Calm Clarity Compassion | Monday Night Talk

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 1:10:51

So I'd like to talk tonight in a way, more or less as usual, that's a reminder to you of something that you already know—not so much new information, but rather a reminder for your own heart and your own reflection to consider: what is it that you do know? And in particular, how do we navigate through hard times, and what would it be like to be a bodhisattva in hard times?

Bodhisattva is a Buddhist term, a compound word. Bodhi means enlightened or awakened, and sattva means being. It's a being who's committed to the awakening or the alleviation of suffering for all—somebody who's committed to say, "My life, my energy, is to relieve suffering and bring wellbeing to as many beings as possible." Some little task like that.

The Dalai Lama wakes up in the morning with this beautiful prayer from Shantideva where he says: May I be a raft, a bridge, a boat to help those cross the stream of the flood. May I be a lamp for those lost in the darkness. May I be medicine for those who are sick. May I be a resting place for those who are weary. And may I do so as long as earth and sky and stars and galaxies exist, so that I can contribute to the awakening of all, for as long as mortal beings exist. Some little vow like that. Fortunately, he has lots of lifetimes to work on it. But you do too. You'll see. Big surprise here.

Aldous Huxley said that an idolatrous religion is one in which time is substituted for eternity. The religion of progress, of endless progress, is a substitution for the mystery that we exist at all—that the stars exist and that life takes all these forms. Endless progress. Remember when computers were going to mean you'd have lots of free time? How has that worked out for you?

An idolatrous religion in which time is substituted for eternity. And we're in the cycle in California. The hills are still green and the plum trees and the quince pop their blossoms. As Pablo Neruda wrote, you can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the spring. There is a regeneration. There's something about life itself that wants to renew itself and that will have its way no matter what. And we get to pause for a moment and look at that plum tree or those quince flowers or hear the bird song. They're more active now. They're singing because they're happy.

So this is a good evening to come to Spirit Rock as well because there's a lot going on out there, and it's a good time to pause and feel, as you quiet down, that sense of loving awareness that is who you really are—a sense of vastness or perspective, timelessness. That famous Ojibwa saying: sometimes I go about pitying myself when all the while I'm being carried by great winds across the sky. To have that perspective.

And yes, we're in volatile times. There's the pandemic—coronavirus is coming to visit your town soon, probably. And then there's politics, in case you haven't noticed. All of that going on, and climate change, and refugees—partly all connected as a matter of fact, all those climate refugees and more—and continuing warfare, and continuing divisiveness, and continuing racism. It's a really uncertain time.

How do we navigate it as human beings? What's really our way in uncertain times?

The vast perspective. The image I like was from Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, who wrote: when the crowded Vietnamese refugee boats met with storms or pirates—and as I say this now, I think of the refugee boats in the Mediterranean trying to get to Europe, trying to get to Lesbos in Greece or to Sicily in Italy or across past Gibraltar; there are refugees in boats everywhere—when the crowded Vietnamese refugee boats met with storms or pirates, if everyone panicked, all would be lost. But if even one person on the boat remained centered and calm, it was enough. It showed the way for everyone to survive.

That's the image, in his both profound and poetic voice, to say: rough seas, this is your time. This is your time to be that person on the boat.

I think about my dear friend, someone I admire a lot, named A.T. Ariyaratne, who is the Gandhi of Sri Lanka. He's now in his eighties. He's been nominated for the Nobel Prize many times. He's gotten other great awards for being the best community organizer in all of Asia. I think about being with him in Singapore at a big conference a couple of years ago.

And the conference—it was a Wisdom 2.0 conference, a lovely gathering—was full of tech titans and CEOs and powerful leaders and brilliant people. And then Ari got up. He's a little bit soft-spoken, his voice gentle but clear. He stood there and said, "There's another way that we human beings have. There's the way of greed, the way of hatred, the fear and ignorance—and that's rampant. But I want you to remember that there is another way."

And he spoke as you find in one of the Buddhist texts: "Others will be harsh. I will respond with compassion. Others will be greedy. I will be generous. Others will speak falsehoods. I will speak the truth. Others may be arrogant. I will practice humility. Others will lack understanding. I will develop wisdom."

He said it in such a kind way. He just looked at people and said, "This is who you can be." And it was so different than all the other leaders who were there, because it was like he was speaking from his heart to the heart of the others who were present.

Now, in Sri Lanka there had been for some decades a quite terrible civil war. And Ari, who was a community organizer and a peacemaker, took into his home at times, as a sanctuary, leaders from the Muslim community—even though he was a Buddhist leader—or from the Tamil Hindu community where the war and conflict raged. I remember hearing through friends that the Sri Lankan military police came to raid his house at one point. They knew he had some leaders from the Tamil Tigers and from the Muslim community, and they wanted to get at them. But Ari was gone, and so was his wife. The only people left

home were his kids.

