

Deep in the Mountains II : Nirmanakaya
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During this week I thought I would give a few talks about things that I would like to emphasize here on this threshold, before I step into another room for a while. Today is the day we are going to talk about The Problem. Just for today. And by The Problem I mean self and story. We are going to talk about it in a way that I hope doesn't emphasize that it is a problem but actually speaks about it in a way that even the poor self can be redeemed—just as we can be redeemed, each of us.

Last night I mentioned the idea of forgiving the world for being the world. Inextricably linked to that is the thought of forgiving ourselves for being selves, for being a self. Not forgiving myself for being myself, for being the particular self I am, but even underneath that, forgiving myself for being a self. Can we do that?

It seems to me that the nature of forgiveness is that it doesn't require us not to feel that there has been or there still is pain, that there has been or that there still is a wound. We don't have to pretend that that isn't the case. But what we do, even though there has been or continues to be a wound, is be willing to accept things as they are. With that acceptance comes the possibility of a warmth and a compassion for everyone and everything involved, including ourselves.

Accepting things *that* they are, is the more accurate way of saying it. I always have to do a little bit of a disclaimer : I am not saying that we should feel fine that there is climate change or genocide. That is not the point at all. It is that we accept that in this moment it is so. If we free up all of the energy that is involved in resisting, defending against and having reactions and opinions about what is so, we can put it towards helping to co-create that different state that we hope for. It's a matter of acting more efficaciously, not accepting the status quo—as in, 'It's all good'—but taking the energy bound up in our reactions to the way things are and putting it toward looking for the seeds of change that we wish to cultivate. Because, if we believe in the Dharma, then we believe that things are always changing. And if they are always changing, the seeds of change are already here, even if they're difficult to

discern. Our job is to look for them, to support them. Not because we think we are right or because we will feel better if we do that, but because that is our bodhisattva vow—to discern as well as we can what is most helpful, and to support that. In order to do that, we have to forgive the world for being the world and we have to forgive ourselves for being a self.

When we talk about being in the present moment—mindfulness—I wonder how often what we are unconsciously imagining is ourselves, located in a particular moment, in a particular way. Here I am, located in this moment, being mindful, being present, paying attention, having awareness. How often, in contrast, are we imagining that what we are doing is allowing a particular moment to be located in us? That’s the beginning of forgiveness. Are we willing to let the moment—whatever it is, however complicated it is, however painful it is—be genuinely located in us? That’s what I mean by acceptance. That is so much our bodhisattva vow, that willingness and openness to what is so. Remembering that forgiveness does not require us to deny that there has been a wound, we accept the present moment anyway.

Why do we have these selves that we spend so much time worrying about? The self isn’t a problem in its fundamental existence; in fact it’s necessary. The self is that part of us that stepped forward and said, “Okay, I’ll take on responsibility for the continuity of the organism. I’ll take responsibility for its preservation.” That is a good and a noble thing. And so that’s not a problem. When the self is doing that, that’s fine.

I mentioned previously the story of placing down on the table two different maps. One a topographical map made by surveyors and cartographers, and the other a map of songlines made by aboriginal people of the deep mythic landscape of the same place—and how both of those things are simultaneously true. To see and know both of them is to have a larger, and therefore truer, sense of a landscape than you could have from either map by itself. We are like that too. We are not monologues. Within ourselves we are conversations and we are made up of parts.

Now the self would like you to believe that it is the thing that is constituted by these parts, that it is the overarching thing and it has little subsections. But that’s not really true. The self is one part, or more accurately one viewpoint, one way of experiencing our lives in the world. In addition to the self we have the spirit, which is those experiences wherein we absolutely know that we are larger than the ordinary, larger than how things usually feel

during the day—that we are part of eternity. It's not a part of us that *knows* that that is the spirit; it's the *experience* of knowing that. When we have that experience of knowing, the viewpoint of the spirit is emerging. We may notice then that the viewpoint of the self begins to recede, naturally. We don't have to do anything about that. We will come back to that in a second.

