Reconciliation

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 53:29

So tonight, following that meditation, which touches me when I do it—I can feel the distance between different groups and the wish that they be reconciled—I'd like to speak about reconciliation.

It sounds like a Senate procedure at the moment, given what's going on in Washington, D.C. But there's a deeper meaning to it. And as I often say for these evening teachings, let yourself listen in a meditative way, to reflect, to notice if there's something that touches you, that seems important or right or truthful to you, that you already know in your heart, and let that be so. And if it doesn't seem right, just let it go. You become the wise one even as you listen.

It seems important to talk about reconciliation. At least it seemed that way to me as I was getting ready for this evening, because there's a lot of conflict out there. And conflict is natural. It's not even that it's a bad thing.

I remember working one day a week in a preschool, and a lot of the work there—alongside all the wonderful creativity of children—was also reconciliation, because the kids would get in conflict. "It's my toy!" "You had it too long, now it's my turn!" "You got a bigger cookie than I did!" So it starts early. It's because we have different needs and ideas and visions.

When they would really get upset and hit each other with blocks or bite one another, you get down on your knees, as I would, and you'd look at them and say, "How are you feeling? Angry? Frustrated? What's going on for you? What hurts or what's upset you?" And then you'd say, "You can use your words. Use your words."

I think maybe we should go to the capital of the US and some of the other great political centers in the world with big signs that say "Use your words," rather than all the other ways that people are trying to solve conflict.

But conflict is there. And it's even there in spiritual communities, as you might well know, because conflict really starts in the heart with our attachments and our needs and our desires.

This is particularly a divided time where there are different beliefs and views about the pandemic, or climate change, or racial and social justice, or how we go forward—certainly in the US as a country, but also in other parts of the world. We need to pause for a moment and reflect. With all these conflicts that are here with us, that surround us really, what is it that matters?

This is from Robert Kennedy, not long before he was assassinated. He was talking in 1968 about the state

of the nation, when our prosperity was measured by the number of telephones and televisions in the household, by gross national product. He said this:

"Our Gross National Product does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It allows neither for the justice in our courts nor for the justice of our dealings with each other. The Gross National Product measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

When I hear that, I think: What is it that really does matter to us? This vision is needed more than ever in the midst of our difficulties.

Some years ago, I was on a retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh at the Green Gulch Zen Center. A small group of us who had been teachers or colleagues were with him. He was giving some teaching about smiling, as he did—that kind of half smile of the Buddha that he puts on—and talking about joy. I sat near him and listened. And as I did, I got very sad. I felt a kind of grief in my heart. I was confused because he was talking about being joyful and happy, and yet here I felt this great wave of grief.

We had lunch together, Thich Nhat Hanh and a few of us. And I asked him, in my confusion, "Thay, when you talked about joy, I felt this deep sorrow. And what I want to know is, is it mine? Or is it yours? Am I picking it up from you?"

He paused. His eyes got kind of moist, and he said, "Oh, it's mine." He said, "I've seen so much sorrow and suffering. That's why I must teach joy."

If you remember, when he first came to the US, he met Martin Luther King back in the 1960s and wrote this book, *Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. He was one of the young Vietnamese leaders trying to bring peace in a divided country. He started the School of Youth for Social Services—clinics, rebuilding schools and things that had been bombed.

But when I heard the story, I also heard that many of the young people who came to work with him were killed, because both sides—the North and the South—considered people who were making peace traitors. And I began to think: what would it be like to bring young people together and know that some of them were going to die? And then I see Thich Nhat Hanh walking, holding the hands of children, which he always did in his walking meditation—the innocence of a new generation, the trust. He said, no matter what has happened, we need to water seeds of peace and joy.