So his eldest daughter opened the door. She didn't unlock the grill, but she opened the door, and they said, "We know you have these people and we want them." And his daughter looked back and said, "If my father were here, he would say you have to kill him first. But he's not here. And if my mother were here, she would say you have to kill her first. But she's not here. So I'm sorry to say you will have to kill me, for I will not unlock this door."

Quite a family.

He created Sarvodaya, an organization that organized the villages of Sri Lanka. He was a high school teacher in the fanciest prep school in Colombo, and his students were the children of the generals and the ministers. He took them out to the lowest caste forest villages. And you'd think he took them out to help them, but he didn't. He took them out there and asked the villagers to teach these kids. The kids thought they were going to do something for the villagers, but instead the villagers taught them how to use machetes and how to open coconuts and cut bamboo and thatch things and create things. And then the villagers, who were very poor, put on a big banquet for the kids.

He flipped it. Because he wanted the kids to understand that everybody has something beautiful to give to this world.

And he began Sarvodaya. As an organization, they dug wells and built schools and built roads in villages until it eventually spread to more than half the communities in the entire country. And he said, "We're not digging wells and building roads and building schools for education or water. We're doing that so that people can love each other. That's really our purpose." His purpose was to empower people so that they would be empowered to live in a different way and respect one another.

Toward the end of the civil war, the Norwegians tried to broker a peace. And there was a peace for a certain time. To support the peace treaty, Ari called all the followers of Sarvodaya to a grand meeting in honor of Anuradhapura, at the most famous and oldest temple in Sri Lanka. Six hundred and fifty thousand people came—in a country that only has eighteen million people. A huge number.

And he got up and said, "We have an opportunity for peace. I'd like to talk to you about peace. In the Buddhist teachings, it's understood that those who are not yet wise look at the circumstances that they see now. But those who are wise look at the causes and conditions that create the circumstance rather than reacting to them. And if we step back and look with this vaster perspective, we can see that it took five hundred years to get into this civil war. Five hundred years of conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims and the Buddhists."

400 years of colonial oppression, from the British particularly. 150 years of economic disparity between the rich wet parts and the poor dry parts of the island. He described more of the conditions, and then he said, "So it will take us 500 years to undo this. And I offer you the Sarvodaya 500-year peace plan: 10 years

of ceasefire, 20 years of rebuilding roads and schools, 50 years of learning each other's languages and traditions, a 100-year economic plan to include everyone. And after 100 years, we'll have a council and see how we're doing—and then we'll do it four more times."

When I heard this, I could have wept. I actually got the chance to tell this story to the Dalai Lama, which was a really cool thing to do, because he has his own suffering to figure out how to hold in this world. Because it wasn't the voice of somebody who's worried about the next election. It wasn't a voice of somebody doing focus groups. It was the voice of an elder who was willing to say, "Here's what's true, and here's the direction that we need to turn our consciousness and our heart." That's why at that conference in Sri Lanka, there were all these CEOs of giant companies and ministers—and then there was Ari. He just spoke from a different place.

The other night, I did some teaching online, naturally, for a large group of people in China who were quarantined and interested in meditation. They had read books of mine that are translated in Chinese, and so I tried to give them teachings that I thought might be helpful.

First, I talked about how the Buddha's teachings instruct us to tend those who are sick as if they were the Buddha himself—to tend ourselves, to tend one another, to bring the care for yourself and another together. Then I talked to them about using the circumstances they had been given. I said, "All right, it's enforced on you. What are you going to do with a month or two of this kind of time where you can't go out?" I was trying to make a little joke out of it. I said, "I just need to tell you, we have 100 people at Spirit Rock and 100 to 200 people in our center in Massachusetts who've just paid $2,000 to $3,000 to be here for two or three months, not allowed to talk to anybody. You get it for free! What do you want to do with that? You could sit there and bemoan your fate, or you could take this time and turn it into something that's really of value to your heart."

And we talked about the kinds of practices of compassion and loving-kindness. I said, "You have this Chinese treasure house that comes from thousands of years of contemplative life. And you know, the things that you value—the Tao Te Ching that Lao Tzu left, Chuang Tzu's writings, and the writings of Confucius—they didn't come out of nowhere. They came because of these people, the nuns and the monks, who sat quietly and listened deeply to the turning of the seasons, to the joys and sorrows that you're now confronted with. And they found a timeless wisdom. Now it's your turn. Now it's your time to do this."

