

Allegiance to the Most Beloved
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Good evening, Vast Assembly. It's really wonderful to be here with you this evening and to be returning to such a fantastic gathering of the bodhisattvas. Thank you so much, all of you, and a very great welcome.

As we were putting this retreat together, every day trying to figure out how to fit one more bodhisattva in, our motto became something from *The Sutra that Vimalakirti Spoke*. You may remember that there's a group of 30,000-plus bodhisattvas who decide that they are going to go to Vimalakirti's ten-by-ten-foot room to have a conversation, and they actually manage to do that; but there's a character called Shariputra, an endearing comic figure in the sutra. Having 30,000 bodhisattvas together in one place at the same time apparently isn't remarkable enough for him, so he frets to himself, "But where will everybody sit?" Vimalakirti, who reads his thoughts, says, "Good Sir, did you come for a seat or did you come for the Dharma?" So our motto has been, "Did you come for a seat or did you come for the Dharma?" It's very encouraging to see so many people coming, I hope, for the Dharma, and my deep hope is that as you come for it, it will come for you this weekend.

Tonight I'm going to be laying down the philosophical foundations of this way of practice that we are entering—re-entering now—that's changing under our feet. Tomorrow we're going to work with it. Part of it will be the community talking about this life and practice they've been developing, and that's exciting.

We meet together at an auspicious time in our tradition, right after the Vernal Equinox, which is a time of new beginning, of Spring returning; it's also in a time in the lunar calendar called "Moon Almost Full". It was a time when divinations were done, so that people could check in to identify what the new thing coming in would be. I think of this weekend as a giant divination to see what the new thing is going to be. I want to start with a quote from Zhuangzi, who was one of the great early Daoist philosophers. He said, "I'm going to try to speak some reckless words, and I want you to try to listen recklessly."

This all begins in a time of restriction, a time when I was very ill, a time when all I could do was lie down on the dark earth. Out of that being able to do nothing but lie down on the dark earth, some amazing things happened. I talk about it because it's an example of exactly the kind of practice and approach to the Way that I'm going to be laying out tonight. As we often say, when you lie down, shut up, and stop wiggling, things start happening. If you really listen, you start to hear voices that are ordinarily drowned out by the cacophony of our daily lives. Things start walking toward you, and if you greet them respectfully, they will sit down with you to tell you their stories. That's what happened to me. I found that after fifteen years of teaching pretty full-on, I suddenly and for the first time understood what it is that I'm doing.

In that time of restriction I saw that I no longer had profligate energy to fling about, and that's where this idea and the name of this retreat came from — Allegiance to the Most Beloved. When you can't fling your energy about profligately any more, you have to figure out what the most beloved is and stay with that, and turn all your energy toward that. In the beginning it can feel like a loss, but over time it begins to feel clarifying, deepening, and quite powerful.

I want to ask right at the beginning for each of us to consider what our Most Beloved is. The answer may come up right away, but it's probably not that. Even if you think you know what it is, it's probably not that. What I want to invite you to do over the course of the weekend is to keep asking that question, keep company with "What is the Most Beloved?" Every time you land on something, see if there's something underneath that, and then underneath that, and underneath that, and see where you go with it. See where you start and where you end up by the end of the weekend.

I'm going to talk tonight and this weekend about how we can walk out to meet the Most Beloved, and to receive the Most Beloved when she arrives. A lot of you will recognize many common things, many things I've talked about before, but the way they're connected with each other and the kinds of patterns that are beginning to be made, I hope will be different and refreshing even if the content is familiar. I'm definitely understanding things differently and things are coming into kind of coherence that is new.

A couple of months ago, I was sitting in what I call my Ark House—a house on the water on San Francisco Bay. It's made, as some of the houses are in that area, of a few small barges stitched together. The barges are locally called arks. It is on a boardwalk between a vast marsh full of birds and a river that runs into the San Francisco Bay. That was a pretty good place to lie down on the dark earth; a very healing place. One day, as I was sitting by the water, I read a poem by Louise Glück, which has an image of the moon. I'll share an excerpt:

In the window, the moon is hanging over the earth ...
burning like a star, and convincingly, so that you feel
sometimes
it could actually make something grow on earth. ...
I move through the dark as though it were natural to me,
as though I were already a factor in it.
Tranquil and still, the day dawns.
On market day, I go to the market with my lettuces.

