



Good evening everybody. These are difficult times, but how wonderful it is to get together like this tonight—or maybe it's not tonight, wherever your time zone is. Time and space are so relative, as we see now in the high-tech era. So I bow to each of you, and I bow to the Buddha, the Buddhahness, the divine, the light, the goddess, in your own seat, don't overlook her.

Yes, these are the times that try our people-souls. Also, it's a good time to turn all the shit that's falling into manure, into fertilizer, as the Buddhist pioneer Chögyam Trungpa once said, and bring forth the flowers of bodhi, the bodhisattvas, the awakening beings, the awakeners, the bodhisattvas, the buddhas-to-be, the compassionate altruists, the spiritual activists, the bodhisattvas. That reminds me, the Buddhist pioneer and cofounder of the mindfulness movement in the West, Jack Kornfield, [just put out a message calling all bodhisattvas](#)—I recommend it to you to read. Wonderful. Thank you, Jack.

Tonight, I'd like to make a few remarks just to get together and bring together our cohort, our community, our beloved community, this sangha, this *satsang* here. It's such an opportunity. It's such a privilege. It's a gift to be able to get together like this in these times, and at no charge, is sponsored by Tricycle, our wonderful Buddhist journal for 30 years. The Tricycle community is one of the great Buddhist communities and networks in the West. These days, everybody can feel the stress, the anxiety, the fears, and the uncertainty. But what do we do with it? That makes all the difference. It's not what happens to us, friends, but what we make of it that makes all the difference. You can take that to the bank, as they used to say. You can rely on that: It's not what happens to us, but what we make it that makes all the difference. This is timeless wisdom beyond any -ism. Whatever hand we're dealt, it still depends on how we play it. That's how our life goes. The combination of nature and nurture, in English, karma and *klesha*—obscurations or conflicting emotions—in Sanskrit, conditioning, in a word, samsara, the cycle of conditioning, of dissatisfactory-ness, until we see through it and realize contentment, and inner peace, and wholeness, and belonging, and interconnectedness.

And what can introduce the verities—the eternal verities, the timeless verities, truths of interconnectedness and interdependence and inter-being—more than this global pandemic, which, as I see it, is a symptom of the environmental degradation and climate change crisis that we face? These new viruses coming out of the jungles or the melting glaciers and the poles, etc. We can all see how it affects us all, just like the Earth's atmosphere. There's no country, no peoples that can avoid that. We're all living in the same atmosphere here on Spaceship Earth, as Bucky [Buckminster] Fuller termed it in the '60s, the genius who invented the geodesic dome, Bucky Fuller. Spaceship Earth, our vehicle! It's beyond talk about Buddhist theology and Buddha-ology about different vehicles and different paths. That we're all in the same boat, that



we all rise or fall, sink or swim, together. This is undeniable. Just look, and see for yourself. Not everybody thinks this way, but I believe this to be true, and I'm pretty skeptical. I'm a New York motor-mind and motor-mouth—skeptical. I grew up in the age of irony and the credibility gap. And just like now, the age of fake news and alternative facts—oh! Don't get me started on that. So what are we going to do with all this stress and tension, not to mention the dangers that this pandemic poses to the whole globe and to our society, economically, physically, mentally—probably, at some point, militarily? There'll be millions of refugees moving around, maybe hundreds of millions when the seas keep rising, and the low coastal areas and archipelagos go under.

So now it's incumbent upon us all to join together in doing the best we can to follow the guidelines that are given to us from the experts, from the scientists, from our “leaders.” And I don't want to focus on that issue too much, of leadership. There was a time in the ‘60s when Robert F. Kennedy, JFK's younger brother, was running for senator, and he said, “Politics is a noble, service-oriented profession,” and nobody snickered. Can you imagine anybody saying that today? So today, we have an opportunity to realize not only interdependence, interconnectedness, inter-being, our basic interwoven-ness, and realize our intrinsic part in the whole, in the whole mandala, to talk Sanskrit, in the cosmos, in the whole machinery—our part in it, inextricable—and that no one can do it alone. And yet, no one is exempt from participating. Even hermits are participating and keeping the world afloat through their prayers and aspirations and mind power—powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal monks, to parse the Superman song.

