The Sacred Pause

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 52:10

Let's have a bit of a Dharma conversation, some time to listen or reflect. The idea with these teachings or talks is not to try to remember everything—there's no quiz at the end, there's no grade—but to let yourself settle and listen in an inward way, to listen with the heart. Notice if there's anything that rings true to you, that serves as a reminder of what you already know in some deep way in yourself, and let that reminder be a kind of nourishment for you.

So here we are at the beginning of spring 2021, and all kinds of wild changes are happening in the world. The seventeen-year locusts are coming out in the Virginia, Maryland, and East Coast area by the billions. The coronavirus is still spreading widely across the world. While there's some great respite in having vaccines now become available to some, there's also the tragedy that many people are not receiving vaccines and that they're not being shared. Even the intellectual property is being held for profit rather than for the good of humanity. And then we have, of course, the ongoing dilemmas of climate change and the very painful, sad, continued racism and violence—the anti-Asian violence that's happened. We can't say that we're shocked about the racism because it's been here all along. We've known it; it just makes itself more visible.

I've been standing out on the street, as I did for a long time with a sign saying "Black Lives Matter," and now it says "Safe and Protected Asian Lives, Respect and Care." I get a lot of thumbs up and horn honking from certain people and shouts and yells from others. For me it just feels important to stand up and say, "Yes, I'm with you, my brothers and sisters from Asia, or Asian Americans who've been here way longer than I have and my family." And also to express the gratitude I feel for the tradition and the incredible generosity of the teachers and teachings and cultures from India and Thailand and Burma and so forth.

So here we all are sharing this—the midst of the pandemic and the beginning of opening up, in the US anyway and other parts of the world, of our connections with one another. Not post-pandemic, but beginning to emerge. How do we come out of it? How do we hold this? How do we do this in a wise way? And what are the lessons to be learned? There are so many.

There's a lesson I find in how a certain solitude and stillness has come along with the restrictions and being sequestered. I realized this nourishes me. I don't want to get so speedy again and travel quite as much. I somehow want to listen more deeply. All of us have heard this, but it's not been an easy thing either. How do we tend ourselves? How do we tend this world?

Here is a very early sutta, a text from the first years of the Buddha's wandering in India. Early one morning, when the Blessed One was out on his alms round, the Buddha approached an area being plowed

in springtime, where a wealthy Brahmin landowner was distributing food to his workers. When the Brahmin saw the Buddha coming for alms, he said, "I, oh monk, plow and sow, and having plowed and sown and worked the fields, then do I eat. You too should likewise plow and sow, and having done so, you should eat." He was putting him down, saying, "Hey, I work—why should I give you food?"

The Buddha responded, "I too, oh Brahman, plow and sow, and having plowed and sown, I eat."

The Brahman said, "You claim to be a plowman, yet I see no plow. Tell me, what kind of plowing is it that you do?"

The Buddha replied, "Faith is my seed and composure the rain. Clarity is my plow and yoke. Compassion is my guide pole, and my heart and mind is the harness. Mindfulness is the plow blade. I use truth to weed and cultivate release. Wise effort is my oxen, drawing the plow steadily toward freedom without regret. This is how I plow, and it bears the fruit of deathlessness. Whoever plows in this way will become free of all sorrow and distress."

Then the Brahmin exclaimed, "Let the venerable monk eat! You are indeed a plowman, and your plowing bears the fruit of freedom." He poured milk rice into the bowl. But as he did, the bowl hissed as if it were red hot, and all that was liquid flew out of the bowl. The Buddha stood there peacefully and then walked on his way.

This is the spring plowing of planting the seeds of faith and tending them with wise effort and compassion, using truth to cultivate release, with compassion as the guide pole. But there's an interesting, almost archetypal or mythological moment in this story. Why is it that when the Brahmin landowner finally put something in the Buddha's bowl, the Buddha stepped back? As the story is told, it's as if to say, "I don't do an exchange for this food." But when the food goes into the bowl, it hisses. Why would that be?

Those of you who are listening who are also farmers will know immediately that when you cut a furrow in a field with a plow blade, at the end of that furrow, if you touch the blade of that plow, it gets red hot. This was the symbol that the bowl the Buddha was carrying was red hot from the plowing that he did—the transformation of all the difficulties of the heart into freedom.

