

Dharma Talk August 19, 2025
Matters of the Heart

Many of you in Peaceful Refuge Sangha and maybe a few in Tiger Mountain know senior dharma teacher Larry Ward. He died this morning at 4 am west coast time. He got out of bed and fell over, so his wife Peggy called 911, but he was gone. I was able to speak briefly with Peggy, in the hospital room, and to see Larry's body lying there. Then I joined the zoom with the Lotus Institute sangha and we sang Buddhist and Christian gospels together. My favorite was I'll Fly Away, just imagining Larry happily free from his troubled body.

Larry was a mentor for me, especially in learning to understand the dharma. Our minds worked in similar ways, though his was much more comprehensive and sophisticated. During the past few years, I often found that Larry was giving a talk on the same topic that I was addressing. And though I remember several times Larry complimenting and encouraging me, I don't remember any time he criticized or even corrected me. The other favorite song of mine is one that Joe Reilly wrote, after hearing a teaching by Larry, Peggy, and Sister Peace. The chorus goes: "I've got my feet in the river of goodness, gonna let the river flow."

Larry has a book of poetry scheduled to come out soon, and I was privileged to review them before publication. At our sangha gathering here in April, I read this poem of Larry's, and it is perfect for today too. I'll read it and then we'll go into silent meditation. You can clearly hear his dharma name, True Great Sound, reverberating from it.

Enter Your Life

Enter your life like a great
epic poem, ride the colors of change
with the wind unafraid and unattached
in light of the coming and going of all things.
Savor the stars in the dark blue sky, trust
the sun in your heart to guide you home.
Here between earth and sky, listen!
Hear your footsteps in the leaves of time
Fix your gaze on the horizon of not yet but
Stay in this moment and ask in this great
Symphony, what is my Instrument? What is my music?
What is my song?
And then surrender to this crucible's alchemy

As it creates the mandala of your holy life.
Cross the lake of life's mystery like a fearless swan
Embodying grace, embodying peace, embodying compassion
As you head toward the other shore.

Here we are, more than halfway through 2025, a truly tumultuous year. And also a vibrant, gorgeous year. How are we doing? How are we doing with our practice of Welcoming Everything? Have we become painfully aware and sensitive to the sensation of constricting? Has it become a little less automatic to turn away from what we don't like? Or maybe we've needed to go into a cave for awhile, to consciously remove ourselves from all the tragedies, and to lick our wounds. Probably some combination of both for most of us.

Let's breathe together and let a felt assessment of the year so far come to us. Most important is to hold ourselves in gentleness. To accept and care for ourselves with tenderness and openness. Can we welcome how we are right now, in this moment? Not because we think we've done a good job or not, but just because we are. We are miraculous beings, and we have shown up in this moment, acting on our aspiration not to waste our life.

Even more important is to see that we do this together. We are all experiencing pain and happiness, sorrow and joy, as the days go by. This is the nature of life here in our universe. Our teacher, Thay, keeps reminding us that we need the pain, the suffering because it is the very stuff that brings us together and creates our joy. The art of suffering is to recognize our challenges as teachers, as opportunities to grow into our beauty. So tonight we address Matters of the Heart.

Here's a poem from Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer, called *For When People Ask*:

I want a word that means
 okay and *not okay*,
 more than that: a word that means
devastated and *stunned with joy*.
I want the word that says
 I feel it all at once.
The heart is not like a songbird
 singing only one note at a time,
 more like a Tuvan throat singer
able to sing both a drone

and simultaneously
two or three harmonics high above it –
a sound, the Tuvans say,
that gives the impression
of wind swirling among rocks.
The heart understands swirl,
how the churning of opposite feelings
weaves through us like an insistent breeze
leads us wordlessly deeper into ourselves,
blesses us with paradox
so we might walk more openly
into this world so rife with devastation,
this world so ripe with joy.

The Three Powers

Thay tells a story of a young man who asked him a question about ambition. This student said he was ambitious to make his way in life, to be successful in school and career, but he wondered how this fit into living a mindful life. Thay told him that in addition to having a balanced approach to obtaining those things, there is a Buddhist teaching on true power that he could also cultivate.

In the Buddhist tradition, there are three kinds of virtues or true powers that everyone can seek. Unlike searching for worldly powers, there is no danger in pursuing them, as developing this kind of power will only make you happier.

