

angel kyodo williams — The World Is Our Field of Practice

Author: Angel Kyodo Williams

Krista Tippett, host: angel kyodo williams is one of our wisest voices on social evolution and the spiritual aspect of social healing. And for those of us who are not monastics, she says, the world is our field of practice. She's an esteemed Zen priest and the second black woman ever recognized as a teacher in the Japanese Zen lineage. To sink into conversation with her is to imagine and experience a transformative potential of this moment towards human wholeness.

angel kyodo williams: There is something dying in our society, in our culture, and there's something dying in us individually. And what is dying, I think, is the willingness to be in denial. And that is extraordinary. It's always been happening, and when it happens in enough of us, in a short enough period of time at the same time, then you have a tipping point, and the culture begins to shift. And then, what I feel like people are at now is, "No, no, bring it on. I have to face it — we have to face it."

Ms. Tippett: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is *On Being*.

[music: "Seven League Boots" by Zoë Keating]

Ms. Tippett: Reverend angel kyodo williams is founder of the Center for Transformative Change.

So I'd like to start by asking this question I always ask, in some form, about the religious or spiritual background of someone's childhood. What I think is interesting about it is that on any given day in our lives, I think we might tell that story differently. And also, what I was thinking about as I was preparing to speak with you is that the spiritual background of your childhood and the religious background of your childhood can be two completely distinct things. So really, I'm very open to wherever you would feel like starting to reflect on that today.

Rev. williams: I would say that I had no religious life as a child except — the life which I would call my spiritual life was a relationship, particularly with Jesus Christ, through a huge King James version of the bible, a white one with gold edges on the paper. And I had a very distinct relationship with Jesus and a kind of affinity for, I guess, what I would now say is his suffering, but no belief. Religion was something that, for me, was — it just seemed like a thing that people functioned inside of for this very limited period of time. And they seemed very concerned [laughs] with how they appeared inside of those religious contexts, but outside of them, they were entirely different. They could be anyone, doing anything. And so I was quite sensitive to that, the disparity, the real disconnect that I saw between who people were in their religious permutations and who they — in my mind, who they really were, how they really were.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, that's very — I think that speaks to, also, what kind of child you were:

You're perceptive; that what you were observing — the level at which you were observing. And also, it seems that you were part of queer culture that was emergent — that seems to me that was just coming to have the nuance, really, that the word is holding fully now — early on. And you've said that that experience as much as anything else paved your way to the dharma. Say something about that.

Rev. williams: Yes. We were at the — so “queer” was still a bad word as I grew up. It was a word that was taunting. And so we were right at that moment in which we were choosing to reclaim our sense of identity, including the language that was meant to turn on us. And so “queerness” actually opened the doorway to all of us being able to explore our identities. And living in the dichotomy that operated as — either you were heterosexual, or you were this other fixed thing, but there wasn't anything in between, and so what we now understand as a much more expansive spectrum of sexual expression, orientation, presentation, performance, was opening with that language of queerness.

And for me, I think, that gave me a language and a lens — because it was happening at the same time — through which to turn the dharma over, turn my Buddhist practice over and over so that it didn't exist for me as a “not-this,” meaning, it was just not-Christianity, it was not-the-Baptist-church that I was trying to get away — it wasn't solely that. It was all of these other possibilities and permutations that lived on a much wider spectrum than, I think, many of us that have grown up very firmly in some kind of a religious orientation, then we move or convert to Buddhism, and it becomes a new fixation; it becomes a new “I am this, now.” “I am not heterosexual; I am lesbian. I am not Jewish; I am now Buddhist.” And I lived in a fascinating and wonderful and I-would-never-trade-it time that said, there are spectrums, there are permutations, there are aspects of me that I can continue to claim that are clearly of their Christian background and Baptist upbringing, my Episcopalian time. I can claim all of it, and it doesn't have to diminish any other aspect of my identity. Queerness gave me the language for everything I know about liberation and freedom.