That moon really came and got me. The question that arose in me immediately was, “What does the moon make grow?” We know that it makes the tides swell and that plants actually grow more in the moonlight than they do during the day, but what else? What does the moon make grow in the same way as the sun makes the animal and vegetable life grow? Dreams, visions, meditation seem like kinds of lunar activity. Things underground, things we can't see, things that are still in the dark. Is it possible that it's sometimes a force of unmaking in the way that the sun is a force of making in the world?

Then, I got a rush of language. It's just a very long list, but when I began to think about What does the moon make grow?, this is what came rushing out of me. I've come to call it The Incantation of the Lunar Dharma. Let all of this wash over you. Don't try to catch it or grasp on to it or respond to it. Like water, let it wash over you and see what happens. Here's the raw, unedited Incantation of the Lunar Dharma as it came to me in about 5 minutes:

stillness
silence
what happens in the dark
insubstantiality
transience
the dream
endarkenment
the great broken heart of the world

the bodhisattva's deliberate wound
being impermeable
being marked, stained, and dyed
dissolving
experiencing objectless devotion
not being certain
not knowing
unmaking
not naming
forgetting
putting down
interrupting the habits of heart-mind
interrupting karmic chains
subverting
letting go
questions
neither asserting nor defending
not seeking
not acquiring
not attaining
not exerting will
stopping
sitting
resting
listening
wondering
being spontaneous
being surprised
surprising yourself
trusting
turning back
turning the light around
returning home
the turning word
reversals of meaning, as the blessing of poverty
paradoxical identities, as samsara is nirvana
the bare ground
the hazy moon
fallen flowers
blue dragon's cave
dragon murmur in a withered tree
deep in the mountains
lost in the weeds
under the sea
riding the currents
leaning back against a tree older than the forest it stands in

lying down on the dark earth
seeing spring in budless branches
opening the hand

Sound familiar? It's the koan way! It just utterly *is*. That deep stream of the koan way is this lunar dharma, the countercurrent to the way life seems to be, so much of the way we experience it.

This lunar current is something old, much older than Buddhism. The traditions that make up this countercurrent that always existed in the world take us back, connect us to a time when we had a strong, everyday, natural, ordinary, daily-life connection to these currents. We could feel them. We were part of them. We didn't turn our backs on them. It was a time when women's voices were appreciated, when we still felt the strong moral claim of the non-human, natural world upon us. These are values that are still meaningful to us or are meaningful to us again, things that we would like to strengthen in our lives now. The possibility of this countercurrent stream of the dharma is strong because it puts us in direct relationship with these very old values and very old experiences in human life that run counter to so much of what we see happening around us. But, again, I want to make clear that they're really, really old and we can't in any way claim ownership of them—but we can claim allegiance to them.

If, on the surface of life, we have a tendency toward building and creating institutions, dogmas, hierarchy, orthodoxy, etc., then underground there's this stream that surfaces every once in awhile and then submerges again. That's the stream I'm talking about, this lunar countercurrent. It's never going to be a mainstream tradition, by its nature, but when it rises every once in awhile to the surface, it brings with it the deep waters of those streams underneath and refreshes the surface, refreshes what's going on in the great making of the world.

As I've come to understand it, the Chan (Chinese for Zen) koan tradition carries with it something very old and precious. It's not identical with mainstream Buddhism, and part of the preciousness of what it carries is that it is drawing on the deep springs of Daoism and shamanism that bubble together from that underground stream through the koans.

This isn't true of all of Chan; it's certainly not true of all of Zen. Both of them are completely capable of being yanked up to the surface and turned into part of the mainstream.

