

Spiritual Parenting

Dharma Talk presented by Tara Brach

[unofficial transcript by Joe McCarthy]

Note: This is an unofficial and unauthorized transcript I created after listening to this talk four times. I've included a few approximate time stamps [enclosed in square brackets] in case anyone wants to listen to specific segments. I'll include the abstract for the talk below. A link to the audio podcast of the talk can be found [on Tara Brach's site](#). A few highlights that resonated most deeply with me can be found on [my blog](#).

Abstract

When we are not sufficiently nurtured in childhood, we are inclined toward anxiety, depression, addiction and other forms of suffering. In a deep way, we do not feel at home with others. We are disconnected from our own body, heart and spirit.

This talk explores how meditation offers “spiritual reparenting” as we learn to bring interest, understanding and love to our own inner vulnerability. This process of healing extends to our relationships with others and our larger society – by reaching out to widening circles with interest and care, we bring increasing harmony and peace to our world.

From a place of caring, ask, “Where does it hurt?”

Transcription

I'd like to begin with a little story I heard in the press that a man tried to sneak his pet turtle onto a flight, and he tried to pass it off as if it was fast food, and the way he did it was he placed it between these two buns and wrapped in paper for Kentucky Fried Chicken. But he got caught, and when he was discovered, he told the airport officials that he just really couldn't leave his beloved pet at home.

I thought it was an interesting little story, because I have had times that I've nearly canceled a teaching trip because I just didn't want to leave my dog. It's kind of this wrenching feeling, and it speaks to how profound the sense of wanting connection and not wanting to be separated is. It's so deep in us.

[1:20]

There's research now that having pets and that sense of warmth and connection and the oxytocin and tenderness .. it increases longevity and happiness, the happiness quality of life. The other side of the equation is when there's a deficit of connection, when there's a lot of loneliness, there is depression, and when we don't have adequate bonding early on, death. It can be physical and on other levels, too.

In the theme of tonight, which has very much to do with connection and separation, there is a myth that I love to share now and then, it's one of the legends from The Holy Grail. It has to do with Parsifal, this young knight on a quest, and he wanders into this very parched and devastated kingdom, where nothing grows; it's a real wasteland. When he arrives at the capital, he finds that the townspeople are behaving as if everything's normal, they're in this total trance, on automatic, and they're just doing their daily duties, but with no affect really. They're completely in another realm; they're not wondering "what horror has befallen us", whereas nothing is growing, the whole place is devastated. So they are dull and mechanical.

He goes into the castle where he finds king, who's in his bed, and he's pale and dying; like the land around him, the monarch's life is waning. So Parsifal's full of questions, but he's been taught by an older knight that asking questions is improper for a knight of his rank, so he keeps quiet. The next morning, he leaves the castle to continue on his journey, but the witch, Kundry, encounters him as he's making his way onward. When she hears he had been visiting the king but he hadn't even asked the king anything about himself, she goes into a complete rage. She says how could he be so callous, he could have saved the king and the kingdom by only extending himself.

Parsifal turns around, and goes back, as he's taken her words to heart, and he goes back into the wasteland, and he goes right to the castle, and without even breaking his stride he walks right up to the king and then comes down onto his knees and, with incredible gentleness, he says "Oh my king, what aileth thee?"

Within moments, color returns to the king's cheeks and he stands up and he's fully healed, and with that, throughout the kingdom everything comes to life. The people, newly awakened, talk with animation, they laugh, they sing together. The crops begin to grow, the grass on the hills glows with the new green of spring, and life has been renewed.

That's the story, and what happened? What happened to make that awakening possible from the trance, into this aliveness and vitality and presence? It was Parsifal extending himself, with care, to reach and touch and connect with another being. That's what awakens us from trance: connection.

Sometimes the connection occurs as we learn to come back home into our bodies, and start really having the courage and presence to feel the aliveness that's here. Sometimes it comes because we listen to our own hearts in a new way, and sometimes it comes because somebody reaches out to us, or we reach out to them, but it's all about relationship, coming into our relatedness, realizing we're not separate, that the truth is: this living web that we are absolutely in a belonging, an interdependence.