So tonight, we're going to take a step off of the treadmill, the gerbil wheel of the to-do lists and all we have to do. Even staying home is a lot to do. Also we have the habit of doing. It's hard to be you, just a human being, and just be. We're going to take a breath, and lean back a little, relax, and co-meditate together with the Dalai Lama. Everything is so subjective. It's not what happens but what we make of it. It makes all the difference. This, dear friends, heart friends, dharma friends, this is the secret of self-mastery, of finding not just independence like what teenagers cry and long for, but realizing *interdependence*, and further, *autonomy* within interdependence, self-mastery—freedom within how things actually work, interdependence, karma, causation. So we can steer our vehicle towards our priorities: towards happiness, wellness, wellbeing, harmony and peace, through loving and giving, and empathic compassion, etc.

So we're going to have a little prayer, a little meditation. I'm going to begin with a little Tibetan chanting, and if you have, say a prayer in English also. I hope you'll join with me, or hum along,



or just meditate along, and let the sacred sounds—the *shabda*, as you say in Sanskrit, the sacred sound, the celestial music, the tongue of the gods—wash over you, and wash through you, and wash your cares away, and clean out your chakras and channels, your energy centers and pathways, and so on, clear out the bats and the cobwebs in your belfry, or wherever they are—in your lungs from vaping, or whatever you've been doing to yourself—and have a few moments of peace. As Buddha said—I've heard—there is nirvanic peace in things left just as they are. Can you believe that? We don't have to totally change. We don't have to put a Buddha's head in place of our own, or a goddess head or a tara head in place of our own. It's all holy, as Allen Ginsberg sang, “holy, holy, holy.” “Holy cow!” as they say in India. [Laughs.] Now, that's one of my cartoons. Of course cows are holy in India. Everything is it. Let's try to practice the Tibetan practice of true perception or sacred outlook, seeing the light of the divine, shining through in everyone, everything, that which is transcendent yet imminent in each and all of us. We call it the Buddhanature or our Buddhaness, our true nature. There are many other words for it—the Christos, not historical Jesus, the great teacher and rabbi and saint, but the Christos, the inner light, the spark, the living light, the eternal light, if you'd like.

This is a time when we're asked to stay at home, and some of us have essential services we have to perform, I know. Let's keep that in mind and pray for the health workers, the first responders, and the truck drivers that keep our supply chain moving on the highways, the fire people, and so forth. And for the rest of us who are staying home, this is an opportunity for us to step back and spend quality time with family and “homeschool” the children, and be together. And stay informed, but don't become a news junkie.

This is a good time to make what the mystics called “the backward step” and think before you react, and read and feel before you react to outside stimuli. Bring the wedge of mindfulness in between the stimulus and the reflex reaction. Here's the secret of mindful anger management, mindful emotional regulation: Bring the wedge of mindfulness in that little space between the stimulus and the kneejerk, reflexive reaction, so we can consider how, when, and if to respond and not just blindly react. Mindful anger management.

Mindfulness is not a panacea, as some might see it. But awareness, as well, in Buddhism—Awareness with a capital A—is the higher power, the inner power, in Buddhism. That's what we take refuge in. And it's within each of us, and all of us, and all beings, not just human beings. So let's do what we can to protect ourselves and each other, and take care of our precious beings and our loved ones, and, by extension, in concentric circles all around us, reaching out and including the whole world and all the beings cohabitating on it. It's now or never, as always. It's not worse now than it's ever been before. There have been plagues and



pandemics, there have been hordes conquering countries and halves of continents and slaying millions of people.

The wheel of cyclic existence or conditioning goes round and round. Let's center ourselves in the unmoving axis at the center of the turning wheel. Come home to ourselves. Take a breath, and breathe out. And take another breath, breathing in, feeling it in your lower belly or higher in your chest, and breathe out, and relax, let the tension drain away, let it drain into your seat, into the ground, into the floor.

Come home to yourself. Gather it. Collect mindfulness—in the original languages *drenpa*, *smrti*, *sati*—it means also recollective-ness. Recollect your scattered energies in the here and now. Be a living Buddha, not a dissociated Buddha. American Buddhists! American Buddhas, awaken! Please! Throw off your hang-ups and neurosis, to quote Groucho Marx.

Breathe, relax, and smile. Lean back a little bit, and relax. No need to be leaning forward, rushing forward to the next thing. Breathe, relax, and smile three steps to the center, to peace and harmony, to wellness, to now, nowness, the holy now, the timeless, the timeless moment, the holy now. As we say in Tibetan, in the “Great Perfection,” the Dzogchen tradition: Nowness awareness is the true authentic unfabricated Buddha within. Nowness awareness is the authentic unfabricated Buddha within, awareness with a capital A plus, not just being conscious rather than unconscious or comatose, incandescently present, lucidly aware, spacious, open. Pay attention, it pays off.