We saw the horrible culmination of that in the embrace of Zen in Japanese militarism and nationalism in the early part of the 20th century, leading up to World War II. So I don't want to talk in color blocks and I don't want to make good and bad. Everything is capable of everything. But there is, I believe, in the Chan koan tradition a persistent tendency, a memory, a commitment, a life force that has the possibility of connecting us back to these deep springs of human life. I don't think our job is to reproduce that or to return there. We couldn't even if we wanted to. Our job is to sink wells into that underground river in our time, in our ways, and bring that water to the surface for the benefit of all. I think there are things here that the world is thirsty for—this deep water—and there is an offering we can make to the world, to anyone who is interested.

Let's step back into the founding story of Buddhism to an encounter between two people that is a moment when the underground stream breaks the surface and changes everything. As many of you will remember, when Siddhartha left the palace he was practicing harsh austerities. So harsh that in the end he almost killed himself and literally was unconscious, dying of starvation. (Parenthetically, I want to give a warning that this is the land of unfairly broad brush strokes, so please receive it like that. This is way too broad but there's something here that I at least want to begin to talk about.)

At that time when Siddhartha was almost starving himself with harsh austerities, the whole Eurasian continent, from Europe to China, including the Indian subcontinent, had spent several millennia cutting itself off from these old traditions, from these old countercurrents from the underground river. In the process, they turned what had been mainstream into something underground—something that became a countercurrent.

Unfortunately, the results were not great. At the time of the life of the Buddha, about 500 BCE, a time that the philosopher Karl Popper called the Axial Age, across this Eurasian continent people were saying, "Wait a minute, this is way too hard, life can't be this violent and this brutal and this cruel. We've got to figure something else out. We can't go on like this." This was part of the movement out of which Buddhism originally came.

A quick shorthand for this is the word *nibbana* (a Pali word that becomes *nirvana* in Sanskrit), etymologically related to a word that means the cooling that comes after a fever has broken. That sums up the longing of the time: "Let's break the fever. Let us find that coolness when we're not living in a fraught and difficult state." And then something extreme happened,

where it seemed to go too far in the other direction. What began as an aversion to violence, an aversion to cruelty and brutality, almost became an aversion to life.

Let's go back to Siddhartha practicing those harsh austerities. One way we can think about that is that he was enacting in himself, in his own body, this great Axial movement; this desire to get away from what was so unsatisfactory about life. But he pushed it too far and almost killed himself, almost destroyed his body, as if he brought the fight inside himself. The brutality of the age was introverted into his practice.

The Buddha was lying on the ground, unconscious, having introverted the entire Axial Age into his own life and knocking himself out with it. (I told you it was broad brush strokes.) Meanwhile, in a nearby town, a woman, Sujata, had a dream. The dream tells her to take the milk of a thousand cows, feed it to 500 cows, and to feed that to 250, and so on all the way down to one cow. (If anyone's a mathematician, you know it doesn't work, but that's the story.) Sujata would end up with a bowl of very rich milk, which she should mix with rice and take out into the forest. No explanation given.

Sujata is this older rhythm. Sujata is this older way of being in which, when given a dream like that with no idea of the meaning, you respond and do it. She goes off into the forest having performed the operation, created this rich food, and finds the Buddha unconscious, feeds him, and restores him to life. It's that gift, it's Sujata's gift that makes it possible for Siddhartha to go sit under the tree and to get up from that tree a day later as the Buddha.

This is Sujata's blessing on him. It's a moment where the undercurrent, the underground stream, erupts into the daylight world. Twenty-five hundred years later we are still being affected by that gift because it made everything else possible.

When Siddhartha had regained his strength by taking Sujata's gift, he went to a stream near the bodhi tree, took his bowl, and threw it into the stream, saying, "If this bowl floats upstream, today I will attain enlightenment." Lo and behold, the bowl floated upstream. The deep meaning of that moment is that Sujata's gift made it possible for him to enter that countercurrent. There was the stream, this rushing torrent coming from the mountains, the great stream of doing, being, becoming, birth and death, old age, decay, death and rebirth, and what he was doing was throwing his bowl against that vast current of becoming and doing, and hoping it would go up-river against all of that to the still source and rest there. Which is

sort of what happened, except the Naga King intercepted it, and put it on his shelf along with the seven other bowls of the seven previous buddhas that had also done the same thing. But anyway...

