Compassion As We Take Action

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 53:01

I have a question to start with. Those of you who have been here all day have heard inspiring and visionary calls to action, information, and so forth. What would help you as we get ready to transition from here back out into the dance of the freeways and the blue waters of the bay and the Easter evening? What themes, what concerns?

James asked me to come in toward the end, and I wasn't sure whether it was tired activists who are here taking a break—who've tried too hard and are carrying the entire world like Sisyphus and need to take a little rest—or whether it's people who are aspiring activists who are saying, "Oh, I think it's about time to get my act together."

What themes or topics would you like to explore? You can leave stuff here, and what you can take is inspiration and spaciousness. What else?

"Can you speak about how to work with the despair that comes up?"

Despair, how to work with despair. Other themes?

"Joyful responsibility."

Oh, that joyful responsibility. Parenting. Reaching people.

"How to mindfully converse with people who may not have the same perspective as we do on some of these crises."

What the Dalai Lama calls "his friends the enemy." It's very interesting—he doesn't say "my friends." He says "my friends the enemy that I talk to." Including each other. How do we talk to one another?

"The anger thing."

Anger, how to deal with anger.

"All the issues around the animal world and all the sentient beings, environmental issues."

All the many other sentient beings that are being affected by everything so deeply—the animal world and the grief around that and concern. Grief, despair, and grief.

"Anger and conflict."

Anger and conflict about all this.

Grief and despair. Anger and conflict—with the people you live with, or perhaps with the corporations that are, after all, also people we share this world with.

I want to weave these concerns into what we explore together today, into our meditation and the setting of intentions. But somehow I feel called to begin on a different note.

I loved sitting here with Wes and Kevin, witnessing how they transform despair and concern and community into art. This is critical work. Wes went to interview Gary Snyder, one of our greatest living environmentalists—Pulitzer Prize-winning poet who wrote "Earth Household" back in the 1950s, when people hadn't yet begun to think environmentally. Wes asked him: "Now you're in your mid-eighties, and you see the seas rising, the extinction of species, global climate disruption, and all these things you've spoken about for decades. What advice do you have for us at this time?"

Gary's response was stunning in its simplicity: "Don't feel guilty."

Three profound words: Don't feel guilty.

He continued: "If you're going to save it, save it because you love it. If you go out because you're angry, or because you're bitter, or to fight—it's not going to help you, and it's actually not going to help the world. The world needs this transformation of consciousness we've been talking about, and it really has to come out of love. It's the only power that's going to make a difference."

Reflecting on Gary's words, what he's really saying is that what will save the world—or serve the world—is your tenderness and your care. Because that's what it's asking for. That's what any child always asks for. The Earth is both our mother and our child.

Here is a poem from Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean poet who won the Nobel Prize in 1945. She was known as a harsh critic of poetry, with extraordinarily high standards. But when a sixteen-year-old boy handed her a sheaf of his poems, she read them, looked back at him and said, "Pablo, you're a real poet. Keep writing." She became the inspiration for Pablo Neruda.

A woman is singing in the valley. The shadow falling blots her out, but her song spreads far across the fields. Her heart is broken, like the jar she dropped this afternoon among the pebbles in the brook. And as she sings, the hidden wound sharpens on the thread of her song and becomes thin and hard, and her voice in modulations dampens with blood.

In the fields the other voices die with the dying day, and a moment ago the song of the last bird stopped. But her deathless heart, alive with grief, gathers all the silent voices into her own, sharp now yet very sweet.

Does she sing for a husband who looks at her silently in the dark? Or for a child whom her song caresses? Or does she sing for her own heart, more helpless than a babe at nightfall?

Night grows maternal before this song that goes to meet it. The stars with a sweetness that is human are

beginning to come out. The sky full of stars becomes human and understands the sorrows of this world.

And her song, as pure as water filled with light, cleanses the plain and rinses the mean air of day in which men hate. And from the throat of the woman who keeps on singing, day rises nobly, evaporating toward the stars.

