just do my own thing? But you know where it starts. As Miss Piggy would say, "Moi?" Somebody has to do it, right? And as Ram Dass said, you are it. You are the world. The world is in you. You are the world. And he said it was this sense of vastness and love—wisdom says I am nothing.

Love says I am everything. And when you get quiet, you feel your connection. The whole idea of separation is completely fiction.

I mean, yes, there is a certain dimension of separation. When you're driving your car, you have to stop at the red light and let the people at the green light go. And if you think, "Oh, we're all one," you will be—but not in a very good way.

But that's only one dimension. Ram Dass used to say you have to remember your true nature *and* your social security number, basically. You have to put those together in your life. But if you only are a materialist, then there's only fear. How much can I get? What do I get for me? But it's not who we are.

And then the goal is not some special state—"Okay, I'm going to meditate and have this fantastic experience." Well, you could, and that's lovely. One of the greatest of Zen masters, Hui Neng, says, "One enlightened thought and one is a Buddha; one foolish thought and one is again an ordinary person." You may have noticed this in your life.

So the point, the goal, isn't to get something—"Okay, now I have it." The goal is to become love, or to become, as my teacher Ajahn Chah said, "the one who knows," to become the loving witness of this world. Ram Dass used the phrase "loving awareness," which I also use now a lot. To find, in that attention that you bring to this mystery of your life, the capacity to be the witness of it.

And say, "Wow"—because you will when you die and you float out of your body. You'll see. You're going to go, "Wow, that was an amazing incarnation. I messed up in those parts, but that part was pretty good." Then you'll see. Then you'll have the next one. But anyway, you'll see. You actually are consciousness. You're not the body. You're spirit and consciousness. And you can witness, you can observe, you can become the loving awareness itself, as we did even in our meditation sitting.

And this brings a sense of trust as you do it, a sense of grace.

Recently in L.A., we had a big benefit for InsideOUT LA, and one of the people who was part of this benefit—Trudy and I and some others did it—was Father Greg Boyle. He started Homeboy Industries in

L.A. twenty-some years ago working with gang kids. And he's your basic saint. And the cool thing about saints is they're not wearing halos and robes and stuff like that. He's like this working guy who lives and works with young men and women—and now middle-aged ones too—who are coming out of the undeclared war in the streets of gangs.

And they're people he calls "the discards," the throwaways. They've just been thrown into prison or shot at by one another or by the police or whatever. And he sees their beauty. He said every one of them has some great gift. He sees their secret beauty in some way. If you haven't got his book, *Tattoos on the Heart*, it's one of the best books I've read in the last ten years. It's his stories of that work.

So one kid comes in, sort of strutting in with lots of tattoos and all his kind of gang gear, but he was forced to go to this retreat. He wasn't even that happy about it. Usually it's people who come who want to. He seemed unable to shake the scowl across his face, and I say, "Yeah, dude, what's your name?"

"Sniper," he says with a sneer.

"Okay, look, I'd been down this block before. I have a feeling you didn't pop out of your mom and she took one look at your face and said, 'Sniper.' So come on, dog, what's your real name?"

"Gonzalez," he relents a little.

"Okay now, son, I know the staff here will call you by your last name. I'm not down with that."

"Tell me, mijo, what does your mom call you?"

"Cabrón." There's even the slightest flicker of innocence in his answer.

"Oh, dude, son, I'm looking for a birth certificate here."

The kid softens. I can tell it's happening, but there's embarrassment and a newfound vulnerability.

"My name?" He manages to squeak out, "Napoleon," pronouncing it in Spanish.

"Wow," I say, "that's a fine, noble, historic name. But I'm almost positive that when your jefita calls you, she doesn't use the whole nine yardus. Come on, mi hijito, do you have an apodo? What's your mom call you?"

And then I watch him go to some far distant place, a location he's not visited in some time. His voice, body language, and whole being are taking a new shape right before my eyes.

"Sometimes," his voice so quiet I lean in, "sometimes, when my mom's not mad at me, she calls me Napito."

And I watch this kid transform—from Sniper to Gonzales to Cabrón to Napoleon to Napito. We all just want to be called by the name our mom uses when she's not pissed off at us.