And this was the same for the Buddha. Many, many years before, there was a war building up between the Koliyas and the Sakyas over water in a dry season—who would get the water from the river that divided their countries, not unlike these days. The Buddha went to the kings who were about to make battle and asked them some questions. He asked, "If I have a jar of water, is it precious?" And they said, "Yes." He said, "If I have a jar of water and it becomes blood, is it precious?" And they said, "Oh, all the

more so." "Then why," he said, "would you fight over a jar of water, which we can find, when blood is so precious?" And in his own way, he was able to lead them to stop their movement toward battle and war.

So where are you in conflict in your life? What conflicts do you have? How do you navigate them? This is a human dilemma—how to solve this for thousands of generations, because our brain is wired with its negativity bias to look for things that are threatening. But yet some other part of us knows that there's another way. An organization started in the 1970s called "A Better Game Than War." It honored our competition and ambition and desire to compete with one another in all kinds of ways. Let's do this differently. Let's find another way. And for all the messiness and difficulty of politics, you could say that politics is ritualized warfare—that the Democrats and Republicans and so forth, they're not getting their tanks and guns and artillery to go take over the Capitol. It's done in a ritualized way, thankfully.

So part of what's needed is a kind of reconciliation. We have at Spirit Rock the Ethics and Reconciliation Council, which says: "Conflicts will inevitably arise within the Spirit Rock community. The health of our community is not measured by the presence or absence of conflict, as much as by our willingness to find effective, responsible, and compassionate means of resolving our interpersonal tensions—to attend to and learn from conflict in our daily lives. Without this intention, we will be lost in our views."

Buddhist conflict resolution is not based on good or bad, blame or guilt, winning and losing. It is based on addressing the suffering of all concerned and seeking reconciliation over estrangement, forgiveness over resentment.

Our Ethics and Reconciliation process actually comes from a long history. Many, many years ago, when you were much younger and in an earlier incarnation—many of you were around the Buddha, very possibly; you don't know, but it's possible, everything is so mysterious—in one of those years, the Buddha spent a rains retreat, the three months during the rainy season when the monks and nuns would pause and live in one place in the forest and not wander, to do deep meditation and also not to cause harm to beings in the rainy season when it's hard to move around. He was at the Gosira Monastery in a beautiful forest near other groups of monks and nuns.

And in this monastery, there arose conflict. The Buddha was staying at the edge of the Gosira Monastery, in a forest more or less nearby but not in the middle of the community. He heard a little about the conflict between the master of decorum and discipline—the Vinaya master—and the master of recitation, who would recite the Buddha's teachings so they would never be forgotten. They each accused the other of not following the rules and not doing things right—all the kinds of accusations that we all know and make against one another at certain times when we feel entitled or right or caught up. Many took sides, and the conflict increased, although some refused to take sides. Over the weeks it grew, and the lay supporters became upset. Finally, they beseeched the monks in that monastery to call the Buddha from the forest nearby.

And so Nagita, the Buddha's attendant, who himself couldn't endure the situation, went and called the

Buddha, who put on his outer robe and went to the meeting hall. They rang the bell for everyone to gather. The Buddha said, "Monks, please cease arguing. It is creating division. Return to your practice of loving-kindness. If we truly follow our practice, we will not become victims of pride and anger."

But his words fell on deaf ears. It got very quiet. And then one of the monks involved stood up and said, "Master, please don't involve yourself in this matter. Return and dwell peacefully in your meditation. This matter does not concern you."

We are adults and capable of resolving this on our own.

Dead silence followed these words. The Buddha stood up and left the hall. He went down into Kosambi for his alms food, and then he headed for the river, not telling anyone, not even Ananda, his attendant. He traveled to a far forest where he found a few monks living together in harmony like milk and water, and joined them for a time before eventually living all by himself for three months among the elephants and the other beings of the forest.

When the three monks living nearby asked why he was doing this, the Buddha remarked, "Sometimes it's more pleasant to live alone than with other people."

Now, of course, I'm sure you have all had those thoughts yourself at certain times. Sometimes it's actually best to step out. He told no one. He left.