The trauma in our life, the wounds, are all having to do with severed belonging. They come in our families and in our cultures, in which we some way get split off from feeling the okay-ness of this body and heart, that we're okay. We get told that something's wrong. We get split off because we get hurt and it's too painful to live in our bodies and feel that hurt. We get split off because in some way, the other has not been able to stay with us.

[6:30]

If we begin to reflect, and sense that what Parsifal did was he brought his presence and his care, that's really what's needed.

[6:40]

I'd like to invite you to do a few reflections, as we often do.

First, close your eyes for a moment, and bring to mind for yourself a time when you might have been in some form of a trance of suffering, some form of a kind of a disconnect, feeling alone, or hurt or confused, or when you were in need and you connected with somebody that had a healing presence.

It could be in a very subtle way you felt that connection, or it could be really one of those powerful moments, but someone you could tell had a healing presence that you could tell was making a difference, was able to help you reconnect, come back into this mutual belonging, this web of life.

As you bring someone to mind - in Buddhism they call it a "benefactor" - somebody who showed up, what are the qualities in that person that made a difference for you? What was it that that person embodied or offered?

When you'd like, you can open your eyes.

[8:35]

I often think that when we're in the earliest phase of life - our infancy, a very young child - what is most needed from our parents. There are two things, and you might have, in some way, have some of the language for these two things when you thought of that person who extended to you.

One of the qualities that we need from a parent is a sense that they understand or get us. Feeling felt, that we're known in some way. This being understands, this being is interested, this being is attuning.

The other quality is, in that feeling felt, that we're loved, that there's care.

These are often described as the two wings of awareness, when they're in full bloom. The understanding and the caring. We all need to receive it, and then we discover it's our natural intrinsic nature. It wakes us up.

[09:35]

What I'd like to explore, for the remainder of our time tonight, is what I sometimes think of as spiritual reparenting. What we're doing on this path of healing and awakening is bringing those two qualities of seeing clearly - "What is going on right here? What aileth thee?" - and caring, that gentleness, to our inner life, to each other, and to our larger world.

I call it spiritual reparenting because there's a corrective quality. The given is that there was some severed belonging. There is some delusion, greed and aggression that ends up getting in

the way of us feeling loved. We all have this capacity within us, to spiritually reparent ourselves and each other, and we all need help.

[10:30]

We're going to explore that, and the inquiry is "how do we awaken that presence?" We're going to primarily look at how we bring it to the wounded and excommunicated and oppressed parts of our own being.

The starting place, and it seems incredibly obvious, but it is what we most forget, is that every one of us needs to feel loved. We get very occupied with what we think we want, but deep down, we want to feel loved.

There's a better language for it: we want to feel that loving presence which is what we are. But one of the first ways that we touch into it is by feeling loved. We want to feel loved. It's a core need, biologically, psychologically and spiritually. We want to feel loved.

[11:30]

If you look early on, there is so much research now on attachment theory and so on, on what happens when there's not a secure attachment with a caretaker. When that seeing and caring is not there. We know that in the very earliest phases of a young being's life - and look at rats, the rat mama licking her pups - that licking, that grooming is what allows the synapses to connect. It's through the nurturing behaviors that we actually wake up our brain, it gets functioning.

We know from studies of monkeys that the effect of erratic mothering is binge eating, aggressive behavior, withdrawal, depression, anxiety. Look at all of us. We have parenting that's not steady, we get anxious, we get depressed, we get addictive, it's all there.

When attunement and attachment is weak - and it is weak, it's societal, it's not just "Oh, my family", we all have some dysfunction to different degrees - it affects us, and we see it in animals, we see it in humans.

[13:00]

Somebody sent me a few of these.

One little cartoon has a parrot on a therapist's couch and he's saying "I want more than a cracker, but I don't know how to ask for it".

Then there's an elephant on the couch who's saying "Sometimes even if I stand in the middle of the room, no one acknowledges me".

Why did the chicken cross the road? The chicken responds "My therapist says I should do more things that scare me".

The donut on the therapist's couch: "I feel like I'm a very well-rounded individual, but people say I'm bad for them".

Okay, enough of these guys.

[13:45]

Biologically, we can see that. There's been some really fantastic studies on the social level that humans' relational strength is what has allowed us to be peak survivors, and it's now hypothesized that it was our need to communicate that most accounted for that phenomenal growth of the cortex in human development.