So there we were on stage, and Father Greg was talking about his work as if this is just what he does, his job. But he also talked about how many people had died, how many funerals he'd been to because the gangs are shooting each other. It's an initiation thing—young people trying to prove themselves because they don't have a family that is intact, or they don't have a way to prove themselves. "All right, I will get a family in the gang. It makes me safer. Okay, now you are going to shoot someone and they will know you are with us."

If it were the Maasai in Africa and a young man had come of age, they'd say, "Here's your spear, go bring back a lion." But these are young people, young men and women, trying to initiate themselves. They don't have elders, they don't have a wisdom tradition, and this is the best they can do.

We were talking together and I asked him, "So what's hard for you in this?" Because he seemed so cheerful and loving. He said, "Ah, the hardest thing is when kids I love kill kids I love."

I could hardly breathe. I said, "Well, what do you do with that?" We were all on the edge of our chairs. And he said, "You know, there's still a lot of people left to love."

It was extraordinary. So much forgiveness there is. Becoming wise in some kind of extraordinary way.

The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent—or she. The day they forgive them, they become an adult. The day they forgive themselves, they become wise.

And so he watches these kids grow up and learn to be something other than they thought they were, in some moving and beautiful way. He looks with those same eyes of love, choosing not to judge. One of the great Zen poets writes at the end of his life, looking at all his struggles: "My old faults—like snow falling on warm ground."

I love this line. My old faults like snow falling on warm ground. You see them. They're there. And they melt away because you're so loving, so forgiving. You learn, as Father Greg did, to tolerate the messiness of life.

So, dear friends, anything we try to do of value, anything that matters, will also be hard. We will meet obstacles.

If you're a parent, you have to protect the little ones. I have this fourteen-month-old grandson who's now learned to walk. He walks around like an Olympic athlete—*I can do it!* Pure triumph. And those strong little fingers—he will get into anything, open any cabinet, pulling at everything. The poor cat now has an enemy, because he loves the cat. He tries to grab her tail and pull the fur, and the cat's like, "Oh my God, he's out again," and she dashes away. Fortunately, the cat's faster. But you have to protect other people from him. Mostly, though, you have to protect him—from putting the wrong thing in his mouth, from hitting another kid with his blocks. All the ways you have to protect this child.

And then they kind of get a little bit more grown up, and you have to protect them in other ways—protect

them from the bullies at school, protect them from whatever comes. And then they're going to drive. Oh my God, what will we do? And then you have to talk to them about sex. They go through puberty. There are obstacles in parenting. Anybody who's ever parented knows that it's magnificent and it's also a piece of work. But you want to do it, and you've got to go through all those obstacles.

Or if you have a garden, you plant all these beautiful things and then there are the pests, and the drought, or the weeds, or a cold spell comes—climate change and all of that—or a hot spell. And you actually have to tend it. You can't just plant the seeds and hope they grow.

Or you start a business. You will have obstacles. Not enough capitalization. A key employee quits. The market changes. You know how it is.

So anything you do that has a vision—to bring a new person into the world, to plant a garden, to build a business—there will be obstacles. In Tibet, when you go to hear teachings or go to do some practice, they say there are always obstacles. And that makes it real. You have to get through the obstacles to do the thing that matters to you.

Now, in AA they also say there are no coincidences. So let me say something kind of radical—I don't even know if it's true. Maybe we as a species, at this time on the planet, need to hit bottom. That's what works in AA. I mean, we're still users. We're still using—the oil and the coal and the armies and all the other ways that we're addicts, really. And maybe all this, all that we face, is asking us to get to the very bottom of it and look anew as a human species. We have to dig deeper somehow in this and not just cover it over.

And so the despair that many people express, the anxiety, the fear, the overwhelm—we have to do something, to go deep in our own hearts and go deep in our minds as a species.

When we did a day on climate change here last year, in conjunction with Jerry Brown's climate summit in San Francisco—thank you to Jerry and to the state of California and all that it's doing—up here in front, I had a dialogue with Christina Figueres, a Costa Rican diplomat who was appointed to be the United Nations Special Representative for Climate Change. She organized the Rio summit and she organized the Paris summit.

