



Meditate & Mediate

Table of Contents

Recap of the Last Session 1

What Are the Three Ingredients of a Conflict for Each of Us? 5

Roots of Conflict: a Sense of Scarcity and a Sense Separation 8

Tapping Into the Resource of Global Attention..... 10

Respect and Listening are Key to Healing Shame14

Begin Meditation 16

End of Meditation..... 17

Q&A: Compassionate Engagement as a Path to Authentic Harmony19

Q&A: Bowing to a Higher Context; Owing Our Contribution to Injustice.....21

Q&A: Surfacing Injustice Through the Way of Power Married with Love.....23

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Thomas: Yes. Maybe we start, again, with a short recap of the last sessions, basically. Maybe, I will speak more about my part on the course and then William can fill in his part.

Recap of the Last Session

As you know, we talked about the I. We talked about how important it is to raise one's own awareness, that I raise my own awareness about myself, that I am deeper grounded in myself, that I practice kind of a contemplative practice, which means I insert space.

We said that space is a fundamental capacity to witness, to digest, to have enough space and time—which I believe are linked, time and space are linked—to digest our experience. We all know that when my nervous system and my body and my whole experience has enough space, I have a much higher capacity to be present within a situation than when I'm busy with my past. We said that a spacious nervous system is presence. A nervous system that is full and still digesting many other experiences—my day, my week, conflicts that I had, arguments that I had, difficulties that I had—so when I don't have enough time to digest, I'm usually, I have a much lower bandwidth to, like a buffer, to host more difficult or challenging situations, or to be of service to mediate those situations.

There is, on the "I" level, on the "me" level, there is a practice that's needed that simply gives me certain capacities or strengthens certain capacities, and also strengthens the capacity to go to the balcony, because we said I need a certain amount of consciousness that when I'm triggered, I still have the capacity to create for myself space within the situation, which we heard is responsible, like that I'm able to respond to the situation.

We said inserting space is something that I do through taking time out—which means contemplation, meditation, taking a walk in the woods or around a lake, and/or listen to music, or have some sort of practice where I help myself to digest. We also said that we are living in a fast-paced world where the data, the speed of data is growing every day, most probably, and we need time to catch up with our experience because most of us most probably have more data input than we can process.

So we have the practice, the practice for the I is sitting meditation, taking moment to moment practices during the day, taking a minute and allowing my experience to sink in, to drop in, to digest, to ground myself in order to be present to the current situation.

Then, on the we-level, we said that relation is kind of a social contemplation, because when I relate and I fill my intersubjective space with more awareness and with subtle perception, so I am much more in tune with, moment to moment, with every situation. That is kind of an I and you contemplation. So then my day gives me the capacity or the possibility to practice a contemplative practice. As we said, we are not sitting in a cave in a Himalayan mountain, but we are here in the marketplace, and if I want to refine my inner capacities—which we will still talk about more in the last part of the course—so then I need a moment to moment practice, because our lives are busy, we are very engaged in life, we are very engaged in relational contexts, which is intimate relationships, society, companies, institutions.

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To translate from the innermost circle of self-contact, or the innermost circle of intimacy, we extend our capacity to be present to the I-you relation. When I talk to my intimate partner, when I talk to my colleagues, when I talk to my boss, when I... I'm in the flow of my daily life.

And then, last time we started to talk about, okay, how does this look like when we extend our awareness into the we-space—a we-space can be a group, an institution, a company, or it can be a part of society or a global society—so that we have an internal and more and more external capacity to presence the globe. So we build the World Wide Web, and I believe we also grow an internal capacity to be a global citizen, to live locally, but to be globally present. I believe we are going to explore that more, also, today.

The same is true, like presence and contemplation I can do in my own sitting, that deepens my capacity of space, my capacity of silence. Stillness is, again, the playground of the future, which is emergence, like when life is emerging into new forms of itself, so the stillness becomes the fertile ground of innovation and inspiration where the seeds of light appear.

Then, in the intersubjective space, it's that I find myself having new ideas when in a mediation, in a therapeutic context, when with my partner, when in a working context, so that relation becomes the contemplation that has enough stillness and openness to receive the future. We're going to talk about this more, what it means that we are inspirational, that we speak from an inner connection. The same is true for the global context, so that my contemplation and meditation can expand, and I can include more and more either situations that happen in the world, moments like, as it happened last week in Florida or as are the Olympic Games in South Korea at the moment, so my contemplation can teach me from an inner science perspective. That's the expansion of contemplation and meditation onto the global we-space.

I believe that's something that is, right now, more and more emerging, that more and more groups around the world are interested in what people call subtle activism or kind of a training of a global awareness. Maybe, William, if you want to fill in a few things that you think are important, that you brought in, so that we complete our summary.

William: I just want to say, I just appreciate this moment in the course when we're on our ninth session and we're all gathered together around the globe right now. Let's appreciate the moment and appreciate... I'm just appreciating how much I've been learning in the course as well and participating with all of you.

Thomas and I, I think, envisioned this, really, as a kind of creating a learning community around a question, which we can put different ways, but it's how do we deal with, how do we live with our differences, with the conflicts around us—be it conflicts in the family or conflicts within ourselves, or conflicts in our workplace, or our community, or conflicts in the world at large, like we've taken the issue of North Korea and the United States and the South Korea as a conflict that has some danger for all of us—and the question being, how do we host these conflicts? I love that image of hosting. How do we host it? One thing I love, that you brought to this conversation so richly, Thomas, is this idea of space.

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Hosting means how do we create space for it? How do we create a sense of spacious safety, as a third side, with an embrace of those conflicts, so that within that embrace those conflicts—be it conflicts within ourselves or conflicts with others around us, or conflicts in the world—can change their form, can transform from kind of a collision, destructive collision, to more dancing polarities, to yielding benefit for everyone, benefit for the parties, benefit for the larger whole, can yield what might be called a win-win-win, a win for both sides of the conflict but also a third win as a win for the whole, be it the family, be it the community, be it the universe.

We entitled this course, as I recall, Meditate and Mediate. It's almost as if how do we host, how do we bring both the awareness that comes from meditation with the engagement that comes from mediation so we marry the inner and the outer seamlessly, so that we can train ourselves to be what you, Thomas, call global social witnesses, third siders, at all dimensions of our life.