Just to clarify, there is a chapter in *The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings*, called The Five Powers. That teaching overlaps this one, but is slightly different. So if you read that chapter, it won't contradict what is said here, and it may enhance it, but it's not exactly the same as this teaching.

Often we think of power in terms of wealth, fame, sex, and influence, the ability to do what we want at any time. This is power over, where we treat others as objects and do whatever we want, regardless of their needs or wishes. In contrast to power over is empowerment, where we use our power to enable others to come into their own power and make their own life choices.

At the base level, we try to develop our power by chasing after wealth, fame, and sex. When we get some of this, it can become addictive. We never seem to have

enough so are always craving more. Some of us now even try to become an “influencer,” using our daily life as a method of telling others what to consume. We build our wealth and fame by embodying craving, encouraging the need in others to always want something new and different, never having or being enough.

In contrast, the three kinds of power in the Buddhist tradition are about empowerment, developing an inner sense of autonomy and strength. This kind of power is of benefit to you and to everyone, and there is no limit to its potential for healing and flourishing. With this kind of power, you feel strong and happy and free.

Renunciation

The first power is called renunciation. When I first heard about this concept, I felt a sense of aversion, kind of like a kid afraid of having his favorite toy taken away. Like St. Augustine, who prayed, “Lord, make me chaste, but not yet.” Knowing this is my aspiration, but still having some oats to sow before I become pure. The tension between wanting to live a virtuous life and the reluctance to give up immediate gratifications. The Buddha taught us to look deeply at these impulses, and to be honest about how they are affecting us. Then he asks us to let go only of what is causing harm to us.

Renunciation is letting go of what doesn’t serve you, of what is making you miserable, of what is clouding your judgment and keeping you in fear. Those things that keep triggering you, in spite of your sincere desire to be a bodhisattva. Think of renunciation as releasing a clamp that is pinching your finger. Letting go of what continues a cycle of pain in you. We become used to having these chronic pains, and it can be scary to release them because, though they are not what we want, they are familiar. And the unfamiliar can be scarier than the painful-but-familiar. So it’s important to look at what we are holding onto that doesn’t serve us, just because it’s more comfortable than changing.

Thay calls this the power of cutting off.

The Buddha says that the source of all these patterns of anger, jealousy, doubt, etc, is craving. He tells us craving the objects of our desire is dangerous, using the example of fishing. Someone trying to catch a fish throws out a line with bait, with a hook inside the bait. The fish doesn’t know about the hook, and the bait is so appealing, the fish bites it, but the hook catches the fish, and when it’s pulled out of the water, it dies.

When we run after our objects of desire, they can hook us, and then we have turned our power over to them. Our society is torn apart by this pattern of addiction, sometimes it seems almost out of control.

The Buddha offers the antidote: we must learn how to cut off the object of desire, and the source of the craving. Easier said than done.

Recently there has been remarkable insight coming from science about the physical nature of craving. I'm sure we've heard about the widespread prescription drugs called GLP 1s. The research on them started when some scientists questioned the pattern of a particular lizard, who went for long periods without eating. They studied the serum of the lizard and discovered the action of the substance, which is to moderate the satiety gene and to enhance metabolism.

Did you know there is a satiety gene in your brain that tells you when you have had enough to eat, that you are satiated? Scientists have recently discovered that a bacterial protein in the gut alerts the brain, via the vagus nerve, when we've eaten enough.

For many of us, this message isn't received by the brain, so we don't have the natural ability to shut off desire. No grown up is there inside us telling us we've had enough cookies, so if we can, we keep eating them until we become uncomfortable. A well-functioning satiety gene in our brain sends signals of moderation, and we know when we've had enough. Studies are widespread and ongoing on this class of drugs, and findings are developing that they are also successful in treating drug and alcohol addiction. Helping to curb our craving. They also seem to be extremely beneficial to the cardiovascular system.

So it turns out that all those judgments about people who couldn't curb their cravings has only served to create feelings of separation and superiority. An addicted person isn't suffering from a failing of will power but of a physical insufficiency that now can be treated. This makes me question every judgment I hold about others and what they are doing and what they believe. Am I sure I know why they are as they are? Am I sure I am so different? Or do I just have a different set of physical conditions that gives me different choices? And how about all that self-judgment?

