Q and A: Summer Solstice | Monday Night Talk

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 21:30

Let's take a few comments and questions before we end this evening. How was that meditation we did at the beginning?

"I am so much better after tonight. Thank you for this gorgeous evening. I came to it with something I need to share. Up to now, I've been living with this contradiction of really having a sense of the light that I am, and simultaneously, right up against that, when I get too deep in the news and get triggered by certain politicians—I won't even name them all—I'm aware that I haven't felt open-hearted toward them. I'm aware of not watering the seeds that I want to be watering in relation to them.

What this evening has shifted for me is really having a greater sense of what it means when I say the planet is my neighborhood. The planet is my neighborhood. And so I can't leave anybody out of that, even the people I frequently think of as bozos and jerks. When I say diversity, it's not just the people we ordinarily think of as being part of diversity—it now has to include people who, up to now, I could just sock. I mean, I have very non-Buddhist thoughts about many of them. And I'm very aware that this needs to shift if I'm going to create the world I want to be creating. That came out of this evening. So thank you."

First, I'm just touched by what you say and by all the feeling behind it. I even invite you to close your eyes for a moment, because what you're expressing and the tears that come with it is how deep you care, how much it really matters, and how you want to be that beacon of love you want to be. Martin Luther King standing there saying, "We will not hate you. We'll wear you down with our capacity to love everyone." Even the bozos and jerks. Because you do need some humor. We've all had un-Buddhist thoughts. You know that's true. It's not just you, dear.

But I do metta, and I can wish anybody well. I pick the worst dictators in the world, and I wish: May you be free from fear. May you be free from ignorance. May you find love in yourself. I can wish that for anyone because, as you said better than I, this is your neighborhood. You become Mr. Rogers' neighborhood. And I just feel the goodness of your heart opening. Thank you. It's beautiful.

"Great to see you, and thank you for tonight. Last week I had chronic pain, and one of my openings and breakthroughs has been that I can feel the pain but also be aware of all these other parts of my body that are pleasant or neutral, and just make more space for all of that. That's been wonderful.

Tonight I came in feeling a deal of shame. I'm closing out a year of being an elementary school principal—what a crazy year that's been. I've been short-tempered and lashed out at too many people, and I was really wearing that. Then tonight, as we sat and as I listened to you talk, just like with the physical

pain, I realized I can make space. There's a place for shame, and there's a place for so much more. Some of the gratitude and the pride and successes—all of that helped shift me."

So I thank you for that.

And I thank you for your honesty, and also for your service. You're a first responder to our children. And it's not an easy thing. I mean, I remember being sent to the principal, and I was terrified. So you have to hold all this stuff.

Our school systems are overburdened because they're supposed to be the clinics, they're supposed to offer advice to parents about how to raise their children, they're supposed to be the surrogate parents when parents are working all the time. They're tasked with so much, and often under-resourced. I don't have to tell you any of this. You want to give the children both an education and heart, and so you get discouraged at times, and then you lose it.

You might close your eyes for a moment and think of all those principals out there, all those teachers who are struggling, because it wasn't just you. Think of the thousands and hundreds of thousands of teachers who entered the profession because they care, how much they love, and how once in a while they lose it. They also feel ashamed because they want to be their best all the time. Just let a sense of tenderness and mercy come in. What a hard thing to choose to do. Feel the courage of those like you who've chosen to do it even though it's so hard, and feel the love behind it.

If you were to put it all on a scale—all the years of work and care, and some of the stupid things you did, like we all do—remember that line from Zen Master Ryokan where he wrote, "Last year a foolish monk, this year no change." When you hold all that in, sort of like the feather in the Egyptian Book of the Dead where your soul is weighed against Ma'at's feather—when you think of your years of care and what you've offered—yes, there's regret. And that regret you can say thank you for, because it's reminding you that you can be even better than you are. It's not a bad thing. The shame isn't a bad thing. It's just saying, yes, there's a nobility in you that says, "I want to live even more fully and beautifully." So it serves you.

I think all of us listening—I want to invite us all to make a kind of inner bow to the teachers and principals and those who are entrusted with our children in often really difficult circumstances, who hang in there anyway.

How does that feel to you?

Yeah.

Thanks to you and all of your cadre, this amazing cadre of dedicated educators. Take care.

Thank you so much for your teachings tonight, and all of them. I recently discovered your teachings a few

months ago, and they've been a great salvation for me. I stayed up quite late on the East Coast to hear this talk tonight because today—through all your teachings, I've learned that you have to sit and sweep the garden. And lately, especially today, I find it hard to sit on the long path to liberation that's required to sweep your garden.