It's a song of tears and beauty and connection with the turning of the Earth. If you were to take all the information—the 360 parts per million, the 410, the 420 that happens to be today's measurement—all the data about global systems and corporate power and climate disruption, somehow you have to find a way to carry it in your heart, in your body, in your being, and do it out of love.

What helps with this is realizing that you're not alone—not in the superficial sense of "we have a big movement," but in something far more mysterious and wonderful.

My friend Dina Metzger, a great activist and poet, once wrote: "Give me everything mangled and bruised and I will make a light of it to make you weep and we will have rain and we will begin again." Take the worst of things and transform them.

Dina has traveled around the world visiting shamans and healers and sages and wise women from many cultures, sitting in council together to ask: What do we do with this difficult, if not dark, time? She said her dream had always been to sit in council not only with humans but with the non-humans.

So when she was in Zimbabwe and Botswana sitting with the sangomas—the shamans there—she shared her dream. "Oh yes," they said. She told them she would love to sit in council with the elephants. They got a large flatbed truck and drove down to the Okavango to a watering hole near where herds of elephants gathered. They parked the truck and sat in a circle in the back for about half an hour, making prayers, sitting peacefully, and envisioning their connection with all of life—which is true, which we have.

Then a very large elephant—though they are all large, aren't they?—

But this was a particularly large elephant—they are all large, aren't they? This was a particularly big female who walked down from the hills to the truck where they were seated in their circle. She stuck her head into the circle, her eye four feet from Dina's, and stood there with them for twenty minutes without moving while they held their sacred space together. Then she nodded and walked off.

"Okay, that was pretty wild," they thought. They sat there, made prayers, thanked the elephant, and prepared to leave. They turned the truck around and were getting ready to go when they noticed that the elephant had gone up over the hill and now returned with fifteen or twenty other elephants. They all lined what was a sort of dry riverbed with a two-track jeep road, positioning themselves as if to acknowledge those who had come to listen and sit with them as they made their exit.

Dina said, "I don't know exactly what it means, but I do know that it means we're not alone—that we're not alone."

I was in Hawaii where I met one of my heroes, a man named Nainoa Thompson. How many people have ever heard of Nainoa Thompson? Maybe one or two people in the room—good, this is a treat then, because I get to tell you his story.

The Pacific islands were populated by the Polynesians, whose genetic lineage, traced through DNA, leads back to the islanders of the Philippines, Borneo, and Southeast Asia. The Polynesians and Hawaiians knew they had these great voyaging canoes in the old days—there were still pictures and paintings of them. They navigated half the earth covered with water, which is the Pacific Ocean.

When Captain Cook, arguably the finest navigator in the Royal Navy of England, went to the South Pacific islands, he met some of the master navigators there and asked them about the South Pacific. They cleared the sand and placed 120 stones on it, representing the islands within 4,000 miles in every direction. Then they took one of these navigators on Cook's ship. Through rain, doldrums, and dark clouds when you couldn't see the sky at night—with no way to know where you were—whenever they asked, he would say, "Oh, my island is there, and here's where we're headed."

In the 1970s, the Hawaiians decided to revive the voyaging tradition. They went to the far Marquesas and found a man named Mau, one of the last living navigators who had been trained in this lineage of shaman navigators. Nainoa was one of the small group who went there to train.

The training was intense. When Mau was trained, he got seasick, so his grandfather tied his hands together with rope, threw him overboard from a small boat, and just towed him around for weeks until he got used to being part of the ocean. Later in his training, his testicles were tied to the bottom of the boat for twenty-four hours so he could feel the waves in his body—there are five levels of waves, including those that bounce off islands 500 or 1,000 miles away and the deep ocean swells. He learned to read hundreds of stars, to watch the floating seaweed and the birds, to feel the different levels of waves.