This need to communicate, through communicating, collaborating, and relating, that we've had our evolutionary success. There's a psychologist, [Louis] Cozolino, and he has a line that I think is fantastic: "We're not the survival of the fittest, we're the survival of the nurtured". [\[reference\]](#)

Nurturing in human development is key. We have an elongated stretch of childhood, this capacity to feel related to others, is what makes our intelligence grow. It makes us capable of empathy, compassion, collaborating, creating and fulfilling.

[15:05]

We need to feel connected, and then, of course, as I've described it, it's very imperfect and we all have our places of severed belonging, and what happens then? We go after substitutes.

We need to feel loved, if we don't feel loved, we're going to go after something else. And the more we don't feel loved, the more we're going to grasp onto that something else, hence addiction.

So we have substitutes, sometime the substitutes are I don't feel loved, well I want to feel admired then, I want to feel approved, I want to be envied, I want to feel esteemed. Maybe I want to feel in control, or I want to over-consume.

[15:50]

One story of going after substitutes took place on an airplane, where a woman sneezed, and then she takes out a tissue, she wipes her nose, and then she shudders quite violently for 10 to 15 seconds.

This guy is sitting next to her and he notices it, but he just goes back to his reading. Then it happens again - she sneezes, she wipes her nose, she shudders - and he's really curious, "What is going on here for her?"

When it happens a third time, he finally talks to her, he says "You've sneezed three times, you've wiped your nose, you shudder violently, are you okay?"

She says "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I have a rare condition. When I sneeze, I have an orgasm."

He's embarrassed, but he says "Oh, so what do you take for it?"

She says "Pepper."

So, we're talking about substitutes here. You get the idea.

[16:45]

We pursue whatever we can, if we don't feel the love. We also have another approach when we don't feel loved and safe: because it hurts, we protect ourselves from intimacy. We long for it, but we protect ourselves because we're afraid of getting hurt even more.

If there's severed belonging, we try to prevent more severed belonging. How do we do it? We withdraw, we defend, we blame others; we make others wrong and bad, basically.

[17:25]

Some of you will remember the story of a little girl who asks her mother how the human race appears. You remember this? The mother answers "Well, God made Adam and Eve, and they had children, and all mankind was made."

Two days later, she asks her father the exact same question. His response is "Well, many years ago, there were monkeys, and from them the human race evolved.

So the girl's confused, she goes back to her mother and says, "How come you told me the human race was created by God, and Dad says the human race evolved out of monkeys?"

She says "Oh, dear, it's quite simple. He told you about his side of the family, and I told you about mine."

[18:05]

We have these strategies when we don't feel love: we either grasp or we push away. The challenge with both of them is that the more we react out of that wound, the less we're able to bring real healing to the wound.

The archetype of healing, of moving from that suffering and that reactivity to healing, in Buddhism, is the archetype of the Bodhisattva, which is an awakening being with an awakening heart. The way that the Bodhisattva of compassion is described is as "listening to the cries of the world".

Guan Yin, The Bodhisattva of Compassion with the ten thousand arms: The beginning of healing is "Oh, there's suffering going on". There's a sense of "Oh, there's this ouch". There's this severed belonging. Listening to that. And then after listening, The Bodhisattva of Compassion responds with care.

[19:15]

This is the model of spiritual reparenting. Like The Bodhisattva of Compassion, something in us goes "Wow, I am hooked on substitutes" or "Wow, I have a habit of pushing people away" or "I have a habit of distracting myself on my iPhone and not really being in intimate relationship with others" or "I have a habit of over-consuming rather than being present and showing up in a

situation" or "I have a habit of being so busy, it makes it really hard for people to feel like I'm right there with them".

[19:55]

We go "Oh, so that's the way I'm avoiding intimacy, that's the way I leave presence". So we're listening, like Guan Yin, to the suffering. And then we can begin to find a pathway to bringing care. And it's really challenging because there's a lot of vulnerability, or we wouldn't be leaving.

[20:15]

What we're going to look at is: how do we begin to bring that loving presence to ourselves? How do we begin - instead of leaving, and grasping, and pushing away, and losing ourselves in distraction - to love ourselves into healing?