The story she told was that as she was trying to get the Paris climate summit to happen, it got worse and worse, more and more difficult. People were recalcitrant. Nations were acting badly. She got more and more depressed and worried and afraid, and in some deep way was losing faith in the whole process.

A friend said, "You know, you need to step out of this. There's a place in southern France called Plum Village, run by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen Master." When Thich Nhat Hanh first came to San Francisco Zen Center to visit in the 80s, I met him at that time.

The abbot of the Zen Center at the time described him as a cross between a snail, because he's very slow, a cloud, because he's so empty, and a piece of heavy machinery—because there's also something about him

that's just unshakable and unstoppable.

So she went down to Plum Village for a couple of weeks or longer. And she said it changed everything. Because when she went in, the field that she was wrestling with was victims and perpetrators. Which country did it to which country? Who did it? Whose fault is it? And they were all blaming each other. When she left Thich Nhat Hanh—because he's the great teacher of interdependence—she realized we're a family. We're all related. And she changed the whole template of how she was bringing Paris together. One hundred and eighty-three countries signed the climate accord.

So there will be obstacles. And you will feel fear, anxiety, or despair. But it's not the end of the story.

Rachel Carson, the great environmentalist from fifty years ago, wrote: "If I had influence with the good fairies who preside over the birth of all children, I would simply ask that her gift to each child in the world would be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout their life."

What Christina Figueres did is what we all need to do in some way—to move from blame and judgment and anger and fear to a sense that we're in this together. To operate more from a sense of grace and mystery, because we don't know how it's going to play out, and then do something.

A French general—I think his name was Lautrey—ordered that a certain kind of olive tree be planted in the place he'd taken over after the Second World War. Some days later, he asked in an annoyed way why they weren't there in the garden yet. The gardener said, "But, you know, General, this particular species of tree takes a hundred years to mature." And he said, "In that case, plant them this morning." Let's not wait.

You come to the temple to quiet the mind, to listen deeply. You're with the complexity or stress or whatever brings you. You have a meditation practice, at least many of you do, and you use that also to get quiet. And to listen. To listen to what matters. To tend the heart. To steady the heart. And to find a kind of trust in this great mystery.

What's beautiful is to see the land now. You know how incredibly dry it was, how brown. It seemed like a desert in some way. And then a few big rainstorms came for days, and it came alive with green. All the animals here are happy. The ones in Australia are in trouble right now. But there's something about life that wants to renew itself. And the thing is, you are that life. You also are part of this renewal.

Deena Metzger, an activist and poet and friend, 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."

It's never too late to start and to do something beautiful and magnificent.

This is Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching. He said the mind and heart—the human mind and heart—is like a piece of land already planted with different kinds of seeds. Seeds of joy, peace, mindfulness, understanding, and love. Seeds of craving, anger, fear, hatred, and forgetfulness. These healthy and unhealthy seeds are always there—you may have noticed—sleeping in the soil of your own heart and

mind. The quality of your life depends on the seeds that you water. If you water a seed of peace, peace will grow. When the seeds of happiness are watered, you will become happy. When the seed of fear or anger is watered, you will become frightened or angry. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow strong.

This is the way it works for us. You become loving awareness, you look at your own life, and then you can choose what to create, how to act, what seeds you want to water.

As Wendell Berry, another great poet, says: "Be joyful, though you've considered all the facts." Because the world really is connected. And it wants to renew itself. It wants to renew itself through you.

I'm trying to consider whether to tell one more story. Ram Dass told me I tell too many stories. I said, "Ram Dass, this is like the pot calling the kettle black." But you know how it is—it's much easier to see it outside yourself than within.

So there's a woman who started a sanctuary for elephants in Tennessee. There were all these retired circus elephants and elephants that had been used in various ways. They were getting older, and she wanted to make a place that was safe for them. She got lots of acres in Tennessee—good horse country, now elephant country.

She described this story. She'd been working there for a dozen years or longer when an elephant in a zoo in Baton Rouge had gotten too old for them to take care of. A female elephant named Shirley. So Shirley was packed up in one of those big elephant trailers and brought all the way to Tennessee. They put her in an outdoor elephant pen next to where all the other elephants were, so they could get to know each other before she was released into the whole community.