Annie Dillard in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* has exactly the same moment. She writes, “If the landscape reveals one certainty, it is that the extravagant gesture is the very stuff of creation. After the one extravagant gesture of creation in the first place, the universe has continued to deal exclusively in extravagances, flinging intricacies and colossi down eons of emptiness. Heaping profusions and profligacies with ever-fresh vigor. The whole show has been on fire from the word go. I come down to the water to cool my eyes but everywhere I look I see fire. That which isn’t flint is tinder and the whole world sparks and flames.”

Shakyamuni and Annie Dillard have been in conversation over the centuries, because what happens soon after these events is that the Buddha gives the fire sermon. He uses exactly the same imagery as Annie Dillard. It’s a turning point where again we’ve stepped out of the lunar countercurrents and back into something else. The Buddha spoke to a group of fire worshippers. He gave the sermon that I’ve excerpted here and turned into another kind of incantation. You might compare it to the Lunar Dharma Incantation.

Monks, the All is aflame. What All is aflame? The eye is aflame. Forms are aflame. Consciousness at the eye is aflame. Contact at the eye is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye—experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too, is aflame.

Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I tell you, with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs.

The ear is aflame. Sounds are aflame.

The nose is aflame. Aromas are aflame.

The tongue is aflame, Flavors are aflame.

The body is aflame. Tactile sensations are aflame.

The intellect is aflame. Ideas are aflame.

Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms. And whatever is experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither- pleasure-nor-pain: with that, too, he grows disenchanted.

He grows disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with tactile sensations.

He grows disenchanted with the intellect, disenchanted with ideas.

Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion he is fully released. He discerns that birth is depleted, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.

That's saying that the only way to deal with this world on fire is to get out. That weariness with the fire, that weariness with the relentlessness of life, leads to the assumption that all of life is like this. The All is aflame. It's always burning and it's only like this; because it's like this, the only thing we can do is get out.

From the perspective of the lunar countercurrents, from the perspective of the lunar dharma, there's something else; there's another way of looking at this. There's an understanding that the problem is not that it's all like this all the time and so all we can do is get away from it. The problem is that something has been denied. Something has been left out and that the cool moisture of that something could bring balance to the fire. So the move is *in* instead of *out*. The move is *toward* instead of *away from*.

This isn't a mistake made only by people a long time ago and very far away. We make this mistake every time we collapse out of our lives into meditation or retreat, and we expect that meditation or that retreat to heal us from the frantic pace of the rest of our lives; when we think that meditation or retreat is an escape from our lives, when we ask it to carry the entire burden of solving the problem of our lives. I always find it a sure signal to the coyotes to start transgressing the borders when we keep meditation or retreat somehow separate and pure, untainted by the problems of our lives.

Instead, we can understand meditation and retreat and all the things we do not as a place we escape to, but a place where we refresh and reground so that we can learn to bring the hermitage with us; so that we don't have to escape to the hermitage, but we can carry it with us and offer it to the world.

This countercurrent dharma agrees with some of the critique of the world that's in the

Fire Sermon and things like it, but we definitely don't agree with the proposed fix. We don't agree with the escape, because if you formulate the problem as "everything's on fire all the time and there's nothing else," and you formulate the solution as "therefore we must get away," in both directions, the world is abandoned. In both directions we either succumb to the difficulties of the world or we leave the world open to the degradations of people filled with greed and aggression; we escape, we go away. We enter into our own separate little happy place. Either way, we are abandoning the world and that cannot be what practice is about.

So if it's not about either of those things, if it's not A or B, what's C? What's the third possibility here? What is not abandoning, neither succumbing nor leaving, but leaning in?

