

After the Election: Buddhist Wisdom for Hope & Healing

A special publication from
Lion's Roar magazine



Wisdom for Times Like These

IF YOU'RE LIKE ME, you're hurting right now.

If you're like me, you're afraid for the vulnerable in our society, distressed that the country is going backwards, grieving for the progress that could have been made, angry that people have been manipulated into believing that victimizing others will solve their problems, and worried about the future.

And if you're like me, you'll find some Buddhist wisdom helpful right now. It's made for times like these.

That's why *Lion's Roar* magazine is honored to offer you this special publication presenting the best of Buddhist wisdom specially focused on the challenges we're facing now, both as caring individuals and as a society.

The day after the election, we asked America's leading Buddhist teachers to offer their comments, advice, and teachings to address how so many of us were feeling. As you will see, what they wrote is wise, heartfelt, compassionate, and forward-looking. Together, these responses show the great depth and breadth of Buddhism today. In my own sorrow, shock, and fear for the future, they have been a lifeline.

In this special publication from *Lion's Roar* magazine, you will also find in-depth Buddhist teachings and practices that will be particularly helpful in this difficult time. They are offered to us by such wise teachers as Pema Chödrön, Sharon Salzberg, and Rev. angel Kyodo Williams. We are also proud to offer an inspiring manifesto on the transformative power of love by one of the most important social critics of our time, bell hooks.

Buddhist wisdom offers us two things we need right now: healing and hope.

Buddhist wisdom is about recognizing and cultivating the human goodness at the core of our being. Accessing our inherent wisdom and compassion will allow us to heal our personal pain and wounded country, and to feel hope for the future.

How will we answer the question, Who are we as a nation? I truly believe this is an opportunity for awakening as a society, if we choose to take it.

Love trumps hate. Love, combined with wisdom and resolve, also overcomes divisiveness, aggression, greed, fearfulness, and domination. It will give us the harmonious society we long for and the future requires. Before it was just a campaign slogan. Now we must make it a reality. I have faith we can.

May this small offering of Buddhist wisdom be of benefit to you, your loved ones, and our world.

—Melvin McLeod, Editor-in-Chief, *Lion's Roar* magazine

Cover: Head of Buddha, ca. 560. China, Northern Qi dynasty (550-577). Limestone, 15.5x10x12 inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Roothbert. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY / Art Resource, NY

What We Have to Do— and How We'll Do It

JAN WILLIS

Donald Trump is now our president. I say “our,” but for many of us it does not feel that way. His victory was actually a huge loss—for immigrants to this country, for women’s rights, for LGBTQ rights, for health care rights, for reproductive rights, and for the rights of people of color.

Now we must prepare ourselves to defend those hard-won rights and to help to ease the fears of those who feel threatened. How do we do this?

On a national level, by remaining vigilant and by being vocal when rights are threatened.

On the personal level: By committing to serve as caring and compassionate warriors for those who are experiencing fear. By our compassionate presence. By being there to listen to personal grievances. By giving, as much as we can, the gifts of fearlessness and hope. By remaining vigilant.

In Buddhism, those bodhisattvas (beings who put others’ welfare before their own) are often referred to as “brave” bodhisattvas. Now, more than ever, we have to be wise, compassionate, and brave.

JAN WILLIS is professor emerita of religion at Wesleyan University and author of Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist.



What I’m Practicing Now

PEMA CHÖDRÖN

During difficult times like these, I’m feeling that the most important thing is our love for each other. We need to remember to express our love and avoid the temptation to get caught in negative and aggressive thinking.

Instead of polarizing, this is a chance to stay with the groundlessness. Since the election, I’ve been meditating and getting in touch with a deep and profound sadness. It’s hard to stay with that much vulnerability, but that’s what I’m doing. Groundlessness and tenderness and sadness have so much to teach us. It’s a time to contact our hearts and to reach out and help in any way we can.

ANI PEMA CHÖDRÖN is an American-born Buddhist nun and the author of such best-selling books as The Wisdom of No Escape and The Places That Scare You.



Dharma for a Difficult Time

JACK KORNFIELD

*Whatever your point of view,
Take time to quiet the mind and tend to the heart.
Then go out and look at the sky.*

*Remember vastness, there are seasons to all things—
gain and loss, praise and blame, expansion and contraction.
Learn from the trees.
Practice equanimity and steadiness.*

*Remember the timeless dharma amidst it all.
Think of the best of human goodness.
Let yourself become a beacon of integrity, with your thoughts, words and deeds.
Integrity in speech and action, virtue, and non-harming bring blessings.*

*Remember the Noble Truths, no matter the politics or the season:
Greed, hatred and ignorance cause suffering. Let them go.
Love, generosity, and wisdom bring the end of suffering. Foster them.*

*Remember the Buddha's counsel,
“Hatred never ends by hatred but by love alone is healed.
This is the ancient and eternal law.”*

*The human heart has freedom to choose love, dignity, and respect.
In every circumstance, embody respect and cultivate compassion for all.*

*Let yourself become a beacon of dharma.
Amidst the changes, shine with courage and trust.*

*This is your world. Plant seeds of goodness
and water them everywhere.*

Then blessings will grow for yourself and for all.

JACK KORNFIELD is a founder of the Spirit Rock Insight Meditation Center, a Ph.D psychologist, and the best-selling author of such books as *After the Ecstasy*, *the Laundry*.

Now Is the Time

ZENJU EARTHLYN MANUEL

Now is the time we have been practicing for.

We are living what happens when what goes unacknowledged surfaces. It feels like a new reality, but you know in your heart it is not.

To suffer based on expectations is to live haunted and hunted. But we are fortunate. There could be no other answer to our meditation and prayers to dissolve hatred than to be placed front and center with it. When a shift in a system has occurred, especially one that causes fear and discomfort, it allows for something strikingly different to appear, furthering our evolution as people. We can only know where we are going when we get there.

Many of us have been practicing the Buddha's teachings or walking a spiritual journey forever and preparing for every moment of our existence. We have been waiting for this time. We are ready for it. Our pain and anger are to be exposed, if only for us to transform and mature with it. In Buddhist practice we say congratulations, because now is the time you have been practicing for. No more just practicing the dance. We must now dance. This is not a dress rehearsal.

REV. ZENJU EARTHLYN MANUEL, PH.D., is the guiding teacher of Still Breathing Zen Community in East Oakland and author of The Way of Tenderness.



The Power We Have

LODRO RINZLER

The person we elect has tremendous power. But they have zero power over how we show up for others and offer love. Zero.

LODRO RINZLER'S most recent book is How to Love Yourself (and Other People): Spiritual Advice for Modern Relationships.

The Bodhisattva's Long Game

NORMAN FISCHER

Bodhisattvas are committed to their practice, which means to sit, to get up, and to sweep the garden—the whole world, close in and far away—every day, no matter what. They have always done this; they always will. Good times, bad times, they keep on going just the same. Bodhisattvas play the long game. They have confidence in the power of goodness over time. And they know that dark times bring out the heroic in us.

We have been fortunate to have had eight years with a decent, intelligent, thoughtful, and caring human being in the White House. This is more than we would have expected. Let's not forget that the same people who elected Trump elected Obama.

It's okay to freak out, grieve, and vent for a while. Then we can get back to work, as always, for the good.