Nainoa underwent this training, and then they took the first big voyaging canoe—two sixty-foot trees lashed together in the traditional way—and began to voyage across the Pacific. When they finally reached Tahiti, half the population came out to greet them as if they were gods, because they were demonstrating what this beautiful culture had always known: the capacity to sail the ocean without a single instrument while always knowing where you were.

Nainoa sits like a yogi—now he's trained his successors, including a young Hawaiian woman—and during the voyages of one or two months, you don't sleep. You sit in a kind of yogic meditation, and you always know where you are.

They decided to attempt the most difficult voyage of all: to Easter Island, the Rapa Nui, the most remote island in all the South Pacific. Through doldrums, through rain and gray skies, almost reaching that area, Nainoa fell asleep. He woke up in the middle of the night and realized he had fallen asleep—and he didn't know where he was. He didn't want to tell anyone he was lost because they had been sailing and paddling

for six weeks. So he just sat, not knowing, for a couple of days, letting them continue to sail.

Then in the night, he heard Mau's voice, his teacher's voice, saying, "When you don't know where you are, stop and do a very deep meditation and realize where you really are."

"So I just let everything go," Nainoa said, "and realized that I was in the center of the universe, that the boat was the center of the galaxy. We're always in the center. Where are you? Here. Now." He said, "All of a sudden I came to rest. I knew what my teacher meant. I was just where I was."

His teacher had told him, "If you are still lost, with your heart and your imagination, raise the islands out of the ocean." Nainoa said, "I didn't quite know what he meant by that, but there I was, sitting and realizing it's dark and I'm in the middle of the universe—what to do but just be."

Then there was a break in the clouds. The moon came out and showed on the horizon the peak of Rapa Nui. "It's as if when I was ready," he said, "the island appeared for me. My teacher could do that at will. We'd be out somewhere and he'd say, 'All right, this is where we're going,' and things would just appear. I don't know how he did that, but I've come to trust that I'm part of something so huge, so much bigger than anything I could possibly imagine with my little brain. When we go out"—imagine going out for two months through storms in a double-hulled canoe to cross the Pacific—"I've come to trust that I am part of something so wondrous and mysterious and enormous. It's not me who's taking care of it. My job is to become in harmony with this and let my love, my voice, my connection, my vision come out of that."

One day when I was walking through the Stanford University campus, I heard this story from Vandana Shiva, another great activist. Much of her work involved the Ganges cleanup project. She worked with the Mahant of Varanasi at the Tulsi Temple on this whole project to clean up the Ganges River.

I was walking through the Stanford University campus with a friend when I saw a crowd of people with cameras and video equipment on a little hillside. They were clustered around a pair of chimpanzees—a male running loose and a female on a chain about twenty-five feet long, a light chain. It turned out the male was from Marine World Africa, and the female was being studied for something at Stanford. And who I thought were spectators were actually scientists and publicity people trying to get them to mate.

The male was eager, you know how they can be. He grunted and grabbed the female's chain and tugged. She whimpered and backed away. He pulled again. She pulled back. Watching the chimps' faces, I began to feel sympathy for the female.

Suddenly, the female chimp yanked her chain out of the male's grasp. And to my amazement, she walked through the crowd straight over to me, took my hand, and led me across the circle to the only other two women in the crowd and joined hands with them. And now the four of us stood together in a circle. I remember the feeling of that rough palm against mine. The little chimp had recognized us and reached out across all the years of evolution to form her own women's support group.

We're part of something, and that something—which is life, which is huge and mysterious and beautiful—is asking of you to participate in life. And it's asking you all the time. You may not always pick up the phone or answer your text, whatever it is.

This from Alison Luterman, poet in Oakland. She describes the generosity of life: "In the same way sun drapes a buttered scarf across your face, rose opens herself to your glance, and rain shares its divine melancholy, the whole world keeps whispering or shouting to you, nibbling your ear like a neglected lover."