Letting our hearts be broken. Healing each burning moment by balancing it with the moist, the cool, and the dark of the Great Mysterious, as the Daoists called it, so that in each moment we are like Sujata bringing her bowl of milk to nourish what is dying. We're like Guanyin pouring a healing balm from her vase into our own heart-minds, into each moment, into the world, over and over again. That's the third thing; that's the other possibility. That's what the lunar countercurrent dharma is inviting us to do.

It's important to emphasize that I'm not saying, dark equals good, light equals bad. This is not setting up another kind of duality where we're opposing dark to the light and saying, abandon the light, enter the dark. That would be falling into the same dualistic trap. In the Dharma we're used to thinking of the light that is not dualistic, that contains both the light and the dark. What if we flip that on its head and we think of a nondualistic dark that contains both the light and the dark? Does it make a difference if it's the nondualistic dark holding light and dark rather than the nondualistic light holding light and dark?

What we're talking about is not "abandon the light, move to the dark", not a picking and choosing, but a compensatory move toward wholeness. We're talking about a move toward including what has been excluded, because to a great extent, a lot of the Dharma and the koan way work with us through lunar practices. Meditation, koans, the work we do with dreams—all of that is essentially lunar practice.

It is important to understand what they have to teach us and to be aware of our tendency to want to turn them into solar practices, by which I mean wanting to *make* or *have* something, to attain something, to exert will in order to make something happen. We think if

we just press hard enough or follow the rules stringently enough, we'll get something out of it. This is a very non-lunar kind of move because, in the countercurrent, we're always deconstructing. We're not acquiring, we're always taking things down, pulling things apart, letting things go, dropping things, so that what was always true, but held in the dark, becomes apparent. We're never going to find what is held in the dark and already true through acts of will. We're never going to do it by acquiring, gaining, and getting. We're only going to do it by interrupting, putting down, letting go, listening, and seeing what is already there, just not yet visible.

The koans are not about making stuff conscious, but about allowing ourselves to be drawn into the dark and finding the wisdom of that place, and eventually bringing it back into consciousness, but not bringing it kicking and screaming.

I want to give a couple of examples of why I have this strong intuition that it matters to think of the dark as the nonduality holding both light and dark. The first example I want to use is mindfulness.

Usually mindfulness in the West is presented in a hyperconscious way. The assumption is that you can bring anything into consciousness, and that the conscious mind can resolve any problem. We are endlessly trying to bring things into the bright sphere of consciousness. From a lunar perspective that leaves out the vast workings of what happens underground—what happens out of our sight and out of our control. A mindfulness that includes both would be mindful of what we do not know, what we cannot know, what is not yet conscious for us, and would respect that and see that as part of the situation as much as those things that we can know and what it *is* possible for us to be conscious of.

Maybe we should talk about it as heart-mindfulness — to remind ourselves that it isn't just this movement into the light, a movement into consciousness, but it is also an awareness of the vast unknown that surrounds the very little bit of what we can know. The approach to mindfulness, if we think of nondualistic dark holding both light and dark, is less of trying to make things conscious and more of embracing not knowing; allowing oneself not to be the miner with her headlamp illuminating the way, but allowing ourselves to be part of the particular not knowing that is unfolding in this moment with this shape.

This room is a vast not-knowing in the shape of everybody in this room, and this floor

and the windows and the air coming in, etc. We're not going to try to see, to understand, to grasp as much as we can about it, but we're going to continue to open ourselves to the not-knowing of this time and place that's occurring in this shape.

Here's an example of doing mindfulness like that. One of the most important, amazing, and consequential shifts in cosmology recently is that people no longer talk about the laws of physics as applying to the whole universe. We're beginning to think that they don't necessarily. What we thought were the laws of the whole are actually the laws of what we can know about here, and so cosmologists are starting to talk about the local universe, meaning the universe that seems to run by the physical laws we're clear about. There is no assumption anymore that beyond the local universe things are like that.