Think of what the Dalai Lama has gone through in his lifetime. He maintains kindness for everyone, though he has lost his country and his culture at the hands of a brutal regime. Yet he doesn't hate the Chinese and finds redeeming features in them. He maintains his sense of humor. He has turned his tragedy into a teaching for the world.

Let's do the same.

ZOKETSU NORMAN FISCHER is a Zen teacher, poet, and founder of the Everyday Zen Foundation.





Teaching: Smile at Fear

It's natural to feel the pain of fear in times like these, but fear doesn't have to hold you back. Pema Chödrön on how to step up for yourself—and all beings.

DESPITE WHAT WE MIGHT THINK much of the time and what the news programs imply, we all wish to be sane and open-hearted people. We could take our wish to be more sane and kind and put it in a very large context. We could expand it into a desire to help all other people, to help the whole world.

First, we need a place to start. We can't simply begin with the whole world. We need to begin by reaching out to the people who come into our own lives—our family members,

our neighbors, our coworkers. Perhaps we are inspired to enter a profession where we can spend our time and energy trying to help at a global or national level. But even if we express our wish to be open-hearted by working for global peace or justice or environmental well-being, even on that grand scale, we need to work on what is immediate to us all the time. We need to work on ourselves.

When we do this work on ourselves, however, we can still think of it in the wider context of our community, our nation, and our world. Viewing the work we do on ourselves in this larger context is very important. I don't mean to be harsh, but I have to say that a lot of people who do so-called spiritual work can be somewhat selfish. Their spiritual path is all about taking care of themselves, and they may not notice that what makes them feel comfortable and secure is actually at the expense of other people. We all know people like this, don't we?

If we're hurting enough, and we really start looking for the source of our pain and what we can do about it, it goes beyond just wanting to feel better ourselves. In Buddhism, this is called the bodhisattva ideal. In the Shambhala teachings, we talk about it as warriorship, or, you might say, spiritual warriorship. At its most basic, it means working on ourselves, developing courage and fearlessness and cultivating our capacity to love and care about other people. It involves taking good care of ourselves, but whatever we do, it's all in the bigger context of helping.

When we look at the world around us—our immediate world and the world beyond—we see a lot of difficulty and dysfunction. The news we hear is mostly bad news, and that makes us afraid. It can be quite discouraging. Yet, we could actually derive inspiration for our warriorship, for our bodhisattva path, from these dire circumstances. We could recognize the fact, and proclaim the fact, that we are needed.

Who are "we"? You and me and every one of us—each of us on this earth is needed at this time. We're needed because there are hundreds of thousands of billions of beings who are suffering. If even one small segment of us, one sub-community, took it upon themselves to live their life in a way that helped their families, their neighborhoods, their towns, and indeed the earth itself, something good would begin to happen.

If we come to the understanding that we are needed and commit ourselves to doing something about our own pain and the pain around us, we will find we are on a journey. A warrior is always on a journey, and a main feature of that journey is fear. This fear is not simply something to be lamented, avoided, or vanquished. It is something to be examined, something to make a relationship with.

Fear is a very timely topic now, because fear these days seems so palpable, so atmospheric. You can almost smell the fear around you. The polarization, fundamentalism, aggression, violence, and unkindness that are happening everywhere on the planet bring out our fear and nervousness and make us feel that we are on shaky ground.

The truth is that the ground has always been shaky, forever. But in times when fear is prevalent, that truth is more obvious. All this fear surrounding us may sound like the bad news, but in fact it's the good news. Fear is like a dot that emerges in the space in front of us and captures our attention. It is like a doorway we could go through, but where that doorway leads is not predetermined. It is up to us. Usually when we're afraid, it sets off a chain reaction. We go inward and start to armor ourselves, trying to protect ourselves from whatever we think is going to hurt us. But our attempts to protect ourselves do not lessen the fear. Quite the opposite—the fear actually escalates. Rather than becoming free from fear, we become hardened. As our fear spreads within, it makes us harder and more set in our ways.

A lot of the most painful conditions in the world are initially motivated by fear. Fundamentalism, for example, comes about when we feel we need something definite and solid to protect ourselves from those who are different from us. That arises from the fear of losing control. Likewise, our addictions come from trying to soothe the discomfort we feel inside, the fear that things are out of our control and we have no secure ground under our feet. Whatever form fear hardens into, it continues to escalate and results in actions that can do great damage. It escalates into wars and riots. It escalates into violence and cruelty. It creates an ugly world, which breeds more fear.

Yet the raw fear initially emerges as a dot in space, as a doorway that can go either way. If we choose to take notice of the actual experience of fear, whether it's just a queasy feeling in our stomach or actual terror, whether it's a subtle level of discomfort or mind-numbing dramatic anxiety, we can smile at it, believe it or not. It could be a literal smile or a metaphor for coming to know fear, turning toward fear, touching fear. In that case, rather than fear setting off a chain reaction where you're trying to protect yourself from it, it becomes a source of tenderness. We experience our vulnerability, but we don't feel we have to harden ourselves in response. This makes it possible for us to help ourselves and to help others.

We're all very familiar with the experience of fear escalating, or the experience of running away from fear. But have we ever taken the time to truly touch our fear, to be present with it and experience it fully? Do we know what it might mean to smile at fear?

Recently I was traveling on an airplane and the man who was sitting next to me had just finished his copy of Time magazine and he asked me if I wanted to read it. I started leafing through it and stumbled upon an article on fear. It said that scientific tests have proved that people are more afraid of uncertainty than they are of physical pain. Wow, I thought, that gets right to what I've been saying about the basic queasiness that leads us to all kinds of self-destructive and other-destructive habits; about the whole chain of events that emerges from our fear of uncertainty, of not knowing what in the world is happening or what is going to happen. All this emerges from wanting to be safe and secure and comfortable.

I've done a lot of observing of myself, my friends, and other people, trying to see how this

nervousness about uncertainty happens to us and what it leads to. It's interesting to explore what happens with our bodies, our speech, and our mind. What I've noticed is that there are two main ways that fear of uncertainty affects us, at least initially. One is that we speed up and the other is that we get very lazy.

Once, when I was feeling uncertain and anxious in my small retreat cabin, I looked at the experience. I was like a ping-pong ball bouncing around. There were only two rooms in this cabin, but there I was bouncing around from one room to the other, starting something and then not even halfway through it, bouncing over to something else. I was all by myself in the wilderness and yet I was filling the space with all of this frantic activity.

As I've talked about this with people, many of them share their experiences of how a basic level of nervousness causes them to speed around even in their own homes, bouncing from room to room and task to task and never quite finishing anything. People talk about going back and forth between one thing and another, emailing and calling people on the phone. They start projects that get half done at best, and they rush all over the place, complaining the whole time about how much they have to do. But in fact, the most threatening thing would be having nothing to do.

Lazy is the other way to go. It is the opposite of speed, and yet these two seeming opposites are both about the same thing: avoiding being present with our fear of uncertainty. In the case of laziness, you become completely paralyzed. You can't get yourself to do anything because the underlying uncertainty and nervousness is so great. You procrastinate. You feel unworthy. The laziness has a frozen quality. You don't move. You become a couch potato, or you spend hour after hour on the computer, not as a form of speediness but just distracting yourself, trying not to feel what's underneath what you're feeling, trying to avoid touching the uncertainty and uneasiness. And yet in the background, it dominates your life.