Another viewpoint we have is that of the soul, which is the experience of experiencing everything. It is everything we experience in a lifetime, through our senses, through our thoughts and feelings, through our intuition. The technical term in Buddhism is the *alaya vijnana*, the storehouse consciousness; the place where all of our experiences fall like leaves and pile up. One of the things that is most poignant and beautiful about the soul, the *alaya vijnana*, is that when we are looking from the viewpoint of the self, it is hard to imagine not immediately having stories about our experiences; and yet there is a place inside of us that already does that, that already accepts every experience we have, through the senses, through our thoughts and feelings, through our intuition, however we experience it. It accepts them completely, makes no meaning from them, fits them into no narrative. Already we can do that thing that we think is impossible, which is just to accept.

Sometimes we see with those eyes. Sometimes we can just receive and accept and watch and notice, pay attention and appreciate. The self is no more than those viewpoints. It's the viewpoint of the organism that would like to keep going for another five minutes. The problem is that the self became sort of imperialistic and decided to take over more territory than that. So what has happened in human evolution is that instead of the self stepping forward and saying, "I'll take care of the organism. I'll provide the continuity", the self developed a whole repertoire of ways to do these things. Some of them are really great. But when you experience a kind of undeveloped self that doesn't have those capacities for taking care of, for tending to, for defending the organism—that can cause great damage. It is developing a repertoire that is endlessly ramified. Now it has opinions and judgments and prejudices and even paranoias that it thinks are necessary to get us from here to five minutes from here to long enough to reproduce or whatever the impulse is. All of a sudden the self thinks it is the organism's job to keep existing so that its prejudices, opinions and judgments can continue. There has been a flip.

The koan tradition often talks about us being upside down. Here's a way we are upside

down. The self is no longer supporting the survival of the organism; the organism is continuing in order to support the opinions of the self. An example is someone who goes into politics with a great sense of public service, of really wanting to do good for people. And then, after a while, he ends up wanting to be endlessly re-elected. That's the problem. Not the self, but that the self has taken on too much, taken on more than it should, in ways that we find problematic.

What do we do about that? One of the traditional things we do hasn't been very successful, and that is to spend a lot of time scolding or beating the self. We try to make it smaller, cut pieces off of it, cut it off at the knees, all of those things that seem to help with making the self smaller. But all you have to do is look at the biography of Siddhartha. He couldn't even manage that. He had to give up the harsh austerities with which he was trying to beat the self into submission and do something else. It might work sometimes, but not very often.

So, what instead? If not harsh austerities, what do we do? One of the things we can do is rebalance the confederation of different viewpoints that make us up. We can, for example, encourage the viewpoint of spirit by doing things like attending retreats. As that viewpoint becomes stronger, as it takes up more space, we discover in a retreat that the viewpoint of the self naturally recedes. When one comes to the fore, the other steps into the background. So that's something we can do.

Certainly there are moments in a retreat like this and other times in our lives, when spirit does seem to fill much more space and the self seems to drop away. But there's no need to push it down. It drops away on its own. It drops away naturally. That's a better way to rebalance the confederacy inside ourselves, so the self takes more of its proper place.

There are times on a retreat like this or times when we've climbed a mountain or times when we're swimming, a multitude of times, when we're just experiencing what's happening. We're in the place of the soul. We're accepting everything as it comes. When we do that, the viewpoint of the self naturally recedes. We can work on retraining the self. We can work on encouraging the self to do what it does well and not to do more than that. That takes a certain kind of discipline, but it's not a harsh austerity. It is a forgiving discipline, a discipline that has warmth to it, a discipline that allows everything to find its proper place just as we hope to find

our proper place in our own lives. Isn't that really what practice is about — finding our proper place in our own lives? And doesn't it make sense that we would turn that towards the places inside ourselves that are difficult?