Here we are on this amazing earth, connected with the creatures and the animals and the atmosphere and the food chains. We saw these white freshwater dolphins in the Irrawaddy River in March when we were traveling in Burma. The dolphins of the world were swimming along with us. And Trudy, my partner, wanted to jump off the boat and swim along with the dolphins because she does that in other places. But I said, the Irrawaddy is not the right place to do this right now—there was lots of other boat traffic and such. But we're part of this web. Everybody knows it in some way.

And then the question is, well, what do we do? How do we take the spirit and the song and the vision and the science and so forth from this day and bring it each in our own way into action?

I would like to use the image of planting seeds. You don't make the fields, you don't make the rain and so forth, but you carry seeds in your heart. And the seeds are really the seeds of your best intentions and the seeds of your actions. As Henry David Thoreau said, "Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me you have a seed there to plant and I am prepared to expect wonders."

It's not given to you to hold the world or change it—that's not your responsibility. That would be pretty egotistical: "Okay, I'm going to do it." But it is given to you to plant beautiful and amazing seeds and to join with others and to water them and to amend the soil, each in your own way.

And it's going to take a while. I'm sorry to say, the earth changes slowly.

Our friend Ari Ariyaratne is the most famous community organizer in Asia. He started the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka that eventually spread to half the villages or more in the country. When the Norwegians were brokering a peace treaty there, Ari called all his people together to Anuradhapura, the great ancient temple there, to talk about how to make peace. Six hundred fifty thousand people came—and this is a country of only eighteen million people. A quite extraordinary being.

He stood up there and he said, "It took us five hundred years to get into this civil war, this mess. Four hundred years of British colonial oppression, five hundred years of conflict between the Muslims and the Buddhists and the Hindus, two hundred years of disparity between the rich, wet parts and the poor, dry parts of the island. So the Buddha teaches us that things arise according to causes and conditions. If we wish this to change, we will have to change the causes and conditions. Therefore, I offer you the

Sarvodaya five-hundred-year peace plan.

"Five years of ceasefire, ten years of rebuilding roads and schools, twenty-five years to learn each other's language and religion, fifty years of an economic plan to bring harmony between the rich and the poor parts of the island, and in one hundred years we'll have a council and we'll sit down and we'll say, 'Twenty percent—how are we doing? Are we on the right track?' And then we'll do it again for the next hundred and the next hundred. And maybe in..."

He said, if we pursue it—not maybe, if we plant these seeds—in 500 years, we will have the island of peace that we dream of.

Now I got to tell this story to the Dalai Lama when I was doing some teaching at an event with him. Having the Dalai Lama sit there when you do teaching is actually a very cool thing. I told this story and he was grinning because he's in the same predicament. He's got Tibet and fifty years of Chinese military oppression and the loss of temples and cultures and all those things. And he said—talking about anger and the suffering—he said they've taken our sacred texts. They've burned our temples. They've taken our ability to practice our religion and rituals. They've taken so much from us. "Why should I let them take my happiness?" And then he laughed.

You understand that no one can take away your joy. No one can take that part of your heart from you.

So I got to tell this story to the Dalai Lama. And then there's the passage from Thomas Merton, where he writes to an activist and says, "Do not depend on the hope of results. You may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no results at all, if not at times perhaps bringing about its opposite. As you get used to this, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, and the truth of the work itself."

And so you set an intention in your heart, you align yourself with what the Earth asks of you—because you are of the Earth, you are the Earth—and you plant your seeds. For some it will be demonstrating, and for some it will be teaching kids in a preschool how to make a garden, raising conscious children, running a conscious business. For some it will be teaching not only English to immigrants, but really making immigrants understand that they too are part of the web of the world that's welcome. Or tending the animals and letting them know that you love them, that they're part of you, that we exist with the animal world. In fact, we are the animal world. It's kind of this delusion to think somehow that we're different from all this.