Just sitting, feel your body, embodied Buddha; just sitting, *nirmanakaya*—natural bodies, Buddha’s body—just sitting, relaxing. And second: Just breathing, natural flow. Let it go. Natural energy, Buddha's energy and breath, natural breath, natural flow. Let go. *Sambhogakaya*. The great delight. And third: *dharmakaya*, natural heart-mind, leaving it as it is. Rest your weary heart and mind, as Longchenpa, the Dzogchen master, said. Natural heart-mind, not visualizing, not imagining, not radiating or reabsorbing, not praying for world peace at this moment—we'll get to that. Just sitting, just breathing, just being, co-meditating, inter-meditating, inter-being together, friends, right now. Rebalancing the disharmonies in this world, coming home to ourselves, to the here and now. This breath, only breath; this moment, only moment.

Just sitting, just breathing, just being—these are the three pillars of natural meditation, or open awareness meditation. Openness, inclusiveness, friendliness, openness to everything, whatever appears and arises, and watching it come and go. Letting go. That's the secret, friends. Not suppressing, or indulging, and getting carried away in chains of discursive thinking. Letting go means letting come and go—letting be, that's the secret. “As it is,” is the Dzogchen slogan.



Leave it as is, and rest your weary heart-mind. So I say: At ease! As it is. Natural body, natural breath and energy, natural heart-mind. Leave it as it is for now. And simply aware. Aware of the flotsam and jetsam going by on the stream of consciousness. Just letting go, the ripples and the waves in the sea of awareness. See, and tune into the totality, the bigger picture, just resting in the center. Like the ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi called the origin of all things. I love that—just resting in the origin of all things. Sitting on your Buddha seat. Assume your Buddha seat, friends, who do you think you're not? Let's bring this all the way down.

[Chanting]

May the Buddha's blessings ever-awaken and illumine our good minds, may the enlightened one's blessing and inspiration ever unfold in our good hearts, may the inconceivable blessing of awakening itself, awakefulness itself, dispel the momentary illusion we've ever been separate, incomplete, inadequate, or apart. Now is the Buddha, the light, the divine in your seat, don't overlook it.

May all beings be free from harm, danger, and fear. May the path be cleared of obstacles and all our sterling aspirations be achieved, and may we all together be purified, transformed, transmuting the base metal of human nature into the platinum of buddhanature, transmuting, that's the thing. Not getting from here to there, like the gradual path, but from here to totally here, the direct path, direct access. Awakefulness, now, may it be so. From these lips to Buddha's ears, *emaho*, wonderful, wondrous, amazing. Eureka. Yes.

Just sitting, just breathing, just being aware. Natural meditation. Buddha's way. Just being, nothing more to do, remember, figure out, or achieve. Leave it as it is, letting go, letting come and go, letting be. Simply seeing, seeing through or recognizing, and third, allowing or releasing. Seeing, recognizing, allowing, releasing. That's the natural way, the natural great perfection—how sweet it is. All Buddhas, by nature—and we have to recognize and realize who we are. *Emaho*. Eureka. Wondrous. Thank you. Yes.

This breath, only breath. This moment, only moment. Awareness, aware of awareness. *Emaho*. Enjoy the joy of actual co-meditation. Nowness, awareness, the ultimate, freedom and therapy, beyond past and future, even beyond present, the timeless time. The holy now. *Emaho*. I love it. Thank you.

Aware of whatever arises, whatever appears in the field of consciousness, in the body-mind continuum, aware of whatever appears, what you're observing, come and go. And remembering



the Buddhist mantra: This too shall pass. The microcosmic mini-events of the body and mind, the phenomena and the noumena, how we experience, as well as the bigger cycles of collective karma, like pandemics, like weather, like climate change, like overpopulation, etc. This too shall pass. And we have a part in that, oh bodhisattvas.

For now, just resting at the origin of all things, free and easy, so when it's time to act according to what's needed, we're free and not inhibited to spontaneously liberate the selfless Buddha activities.

Eye gazing, sky gazing, space mingling, dissolving in the infinite, letting go. Rest in the center, the origin of all things, the skylight, nature of the heart-mind, Buddha mind, right now. This is it. *Emaho*. Wondrous, amazing, yeah. And enjoy the joy of natural un-meditation, undoing the habit of overdoing, pure unadulterated awareness, incandescent presence. Awaring. Presencing. Enjoying the only show, the best show in town. *Emaho*.