One of the ways that the self can cause problems is in the stories it tells. I don't want to leave the impression that all stories are bad all the time. That's not at all what I'm saying. What I am saying is that we can get caught in a story that's smaller than what is actually true, and that can be a problem. If we're continually living in the story that the self is always telling, that story is too small, it contains too little. When things are partial like that they're further away from the truest thing. So what we're talking about is not destroying those stories but continually trying to open them up to include more, so that they're in some way truer to the way things are. Can we imagine living in stories, being aware of stories, that aren't located just inside ourselves, aren't just about the concerns we carry with us all the time but exist both inside ourselves and outside ourselves? In any moment, what is the story that contains us, that includes us but isn't limited to us? What is the rest of the story, the larger story?

In some ways, all of practice is about moving out of those stories that are too small, that limit and constrict us, into that larger story that exists not only inside of ourselves but in the local universe right around us. Because otherwise, all we have is a story about a story. It helps to move from the story about the story into the story itself. Why not go straight to the source instead of our second order of experience? Much of what we do is about that one shift. Open the gate, open the door, make it larger, or rather, see the larger it already is. See that we are larger than what our thoughts and feelings contain. Then when the stories of the self come they don't fill the universe because the universe is not that space bounded by our skin. If our self has expanded out into that larger space, the story arises in the meadow and the wind in the aspen and that sky full of clouds and sun and wind.

What does it mean then? What does the story mean against that sky? We don't have to annihilate it. We don't have to get rid of it. We don't have to fix it. We don't have to improve it. All we have to do is see it in its true context against that sky. That's all. Then it will become quite apparent how much weight to give it, how much to let it run the show. Then it's an effort to stay small, stay limited; that becomes the difficult thing to do. That becomes the thing you have to put a lot of energy into, because you've seen something else that keeps reminding you that something else is always there.

The ancients called the world the Great Sutra. There was the sense that we're all connected in this great sacred text that is speaking itself all the time. In all of the infinite number of forms it's speaking itself. Our task, they thought, was to come to know that great sutra as well as we could, to see that every time something spoke or made a sound, there was a scroll of sutras falling from its mouth. Every time something moved, there were scrolls of sutras unfurling from toes and hoods and wings and everything else. It is not smaller than that. And we have a place in it. We have a part in it. We're a line somewhere, or maybe a paragraph. But there's something much bigger going on all the time—that Great Sutra.

In one of her poems Jane Hirshfield talks about “the immeasurable's continuous singing, / until it falls back into story and feeling.” The immeasurable's continuous singing—that is the Great Sutra.

Our job is not to slash and burn and scold and feel bad and have judgments about the nature of being human. Our job is not to slash and burn and scold and have judgments about the nature of the world; but to move into the world, to let the world move into us, more importantly, with a kind of foundational forgiveness, a foundational willingness for that to happen. When we do that our task becomes to open the gates that are closed, to lift our eyes, to open our ears, to hear and see and experience what is already so. And to know deeply that that is already us. We are not lonely pilgrims. We are part of that already. Moving in that direction, letting that happen, doesn't seem like such a bad way to spend a life.

I'll stop there and welcome any comments or questions you might have.

Q: There's the three legs of practice : great perseverance, great doubt ... what's the third one?

JS : Great trust

Q: It seems to me that there's a way to do what you're talking about. Method isn't right. Way isn't quite right. That's a fourth, for what you're talking about, in order to have those. It takes all of that, it seems to me, to try and move past those limits, or just open up to the fact that we're not limited. Like you were saying, I'm amazed. Why would it be so hard, and yet those three feel like a support to that.

JS : That's wonderful. There's that time when they become enormous, too. They become not just the methods we use, and I don't mean that lightly; they're really important. But then we see that they are in fact the nature of the universe itself, and we connect with the great perseverance, the great doubt, and the great trust of the universe itself and see that it was never any different from what we were doing in our own practice.

Q : There's a quote that is something like "The life that we desire is far too small for us to live. [*Actually, "What you can plan for yourself is much too small for you to live in."*]

JS : Again that sense that we take our lives very personally. We think our lives are about what happens to us, each as an individual. Actually we are located in this life that is so much larger than that. We wound ourselves when we keep retreating into that personal life. We think it's safer or easier. And maybe it is sometimes, but it comes at such an enormous cost.