I introduced some tools, some languaging around going to the balcony, which of course is extremely congruent with meditation, which is kind of imagining that we're on a stage, and that part of us goes to a mental, an emotional, a spiritual balcony overlooking that stage, a place of perspective, a place of calm, a place of spaciousness, a place of perspective where we can keep our eyes on the prize. What is it that we truly want? What is really wanted here? What's most important here? Then, the ability to kind of zoom into the stage and be an actor in the stage, engage in the world, and zoom out to the balcony, and zoom in and zoom out. Not a dissociated balcony but an integrated balcony—well, that was one of the questions that came up.

From the balcony, then, from that place of spaciousness and calm, we can listen to ourselves, listen to our own feelings, listen to our bodies, listen to our thoughts and create spacious enough that we can then host the thoughts, the emotions, what's going on for others, that we could truly listen to them—not just from within our frame of reference but from within their frame of reference—so that we can truly put ourselves in their shoes, listen with an open heart, listen with compassion, that being the key, that ability to go to the balcony and then listen, listen, listen. The art of deep listening is something that I think we're all trying to practice.

Then, also from the balcony, then being able to reframe the situation, because so often we approach conflicts like it's either-or. It's win-lose. There's a confrontation and there's stuckness. The question is how can we reframe it so there's abundance, so that we're not just quarreling about a fixed pie but we're expanding the pie so there's enough for everybody in this to meet their essential needs. How do we reframe that? How do we reframe, see the situation differently? How do we change the game from win-lose to win-win-win? We talked about that and different tools.

Then, we got into the dance, really, of conflict, which is around these two words of no and yes, yes, and no. What do I say no to? What do I say yes to? How do we get to yes? But how do we say no, very importantly, in a positive way that really can protect what is most valuable to us, that we see the highest values? How do we... the no of protection that is at the same time relational, so that we can relate, so that we can say no with one hand and get to yes with the other. How do we blend yes and no? How do we marry yes and no—because no has been stigmatized—how do we marry them and see that they actually can combine and blend with each other in a beautiful way in the process of transforming conflict?

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That, we talked about it, obviously, at the individual level, within ourselves, getting to yes with ourselves. We talked about it at the interpersonal level. Then, how do we do that collectively? How do we create a third side in which the third side is a balcony? We're on the balcony. The third side is listening. The third side is reframing, holding open the possibility of a win-win-win, of a possibility of abundance. How do we do that? How does the third side create a sense of spacious safety for the parties, within which even the most difficult trauma-based reactions can start to relax, and we can begin, slowly, to transform the stuck places, the numb places?

I think that's what we're sitting with, is can we do that? What I would imagine, I mean, my vision, my dream is that the third side, which I believe is the most abundant resource that we all have, that ability to collectively come together, it's our oldest human birthright, as I mentioned, it's something that comes from our hunter-gatherer ancestors, how do we recreate this in today's world, using the technologies that we're using today, like Zoom, where we can come together and bring it to bear on conflicts at all levels in our life, all the way up to the global issues that are so challenging for us right now?

That's the question we sit with. I am just really delighted to be participating in this exploration, hearing about the incubators, hearing about your own questions, which I was reading again yesterday, just that we are creating a sense of community here that might go well beyond this course and really, like a stone in the lake that I see in front of me, send ripples around the planet. That's my dream.

What Are the Three Ingredients of a Conflict for Each of Us?

Thomas: William, I think that what you said right before the end is that, I heard you talking about fear and about how the sense of unsafety, not being safe, is a key ingredient, obviously, in conflict situations. Maybe we can look, at this point in the course, so what did we learn so far? I mean, what did we learn about conflict? What are the deeper patterns in conflict situations that might be kind of more universal in the human nature?

I would love to go through a short journey with everybody, and that we together speak a little bit to different aspects of conflict and then we let the sentence or the comment drop in, and look at it in your own life. Later on, once we are, after this journey, we can open the chat window and have everybody type in, maybe, three, four words, or a short sentence that summarizes the essentials of this short contemplative journey that we will go through.

I think it's interesting to see. Now we are kind of in session 9. We looked at conflict or the human nature, trauma, shadow, collective trauma, needs, unexpressed needs, safety, a lot of fear and insecurity or not feeling safe. Maybe, we bounce off a few impulses and we take it and we let it sink in and say, "How does this connect to my life, and to my life experience?" Then, at the end of this journey, see what kind of words or what sentence vibrates alive in you. Then, if you want, you can type it into the Q&A window. Then we can get kind of a collective intelligence, co-work document, all our... a deeper understanding. Like in the inner practice or the mystical practice, we are constantly distilling the experience and more and more dropping into pattern levels and into the deeper fundamental roots within our experience.

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I would love to walk through this a bit. I want to start with what, when you take everything that you know from your life and also what we explored here in our collective exploration, as William said, what do you think, if you have three major parts that you feel are part of a growing conflict situation, what are the three major ingredients for you where it's highly likely that we will end up in a conflict? So what composes conflict? If you think of three qualities, just to make it more concentrated.

I look at my life, and whatever is my... I look in my experience, not just in the theory, but when I look at conflict in my life, that I had or that I mediated, what do I feel are the three major contributors to a conflict? When you think of the three contributors or the three instruments that compose the song of conflict and you let them vibrate in you as a... that the words are not just words but the words point towards, are pointing to qualities within us. And to feel how that feels in your body, your emotions, your mind. That's kind of a holistic exploration.

Then, maybe, a second question that comes with it, how much are you aware within fear and anxiety within yourself, within your family, within the wider community, within daily work interactions? Fear often comes in disguised. Fear doesn't come in with a T-shirt that's written, "Fear." I mean, sometimes it is so strong that it's inevitable, but fear has many faces. In order to recognize which interactions, which comments, which situations are actually fueled by fear, I need to pay attention, because often, it comes with another mask.

When you look, for a moment, at your life, but also, maybe, your work in the world, your work in companies, in institutions, or in mediations, if you mediate, or if you're a therapist and you work with clients—anxiety, fear, like a carpet of fear that we are walking on, that I believe is much bigger than it sometimes looks like, and how does fear and anxiety contribute to conflict when I feel safe and secure, or when I feel unsafe?

Again, when we do the exploration that we are doing right now, and our whole body, emotional field, mental capacity, presence, like we participate not just mentally but holistically. William, do you want to add a few impulses?