After three months he returned, and as he came closer to the Gosira monastery, he asked, "What's happening?" He heard the story that the conflict had gotten worse, and that the lay disciples were upset with the monks and had said, "You continue to argue. You drove the Buddha away." Eventually they declared, "Unless you get over your pride and your arguments, we will no longer offer you food." So the monks quieted down and agreed to pause and meet together. Taking away the food made a difference, as you can imagine.

When the Buddha returned, he met with the wisest of those monks who were still there, who had not been involved in the conflict. They asked, "What should we do now? How do we reconcile them?" He said, "Bring the two groups close together, but still keep them separate." And then he began to outline a seven-step process of reconciliation.

The first step was called face-to-face speaking, where those who had been involved in the conflict were invited to sit surrounded by others in the community and by the elders, and to tell the truth as best as they could of what had happened. The face-to-face gathering in front of all was to avoid, said the Buddha, private conversations. Because those of you who watched *The Social Dilemma* and know the echo chambers of the internet and the online world understand that our private conversations and separating ourselves into groups can actually heighten and increase the hysteria and the level of fear and all of the emotions. So the first step is to come face to face. Don't talk privately outside. As the saying goes, it's hard to hate up close.

Once there was this gathering face to face, then there was the speaking of truth. The speaking of truth, said the Buddha, is so important. When he was asked at another time, "Why do you ordain both the untouchables and the high caste together? Don't you know that our tradition for a thousand years has placed people in different orders?" he replied, "That is simply tradition and it is not true. Every human being who is born has inherent dignity and value, none higher or lower." He said, "The truth is the truth, whether anyone believes it or not. Though a million people may believe the lie, it is still a lie. You must have the courage to live according to the truth." So there is the telling of truth, face to face with one another.

The second step is called deep listening—remembering with clarity what happened and then being willing to listen to the other side. This allows us to understand in a new way.

I remember when there was considerable conflict at our center on the east coast. The conflict arose between the teachers who were the most conservative and the teachers who were the most progressive—the wild-eyed radicals and the stick-in-the-mud conservative ones who wanted to keep things the way they were. There was a lot of unhappiness and words spoken behind people's backs, and fear and conflict about who we should follow.

We had the benefit of Robert Hall, one of the Spirit Rock teachers and a psychiatrist, who came to help with our meeting. At one point he said, "Let's have the two people who most represent these poles do something that we can learn from."

He first asked the person who was the most radical—a follower of Krishnamurti at certain points, who said we don't need tradition, we don't need to follow the old ways, we need to find truth exactly where we are, throw out a lot of the old things and just keep it true and simple—he asked them to please leave the room.

The twenty of us sat there without that person present. Robert said, "How is it without this firebrand wanting to change everything and make it all new and throw away the old?" People said there was a certain sigh of relief. We weren't getting that pressure. Robert said, "Well, is there anything else? What would you miss about them?" I spoke up and said, "Well, if they weren't here, I would have to become more of a revolutionary. But because they carry that spirit, I can relax a little and I don't have to be so involved in making the changes." Then they were brought back into the room. Others spoke as I did, seeing their value.

Then the most conservative person—who was afraid that the teachings of the Buddha would be lost or changed or sullied, that the depth wouldn't be maintained if we changed things in any meaningful or different way—was asked to leave. You have to understand that each of these teachers was very attached to their view and quite judgmental of the other and of the rest of us.

Robert said, "How is it without this person?" Oh, we relaxed. He's pretty judgmental of a lot of us for not

doing things the traditional way completely. If he weren't here, we'd be much more at ease.

And then Robert said, well, what would you miss from him?

And others of us spoke up as I might. Oh my gosh, he really hews to the tradition. He recites the sutras. He tells us the original teachings and stories. If he wasn't here, I would have to do more of that. But because he's in the community, I can teach the way that I choose to.

