**Catastrophe**

Today I would like to offer a few thoughts about relating to the catastrophe that is unfolding in our nation. I’m speaking, of course, about the turn toward oligarchy and authoritarianism that is underway. I use the word “catastrophe” deliberately: it comes from a Greek word that means “to overturn,” and that is indeed what is happening.

One of the architects of this catastrophe forthrightly stated that it is necessary for Americans to feel traumatized by the assault on our institutions. He was specifically referring to using trauma as a strategy with the federal workforce, but I think it is fair to say that many of us have felt (and feel) traumatized by the upheaval, chaos, unpredictability, and most of all the unbridled cruelty of what is taking place. Even if we ourselves are not direct victims of the changes that are taking place, many of us feel a sense of moral injury as we witness the remarkable greed and cruelty at the heart of these changes. Many of us are hobbled by fear of what will happen next and to whom it will happen. Much of what is under assault is what I call institutions and systems of caring: the various mechanisms by which we as a nation contribute to humanitarian aid around the world, educate our children, advance health care, and take care of the vulnerable. It is understandable and appropriate to feel the pain of their loss and diminishment.

As people dedicated to the practice of metta, I believe that we have to face the full extent of the harm that is being done to ourselves and to others. To face the harm is to face the fear and grief of losing things we did not even know we valued. To face the harm and grief is to begin to repair them. Facing our grief and fear frees up space within us for appropriate, life-giving responses to emerge.

When space begins to open up—when we can move beyond a defensive, constricted orientation toward the world—it becomes possible to realize that harm is not the only thing that is occurring. I’m not referring here to the hopeful signs that we occasionally see in the political and judicial realms, but to the unfolding story that we cannot yet see–much like we cannot yet see the microscopic shoots of new forest that are coming to life even as the raging fire is destroying the old.

An important part of our spiritual journey is cultivating confidence in this unfolding story and knowing that we have a part in writing it, not necessarily by heroic acts but by virtue of living our practice in our everyday interactions. As I played with the word “catastrophe”—an overturning–I was struck by its similarity to the phrase “The Great Turning,” a term coined by Joanna Macy and others that refers to a paradigm shift towards a more sustainable and just society. It emphasizes the need for a fundamental change in our relationships with the planet and each other. It’s a transformational shift that prioritizes community, well-being and ecological balance over profit. In my view, it is the equivalent of the new forest’s microscopic shoots emerging in the midst of fire.

Perhaps it is utterly absurd for me to suggest that our present catastrophe contains the seeds of such a paradigm shift. I hold it out for your consideration this morning not to try to soothe us into the simplistic conclusion that “all will be well,” but to underscore the truth that how we respond to this moment matters. Acknowledging our suffering is the first step. As Joanna Macy said, “This is a dark time, filled with suffering and uncertainty. Like living cells in a larger body, it is natural that we feel the trauma of our world. So don’t be afraid of the anguish you feel, or the anger or fear, because these responses arise from the depth of your caring and the truth of your interconnection with all beings.”

May we respond with unconditional metta for all beings in all circumstances of our lives. May our political, racial, social, economic, and all other differences not be barriers to good will. May we be unafraid. May we demonstrate renewed appreciation for the inherent dignity of every being.

I invite you to generate and express good will and lovingkindness toward yourself, toward someone it is easy to you to appreciate, someone with whom you have difficulty, and all beings without exception. If you wish, you can draw on our core intentions:

May I/you be happy and content

May I/you be free from harm and ill will

May I/you be healthy

May I/you live with ease, free from fear and anxiety