What Trungpa Rinpoche taught about the underlying, fundamental uncertainty is that the very basis of fear is doubting ourselves, not trusting ourselves. You could also say it is not loving ourselves, not respecting ourselves. In a nutshell, you feel bad about who you are.

So the very first step, and perhaps the hardest, is developing an unconditional friendship with oneself.

Developing unconditional friendship means taking the very scary step of getting to know yourself. It means being willing to look at yourself clearly and to stay with yourself when you want to shut down. It means keeping your heart open when you feel that what you see in yourself is just too embarrassing, too painful, too unpleasant, too hateful.

The hallmark of this training in spiritual warriorship, in the bodhisattva path, is cultivating bravery. With such bravery you could go anywhere on the earth and be of help to other people because you wouldn't shut down on them. You would be right there with them for whatever they were going through. But the first step along this path is looking at yourself with a feeling of gentleness and kindness, and it takes a lot of guts to do this. If you've tried

it, you know how difficult it can be to stay present when you begin to fear what you see.

If you do stay present with what you see when you look at yourself again and again, you begin to develop a deeper friendship with yourself. It's a complete friendship, because you are not leaving out the parts that are painful to be with. It's the same way you would develop a complete friendship with another person. You include all that they are. When you develop this complete friendship with yourself, the parts you're embarrassed about—as well as the parts you're proud of—manifest as genuineness. A genuine person is a person who is not hiding anything, who is not conning themselves. A genuine person doesn't put up masks and shields.

We know what it's like to look at someone and feel we are just seeing their mask, that we're not really seeing their genuine heart, their genuine mind. Their speed or their laziness, their fear, takes the form of a mask. They hide behind their roadrunner or couch potato persona. But when someone is present for all of their uncertainties, for the scary places within, they become genuine, and the mask, the persona, falls away. You feel you can trust them because they're not conning themselves, and they're not going to con you. Their genuineness manifests because they have seen all there is to see about themselves. It doesn't mean that they're not still embarrassed or uncomfortable about things they see, but they don't run away. They don't avoid experiencing what they are feeling through some form of suppressing, like drinking, drugs, or another addiction. They don't become fundamentalist to avoid feeling what they feel about themselves. They do not strap on the armor.

When we wall ourselves off from uncertainty and fear, Trungpa Rinpoche said that we develop an "iron heart." When someone develops a true friendship with themselves, the iron heart softens into something else. It becomes a vulnerable heart, a tender heart. It becomes a genuine heart of sadness, because it is a heart that is willing to be touched by pain and remain present.

You might think becoming a spiritual warrior means going to the most hellish parts of the earth and helping people. It is true that a spiritual warrior would do that if it was called for, but becoming a spiritual warrior does not start there. It must begin with the determination that you want to really know yourself completely and utterly, so that you don't have any private rooms and nooks and crannies that you're concealing. You can't become a warrior who helps others to find themselves if you are not making that journey yourself. The journey needn't be completed, but you must have started down the road of encountering your fear.

Once I was staying in close quarters with a friend who was really angry at me. It was the equivalent of being trapped on a Greyhound bus for a couple of months together—me, my friend, her anger, and my feelings of inadequacy. I tried everything to get her to like me again, but she just became angrier and angrier until she refused to talk altogether. That's one of the most uncomfortable places to end up in with someone you are trying to get to like you again, because you're getting nothing back. This situation intensified to the point where

I realized that my whole personality, everything I did, the whole way I related to people, was based entirely on avoiding feeling bad about myself. I strove to live behind a mask that others would love and would therefore cause me to love myself. That plan did not work.

It was a powerful revelation to see that all my habits and approaches to life were coming from this deep hiding and avoidance. It was exhilarating in some way, but then I realized that my friend and I were still on the bus together, and work remained to be done. Life is like that. You have your insights, but the challenge remains.

I had heard the phrases “unconditional friendship” and “genuine heart of sadness” before, but at that point they began to make real sense to me. What produces a genuine person, I realized, is being open to not feeling okay. It means to be open to everything—to all the horrors as well as the beauties of life, to the whole extraordinary variety of life. I began to realize that this whole mess the human race is in—the fact that we don’t take care of the planet and we don’t take care of each other, the wars, the hatred, the fundamentalism—all actually come from running away. Individually, collectively, we are trying to avoid feeling bad about ourselves.

Once you start to look at it this way, to smile a bit about this fear instead of letting it escalate, you realize that going about things this way is a bunch of bullshit. Wait a minute here, you might think, what’s going on? Seemingly, it’s just me. But me seems to be being pretty hard on me. What’s up with that? When I was stuck with my friend, I started to see behind it all. A smile crossed my face. If I allow myself to look at what hurts, I find a genuine, open heart. The business of avoiding who we are is a game that never needed to begin in the first place. That’s worth a smile. It was a very fortunate bus ride.

My companion never did really like me, but in that situation she became my teacher. When none of my cute words and jokes and compliments worked, I had to deal with what was under all of that—someone being harsh with themselves for no good reason. It takes guts to get to that place. I can’t say that I did it willingly, and I’m not sure that anyone would do it willingly, but situations like that can help us to see why we need to look into our fear.

It’s not so easy to do, but fortunately we have a method that can help us discover the courage to smile at fear. Meditation practice is a method for being with ourselves fully and completely, allowing the time and space to see it all with gentleness, kindness, and dead honesty. It is the safest environment within which to undertake this mission impossible. And when meditation practice has helped us to be honest and courageous enough to know ourselves in a deep way, we can begin to extend out and help others, because the things outside of us that appear threatening seem that way because of the fear within, the fear we have been reluctant to look at. The things that unnerve us, that trigger feelings of inadequacy, that make us feel that we can’t handle it, that we are not good enough, lose their power over us when we learn to smile at fear.

It’s not a one-shot deal, as Trungpa Rinpoche was fond of saying. There are many reruns.

We go through it again and again. We feel uncertain, we busy ourselves, we become frozen, we are lazy, our fear escalates. But our practice also makes it possible for us to notice it happening again and again, and to allow fearlessness and genuineness to emerge from the very act of going into our fear.

While fearlessness may be our goal, so to speak, the basis of fearlessness is knowing fear, and that knowing takes place over and over again. Fearlessness and the compassion that arises from it are not solid and permanent. They emerge when your fears are triggered. I'm sure that if I had to go on the bus with that same lady tomorrow, it would be a very different experience, yet I would still be uncomfortable. But when my fear was inevitably triggered, warriorship would be triggered as well. And a smile might more easily cross my face.

If you touch the fear instead of running from it, you find tenderness, vulnerability, and sometimes a sense of sadness. This tender-heartedness happens naturally when you start to be brave enough to stay present, because instead of armoring yourself, instead of turning to anger, self-denigration, and iron-heartedness, you keep your eyes open and you begin, as Trungpa Rinpoche said, to see the blueness of an iris, the wetness of water, the movement of the wind. Becoming more in touch with ourselves gives birth to enormous appreciation for the world and for other people. It can sound corny, but you feel grateful for the beauty of the world. It's a very special way to live. Your heart is filled with gratitude, appreciation, compassion, and caring for other people. And it all comes from touching that shakiness within and being willing to be present with it.