At the same time, there are amazing discoveries that say that about 94% of the universe is dark energy and dark matter, which leaves about 5 or 6% that is what we think of as ordinary matter and energy. So 94% of the universe is invisible to us, unknown to us, and may never be known to us. It is the visible world, it is the world of our sensory experience that is the anomaly in the universe, the thing that almost doesn't exist. The little that we know about dark matter and dark energy is that dark matter forms invisible skeletons throughout the universe around which ordinary matter clusters. Galaxies cluster along these skeletons of dark matter, and then dark energy forms halos around these clusters of galaxies along the skeletons of dark matter. So you've got skeletons and halos surrounding everything that we can be aware of. An astronomer called this the ultimate Copernican revolution. Not only are we not at the center of the universe, which is what Copernicus showed us, we're not even made of the same stuff as the vast majority of the universe.

The physicist David Bohm described our existential situation like this : everything that is visible and knowable to us (that 5 or 6% of the universe that is ordinary matter) is like the bubbles on the foam on the top of the waves that rise on the surface of an infinite ocean beneath us. And that ocean is completely invisible and unknowable to us.

Just for a moment as you sit here, notice what you can know through your senses about this room, about your situation at the moment. What you can know right here in this room, sitting here, is only 6% of it. It's not the whole big deal, but just 6% of this room right here and right now. That's what you get—6%—through your senses. Now, without losing it,

without shutting your senses down, see if you can drop down toward that 94%.

Isn't that what meditation is? Isn't meditation allowing ourselves to sink into the beginning, the small first parts of that 94%? Isn't that truer? Isn't it truer to say about the universe that 94% of it is invisible and unknown to us, rather than pretending that it's only what we can know? Isn't it truer to say that our experience of this room includes what we can feel in meditation? It's bigger, it includes more, and it's closer to the truth. So that's the move we're talking about making—endlessly opening up to that larger thing, that truer thing.

I want to give another example of why I have the intuition that it matters that we think of the dark as being nondual and holding both the light and the dark. This is something that Huineng, the sixth ancestor, said: "The very passions themselves are enlightenment." The very passions themselves, the things that we're supposed to not have, or get rid of, or pretend we don't have, are enlightenment. What is that about? I think Huineng and our tradition are saying that our task is not to indulge the passions or to believe unequivocally in what they tell us about the nature of the world, which is option A. On the other hand, option B is to annihilate them, to cut them off at the knees, to get rid of them, to not feel them, to become passionless. But if it's neither of those things, what's the third move?

What if the lunar move, that thing that has sometimes been left out, is that we let our hearts be broken by compassion for them? What if we allow ourselves to feel the sorrow of those passions, the pain of those passions? We let our hearts be broken because that's what we need to awaken. That's what Huineng was saying: the very passions themselves are enlightenment. We *must* let our hearts be broken by them in order to awaken. It's the same thing Vimalakirti said, that there is no other way except to walk the back streets of this world and to let your heart be broken. This was spoken by Huineng, the most uncompromising and least sentimental of all the ancestors.

A couple of bedtime stories to take with you and see what happens. The first one is one of the oldest stories written down. The second one is so new that most of it exists in the future; we don't know what's going to happen yet.

The old one is a Chinese description of the world. In that description are two trees. There is a sun tree called Leaning Mulberry in the east of the world, and there is a moon tree

in the west of the world whose leaves give off the red light of sunset. In that eastern tree perch ten suns in the form of three-legged ravens. In the western tree perch twelve moons, sometimes in the form of toads or hares. Ten and twelve are probably due to the fact that in the old, sacred calendar of the Shang Dynasty a month was made up of three ten-day weeks, and there were twelve moon cycles, twelve months in the year. Ten suns in the eastern tree, twelve moons in the western tree, and each of those has a mother—the mother of the ten suns, the mother of the twelve moons.

The mothers would take one sun at a time or one moon at a time in a carriage across the sky. That was the passage of the sun through the day and the passage of the moon through the night. Each of the suns and moons would be received in the opposite tree when the passage across the sky was complete. There was a pool at the base of each of these trees where the mothers would bathe the trees when their journey was over. The pools connected to the great underground river called The Land of the Yellow Springs, or the Ghost River—a kind of underworld place. The sun and the moon, having made their passage across the sky, would go back to their home tree through the underworld, carried along the river. Then they would begin the ascent back into the tree. While they were climbing up the tree the next sun or moon would take off from the treetop.