Ms. Tippett: And there's something in what you just described and the way you described it that points at your voice in this moment we now inhabit culturally. I'm very taken with this book that you wrote, actually in 2016, *Radical Dharma*, which I think was a prescient book. It's very much about what we're living through, but you wrote it in the middle of that election year, before that was all done; looking at, as you said then — and I don't — I think there's a clarity about this now that there wasn't then, about this increasing collective anxiety about transitioning from the first black U.S. president. So, focusing on that human anxiety that was there and was going to be there, whoever had won the election, you make this statement that I find so compelling and stark. And this — I just want to delve into this with you. You say: “We cannot have a healed society, we cannot have change, we cannot have justice, if we do not reclaim and repair the human spirit,” if we don't do inner work, as you say in another place, that has been underemphasized. That we have not trained ourselves to do the work that is upon us now.

Rev. williams: No, we haven't. We haven't; and we haven't, for good reason, from a particular perspective. To do our work, to come into deep knowing of who we are — that's the stuff that bringing down systems of oppression is made of. And so capitalism in its current form couldn't survive. Patriarchy couldn't survive. White supremacy couldn't survive if enough of us set about the work of reclaiming the human spirit, which includes reclaiming the sense of humanity of the people that are the current vehicles for those very forms of oppression.

Ms. Tippett: Right. That's such a huge statement.

Rev. williams: It's hard. *[laughs]* People always look at me in this slightly hopeful — and furtive — way.

Ms. Tippett: Right. So let's talk about that for an hour. *[laughs]* Also, you have lived inside this dynamic — obviously, you are also a product of this culture, and you speak very openly about having your angry activist phase — which was more than a phase, and a very important, formative part of your life, which is also a formative part of our cultural life and of our cultural impulse to feel discomfort and leap to change and want to leap over that inner work, where anger and healing and these things actually reside.

Rev. williams: It's funny — I was just speaking about that to a friend as I was on the way to have this conversation — that there is this place of vulnerability from which truly transformative action must come from is what I have discovered and wrapped my whole language and view around, is that we can take action, and we can take very skillful action. Don't get me wrong in any way — there's an enormous amount of advocacy being done, very hard choices that people are making, to put themselves on the front lines. But without this particular place and location of a willingness to be flexible, open, soft-bellied enough to be moved by the truth of the other in whatever given situation, then it is not transformative. It's change, maybe; it can be moved backwards again, as we can see — the stroke of a pen.

But for us to transform as a society, we have to allow ourselves to be transformed as individuals. And for us to be transformed as individuals, we have to allow for the incompleteness of any of our truths and a real forgiveness for the complexity of human beings and what we're trapped inside of, so that we're both able to respond to the oppression, the aggression that we're confronted with, but we're able to do that with a deep and abiding sense of “and there are people, human beings, that are at the other end of that baton, that stick, that policy, that are also trapped in something. They're also trapped in a suffering.” And for sure, we can witness that there are ways in which they're benefiting from it, but there's also ways, if one trusts the human heart, that they must be suffering. And holding that at the core of who you are when responding to things, I think, is the way — the only way we really have forward; to not just replicate systems of oppression for the sake of our own cause.

Ms. Tippett: That kind of discernment is also about knowing ourselves — uncomfortably knowing ourselves.

Rev. williams: Well, I think it's actually uncomfortably un-knowing ourselves. *[laughs]* It is this willingness to keep being willing to come undone — to do what we can to understand the world around us and how we operate and what is impacting who we are and how we are, and to allow that to keep coming undone. That's what I think is really the paradox in what is possible, from a liberatory standpoint, is to recognize, oh, we're not trying to become something, we're trying to un-become. We're trying to undo ourselves.

And that is really what is most challenging for us, because we want to be known to ourselves. We want to be known to others. But the moment we try to do that, we're actually fixating in a way that traps us, so we feel both safe, but it's also confining.

[music: “Clear My Head” by Joel P West]

Ms. Tippett: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is *On Being*. Today, with Zen priest and social visionary, angel Kyodo williams.