Q : We can sense that we're always trying to make meaning and concoct stories that will account for a lot of the data. If you put yourself in the way of certain experiences you begin to acquire some stories that the self tells itself, and that occasionally remind it that it's not the whole game in town, and to get out of the way a little. So there's that odd thing where you are trying to tell yourself a story that will let you get out of the way of what's going on. I think the other side of that is that the self is so canny it's going to find a way to tell a story that is about the non-centrality of the self and somehow sneakily make the self central anyway. *The Kalpa-Ending Fire* koan is one of those for me. "Does it go along with it when everything ends or not?" There's this incredible desire to extract something eternal that you can keep in your pocket that won't disappear. It seems to me, one of the things about the koan tradition is it's constantly telling stories that are at least momentarily difficult for the self to subvert and turn into stories that place the self at the center again.

JS : The problem with harsh austerities, with manipulating the self or fixing the self or destroying the self is what you are obsessed with. It's just a negative emphasis on the self, as opposed to any other kind. You can't use the self to destroy a self, in the language of the tradition. So it has to be something else. The kinds of stories we tell ourselves in retreat to get out of that supremacy of the self feel like they are located in something larger than ourselves. That's what's compelling, that's how they work. Then the self tries to reel it back in and make

it small and limited again, but if we can keep saying, “No, I don’t think so”, those stories can keep working on us. That’s letting in the sky, placing the smallness of the story that the self is trying to reduce it to against that.

Q : And so the self stories become a little less compelling.

JS : Exactly!

Q : Or it has a little bit of humor about the story it’s telling itself.

JS : Without it we don’t have to do the whole self-absorbed, self-obsessed thing—we just see it in its proportion. It’s like a bird that flew across the sky—“oh, okay”—and it’s gone.

Q : If we keep ourselves open to not knowing then we have a chance?

JS : Yes!

Q : So every time we have an insight we can enjoy it, but then... we drop it again.

J : Drop it or hold it lightly until the next insight comes along to demolish it. Someone once asked a contemporary Japanese Roshi, “I just don’t get what the ideas in Zen are. I can’t find the ideas.” And the Roshi responded, “The only ideas in Zen are the ones that blow themselves up.” But the less dramatic version of that is, Okay, you have an insight. That’s beautiful. Live with that. Hold it lightly. Look for conflicting data. Look for something that might contradict it or change it or deepen it or enhance it or enrich it. That’s the whole thing, and then at a certain point you might find that it is time to put it down because you’re not harmonizing with the Great Sutra anymore. Somehow you’ve gotten a little out of harmony with it. If everything is changing we’re not going to be able to have insights and principles or stories that are unchanging that you can hold onto.

Q : It’s a little bit like living with a teenager.

JS : The self is a little bit like a teenager.

Q : It keeps us on our toes.

Joan : Okay. *And* what you're describing means that you're still a little bit outside the experience. If you were completely in harmony with it you'd be swaying with it and that would be what is true. So when you notice that feeling of, "I'm being kept on my toes", there's nothing wrong with that. But see if there's a way you can identify something that's keeping you from just swaying with what's happening.

Q : I find so much warmth, a sense of being very deeply moved, and compassion in this. Everything gets to be included. There can be moments of practice without the self struggling against being a self, which is kind of hilarious. But the moment that there is this profound openness to that experience, there's a tremendous compassion for the whole thing.

Joan : And can you feel how that's the bodhisattva vow, and when we refuse that compassion for ourselves, we are refusing our vow. Because we're refusing that exact channel you're talking about that opens out into the whole world.

Q : And then of course, ironically or paradoxically, the self falls away, becomes totally small in context.

JS : Yes, in the context, exactly, right. So again, lift our gaze. It's so important that we do that, so that we're not locked in the struggle inside ourselves, but the struggle is seen in its *true* context.