This was the endless cycle of days and nights. The balance of this, and the awareness that the sun's journey is not complete when it goes across the sky from tree to tree, is so beautiful. It has to make that underworld journey through the river to get back home again. The same is true with the moon. There is an endless cycle of perfect inclusion of light and dark repeating itself—the above-ground and below-ground, what is blazingly visible at noonday and what cannot be seen in the caverns under the earth. That's the old story.

Here's the new story, most of which has yet to happen : Since 1977 one of the most amazing things that human beings have ever done has been happening, and most of us are completely unaware of it. In 1977 two little satellites, Voyagers I and II, were launched into space. Their original mission was to check out the big gas planets on the outside of the solar system. They fulfilled that mission and sent back a lot of cool pictures. And after that they were still doing fine. They went past Neptune and were still going strong. Everyone said, "What the heck, keep going. Don't stop." So the two little silicon beings with less computing power than a digital watch apiece turned their cameras off to save energy, turned away from

the solar system, and headed out toward the edge of what is called the heliosphere. The heliosphere is the body of the solar system. It's created by the vast solar winds that get pushed out and create an oval that makes solar system space separate from interstellar space, defined by these winds. So off they went and they trundled along and they sent back other kinds of readings; even though the cameras were turned off they were still sensing electromagnetic fields and winds, etc. People really had no idea what they would find and how far they would get.

Things went along as expected for years and years and years. Then, all of a sudden, an amazing thing started to happen : everything went really chaotic. The solar winds of the heliosphere are often described like the skirts of a ballerina that spin out in a symmetrical way, but the satellites hit a zone where the skirts were breaking up and becoming ragged. There were trails of the solar winds and nothing was as expected. The laws of physics seemed to not apply much anymore. They sailed through that zone for a while and everybody thought that that might have been the edge; that maybe that's what happens at the edge.

Then an even more surprising thing happened, literally instantly; they went away for lunch and when they came back from lunch, everything had gone completely silent and still. No more solar winds, no more electromagnetic fields, nothing going on, perfect silence. That went on for a long time. Then they thought, "Oh, the edge of the heliosphere is not a line, it's a place." They traversed that for a couple of years and nobody knew what would happen next.

Last December NASA announced that the next thing had happened : the satellites were still traveling through the silent, deep, still zone, but there were magnetic lines that came out not just from the sun, from the heliosphere, but there were also magnetic lines coming from interstellar space *in*, and the lines were connecting. So Voyager is following the magnetic lines that are the place where the solar system meets the universe. The universe came to get us. The universe came to open up a road into interstellar space.

Without clunking heavily down on metaphor, let me just say that in the quest, in the journey to the Most Beloved, it's really good to get to know the solar system. It's really good to get to know our heart-minds and our habits and what we do and what the world is like around us. That's a beautiful thing. And it's really good not to stop there. It's really good to keep going into that place where everything starts falling apart and gets really crazy and

nothing you thought pertains anymore and you don't know how long it's going to go on. You don't know if the spacecraft is going to rattle apart or whether it's going to survive. You have no idea. But it's good to keep going.

It's also really good to get to that zone where everything gets still and deep and quiet. That deep samadhi is a beautiful place to be. And it's not the end, because the universe will come to get us. The universe will throw open roads in that silence, in that stillness, and offer us the invitation of an infinite voyage as far out as we can go. It's my hunch that that's where the Most Beloved will be found.

So, let us not stop. Let us keep going into the vast and the dark and the unknown. Let us see what we discover about the Most Beloved and what we discover over a lifetime of what it's like to hold our lives like that. Those of you who are willing, let us dig wells into that underground river. Let us bring that healing balm up to a world on fire and let us offer that to ourselves, to each other, and to the larger communities of which we are a part. I can think of nothing I'd rather be doing, and I hope some of you will decide that there's nothing you'd rather be doing, too.

Thank you.