William: Yeah. Just, wow, that's such an interesting exercise. I tried to approach it fresh for me, as you're asking those questions, and just the study of what my own association with conflict was, the first thing that emerged was a thought, actually, was a thought of scarcity, that there isn't enough. Then, the feelings that arise from that are a feeling of fear, as you mentioned. There is a fear that my needs or the needs of the parties, the needs of people will not be met. There's not enough to meet needs.

Then, very soon thereafter, comes, I can see in conflict, anger, that another is taking more or is taking something from me, or is threatening me, or is threatening my needs. So a dance of—almost like a triangular dance, you got three—of scarcity, fear and anger. Anyway, that's what came. I had gone through this exercise before, but that's what emerged from me listening to you, Thomas.

Roots of Conflict: a Sense of Scarcity and a Sense Separation

Thomas: Beautiful. Let's take what you said right now, scarcity. What is scarcity? What is the nature of scarcity? Let's look at this. Again, just in your experience, when does a moment feel scarce? When do we feel, "Wow, here is scarcity"? What is the nature, the deeper nature of scarcity? As an experience, that we all have a moment to see, okay, what's the composition in my body, in my emotions, in my mind when I have the feeling, "Oh, now there is not enough." What does not enough have to do with the present moment? What does it have to do with the past? Then... Yeah, go ahead.

William: I was just going to say, as you're talking, I'm remembering of a... You may have quoted this before, earlier, but I'm just reminded of something that Albert Einstein said shortly after the second World War, shortly after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His reflection was that the most important question any of us as human beings need to answer is the question of whether or not the universe is friendly. It's a very deep question. It's kind of like, can I trust in life? Can I trust in the universe? I think it goes directly to the heart of what we were just talking about, about scarcity, because what's scarcity but a distrust in the abundance of life to be able to provide for needs.

What I think is beautiful about that is to realize that, in the end, yes, there is objective scarcity, and not to diminish that in any way. There is an aspect of it, which is, as Einstein pointed out, a decision. It's a choice. It's a way to see the situation. Do I see—it's almost like a flicker because it seems like, objectively, the situation, it is scarce. I mean, there are things that are scarce, resources, and then there isn't enough to go around, but there's also a sense in which there's a choice as to whether or not we see it as scarce, whether we trust life or whether we don't trust life based on, perhaps, some trauma and trauma experiences in the past, that there's a subtle choice we can make about looking for scarcity, looking for abundance that, independent of the objective situation, which is very real and which is not to be diminished, there is an element of choice in how we see it.

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Thomas: Maybe, everybody can look in yourself, when you feel within a moment that there is not enough, what's the composition, or when you observe in other people that it's not enough, and how generous can we become towards the scarcity that is either within us, around us? Is the experience of other people is, maybe, wired in other people.

How much is my awareness open to detect when something is not enough and the capacity to voice that we need more, like an inner expression of the need? How many needs stay unspoken, and how the capacity to express needs, often very fundamental needs that we have, is free to be expressed or that very basic needs are not being expressed openly because that function has been hurt because of many other reasons? How much do I hear the unspoken needs within myself, of course, within my intimate partner, within the world around me, my coworkers, the world, different parts of the world? How much do I participate in not only the spoken part of life but the unspoken part?

William: Very beautiful, Thomas. As I'm following your thread, the other word that emerges for me that's the twin of scarcity, kind of at the root of the essence of conflict, is the word 'separation'. It's scarcity and separation. Scarcity, meaning 'not enoughness', that there's not enough to go around, my needs will not be met, other people's needs will not be met. Then, the twin of that is separation, which is the assumption that there's a separate me that has needs and scarcity.

What's so beautiful about the resource of meditation and spaciousness and all the themes we've been talking about in this course of meditation as a practice is that meditation brings a sense or can bring a sense of enoughness and can bring a sense of connection, of relationship. So meditation, in some sense, as a resource, addresses these twin roots of conflict—of scarcity and a sense of separation. There's a way in which, and which is why it makes sense, then, that meditation is a channel into mediation, because it treats the roots of conflict, brings you into a different perspective where there may be the beginnings of enoughness, the beginnings of connection and relationship, within which, then, we can really serve those around us as mediators or can serve ourselves, for that matter, as mediators.

Thomas: Right. And how our capacity to recognize or detect or activate resources is. So what's my capacity, within myself, that I can recognize in difficult situations for myself, how can I recognize resources? What are my resources? Sometimes, we have situations that flow perfectly. They seem like, "Wow, it's just one flow." Our life is a flow. We are kind of in the movement of life, and everything seems great.

Then, there are moments that are difficult, but underneath there is a kind of a driving force that gets us through the difficulty and transforms the difficulty, eventually, into movement. Then, there's another form that most probably also we all know, that they are difficulties, and it feels like the fuel is missing to go through it. The fuel is missing that... where should I draw from? Where is my strength? Where is my motivation to really face and be present to the difficulty? I'm interested in what is the resource and what is my capacity to detect resources in systems that help to elevate the possibility of change and the possibility of transformation or the possibility of conflict resolution? Because I have a high sensitivity, like a radar, for the resources within the system. So, if something is not enough or scarce, so where is the fuel of life that knows there is enough?

Tapping Into the Resource of Global Attention

William: Really fascinating. As I'm listening to you, I'm just taking a case in point right now. I was flying back from Washington this week and I noticed the passenger next to me watching, on their little smart phone, watching the Olympic figure skaters, and someone in front of me was watching someone doing a half-pipe snowboarding and things. There are so many people all watching the Olympics.

The case in point is, since, as you know, I've been following that conflict, so I've been living it day and night, is, if you take that as an example of a conflict where there is a scarcity, there's real scarcity, there's a feeling of profound unsafety, there's fear, there's anger, there's scarcity and there's separation, these two possible root causes of conflict, scarcity and separation. What the Olympics is doing, almost unbeknownst to us, but I'm watching it even in its impact on the conflict, is, by having a billion people around the planet, or more, focused, giving their attention, activating the third side, they're feeding a sense of abundance that the people in Korea, in the North and the South, are feeling. They're feeling seen and respected.

There's all this attention, positive attention, of excitement, these feelings that are concentrated, almost like, it's almost like the third side is a circle, and everyone is beaming sort of like a laser, these little lights, and they all meet in the middle there, on the Korean peninsula. The Korean peninsula is receiving abundance where there was scarcity and receiving connection, connection with the whole world, with the heart of the world, where there was separation.