Q : I want to quickly tell the little story of the pangolin cult. Mary Douglas, an anthropologist, has a book called *Purity and Danger* where she wonders about what's taboo. Her notion about what's taboo is the stuff that violates our categories because it doesn't fit those cognitive structures that we build up. For one tribe in Africa, the most taboo animal is the pangolin, because according to a lot of different categorizing binaries, it violates all of them; it's neither this nor that, nor that, nor that, so it's completely un-categorizable. So the most esoteric cult is one that eats the meat of the pangolin, some deep experience. Mary Douglas asks, "So what do those people do the next day?" The next day they go back into the village, pick up all the taboos again and obey them. For me, that's that feeling of the self. You have an experience and then you come back but you've eaten the pangolin and so you have a different relation to your

opinions and the structures you live inside of and the stories that you're listening to that you're telling yourself.

JS : One of the ways we can think about karma that comes out of what you were just saying is when we hit a place where there's a karmic knot and it's difficult and we suffer and we can't figure out what to do about it. We can think of that as some cross we have to bear, something that's personal to us, that might seem tremendously unfair or however you want to categorize it. Or, if we're thinking in terms of the Great Sutra, it's like a little tear in the paper that needs stitching up and when we do it, we do it for all of life. We take that knot of karma and we help to dissolve it, so that all of life is a little bit less knotted. I think you can hear in what I'm saying, that the movement, wherever we look, in whatever direction we look, whatever problem we're confronted with, whatever challenge we're taking on, the move is to get out of the constricted space that thinks that it's only about *me*. Open the gates and see that *me* is gigantic, *me* contains so much and that is the space in which I'm working. I'm working in that large space for the benefit of *that large space*.

This means that when we mess up it's really not that big a deal, taken in the context of the very large space. As long as our intention is to keep working on the knot or keep doing what we can do. You know the universe is thirteen billion years old. The earth is four billion years old. Relax in this thing that we all care so much about. In this thing that has tears just below the surface because it's so dear to us, because we feel so devoted to it. When we meet like this we can taste it. It's so close and we long for it so badly. In that very longing take the time; take the time, because you have the time, lifetime after lifetime after lifetime. And that doesn't mean to be lazy, because it's a lifetime of caring this much. It's lifetimes of caring this much. So, it's not about becoming lazy but it is about really caring.

When you find yourself in a blind alley, back yourself out and try something else and don't worry about it. Something happened there that was important, even if you don't know what it is yet. Because we can't know what's happening underground.

We have this idea that we can drag everything into consciousness and figure it out. 96% of the universe is dark and there's no way for us to see it or know it or experience it. Can you trust that? Can you trust what's happening underground? Can you trust what's

happening in the dark? Can you trust that so much of our practice is about being willing to walk through the dark, not turning on the light switches, but finding out what is possible to know in the dark? Again, being larger, expanding the realm of our understanding out beyond what is conscious, out beyond even what we are mindful of, into those huge spaces that we can't know. What is it like to be mindful of those spaces? If we can't know them, if we can't bring them into consciousness, if we can't grasp them, what does it mean to be mindful of them? Do we ignore them? Do we pretend they're not there? Do we tell ourselves a story that sort of ties it all up? Or is part of being mindful not knowing at all? Being always aware of how much there is that we don't know, we can't know. Right here sitting in this room is 96% stuff we can't know. What does it mean to be mindful of that? What does it mean to be mindful of the fact that we move in this Great Sutra through a great mystery? There's no outside, there's no getting out of the mystery, there's no solving the mystery. There's no unlocking it. There is only coming to love it. Can you see that?

Our choices are either to be forever alienated from the world and our own lives or to figure out how to love it. It's pretty stark. Part of loving *it*, is loving our little knobby gnarly elfin selves; because that's part of it, too. No more, no less. Even if you take a walk and you are weeping, you are that part of the mountain that's weeping. You are not against the landscape; you are the part of the landscape weeping. That's all right. There are lots of parts of the landscape doing lots of different stuff and in five minutes it'll all be different.