This text, this story, has a couple of different levels to it. The first is the Buddha expressing, in some way, "I have practiced until I've come to the deathless, to that which is beyond birth and death, to a freedom of heart amidst all circumstances."

T.S. Eliot, the poet, called this a condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything. Sometimes it's called the abode of peace, or the supreme harmony. It is that place of being without wanting or resisting a single thing—an openness of heart, absolutely present and awake.

"Oh nobly born," the Buddha reminds us at the beginning of so many texts. Remember, this freedom is possible for you too. Remember that you too can awaken this freedom of heart.

Now, how to do this?

I remember having a conversation with Ram Dass when I was relatively new at teaching. He'd become a friend and a mentor, and in fact came to the second retreat I ever taught, in a camp in Western Massachusetts. Joseph Goldstein and I were teaching together, and that retreat was attended by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Dan Goleman and my beloved Trudy Goodman and a whole group of other people who became themselves well-known dharma teachers.

Sometime after that, I was sitting with Ram Dass—maybe it was after the first year of teaching, or the second—together at Naropa Institute, the Buddhist university. And I said, "I'm kind of getting the hang of teaching in ways that really serve the different people who come. I'll be in a room and there will be those who are quite new to meditation with their questions, and some who have practiced a long time and maybe spent time in an ashram or temple or monastery for months or years, and some in the middle, some with backgrounds in therapy or psychology. And I try to find something I can say to each one of them, where they are, that uplifts their heart, that gives them a sense of nourishment."

And Ram Dass paused. He leaned back the way he did sometimes and smiled. He said, "Yes. And when you get good"—with a little smile—"you can say something so simple and elegant and true that it resonates on all those levels at once."

I think of that often. I think of Suzuki Roshi's phrase "Zen mind, beginner's mind," and picking up that book and reading that the goal of meditation is to always keep our beginner's mind—how simple and elegant and direct that truth is. To be here now, where we are, with a beginner's mind.

I think of my teacher Ajahn Chah, who was simple in that way. You came to him struggling or suffering, and he'd peer at you and say, "Suffering? Having a hard time?" Then he'd smile kindly, with great compassion, and say, "Aw, must be a bit attached, huh?" That was all. So simple.

A condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything. A letting go. A presence.

And it's not far away, oh nobly born. We live in the realm of mystery, and we forget it because we go through our quotidian tasks of the day. We get busy, we get lost in thought and all the things that come with being a human being. But then we enter a magnificent cathedral, or hear an extraordinary piece of music, or stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon, or high in the mountains. Or even more—when we're there for the birth of a child, or in that mysterious and tender moment when we might hold the hand of someone at the very end of their life, sensing their body and spirit separate as consciousness leaves and it's just the empty shell of a body, and the gates between the worlds open. We know this in making love. We know the mystery in so many ways.

I think of my daughter when she was little, how astonished she was by a ladybug that came into her room, or by a little red pebble. One day we were walking—maybe she was three years old—in the early evening, and she said, "Daddy, look! The moon is following us. When we turn the corner, the moon comes with us.

How does it know to do that?"

The question is not the future of humanity, but the presence of eternity.

Can we, in this equinox, in this beginning of spring, in the midst of the great difficulties of our lives in this world, in the midst of the unbearable beauty of life—can we pause and be present? Can we take a step back and be the witness, the loving awareness, and remember that who we are is consciousness itself, having a human experience?

When we do, our eyes and face get soft. I love watching people come to the end of retreat. They come in all tense, carrying the struggles of their lives. And after a week or ten days or however long it is, you see them and it's as if they've been born anew. Their brows are unfurrowed. We talk about it as the Vipassana facelift.

But you don't have to go on retreat. The invitation to pause, even in short ways—to walk among the trees, to take time as spring begins and as the pandemic begins to open a little bit with very thoughtful care—is always here. Pause and remember the sense of mystery. Find that peace that's not arguing with the world or trying to make it something, but actually, as the Buddha that you are, is simply present, compassionate, and open.

Mary Oliver writes:

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks, and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me, the trees stir in their leaves and call out, "Stay awhile." The light flows from their branches and they call again. "It's simple," they say. "And you too have come into the world to do this—to go easy, to be filled with light, to shine."

Taking the pause, the sacred pause, there's a fundamental dignity that you carry, that every human being carries. And here is the Buddha standing in the middle of the spring plowing, in some way being judged as unworthy, for he's not a farmer or a working person. Yet he stands there in the place of peace and radiance and being, and says, "I have done my plowing, and it bears the fruit of the freedom of heart—to be just as I am in this mystery."