And inside yourself—well, as the poet Kabir says, "Inside this clay jug are canyons and pine mountains. All seven oceans are inside. And the one who judges jewels, and the music from the strings of the spheres—all this is inside." Volumes of poetry are in you, yet unwritten. The music, the creativity, the longing, the vision. You don't have to go out. You can also go in.

So we talked about all of that. And then we talked about the bodhisattva—and in particular, about alleviating suffering. The vow of the bodhisattva is: if there's a place of suffering, sign me up. I'll go there. And you have all these stories about bodhisattvas saying, "Oh, there's the epidemic," or "There's the

war"—and "I will go there and do what I can to alleviate suffering." Which is to say that the difficulties become the perfect place to grow the great heart of compassion. Where else could you do it better than in times of difficulty? In the community, in the nation, in the globe, the climate—all of these things.

And this is your lineage as well as those in China. It's the lineage of not just survivors, but of humanity that has triumphed in different ways and made beautiful communities over thousands of years. We know how to do this. We know how to practice. Practices of love and witnessing and freedom. Becoming loving awareness.

So what does this have to do with climate change? Here's Paul, my friend, sitting here. We'll get to it. They're completely connected. We're all in it together, whether it's the virus or the climate. It's us, baby. We're all in it together—the refugees, the illness, the loss of species, the loss of homes.

There's a general feeling in many places of anxiety. It might feel like it's too big. Climate change. Despairing. Hopeless. Politics stokes fear—you know it does. That's how politics works. Let's make you afraid. They want you to be afraid, actually. Don't buy it.

Cristina Figueres, who you probably know, was here when we were talking about climate change last year. She's the UN special envoy for climate change who helped organize both the Rio climate summit and the Paris climate summit. She talked about how she'd become despairing and despondent as she was trying to get Paris underway—186 countries. There was so much conflict and difficulty that she became really depressed and felt undermined. "I can't do this."

Someone said to her, "You know, there's this little place in the south of France run by this Vietnamese monk. His name is Thich Nhat Hanh. Plum Village, I think it's called. Maybe you should go there. It might help you."

So she described going to Plum Village because she didn't know what else to do. Profoundly depressed. And after some weeks in Plum Village, she said her whole consciousness changed. She got quiet. She practiced as we did tonight. And she said, "I realized that most of the climate accord problems were based on the model of victim and perpetrator. Who was doing it to whom? Who owed whom? Who was the bad guy?"—I'll leave it in the masculine; it belongs there—"Who were the good girls or whatever?"

Then she realized we can't do this that way. This is really how we got stuck. Her whole consciousness changed, and she said, "We're a family. It's not victim and perpetrator, it's us." Somehow that revelation changed her psyche and her heart, and she was able to go back to Paris and pull together 185 countries in this remarkable way.

Now, Paul, who wrote or pulled together, among other things, *Drawdown*, which I mentioned to you—in a crowdsourcing way, he got people all over the world to contribute to the possibilities of not just stopping but reversing climate change. In the end, there's this amazing list of the hundred solutions, ranked by the most effective. How many gigatons of carbon will it take out of the atmosphere? How likely is it to do?

What are the political ramifications? What will it cost? And so forth.

It's practical. And it's also incredibly empowering, like Ari Ratana was empowering people to say, "It's in your hands." Because in the top ten, it's not just nuclear or wind—it's food waste in the top ten, and agricultural practices. The top technological one is refrigeration.

All the chlorofluorocarbons in every little ice cream maker and air conditioner in Buenos Aires and Pakistan and so forth—when those gases get released, if we don't have a simple technology which is easy to distribute that will transform those gases, they will undo all the wind or solar power you can build. So there's a tremendous amount of understanding in this work.

But the thing that's most moving to me is that in the top ten or fifteen solutions, if you take two of the things that belong together, they become the number one intervention before nuclear or wind or solar: the education and empowerment of women and girls. That would do more to reverse climate change than anything else on the planet. Yes, it's partly family planning, but in Kenya, half of the economy is being conducted by women on smartphones, and they make entirely different decisions about what to plant and what to sell and what their family should do, how they relate in the community—all of it because they're getting educated.

I just came back from Hawaii where I was part of the memorial for Ram Dass. Very moving. I talked about Ram Dass last month. One thing I wanted to say, because he inspired so much and he was so amazingly loving by the end of his life—he just loved everyone. You could feel it. You'd come by and it was like the love machine. Everybody vibrated, and in the room without him there was so much love because his picture was there.