He was brought back in the room and we looked at each other and learned that between us, there was a greater wisdom and a greater whole. That in fact, the mandala of who we were together—with conservatives and liberals—carried a kind of intelligence and wisdom we needed from one another.

So remembering with clarity, speaking with truth, speaking as an act of truth, and deep listening so we hear one another in a new way. Curiosity in your family: What are you grateful for? What would you do if you had no fear? What conflicts have you solved in your life? How did you do it? How are you managing to cope with all these changes? These are the kind of questions you can ask someone, even someone you feel is very different than yourself. And they will answer in a way that lets you connect outside of that conflict, deeper than that conflict.

And the third step, face to face, deep listening, is non-stubbornness. We get so attached to our views. Here's the Buddha saying, "How could one have conflict with the wise ones who do not grasp at any views? For one is free from views. There are no ties and no suffering. But those who grasp after views and opinions, they wander about the world annoying other people."

I like to think of this as a little bit of humor from the Buddha as well. They wander about the world annoying people.

But non-stubbornness is the next step, the Buddha said. Bring these monks together, deep listening, and then let go of their views. Invite the quality of non-stubbornness for them and for you.

And then the fourth step is called voluntary confession. How painful it is to reflect: How have I contributed to this conflict? Because in some ways we may have all contributed to the conflicts we look at.

And I think of this extraordinary book entitled *A Human Being Died That Night* by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who is a South African activist and psychologist and part of the Truth and Reconciliation process. She decided to go into the maximum security prison where they had locked up Eugene de Kock, who is known as the commander of the death squads during apartheid, who murdered and tortured many people and ordered others to do it. She said, I need to understand how someone could do this.

And she spent a year going into his cell, at first terrified, just talking and listening and recording. And on one day he came to say, when she asked where he was, "I think that I lost. It's a feeling of deep loss. Well, the first thing that goes is innocence. I mean, there's no more fairy tales and Bambi. That's gone. We killed

a lot of people and they killed some of ours. We fought for nothing. We fought each other basically, eventually for nothing. We could all have been alive having a beer. The politicians—if we could put all the politicians in the front lines with their families and grandparents and grandchildren, if they're in the front lines, I don't think we will ever have war again. I think it's educated people, very educated people who sit in parliament and decide about war. So I'm confused. I'm very confused and I'm just very tired."

And she wrote about how, through a year of dialogue, she who had lost family members and seen so much suffering had come to understand him and in her own way had offered forgiveness. When she heard his voluntary confession of how he too had seen this and wished that he had not done what he did. How do I contribute?

And then the next step was decision by consensus. That is to allow the group to be quiet for a time and to reflect and to listen to one another and come to an agreement: yes, this is how we can move forward. Again, a very deep listening.

And then the next step is called accepting the verdict. And that is really the willingness to change. You know this in the work of addictions, where nobody can help someone who's addicted, an alcoholic or a drug addict. My name is Jack and I'm a Buddhist.

And to accept the verdict is really to say, "All right, I have contributed as well, and now the consensus has come that we must move forward, and I accept too."

And then finally, the last step is called covering mud with straw. There they were—the Buddha and senior monks and this whole group of community that had been in conflict. And in the middle are especially the two masters who started the conflict, having gone through face to face, telling the story, deep listening, non-stubbornness, voluntary confession of how I've contributed, decision by consensus, accepting the verdict.

And then covering mud with straw means that you sit and listen to the elders who are there, who will give some teachings as the Buddha did: Practice loving kindness to overcome anger. It has the capacity to bring happiness to others without demanding anything in return. Practice compassion to overcome cruelty. Compassion has the capacity to remove the suffering of others without expecting anything in return. Practice sympathetic joy to overcome hatred. Sympathetic joy arises when one rejoices in the happiness of others and wishes others well. Practice non-attachment to overcome prejudice. Non-attachment is the way of looking at things with open and equal mind and equanimity. This is because that is. That is because this is. Myself and others are not separate. Do not reject one thing only to chase after another.