[music: "Clear My Head" by Joel P West]

Ms. Tippett: One of the words you used, when you were writing in 2016 about what this moment requires of us, is that it calls for "pause." And you come from a tradition, a spiritual tradition, which has sitting at its core — "So we sit, and we feel" — I want you to unfold that a little bit, because this thing we're talking about, it's so countercultural; it can so easily sound like this is about not being relevant and not attending to what is urgent. But sitting, as you — and what happens in sitting and in pausing is not about not acting. [laughs] It's a different move, so just take us inside that.

Rev. williams: Yeah, I love that — "It's a different move." There is so much momentum to every aspect of what drives us, what moves us, what has us hurtling through space, including all of our thoughts and even our own sense of our emotions; how we interpret any given feeling, any experience of discomfort; where that discomfort sits in our bodies. It's not just that we have a feeling of pain or awkwardness. It's that we then interpret that.

And those interpretations — much to our chagrin, we come to understand through a process of observing them — are not clean, or not free of all of the things that are impacting us outside. And so even our sense of what pains us and what makes us feel shame, feel guilt, feel awkwardness, feel put-upon by people, feel disempowered, has to do with the external information and cues that we have received. And they're moving at an incredible rate of speed. And, for the most part, we almost never get the opportunity to observe them and sort through them — kind of like that drawer that collects everything in your house.

Ms. Tippett: I have a few of those.

Rev. williams: Yeah, where you say, "Oh, but wait a minute, someone lived in this house before me," in essence. "And some of that stuff is not mine. Actually, this is not mine. That's my mom's. This is not mine; that's the inheritance of white supremacy," or, "That's the inheritance of generations of oppression and marginalization that subjects me to habitually feeling less-than, even if the current situation has no intent to make me feel that way." And we have no real way of being able to discern what is mine, what is yours, what are we holding collectively, what have I inherited, what have I taken on as a measure of protection, of a way to cope at some point in my life or past lives, that I no longer need?

And sitting lets us begin to do that. It doesn't do it right away, because what we first are confronted with is just the assault of the amount of thoughts and the mixed messages that just inhabit our body and our mind and our experience on an ongoing basis — that when we sit, the first thing we're met with is not quiet or calm or peace. The first thing we're met with is, "Oh, my God. Who is in here, and why won't they shut up? How do I get them to stop?" And not only is something and someone and everyone speaking to me, it's mixed messages. Things don't agree with each other. I don't agree with my own truth. I'm having arguments in here that are not my arguments, they are someone else's arguments. They're my parents' arguments. Sitting lets us just, first of all, recognize that we are this massive collection of thoughts and experiences and sensations that are moving at the speed of light and that we never get a chance to just be still and pause and look at them, just for what they are, and then slowly to sort out our own voice from the rest of the thoughts, emotions, the

interpretations, the habits, the momentums that are just trying to overwhelm us at any given moment.

And when I say “trying to overwhelm us,” that’s really a key thing to understand, because that means that there’s an “us.” There’s a core and deep and abiding “us” that is being overwhelmed by something that’s actually not us. And when we become aware of it, we’re like: “Oh, I actually have some choice here.”

[music: “Into the Dust of the Earth” by Brethren of the Free Spirit]

Ms. Tippett: You can listen again and share this conversation with Rev. angel Kyodo williams through our website, onbeing.org.

I’m Krista Tippett. *On Being* continues in a moment.

[music: “Into the Dust of the Earth” by Brethren to the Free Spirit]

Ms. Tippett: I’m Krista Tippett, and this is *On Being*. Today, a conversation about social evolution and the spiritual aspect of social healing, with Zen priest and teacher, angel Kyodo williams.

Ms. Tippett: You are a teacher; you are steeped in this tradition. And yet, I also feel that you feel a calling to open the fruits of this tradition. You’ve said, Buddhism — for you, there’s no question that it is a religion. But there is also Buddhist psychology. There is also Buddhist philosophy. And these have wisdom to offer up to the world. One of the things — actually, your first book was in 2000, and that’s also a wonderful book — *being black*. It’s *zen and the art of living with fearlessness*, right?

Rev. williams: *with fearlessness and grace*.

Ms. Tippett: and grace — *with fearlessness and grace*.

Rev. williams: and grace — which was saying a lot, back then.