So that's one part of this text: the invitation to be present in mystery, seeking nothing, becoming the conscious witness of it all, the loving awareness.

But there's another part of this text. Zen Master Suzuki Roshi explains it beautifully when he said, "You are perfect just as you are, and there's still room for improvement." And that's the plowing part.

Even as we remember the mystery and rest in being and presence, we can listen to the words of Thich Nhat Hanh: "The mind and the heart is like a piece of land planted with many different kinds of seeds—seeds of joy, peace, mindfulness, understanding, and love; seeds of craving, fear, anger, hate, and forgetfulness. These healthy and unhealthy seeds are always there, sleeping in the soil of the heart and mind. The quality of your life depends on the seeds you water. If you water a seed of peace in your heart, peace will grow. When the seeds of happiness in you are watered, you'll become happy. If the seed of anger in you is watered, you will become angry. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow strong."

So this is also part of this beautiful text. Yes, there's the presence of freedom that the Buddha displays. And yes, he says, "I have done my plowing." Each time you sit in meditation, you follow in those footsteps. Trust and faith is your seed. Attention is your effort to be present for what is. Compassion is your guide. And you too do the plowing that brings freedom.

Now over the last thirty years, as we know, there have been eight or nine thousand papers and studies that show the benefit of training in mindfulness and mindful loving awareness and compassion. It increases empathy and connection. It helps with emotional regulation. It steadies and deepens our capacity for attention. It actually changes our nervous system—measurable MRIs in the brain. It changes the epigenetics in our cells. Even eight weeks of meditation is shown to change the telomeres, those caps at the end of chromosomes that are protective and keep us healthy and help us age well. So neuroscience is affirming what the Buddha said: our practice of wise attention—*yoniso manasikara,* it's called, caring or loving attention—planting the seeds of trust, mindfulness, and compassion, they change you. They change me. They change us.

Now what's important also to understand is that this transformation happens not just when things are easy, but even when the gardening gets difficult.

There was a famous gardener who taught at the University of California in Santa Cruz, the father of biodynamic gardening called Alan Chadwick. He gardened by growing soil to grow plants. And what he meant by soil was different than the earth's surface that you usually think of. He meant a power in the universe that could be concentrated in gardening to capture cosmic magic. Chadwick grew soil and planted seeds based on relationships that exist between the Earth and its moon, the sun, the other planets, the weather, the way doves in the area coo, the mist in the trees, and everything you could imagine.

When winter was very bleak, he'd sing about the energies under the surface of the earth: "Underneath, the

seeds are full of life, life! This very moment, the seeds are waking up and pushing up to the sun. The doves are singing in spring—coo, coo—life, life!"

Once Chadwick took a class to a junkyard lot that was full of rusted-out cars, broken glass, chunks of cement, sand, lots of abandoned trash. He asked the owner if his class could use the lot for an experiment to grow flowers and vegetables. The owner said, "Sure, but you're crazy—that soil is dead." This garden later became famous for its extraordinarily delicious vegetables and its gorgeous flowers.

This is our task in this world: to plant beautiful seeds, to till the soil with our hearts, and to tend them.

And I think of my teacher, colleague, friend, and inspiration, Maha Ghosananda, the Gandhi of Cambodia, guiding the hundreds of thousands of refugees who escaped the Khmer Rouge back to their villages where temples were burned and most of their families were killed.

And him saying, you can't go back in a bus or the back of a truck. We have to walk together and reclaim this land with loving kindness.

And so he would lead long lines of hundreds and hundreds of villagers with a bell in the front, chanting, "Hatred never ends by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law." And as he chanted the chant of loving kindness through the killing fields and the places of destruction, until people could go back to their villages, he said, "With every step, you reclaim your heart and you reclaim this land." This was planting the seeds of loving kindness in a place that so needed it.

Now, every gardener expects obstacles to arise. Weeds, drought, insects, blights—all of those kinds of things will come. And guess what happens when you meditate and you do your spiritual journey or practice, or gardening, we shall call it? Go ahead, ring your bells, light your candles, burn your incense, call out to the gods. But watch out, because the gods will come and they will put you on the anvil and fire up the forge and beat you and beat you until they turn brass into pure gold.