And Krishna Das, this wonderful kirtan singer and musician many of you may know, said the line I liked best in the whole memorial. He said, "I met Ram Dass when I was eighteen years old. He'd just come back from India. He was Baba Ram Dass with his beard and his robes and beads, teaching. And I heard him teach and I was so inspired." He was an amazingly inspiring orator and teacher. "So I started to get to know him and then I followed him to India." And Krishna Das paused for a bit and he said, "And now, forty years later, I'm happy to say that Ram Dass became the person we thought he was when we met him."

Which is a really amazing thing to say. In India, they say there are three things to keep at a certain distance: fire, the government, and spiritual teachers. You don't want to get too close. But in any case, Ram Dass became that. He became who we thought he was.

The thing is that you can become that too, and I can, and Paul can. That's the beautiful thing. It's not just Ram Dass. The game is really to be empowered, and you can choose to act in this world. In fact, if you don't, it's because you've chosen not to act. You can choose to quiet your mind, tend your heart, and become the vastness that you really are, the loving awareness. And then you can get up and you can be

empowered. The world needs you to add your voice and your heart and to make a difference. Probably more than ever right now.

And as you do it, be courageous and strong, but—because things are tough and they're going to get tougher with the epidemic and politics and all that—be extra polite. Extra courteous. Respectful and patient. Because people are afraid. And you don't have to be. You can trust. You see the spring come back, and that's your ally. You can trust that the world wants to regenerate.

Try podcast number 78. It's not too good, it's phenomenal. "Meets the Lord of Death." I mean, it is spellbinding—absolutely stand-up comedy Buddhism. You can't do any better.

And thank you so much for that. I feel like I've come through the looking glass. I've heard every one of the podcasts, sometimes more than once. So I'm sitting here with this sort of feeling that some night I'll turn on a podcast and say, "Oh my God, it's me." I'm so shaken up by that, but I'm so grateful that you want to listen to me tonight. Thank you for inviting me. I'm very glad you're here.

So—how many people are anxious, concerned, uneaseful, worried, fearful? There are other adjectives, but you know what they are. About climate change or global warming. Raise your hand. Okay, that's good. How many aren't? Okay. Can we talk afterwards? I want to know what you know.

It's really something. I'm so glad the worry bin is full.

Here's the most important question: How many people think the climate is absolutely perfect?

Ah, yes. You all should have raised your hands. You really should have. It is absolutely perfect. It doesn't have any choice in this matter at all, by the way. It is doing exactly what the climate has done for a billion years, which is respond and change. Get warmer, get colder, do ice ages, blow everything out, try it again, start over. The climate is perfect. Talk about blessings.

When you hear the term "climate change," which has become a standard phrase, the climate is *supposed* to change every nanosecond. And that's what it does, and it does it so well. If it didn't, we wouldn't have seasons, food, animals, critters, biodiversity, and beauty. The change is what causes that.

I'm the same person who raised their hand for the first question, and still am to this day, by the way. Every morning I have these RSS feeds that come in, and I cannot read them at night—I don't sleep well. So I read them in the morning. I can have the whole day to try to integrate and incorporate them. And there's always something saying, "Oh no, don't say that. Wait, we're losing our cloud cover." No, please, scientists, this can't be true. So you see this incremental expansion of the predictions of what an interesting predicament we have created for ourselves.

But for me—I'm not a scientist, I'm an English major—I have for two decades now, or more actually, been looking at and parsing how we talk to each other about this. The language itself. And for me, it just didn't make sense.

And it's interesting because prior to that, the word *sustainability* was being used everywhere around the environment. It became what's called a weasel word, which meant it means anything to whoever's using it, however they define it stipulatively. So it had no meaning.

When people used to ask me what sustainability meant, because of the influence of my teachers, I said it means alleviating the suffering of all beings. That's what sustainability means. And that took care of that one. Then we could go on talking about how to do that.

But around climate, I felt like what is so beautiful about the way we talk about it is emblematic of the cause. In other words, the semantics or the wordings that we use commonly, that the media uses, actually tells us what the cause is. And those words are war metaphors and sports metaphors. Very male. Fight climate change. Combat climate change. Tackle climate change. The climate crusade. Is there anybody here of Arabic origin? I mean, you might as well say Holocaust when you say crusade. That's a horrific event in human history. And these are the words we're using.

Well, what do they tell us? What they tell us is that we are othering a miracle. Climate is a miracle. And we're using language which the egoic mind always does—making a separation between self and other, object and subject. So that is the cause. That's where it came from. That's how we did it. We othered the natural world. We othered Native Americans. We othered other races—racism. We othered religions—Islamophobia. We othered women, apparently for at least two and a half thousand years, maybe longer, I don't know. But now we have Me Too. It's just such a humble phrase when you think about it. Just "me too."