Q: I don't know if I can articulate this, but when you talk of the ever-changing, it seems in my experience, particularly on retreat when some of the constructs fall away, that I come into something like the primordial neurosis. It seems like it's un-ever-changing. And it's a state of mind I can remember having as a ten-year-old. Really unpoetic, very gnarly ... but it seems like its purpose is to remind me that it is never changing. It's always the same. And I'm trying to understand where that fits into this conversation.

JS: Part of the story I'm telling about the self, is that the self has decided that one of the ways it will protect you is by creating the illusion that things don't change, that things are steady and stable as long as it's in control. And it will do anything, even, quite frequently, very negative things, to convince us that things are stable and unchanging, when we know they're

not. I think that's where it comes from. That's another trick that the self is throwing up. So, what do we do about it? One thing is to recognize that if it goes back as far as we can remember—we can remember it in childhood—and it seems as though it's going to stretch on forever, that it's still rising and falling. It might take 75 years, but it's *still* rising and falling. There's nothing that isn't, even if its duration seems unbearable.

The things that happen in our internal landscape are like weather. They blow in and they blow out, it's raining and then it's not raining. I feel this way and then I don't feel this way. We can watch it like weather and get caught in it for a moment and then it's gone. Then there are other parts in our internal landscape that are like seasons, they come and they stay awhile. We are in a particular season in a time of our lives, but even the seasons eventually change.

Then there is the layer you're talking about, which is the layer of geology. It looks permanent, but it's not. Even the Himalayas were an ocean floor once. Even geology rises and falls. And mostly we're holding a pick in our hand and we're chipping at it and it's really hard. One of the things we do in practice, and one of the things we do when coming on retreat, is we borrow a backhoe from the gods for a while. And we do some serious work on that geology. Sometimes we hit just the right vein and the whole thing cracks off. So there's no quick trick to that. There's no spiritual dynamite for that. But it is rising and falling. When it feels like geology, when it feels like a stone, breathe into it and see if you can find any kind of porousness in it. See if you can find any way in which it's permeable. Because we can't underestimate how our telling ourselves that it's immutable is helping create the illusion that it's immutable. Don't take that for granted. Keep trying. Keep seeing if you can find a way that it's permeable. You don't have to do any more than breathe warmth into it. Keep doing that and see what happens, if you can.

Q : Can you say any more about living with that a little bit lightly.

JS : You mean because it's hard?

Q : Yes, because it's always been this way. It looks this way as far as something stretches. Is there an outside to it that I can see and feel or not, and if not, how to live well with that.

JS : It can't be that it's always been that way and it's always going to be that way. It's that way in this moment. That's you sitting on the needle. You know that koan about sitting on the needle?

Q : Yes.

JS : So, stop saying those things. Because that's the way in which we contribute to the feeling that it's immutable, but conditions that rise and fall very slowly, I'm aware of what that's like. Stop fighting. Stop thinking it ought to be different. I'm saying all of the obvious things. Stop needing it to be different. This is your one true life. This is no accident.

Q : I don't understand, It's really not possible given how your brain works because of neuroplasticity. That's talking about some circuitry that's gotten entrenched for years. That's a story and it does always change or it can always change. It's like the brain tricking itself. It really doesn't work that way. You know what I mean? So then we call that the self. We used to talk about how memory operates in different parts of the brain and it's not just one section, it's not! So that's already a pretty wide arena of how we experience things. So if we feel like we can't escape certain circuitry, it's tricking ourselves.

JS: I think you're bringing up something really important and very delicate, which is the difference between believing there's something you can do about it—that there is plasticity, that things can change—and accepting the karma of this particular lifetime. And that's a very tricky thing. That's really a knife-edge to walk. You can fall to one side or the other of that all the time. Again, this is that sense of holding things lightly; how do you hold the possibility of things moving and changing as well as what happens if they don't? You've got to live both of those lives simultaneously or live both of those things within your one life.

Q : That makes total sense because sometimes I think if you don't accept that it might not change or "die to it" then you're almost addicted to the idea. You can't live without the idea, it has to change or it must change. I think there's an underbelly base line that also comes from surrendering to your life.