That is beginning to take this very numb, frozen conflict, traumatized conflict, and you could just see the very faint beginnings of the numbness, of the ice, beginning to unfreeze, beginning to unthaw, and possibilities for dialogue, for connection, for the very beginnings of dealing with the conflict, imagining that this conflict could be dealt with in a different way, in a more cooperative way, in a way that's more abundant. It's facilitated by this kind of global activation of the third side, so it's because the third side goes to the very roots of the conflict and that feeling of scarcity and that sense of separation.

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Thomas: Just to say that the global attention is also a resource. So global attention and giving my presence into a situation or, right, into a situation, is a resource. The question is why in the middle of, let's say, kind of one of the peaks of the conflict at the moment, what is the reason for Olympic games happening exactly in that time? I think that's an interesting question. What does this tell us about global resources?

Because I don't think it's a coincidence that there is kind of a very strong tension and at the same time there is kind of a global agreement, a sports agreement, so to speak, but it's a global agreement, and it happens at the same time, in the same place. That's an interesting question, I believe, to ask what is the seeming coincidence of a strong potential resource coming into a place with a... being part of a strong conflict?

William: It almost seems too coincidental to be a coincidence. It's like some kind of cosmic coincidence that... What are the odds that at the time—I mean, this may be the time of, at least in my lifetime, that I remember, maybe, with the time of kind of maximum peril of a genuine Holocaust—what are the odds that exactly at the height of it, the Olympic spirit, the Olympics, the excitement, this celebration of human potential, the beauty of those figure skaters, what's best about humanity shows up in some way right there, right on the border, right there at that moment, and provides this moment of unthawing the numbness, this connecting what was separated, this abundance where there is scarcity.

It's quite amazing and it leads one to imagine... I mean, I remember, in the last session, Thomas, you gave a very striking example. You said, if there's a car accident and the emergency paramedic shows up, and they're giving attention and care to that person, to the accident victim, that can reduce PTSD, that can reduce trauma.

In some funny way, the Olympics right now is like global paramedics. We're not even aware of it, but it's kind of, it's like showing up on the accident scene, all of us together, each radiating out a little bit of... that can reduce that PTSD that leads to such rigidity that could actually, that is so dangerous for the possibility of turning into a catastrophic war, so just at that moment.

And it makes one wonder whether or not—because all that's arriving, all that attention is arriving through the means of communication, through television, through the internet, and so on—it makes one wonder whether, in the future, we can imagine a future in which that kind of global resourcing can arrive... doesn't have to wait for the Olympics, can arrive any time, for any global emergency or, for that matter, for any family emergency.

What if the third side were an abundant resource available at every level, to all of us, at every time in our conflicts, at whatever level—from the workplace, to the community, to inside—and it was there, that attention, that spacious safety.

Thomas: Right. Maybe we'll come back later, after our journey, again, we can come back to that situation right now, but it's a potential exploration. What are resources? How do I detect resources? What are the resources that are available to me in certain situations? What kind of inner and outer environment do I need to create to be able to tap into those resources?

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When you just go in for a moment and say, "Okay, basically, in my life in general, what are resources for me? What actually raises my energy? What helps me to create more vitality, more presence? What are resources for me to fill my battery?" So, what are resources for you, first of all, for yourself, and when you find yourself in more difficult situations, what resources you so that you have more power, more motivation, more attention, more participation, more presence, more inner space, whatever, to deal with certain difficulties.

How is the quality in you, first of all, for you, to ask for resources, to ask for support, and to ask for potential resources that you need in order to be responsible. Responsibility is also to know when to ask. I'm responsible, if I run into the same relationship conflict again and again and again, and me and my partner we cannot solve it, so I need to ask for support. If you have recurrent situations that are kind of repeating themselves over and over and over again, so after some time, I see, "Okay, obviously we have not... we do not have the capacity to resolve this, so the responsibility is to invite support." Maybe, to invite William and help us with the potential conflict—so I bring in a resource.

Then, when you think of your day, of your days, how much are you connecting to resources or providing resources in situations where it seems that there is a scarcity of resources—there's a scarcity of awareness, there's a scarcity of emotional connection, of whatever, interconnectedness? Do you feel you have a good sense for the resources available? Do you practice to learn to detect resources in systems, to tap into what is already there but, maybe, in a hidden way?

So, as one way to think of resource, is also: where is the movement? So, we're often in situations that are more kind of contracted or stagnant. Where is the movement that infuses more fresh water into a standing water? What are the hidden partners in the room that, when I know how to activate those hidden partners in the room, so I have kind of allies.

William: That's very beautiful. I guess the question to add to that would be for us to ask ourselves, "What makes me safe?" What makes me feel safe? What resources make me feel safe? What inner resources create a sense of safety for me? What outer resources create a sense of safety for me? Is it a friend? What is it that makes me, that allows me to have a sense of spacious safety, that frees me, that liberates me from the fear that constricts my heart? What makes me feel safe? Then, by extension, what makes the other feel safe? What could make the other feel safe?

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Because if we can both feel safe, if we can all feel safe, or begin to feel safe, if that contraction can begin to relax, then there's possibility. New possibilities can emerge.

Along with safety is the very allied question of belonging. What gives me a sense of belonging? What gives me a sense that I belong, that I feel emotionally, psychologically safe, that I'm home somehow, that I belong, that I have a place, that I am respected, that I'm seen, that I'm met? What creates that feeling for me? Because that's the role that we can each play for ourselves and that, as third siders, we could play for others, is to create that cocoon of safety, of respect, [inaudible] and perspective.

Thomas: Again, let's have this question drop in, and explore: what is safety, what is belonging, and to allow the physical, emotional, mental inner resonance. Also, how it feels when I feel safe, how I am completely different within the relational space, within the world, like I'm sitting and resting, so my nervous system is able to exhale, is able to exhale and be in a place, be in my body, be in contact with myself, be in contact with the space around me, with the other person, with a group, with the world, kind of roots that strengthen my capacity of belonging.

But also in the belonging, there is a heightened sensitivity to include everyone around us. So when you follow this invitation of William and you look how does safety and belonging feel in myself, at least in most of my moments? What is the principle of safety and belonging within us?