Be Kind to Yourself

A three-step contemplation by Kristin Neff to give yourself the compassion you need (and deserve) at times like these.

1. Put both hands on your heart, pause, and feel their warmth. You can also put your hand any place on your body that feels soothing and comforting, like your belly or face.
2. Breathe deeply in and out.
3. Speak these words to yourself, out loud or silently, in a warm and caring tone:

This is a moment of suffering.

Suffering is a part of life.

May I be kind to myself in this moment.

May I give myself the compassion I need.

The first phrase, This is a moment of suffering, is designed to bring mindfulness to the fact that you're in pain. Other possible wordings are I'm having a really tough time right now, This hurts, or anything that describes the suffering you are experiencing.

The second phrase, Suffering is a part of life, reminds you that imperfection is part of the shared human experience. Other possible wordings are Everyone feels this way sometimes, This is part of being human, etc.

The third phrase, May I be kind to myself in this moment, helps bring a sense of caring concern to your present-moment experience. Other possible wordings are May I love and support myself right now, May I accept myself as I am, etc.

The final phrase, May I give myself the compassion I need, firmly sets your intention to be self-compassionate. You might use other words such as May I remember that I am worthy of compassion, May I give myself the same compassion I would give to a good friend, etc.

Find the wordings for these four phrases that are the most comfortable for you and memorize them. Then, the next time you judge yourself or have a difficult experience, you can use these phrases as a way of reminding yourself to be self-compassionate. This practice is a handy tool to soothe and calm troubled states of mind.

KRISTIN NEFF is the author of Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind.

Our Work Is Clear

ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX

It's clear we have our work cut out for us, the work of love and wisdom.

So please, stop and look deeply. Let's work together in building not a contentious future, but a generative one. Let's not pretend we know what to do, but be open and learn. Let's bear witness to what is happening in our country and in our world, and take wise, compassionate, and courageous responsibility. Let's reach through differences, listen deeply, and "give no fear."

Here are the four great vows of bodhisattvas in community:

Creations are numberless; we vow to free them.

Delusions are inexhaustible; we vow to transform them.

Reality is boundless; we vow to perceive it.

The awakened way is unsurpassable; we vow to embody it.

Do not squander life!

ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX is the abbot of Upaya Zen Center and author of *Being with Dying*.



One Body

JULES SHUZEN HARRIS

If ever there was a time to invoke Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, it's now! As bodhisattvas, we need to open our hearts and drop our preconceptions and need for security. Listen and remember that we are ONE BODY!

JULES SHUZEN HARRIS is the founder of the Soji Zen Center in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania.

Let Us Create an Enlightened World

WENDY EGYOKU NAKAO

This is a time when you must know what you stand for.

This is a time to let go and allow meditation to steady and sustain you.

This is a time when you vow to listen deeply to the cries of the world and shed your own tears.

This is a time not just to hear echoes of your own ideas but to learn from someone who is not like you.

This is a time when the bubbles are bursting and determination is raised.

This is a time to be fierce in the dharma values of unity, inclusion, respect for diversity, and doing beneficial acts for all.

Let us create an enlightened world in which all beings live in harmony, everyone has enough, deep wisdom is realized, and compassion flows unhindered.

WENDY EGYOKU NAKAO is the abbot of the Zen Center of Los Angeles.



A Wish for the President-Elect

BOBBY RHODES

Donald Trump especially needs our love and encouragement now, after taking on this huge responsibility. He has Buddha's eyes, Buddha's ears, Buddha's mind. May he realize his true self and strive to see and hear all things clearly and may he always act out of love.

BOBBY RHODES (Zen Master Soeng Hyang) is the School Zen Master and Guiding Teacher of the International Kwan Um School of Zen.

Reality Check

DZOGCHEN PONLOP RINPOCHE

Whoever you supported during the recent presidential election, it's been an emotionally challenging year. Whatever hopes, dreams, and fears you lived with and cherished, all have been variously praised and blamed, embraced and scorned. Now, it's time to relax, to be open and kind, and to stop hanging on to this ever-turning wheel of thoughts.

As we stop and consider “what happened” and “what now,” it is important to see that difficult experiences pervade our samsaric lives. We go through them on an individual level in everyday life. But on a larger scale, going through this kind of experience together can make it feel much more emotionally intense.

The Buddha taught the experience of individual and group karma. He taught that individual karma is easier to transform through one's own practice, whereas group karma can only be changed by individuals working together with the skillful means of compassionate action in a group.

Therefore, we must not be discouraged or bogged down by a divisive state of mind. Instead, we must be more vigilant, compassionate, and skillful in order to help lead others with awareness towards a unified group-mind of love, wisdom, and peace—without letting our negative emotional habits get in the way. This is the only way to make this world a better, kinder, and more peaceful place for all beings. We must not give up our loving-kindness and compassion!

It is also important for us to notice our deep-rooted tendencies to want to control whatever is happening in our world. Our inner control freak is always watching to see if things are going our way. When they don't, or when things are feeling unpredictable, strong emotions can come up —

fear, anxiety, anger. There's a fear of the unknown, and not knowing can be a dark and scary place. It can be uncomfortable to realize that our belief in having control is just that—a thought or desire—which is not the same as knowing exactly how things will turn out.

From time to time, it's helpful for all of us, especially spiritual practitioners, to do a reality check. The reality is, we are still in samsara, and samsara by definition is imperfect. We are communities and countries populated by samsaric beings, and samsaric beings don't always understand what they are doing. Samsara, as we learn from the dharma, means being ignorant, ego-centered, and full of negative emotions.

The divided state of our nation is a wide and clear mirror for us, a powerful reflection of our own dualistic state of mind. It's time for practitioners to bring this situation home to the path, along with all of the mindfulness and awareness we have learned and practiced. This is how to transform our own thoughts of duality and shine the light of compassion wherever it is needed.

If we can engage with our spiritual practice, with our mindfulness and awareness, the situation we are in now can be an extremely powerful and transformative tool for the path of awakening. It can help us bring great benefit to all beings: starting with Americans and extending to all citizens of the world. The eyes of our nation and of the world are on us.

DZOGCHEN PONLOP RINPOCHE is founder of Nalandabodhi and the author of Rebel Buddha and Emotional Rescue.





6 Baby Steps to Kindness

Building a kinder, more civil society begins with us. **Judy Lief** has six tips to get you on your way.

Mahayana Buddhism is all about stretching. What are we stretching out from? From our small-mindedness and self-absorption. To do so we need to engage in the world. But it is amazing how often we think we are out in the world interacting with others, while actually, we are simply robotically acting out our preconceived internal storyline. Our vision is clouded and we can only take in what feeds into our plot line.

One way to begin to soften this kind of pattern is by exploring some basic steps that can lead us in the direction of kindness. Instead of trying to will ourselves to be kind—presto! all at once—we can create an atmosphere congenial to the development of loving-kindness. The following are five small steps you can practice that may be helpful in this regard:

1. Settle Down

There has to be a here to be a there, and a connection between the two. So the first step is to slow down and let your mind settle enough that you are able to drop from the heights of conceptuality back into your body, a simple form in space. Can you really feel present, in your body as it is, right where you are?