Well, when Shirley arrived and the other elephants came by, she went a little berserk. She started trumpeting and stomping her feet and beating on the gates and the bars. They just couldn't figure it out. They did a little research. It turned out that thirty years before, when Shirley was just a few years old, she had been part of a group of elephants with one of the elephants that was there now, before she was sent to the zoo. She'd seen her friend. It had been thirty years, and she was just so excited.

That's what they found when they did the research. And in fact, that was the other elephant that came and poked its trunk through the bars. When they let Shirley out, those two became best friends—after thirty years.

It's mysterious. We are connected. And we can do something. It's never too late.

So here's a question. Let yourself sit quietly for a moment. What seeds do you want to water in your own heart and mind? And in this world? And what are the obstacles you'll face—the obstacles you need to overcome so that these healthy seeds, these beautiful seeds, can grow?

I have a possible suggestion for you among the seeds you might water. I'm actually going to hold up a book

from my friend Paul Hawken called *Drawdown*—a New York Times bestseller about the most comprehensive plan ever proposed to reverse global warming. After crowdsourcing it around the world to the best experts, in the back of the book is a summary of one hundred solutions to reverse global warming—not just to stop it. All kinds of things: everything from food waste to the education of women and girls, which is at the very top of the list and would change the world. Yes, there's solar and wind, but there's all kinds of other approaches too.

Pick one. Just get the book and choose which one. It doesn't matter. Pick one of the hundred. If you want something to do, there are seeds to water. I really recommend it. It gives heart instead of leaving you feeling like things are impossible. They're not.

The second book that may give you a hint is called *A Bright Future* by Joshua Goldstein and Stefan Kvist. Steven Pinker, the Harvard professor who is really an anthropologist, philosopher, and historian looking at human development over centuries, writes on the front cover that this is the most important book about climate change that he's read. On the back, James Hansen, who is the head of NASA and one of our most important climate scientists, says this lays out the only viable path proposed for rapid global decarbonization. Christine Todd Whitman says this is the path for us. And it says how some countries have solved climate change and the rest can follow. Now I have your attention.

What this is, actually, is a vision of using nuclear power—which, you know, some of us who were hippies and activists boycotted. But fourth generation nuclear power plants that don't use water, that use sodium, that are much smaller, that have a greatly decreased amount of radioactive material which can then be reused in a cycle—these are not only incredibly safer than the big old ones that have scared people, but it turns out that Sweden doesn't use coal or gas anymore, pretty much just does this. If India or China were to choose to do this, or the United States—build a thousand of these—China, no more use of coal, no more use of oil. It could entirely change the energy needed to run a country, and these can be designed in a way that doesn't add to the danger of nuclear proliferation. It's just one of the many things in *Drawdown*, but one of the more important ones.

We sit here while the fires are burning in Australia and the climate is changing in all these other places. I'm particularly aware of this at the moment because we had all our own fires last summer, didn't we? Lots of them. I want us, just before we end, to do a little bit of metta, send a little cooling love to them.

But first, a blessing from John O'Donohue:

On the day when the weight ends on your shoulders and you stumble, may the clay of the earth dance to balance you. May the nourishment of the earth be yours. May the clarity of light be yours. May the fluency of the ocean be yours. May the protection of the ancestors be yours. And so may a slow wind work these words of love around you, an invisible cloak to hold your life.

Let your eyes close again gently. Remember who you are. You are consciousness itself. You are loving

awareness inhabiting this body. You are connected to everything, not separate from it at all. You are life moving itself through you as through all the grass that shoots up from the soil. You are the web of life tending itself, and you are the vastness.

With your good heart, picture or send blessings of loving kindness and coolness and care to all the creatures, the humans and animals of Australia, all those running from these great fires. May they be cooled. May the winds abate and the heat diminish. May the fires go out, sprinkled with love and water and tears. And may life restore itself, as it will again, there and everywhere.

And finally, bring that same tenderness to your own heart, to your own body and mind. Water the seeds of your own love and courage and goodness.

Thank you for your kind attention. Thanks for singing to the baby—it's a sweet thing to do. Drive safely out there; it's crowded. Be polite with one another the best you can. And come back to Spirit Rock sometime. Let it be a place to walk the land or come on a retreat, whatever would serve you.

Thanks, and good night.

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