As we said, let's simply just walk together through these questions. Then we see what, at the end, are the most concentrated aspects that stay with us. How is safety and belonging related to generosity, and to be able to host? What is the quality in me to enrich the resources, to enrich the context around me? What is hospitality, hosting, generosity, the well? What's the nature of the well? What's the nature of generating more energy within a context than was there before?

So when I enter a context and there's a certain amount of energy, and afterwards the context feels elevated, energized, more participating, inspired, what is the quality to host, to be generous? How do you know generosity within your own life? What supports a situation to become more generous? What is actually added, or what happens when we say, "Something is generous," "Somebody is generous," "This is generous environment?" What is, actually, generosity?

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Respect and Listening are Key to Healing Shame

Then, maybe, one more question or two more questions. One is, "What's the role of shame?" What's the role of shame? How did we, how did you, how did we, how did I explore the nature of shame and the capacity to feel when somebody else feels ashamed, and how we create shaming environments, and how we create environments where shame can start to move, to open up into relation? How much is shame part of a conflict situation?

William: I would just add to that, Thomas, shame is really... goes back to—if those of you who may have had a chance to listen to Thomas's and my interview with Donna Hicks about dignity—shame somehow often seems to arise from a felt violation of our dignity as human beings, often, too. Often, it seems to me that, if I ask myself or you ask yourself, what makes me, what makes you, what makes us feel respected? What makes us feel seen, really truly seen, truly accepted for who we are? Under what conditions can that respect, that acceptance heal the shame? To what extent can we do that for ourselves? How can we do that for others?

Seems like respect, which has this root from the Latin of 'to see', 'to be seen', we can truly be seen and accepted, that's somehow key to the process of healing. That's what listening is about, is when we feel truly listened to, imagine, if you can just imagine a moment, imagine a moment when you felt truly heard, truly listened to, truly seen in your essence, how that felt like, and where are the resources within yourself and around you to have that experience of being truly listened to.

Thomas: Maybe to add, how does it feel to be truly seen, even if that means that it comes with a certain level of discomfort? So when we are seen and we like, for example, the feedback that we get, then it's easy, but what is my capacity to recognize that something rings very true even if I don't like to hear it?

[01:00:00]

So does being seen mean that somebody supports me kind of all over—or that somebody supports the essence in me, and not my addictions, my patterns, my shadow parts? What is feeling seen on a deeper level, where we participate in the resonance of kind of the feedback of the world, which means, when I get a feedback, that I also can stay present to the uncomfortable feedback that is actually illuminating a very vital part or a very authentic part of myself?

I think that's also interesting. Where do I like people if they tell me things that I like to hear? But the true feedback is sometimes very supportive of the resources, but sometimes also confrontational or illuminating whatever shadow aspects of us, or when life hits my traumatization. So how do I participate in life embracing that?

That's also a very interesting exploration. How does respect land in us? How do we respect our environment? That's an interesting question, William, that you raised, what is the difference between soothing or harmonizing and authentic respect?

William: Yeah. Sure. It has something to do with the quality of listening. I mean, everything, I mean so much... what is the third side? It's a space for listening. Just as you're talking, Thomas, I've asked myself, what is the magic of listening? I mean, true listening, deep listening, if you remember a time where you felt truly listened to? Listening, it creates a sense of spacious, almost abundance, like psychological abundance. It opens up. Most... a lot of things, if I give you something, I have less, but if I give you listening, I have more, actually.

Listening is one of these positive sum phenomena that just grows and grows and grows. So listening turns... somehow heals that sense of scarcity, because, wow, listening is... it could be the most, potentially, most underutilized resource we have in the world is our ability to listen, individually and collectively, to ourselves and to others. Then, listening, also, it deals with one of the roots of conflict, which is scarcity, but it deals equally with the other root, which is separation, because listening connects, it connects hearts, it connects minds.

So this conversation really gives me a deepened appreciation of why. Why is it that I find in all my experience in dealing with conflicts around the world that the magic isn't so much in the talking, it's in the listening, that the most successful mediators are the ones who listen best, not necessarily the ones who are most persuasive in talking. It's in that quality of listening, of witnessing, of presencing, that the real magic begins.

Thomas: Let's apply what you said right now. There were many impulses so far. Let's have them sink in and say, okay, how does all of it—and maybe more, these were just some impulses—allow me to have a deeper and deeper understanding of the root aspects of human conflict? Of course, we didn't mention the functions of anger and aggression. Anger is a protective move. Anger is an expansion of one's autonomy, of resistance in order to feel, to develop power.

[01:05:00]

There are many, many other aspects, of course, to the past, the present, and the future, but if we allow, first of all, everything that has been said, to settle, it'll take, maybe, a few moments of silence.

Begin Meditation

When I ask myself, okay, what is my current understanding of the composition of conflicts? Are there kind of more universal patterns?

Also, maybe to apply what William said, listening is an amazing tool where we allow spaciousness within a situation, where we bring in a resource for another person, for a situation, but it's also, in my own exploration, when I listen to a question that I hold inside, when I listen to a certain exploration inside and I find a very deep partner in stillness, the capacity to presence a situation, and to listen to the depth of consciousness inside.

So the place where, in a way, my inner space merges into a much more transpersonal inner space, where my heart and the heart of the world kind of synchronize or create a mutual pulsation. In a state of inner coherence there is a wider overlap with a collective intelligence of the system.

And for us as a community, to deepen, to bring together our wisdom, to embrace our understanding of conflict, and to learn even more from life itself.

End of Meditation

Maybe, if you want to, maybe, just write one sentence, if you want, into the Q&A box, anything that feels important as whatever are parts, maybe a few words that arise in you through our exploration. What are the, maybe, root causes of conflict, the root compositions, or anything around conflict resolution, which goes hand-in-hand? Just a few words or a sentence maximum. Like the concentrated liquid of what is in you right now.

Well, William, do we have any comments so far?

[01:10:00]

William: Well, first of all, I'm appreciating the chance to really listen to all these voices. Just remind me, Thomas, remind me the question that you asked.

Thomas: What are the root causes of conflict? What are the more universal...

William: Yeah.

Thomas: Also, what adds to conflict resolution?

William: Yeah. Okay. I got it, because I'm seeing both. I'm seeing a lot around separation. I'm seeing themes, you know, and trauma, so... and listening does seem, again, to be... I just keep on coming back to that, it seems to be resonating, I'm also seeing it in the Q and A box here, which is... seems to be, why is it so... what is the magic? What is the power of listening in dealing with complex situations as kind of creating a context within which the conflict can possibly be transformed? What do you see, Thomas?

