

Mushim Patricia Ikeda
Teachings for Uncertain Times
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I am Mushim Patricia Ikeda. I live and teach in Oakland, California, at the East Bay Meditation Center, and this is part of the Tricycle series called "Teachings for Uncertain Times." It's now December 2016, a very specific crossroad in the history of the United States and a time of great uncertainty for many people. Specifically in my circles, there is a sharp increase in the already existing fears within communities of African Americans targeted by police violence, communities of undocumented immigrants, Muslim communities, and all people of color impacted by both overt and thinly concealed white supremacy.

In a recent statement titled "Now is the Time to Stand Up," Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield wrote: "Do not believe that meditation and contemplation are the fulfillment of the Buddhist path. The foundation of dharma is relational, built on generosity, virtue, and lovingkindness." So, I'll repeat that. "Do not believe that meditation and contemplation are the fulfillment of the Buddhist path."

As a mother of an adult child, I know very well that in uncertain times many of us, myself included, seek refuge in that which is familiar, in whatever certainty we can find, and this is natural and very basic. The need to feel safe, accepted for all that we are; seen, heard, valued, and respected. As we grow up, and as we mature spiritually, we might grow to understand more and more the essential truth of what the Buddha taught. Impermanence, the nature of everything we love and cherish to change, as well as the nature of all things to change.

The question is, what's going to change and how will it change? Dharma practitioners have always formed communities and deep spiritual friendships that have helped us to weather the winters of hard times and to bask together in the warmth of good times.

In uncertain times, how will we help ourselves and others? If we are meditation practitioners—and not all Buddhists are—and we say, "I love the practice," or "I practice 20 minutes a day," it is now the time to ask ourselves what have we been practicing for, and to what end? Social justice activist Paul Kivel—that's K-I-V-E-L—has said, "most of us know what we stand for." In other words, we know what our core values are. So most of us know what we stand for, but do

we know *who* we stand with? And this question points to how strong or tenuous our on-the-ground relationships are among communities impacted by structural violence.

I met with one of my meditation students not long ago. The pain of racism had manifested in our spiritual community, and this person was in tears. They said to me, "I don't know whether my practice is strong enough for this," and I said, "Now is the time to drop down and dig in, because I'm in it with you, and I've got your back 100 percent." So that's the message that I would like to leave you with. It is my belief, according to my own practice, that now in the United States, in the world, is the time to drop down into what it is that we've been practicing for in the buddhadharma. Now is the time to dig in and do what we feel is needed to create the world in which we want to live. If that's the case, I've got your back 100 percent.