2. Be in the Moment

Now that you are more solidly somewhere, you can let yourself be more clearly sometime. When your thoughts drift from the past or the future, from memories and regrets to plans and dreams, you can gently bring yourself back to the present moment.

3. Drop Escape Routes

Stay put in this particular place and time, just the way it is.

4. Pay Attention to Space

Notice the quality of space within you and around you. Pay attention to the boundaries of your physical body and the space in front, behind, and on each side of you. Also pay attention to the mental–emotional space that accommodates the comings and goings of sensations, thoughts, moods, and emotional upheavals. With whatever arises in your perception, on an outer or inner level, notice the space in which both you and your perception rest.

5. Share the Space

Explore what it is like to share this quality of space with whatever or whoever is there with you. Notice the power of accommodation, acceptance, and nonjudging. When you sense the arising of territoriality and fear, accommodate that, too, in greater spaciousness.

You can explore these steps singularly or in combination, it is up to you. The idea is that if you create the right atmosphere, compassion naturally arises. It is already present, just waiting for your invitation.

6. Alchemy

What ordinary people see as lead, alchemists see as gold in disguise. Like alchemists, we can learn to uncover the gold hidden within our human condition—no matter how conflicted and unpromising we humans often seem to be. Our dramas and fascinations, our obsessions, our loves gained and lost may captivate us, but they are fundamentally ephemeral. However, anything that awakens and touches our hearts even a little bit can open us to the possibility of something more. Within the fluctuating passions of the human realm, we can discover the unwavering force of selfless compassion and loving-kindness. of the human realm, we can discover the unwavering force of selfless compassion and loving-kindness.

Let Yourself Feel This

REV. ANGEL KYODO WILLIAMS

I don't have a lot of words, but I have a lot of faith. I know the road feels slow and winding and we seem to need the pain to cut to the core to emerge from the sleepwalk of despair and feel through the numbness of disconnect and indifference. But if we let ourselves feel this, we will be better for it. We will wake up and reach out and finally tap into our love for one another and our planet. We will breathe deeply and remember we have survived worse. But now it is time to live. And to love. And to see justice. In the meantime, hold tight to someone you love and take care of someone you don't know.

REV. ANGEL KYODO WILLIAMS is the author of Being Black and co-author of Radical Dharma.



We Will Not Let This Country Go Backwards!

REV. ANDY HOOVER

There is nothing in this world—nothing—that lasts forever. We are lucky that impermanence is built into our system of government. The value of recognizing the reality of impermanence is that a) we cherish the people and circumstances that bring us joy, and b) we know that hard times pass.

If our practice could be summarized in one sentence, it is this: we awaken to the oneness of all beings and act on it. That's what drives me in the work that I do.

Donald Trump built his support by being very clear that, far from oneness, his worldview is one of separation and division. And a lot of our fellow Americans agree. But I take solace in knowing that more than 60 million Americans embraced the message of moving forward together, seeing the importance of equality and fairness. More people voted for that message than voted for Trump's message of fear and division.

We're going to keep working for that vision of oneness. I want my LGBTQ friends, my immigrant friends, my black friends, my Latino friends, my Muslim friends, my female friends, and everyone who feels vulnerable right now to know that we are in this together, tens of millions of us. We will struggle together and we will not let this country go backwards.

REV. ANDY HOOVER is an ordained Buddhist minister in the Blue Mountain Lotus Society and legislative director at the ACLU of Pennsylvania.



This Nation Needs Our Awakening Together

LARRY YANG

Have you noticed? We are not an enlightened society.

More and more, our spiritual practice is not just a personal practice concerned about our personal awakening. We are called to bring the force of transformation into our collective experience, to create non-harm in ever-expanding ways.

We can work to change the world because we hate the injustice, or because we cannot abide the abuse and despise the corrupt immorality, or because we are enraged by the disparity and oppression, or because we are driven by the urgency that pain demands.

Or we can be inspired to change the world because we love it so dearly, because it reveals its precious value each and every moment, because we hold it with such wondrous awe in its resiliency, creativity, and courage.

We cannot do anything else but alleviate suffering in the world and pursue further freedom for as many beings as possible. The choice is ours.

Margaret Wheatley has written, “There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” This caring is our ability for collective compassion and the possibility of awakening together. Thich Nhat Hanh says, “The next Buddha may take the form of a community practicing understanding and loving-kindness, a community practicing mindful living. And the practice can be carried out as a group, as a city, as a nation.”

This nation needs our dharma.

This nation needs our practice of compassion, wisdom, and ethics.

This nation needs our awakening together.

LARRY YANG is a core teacher at the East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland and the Insight Community of the Desert in Palm Springs.



Don't Bite the Trump Hook

SUSAN PIVER

Pema Chödrön famously introduced us to the notion of shenpa, which she defines as “biting the hook.”

When someone leaves us, we may bite the hook of grasping. When something unfair happens, we may bite the hook of rage. When we are disappointed, we may bite the hook of numbness.

What would it look like not to bite the hook? What happens when we don't give in to our habitual reactions? A giant hook with a massive comb-over has just been lowered from bizarro-world. Here are a few suggestions how not to bite.

1. Remind yourself that generosity is a gesture of power.

Rather than scanning the environment for confirmation or denial of your worst fears, scan it for someone who could use a kind word or glance. It can be that simple. Whether we are swinging on the hook of grasping, aggression, or numbness, there is one sure way off. It is to help someone else who may also be swinging. This is a really good thing to do for others, but also it is good for yourself. When we are afraid, we feel powerless. But generosity is a gesture of power.

2. Remember that nothing is ever as good as you hope, nor as bad as you fear.

One day at a time. Beyond this, one thought, one moment, one heartbeat. This, by the way, is why we practice meditation: it teaches us how to meet our experience on the spot, without embellishment, fully and courageously. Look clearly at your hopes and fears. They are always exaggerated.

3. Reestablish dominion over your world.

Your home, family, friends, workplace, body, abilities—these are your kingdom. You have full rulership here. What can you do for your world? What or who needs tending? What needs to be added or eliminated?

This is a time to look squarely at the piece of land that you are responsible for. Because all bets are off, we can feel encouraged to focus on what is really essential. Most important, we could focus on removing every obstacle that stands between us and doing our true work in the world. The world needs you to own your brilliance, stop pulling punches, and offer your gifts.

4. Express your love for your brothers and sisters.

On one level, this means recognizing the vast tribe that feels as you may right now — absolutely certain that there is no place for hatred, racism, misogyny, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and religious intolerance in America or anywhere. Reach out to each other. Affirm your friendship.

But please don't stop there. You could also recognize the vast tribe that does not feel as you do right now, your countrymen and women. I'm not suggesting that we get all snugly with hate-mongers, but to acknowledge that we are all Americans.

This is our country. People fought very hard to give it to us and to protect it. If we seek to excise from our minds and hearts fifty per cent of our brothers and sisters, we add innumerable steps to the path out of this mess.

5. Finally, this: Feel what you feel.

As best you can, don't pretend you aren't scared, sad, or angry. There's no problem with those feelings. What is a problem is to avoid what you feel and then, as humans tend to, work it out on someone else by vilifying them. We stand at an intersection of tolerance and hatred. Biting the hook of grasping, aggression, or numbness prevents us from seeing the best course of action to take our country back.