Thomas: First of all, I thought it would be great to take all the answers and post them somehow, like that we can all read more in a quiet moment when it's not running so fast. I caught many things, but I think it's going to be interesting for us because we, in a way, reflect the kind of a collective body here on the course, within the course. I think it's going to be interesting to look at the essentials that we see, and patterns within the whole text that we see here.

I thought it's interesting, what happens when I read and at the same time I feel us as a we-body, like that there is a felt connection. So I practice the contemplative listening to the we-space, to us as a course. Then, at the same time, I am able to read what my mind can grasp. I think that's the other thing, to practice both at the same time.

William: I'm wondering if we could just adjust the exercise a little bit and ask, I know this is not easy, but ask the participants to put down in one word, just one single word, sum up in one word, what for you is the root of conflict, in just one word, just to see what that would show up. If you had to subsume your comment in one word of what is the root of conflict, in a single word, what it would be. Then, I feel like somehow that would concentrate us all, and we could start to... could listen to the patterns more easily with one word.

There we go. Yeah.

Disconnection. Stress. Fear. Distrust. Separation. Shame. Egoism. Need. Greed. Not seeing. Constriction. That gives me a good sense. Not being loved. Inequality. Resistance. Impatience. Inequality. Disconnection. Separation. Injustice. Distrust.

[01:15:00]

It starts to populate. Beautiful. If I could just ask one more question that you could put in one word, which is, for you, as you kind of reflect on what we've learned in the course, if there's one lesson for hosting, how to host conflict, one lesson that you've learned that actually deals with the root of conflict, one word. Like for me, as I mentioned, it might be listening. What would it be for you? What's one lesson and one word that addresses the root of conflict, that allows us to host conflict more effectively?

Space. Love. Trust. Love comes up a lot. Caring. Presence. Dancing. Empathy. Compassion. Inner relaxation. Balcony. Inner room. Witnessing. Humor. Awareness. Non-reactivity. Allowing. Breathing. Bowing. Receptivity. Opportunity. Intuition. Connection. Compassion. Space. Spaciousness. To be seen and heard. Listening and respecting. Love. Hope. It's beautiful.

Thomas: That's good. Also, that was lovely with one word. Then, I think, what's also lovely is to feel the difference between the words or the qualities that have been described as creating conflict and the part that you ask, resolving conflict, in one word, what's the difference within my experience when I listen to both? How do I feel when I read only one column of words? How do I feel...

We will post this. I want to extract this. I want to post this somewhere that we can all get the experience. Then, to see how hosting we are, because there are many—love, openness, inner space, humor—there are many qualities that describe, in a way, what we need in order to embrace the root causes of conflict. I think that's a very lovely exercise. Even if we look at love, love doesn't happen where we already love each other. Love happens where we include something or we embrace something that was difficult for us to embrace. So that's where love gets expanded. The other part is already a consequence of love. That's already life... that's the consequence of life having embraced itself already. I think, I will try if we on the team can extract the words, and then we will post them so that we have kind of a social contemplation. I think it's going to be interesting how much, of course, we feel at home in the resources that we saw, but also how much we can apply the resources to embrace the other parts that we have seen.

I think that's an interesting homework, or something for us to contemplate on, and, maybe, that we refer to this in the next session.

Q&A: Compassionate Engagement as a Path to Authentic Harmony

Host: Just a few questions for you guys. The first one had to do with, Thomas, what you alluded to about the distinction between real feedback and feedback that's tempered by the need to kind of create a false harmony, or to avoid conflict, and what the cost is to that in terms of actually creating a kind of backlog of conflict that goes unaddressed and unwatched, and starts to build up, in not just interpersonal relationships, but perhaps even in geopolitical relationships, when we're going for a kind of false harmony rather than the ability to meet each other in precision. I've wondered if either or both of you could comment on how you see that, and what any of us can do to get past that kind of conflict aversion when actually productive conflict would be worth engaging.

[01:20:00]

Thomas: Right. I mean, you said it already. I think, for us, I believe, unconscious tendencies are either being reinforced by the we-space, or the societal body, or they are basically illuminated and rewritten. I believe, for every one of us, to live a life that is a continuous exploration to clarify one's internal environment, because my internal architecture is the basis for how I will engage with the world, and is also the basis for what I can see and perceive in the world. So where my shadows and my traumatization is active, I have a reduced version of the world in me. So what appears in me is a reduced version of the world.

I believe, in a healthy environment, we more and more feel really seen. But really seen means also that my resources are being seen, so my resources are being activated in order to support me to deal with the parts in myself that I find difficult, so that I can learn to integrate more and more of who I am, the complexity of who I am, into myself.

My sense is we all know how it feels to feel really seen by somebody, how deep that goes, and how deep it's opening our heart, how deep it generates a feeling of love and connectedness and interconnectedness, and also how it feels when we are really seen, but when what we hear is not always pleasant. But if that comes from a separated place that is reactive—and I think that's the important part because William's deep listening is a very important part—does a clear feedback come from a spacious connected place, or does it come from a hidden kind of reactive place?

That's why I'm saying, I think if we create a society that is more and more interested in the exploration, so we will also clarify our social body more and more and create healthy, authentic, and real relations, so then I'm not just interested in hearing things about myself that are pleasant and that I want to hear, but I am also interested to get reflections about myself, about my shadow landscapes, and the parts that I don't see, and how important it is to have some relationships in our life where we know that we get authentic reflections.

I think that's, for me, to establish this in my life is part of my responsibility, because that's where I literally expand my world. That's where literally love is growing and presence is growing. I think that's a blessing.

William: I would just add to that. I understand that siren song of harmony that might lead us to false harmony or premature harmony, and we would miss out on the opportunity to actually engage, which allows us to grow. That's why earlier in the course, I was emphasizing rescuing the power of the word no, because no is that uncomfortable word that shatters harmony, that breaks harmony, at least temporarily, so that we can have a higher harmony, a more integrated harmony that's more based on truth.

To me, the purpose of this exploration in the course is to actually learn to engage in the opposite of avoidance, which is what leads to false harmony, and the opposite of avoidance, of course, is engagement. The trouble with... We've learned that engagement sometimes leads to destruction. We're afraid of engagement because we're afraid it's going to strain the relationship. It's going to strain the harmony. It's going to lead to destruction. So the key adjective we're aspiring for in this course is aware engagement, conscious engagement, loving engagement.