And when he spoke about resting in loving kindness and compassion with a deep understanding, the community changed.

I remember sitting with Thich Nhat Hanh after he had his major stroke. It was the last day and we did an early morning meditation. He was here in San Francisco, brought by Mark Benioff of Salesforce with a

group of monks and nuns to have medical care for six months. And though he couldn't speak—his stroke had taken away his language—he sat in his wheelchair and we all sat together.

At the end, the bell rang. He was about to board a plane later that day and return to Plum Village in France. He looked around the room at the twenty of us sitting with him, and it was as if he looked with two different eyes. One eye acknowledged each person who was there. He nodded to them without words—to myself, to others. We could feel our connection over the years in that moment, absolutely present and deep. And the other eye was looking to eternity. You could feel a vastness of his presence, a sense of timelessness, the fact that yes, he knew his body was toward the end of his life. He could see all of that with one eye, and with the other he could be totally present and loving.

This is the vision of an elder covering mud with straw—loving each person as they are, where they are, and seeing the vastness of things as well.

So you listen to this story of the Buddha and the monks in conflict. You know how guys are—it happens. Reflect for a moment: where are you in the story? If you were to find yourself in the story, are you like the Buddha in that moment where no one will listen to you? Or are you more caught like the stubborn monks? Maybe you're the disgusted lay people who don't want to pay taxes anymore and don't want to support these people in conflict and feed them. Maybe you're the one who didn't take sides. Are you one who listens deeply? Are you willing to cover mud with straw? We all have these in our lives.

I grew up in a very painful, violent family because my father was a tyrant and a wife beater and batterer, and at times brutal with his children—not always, but completely unpredictable and terrible. I tried to be the peacemaker in the family. Now you can see I do it for a living. At times it was a little bit helpful, but mostly not. I just listened, but they didn't listen to me.

Then I remember my twin brother, who was a lot bigger. I was this skinny kid and he played football. We were both fourteen—I was still pretty skinny and he had sort of bulked up—and my father was getting violent with my mother and hit her. My twin brother strode over and stood up, kind of showed his young band of muscles, and raised his hand and said, "I'm going to beat you," to my father. You could see the rage in my twin brother. And my father backed off because my brother really would have just pounced on him. After that time—standing up to the bully—my father did not lay a hand on my mother. He could still be verbally abusive, but he stopped beating her and harming her.

So it also says sometimes maybe you need to stand up to the bully. Maybe so. But more than anything, it talks about how the fact is that there is grief and pain in every one of our lives.

And that we carry a legacy—whether in our families, where we might have had a beautiful, peaceful family, or in our human family. We're all in this together.

And reconciliation is hard. It's hard in our families.

I think of the woman who came to see me, someone I work with, because she was in this terrible divorce where her ex-husband had hired the most vicious lawyer to try to keep all the money and take the children from her, making up stories of her unfaithfulness and her being crazy. I said to her, "Get yourself a really good lawyer," which she did. The father was trying to turn her children against her, as happens in these terrible divorces.

And she came in one day to see me and said, "With all these terrible things happening, I realized that in the midst of them all, I will not turn my children against their father, no matter what he does. I will not bequeath a legacy of bitterness to my children." I felt like she was one of those wise elders at the end of the reconciliation process.

A teacher in one of the online groups—we now have so many meditation groups—talked about her online Dharma group and how she imagined, because she was relatively liberal and she looked out at the demographic of who comes to meditation, that there wouldn't be Trump supporters in the group. But of course she was wrong, because the gates to the Dharma open and welcome everyone—liberals and conservatives and libertarians. They welcome all beings.

You could hear that in the story of Robert Hall and our meeting, how we actually need to listen to each other. We each carry something important.