All of this is about seeing it as other.

Occasionally now, when I'm in an audience, I'll ask people to do this—just wave their arms around—and they don't want to do it. I say, "No, go ahead, do it. Just close your eyes, just dork out and do it." And they do. And I ask them, "What do you feel?" And they say, "Air." And I say, "No, that's the atmosphere. The thing that you're going to tackle." And this idea that we don't influence it—I just did. I exhaled CO2. Boom.

When you understand it and see it that way, the inextricability and interdependence between all these things we name, we label them, but they're inseparable. Whether it's climate, weather, atmosphere, and this miracle we call life—it's the same thing. They're vastly dependent on each other. Biosphere creates climate, climate creates the biosphere, biosphere affects climate, biosphere affects the atmosphere. It's this beautiful dance that has been going on for billions of years.

So *Drawdown* the book, for me, was really a plea in 2001 to scientists and NGOs and academics. What I was simply asking was: Can we just find out what to do? I don't know what to do. And there was no list of what to do, how much it costs, what impact it will have. This was when the third assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change came out, and each one is more sobering than the prior one. Everyone I spoke to said, "That's a great idea. We don't do that. Why don't you do that?" I said, "I don't

know how to do that. That's why I'm asking you."

And there it went. For years and years, I stopped asking.

And then in 2013, Bill McKibben wrote a piece called "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math." And it did terrify people. It was a good piece—he's a good writer. And people came to me and said, "It's game over. I'm going to move to British Columbia, take the kids, whatever. It's over. It's done. We tried. We worked hard." They were—the people who came to me were those people, the ones who had worked hard.

And what I felt then was that when people surrendered—when there was actually a surrender, "game over, we give up"—that it's actually an opening. It's really an opening for consciousness and awareness, because you know you don't know anymore.

And so, as Jack said, I knew that I couldn't do it. Even if I could, if you had a white male saying, "I know what the answers are, listen up"—that would have all the credibility of a lentil. The only way to create something that had some substance and credibility was to reach out as a community, as a collaboration, so that all the voices are being heard and working together. As opposed to what we often see now—and I understand their leadership—but I think that age of the white charismatic male vertebrate is over. Thank you, you've done enough damage.

Going forward, it's not to obviate or diminish the role of the male so much as to diminish the role of othering—of the male as an identity unto itself. And so that is where the language, the sciences, and the so-called actions come from.

What Doron did is put the word out all over the world asking for research fellows, Drawdown fellows. Almost half women, twenty-one countries, every major religion and some minor ones, White House fellows, Areca Con Award winners—just an extraordinary group of people came forth. And we worked together for three years. Drawdown is the result.

I authored most of it, but I authored it from theses that had been done by these research fellows—five, ten thousand word theses on each solution. Extraordinary work that they did. Half are PhDs, post-docs, double degrees—they're amazing people. But I was also the editor, which is what it says on the cover.

What I didn't say to anybody—and maybe I should have, but I didn't—is that the book was a technique. It wasn't just a book.

The first thing: the cover had to have the problem and the solution, both. It can't be just "Uninhabitable Earth" or "The End of Ice."

Number two: it had to be a collaboration, so that it had some credibility.

Three: no fear, no doom, no threat to motivate. It doesn't work, so it was an easy choice. We know that from every neuroscientist alive. And yet we still try to employ that as a way to get people excited about

things and to do something.

Also, no blame, no shame, no finger pointing, no demonization of anyone.

The next thing: never say that you're right. Don't be right about anything. Be helpful, share information, have citations—but it says right in the introduction: "This is not right. We hope it's approximately right. You be the judge." Because as soon as you're right, you've made somebody wrong. You divide.

So next: no divisions. Don't divide the world.

And again, it's about verbs—about combating, tackling, fighting. All those verbs divide the world, divide it up. So we didn't do that. And then we tried to make it beautiful. In other words, to make the imagery so that solution number six—educating and empowering girls—is the most beautiful Kenyan girl you've ever seen, standing there with this grin on her face in front of a blackboard, instead of just black and white words about educating girls. Factoid, factoid, factoid. We told stories. And facts don't change people's minds. Only stories do. Only storytellers do.

That's why I'm a junkie for stories. Ramana said I tell too many stories, but that's it. I said, "Pot calling the kettle—we've got a little of that going on here."

The point is that with Dharana, we were trying to enter into the stream, the river—to enter that river of confusion, of anxiety, of concern, which is very justified, by the way, by the science. It makes sense if you're worried and concerned, of course. It doesn't make sense to be attached to it, but that's another subject. So how to enter into that stream in a way that actually was spacious, to create spaciousness for people.