So you sit down to meditate and you say, I want to be peaceful, calm, gracious. And what happens? It's hard to make a time. Your life is too busy. You've got a long list of things to do, people and things that you care about to attend to. And then finally you get to sit down and you're sleepy or you're restless. Or you have the "if only" mind—if only I did this, if only I hadn't done that, if only... All the desires. Or your doubt comes: I'm not getting very far. Should I be doing this? Or you feel all the tensions your body holds.

And what do you do? The line from Mary Oliver: "to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves," to hold it in tenderness.

And then you sit and tears come. Ajahn Chah said, if you haven't wept deeply, you probably haven't meditated very long. Because we carry the tears of the world, the ocean of tears of life, along with its magnificent beauty.

And fear comes, and you bow, and you name it. Fear, fear—as we did in our sitting. Let me not turn from

you. Let me feel this wave of fear. Fear, open, show me your dance. Breath stops. Everything contracts. Fear, fear, I feel like I'm going to die. Dying, dying. Now what? Oh, I'm still anxious. Anxious, anxious. I wish you would go away. Wishing, wishing. I hate this fear. Hating, hating, hating. Oh, but I'm tired of it all. Tired. Maybe I'll just go back to my breath. Calm, ease, breathing in and out. Hey, I did pretty good with that fear. Oh, pride. Pride.

All right. Another breath.

And you start to smile. You become the loving witness of all your dramas. You name them. The emotions have come—the shame, the guilt, the fear. Instead of resisting, you become the loving awareness that says yes, this too is part of being human.

How do you touch the difficulties that arise in your heart and mind, the pains in your body, the difficult emotions? Can you find the courage as a gardener to turn toward that which is difficult—the weeds, the insects, the blight? And can you tend them with a tender heart and care, and water the seeds of compassion for it all?

Here's the secret, or one of the secrets that's important for you to know: these obstacles are the path. It's not like they're in the way of your getting to some magnificent, great, wonderful state where you're always open and stop breathing because it's just so peaceful.

These obstacles are the path, for the very things that are difficult—your restlessness, the doubting mind, the tears that you carry for yourself or the world—these are the places where you learn to steady your heart, where you learn to recognize and allow what's true, where you learn forgiveness and kindness. They're the places where you shift your identity from being caught in how it's supposed to be and how you're supposed to be, to that place of love. They're the places to grow strong and steady and free in the heart.

The Buddha says, as the farmer channels water to their land, so the wise one directs kindness and compassion to their own heart and mind.

You remember that phrase in Zen: there are only two things—you sit and you sweep the garden, and it doesn't matter how big the garden is. That is, you quiet the mind and tend the heart, and then you get up and tend the garden. A mindful presence as you quiet yourself in this turning of the seasons, and then a mindful loving response.

As you learn these inner capacities in meditation—to be with all the waves of emotion and doubt and thought, all the beautiful things and the joy that open and then the closing again, the contraction and opening and closing, just as the body breathes, the emotions and the heart open and close, and the mind opens fast and then closes in its ideas—as you learn to be with all those waves, that inner gardening gives you the same capacities you will need in tending the world.

In your love relationship, should you have one—and you do in some way, whether it's a loving partner or family member or community—but especially when you fall in love with somebody, it seems so wonderful. They just seem so compatible and magic and special, and you just love it and think that everything's going to be great. You know how it works. And then you decide to live together and have a big family and start a business together and buy property and make a whole tribe, or whatever you do.

But you find someone you fall in love with. And then at some point, this little thing starts to happen we could call disappointment. They fall off the pedestal. You see their messy humanity, like your own. You get irritable, or they are irritable. One of you gets anxious, the other gets judgmental. And there's the place to love. Because you've learned it in your meditation, you've learned it for love.

When I used to perform weddings—which I really don't do anymore, but I did for a long time, and most of them are still married—one of the things I would do is have the two partners who are going to be married, at some point in the ceremony, look at one another. And I'd say, "Do you take this person as is?" You know how in the used car lot there'll be a sign in the window of the car: "Here it is, $6,900 for this car, as is." I'd look at these people who love one another and are getting married, and I'd say, "Do you take this person as is?" Because that's the game. That's really what love is.