The question we're asking is—compassionate engagement—how do we go deeper, deeper into the conflict? How do we surface more conflicts?

To me, one of the beautiful things about the “Me Too” movement that is sweeping the world right now is it's surfacing conflict. We need to surface conflict. These things were buried. We need to surface injustice. We need more conflict. We need more surfacing. In order to do that, we need that embrace. We need to practice these arts. We need to learn these arts of aware, conscious, compassionate, loving, engagement, so that we can actually surface more, because there's so much suppressed injustice, suppressed trauma that we don't have the capacity to deal with without going into very destructive modalities. To me, that's the opportunity here is not some premature harmony, but a higher harmony that comes after struggle, conflict.

I think for those—and I'll start with myself—for those of us who are drawn in mediation, drawn to meditation, we have a bias for harmony. So this is a particular trap that we can all fall into when the real engagement is into engagement at a higher level that can bring the kind of genuine peace that the world needs, that we need, inside of ourselves and outside.

Q&A: Bowing to a Higher Context; Owing Our Contribution to Injustice

Host: The next question I have also harkens back to an earlier part of your dialogue where you were talking about, on the one hand, looking starkly at disproportionate allocation of resources in the world, or real places of poverty and hunger, of true scarcity on this plane of experience, versus the mystical resource of knowing there's divine intelligence, that life is for you, and being able to trust in the benevolence of the universe.

I wondered if you could both speak a little about the dual planes of consciousness you're pointing to, and how to see our own natural arising of compassion in the face of suffering as part of also part of divine intelligence being the repair to address that, but there were a number of comments about, as an activist looking at the suffering of the world, how do you also not get contracted in scarcity but really hold an understanding of the resource, as you were saying, Thomas, to notice and invoke and be a part of the resource of response.

Thomas: First of all, I think very important is that we see, that we create a healthy understanding, in ourselves, of the Divine. When we say a life that becomes more and more equal with the force of the Divine, it means that we are becoming more and more equal to the creative impulse of the universe. Creativity in itself is kind of generating energy. When I lead a life to come closer and closer to the inherent creative impulse of life, so then I'll more and more generate more. So I'm literally becoming a well in life, because the resource is the creative impulse that creates the universe. That's abundant energy.

On the one hand, the spiritual practice is kind of a very deep resource in life to be more and more energized, to be more and more receptive to inner creativity, authentic inner intelligence, and how we create life, and how we are allowing, again, a blessing, so that there's a higher context to my life. I am not running my life alone. There's a higher context that I bow down to. I think that's very important.

But on the other hand, I think a serious exploration—how I am part of the inequality in the world and how much I contribute to a world that is different—is equally important, because there's a portion of spiritual seekers that, in a way, try to invite more and more light, blessing, and presence but not really look at how we in our life participate in the inequality and how we co-create it, maybe, also. I think that real exploration that might surface uncomfortable parts or our parts where we, by ourselves, look away and participate in unconscious dynamics in the world—that's very important. That's something that nobody will do for us. That's something that we need to sign up, each and every one of us, if we want it, by ourselves. That's a kind of a self-exploration that needs to be self-motivated.

[01:30:00]

I think if we see how we create imbalances in the world, and we don't wait for somebody to rescue us, but that a deeper and deeper connectedness with the creative impulse surfaces and sparks and fuels my creativity to contribute to the world, I think then I'm not bypassing the difficulties of the world but then I explore, I see how I participate, and how I grow beyond and transcend, in a way, the world as we see it into a better world, through my life. I think that's walking through my own kind of spiritual restoration, and then participating in a collective spiritual restoration. Yeah. Maybe, I don't know if there's anything ...

William: Yeah. I will just add quickly because I agree with that wholeheartedly. There's a razor's edge there of holding both truths in your heart and really looking into the injustice, into the ugliness, into the evil, into the suffering. I mean, this is what, I mean, our hope for this course was for us to train ourselves as Shambhala warriors to have the courage to go into the heart of it. As Thomas says, understanding the evils in us as well. At least we're all co-responsible for—as we mentioned, Korea is us. It's here in our hearts. The poverty, the injustice, the inequality of the world is here.

Being able to go into it at the same time as have maintained that perspective on the balcony, drawing on compassion, drawing on love, and so living in the world of scarcity, material scarcity, and spiritual abundance at the same time, that razor's edge, that's the razor's edge that the Shambhala warrior dances on.

Q&A: Surfacing Injustice Through the Way of Power Married with Love

Participant: Yeah, I did have my hand up. I had my hand up in response to the earlier discussion of scarcity, because as you talked about scarcity, it reminded me of the experience of living as an African-American in America, because we are required to live our lives almost completely in scarcity. It starts very early. I would guess you realize that you're going to have to live your life that way when you get to your early teen years, and it's clear that you're not going to be able to fully benefit from what it means to be a human being.

I think, once you have that realization, you dissociate into two completely different personas. One persona is that of the hoped-for humanity, and you sort of put that into the back of your mind and you hold it in abeyance until those rare occasions come up when you have an opportunity to express it. Then, there is the practical persona that you exercise substantially all of the time. That's a defensive persona, going through life with a defensive perspective of how do you protect yourself from all of the things that are arrayed against you, all of the laws, all of the social behaviors, all of the deficiencies in the educational system, the health system, all of the municipal bureaus you have to deal with, your interactions with the police, and all of that.

So you are reduced to a life of defensiveness and scarcity. It's a life that is a great challenge to move through. It is the beauty of America that, despite all of that, we could have experienced for eight years an African-American president, but that did not change the experience for substantially all of the African-Americans who live here. So I think that's a great example of the scarcity that Thomas was talking about.

[01:35:00]

Thomas: Yes. I agree with you. I agree with you. I'm very happy that you—I need to look down here because I see you down here—I am very happy that you come online. I am happy that you shared what you shared. I very much resonate with you. I think that's definitely something that we have to kind of embrace in our time, but also that's what I meant last time, that I believe our world is full of scars. I think the huge scar kind of in our world, I think that needs to be addressed on a much bigger scale of understanding how trauma has been passed on for generations and generations. That's a very serious exploration that's needed here.