Now close your eyes—or maybe they're closed already—as you like, and gaze into the sky-like inner clear light, the inner incandescence behind your eyelids. You might think it's dark, but really look. Can you see? Fulminating iridescence, the evanescence, little changes—the black light, as they say. Like deep space, not just the blue sky but deep space—infinite—just gaze into that. Breathe out into it, breathe in out of it. Focus on it, concentrate on the inner light, clear light. Go into it. Breathe out into it, focus on and concentrate on it. Gaze beyond judgment or evaluation. Gazing, focusing, a clear light within, the dharmakaya nature of lucidity, luminous mind, mind, wisdom-mind, heart-mind, awakefulness.

Breathe out, focus on the light—become light, be light, lighten up, brighten up. *Emaho*. Illumine the universe. Resting at the origin of all things, all colors, all possibilities, all contained in this ultimate sphere, this big tickling, this natural, great completeness. And just being with a capital B plus. *Emaho*. Enjoy the joyous, buoyant, clear light meditation.

The less there is of me, or I, the more room there is for it, for other. *Emaho*. The Buddha contemplating Buddha in the mirror, the clear light of mind. *Emaho*.

Gazing into the light behind your eyelids, the clear light meditation of the Diamond Path, Vajryana. Going into it as if you're sky-gazing with eyes open, but into the inner. If we can't go out these days we can go in, until we see through the difference between outer and inner and all such dualities and polarities, realizing the inseparability of us, of oneself, others, of oneself and everything. *Emaho*.



Now we're going to complete our natural meditation session, our clear light meditation. Go out singing, and praying, and practicing compassion, lovingkindness, equal to all. Joy to the world. And some healing and rebalancing. Prayers, chants, aspirations. So please join in if you know it, otherwise just hum along, it's not that complicated. We're going to chant the six-syllable mantra, the national mantra of Tibet, the Dalai Lama's mantra, the mantra of unconditional love and compassion; Guanyin, Chenrezik, Avalokiteśvara's mantra, the mantra of unconditional love and compassion, the Buddha's heart mantra: *om mani padme hum*—the famous six-syllable mantra of Tibet. Literally: The jewel is in the lotus. Or more profoundly: the Buddha is within. And even more mystically: The light is in the shadows—shadows are nothing but light. Check it out. No separation. Direct access, now. *Emaho*.

[Chanting the mani mantra]

Chant from you lower belly, breathe deeply, let it out open your heart chakra. Enjoy it. God praise by singing. God. What does he do? He prays by singing and dancing, according to Thomas Merton.

[Chanting the mani mantra]

Breathing out the love, and then breathing it in, and also radiating and reabsorbing it.

[Chanting the mani mantra]

Pulsing like a pulsar star with love compassion for those who suffer feeling what they feel and being moved to help feeling with them empathy. The root is compassion.

[Chanting the mani mantra]

Love for all, compassion for all. Reconciliation, acceptance, peace, patience. Cultivating, inculcating it, modeling it for our young'uns. *Om mani padme hum*.

May all the suffering of beings come upon me and be absorbed into the emptiness of my true nature, may they have all my peace and joy, pleasure, happiness, in totality. May I absorb it all, may all the viruses come upon me, be absorbed into the emptiness of my true nature. May all beings have resistance, immunity, health, resilience, my youthful energy, and accomplishments.



Let me carry your burden, as the man says. This is *tonglen*. This is giving and receiving. It's an advanced practice, don't practice it if you're afraid what's gonna happen. *Om mani padme hum*.

Just listen, just meditate, just contemplate. May all the AIDS be gathered into me, and all the sick people have all of my T cells. May I be like a pin cushion for all the slings and arrows and spears of outrageous fortune, all afflictions of being, outer, physical, inner, mental, emotional, and, subtlest, spiritual ailments, all the afflictions, all the *kleshas*. May I be the pin cushion. May I be the sponge and sponge them up, and radiate out, breathing it in, hoovering it up like an air conditioner and sending out rays of lovingkindness, compassion, joy, forgiveness, mercy, equanimity, being a boat for those who need to cross over the river, being medicine for those who are sick. May I be a light in the darkness, a cool breeze for those who are overheated, water for the thirsty, rain for the crops. Love and connection and companionship for those who are lonely. May I be like a wish-fulfilling jewel, like a bodhisattva, awakening the Buddhist heart within my own chest. Feeling, cultivating feeling for others like I feel for my own children, nieces and nephews, grandnieces and nephews, and children, etc. And my own gurus, so kind and gracious. And my own mentors and teachers and my dear friends, male, female and otherwise. And especially pets and animals. *Om mani padme hum*. May I hoover up all their afflictions, absorb it all, and just let it all dissolve into the emptiness of my true nature, breathe out light and love, may they grow and glow and be nurtured and protected and happy and secure in every way. *Om mani padme hum*.