For me, it's vital to remove all self-criticism and judgment around my habits of craving. When we look back at our failures to change our habits, there can be so

much disappointment and shame. We need to remember that it's not about the past; our power lies here, in this moment, in the choice before us right now. And even if we make an unwholesome choice in this moment, if we do it with awareness, that is a step towards waking up, towards the possibility of change.

When our craving is cut off, we are free. The psychiatrist Victor Frankl famously said: "Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." We'll explore the nature of freedom more in our next talk.

I live with an old dog, who during the past couple of years, has had a skin allergy that gives him an unhealthy habit of licking his belly. He and I have gotten to the point where, when he has the craving, the impulse to lick, and we're in view of each other, I will look at him as I see his head moving in the direction of his belly, and he will stop and look at me. We maintain our gaze with each other, and I'm aware that we are breathing in that gap between the itch and the response. Just being there, feeling that need and aware that there is also the choice to not respond in that unhealthy way, there is also freedom. He usually chooses to not follow through on the impulse in these moments of awareness.

He is helping me learn to pause and to identify that gap between the stimulus and the response. Breathing into that gap, I am free. When I do this, I'm amazed at how quickly the desire fades away, and life presents something else for my attention. This is our practice: awareness of what is happening, and making the wholesome choice.

How do we cut off the craving? We use the second power.

Wisdom

The second power described in this process is wisdom, the power to understand, insight. Insight is the outcome of meditation. If you have enough mindfulness, you cultivate concentration. And with mindfulness and concentration, you practice looking deeply and you break through into the heart of reality.

We use this second power of insight to cut off our continued craving. When we become clear, we see the hook inside the bait, we see the potential for harm in our object of desire, and we don't give away our freedom. We rest on our foundation of the precepts, we allow our deepest intention to inform our choices, and we remain free from the draw of the illusions dancing in front of us. We know that we

cannot always trust our perceptions, that our bodhisattva nature can see more deeply, beyond appearances. We know how to go inside, to return to our basic goodness, and to what is most important. Every time we do this, we are breathing life into our inner Buddha, developing our Buddha nature, and we are choosing to evolve our consciousness and our species.

We might remember our good friend, Manjushri, the bodhisattva of Great Understanding. Until we are free from our wrong views, we really can't do much to transform the suffering in ourselves and in the world. We need Manjushri to bring his sword and to cut through our bonds of illusion, our wrong ways of thinking. We need him to challenge our limited views of the possibilities of life. To open the door to what we might become if we fully embody our potential.

Manjushri's sword liberates us from our delusion, from our misunderstandings, from our perceptions, and we are free. As Thay says, we engage the power of cutting off.

When we sit to meditate, when we cultivate our mindfulness and concentration as we move through our day, the fruit of this practice is clarity, insight, a release from misunderstanding and delusion, a release from habitual craving. This is the path to liberation. And when others come to you, you can help free them of their difficulties through your insight, your clear way of seeing.

What is Right View? One way of getting right view is to adjust our lens so we have a bigger view. Kind of like climbing to the top of a mountain so we can see farther. When I feel stuck in what is happening in my world, I often take refuge in doing this.

I recently read the latest book by the Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, called *The Tears of Things*. In one section, he talks about taking this longer view of the situation in our society right now. He says:

“Reforms rarely move directly from the existing order to a new order automatically or by a single positive insight. The old order has to somehow show its disorder, its shadow self, its injustices, its wrongness. Then there must be a period of disorder, a fertile time of searching before a new order can be found. The rule must reveal some exceptions to the rule before any reordering will be sought, trusted, or allowed – and even then all things human will still reveal themselves as incomplete.”

Korean Zen Buddhist teacher Haemin Sunim suggests that being in the low point of the wave also has value in helping us be clear. He says, “When we take a broader view, the present slump can be seen as the trough of a wave, which sinks down to gather the energy it needs in order to rise again. It’s thanks to these low points that, when we’re again riding the crest of the wave, we’re able to be humble rather than arrogant, and to have the wisdom not to get carried away.”

So all the steps on this path of up and down, high and low, are essential in our growth and development as humans and as a society.

Richard Rohr continues, talking about prophets, which he defines as the truth-tellers in society: “...prophets need to live on the *edge of the inside* if they are to speak from a proper perspective – definitely not in the comfortable center, but also not outside throwing stones without empathy for the full situation. Most of us settle for a more defined position: fervent insiders, rebels against any belonging system, or too jaded to place our bet anywhere.”