Ms. Tippett: What? Which was saying —

Rev. williams: It was a bold statement. There was something really quite challenging in that statement.

Ms. Tippett: The “living with fearlessness and grace” part, or “being black”? [laughs] Or both?

Rev. williams: Both; that we could do that, that we could live in grace. I just want to say that I think black America, as non-monolithic as it is, has persisted in an amazing grace throughout the history of this country that is phenomenal; that if any of us were willing to be just a little bit sane [laughs] and look, we would recognize, “Oh, my goodness. How extraordinary that black people, in particular — indigenous people, as well — could live the lives of dignity that they have chosen for themselves in the face of the onslaught of what this country’s history has been and continues to be and continues to put upon them.” So grace, I think, is a gift that black peoples have inhabited for a great deal of time.

Fearlessness, though —

Ms. Tippett: It's such a wonderful word to call out too, as you say.

Rev. williams: Yeah, but fearlessness is the really bold statement, because we are expected to not be fearless. And in fact, our fearlessness is dangerous and threatening. And so having people of African descent, people that identify as black, to choose fearlessness is a very, very *[laughs]* bold statement of defiance. And I remember Buddhist teachers being tentatively, or sometimes not so tentatively questioning about the idea that, in the book, I talk about warrior spirit. And I could see their discomfort with aligning black people with the idea of warriorship.

Ms. Tippett: Well, and in your life, this is — I don't want to call it a line that you straddle, but these are identities — being Buddhist and being black — those two things — you talk about your first weeklong Zen retreat, where, you say, there you were, "walking in circles, staring at a gaggle of white people's feet." *[laughs]*

Rev. williams: *[laughs]* Yes, the things that stand out and stay with us.

Ms. Tippett: And I don't even think you wrote that — it wasn't even as a criticism. It was like, "Well, here's the reality. This is what I'm seeing." So here is this tradition that has offered so much to 21st-century people. It's risen up from thousands of years of cultivating — cultivating this kind of attention and presence. And yet, this tradition itself has this very — it should not be surprising — has this very contradiction at its core, in its American — in its Western manifestation, of having been brought to the West — as we say, imported — mostly by young Jewish people and some Christians, who were white, mostly. You have some very interesting things to say about how that — also, how white culture affected — for example, the focus on meditation, which is, again, what the 21st-century West knows as a headline about Buddhism, and that this, in fact, is not the primary practice for most of the world's Buddhists. So that it's a non-relational way of developing community, which has more to say about us than about the ancient tradition.

Rev. williams: I think two things are happening. I think we are, in the West — and yes, primarily white folks; primarily white folks of a level of a certain amount of privilege, because one would have to be of a certain amount of privilege to go off to Asia and bring — package up teachings and bring them back — and sometimes, package up teachers and bring them back. *[laughs]*

Ms. Tippett: Yes, that's right — but also, when you talk — and I've spoken with many of them, these wonderful — these mothers and fathers of western Buddhism. But they also will describe this spiritual emptiness that they were uncovering in what they had been handed as a life. Sorry, go on.

Rev. williams: And that's what I was gonna say. So, they, of some amount of privilege, responded to what they needed. And so it's not a criticism to say, "Oh, look, the white people went and made meditation important, when that's not what the rest of — the majority of Buddhists are practicing in the world." The criticism is not that meditation was made important. But the grip on it and the, therefore, denial of everything else that might be expressed and generated from these teachings in modern times, in modern society, but through a different cultural lens, are set aside as "not the real thing, not the true thing, not the

pure thing.” [laughs]

Ms. Tippett: What would you name? What, for you, is in that ecosystem of practices and impulses?

Rev. williams: Well, I certainly think the chanting practice — and it’s well known that Nichiren Buddhism and what most people have been familiar with, if they’ve heard of black people practicing Buddhism — they think of Tina Turner and — as chanting “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” And that we talk about Buddhism as being largely white; and actually, there is an enormous number of people of color in the Soka Gokkai sect. But it’s dismissed, almost to the point of appearing nonexistent in our mainstream — as much as Buddhism could be mainstream — [laughs] magazines and media. We almost never talk about Soka Gokkai, about chanting Buddhists. We even call them “chanting Buddhists,” as if that’s a pivot off of the “real thing.”