There's one way to be in relationship, which is attachment—you want something from them, and it's a sort of business deal where they give you and you give them. There's another way in which you, as the Buddha, as the wise one, as the compassionate goddess Kuan Yin, see the beautiful spirit behind the eyes of this person. And your love is simply like the gardener's, to say, "I'm here for you, and I want to support you to blossom and grow in whatever way you can." That is the game you learn in your inner life, translated into relationship.

But it's true in every relationship and in everything. I certainly see it in my marriage to Trudy, my beloved, after the last year plus of being sequestered together. There were moments of cabin fever, if you will, or irritation. And then I just look at her, and I step back from the place of loving awareness, and I see her as a little girl, one or two years old, toddling around. I see her as seven or eight. I see her as a young teenager, thirteen, fourteen years old, with that kind of brightness and innocence. I see her as a young woman. I see her when she had her child and as she grew. And I see her now, and I see this whole arc of being and the mystery behind it, the joys and the suffering she's been through. When I step back and get quiet and gaze in that way, instead of with judgment or need, I just feel a gratitude and an ability to love and be present for the mystery of this other person. And it's the same gardening.

And parenting—you have these kids and they're small and they try to put everything in their mouth. They're a little older and they hit each other with blocks, and you have to socialize them. Then they start careening down the street on their bicycle and they fall off, and you have to take care of them when they hurt themselves. Then they hit puberty. And what do you do with that teenage angst? Then there's sexuality and alcohol and drugs, and they're not who you think they should be. You get through all of that,

and then they leave you.

How do you do it? You do it as a gardener. These are beautiful seeds. You water the goodness in them, as you do in yourself. You tend them, you love them, and you stay steady.

The same thing in business. You'll have obstacles—not enough capital.

The market changes, the competition gets stronger, employees quit—whatever challenges arise. You water the good seeds.

And we need this practice now more than anything for social change. The divisiveness, the war, the racism. I've been reading a wonderful book called *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, where she reframes the racial suffering we have in a deeper way through the lens of caste—like caste in India or caste in Nazi Germany, where one group is empowered over another, abuses another. It's really worth looking at. I recommend it highly because it offers a way of understanding injustice, how we participate in it, and how we can change it.

But it's a tough time. I watch what's happening to my friends in Burma. We led a march across the Golden Gate Bridge a week or two ago with hundreds of people from Burma and from the Buddhist community to say, "We're with you"—and spread those images across the media and underground in Burma so people know they're not alone.

We know this: If we want the world to be different, we have to water the right seeds. We have to see what really matters. We have to tend those seeds that matter most.

Here is Robert Kennedy, from a speech he gave the year before he was assassinated. He was asked about his vision for the economy, and someone raised the question of Gross National Product. Kennedy shook his head and said: 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 justness 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.

This is it, baby. This is our garden. Maybe the myth is that we stepped out of the Garden of Eden, but we have the garden of this beautiful planet and this beautiful life. How are you tending it? What seeds do you plant? What do you water?

Henry David Thoreau said, "I do not believe that a plant will grow where there are no seeds, but convince me that you have planted a seed and I'm prepared to expect miracles."

And so our meditation, our spiritual life—it's not about becoming a good meditator. It's about one breath at a time, one plant at a time, one day, one moment. And seeing the goodness in the seeds. As Nelson Mandela said, it never hurts to see the goodness in another person, to acknowledge the goodness in

another person. They often act the better because of it.

I see my friend Father Greg Boyle—I've read from his book *Tattoos on the Heart*—where he started Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, working with gang kids who would otherwise be thrown away by the system into prison, or shot, or worse. And he sees the secret beauty behind these posturing, tattooed gang kids, who are mostly aggressive because they're trying to save their own lives. He meets them exactly where they are. And he loves them.

This is what you get to do. To shift somehow from the struggle of things and say, "I can water beautiful seeds. I can take a walk and stand still among the trees," as Mary Oliver says. I can do compassion practice. I can stand up for justice. And do it not because you have to, but because you *get* to.

Change your language from "I have to" to "I get to." I get to tend this garden, even with all the rusted cars and cement, as Alan Chadwick found. Underneath, we can tend this soil and make something really beautiful grow.

There's a story of a woman named Cathrine Sneed. Cathrine Sneed started the Garden Project in San Francisco some years ago. She was concerned about the soul death of so many people in the San Francisco prison system. So she began a project to allow any of those who were incarcerated to help plant a garden. They were invited to grow vegetables in a garden plot behind one of the prison buildings. Through some fundraising, she got them seedlings and mulch, fertilizer, garden tools. To be able to grow a garden with their own hands, to be responsible for its blossoming, to overcome insects and drought—this brought out the best in men who had otherwise been thrown away by the world. And we have so many millions in our racist poverty prison system.