I think, for this, that's exactly why we also, for example, formed the Pocket Project, and why we said, okay, let's explore those scars around the world and find ways how we can build tools and kind of containers that we can have exactly that conversation on a very deep level and see what is needed to grow beyond. I think that what you raise is a serious and very, very important conversation, but it's not only a conversation, it's a deep process exploration, I think, that we need in order to heal, to create a different society that outgrows what you mentioned.

I am, with my heart, very much with you. That's definitely one of the big questions, I think, we have to attend to, to listen to, and to deeply engage in order to create a change in our world. I am very much with you.

William: Thank you, too, Rich. I mean, it's a beautiful example of scars that are on the... scars in the heart of humanity, really, that emerge from racism, from violating the dignity of whole groups, classes of human beings on this planet. That it's an example of scars that are often, they're not fully visible. This is why I think we're called to really surface. I really appreciate you adding your voice here because it calls our attention to surface to how much even invisible indignity that no human being should live through is there that needs to come to the light and needs to be engaged, needs to be struggled with, there needs to be more conflict.

That's why, to me, the need is not less conflict, it's more conflict. It's because those kinds of scars are surfaced through engagement, through conflict in the question. This was one of the great lessons I've learned from people like Martin Luther King and Gandhi who were pioneers in how do we surface injustice, but surface injustice through the way of love, through the way of power married with love. How do we unite those two? I truly appreciate your reminding us of that.

Thomas: I want to say something more. It touches me that we are having this conversation, because I think exactly in environments like here, when we create a safe environment to have that kind of conversation and integration process, I think we are the ones that are developing tools how to do what William says. Like, how do we create a process that is infused with love and compassion and presence—and the right amount of clarity, not a dissociated clarity or a defensive clarity?

[01:40:00]

I think that's something that we need to develop because the wounds in us, how do we have a practice where we can all work together to have this dialogue on a much, much bigger scale. I think that this is kind of a think tank and an exploration and a mutual learning, how we develop the best tools that we walk this path that William mentioned. So I'm very happy that you spoke and we talk about the deep need to really attend with open eyes to the big scars that humanity has.

I often tend to say we are looking at this planet from outer space, and it looks so lovely and blue and beautiful, which it also is, definitely, but I believe the deeper reality of the planet is that it has big scars. I think you spoke to one very important one.

Host: *Rich, just to echo what Thomas said, many people have been writing and appreciating very much what you spoke, and the heart with which you spoke it. Thank you for coming on.*

Participant: You fellows will be glad to hear that I have developed a solution to the problem that I spoke to, which I have been working on for 50 years, intensely for the last 10 years. I do have a solution. I have created a six-lesson class which will be in beta in a week or so. The beta will conclude in the first week in April. After that, I will be taking that solution to the world. So I do have a solution. I am at a point where I can say to all of the European-Americans wherever they might be, I forgive you.

William: Thank you. Thank you, Rich. Look forward to seeing your solution.

Thomas: Many things have been said today. I would love to invite all of us to look at the flow of words, and to contemplate like an inner sculpture of the social body. I would love to not only contemplate this rationally, but to contemplate, to read this with the whole body, and to see how the different streams that we created relate to our interior worlds and to our inner sculptures so that every situation speaks to kind of an inner state or inner makeup, or inner sculpture.

I believe, when we contemplate such social collections, so we get a chance to resonate deeper in us with those qualities. Not to forget that I am convinced that our body is not just our body in this lifetime, but that our body is a very sophisticated bio-computer that has been developed over hundreds and thousands or millions of years, and that there are very deep forces connected to many of the words that have been written here, and that I believe we are living in a time where we have the chance to rewrite certain imprints of evolution in us and to stop certain recurrent cycles.

But I believe, in order to rewrite the book of life, we need to be very present and conscious of the book of life, not to be part of its recreation. That principle is, I think, a very deep principle of the deep spiritual or mystical practice. I believe, when I look before to the flow of words that I saw, it speaks to very deep forces in us, and we also brought in the resources and the mutual, whatever, contemplation can help us. But I think it's a demanding journey to transcend certain patterns that have been developed and grown over hundreds and thousands of years. I think that's a very interesting experiment. Yeah. Over to you, William. William: Yeah. It's a very rich session. I really appreciated your leading us on a long and deep meditation into the roots of conflict. I'm struck by the word scarcity, and it's... scarcity is scar-city. It's like a city of scars. It's so much related to trauma. There are so many scars to be healed in the human heart, collective and individual. We started off this course with a question of how can humanity heal itself, is the question we're sitting with. How can we heal the scars?

Because it's like we're at this particular moment in the story of humanity where it's very unusual, if you think about it, it's like for the first time—speaking as an anthropologist, for a moment—of... We came out of Africa as a species. We came out of Africa. Our ancestors are all Africans. We came and inhabited this planet, and there was all this separation, separation. We're in this time of this incredible revolution of technology of communication that allows us to communicate like we're doing this precise instant.

So we're living in a time that, I think, future anthropologists might look back and say this was a time of the human family reunion, the time when all the different tribes on the planet—and there are more than 15,000 language groups on the planet—were coming together. And like many family reunions, it's not all peace and light. There's a lot of resentment and anger and fear and injustice and inequity and racism and separatism. The question is, in this family reunion, how can we learn to heal our scars? How can we learn to come together? How can we learn to learn that, in fact, separation is an illusion, that actually there's only one humanity, there are not two humanities? There's only one of us, and we're all part of it. The question is, how can we learn to treat each other with dignity and share this, share and live together?

We're looking at what is the breed of warriors—because all of you, all of us, we're in this particular moment, and we're feeling called to engage, to not hide, to not go for false harmony and just have a nice family party, but to engage with the deepest traumas and to see what can be done to heal.

I think, somehow it begins with that place of spacious meditation that I like to call the balcony. Then, from there, having tended to something inside of ourselves, we're then much better able to listen to the other, to see the other, to respect the other. By respect, I don't mean approve, I mean to respect the dignity of every human being. That's what I mean by respect. I mean that respect that is every human being's birthright.

By listening and respecting, seeing the human being there, then what kind of actions can emerge, including mediation? What kind of compassionate actions that can actually heal the planet? So I feel we're deep into the question, we're deep into sitting with the question. I can feel the juiciness of this, and just enjoying it and feeling like there's a field being created that I hope will continue long past this course. Thank you.