And what's happened is that it is taught in every grade level in the United States—from fourth grade, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh—all the way to MIT graduate school. The same book. The fourth graders cut it up into pictures and then actually dress up as solutions and try to have their friends guess what the solution is and what it does. I mean, that's how they use the book. I have no idea what they do at MIT. I'm sure it's rigorous. But the fourth graders will dress up as a pea and a carrot, you know, peas and carrots. And they'll say, "Oh, that's a plant-rich diet! Yes, you won."

I remember somebody asking me once in a talk. He was in the back of the room, and it was being televised, live streamed, but the streaming had stopped. It was an hour, and there were still hands up, so the moderator called on this person. And he was—I can't even do it to you, but I'll do it here—he was pointing, jabbing his finger at me like this, which is beautiful because it's universally a bad thing to do in every country in the world. I understood it. But he was saying in a very confrontive voice, "What do you say to the NASCAR people, huh? Like, huh? You're talking to the choir here, you know."

And I said what I always say when somebody asks a question, which is, "What a good question." Every question is a great question, because if it's genuine, it's a good question. And I thought about it. I said, "I'd

probably ask him if he favored Kyle Busch or Chase Elliott for the championship." He looked at me like, why? What do you mean? Why would you say that? I said, "The implication of your question is that it's my job to change somebody else's mind. And that's not my job. My job is to change my own. And that's hard enough, I tell you that."

And so in this movement, this climate movement so-called, I just feel like there's a quality that comes from practice, from sitting, from meditation, from sanghas, that is remarkably more effective than the activity that is being engendered because it's a climate emergency, it's a climate crisis. And so therefore the amygdala responds and you think, "Well, I've got to do something quickly, and it's got to have a big impact." And then you start to feel all that anxiety—and you know you're off base as soon as you feel it, but you might continue to do it anyway because it's such a big emergency.

The quote I mentioned – there was a beautiful quote from William Stafford that I brought with me in my notes. I never have notes, but I brought notes for this. It says: "The things you do not have to say make you rich. Saying things you do not need to say weakens your talk. Hearing things you do not need to hear dulls your hearing. And the things you know before you hear them, those are you. Those are why you're in the world."

Which is such straight-up Theravada – like the one who knows, you know.

And from my perspective, Regeneration – the next book – is really about trying to draw out what we do know. We know what to do and we know how to do it. What we have not been called to is to come together in ways that are honoring, respectful, and listening-based.

The emphasis is on not the future. You heard in the last Democratic debate – every single candidate talked about future existential threat. It's burnished on their cortex now. But it's not about future existential threat. That's just in your mind. It's good science, but it's not a place to dwell.

What Regeneration says is this: if we're going to reverse this climate crisis, we have to pay attention to current human needs. If humanity isn't paying attention – which it's not really – it's because we're not paying attention to humanity. If the climate movement isn't directed toward the needs of the vulnerable and the impoverished and the disenfranchised and those who are suffering right now – who will suffer more from changes in weather, rain, drought, food, war, migration – then we're not serious about it.

This is not a top-down solution. This is not going to come from the top. I love that people get together every year in four- and five-star hotels from 186 countries to meet about it. That's great. And with all due respect to Christiana, who's an amazing woman, nothing is going to happen from that. You can count on it. It's been going on for twenty-five years, and the atmosphere hasn't noticed yet.

The reason for that is that these gatherings have no agency. A confluence has no agency. You do. You do. All agency comes from an individual initially. And it becomes a dyad and a group and a community and a gathering. And sometimes it becomes a movement.

Simultaneously to this, around 2001, I wondered: Where do movements come from? How are they begun? How do they start? I want to tell you how the Civil Rights Movement began, because I was a part of it. I wanted to follow the breadcrumb trail back as far as it could go to see where it originated.

Where it originated – literally – is Ralph Waldo Emerson's father, who was a pastor, giving Ralph Waldo Emerson a copy of the Bhagavad Gita. When Emerson read it, he wrote that he put it on par with the Bible in terms of its spiritual importance.

Emerson then becomes a pastor himself, and he marries this wonderful young woman. He's twenty-three, she's eighteen, and within about a year and a half, she dies.

And he is just heart-stricken in grief and sadness. His friends say, "Go to Europe, get out of here, get out of Boston, go there."