Joy to the world peace, harmony, love. *Om mani padme hum*. Gently, softly. *Om mani padme hum*. *Om mani padme hum*. Melting, dissolving, letting go, decontracting totally. *Om mani padme hum*.

Joy to the world. May all beings everywhere, with whom we are inseparably interconnected and interdependent, inter-being, and who want and need the same as we do, who suffer and are fearful and anxious and stressed for ourselves and our loved ones these days, may all beings who are just like us, wherever they may be, may they experience peace, happiness, contentment, fulfillment. May they be free from harm, danger, and fear. May all beings be awakened, liberated, illumined, healed, and free. May there be peace, contentment, reconciliation in this violent world, and an end to war, poverty, oppression, inequality, injustice, disease, confusion and collusion. An end to violence, domestic violence, outer violence, inner violence, giving into the inner tyrant or the harsh critic that we hear in our own head. Peace, Shanti, and may we all together complete the spiritual journey. Like Ram Dass says, walking each other home. Resting at the origin of all things. As I said, being there while getting there, every single step of the way. Not waiting for pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, an illusory pot of gold. The rainbow way,



is it? The rainbow is a circle. There's no end, if seen from above, the bigger picture, the view from above. Do you hear this bell? [Ringing bell.] That's it. That's awareness itself. Hearing, seeing—the six senses, left in a natural state, or natural way, is the way of the natural Great Perfection, as the master Longchenpa said.

Emaho. Love to one and all. Thank you. I bow to the Buddhahness, the light, the divine, in your seat, don't overlook her. Assume your Buddha seat. We are all Buddhas, not Buddhists, God forbid. We're all Buddhas by nature, we only have to recognize who and what we truly are, as it says in the the Hevajra Tantra, as my late, great teacher Kalu Rinpoche always used to quote.

So who do you think you're not? American Buddhas, awaken, throw off your chains. The karma and *kleshas*. Your hang-ups and neurosis. Let's continue walking this path together. Even His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, a lifelong monk, says no one can do it alone. We need each other, to open our hearts, not just to illumine our minds.

Thank you. There's nothing like practicing together, and awakening in the spirit. And then it feels like it's all here, nothing missing, nothing extra to get. As Lord Buddha himself said—you can find this in the scripture called the *Diamond Sutra*—by complete, unshakable, irreversible awakening, *samyak sambodhi*, by enlightenment, I obtain nothing new that wasn't already in me. That's an unbelievable statement. Like the eye through which I see God, or Buddha, is the eye through which he or she sees me.

I think these are good days to be less partisan, if not ecumenical, universal, at least a little less partisan; and for a little more listening and not so much broadcasting and shouting louder than the next one. So thank you all, I wish you well. We're going to open the floor to questions now.

Anonymous: “Since we are approaching a time when the sickness is speeding up and, for some, death, how can we give our best to those who may not have a similar outlook as Buddhist practitioners about death?”

Well, that's a big question, and thank you for raising it. It's hard to say in the abstract, how you—who I'm talking to, who I don't know or see—should talk to another person. You know, it's like we're having therapy here. I'm not having therapy with your mate that you're telling me about. But you're thinking about how you can talk to them or relate to them, and I think that's a lifelong question, isn't it? That's not something simple that just has to do with the virus time or the state of emergency. As the Zen master Suzuki Roshi said, maybe one in the family is enough. And everybody in the room went: Ah! A huge sigh of relief. You know what I'm saying? You



don't have to proselytize and missionary-ize. Now, if one is insecure and wants agreement from others, that's a different matter. That's something else to inquire into or reflect upon and consider. Maybe do something to recondition and decondition that insecurity. But in general, I don't have any problem relating to all kinds of people, even when I'm on panels with some dogmatic Bible thumpers in the Bible Belt and down south or in the Middle Atlantic states, and they say they're gonna pray for my eternal soul, the minister trying to be kind. They're gonna pray for my eternal soul, not to go to hell, because I don't follow their Jesus way or something. Well, that's very nice. Thank you. I accept all prayers. You see what I'm saying?