Ms. Tippett: That’s so interesting.

Rev. williams: So we have chanting Buddhists, which means that, by default, the rest of Buddhists are not chanting Buddhists, which is absolutely not true. [laughs] And so that’s the mashup of dominant culture that has incredible impact and a spread, in terms of its ability to affect the world and how the world understands itself and what’s important and what’s deemed as valuable, and therefore, not valuable. It’s a capitalist orientation [laughs] to, even, spirituality.

[music: “Entwine” by Auditory Canvas]

Ms. Tippett: I’m Krista Tippett, and this is *On Being*. Today, with Zen priest and social visionary, angel Kyodo williams.

[music: “Entwine” by Auditory Canvas]

Ms. Tippett: I want to, also, talk to you about love. You first got thinking about love, with bell hooks. And I have to say, I think we forget, but we may be remembering that the great, not just spiritual geniuses but social reformers have used this “L” word, “love.” And it was absolutely central to the civil rights movement. And I hear this word surfacing everywhere, and also an attention to how we have to — how we have to revive it, how we have to fill it with connotations that take in the complexity of us and the hardness of what’s before us. You’ve been thinking about this, the role of love in movements, I think, for a couple of decades. And I wonder how your thought on that — also, what you see in the world — is evolving right now.

Rev. williams: I think you were pointing towards it. bell — and reading bell, and getting an opportunity to meet bell, also — gave me a lens into the possibility of love being something that I could — not only “could,” I want to say — that I had to bring into the language of my perception of the world; and that love was not to be limited to my bedroom or my family and just people that I thought that I liked; that what I was doing in the past and what we often do and what our culture calls us to do is to use love to be a quantifier of “Do I have a preference for you?” [laughs]

Ms. Tippett: That’s really well put.

Rev. williams: “Am I aligned and in agreement and affinity? Are you reflecting back at me what I want to be reflected back at me? And if you are, and if you are enhancing my idea of myself, [*laughs*] then I love you.” And bell opened up the idea that that was a very limited way of understanding — and she still does — that that’s a limited way of understanding love.

The way that I think of love most often, these days, is that love is space.

Ms. Tippet: Say some more about that. What do you mean?

Rev. williams: It is developing our own capacity for spaciousness within ourselves to allow others to be as they are — that that is love. And that doesn’t mean that we don’t have hopes or wishes that things are changed or shifted, but that to come from a place of love is to be in acceptance of what is, even in the face of moving it towards something that is more whole, more just, more spacious for all of us. It’s bigness. It’s allowance. It’s flexibility. It’s saying the thing that we talked about earlier, of “Oh, those police officers are trapped inside of a system, as well. They are subject to an enormous amount of suffering, as well.”

I think that those things are missed when we shortcut talking about King, or we shortcut talking about Gandhi, or we shortcut talking about what Aung San Suu Kyi was doing at some point. We leave out the aspects of their underlying motivation for moving things, and we make it about policies and advocacy, when really it is about expanding our capacity for love, as a species.

Ms. Tippet: That’s so interesting, to just focus on that word, “movement” — because again, if we just take a reality base, you don’t move people by hating them or criticizing them. And you don’t always move people by loving them, but you don’t have a chance of doing it with the other tools. But I’m also thinking so hard at the moment — you’re right, we haven’t even seen this aspect of that history, even the history that’s not so long ago. I sometimes have this feeling that we are only now growing into, for many reasons, the aspect of consciousness here, what you’re talking about — the real human work, without which those political changes are fragile.

How are you — I feel that what you are describing and participating in feels like some kind of evolution; I don’t know. This is kind of like taking a very wide lens and going to a big, telescopic level, as Maria Popova likes to say — a telescopic lens on the present. But just say a little bit more about that, because I think that also is calming, in its way, for us.