So he starts in the boot of Italy, and he goes up, meeting Wadsworth and all these amazing people. But then he goes to Paris, and those who've been to Paris near Notre Dame know that just down the river is the botanical garden—but then it was called the Jardin des Plantes. It was run by the Jussieu family, and the Jussieus, before Wallace and Darwin, actually had a way of organizing botanicals and all the pieces and parts that were coming in from all over the world from explorers, so-called explorers. They had a topology and organized it so that when you went in, you saw this little wing and a bigger wing and wings and colors and so forth, the same with plants.

Emerson went there and he was blown away. You should read his journal that night. It's like, for the first time ever, he is joyous. He has seen the web of life, and he realizes that all of life is interconnected, interdependent, mutually arising. He just cannot write enough and keeps going on and on. Then when he comes back to the States, he writes the book *Nature*, which is an extraordinary book to this day, by the way. Extraordinary.

As soon as it's published, one of the first people to buy it is Henry David Thoreau. He graduates from Harvard and goes to Emerson and says, "What should I do, what should I do?" Emerson says, "Keep a journal"—which he did for thousands of pages, six thousand pages. But then he builds this little cabin on Emerson's land on Walden Pond.

A friend of mine said, "You know, I collect books that were owned by the transcendentalists. Let me send this one to you." It was over Thoreau's head on the shelf in his cabin at Walden Pond—by R. Spence Hardy, called *A Manual of Buddhism*. It has his margin notes in it. We don't know that story well, but North Boston in the 1870s was like Boulder. You could buy mala beads and Buddhas—you probably couldn't get Buddha bobbleheads like you can now, but you could get everything at that time. There was this just amazing efflorescence of Buddhism in the Northeast.

But it's pertinent because in 1846, Thoreau was walking to town and he was arrested by the sheriff of Middlesex County for not paying his poll tax. He didn't pay his poll tax because the poll tax barred African

Americans from voting—which, Republicans are still working on that to this day. So he was arrested. His sister brought him some hot chocolate. He was let out the next day. But then he gave a talk at the Concord Lyceum, basically saying: when the government is unjust, the just person is in jail.

What he did is he took the shame and the ignominy of being in jail and flipped it—flipped it into something of a badge of courage and a badge of honor.

Four years after he died, there is this essay of his—the essay that he wrote, except it's called "Civil Disobedience." He never said the word. He never wrote it. No one knows where it came from to this day.

That was 1866, and then in 1906, this skinny little lawyer in Durban, South Africa, is meeting with a thousand Hindus and Muslims. They have decided to basically oppose the Black Act—which is basically apartheid and registration—and they agree to get arrested. Gandhi goes home that night and says, "We agreed to, but I'm going to get disbarred. I just got my—I'm just able to practice now. And I'll go home to my family and this and that. We've all agreed to get arrested."

Somebody from the *Durban Times*—we don't know when—gave Mohandas Gandhi the essay on civil disobedience. They got arrested, and he held it up as he went into jail in South Africa.

That is so important because when Martin Luther King was appointed the head of the Montgomery boycott, he hadn't really had it. Joanne Robinson had it.

That was because Rosa Parks wouldn't give up her seat. And why didn't she give up her seat? Not because she was lazy or tired that night, but because she had been trained at the Highlander Institute in Tennessee, paid for by Clifford and Virginia Durr, who were still trying to get poll taxes taken away even then, in 1955. She learned nonviolence because Miles Horton had studied with Gandhi. And so when she didn't give up her seat, she was practicing nonviolent resistance—satyagraha—which is what Gandhi created.

And that's how King got hired and came to Montgomery. Within two months, they had blown up his front porch with his wife and children in it, and he went crazy. He was just so upset about it. He tried to get a license to get a gun. The sheriff wouldn't give it to him, but he had guns in the house. He had African-Americans who had rifles. He was armed.

And Bayard Rustin came down. Bayard Rustin was the most beautiful—I had a chance to meet him—just forget African-American. Man, you'll never meet. He happened to be an African-American. Spoke the King's English. Was tall. Could sing, act—he was just an extraordinary human being. And he was gay. Well, you never sent Bayard Rustin down to the South unless it was really, really important because he was so vulnerable because of that.

He brought to Martin Luther King—he sat down like this, he sat down and said, "What's that?" He pulled out a gun. "What are you doing?" King said, "Well, I'm defending my wife and children." And Rustin said,

"No, haven't you heard of Gandhi?" "Yeah, I've heard of him." And so Rustin got a Methodist preacher there, and he came over and gave King the autobiography of Gandhi and the copy of Civil Disobedience. And that Sunday—you can read that sermon—that completely changed Martin Luther King's career.