JS : Yes. If you fall on either side—if you fall on the side of "this has to change, this has gotta change", or you fall on the side of "nothing will ever change, this is exactly the way it is," in

either case, on either side, you're not living your true life. You're living a story about your life. The true life is on the knife-edge. The true life is "it might change and it might not change." And how do I walk that knife edge?

Q : It's the aboriginal songlines and the topo map together.

JS : It's so human to want to choose, because it's easier to want to fall somewhere. "This is my story and I'm sticking to it. It'll never change. It's gotta change or I'm gonna die." And what we're being asked to do is not to fall, not to choose, not to pick and choose but to live it *and* not to deny it, not to say, "It's too complicated, I'm gonna go take a nap", but to stay with it; to stay with walking on that knife-edge, wherever it takes us. And wherever it takes us—that's our life! If we stay walking on the knife-edge and we don't pick and choose, and we hold it all, and we don't go take a nap, but we keep walking, *that is our life*, and there's nothing left out, there is nothing excluded, there's nothing abandoned or orphaned. Everything is there.

Q : Is there any difference between psychological neurosis and social neurosis? Come back to activism and climate change and all the big problems of the world. Is that your recommendation for how to live? Don't get too much into fighting for climate change but don't accept it either, and find that edge point where you're living your life but you're not invested in a certain outcome.

JS : I'm not sure if that's the knife-edge, but definitely, if we genuinely tend toward not knowing and we genuinely tend toward the idea that everything is changing all the time, we can't possibly know what the outcome is. No one in this room, no one in this world, can know what the outcome will be. So that's one thing. I would say that's one side of the knife. Uncertainty. We cannot know what's going to happen. The other side is, if we have a developed moral sense, we have to do something about this. So, that's the tension. The tension is: how do we do something about this, meanwhile accepting that we cannot know what's going to happen? I don't think it's an option not to do something, but if we're doing something because we need a certain outcome, that's really dangerous because quite often, we don't get the outcome we think we ought to have. We have to work with climate change or whatever the issue is. We have to do it because that's the way we're made; because we don't know how to do anything else except do that. But we do that without demanding a certain

outcome. And again, often we limit ourselves by focusing on an outcome, because who knows what seventeen-year-old is out there with a great idea. We don't know. We don't know all the variables. So we shouldn't limit ourselves to the seventeen-year-old science genius who's going to invent something in ten years. I'm not saying that a *deus ex machina* is going to save us. But we don't know. So, how do we act in the most bodhisattva-vow way that we can, while holding uncertainty and not being sure? Do you have to have a good outcome in order to act, say, on climate change? Do you have to be certain that you're going to have a good outcome in order to be an activist about it? Or does your motivation for activism come from somewhere else which is, *this is the way I'm made*? Do you see what I'm saying? That's the deep bodhisattva question: do I need to know that what I do is going to have a result or else I'm not going to act, or do I act anyway because that's the vow?

Q: Getting back to don't-know mind, I remember when George the first Bush invaded Kuwait, Desert Storm. I was in a laundromat and a news team came in and asked me what I thought of it all and I was really invested in my opinion and how right I was and I was mad. I said I would hold George Bush responsible for every death that came down and then I heard a couple of days later, Ram Das was asked about whether he was optimistic or pessimistic about what was going to happen there and he said, "I am neither, how do I know what is supposed to happen?" Which for Ram Das, he has the podium; he gets to say brilliant things and people all sigh and listen. "I don't know, I don't know what's supposed to happen, but you do what you do and don't be lazy." That's his advice. I just love that.

JS: Absolutely. I think of Gandhi saying, "People want a lot of rules so they don't have to be good." They just have to follow the rules. And I think that one of the things our practice is deeply about is finding that good in each of us and cultivating that, not relying on rules, and then finding what the natural impulse is that arises out of that good; which we might talk about as that ground in which our individual vows meet the vows of every other being, the vows of the world, and rise from that.

Thank you.