SUSAN PIVER'S most recent book is Start Here Now: An Open-Hearted Guide to the Path and Practice of Meditation.



PHOTO BY: Christine Alicino

Love Everyone: A Guide for Spiritual Activists

Has there ever been a more important time to infuse politics with spirituality—and vice versa? In this conversation at the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, Buddhist teachers Sharon Salzberg and Rev. angel Kyodo williams bring the two worlds together.

*SHARON SALZBERG is one of America's best-known Buddhist teachers and the author of such bestselling books as *Real Happiness* and *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*.*

REV. ANGEL KYODO WILLIAMS is a Zen teacher and founder of the Center for Transformative Change.

Sharon Salzberg: I'd like to start with a meditation. Settle your attention and energy into your body and feel your breath. Find the place where the breath is strongest for you, bring your attention there, and just rest. Feel your normal, natural breath, however it's appearing, however it's changing.

No matter what we go through, no matter where we are, we have this anchor, this centering point, available, if we remember it. So just rest your attention on the feeling of the breath.

If distractions come up that aren't too strong, you can stay connected to the breath. Just see if they can flow by. But if something's strong enough to pull you away—you get lost in thought, overcome by a fantasy or fall asleep—don't worry about it.

The moment after you've been gone, after you've been lost, is actually the most important moment. That's when you have the chance to gently let go. It's what one of my teachers calls "exercising the letting-go muscle." You have the chance to begin again. Instead of giving yourself a hard time, you can let go and start over.

So when you feel ready you can open your eyes or lift your gaze. Thank you.

I'd like to tell the story of a conversation I had some years ago with a civil rights pioneer about love for all beings and love for life, which become one.

Myles Horton was the founder of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, which was a kind of training ground for civil rights protestors and later for people beginning the environmental movement.

I asked him what he did to develop resilience or get a break from the pressure and stress of his work. He said, "I look at the mountains. I just sit and look at the mountains."

Then we segued to loving-kindness meditation, which is a big part of what I teach. He said, "Martin Luther King used to say to me all the time, 'You've got to love everybody.' And I used to say, 'No I don't. I only have to love the people worth loving.' And King would laugh and laugh and say, 'Nope, you've got to love everybody.'"

It's a complex question. What in the world could it mean to love everybody? To love somebody that you actually don't like, that you're going to fight and protest against?

Rev. angel Kyodo williams: You don't have to like anyone at all! [Laughter] People always tease me about this. I hardly like anyone. But I love everyone. And that is possible. In fact, it's the very thing that bridges the spiritual life and the activist life.

When I came to Buddhist practice, I thought that when people were at the pinnacle of their practice they would see the need to respond to the problems in world. Isn't that what would happen once you get there, wherever "there" is?

But that wasn't my experience, so I switched my focus to the activists. They were trying to change the world, and I felt that if I could support them with meditation and awareness practices, then they could do it more effectively.

What I ran into, of course, was that they pretty much didn't love anyone. [Laughter] So love is what I've focused on, because in social justice work the only option is loving everyone. Otherwise, there is no path to real change. Whether we're leaning toward the spiritual community or the activist community, what we need is the combination of a mind that wants to change the world and a mind that is steady, clear-seeing, and seeks change from a place of love, rather than from a place of anger.

It's important not to get stuck in your own views. Even if you think yours is the right way, there's always someone else who has another way. Then you're in an irreconcilable conflict that doesn't get resolved except, I think, through love.

King and Gandhi understood that everyone holds some aspect of the truth. So when you're in the pursuit of social justice, it becomes very difficult to hold onto your own idea of the truth. You'd think that the more you're in pursuit of justice, the more you know what's right. But it's actually the opposite.

Happiness and suffering, right and wrong, like and dislike—these are the paradoxes that exist for all of us balancing the inner life and outer life. We think it's one or the other: either we like and agree with people, or we're against them and we have to hate them. The question is, how do we exist in the space that holds both of these dualities at once?

Sharon Salzberg: Thank you for that. That was beautiful. Happiness is another kind of inner resource for people seeking social and political change. I don't see how any of us can keep giving when we feel depleted and exhausted, when generosity is trying to come out of nothing.

The sense of replenishment we get from our own happiness is a gift not only to ourselves but to others. Some people think of happiness as just avoiding conflict and seeking pleasure. They feel guilty about being happy because there are so many people suffering. And people are suffering and it's terrible. Yet it's so hard to really help others over the long haul without the inner resource of happiness.

Rev. angel Kyodo williams: Along with happiness, joy is one of the fundamental abodes. Lack of joy is where we often have difficulty as activists. On the other hand, some of us who are doing contemplative work tend to be conflict-avoidant. If we are abiding by Right Speech, then, heaven forbid, we don't talk about race, because that's difficult.

Activists talk a lot about struggle, but I tell them we should get that word out of our vocabulary. I ask them, "Would you permit the people in your life to run themselves into the ground like you are?" And they say, "No, of course not, that's not what we're working toward."

If what we're practicing now is running ourselves into the ground in order to have justice, at what point will we practice something different? Because whatever we practice now is what we will practice in the future.

Sharon Salzberg: I think one of the things the meditation community can learn from the activist community is systemic thinking. By itself, meditation will produce a kind of good heartedness and compassion, but I think it's not directed at social and political systems.

It's like the person on the street asking you for a dollar. Meditation practice may help you look them in the eye and see them as a suffering human being, which is an enormous thing. But that doesn't necessarily lead you to ask, "What is the housing policy in this city?"

It's about looking deeper: what are the social causes and conditions that create homelessness? I've learned this kind of thinking from people like you, angel. I don't think it could have come from my own meditation practice. It takes another kind of education.

Rev. angel Kyodo williams: Most of the people who are driving structural activism are doing it, at least initially, out of their own experience—either personal necessity or their relationships with people suffering oppression. So we have a challenge because meditation and mindfulness have largely landed in a privileged community of older white folks.

I'm obsessed with the question of how we shift that. How do we not let our own circumstances determine where we focus the lens of our practice?

If our lens stays within our privileged circumstances, then we turn our compassion only toward things that are personal and interpersonal. Rarely does that lens focus on systemic problems, because the personal need to do that doesn't exist. People aren't going to deal with things like racial injustice and white supremacy because they're not affected by it personally.

We need to solve this. We can't let such a powerful tool as meditation be limited by people's personal circumstances. We don't have the numbers to move this country toward greater social justice if the only driving force is whether or not people are feeling the pain personally.

I think there's something in our social order that contributes to this. There's something in the way we are practicing Buddhism that actually seems to make us more insulated. Even this practice that is supposed to be about how we relate to the world and to the people around us becomes hyper-individualized. It's time for us to cut through that.

That goes for the activists too. They say, "Oh, I don't have the time, money, energy to do contemplative practice." They only look at their current circumstances. And on the privileged side people say, "Oh, I'm not touched by education issues, access to water, systemic racism."

What is social justice about? What is contemplative practice about? What joins them or aligns them so we're not only looking to our own set of circumstances to orient ourselves? How do we speak about these things differently so love for everyone is what drives us?