Why do I tell this story? Because it's not about King or Parks. It's not about Gandhi. It's not about Thoreau. It's not about Emerson. They would be magnificent people no matter what happened. What I'm telling you about—who renamed the essay? We don't know. Who gave Gandhi the essay? We don't know. We know who Joanne Robinson is, but nobody knows her. She was the one who organized the Montgomery bus boycott. She was the one who brought in Martin Luther King. I can name more and more names.

What I'm saying is we have so little control, but we do control a couple things: our intention, our ability to let go, to forgive, and to be generous. Those things we can control. And I feel like the way a movement starts is so mysterious that it's not knowable. You can't plan it, but you can embody it.

And I feel like what we face in terms of global warming—if you describe it and get into the science—it is almost science fiction in its nightmarish qualities going forward. We face thirty years, no matter what we do. We face thirty, forty years of severe changes on the planet. There's nothing we can do about it right now. It's locked in. It's baked.

So to Jack's point: Who are we going to be? Who are we?

She has this wonderful flip—it's a prepositional flip. And the question is: Is climate change happening *to* you, or *for* you? It's a fair question.

Because if it's happening *to* you—if you're the object, the victim—you're going to blame, you're going to finger point. You're going to live in that mind. And that mind is going to see itself as separate, and therefore impacted, hurt, or harmed.

But if it's happening *for* you—which it is, by the way—it's a blessing. Global warming is a total blessing. Why? Because it's feedback. It's beautiful feedback. And any system that ignores feedback perishes. So it is a gift. And if it's for you, then you can take one hundred percent responsibility, stop finger pointing, not blame anybody, and you are free to innovate, to imagine, to generate, to create whatever it is you can do in this world that makes a difference. And you do it not because you're afraid, but for the only reason that this will be upheld by humanity—you do it out of love.

For me, if you doubt it, fall in love with what's outside. Fall in love with the critters, the creatures. Fall in love with everything you see right now. Springtime is the best of all in some ways. And it's out of that love of the living world that we achieve transcendence and a sense of... Like the thing Stafford said: the thing you don't need to hear is who you are. And what you don't need to hear out there is something nobody will tell you—that you are the miracle as well, as is your heart, as is everything we do together.

For me, regeneration is really about stopping degeneration. Come on, let's stop. We've done it. How is it

working for us? It's not working so well. And it's about turning around.

I could talk more about that some other time. But that's why I'm a podcast junkie—because I get fed. I need to be fed. I get all the science in the morning, and then I get all the Dharma at night. I think it's a good mixture. Anyway, I just want to thank you all for who you are and what you do.

Thank you.

So Paul told me a story—we just have a few more minutes—about the publication of *Drawdown*. Now he's working on regeneration, and the words of empowerment and the stories he's telling tonight are such a reminder to us. But when this book was about to be published, or when they were considering it at Penguin Press, there were a lot of doubts, you said.

The accountant said, "Oh my God, it's got all these color pages in it, it's really expensive." And then apparently: it's on one hundred percent recycled paper, and it's not a hardback, so the *New York Times* won't review it. There were many, many critiques of all kinds.

You can tell the rest of the story.

My editor—I'd had him for thirty years; I'm kind of a dog that way, so loyal—he's the fifth publisher he's been with, but he didn't really want to publish it. He was getting a lot of negative feedback about the cost and promotion. It wouldn't get reviewed. They have to print fifteen thousand copies at a time, and climate books don't sell, and they're going to sit in the warehouse and be remaindered—all that sort of stuff.

When they publish a book at Penguin Random House, it's a circle. It's by consensus. Everybody has something to say—promotion, production, academics, editorial. And they kept going around for a year, not making any decisions. Everybody was being equivocal. No one wanted to say yes or no, but nobody was saying yes.

They had a final meeting. We had made the book ourselves—set it to type, everything—so we didn't need anything from them except to put it on the press. And the publisher of Penguin is a woman, Catherine Court. I didn't know this story until after the book was published. But she listened to all the conversation—she's a really lovely woman, very dignified and humble.

And she said, "May I ask one question?" And she's the CEO, so yes, you can ask the question. She said, "Tell me this—if we don't publish this book, why are we here at all?"

And it was a New York Times bestseller the first week. It was so interesting because everybody at Penguin was suddenly taking credit. Success has many authors, as you know.

And I asked Paul to tell that story because—why are we here? Why are we here? Why are we here?

I'm grateful for the work and the vision and the inspiration, and for the breadcrumbs, because you're adding your breadcrumbs to the common trail that we're on. And at this time, it feels really important that we practice—practice centering yourself, quieting your mind, tending your heart, being that person on the boat—and then offering your gifts to the world.

So let's just sit for a few seconds, quiet.

May you carry your beauty out into the world.

Thank you.

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