I wondered if you had more insights to share. My heart is needing to hear more about when you're so dismayed on certain days, how to find the patience to trust when you can't find the worth in trusting.

And I think so much about what your teacher Ajahn Chah said about the boulders in the field—they're heavy, but not if you don't pick them up. I really don't want to pick them up, but it feels very hard to let them go.

Can you tell me what some of those boulders are?

Just false narratives I've been told, or aspects of personal life—whether family or something you're so close to that perhaps doesn't always serve you. I want to sit and keep sweeping my garden, but sometimes it feels like a really long path. How does one find the worth in patience, in trusting?

A couple of things to say. It's really step by step. If you think of it as long, you can get lost and overwhelmed. But if you realize that where you're going is not there—you're not going from here to there, you're going from there to here—the path leads you back to this moment, and in this moment to a more tender heart toward yourself and those around you. When you feel that, you can pause and say, "Oh yes, I have all these expectations."

They're trying to help you. Thank you to the expectations. And where I'm going is here. Can I find some tenderness?

Now, a couple more things to say. If you have a little bit of difficulty with your family or things they say to you or their expectations—it sounds like you do, yes?

Yes.

Remember that Buddha and Jesus both had a hard time when they went back to their families. Which is to say, family is like the advanced spiritual practice. You don't want to have a lot of expectations that you're going to do it right or fix them or whatever. They are who they are. And you just have to love their quirkiness and their judgments and their being lost and all that. They gave you life. They did what they could. They still do. And you can say thank you, even though you don't have to follow everything they say. And you shouldn't. You really have to follow the wisdom of your heart. But understand that family is family, and you don't have to do anything about them or fix them. You just have to say thank you, take what's good, and love yourself.

Now, here's another thing. I'd like you to close your eyes for a moment because I can feel the dedication in you—that you really want to live with tenderness and courage and love. Can you feel that in yourself?

Yes.

I'd like you to imagine—I don't know if you have one—that you make a little altar where you live, someplace where you can put a few precious things and maybe some images of whoever inspires you. It can be Kuan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion, or Mother Mary, or whoever it happens to be. And then on this altar, I want you to imagine that when things seem difficult or too hard for you, you can acknowledge them lovingly and then write them on a little piece of paper—impatience, fear, longing. You honor them kindly and then put them on the altar and say to Mother Mary or whoever is there, the Buddha, "Will you hold these with me?" So it's not just you. It's you and the illumined ones of all the ages. And it's also all the young women of the world who need their own altars, saying, "Yes, let's do this together. Let's not be under the weight of these, but let's carry them with mercy and tenderness."

Feel how, as you do that, it frees you in some way. Now you don't have to carry it alone. It's actually carried by Mother Mary, by Kuan Yin. Sense this image and tell me—does this feel like it might be useful?

It does. It feels lighter, like I'm not picking up the boulder.

Yes, you can place it there. Let your eyes open.

The other thing to say is that one of the things that most helps all of us in this journey is community. We started taking refuge in the Sangha with that funny story, but Sangha as community—we can't do it alone. I don't know if you have a connection with a community online or where you are, but to join a group, to be part of something, helps because you can practice together and hear everybody else's stories and realize, "Oh, we're doing this together. We're holding this together." Do you have any connection with community yet?

I do.

What's the community?

My friends.

And are they interested in the same things, including this kind of awakening compassion?

Some are. I think some of it too is feeling shame around some of my stories, but that's okay.

So feel the shame too and put your hands on your heart. You don't have to make the shame go away. You don't have to shame the shame, because it's really trying to protect you.

It's trying to say, "All right, I want you to be better." It believes that. The fact is that you are good—that you're actually good and beautiful. But the shame is taught to you, and it's a fear. Hold it and say, "Thank you for trying to protect me. I'm actually fine, thank you. I'm just fine. I'm good just now." And then you can put the shame in the lap of Kuan Yin or Mother Mary and say, "You carry this for all the young women who feel shame. You carry this. I'm fine, thank you."

So much tenderness. You're doing great.

And I think beyond your friends, it would be useful to look for an online meditation community, or depending on where you live, some place where you can connect with others who are actually meditating and dealing with the same things that we do as we open our hearts and our minds. Look for that. And thank you for your honesty. You're actually doing really well, just so you know.

Take care.

With this, I think we'll pause for the evening. It feels like enough.

I hope you take whatever was a reminder into yourself—from the meditation, the stories, the conversations we've just had—whatever reminds you of the goodness in your own heart. And in this week of the illumination of the light, remember that you are that light, that you are the light of awareness itself come into this body. As the Buddha's last words said, make of yourself a light. Let that love and light, that illumination of awareness that you are, shine through.

Thank you, and be safe and well. See you again. Good night.

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