Instead, it changed them. She talks about one macho giant saying, "Don't step on my babies," as she walked through the garden. The prison wardens were amazed by the change. The garden became so important to those who cared for these patches that their lives began to revolve around them. In fact, when the time came for these men to be released from prison, some purposely violated their parole so they could return to their gardens.

This led Cathrine to the inevitable next step: a garden project for ex-prisoners that spread across the Bay Area. Because the harvest she was interested in was not the fruits and vegetables—it was the harvest of the souls and spirits of these men.

I don't think this is impossible in this world. I've talked to you about the better angels of our nature—

the book by Steven Pinker, where he details with numbers the decrease in slavery in the world, even though it's still here in painful ways. The decrease in child abuse and child labor exploitation, even though it's still here. The decrease in warfare over the centuries, even though it's still present. The increase in the freedom that women experience, even though it's still terrible in many ways around the world.

When you look at centuries of human life on this earth through the lens of consciousness and care and improvement, you start to see that it's possible for us to change this world. Even though things seem difficult, we can do this.

Now, the idea isn't to make it perfect—to create some ideal house and garden where you get the camera at the right angle and the right time of day and post it online, some showy garden representing an ideal you have. It's a little bit like that New Yorker cartoon showing a couple of fish swimming in the depths of the ocean, one fish talking to the other, saying, "I want the whole thing—the glass bowl, the blue pebbles, the little white castle." You know how we are. We always want something else.

But the point isn't to make a perfect garden. The point is to perfect your love. To take the garden that you've been given and find within yourself the intention to turn it into beauty, to do it with joy.

L.R. Knost writes, "Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break and all things can be mended—not with time, as they say, but with intention. So love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the healing and the light and the water that you can offer to it."

Take a moment and reflect as we start the spring amidst the ten thousand joys and the ten thousand sorrows of life. What seeds do you most want to plant? What seeds do you most want to water and nourish? What are the seeds in yourself that are calling out to be watered and nourished—your body and your heart? And what are the seeds in the world that you can care for?

You can do this, oh nobly born. You are the plowman in that sutra. The plowwoman. You are the one who tends this garden of the world.

As Mark Morford wrote long ago, stop thinking all these global crises are all there is. Realize that for every ongoing war and religious outrage and environmental devastation, for every trouble of humanity, there are a thousand counterbalancing acts of staggering generosity and humanity and art and beauty happening all over the world right now, on a breathtaking scale, from flower box to cathedral.

Resist the temptation to drown in fatalism, to shake your head or sigh and throw in the towel. Remember, this is the perfect moment to change the energy—to renew and envision the re-enchantment of the world, to step right up and crank up your personal volume right when it might seem dark or bitter or offensive or acrimonious and conflicted. This is your opening.

Remember mystery. Believe in the seeds that you plant and water as part of a groundswell, a seemingly small but actually very large impending karmic shift, a foundational shift, the beginning of something important and beautiful that can grow with your care.

Pablo Neruda writes, "You can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the spring."

It's never too late to start again, wherever you are. This day, you can forgive. You can let go. You can

honor the secret beauty and mystery in every being. You can become that loving awareness that is your true nature. For we are the earth becoming conscious. We are consciousness itself—the earth becoming conscious of itself. Such a mystery, and we get to do something really beautiful with it.

This is why you meditate. And this is why we get to come together and hold hands with each other, or as we do even this evening, gather to share our care, our respect, our love.

I know as I finish that I speak of my own intention. I want to become like Ram Dass became at the end of his life. He grew more and more transparent and more and more loving. He loved everything. He said, "Whatever it is, I love it." And he really showed it. "I love this too, and this, and this." On his altar, all the saints gathered together—statues of Mother Mary and Jesus and Buddha and Kuan Yin, passages on the mercy of Allah, Indian saints and saints from all around the world. And there, of course, were Dick Cheney and Donald Trump, and they all had their place. He said, "My love is for all. I love it all." And he would gaze with those eyes like the Buddha standing there, not wanting a single thing, but becoming that loving awareness.

This is who we really are.

Plant beautiful seeds. Love it all.

Thank you.

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