To me, this describes the bodhisattva’s position: on the edge of the inside. With a heart open enough to encompass all, with a clear view of what needs to change and a trust in the process of life. Most of all, an ability to take refuge in our own goodness, and to make that space of refuge big enough to hold everyone.

So that is the second kind of power that you get with the practice: clarity, wisdom. Insight is the flower, the fruit of the practice. When we learn to stay firmly rooted in the present moment, whatever the content of that moment, whatever is happening: when we have enough mindfulness and concentration, we will have the insight we need to undo our difficulties and help other people around us to undo their difficulties. When you are rich in insight, you are free.

The first spiritual power helps you identify and loosen the bonds of craving. The second power helps you to remove delusion, ignorance, misunderstanding that are the source of that craving. Thay says: “With that kind of power you can help many other people around you to do the same. You are distributing happiness around you just because you have insight, you have wisdom. And nobody can steal or take away your wisdom.”

I love this quote from my favorite classical philosopher Michel de Montaigne: “The most certain sign of wisdom is cheerfulness.” *Essays (1580)*
This makes me think of the Dalai Lama.

Love

The third source of power is love. The Sanskrit word for love means favor, doing someone a favor. Thay says, “This is the power to forgive, to accept, and to offer understanding and love. As a good, successful practitioner, you have that power. You have the capacity of forgiving. You have the capacity of accepting the other as they are.

He continues, “There are those of us who are not capable of accepting the other person, accepting the situation. We say that if they don't change, I will not change. Because they are like that, that is why I keep being like this. But if you have the third power of love, you are able to accept them as they are. You accept the situation as it is, and go on. You stop reacting, which doesn't help, and you begin to act, to respond creatively and effectively.

With the practice, you transform yourself. With more freshness, with more loving-kindness, with more wisdom, you are able to change the situation and to change the people around you. You don't hold the notion that if the other person does not change, then there's no way that the situation can get better.”

Recently I had an interaction with a friend, who I consider a teacher for me, primarily because she sometimes sets off a trigger in me, and then I get to look at where I am still constricted, still holding onto an idea of myself that is rooted in my ego. I've known her for a long time, and my experience is that I never know who is going to show up. Often it's the relaxed, friendly person I expect. But then suddenly, I may make a comment I consider benign, and she erupts in anger and hostility. On these occasions, I do my best to come home to my breath, to stay calm and not react and not to make assumptions. I try to protect myself but not close myself off to her. I'm often not that good at it, but I do my best.

A few weeks ago we were texting about something, and I made a comment that I thought was in line with the conversation. Of course, it's notoriously hard to determine tone in a text message. But she came back with a reply that triggered me, something I considered self-righteous and judgmental. Fortunately, since it was a text, I had time to react without her being present. I felt myself triggered, remembering other times this had happened, and did my best to just stay with my breathing. I had some things to do, so instead of texting back, I went out for a few hours. When I came back, there was the text, and I wrestled with responding or not. The deepest, clearest part of me told me not to respond at all. However, another part of me really wanted to be honest with her about how I felt, so I ended

up sending a short message that I hoped was honest but also would help diffuse the conversation.

I didn't hear back from her, and for the next few days I returned to the situation in my mind many times, hoping I hadn't created more drama and suffering. When I finally saw her again, she was her relaxed and friendly self, and it was a great relief to me that my reply hadn't created more difficulty between us. During the time I was waiting to see her, I read this teaching on the three powers from Thay, and the following section, where he says:

“With the third power, you say, Oh, she is like that, I accept her as she is. As I cultivate more loving-kindness, more insight, more freshness, I will be able to help her, and the situation will change. Now you don't feel helpless because you have the capacity of accepting, of forgiving, and that is a tremendous source of power.”

Though Thay gave this teaching in 2008, it was like he was speaking directly to me and my dilemma with my friend in that moment. Clearly, he said to me, you are right, the best thing you could have done was to just accept and love her as she is, not to respond or need her to do or say anything different. And I also believe Thay would tell me, you did your best.

I learned a lot from this experience, and maybe next time I will be able to refrain from reacting, and instead see only her buddha nature, and take refuge in the love that holds us both in this dance together. As one of my teachers said: “Acceptance is the entrance into the heart.”