During the first meetings of this group, the teacher unfortunately said something unsupportive of Donald Trump. And one of the group members, who was already uncertain whether he wanted to be in the group and had not showed up a couple of times, said, "Let me request that we don't discuss politics here, because I'm a supporter of Donald Trump and I need this to be a safe space."

So this woman, the teacher, and the group all immediately agreed. And by not talking politics, we kept this man safe. In the process, we've gotten to understand his suffering and see why he thinks the way he does. It's been so valuable. If we stick together, keeping on the path of awareness, we can see each other more clearly, each in our own time. Maybe we're avoiding something by not discussing thorny issues, but it feels right to do in this moment.

And so on this day in our group, we have a Trump supporter who is a war veteran, a gun owner, and a warm and wonderful and wounded person. We are continuing on as a Sangha. We've held him and each other with gentleness and acceptance, and he in turn has become closer to each of us—much more than he ever intended. He was very skeptical of us and felt very much an outsider, for good reason. But now the trust is there among us.

You can hear this and feel the value and benefit in reconciliation. We need to do this in our families, in our work with one another, and we need to do this nationally.

I've been talking to various friends—one of whom is a federal judge—about the fact that we need a truth and reconciliation process in the USA. It doesn't fix things, but it's a start. If you could go to Montgomery,

Alabama, and see the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, you would see the names of thousands of victims of lynching and terror over the years—people killed by mobs.

The model of truth and reconciliation from South Africa has now been adopted in thirty-five countries. And we're starting to do it locally.

There was a process done in Greensboro, North Carolina. Reverend Nelson Johnson was a co-founder of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation. He said, "We were organizers then, active organizers in the textile industry and in communities throughout North Carolina. We chose to have a march through the historic Black community. Nine carloads of Klan Nazis drove into the march with a cache of weapons and fired on the group. Five people were killed; I was wounded. I knew then that this couldn't happen without police collusion. We fought it from the very beginning. Two juries did not convict the Klan or find anyone guilty of anything. So at the twentieth anniversary of this tragedy, we mulled over what to do and resolved to build a truth process over forty years of persistent work."

They got people to come in who remembered and tell the story, and the entire community heard what had really happened—all the things that had been buried. It made the community come together and say, "Yes, we lived this way, and we will not live this way in the future."

There's been a truth and reconciliation process in Maine as well. Part of this process was started by Denise Altvater, who is a Wabanaki native, an indigenous person, and the founder of the Maine State Child Truth and Reconciliation Process—because the state of Maine removed more children from native families than any other state by percentage.

A third of children were taken from their parents. She wrote, "The state came with a station wagon and took myself and my five sisters out of our home. They put all our belongings in garbage bags. My mother was away shopping. She wasn't home. And we did not see her again for four years. They forbid us to speak our language. They forbid us to talk of our tradition. So when they drove us away from the reservation, they drove me away from the only thing I'd known my whole life. And for four years, the foster parents tortured us, and the state left us there."

These are terrible stories. But without telling the truth of the native genocide, of the history of slavery, of the lynchings, of the way that we've treated one another, we can't move forward. Because we're still fighting the Civil War, as if slavery wasn't bad and it didn't happen, as if we can pass over the native genocide.

But it's not the end of the story. As the Buddha says, "Look how he beat me, abused me, threw me down, robbed me. Continue to live with such thoughts and you live in hate. Look how he beat me, abused me, threw me down, robbed me. Abandon these thoughts and live in love. In this world, hatred never ends by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law."

We can do something different. We can learn from one another. We may, if we are fortunate, be able to

create a national process of reconciliation, to listen to one another. As Longfellow said, "If we could read the secret history of our enemy, we would see sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility." If we could really listen and hear the pain and fear that's carried by each one, if we could suspend our prejudice, and in some way be willing to follow this reconciliation process, cover mud with straw, be not so stubborn.