So spirituality is very personal. I don't think there's just one Buddhism or one outlook or one view that I could recommend that you share with them. I think that your natural, good heart and original goodness, the more you cultivate that, the more the flowers of goodness, of *bodhi*, of awakening, of empathy and sympathy, you know, will start resonating together with others. And not get hung up in squabbles or proving anything.

Death, people who are dying—you know, I've sat with a lot of people in my role as lama, and people have asked me to help them die or go more consciously, and even afterwards—I've found, even if they're reading the huge tome, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, that the best thing you can do for them is just be there for them and not for you. That's like a basic equation. Just like babies and children, just to be there for them more than for you. They're the ones in duress. They're the ones at that crucial turning point that we call death. They're probably suffering. They're weak. We're strong. So we could just be there for them. And then, if you really check your motivation and it's more aligned in that way, then whatever you do or respond to will probably be more communicative or resonate better with them, even without words.

Buddha himself said that death was the greatest meditation, he put it in his colloquial way of ancient India. I'm sure you're all familiar with these kinds of animals and images, so no need to worry too much about this translation of the concepts. He said, just like the footprint of the elephant is the largest in the jungle, the contemplation of death and impermanence, or our own mortality, is the greatest meditation, the most important life-transforming meditation. So I think that says a lot. He's saying that to recognize the impermanence of all things, including our own, and contemplate the inevitability of death and the universality of mortality—all that are born die—helps us to let go a little, to loosen our grip on that which is in any case passing through our fingers. We get rope burn from hanging on too tight to what's passing through our fingers—doesn't mean we have to throw it away. Just loosen our grip, there's less irritation, less *dukkha*, less dissatisfaction. That's the secret of cultivating non-attachment, equanimity, evenness, and not being so partial, or partisan, not to mention selfish. So death is a great subject.



And how you relate to other people about your Buddhism, that's a bigger topic, and you can talk to your spiritual friends about that or instructors or teachers, or read it in books and things. People have good ideas about this.

Barbara: “Can you please explain ‘*Emaho*’?”

Yes. I'd love to. *Emaho*! That's it. [Laughs.] No. I'm not a Zen teacher, if I was, that would be it. *Emaho* is the shortest Dzogchen teaching, the shortest teaching of the Diamond Path Tibetan tantric tradition called Dzogchen, the natural great perfection or the imminent great completeness. Original goodness, not original sin. It's like original health, and illnesses is the aberration. We don't get health from the doctor, from the medicine, or from outside. We return to health. Similarly, original goodness is the way we see it. That's why Buddha said anybody can become as enlightened, as unselfish, as blissful, as wise and loving, as liberated as the Buddha did—meaning himself—man or woman, old or young, learned or illiterate. That was a huge, radical war cry in those days, 2600 hundred years ago, with the caste system of ancient Hindu India. Anybody—male or female. I mean, even today, there are churches and many organizations that don't have many or even allow women at the fore, in the lead, in the clerical position, or at the top. Look at the list of the presidents of the Forbes 500—not one of my specialties, but there's very few women there in the 500 even today.

Anyway, I think it's very important to slow down a little, take the backward step, and consider these things and be open to new perspectives. *Emaho* is an exclamation of wonder. One of the Dzogchen emphases is wonderment, like the joy of experiencing, not just distractions. Seeing everything as a great spectacle. All the world's a stage, and all the people players, and that means us, as William Shakespeare said. Not that different than East Asian doctrine of Mayadevi, or the dance of illusion. *Emaho* means wondrous, amazing. So that's the spirit of Dzogchen—or natural perfection—practice and life. Of course, we can expand that in some other directions. Many spontaneous poems of enlightenment or Dzogchen teachings and so on start or end with “*Emaho*!”

Now, if you like short teachings like that, let me bring up something else that you don't hear enough about. As one might know, the Buddhist scriptures are called sutras, like suture—what ties and brings things together. It's the ancient Sanskrit, European Sanskrit language, where the word “suture” comes from. So sutras—tying it together, bringing it together, and I'm not going to go into all of it about the palm leaf manuscripts at all—but, so what is the shortest sutra in the Mahayana canon? Anybody know? No, not the Lovingkindness Sutra, the *Metta Sutra*, which is short, like one page. No, not the *Heart Sutra*, which is one page. Not the *Diamond Sutra*. The



shortest Mahayana sutra—this is the Sanskrit sutra, not the Pali language sutras—is *Ah*. I'm not joking, that's the whole sutra. That says it all. Like *Ohm*. *Ah*. AH! With some out-breath, opening. That's all, that's everything. It's all in the release, the letting go, letting be, the uncontracting, in the uncongealing, the unsticking, the natural unstuckness. Ah.

