

## Daily Meditation 3-2-26

### Kaira Jewel: The Role of Community in Practicing Resistance & Compassion

Good morning.

It is our pleasure today to call in the wisdom of Kaira Jewel, in her very fine essay called “Compassion as Protection: Practicing with Those Who Cause Harm.” Let me just touch on a few of the points that leap out to me in our essay, and then get into some more material from Kaira Jewel and from her book, *We Were Made for These Times*.

I like how she says that “the question of how we do compassion for those who do us harm, is not a philosophical question. It is lived and embodied and awe,” she says. Dealing with our ancestral grief, with the very real dangers we face today, experiences of ICE and inequality, and certainly climate change and the rest. But in her experience at Plum Village as a nun in Thich Nhat Hanh’s community, they learned that compassion is the best protection. That does not mean being naive or passive or self-sacrificing, or in the words of Lama Tsomo, “there is such a thing as idiot compassion.” And certainly Kaira Jewel is not talking about that. Instead, she says, “It asks us to be wise, embodied and rooted in reality. When we begin to return to our bodies and allow ourselves to feel what has been unfelt, something shifts.”

So going deeper into our deepest experiences, going into the Via Negativa, going into our grief, all that is very bodily. We carry our grief in our bodies, and there’s so much truth to come out there. So often we’re spending so much time and energy keeping the truth down, and ourselves distant from the truth, the darkness of things. And she says, “This is why taking refuge in community matters so deeply. We are not meant to hold this alone.” So in community, the shared humanity and the shared grief has a place, a space to be acknowledged.

“Community,” she says, “helps us metabolize grief, anger and fear, so they do not harden into hatred.” So remember what Erich Fromm says, that “All Fascism is based on self-hatred.” It comes into being because we are unable to make touch, metabolize that deep grief and anger. Remember, anger is the first stage of grief, and fear that, as Kaira Jewel says, can morph into hatred. And that compulsion of fascism to control, to make controlling our “god,” is an effort, then, to remain out of touch with that which is darkest in our society or darkest in our time or darkest in ourselves.

So she says, “If you are feeling raw and weary and unsure, know that you are not failing in your practice. This IS the practice.” That is, getting in touch with the Via Negativa and with the pain. “Compassion grows slowly, especially in hard soil.”

I’d like to share with you a few of her teachings that are so useful in this book. The title I love, the title itself is so meaningful. *We Were Made for These Times*. And this book came out a few years ago, before 2021, and so before some of the realities we’re facing today, in terms of ICE and the explosion of authoritarianism and fascism in America and in many other parts of the world. But just to pause on this title, *We Were Made for These Times*, I think that very title is ennobling and enabling, because it’s telling us not to be afraid, telling us that we have what it takes to face the chaos and the meanness and the cynicism that is emerging. And even the cruelty. We have the strength within us to stand up to it, to resist. And her subtitle to the book *We Were Made for These Times*, is “10 Lessons for Moving through Change, Loss and Disruption.”

And this is a very practical book. Each of these chapters, the 10 lessons, is a meditation practice that allows one to endure, and more than endure, to resist, in a positive way, the forces of culture or personalities that are pressing down upon us. And again, the ultimate appeal that she lays out in today's essay about resisting with community, that community is the refuge. This is very important again, that we’re not alone. And she says WE were made for these times. She didn’t say, I am made for these times. It’s together: that we are made for these times -- that we strengthen one another for the endurance and the imagination and the creativity it takes to stand up and make a difference.

So I’d like to begin with a quote, a poem that she offers at page 1, from Amanda Gorman, a poem called “The Hill We Climb.” So this is really the opening words for the preface, and of her book.

*This is the era of just redemption. We feared at its inception. We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour. But within it, we found the power: to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves. So while once we asked, how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe, now we assert, how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?*

So I love this opening to the book, because it is a statement about courage and strength, inner strength, that we can move from pitying ourselves with the possibility of catastrophe prevailing, to moving into our actions and responsibilities. Catastrophe not prevail over us, so we are empowered to do something about it. And she offers such practices here. We don’t have a lot of time to go into them.

But one point she makes, which is very parallel to my point about being camels who drink up the joy of life at the pool of the Via Positiva, the beauties of life and so forth, and carry that like a camel does across the desert in the darkness. So she has a chapter called “Nurturing the Good.”

*We may believe that in order to be happy, our suffering has to disappear completely, that they can't coexist. In my experience, she writes, even though I may be struggling in a time of transition or adversity, I can still be in touch with what is wholesome and good in me and around me. In fact, this is a moment I need it the most. Nurturing the good is crucial to our well being and resilience in the face of change and tumult.*

She cites Toni Morrison, who writes, “At some point in life, the world's beauty becomes enough.” At some point in life, the world's beauty becomes enough. And she cites Albert Camus: “In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was within me an invincible summer.” That there is that memory of Original Blessing, of the great gift it is to be here in this universe of 14 billion years, of gestating the good and the beautiful.

Another practice she offers is to remember the five lessons, five remembrances. These are from the Buddha, that *we are of the nature to grow old and to have ill health and to die, that our loved ones are of the nature to change. We cannot avoid being separated from them. And lastly, that our actions are our only true possessions. We don't get to take anything else with us when we pass away, except our actions.*

The primary action is that return to the One, a return to the love that generates all of our existence, and that of the entire community -- that is, the universe.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.