And so you have one foot in the trees and the soil of the earth and the other foot in eternity. Because the question is not the future of the earth or the future of humanity, but it is the presence of something greater, of eternity itself. And that means somehow that in order to do this work—to not feel guilty, as Gary says, but to do it out of love—requires that you first carry, that you set an inner intention that's really beautiful, maybe something you can't possibly do, but you set it as the vision, your bodhisattva vow. You

act on it, you plant your seeds.

And here's the secret. It's a summary of the Bhagavad Gita, and you get your money's worth today. This is the secret: to act well without attachment to the fruits of the actions, because it's not given to you to determine how it's going to come out. But what's given to you is to act beautifully and bravely and mercifully and to love. And if you do that, all kinds of things—the elephants will be cheering you and the dolphins will be swimming with you and the chimpanzees will take your hand and say, "Come on baby, let's do more of this." The earth will be with you, because the earth wants this as well, and you can begin to trust this.

So I'm supposed to teach a meditation and we don't have all that much time. Let me think for a second. Anything else that I want to say? Yeah, I'm going to read you one little thing, then we'll do our meditation. It's one of my favorite poems from Diane Ackerman, who's also a good friend. When I think about people making a bodhisattva vow—I think Donald and David Loy talked about the bodhisattva vow: "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all," and so forth. Of course, it's very complicated because if you decide to save the sentient beings in your family, they don't necessarily want to be saved by you. Then you realize that saving sentient beings means something a little different than your ideas about how they're supposed to be.

This is Diane Ackerman's version of what I call her version of the Bodhisattva Vows—saying if you were to have prayer in the schools, here's maybe a morning prayer that kids could make: "In the name of daybreak and the eyelids of morning and the wayfaring moon and the night when it departs, I swear I will not dishonor my soul with hatred, but offer myself humbly as a guardian of nature, as a healer of misery, as a messenger of wonder and an architect of peace."

And so in the meditation, which we'll do now, one of the things I'll ask is if you were to make a little vow, make your own bodhisattva vow from today, what would it be? What would the seeds be? Sometimes it's just as simple as "I vow to be kind to every being I encounter." It can be that simple, but it might be something else, and only you can know. It's sort of setting the compass of your heart.

So let your eyes close gently and come back just to feel your breath breathing. The wind that was carried to you that dusted the peaks of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, swept across the Pacific to your breath that you take in right now. Of course, it also was the breath of the person sitting next to you a few seconds ago. You don't even have to kiss them—they give you your breath. It's true. And it's the breath of the...

Continue beautifying this talk (part 6/8). Maintain the same tone and style as previous parts.

raccoons that dwell in the trees and the deer that move around us and the earthworms and the sparrows. Let your life breath breathe in and out, and bring your attention gently to the area of your heart.

Feel that you have been given life. You have been given this amazing incarnation, this gift of being alive. Sometimes it feels small, and you become identified with unworthiness and grief and fear and

attachments. But it is also possible to feel the radiance of life given to you that breathes itself and moves. In this there dwells a deep peace and natural love.

Imagine as you sit now that this love—which is what was born into you, this tenderness and care that is born into every newborn child—fills your body, all the cells of your body, with life force and healing and care.

Now imagine somehow that you could expand so that your head pokes up through the ceiling and your body grows bigger and bigger until you are larger than this whole building. All the beings inside here, breathing and meditating, are now contained within you. You become this great vast being who holds Spirit Rock in your body. All their human experiences—breathing and thinking and feeling—rest within you.

Let yourself grow bigger and bigger. Imagine, because identity is so mysterious, that you can feel not just the room, but float up into the sky and become enormous. As if you float over the Bay Area, and all of California is now down there, but part of this huge body you are becoming, bigger and bigger.

Within you is humanity—the human condition of joy and desire and loneliness and caring and violence and the love of parents for their children and failure and creativity—and all the animals, the bay and the ocean. All of this dwells in you. You are now this vast being, and you grow bigger and bigger as if you are so immense that the whole earth is there in front of you and you could hold it in your lap. You realize, no—it is part of you.