So we've talked about the meaning of Emaho—don't worry, you won't be tested, and Ah. Thank you for that question. Emaho.

Nina: “How do I know what the limit is for me to give? How much to give, and how much to keep for myself? How do I know if fear is blinding me, and I could give more, or if giving more puts me at risk? How much fear is reasonable?”

Yes, that's a great question, and a lot of us face that in life. It's hard to say how much. You have to find your own inner guidance or inner gyroscope, which, as we grow up, we start to learn, through trial and error, and we have lessons, and people tell us stuff, and we observe things, and sometimes we give too much and might regret it—although I would say people usually err on the side of giving too little and regretting that eventually. But, you know, sometimes we're a doormat, and we don't assert ourselves, so that's like giving up or giving away ourselves or absenting ourselves, in relationships.

Now let's jump to the field of organized religions and spirituality, in the West, at least, and a little new here in last hundred years, coming from the East to the West, but it could also apply to Christian and Jewish and Muslim sects, and cults, and so on. Some people sign away their lives to the guru or the master or the saint, and then they regret that. Some leaders are less than scrupulous, they're unscrupulous. They don't have the integrity that's really needed for this kind of responsibility of being a spiritual elder and leader, and they tell people to give their inheritance, or this and that, and then their parents will get better rebirth. It's like selling indulgences in the Catholic church. This is not recommendable, as my lama used to say in his excellent English, not recommendable. So it's hard to say exactly, and I don't know how old you are, Nina, but it's very hard to say exactly. Nobody can say exactly. Therefore being me, I'm going to tell you exactly how you know. No, not with a postal scale. No, not with the third eye. By remembering, or using as a touchstone, the Middle Way. Not too much, not too little. Not “always,” not “never,” you know, when you argue with your mate or your friend. “You always do this. You never do that.” You know, it's exaggerated, and it's almost always not true, but it's maddening. It's like waving red flags and being extreme, and feasting and fasting, and other things do we do. Crazy diets that take off 50 pounds and put it on over the next three months, and do it a couple times. Would that we could see the havoc that wreaks with all of the various



systems, outer and inner, of our body and soul. So the Middle Way is Buddha's greatest teaching, as I like to say. No, not lovingkindness, not emptiness, not the enlightened life is dissatisfying, but there is another life, which is the four noble truths. No, not that. Not meditation—there's meditation in a lot of other places, religious and secular, contemplation, all kinds of things. Buddha called his teachings “the Great Middle Way,” not Buddhism, by the way. He didn't want to start a religion that had followers. The Middle Way of moderation. And also moderation in moderation—on New Year's Eve, maybe a little more excess. If you see what I'm saying? It's not a razor's edge. It's not like the white or yellow line down the middle of the highway. There's many lanes on the great way of awakefulness. We can live a colorful life. We can do what humans do. That's what we're supposed to do—be one with ourselves and our karma, and be in the world and the entire messy spectacle, as Zorba the Buddha—as I like to call him—called the entire great catastrophe.

There's many lanes. Let's try to stay out of the ditches on the extremes, like materialism, and only believing what we can touch and see is real on one extreme, and on the other extreme, nihilism—nothing matters. And that's how, through trial and error—this is a tried and true method—to find out in your own experience, not just what somebody else tells you, find out for yourself, and gain your own convictions, not just have some belief or follow the leader, like sheep, and realize for yourself and grow wiser. This is how we cultivate wisdom and awareness, not just faith or belief—blind faith—but conviction, realization. Self-knowledge with a capital K—gnosis, as they used to call it.

So I hope that's helpful, and I want to advocate, again, the Middle Way—not too much and not too little. It's like saying no. Some people have a hard time saying no or setting boundaries. Then look what happens with the kids, because they don't know what's what, what's right and wrong or where the boundaries are, and it hurts them sooner or later. Sometimes saying no to a child is more affirmative than just saying yes all the time and being an enabler. So the Middle Way, the way of moderation and balance—balance and appropriateness, not just moderation—balance and appropriateness, the Middle Way. Not just trying to leap from peak to peak, but actually doing the work, covering the territory. Making the journey, the wonderful, great spiritual journey that we're all on together. As well as being there while getting there, not waiting. Being right here, totally, while getting there, every single step of the way. Thank you.