Generous Assumptions by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

I would like to open my heart to you
and keep it open, but the truth is
sometimes all it takes is a glance,
or the lack of a glance, or a certain tone,
or a serrated word, and instantly the heart
puts on its armor, which is something like
a coat of porcupine quills, only
the quills go inward, too, and the instant
I wear it, I am aware of how much it hurts
to wear it. How in that moment when I seek
to protect myself, I wound myself.

What if I believed you are doing the best you can
considering the forces that have shaped you?
What if I listened past your words, looked through
your actions to see how you, too, feel threatened?
The Buddha said we are always moving
toward or away from freedom.
Could I, in that moment before the prickly coat
has started doing its prickly work,
could I move toward freedom
by refusing to put it on? Could I choose instead
the silken robe of generous assumptions,
the one that allows for compassion, connection,
even kindness toward you, toward myself?
Already, just thinking about it being possible,
I notice a softening, a curiosity about how I might
change not you, but myself. Already, I feel
how fluid this robe is, how gently it swirls around me,
how strong its fibers are, how freeing it is, cool
and breezy, this gift to myself.

With this kind of power, these virtues, the more you have, the happier you become, and the happier the people around you will become. Many people become victims of their own success in wealth, in power. But if you have these kinds of power, you'll never become a victim of your success.

In fact, the more power we have, the freer we become, the more loving we become. We can return to the question from the college student who has ambition to become a great scholar, to become someone who has a successful position in society.

Thay answers, saying, "Once you have these three kinds of powers, there's no danger at all if you do have some wealth and some fame. If you have these powers, then your wealth, your fame will become very useful for you. Buddhism is not against wealth and power. If you have spiritual powers, you will not become a victim of your wealth and your fame. You will know how to make good use of them, and use them to do good for the people around you. A good practitioner knows how to use her money to realize her ideal of compassion and understanding."

We practice these three powers simultaneously, as they intertwine in our lives. I tend to hear these teachings in a linear way, thinking I have to succeed completely in the first power before developing the second one. When I think this way, I feel disappointed and frustrated, as I can hardly imagine ever being free of all my cravings. But these powers work together in us: the ability to love creates a soft nest where we can be present with our habitual patterns and accept ourselves as we are right now. As our love and clarity allow us to stay present, that acceptance creates a path for transformation and letting go. The three powers of cutting off craving, of true understanding, and of letting go, enable us to love unconditionally. This leads to true freedom and happiness.

Psychologist and Buddhist teacher Rick Hanson summarizes the three powers of craving, clarity, and love in this way: “If you look, and look again, you can see directly that right now, and in every now you’re alive, you’re cradled by the world like a child carried to bed by her mother. This cradling is a kind of love, and when you trust it enough to soften and fall back into it, there’s an untangling of the knots of fear and separation. Then comes both an undoing of the craving that drives suffering and harm, and a freeing and fueling love living through you as you step out into the world.”

Living Gems

I want to share with you a volunteer project from Plum Village I am honored to be part of. It’s called Living Gems. Work started on it over a year ago, and I have been part of it since April. The goal of the project is to transcribe all of Thay’s spoken teachings and make them available to everyone. I believe there are over 3,000 talks, and the goal is to have them all translated into multiple languages. With the help of AI and a team of volunteers, we hope to have enough material ready to launch it this October. As I understand it now, you will be able to go to an online platform and ask a question of Thay, and from all these teachings, AI will bring you his response.

As a preliminary reviewer, I receive a video of a talk given by Thay and alongside it, a transcription produced by AI. My job is to listen carefully, and to add, subtract, and correct words and punctuation. When I have completed a talk, I send it on to my volunteer coordinator, a fellow named Mark who lives in Belfast. Then it goes up a chain of volunteers, to a proofreader, an editor, and is finally reviewed by a senior monastic before it is accepted as a clear and accurate teaching of Thay’s.

I feel as if I have the best job, sitting down with Thay and carefully watching and listening. This is where he offered us the teachings on the three powers that I just shared with you.

Another wonderful aspect of this work has been the flavor of the working relationships with the other volunteers and with the coordinator, Mark. He continues to remind us that it is more important to relax and enjoy what we are doing, rather than rushing to meet some deadline. Not to feel pressure or stress, not to live up to some idea of what is needed, but to do our work in the spirit of mindfulness. Though Mark is a married lay person, he lived in Plum Village for 15 years, so he has learned to embody this peaceful and joyful energy. What has most impressed me is his mastery of the art of flower watering.

