

Responding to Difficult Situations

**Dharma Talk at ABC Home
September 2016**

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illustration by Brother Phap Ban

Dear Thay, Dear friends, Dear Sangha,

Walking from the bus to ABC Home in New York City this morning, the streets felt different. Barriers were up, and many cars weren't around. While I knew it was Sunday morning and this explained the absence of cars, the energy felt very soft and tender. I stopped to rearrange my backpack and asked someone why all the barriers were up. He said two bombings happened last night. I was so grateful I was on my way to our Day of Mindfulness, after hearing this news.

We are today [at ABC Home] in mindfulness, doing exactly what's needed, but particularly when we're experiencing the effects of this kind of harm and brutality. When we practiced walking meditation earlier today, I felt we were creating a force field together. It was the kind of food I needed, and it nourished me. It was like drinking up a sense of calmness; we held space for each other through our peaceful steps on the earth, our quietude, and our open acceptance of one another.

We talk about the Sangha, or the spiritual community of practice, as a place of refuge. The Sangha becomes a welcoming boat where we can come and be safe. We have created the container so we can settle down and replenish ourselves. With each mindful breath and step, the container becomes stronger. We are building a force field whose seeds of presence, of being available to ourselves and each other, don't end when we leave here. The energy we are forming together affects this whole city, planet, universe.

We had a writing exercise to reflect on what love in action looks like. This love looks to me exactly like what we're doing right now—showing up and settling in. Only when we've grounded

ourselves can we appropriately address the injustice and violence around us. This day of exploring, where spirit and action meet, provides us with an opportunity to begin the process by stopping and turning within. I know I need help to do this for myself. I can come to a deeper place of rest in myself when I am with others who're sharing this process.

I want to offer you questions I've been pondering. These may resonate for activists and anyone else who engages with suffering at home and in our world:

- How can we sustain a culture of self-reflection in our activism and our work for change?
- How can we organize around a cause while remaining open to its constantly changing nature?
- How can we nurture ourselves so we avoid burnout?
- How can we avoid reinforcing the very systems of oppression we are working to change?
- How can we remain true to our deepest aspirations and intention?

Mindfulness helps us envision the change we wish to create. Part of mindfulness, part of holding ourselves with care in the work we do, includes being aware of our limits. A large number of us are on the brink of being overwhelmed—if we're not already completely overwhelmed. I joked with a friend the other day that my email swamps me. Often when I check it, I think, "I can't keep up with this pace." It feels like the world is spinning faster and