Question: Rev. angel, I liked what you had to say about not necessarily liking people. For me, there's aversion attached to that, so I don't know how you bring in the love. I am very

distressed by violence toward women and children, especially child brides who are sold to men at a young age. I feel, essentially, hatred for people who do that and I don't know how to get in touch with equanimity.

Rev. angel Kyodo williams: I think the critical piece is learning the difference between aversion toward the injustice and not loving the person. My experience is that it actually has to do with the relationship we have to ourselves. The path to loving everyone is loving ourselves, and loving ourselves completely.

So we have to investigate what is not fully accepted in ourselves, what feels unworkable, untenable, and needs to be left behind. I hate that I can't do anything about violence against women and children, and that makes me hate the perpetrators. But I don't even know them, so generating hate for them is, I think, almost impossible. What I actually hate is that I feel helpless.

For me, the behavior of individuals is an indication of the failure of society. When I sit with a sense of the human being there, I don't actually feel hatred at all. I feel a kind of grief for their circumstance and for the society that allows injustice to happen. They're just as caught up in it as every other person who allows this to be the social order. It's hard to accept, and it's a really, really deep practice, but I haven't discovered anything else to be true and actually workable.

Sharon Salzberg: I think that truth is contained in the Buddha's teaching. One time the Buddha told a king, "You should be just, you should be fair, and you should be generous." But the king forgot to be generous and so people started going hungry and they started stealing. Then the Buddha said to the king, "The point is not to start making laws against theft. The point is to look at why people are hungry."

So that is the prompt: Look deeper. Look at all the causes and conditions. But that kind of assessment is so rarely applied in this country.

Question: I've been thinking a lot about loving myself, but I feel like I have to like everything about myself to love myself. But I had a realization when you were talking that I could just have some compassion toward myself. I don't necessarily have to like every part of myself. It's a process.

Sharon Salzberg: You're right. Part of the way I think about it is the contrast between self-compassion and self-esteem.

Self-esteem is nice. You don't need to focus only on your faults. Maybe this morning you did a really stupid thing, but you also did five great things. Give those a little airtime too.

Self-compassion comes in when you've blown it, when you've made a mistake. When I teach meditation, I emphasize that so much! It's not going to be 9,000 breaths before your

mind wanders. It's going to be one or two breaths, or maybe five, and then you're going to be gone. You're going to be way gone. And that's the extraordinary moment when you can forgive yourself and start over.

That is the revolutionary moment in meditation practice. It's all about self-compassion, whether it's called that or not. It happens not when we're applauding ourselves for something, but when we have strayed from where we want to be. How do we start over? It's got to be with kindness. So I think you're right. Put that in the self-esteem column! [Laughter]

Question from the audience: Rev. angel, when you go back to your community, they may view Buddhism as something that's for rich people, not for them. How do you approach it?

Rev. angel Kyodo williams: I don't talk about Buddhism to the folks anymore. With all due respect, I don't care about Buddhism. I'm not nation-building around Buddhism. We nation-build a lot. We're colonial by inheritance, and we get very fixated on this thing that we're building.

I just want it to work. I want people to be liberated. I just point to the basics and let people find their way to whatever lineage, practice, tradition, or religion they want to find their liberation in. As long as they're clear that it's about love and liberation.

Question: You were talking about how compassion and love can transform society. But we're dealing with tremendous amount of injustice, so how do you reconcile patience with that?

Sharon Salzberg: I find that there's an amazing quality of patience in a lot of visionaries. People who have a really big picture of life often have a kind of unflagging patience. Maybe it's because they're connected to something bigger, whereas I may be more caught up in the immediate ups and downs.

Equanimity doesn't mean indifference. I think part of it is admitting how much we don't know, because such a big part of the conditioning in this society is instant action. Then we look back and ask, "Who knew that this would actually lead to that?"

Things take time, and there's so much that's unknown, but I don't feel despair. Maybe I should, but I think that is significant movement happening, the beginning of many things. I feel a kind of happiness, even. It's so hard to see the end of the story, very hard, but we get a lot of energy doing what we feel needs to be done.

As This New Era Unfolds

DZIGAR KONGTRUL RINPOCHE

We must respect the democratic system that our country was built upon and be open to see what happens next. We want to respect our differences and also believe that there is goodness in everyone; we cannot afford to fall into pessimism. We must continually see where we can unite and keep looking forward together as this new era unfolds, without fixed preconceptions.

DZIGAR KONGTUL RINPOCHE is a Vajrayana Buddhist teacher and author of The Intelligent Heart.



Go Against the Stream

NOAH LEVINE

Here in the United States of Samsara, ignorance is the status quo. The Buddha's teachings guide us to go "against the stream"—to develop wisdom and compassion through our own direct actions.

As the path encourages, "Even amongst those who hate, we live with love in our hearts. Even amongst those who are blinded by greed and confusion, we practice generosity, kindness, and clear seeing."

Meditate and destroy!

NOAH LEVINE is the founder of Against the Stream and Refuge Recovery and the author of several books, including The Heart of the Revolution.



The Transformative Power of Love

Creating a culture of love, says bell hooks, is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination that defined this election campaign.

When lecturing on ending domination around the world, listening to the despair and hopelessness, I ask individuals who are hopeful to talk about what force in their life pushed them to make a profound transformation, moving them from a will to dominate toward a will to be compassionate. The stories I hear were all about love.

That sense of love as a transformative power is also present in the narratives of individuals working to create loving personal relationships. Writing about metta, “love” or “loving-kindness,” as the first of the brahmaviharas, the heavenly abodes, Sharon Salzberg reminds us in her insightful book *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* that “In cultivating love, we remember one of the most powerful truths the Buddha taught ... that the forces in the mind that bring suffering are able to temporarily hold down the positive forces such as love or wisdom, but they can never destroy them.... Love can uproot fear or anger or guilt, because it is a greater power. Love can go anywhere. Nothing can obstruct it.” Clearly, at the end of the nineties an awakening of heart was taking place in our nation, our concern with the issue of love evident in the growing body of literature on the subject.

Because of the awareness that love and domination cannot coexist, there is a collective call for everyone to place learning how to love on their emotional and/or spiritual agenda. We have witnessed the way in which movements for justice that denounce dominator culture, yet have an underlying commitment to corrupt uses of power, do not really create fundamental changes in our societal structure. When radical activists have not made a core break with dominator thinking (imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy), there is no union of theory and practice, and real change is not sustained. That’s why cultivating the mind of love is so crucial. When love is the ground of our being, a love ethic shapes our participation in politics.

To work for peace and justice we begin with the individual practice of love, because it is there that we can experience firsthand love’s transformative power. Attending to the damaging impact of abuse in many of our childhoods helps us cultivate the mind of love. Abuse is always about lovelessness, and if we grow into our adult years without knowing how to love, how then can we create social movements that will end domination, exploitation, and oppression?

BELL HOOKS is one of America’s leading social critics and the author of such ground-breaking books as *Ain’t I A Woman*, *All About Love*, and *Feminism for Everybody*.