We may know our practice of flower watering, which can be the first step in our process of Beginning Anew, and can also be a deep practice on its own. I believe we talked about it when we got to know our great bodhisattva friend, Never-Disparaging, Sadaparabhuta. His special power is to see and call out the buddha nature in each being he meets. In this way, he reminds each of us of our potential, of the true goodness already within us.

Flower watering involves, first of all, seeing true goodness. Noticing the small, everyday ways someone manifests courage, compassion, generosity, and love. And then reflecting that back to them. This is done at the monastery regularly, and for a time Robert and I practiced it every week. When you are being acknowledged as a unique and lovely flower in the garden of humanity, the nourishment is palpable. You feel seen.

It's vital that the appreciation expressed isn't general: "you're a nice person." But concrete and specific: "Yesterday I saw you run back to hold the door for someone who needed help."

When Mark receives and reviews a finished transcript, first an announcement comes that says: "This is a happy moment! Your suggestions have been approved." And then he sends a personal email, expressing how much you have improved the transcript, giving several specific examples of corrections you have made. I have been noticing just how much impact these messages have had on me, and continue to make. Of course, when I first read a message like this, I feel good. My work has been noticed and acknowledged. I feel seen and appreciated, I feel helpful. Then, as time goes on, I notice that I am having very favorable impressions of Mark, my flower-waterer. I am falling a little bit in love with him.

Because he isn't flattering me or making something up, because he has carefully reviewed my work and expressed appreciation for it on behalf of the whole sangha, the true goodness inside me has been watered, and I feel a deeper connection to that part of me. The seeds of love begin to bloom. And in those seeds is the natural inclination to share, so I become more loving to all around me.

I know we've all experienced the good feelings that come when we have expressed our appreciation to someone and we see them start to blossom. This is something to be cherished, and to be encouraged. Let's do more of this! This is a palpable way love is spread in the world.

More and more I am beginning to see the fruits of my expressions of love and appreciation, and less and less benefits from me trying to instruct, correct, or change anyone. I've had several experiences being at one of the monasteries, where the monastics greatly prefer people to dress modestly, covering their arms and legs. However, they never want to correct or even make this request, for fear that new practitioners will be offended. One time I tried to tell an OI aspirant student of mine to please remove her hat in the meditation hall at the monastery, and she flipped out at me. While my intentions were kind, they weren't well received at that moment. Of course I'm not saying to never speak out, but for me, I am doing my best to stop and ask myself if it's necessary or will be helpful in that situation. To develop more acceptance of what is and less needing to correct or change. My Hawaiian shaman teacher says the easiest way to change something is to first make friends with it. Like jumping into a stream and flowing with it before gently trying to alter its direction. Making those generous assumptions and coming from the powers of compassion and insight when we step up to become a force of change.

Compassion

Our natural impulse is one of compassion. Toddlers reach out to help when they see someone in distress. This is our natural impulse, we don't have to learn it. So I'm wondering: could it be that, as we grow and develop some agency in the world, in our minds somehow this natural desire to help others gets turned into the need to fix? That our discomfort with being present to suffering drives our need to take action?

How do we step out as a bodhisattva, responding to suffering with action that will truly heal and not just provide a temporary fix? Not just put a band aid on the

wound so we don't have to look at it. Of course, sometimes we have to apply the bandages as fast as we can, but at the same time we need to cultivate a deeper response, one that trains us in the art of suffering, as our teacher instructs.

It can be dangerous and exhausting to believe that we need to solve all the world's problems in order to be happy and safe, and we know this doesn't work. We've all heard stories about people who win huge amounts of money in a lottery and are deliriously happy, only to lose it all within a few years and end up right back where they were, struggling to make ends meet.

Our challenges in this life are opportunities to come closer to one another, to wake up to the reality that we need each other, that we are all in this together. As bodhisattvas in training, our practice is to cultivate the art of suffering, so we cannot afford to waste a good challenge.

We need to address the urgent needs in our world, to relieve suffering and work for social justice. But if we don't cultivate our true source of power, more suffering and injustice will continue to be created. We need to be mindful of our urge to fix as a way to avoid being fully present with the suffering. We need to learn to stay present without getting caught in taking sides or in adopting views of us vs them.