Ann: “What is a positive affirmation that I can do daily to stay calm and relaxed?”

Since you used the word affirmation, of course there's a lot of affirmation traditions and all that. We don't use that word that much. We use words like resolves, or prayers, or aspirations—not



just desires or wishes, but aspirations. Anyway, without nitpicking, we we can say a mantra to ourselves, which is really just a reminder, like to remember what we've forgotten momentarily, like "This too shall pass" is a good one. Or take a breath, take a break. And you can write these down. You know, I've been in this business for 45 years, since I was 20 years old, full time. I write things down on yellow stickies, on index cards, you know, notes on my cell phone, things I can look at while I'm waiting on my travel teaching tours and things, waiting in airport terminals. You know, remind myself. I know one great Lama, the late, great Dudjom Rinpoche—he was such a great Dzogchen master—and this is a quote, and we all thought it was so empowering to us, because he said, "When I am distracted, I chant the hundred-syllable purification mantra," and we all went, "What? He gets distracted?" That's how naïve and idealistic we were. So maybe you chant the mantra, say a prayer, but I think basically and the most secular—you can use it anywhere, it's like blue jeans, rather than tuxedo, fancy—take a breath, take a break. Nobody needs to know you're doing it. You don't say anything make any noise. You don't have to close your eyes even, or you can. Take a breath, take a break. Or "This too shall pass." Or some variety of that. There's another one, but it's just on the tip of my tongue, that I really want to mention, which I use a lot. I can't remember what tradition it comes from. "Be still and know. I am God."

That's a great, Christian-based, let's say theistic based affirmation. If you're a dyed-in-the-wool Buddhist, you don't like the "God" word—I mean, we don't know what the word God, Buddha means anyway, they're just placeholders for most of us—but you could say: "Be still and know. I am Buddha." Or even more secular: "Be still and know. I am okay. All is okay. I'm okay. It's okay. This too shall pass."

So I hope you're getting something out of this, or even writing something down. But the breath and the backward step is the main thing, first to do that. And it involves your body also, to slow down the energy. Ah! Maybe say a little "Ah" with the out-breath, unless you're in a meeting or something.

So, I hope that's calming and helpful, and we certainly need that these days. We all do. I do too. People right here are going into harm's way every day, being surgeons and Tibetan doctors and things, so we pray for them, and we're very concerned. We all need to calm down sometimes, but calm is not the goal. Life is much richer than that. Dancing with life doesn't just mean dancing calmly all time. Sometimes you really let it go, just really let it go. If you have time, three breaths is recommendable. Three breaths and remember to remember what can never be forgotten, what's always present, what's ever-present, and find refuge, a safe port in the storm, the eye of the cyclone, however you think about it. Rest in the origin of all things. Come to your center. In this kind of practice naturalness is the way. Not trying to change everyone and



everything. Acceptance has its own transformative magic, friends. Just think about how little acceptance, if you could accept your mate a little more, how much it could transform your relationship. Acceptance doesn't mean just passivity or complacency. This pandemic, too shall pass, and there maybe others. If you're worried about the stock market—and all these things seem to happen every 10 years, whether there's a pandemic or not. 2008, 1990-something, '86—I remember in 1986, there was a big one, I think it was called “Dark Monday” or something like that. I was out of the country, I was in retreat. Not to mention the Great Depression of the '30s, and other booms and busts. This too shall pass, and our life too shall pass. I was always one of the youngest ones on my sports teams in my class, I was pushed ahead, and in India—I went to India when I was 20, and I was there with all my friends who have been dying lately, like Ram Dass and other people—you know, I was always the youngest, one of the youngest, and now I've become one of the oldest. How did this happen? What's wrong with this picture? I say to the mirror every morning. But I know I'll get used to it eventually. [Laughs.]

I guess that's the last question, so I want to wish love to one and all. Do what you can, but more importantly, be where you are—and I'm not gonna say who, we don't want to get into the thick of that—just be as is for now. Shelter in place, assume your Buddha seat. Take the backwards step. Being there while getting there, being here while getting there, every step of the way. May we all together complete this spiritual journey, for a better future to the possible, the better future that begins right now. Thank you. Thank you to Tricycle magazine. Love to one and all.