The first step, like Parsifal, is to begin to ask ourselves the question, "What's going on inside me right now? Can you get under your thoughts, and ask what's going on in your body or your heart? Is there a restlessness? Is there an anxiety? Is there interest? Is there sadness?

You can continue with your eyes closed or open.

[21:35]

I have recently been inspired by an interview on On Being (Krista Tippett) with a woman named Ruby Sales, and she's a civil rights activist, a theologian .. an amazing woman. I recommend the interview. She talks about this need for unconditional love - that we offer to ourselves, each other and our world - as really the essence of this healing.

She describes this archetype - just as the Bodhisattva is the archetype in Buddhism, this loving presence - in black folk religion. In the interview, she has a line from one of the spirituals, which is

I love everybody
I love everybody
I love everybody
in my heart

She described in her own life how she grew up in this black folk spirituality, but she left it - and got into Marxism, into this, into that - and in a way, it seemed like she had left home, left her spiritual grounds, but two experiences that were really profound for her let her know that she had never left, that conscious loving was really the centerpiece of her theology.

The first of these two experiences - and this is bringing us right to "how do we bring these two wings to ourselves?" - she says:

"I was getting my locks washed and my locker's daughter came in one morning and she had been hustling all night, and she had sores on her body, and she was just in a state: drugs. So something said to me, "Ask her, 'Where does it hurt?'" And I said, "Shelly, where does it hurt?" And just that simple question unleashed territory within her that she had never shared with her

mother. And she talked about having been incested, and she talked about all these things that had happened to her as a child, and she literally shared the source of her pain. And I realized, in that moment - listening to her, and talking to her - that I needed a larger way to do this work."

So just like Parsifal, she asked that question, "Where does it hurt?" That same question, "What's going on inside me right now?" A powerful beginning of intimacy.

[24:05]

The second experience she had, she says:

"I was riding down the road one day in Washington, DC, after having been at a demonstration against the war in Iraq. And suddenly, out of nowhere, I started crying. And I realized God had been with me even when I hadn't been with myself. And those moments made me really begin to seek, to go back to thinking deeply about black folk religion and to really wanting to develop in a very intentional way an inner life that had to do with how I lived in the world."

This return to unconditional love, to the life that's within us, the life around us, that's the centerpiece of her theology.

[24:50]

When I heard that story about her asking that question, and I had already known the Parsifal story, it really landed in quite a beautiful way. I could think in my own life of times that people asked me a question, and really asked from a place of presence, and in those moments, feeling that healing that comes when somebody really wants to know, that actually opened up something in me.

[25:25]

I wonder if you'll do another little reflection, if you will, just to close your eyes, and in this pause, see if you can relax back, come right here, feel that here-ness, your body sitting here breathing, the life that's here.

You might bring to mind a challenging situation that's going on in your life. Anything that feels challenging.

Bring to mind somebody who you consider to be a caring person, that you trust as a caring person.

Just imagine them looking at you with care and asking the question, "Where does it hurt?" or "What's this like for you?" "What aileth you?" "What's going on?"

What's it like to be asked?

This is the beginning. This is that first wing of spiritual reparenting. Just as a parent if they see their child upset - angry, withdrawn - "Where does it hurt?" "What's going on?"

We begin to learn to ask this of ourselves. We begin to pause and say "What is going on inside?" "What's happening?"

We're going to practice more fully in a few moments, with our inner life, but just to get a taste.. So you can open your eyes.

[27:45]

We're talking about addressing within ourselves our individual personal self, but this is the same exact question that - if we widen the field - we can begin to ask of any population that is having trouble.

If we really want to have a world where we're understanding each other, and there for each other, and responding to each other, we need to ask that same question: "Where does it hurt?" "Where does it hurt for this group, or for that group?"

[28:20]

That question, "Where does it hurt?", we need to address that to everyone, if we really want to understand each other.

So we ask that question, we do our wide awareness training, so we say "Can I imagine, what would it be like being a person of color here in Washington DC, where you're out in the streets and with the racial profiling that goes on you're just going to be very inclined to running into trouble. Or the mother of a son or a wife of a husband or the daughter of a father who could easily get arrested. Or what's it like to be a Muslim right now in this country, or to be an immigrant who might not be fully documented or might have some minor criminal infringement.