In the midst of the Vietnam/American war our teacher formed the Order of Interbeing and wrote the 14 Mindfulness Trainings as its bedrock. He said that he wrote the first three trainings as a direct response to the war. They are titled: Openness, Freedom of Thought, and Non-Attachment to Views. When I first read them, I felt great relief and comfort. They made a home for me, where I could find myself and where I could find my way. They said that at that time, no one wanted to end the war, leaders on all sides just wanted to keep fighting. He had to do something, and this was one way he responded. And we, his students are the fruit of that action. They called this response the Lion's Roar. The fierce voice of the Buddha standing up for openness, inclusiveness, peace. The determination to call out for freedom of thought and non-attachment to views in the midst of everyone taking sides and bombing each other because of a difference in views. The Lion's Roar, calling for love in the middle of so much hatred and violence.

Here is another roar of the lion, in the first verses of Diane Ackerman's poem, called School Prayer:

In the name of the daybreak

and the eyelids of morning
and the wayfaring moon
and the night when it departs,

I swear I will not dishonor
my soul with hatred,
but offer myself humbly
as a guardian of nature,
as a healer of misery,
as a messenger of wonder,
as an architect of peace.

Our lion's roar is where we take our stand, it's the ground of our convictions. It's the actions we take that come from our deepest understanding. What is your lion's roar?

I believe that at this time, our deepest call is to love more fiercely.

How do we do this? We can look to our senior siblings, our bodhisattva friends to guide us. We learn to cut through our craving and our illusion from Manjushri. We learn to develop our compassion by staying present to suffering from Avalokiteshvara. We learn to see with the eyes of Sadaparabhuta, calling out the Buddha nature in each person we meet, increasing the love and goodness manifesting in our world. We notice where we are putting our attention and learn to make good choices. We aspire to not put anyone out of our heart and to see all beings with eyes of compassion.

We develop the patience and equanimity to be able to stay present to what is. It can be so painful to watch a loved one suffer. There is a story about a husband and wife: the husband had a pattern of always messing up, and the wife would step in and fix it. Finally, one day, the husband said, "How am I ever going to learn and grow, if you keep fixing everything for me?"

How can we shine our attention on patterns of suffering, so they can be transformed by love? We start by developing the capacity to stay present and open-hearted in the face of our own pain. By learning to hold it gently, with love, and allow its voice to be heard. We listen to ourselves carefully, both to the pain and to our reaction to it, learning to acknowledge when our heart constricts and our motivation shifts from presence to aversion or distraction. When we are aware of these tendencies within us, we can smile at them and let go. Our bodies show us the way, opening our fists, unconstricting our hearts, breathing as a free person.

A few weeks ago I was in a class lead by an Episcopal priest, who led us in a practice of metta, loving kindness meditation. One helpful reminder from him was, when sending well wishes to people suffering in the world, bring to mind a specific image. When wishing nourishment for the starving people in Gaza, for example, bring to mind that picture of the child's back, vertebrae bulging out, and send your prayers to her. May she have enough to eat.

Let's take a moment now, and each of us bring to mind someone who is suffering, and send the energy of love to them, in whatever form they need.

Just holding that image in your heart, the energy of love is generated. We don't have to say or do anything in that moment, except to open to what is. I heard a story about a radio interviewer who decided spontaneously to call the Sisters of Charity in Calcutta and ask to speak to Mother Theresa. When she came to the phone, the caller was so surprised, he didn't know what to say, so he asked her, "When you pray, what do you say?" Mother Theresa said, I don't say anything, I listen. So he asked, "What does God say? And she answered, "He doesn't say anything, he listens."

In a new book called *How Compassion Works*, by John Makransky and Paul Condon, the authors say:

"Everything we care about—our mental and physical well-being, our relationships, our ability to benefit others and the world, the deepening of our spiritual life—all depend on the power of love and compassion operative in us. The strength of that power, in turn, depends on how well we are able to access the qualities, attitudes, and energies of love and compassion; how deeply we can be healed, replenished, and transformed by them. Then we can extend that same loving power to others more sustainably and unconditionally in our attention and action. Love and compassion take us beyond ourselves, so we are less caught up in our own worries, more fully present to others, more in touch with our better selves and our purpose for living, and therefore naturally happier."

I've found some universal wisdom in healing relationship practices from at least three different traditions: Plum Village, Hawaiian shamanism, and hospice.