You are as big as the solar system, and you expand like the galaxies, huge. Even the little earth is just there, a blue-green ball deep within you, with all its dreams and hopes and hundreds of thousands of millions of years of life. You rest in the vastness that is silent and peaceful, where everything that exists dwells within you.

You are the ancient one. Everything that ever is or was or will be, all time, the dance of the universe, exists within you. It is silent and peaceful, without boundaries, beyond form.

Gently begin to collect yourself. Gently the vastness starts to gather and grow smaller. Slowly you feel the galaxies and the solar system and the earth floating within you with all the cities and forests and oceans. Now you look and see the earth and the beings on it, and realize you are being given the gift of incarnation—to be a small part of the whole and yet at the same time to have one foot in your human body and another in eternity itself, in the timeless.

You can do something beautiful with the life you have been given. You can tend this earth, you can care for all beings—not out of guilt, as Gary says, but out of love and compassion, out of care, for they are all part of you.

Before you return to your small self, to the limited and beautiful and wonderful incarnation that you have

been given in this body, as you look at this earth from this vast perspective, let yourself listen for your own bodhisattva vow or your own highest intention. What would it be that on this day you might say: "This is the direction of my heart"? What is the spirit and what are the energy and the vision that you want to carry from this day? How can you carry it beautifully in your own form—as a guardian of nature, a healer of misery, a messenger of wonder, an architect of peace?

As you envision now coming back to this body and incarnation, let the heart fill with compassion for all the worries and struggles that you and others carry. Let there come an understanding in this tenderness—heart filled with tenderness—of how to navigate the joys and sorrows, the gain and loss, the praise and blame, the birth and death. This is human incarnation. This is this earth. How to carry yourself so beautifully and plant the best of seeds.

As you envision, feel what your body would be like to carry the spirit of awakening. Sense what the quality of your heart will be as you carry this spirit of awakening and care. As you prepare to re-inhabit this human life with wisdom now, and the vows of what you will do, and a deep sense of tenderness.

As you return, you realize that in your lap, the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas—Kuan Yin, the goddess of infinite compassion—have left you a gift. You can picture or imagine that there is a gift in your lap, which is a clear symbol of just what you need to carry you into this work of loving and serving the earth most skillfully.

You open this gift from the goddess of compassion and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. It is the perfect thing that you need to keep this sense of peace and the beautiful seeds and the action you will take. Let yourself unwrap it, picture it, imagine it, envision it in any way you can. If it is not clear, hold it up in your hands to the sunlight. This is the gift—the clear symbol of just what you need as you leave the temple and return to the marketplace.

Finally, coming back to sense yourself seated here now with this gift and with your heart's intention, let there be loving and compassionate awareness of this life you have been given. Think of the people who care about you the most, how they love you and want the best for you. You are a daughter or a son of this earth. You are wanted here.

And let the love in, because compassion and love are never complete unless they include the one seated right here on your own cushion. Then the circle is complete and you become an expression of that love. Fill yourself with that love. Let it bless you. Let it touch all the cells of your body, every breath and heartbeat. Take your gift. Remember your vows or your sacred intention. Most of all, remember that you can dance.

[Pause for movement and preparation]

As these cords are passed around, don't tie them on yet. Just hold them and pass them to others near you. You may have seen people wearing blessing or protection cords—there are red ones and golden ones.

While they're distributed, let me speak about them briefly.

Throughout Buddhist Asia, from what were the Buddhist countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan and India, all the way across Southeast Asia through China and Japan, the sacred thread is used as a symbol of our interbeing and interconnectedness. It's part of all kinds of rituals of blessing and care. Often they're colored red—I received this one from the Dalai Lama—or sometimes they're golden. The reason is that they're considered one thread from the robe of a monk or a nun that you wear in the marketplace. It's essentially remembering that this is your true nature. You're a monk or a nun in disguise, basically, out there in the marketplace. You have to remember that your true home is the temple and that your vows and the intention you set speak from and to who you are in the deepest and most beautiful way.