What's it like to be any of these people right now? Where does it hurt? Can our hearts really get that?

[29:15]

Ruby goes further than that in this in her conversation and says that we have a white spiritual crisis going on in this country, and in order to understand what's underneath the aggression, and the anger, and the reactivity, we really need to ask that question, "Where does it hurt?" And really get what it's like to be unemployed, to be losing jobs to globalization.

Dalai Lama says there's a suffering of not feeling needed, not feeling relevant anymore.

It's like that story I tell so often of approaching a dog that's under a tree and you're all friendly and want to pet it and the dog lurches at you angry and then you see the dog has its paw in a trap. And then you go from feeling angry at the dog for being aggressive to "Oh you're aggressive because you're hurting".

Where does it hurt? Can we ask that of everybody? Instead of making somebody a "bad other", where does it hurt? A powerful question.

For Ruby, this is the theology: unconditional love, finding out where it hurts.

[30:35]

Back to spiritual parenting, the parent asks the child, "Where does it hurt?", we ask ourselves that, and then once we've started tuning in "Okay, it hurts. I'm feeling unloved. I'm feeling unworthy. The next step is we need to feel with that. Let ourselves feel it, so that the caring comes alive.

Now here's a challenging place: We can ask ourselves "Where does it hurt?" We might even get in touch with some loneliness, some feelings of shame, some feelings of being unloved by others, but we don't want to hang out with that, we very quickly want to leave.

[31:20]

Some of you might remember this story of people going to seek wisdom from a wise old sage who lived way out into the wilderness. They had to cross through dangerous jungles and forests and so on to get there, and when they get there, he'd swear them to silence and then he'd say, "I have one question for you: what are you unwilling to feel?"

So that's the question, when we start getting towards it, to the hurting place, we don't want to feel it, so we exit, and we all have our exit strategies.

[31:55]

The next step in our training of spiritual reparenting ourselves, we ask the question, and then we have to learn to stay, to stick around. Not so easy.

We look at the different ways we leave, and we start just noticing them, not judging them. "Okay, I leave a lot I get lost on the Internet" or "I leave a lot and I overeat" or "I get over busy" or whatever. We don't judge it but we start noticing it.

[32:25]

One of the main ways that we leave, rather than staying and feeling where it's difficult, is we just move into judgment mode. "I shouldn't be this way". "I'm bad for being this way".

We blame ourselves. Or we judge others. We do them both.

We get angry.

Spiritual reparenting: if the child's angry, what do we do? We stay with an upset, angry child, until they can get in touch with what it is they're really wanting. And it's the same thing when we're judging ourselves and angry.

[33:10]

Back to Ruby Sales, she says "We talk a lot about what we hate" - in other words, we're very quick to go into our judgments about ourselves and each other, "I hate when it's like such and such" - she says "We need to talk about what we love".

For us to be social activists or for us to go and do internal healing work, if we're staying with "I hate myself for such and such" - even if we're doing a harmful behavior - we're not going to change.

"I hate the society for the way it such and such", we're not going to change it.

But if we can move into "I hate it when it's like this because this is what I care about; I want to see such and such happen", then we have the energy for change.

[33:55]

You can think of it in terms of hating ourselves, judging ourselves. One woman I was working with years ago hated herself for binge eating. I say one woman, I have worked with myself and ten thousand women on this, so it's not one woman, but I'm thinking with now of one woman. That was her main position, which was that "I've ruined my life with this". In other words, "I've ruined my body", "I can't be in a relationship", "I can't enjoy being physical with another person", "I'm too self-conscious", "I'm disgusted with myself" .. "I've ruined my life". That was where she was locked in.

[34:35]

So where does spiritual reparenting go? You start by saying "Okay, so what is it, where's the hurt?" "Well, the hurt's right now, all I can feel is my anger and my hatred towards myself". We started right there, with the hatred towards herself, and let it be as big as it is, and it was really big, and I said "Okay, so if you really open to it what's the deepest thing you are aware of?" "Well, it's deprived me of my life" "So what has it deprived you of?" Then she started saying "I want to feel connected, and it keeps me from feeling connected" I said "Say more about that, what do you really want?" "I want to be able to feel really close" "What does that mean? What does that be like?" And it got right down to the place of feeling absolutely in communion. She was longing with communion

[35:30]

Most of her moments in life: "I hate myself for the way I eat". Deep down: "I'm longing for communion".