I read, I think last time or the time before, this story from my daughter Caroline's organization, Oasis, which provides legal services and support for LGBT people from around the world whose lives are in danger. She shared this account: "One of our clients and volunteers and staff told me this story. We had a young law student who was here in Berkeley but came from Saudi Arabia. We'll call her Miriam. She volunteered to help us with asylum cases, and she volunteered to help Elena, a transgender woman from El Salvador, attend her asylum interview—despite Miriam's own conflicted views around transgender and sexual orientation and all the things she'd heard about gender identity, the kind of prejudice that she had absorbed in her community. She was professional, courteous, and respectful as she prepared the client for the hearing, but she didn't engage in small talk during the long ride over to what would be one of the most difficult days in Elena's life.

"Miriam and Elena sat silently in the sterile waiting room. The asylum officer was running late. One hour, then two hours went by. Finally, Elena pulled out her phone and showed Miriam a photo of her Pomeranian. Miriam's face lit up. She had a Pomeranian too, named Ali. They traded photos and stories, soon moving on to their love of jewel-studded high heels and Louis Vuitton purses. Miriam taught Elena about the abaya she was wearing. By the time the officer was ready, four hours later, Elena's fear had receded and Miriam was whispering reassuring cheers as they walked into the room.

"Standing outside the subway station at the end of the day, they held hands and each thanked one another. Elena won asylum, escaping almost certain death if she returned to El Salvador. And Miriam, the next year, returned to her life in Saudi Arabia. They would likely never meet again."

Our hearts cannot help but be moved as we see how each had a deep impact on the other's life. In these times of darkness, we must remember that when we're able to sit down and listen to one another, to see the world through another's eyes and believe in our common humanity, there is hope.

This isn't easy stuff. Mahatma Gandhi said, "True love is not for the faint-hearted." And the Bhagavad Gita says, "If you want to see the brave, look to those who can forgive. If you want to see the heroic, look to those who can return love for hatred."

On another night, perhaps I'll talk about forgiveness and how it works. It doesn't mean you condone things that cause suffering. Your first step is to do whatever you can to prevent yourself or others from continuing to suffer. But then there's a deep process of forgiveness that's possible. And we all know this because we've all needed forgiveness as well.

Nelson Mandela said, "Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

"O nobly born," begin the Buddhist texts. Remember who you really are. Remember that you have within you the great heart of wisdom and understanding, the great heart of compassion, that this is possible for you.

And as it says in the Majjhima Nikāya, the words of the Buddha: "Others will be cruel—I will be kind. Thus I will incline the heart. Others will be greedy and hoard—I will be generous. Thus I will incline the heart. Others will speak falsehoods—I will speak truth. Thus I will incline the heart. Others will be envious—I will be appreciative. Thus I will incline the heart. Others will be fraudulent—I will be honest. Thus I will incline the heart. Others will be arrogant—I will be open-minded. Thus I will incline the heart. Others will be harsh—I will establish compassion. Thus I will incline the heart. Others may lack wisdom—I will see what is wise and live with it. Thus I will incline my heart."

You carry within you the seeds of awakening, your own Buddha nature. What seeds will you water? You carry the seeds that the world needs more than anything—your ability to stop, to pause and listen deeply. To not cling to views, but to hear the hearts of others, their pain and their conflict and their difficulty. To live with non-stubbornness. To realize that we are a family, that we're in it together: the family of humans, the family of beings on this earth.

You are of the vastness. Consciousness and loving awareness is your true nature, born into this body. It is who you really are. And even in times of conflict, which will come again and again and are natural, remember your own dignity and nobility. Remember the capacity of your heart to be brave, as the Bhagavad Gita says—to be heroic. See with the eyes of love and compassion and tenderness. Stand up to protect those who need to be protected, including yourself, but do so as Dr. Martin Luther King said: with only the weapons of love, with only the weapons of the heart itself.

You meditate. You listen. You hear these teachings. Some of them may resonate for you—I hope so. But more than anything, you carry the lamp and you carry beauty into the world.

I honor you for it.

Thank you.

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