These sacred threads appear across traditions. If you go to India and meet a Brahmin priest, they'll wear a white thread around their body for the whole of their adult life to show that they're living within the understanding that takes every experience, every being, everything they touch as part of the divine, as part of what's holy.

When I first participated in these protection blessing cord ceremonies with Lama Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche years ago, somebody asked, "Well, what exactly does this protect you from?" And he said, "Why, yourself, of course."

To create these cords, we need to tie knots in them as a way for them to truly bless you.

The first knot is the knot of refuge. Hold your cord and reflect on what is the deepest refuge you can take—the refuge that will carry you and support you. In the Buddhist tradition, sometimes it's refuge in the Buddha and in all awakened beings, the possibility of awakening, seeing the Buddha nature in every being. Refuge in Dharma, in what's true, speaking truth and acting from truth. Refuge in Sangha, the community of all those who are awakening together—the ordained Sangha, the Sangha of awakened ones.

But your refuge could also be refuge in life itself, in Mother Earth, in Pachamama. The refuge could be in the community of all who are serving life. Think for a moment: what is the refuge I turn to for support when things are hard? When I want to sit in council with the elephants or the dolphins? When I know that this is really where I go for my connection to all things?

Knowing what your refuge is, and that it can support and carry you through anything, take refuge and tie a knot in your cord that is a reminder that you are connected with this timeless, eternal refuge—always there for you.

The second knot is the knot of compassion. Traditionally, in the creation of a protection cord or when entering a temple or monastery, you would take vows: to refrain from killing or causing harm to living beings; to refrain from stealing or taking that which doesn't belong to you; to refrain from being greedy and disturbing the wise relations of the world by taking what you shouldn't; to refrain from causing harm through speaking falsely or misusing speech; to refrain from causing harm through the misuse of

intoxicants or sexuality.

But underlying all of these is simply the heart's vow to move through this world out of compassion for yourself and other beings and not to cause harm—to let your life be one that affirms life. This is the knot of compassion. Hold it and reflect on your own deep intention to not cause harm and to meet all beings—those who are joyful and those who are suffering, those who are causing suffering and those liberating beings from suffering—to meet every being with a tender heart, especially yourself, to be the carrier of compassion.

When you're ready to take the intention or vow of non-harming, tie the second knot in your cord.

Now it's almost fully activated, but not quite. The third knot is the knot of the bodhisattva vow—that intention you held when coming back to this body and this planet and this life, when you saw what you would take to set the compass of your heart. Each of you has envisioned something: an intention, a vow, a sacred direction, touched by what you've seen today, by what moved you, by what reminded you who you are, what inspired you.

Now, holding the cord for the third and final knot, tie into it your sacred intention, so that you might not forget but carry it beautifully from this place and this day.

And now it is fully activated.

If you want to wear it around your neck, you can put it around your neck. Don't tie it on yet—let the two ends hang down. If you want to wear it around your wrist, or your ankle for that matter if you're very hip, whatever. Wrap it around three times and let the two ends hang down.

And then, before you do anything else with it, I'm going to ask that you turn to a person sitting near you in a moment. Before you tie on their blessing cord, and when you tie it, really give them a silent blessing. But first, they have to tell you what their vow was that they made. Because giving it word and saying it out loud brings it more alive on this earth and in your being, in your consciousness.

And then before they tie yours on, you get to tell them what your vow was, what your sacred intention was. Then you get to tie these together, and we'll have a little celebration to end.

So turn to someone, find a partner, whoever's near you. This is not dating, remember. This is just, you know... And if there aren't two people, it could be three.

The story you're telling is of the third knot—your main intention from the day.

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