[35:40]

So what we did, I said "Let's explore what would happen if you were in touch with that longing more and you kept praying from that place, and you kept remembering that place that longed, and you got familiar with it." And that became her practice.

Every day she would meditate and she would get in touch with the place that really longed to feel connected. From that place, when she would binge, she had more forgiveness, because the more she remembered that she longed to feel loving presence, the less she attacked herself.

[36:15]

She started to be able to work with the addiction from a place of caring about her life, not hating herself.

[36:25]

And so it is with spiritual reparenting. We begin to reparent ourselves from a place of caring about the parts that are having trouble.

And so it is with our wider culture. As Ruby says, there's redemptive anger, and I think that's a really cool contrast. Redemptive anger is when you feel the energy of anger because you sense an opposition to what's healthy and healing and good. That's healthy. But she says if you lock into anger, and it gets targeted to blaming and making somebody bad, then it gets toxic.

[37:10]

How do we take the anger and judgment and so on that we feel and have it be redemptive? She says "Remember what you love". The anger is there because there's something you love that's getting blocked. Then act from that loving.

Cornell West says "Justice is what love looks like in public".

[37:30]

We love ourselves into healing, and it's not just our inner life, we have to love our world into healing. We have to ask where it hurts to our world too.

Thus far, asking that question, "Where does it hurt?", staying, feeling, being with the loneliness, the fear, the anger, the hurt .. being with it, and learning how to really respond.

[38:00]

A really big challenge in spiritually reparenting ourselves is that, to some degree - sometimes small, sometimes large - there's trauma there, and it's very hard to stay with the place of rawness, and hurt, and fear, and stay with it in a way that truly can comfort ourselves. Often, we try to be with ourselves, and it just makes the trauma stronger, we get more fear.

[38:25]

The last thing we'll talk about in spiritual reparenting is how do we be with ourselves when there's really raw, deep feelings that are hard to be with? I thought I'd share with you, as a kind of modeling of how we do it, I was thinking about the movie, The Horse Whisperer.

You might remember in it, this is Robert Redford and he's playing the role of a man who agrees to tame a traumatized horse, and the horse's name is Pilgrim. At one point in the movie, he's created a very nurturing relationship with the horse. He's done the spiritual reparenting. He's

created trust. He's in that relationship of stabilizing, calming, soothing, creating a really loving presence.

But the horse gets triggered by a cell phone that a woman has that goes off, and it triggers Pilgrim, and so his trauma comes back. He contorts and he writhes and he runs off into open pasture. That's like trying to imagine being with yourself, and you're trying to bring some connecting and healing to your inner life, and a part of you gets traumatized, and it completely contracts and it pulls away, and you're feeling panicked or an enormous amount of anger, or whatever it is.

[40:00]

It's like you're the trainer or the parent: how do you begin to come into relationship with the traumatized part? Here's what he did.

The horse is far in the distance, and this trainer kneels down in a form of submission right where he is. He doesn't chase after the horse. He just stays where he is in a humble, present way, and he's just attending to what the horse is doing and needing from a distance. So he's staying in connection, not chasing down the horse, staying present and attending. "What do you need?" "What's going on?" He's asking those questions from a distance.

He waits until Pilgrim is able to come into relationship with him, and after some time, Pilgrim slowly walks to where the trainer is kneeling. And as he comes in closer, the trainer is incredibly present, gentle, still, just a receptive presence. And finally Pilgrim lowers his head, and that's the horse's sign of trust and submission and readiness. In other words, he's attended and created a field that allows the horse to re-establish that trusting.

And when that happens, the trainer just gently strokes Pilgrim's head, so they're reconnected, and then he's with one finger able to guide Pilgrim back, here's the pathway back to healing, and they can go back home to complete their training and recovery.

[41:30]

So what does this tell us? We've felt the parts of ourselves that are suffering, we've asked that question "What's needed?", we try to be with, we sense trauma, we really stay and create that safe space and patiently, gently wait until there's enough calming so that we can do that stroking, that nurturing, that healing.