John Welwood shares the insight in *Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships* that many of us carry a “wound of the heart” that emerged in childhood conditioning, creating “a disconnection from the loving openness that is our nature.” He explains: “This universal wound shows up in the body as emptiness, anxiety, trauma, or depression, and in relationships as the mood of unlove.... On the collective level, this deep wound in the human psyche leads to a world wracked by struggle, stress, and dissension.... The greatest ills on the planet—war, poverty, economic injustice, ecological degradation—all stem from our inability to trust one another, honor differences, engage in respectful dialogue, and reach mutual understanding.” Welwood links individual failure to learn how to love in childhood with larger social ills; however, even those who are fortunate to love and be loved in childhood grow to maturity in a culture of domination that devalues love.

Being loving can actually lead one to be more at odds with mainstream culture. Even though, as Riane Eisler explains in *The Power of Partnership*, our “first lessons about human relations are not learned in workplaces, businesses, or even schools, but in parent–child and other relations,” those habits of being are not formed in isolation. The larger culture in our nation shapes how we relate. Any child born in a hospital first experiences life in a place where private and public merge. The interplay of these two realities will be constant in our lives. It is precisely because the dictates of dominator culture structure our lives that it is so difficult for love to prevail.

When I began, years ago now, to focus on the power of love as a healing force, no one really disagreed with me. Yet what they continue to accept in their daily life is lovelessness, because doing the work of love requires resisting the status quo. In Thich Nhat Hanh’s *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart*, he reminds us that “to love, in the context of Buddhism, is above all to be there.” He then raises the question of whether or not we have time for love. Right now there is such a profound collective cultural awareness that we need to practice love if we are to heal ourselves and the planet. The task awaiting us is to move from awareness to action. The practice of love requires that we make time, that we embrace change.

Fundamentally, to begin the practice of love we must slow down and be still enough to bear witness in the present moment. If we accept that love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we can then be guided by this understanding. We can use these skillful means as a map in our daily life to determine right action.

When we cultivate the mind of love, we are, as Sharon Salzberg says, “cultivating the good,” and that means “recovering the incandescent power of love that is present as a potential in all of us” and using “the tools of spiritual practice to sustain our real, moment-to-moment experience of that vision.” To be transformed by the practice of love is to be born again, to experience spiritual renewal. What I witness daily is the longing for that renewal and the fear that our lives will be changed utterly if we choose love. That fear paralyzes. It

leaves us stuck in the place of suffering.

When we commit to love in our daily life, habits are shattered. We are necessarily working to end domination. Because we no longer are playing by the safe rules of the status quo, rules that if we obey guarantee us a specific outcome, love moves us to a new ground of being. This movement is what most people fear. If we are to galvanize the collective longing for spiritual well-being that is found in the practice of love, we must be more willing to identify the forms that longing will take in daily life. Folks need to know the ways we change and are changed when we love. It is only by bearing concrete witness to love's transformative power in our daily lives that we can assure those who are fearful that commitment to love will be redemptive, a way to experience salvation.

Lots of people listen and affirm the words of visionary teachers who speak on the necessity of love. Yet they feel in their everyday lives that they simply do not know how to link theory and practice. When Thich Nhat Hanh tells in *Transformation and Healing* that "understanding is the very foundation of love and compassion," that "if love and compassion are in our hearts, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle," we are moved. We may even feel a powerful surge of awareness and possibility.

Then we go home and find ourselves uncertain about how to realize true love. I remember talking deeply with Thich Nhat Hanh about a love relationship in which I felt I was suffering. In his presence I was ashamed to confess the depths of my anguish and the intensity of my anger toward the man in my life. Speaking with such tenderness he told me, "Hold on to your anger and use it as compost for your garden."

Listening to these wise words I felt as though a thousand rays of light were shining throughout my being. I was certain I could go home, let my light shine, and everything would be better; I would find the promised happy ending. The reality was that communication was still difficult. Finding ways to express true love required vigilance, patience, a will to let go, and the creative use of the imagination to invent new ways of relating. Thich Nhat Hanh had told me to see the practice of love in this tumultuous relationship as spiritual practice, to find in the mind of love a way to understanding, forgiveness, and peace. Of course this was all work. Just as cultivating a garden requires turning over the ground, pulling weeds, planting, and watering, doing the work of love is all about taking action.

Whenever anyone asks me how they can begin the practice of love I tell them giving is the place to start. In *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen offers this testimony: "Every time I take a step in the direction of generosity I know that I am moving from fear to love." Salzberg sees giving as a way to purify the mind: "Giving is an inward state, a generosity of the spirit that extends to ourselves as well as to others." Through giving we develop the mind of gratitude. Giving enables us to experience the fullness of abundance—not only the abundance we have, but the abundance in sharing. In sharing all that we have we become more. We awaken the heart of love.

Dominator thinking and practice relies for its maintenance on the constant production

of a feeling of lack, of the need to grasp. Giving love offers us a way to end this suffering—loving ourselves, extending that love to everything beyond the self, we experience wholeness. We are healed. The Buddha taught that we can create a love so strong that, as Salzberg states, our “minds become like a pure, flowing river that cannot be burned.” Such love is the foundation of spiritual awakening.

If we are to create a culture of love then we need enlightened teachers to guide us. We need concrete strategies for practicing love in the midst of domination. Imagine all that would change for the better if every community in our nation had a center (a sangha) that would focus on the practice of love, of loving-kindness. All the great religious traditions share the belief that love is our reason for being. This shared understanding of love helps connect Buddhist traditions with Christian practice. Those coming to Buddhism from Christian traditions appreciate the work that Thich Nhat Hanh has done to create a bridge connecting these spiritual paths. In *Living Buddha, Living Christ* he offers a vision of inclusiveness, reminding us that both Jesus and Buddha are doors we can walk through to find true love. He explains: “In Buddhism such a special door is deeply appreciated because that door allows us to enter the realm of mindfulness, loving-kindness, peace, and joy.” Sharing the truism that there are many doors of teaching he states: “Each of us, by our practice and our loving-kindness, is capable of opening new dharma doors.”

All of us who work toward creating a culture of love seek to share a real body of teaching that can reach everyone where we are. That was the lesson I learned at the conference last May—to be broad, to extend the circle of love beyond boundaries, bringing together people from different backgrounds and traditions, and feeling together the way love connects us.

The Bottom Line

JAMES ISHMAEL FORD

What to do? What to do?

I find a couple of things are critical. One is to not forget my meditation practice. For all sorts of reasons, but most of all to help me recall the fundamental matters of presence and intimacy.

Another is to recall all the suffering of the world. For me this starts with women, immigrants, people of color, the LGBTQ community—everyone who seems the target of Mr. Trump’s campaign of purity.

But also to recall the hurt and fear that led so many people to support him. To simply dismiss their emotions, while it may feel good, ultimately does no good. The Buddha was right: in the great play of cause and effect we are all of us caught up in layer upon layer of grasping after things in flux.

The bottom line is recalling there is no separation. We have to act—there is no alternative. But what will that action look like? More hate? More blame and condemnations? Or can we genuinely recall that in the last analysis there is no goal but only the path? If we can recall that we are all in this together, that we are all in the end one, then ways through will appear.

We met the enemy and he is us. We met the friend and she is us. That is the secret that will win the ultimate victory.

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We contribute to this mission by making Buddhist teachings, commentary, and perspectives available to all who might benefit from them, and by connecting individual practitioners with great teachers and strong communities, via all effective forms of communication.

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