In the Plum Village tradition, we have a practice called Beginning Anew, which you may be familiar with. It begins with Flower Watering, which we have talked about. The next step is expressing beneficial regrets, any way we feel we have not lived in integrity in the relationship. The next step is expressing any hurts we may have experienced, along with our aspiration to forgive. The final step is the expression of more appreciation, gratitude, and love.

These same steps are outlined in an ancient Hawaiian practice called Ho' Oponopono. The steps are described as: Thank you, I'm sorry, I forgive you, and I love you. And these are the same steps hospice recommends following when having a conversation with a dying loved one.

So this seems to be a universal story of how to express our love authentically. Thank you, I'm sorry, I forgive you, I love you.

I recently heard a talk by my Kahuna, Serge King, about how to increase our ability to love without conditions. He says, We all have the desire to be loved, innately. This is a natural instinctual drive, but how to love and be loved has to be learned. As we grow and develop, each of us creates arbitrary guidelines around who is loveable and who loves us. It's crucial to understand that these guidelines are arbitrary, they do not correspond to any cosmic law. We each create our own, based on our inherited impulses and our environment; this is how we develop our beliefs.

I remember when I was first getting into dating, I had so many conditions! Especially around what someone looked like, but also, how they chewed their food, how they laughed, etc. So many reasons to turn away the potential for love.

So, from all these conditions, we create a hierarchy of love, from our idea of blissful union down to the barest tolerance. We create stories that go: If you loved me, you wouldn't... or If you loved me, you would.... These stories set up the guidelines that let us know when we are being loved, or not. But of course they are a prison, limiting our ability to love and to feel loved.

And because they are arbitrary, it's always possible for us to simply toss out these conditions, and to open ourselves to the possibility of more loving. If you start reducing the number of conditions, you will have and give more love.

If you throw out all the conditions to loving and being loved, you have unconditional love. When you have no demands that life be a certain way, it puts you into a state of loving and being loved all the time.

You have the power to decide whether you are loved or not loved. You can assume everyone loves you all the time and that all their expressions toward you are their best expression of love in that moment. You can decide to interpret whatever happens as a sign of love. No matter what anyone did, they were loving you the best way they could. This gives you tremendous freedom to love back and also frees you from resisting whatever anyone does. If you constantly think of others as loving people, you will be surrounded by people who help you live in a state of love. This is the third power Thay taught us.

As bodhisattvas in training, we wake up each morning and welcome the day with gratefulness for our breath. We perform loving self-care for our bodies, we settle our hearts and minds in the present moment, and then we step out and meet the day. We do our best to embody our buddha nature with our open hearts and curious minds. We walk in the spirit of not-knowing, aware that we are a tiny spark in the mystery of life unfolding within and around us. We choose to show up, to pay attention, to tell the truth, and to take refuge in uncertainty and change. We breathe in and return, again and again, to our own good hearts. We breathe out and offer love to the miracle of this moment.

Homework: Flower Watering

I'd like to offer you some homework for the next quarter. Practice flower watering. Explore creative, skillful means to recognize and acknowledge the wonderful qualities and actions of those in your world. It could be towards a loved one or a stranger, it could be noticing something big and memorable or the smallest kindness.

As your noticing of goodness increases, experiment with a variety of ways of acknowledging others. You can make a comment in the moment; you can find a way to offer a small gift of appreciation, in recognition of their good action; you could write them a poem, send them a card or offer a small bouquet. A piece of fresh fruit or any small, unexpected item of delight. It can be done anonymously if you prefer.

I suggest trying different methods and taking note of how each one feels. This will help you develop the fine art of knowing what is most appropriate and

what will be most meaningfully received. It will tune your heart to notice first what is good and loving about each person you meet. And you will see how your own goodness is being watered and is blooming in possibly unexpected ways.

Throughout the next three months, you can share the results of your flower watering experiments with your sangha. Let's all use sangha eyes to find creative and concrete ways to water the seeds of love, to fiercely and indiscriminately love with brilliant abandon.

And one more piece of homework: if you want to celebrate the life of our precious brother, Larry Ward, here are a few tips.

1. Larry loved food. All kinds of good food, from all cultures and ethnicities. He took good eating seriously.
2. Larry loved music. Anything that gets your body moving, breaks your heart open and brings you joy.
3. Larry loved animals. Especially his precious dogs, Charlie and Tashi, but also deer, rabbits, squirrels, and anybody who came by to visit on his early morning sits outdoors.
4. Larry loved life, so your favorite way of celebrating life will also be a tribute to him.