[42:00]

And this is the way out of the wasteland. When we're in trance, all trance has to do with separation. We're cut off. We're cut off from this larger living, loving reality and in this static fragment of a story of "something's wrong", trance.

How do we wake up out of it? There's some awareness in us that says "Hey, what's happening?" "What aileth thee?" "Where does it hurt?" And then we deepen presence in that gentle way. This is the archetype of unconditional loving. We love ourselves back to healing.

[42:45]

I've been going back and forth tonight - as you've noticed - between loving ourselves into healing and loving the people around us - and really, the wider society - into healing.

[43:00]

We're going to do a final meditation, but I thought I'd first read to you one short piece from Martin Luther King, it's from a talk "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence", and I think it's very powerful:

"This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing - embracing and unconditional love for all mankind. This oft misunderstood, this oft misinterpreted concept, so readily dismissed by the Nietzsches of the world as a weak and cowardly force, has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response. I am not speaking of that force which is just emotional bosh. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality."

[44:00]

Let's do a short practice of this unconditional loving, this spiritual reparenting, and give you a chance to just taste with your own experience, and then you can practice more on your own.

Take a moment to pause, and arrive again, right here. You might take a few full breaths to collect and gather your attention. Inhaling deeply .. and a slow out-breath .. letting go, letting go. And again, inhaling deeply .. and a slow out-breath .. letting go, letting go. Letting the breath be in its natural rhythm.

And as we did a bit earlier, you might bring to mind a part of your life right now that you feel there's some suffering for you. Some difficulty. It may be where you feel disconnected or conflictual in a relationship with another person. You might feel suffering about what's going on in our wider society. It might be a sense of disconnection that's coming because of your own behaviors, ways you're down on yourself. It might be fears around health, money, something at work. Somewhere where you're struggling.

Calling on that dimension of your being that's most awake and most caring. You might call it your awakened heart, your highest self, your future self, that which you're evolving into. Just from that place, sense that you can ask yourself the question, "Where does it hurt?" "What's really going on inside?"

Direct the question to the most vulnerable part within you. What most wants attention?

And as you ask that question see if you can feel into whatever vulnerability is going on: the fears or the hurts. Sense what's most calling your attention right now. Like that horse whisperer, really attending with sensitivity.

You might sense what the unmet need is. Remember that all of our wounds, the deep part, is really a sense of separation. What is the need of the vulnerabilities? The need to feel loved, to

feel seen, accepted, held, to feel belonging to something larger, to feel safety, understanding?
What kind of connecting does this place most need?

From that awakened heart, from the highest self, the future self, just to sense that you can listen, and feel with that vulnerability, and begin to offer inward whatever nurturing - like the horse whisperer that gentle stroke - and, if it helps, put your hand on your heart - for so many of us that can begin to create a relationship of reparenting, of healing, that is so different from our normal way of relating to ourselves. Just to put your hand on your heart is a gesture of kindness. You might experiment with that.

Survival of the nurtured. Can you offer that nurturing inwardly, through some words, maybe, some message to your heart - to the wounded place, to the hurting place - that's kind.

As part of nurturing, you can imagine and sense the love of this universe. The light and warmth of the universe moving through your hands into your heart. Let the nurturing in.

From that heart space that can then sense the potential of the healing, of the nurturing, you might bring to mind someone that's dear to you that's having a hard time so that you can extend it outward. One person, that's dear, that's having a hard time. Just bring that person to mind and imagine asking the question, "Where does it hurt?" or "What's happening for you?" "What aileth thee?" "What's going on?"

Sense that you can bring that attention and that care to that person's vulnerability, in whatever way you can offer nurturing. And imagine what it's like for that person to feel you there. Just the connection that opens up when you offer your presence to another. The warmth, the tenderness.

Feeling that heart space, the heart space that expresses nurturance, and just resting in that. Sensing all beings as part of that heart space.

[51:20]

I'll close with a simple verse from the poet Hafiz:

Admit something.
Everyone you see, you say to them
"Love me".

Of course, you do not say this out loud,
otherwise someone would call the cops.

Still, though, think about this.
This great pull in us to connect.

Why not become the one who lives
with a full moon in each eye
that is always saying,
with that sweet moon language,

what every other eye in this world
is dying to hear?

Namaste, and thank you.