Rev. williams: We’re at this unique time. I’m surprised, actually, that more people aren’t talking about it. I think I may have glimpsed an article that I disciplined myself to not read. But we are at a time, so incredibly unique in human history, where there is a meaningful number of us that are not driven by mere survival, and we are not defined by the work that we do or the place from which we come. We are able to be transient. We can move around places. We can create meaning out of things and ways of being and work that we choose to do. And we can recreate it, over and over again. We’re not defined by where we are or what we do. We can make meaning out of it, but we are not defined by it in a way that former cultures and societies that were limited in transportation and had a necessity to be able to put food on the table, and so we farmed, and so we did a whole bunch of things that were about fundamental necessities.

Ms. Tippet: You just inherited identities from — all kinds of identities from your kin.

Rev. williams: And they're inherited. That's exactly right, which is part of our great conflict in this country right now. We are running into the conflict between people that inhabit an inherited identity with the place that they are — coal-mining country, and the work that they do as a result of the place that they are — up against people that have values and ways of perceiving the world that have shifted because they are not identified by their place and the work that they do in the same way that location and a fixed place tells you who you are and how you be in the world.

And that conflict, and the values that come from those two disparate locations, is the conflict that we are up against right now — in this country, in particular, but also in other places in the world.

Ms. Tippett: All over, yeah. It's global.

Rev. williams: We are in this amazing moment of evolving, where the values of some of us are evolving at rates that are faster than can be taken in and integrated for peoples that are oriented by place and the work that they've inherited as a result of where they are.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, and who are in survival mode.

Rev. williams: And who are in survival mode as a result of that, and so our values and what's acceptable to us — enough of us — is shifting at a pace that is just outside of some of our ability to even take in. And the problem is — that's always been true, but the problem is, now we have a meaningful number, a substantive number of people that have those rapidly evolving values in confrontation with people that are, understandably, still working with the location-, survival-based orientation. This means a lot of things for us. This means that, in terms of values, we can be more spacious. There are many of us that can afford, literally, to be OK with people that are really, really different. In fact, we can be curious about it, because our sense of threat is diminished, because our identity is not prescribed by sameness and being afforded belonging because of sameness.

Our own identities have evolved in such a way that, because we're not merely trying to survive — I'm not saying we're not trying to pay our rent and everything, but because we're not identified with merely trying to survive, our sense of survival, our sense of thriving is embedded in a sense of movement and spaciousness and increasing allowance for more and more difference that is in direct conflict with people that are in a space-time continuum that is still place-based, survival-based, get-food-on-the-table-based. "If I don't cut off the top of this mountain, where will I go? If those people are not beneath me, how will I know my own value?" Et cetera, et cetera.

Ms. Tippett: You sometimes do an exercise — you did this in your TEDx talk, where you have — you've got a roomful of people, and you have them stand up and — it's about placing your — a hand on the side of someone's shoulder and creating pressure and, I think, feeling embodied, but also feeling the space around you and feeling the other people in the room. I'm kind of longing — and we don't have time to do that, but I'm kind of longing to end with you just offering some ways for people to begin. There's this wonderful notion that runs all the way through your recent writing, that the world — you said, "for people who are not monastics, the world is our field of practice."

Rev. williams: That's right. Our teachers — as much as we love our embodied teachers that

come in flesh and bone and sit on cushions — are really the people, the situations that we confront moment to moment, day to day, month to month, year to year, that incite a sense of discomfort, dis-ease, awkwardness in us. And rather than seeing those moments as threats to who we are, if we could reorient, if we could center in our relationship to ourselves as evolving, fluid, ever-expansive creatures whose role is to be in observation of: What is that? What has that inspired? What has that called forth in me, that discomfort that is speaking to something that feels solid and fixed and is now challenged in its location? — if we could do that, if we could live our lives in a way in which we understand that our deepest learning, our deepest capacity for growth comes not from walling ourselves off from the things that make us feel a sense of threat or discomfort or out of alignment or out of sorts, but rather, figuring out what is speaking to us when we feel those things, and what do we have to learn from that teacher that is embodied in that situation, that moment — not so that we become something different than who we are, but that we're evolving into a greater and greater sense of what it means to be fully human, to be radically, completely in the truth of the human experience and all of its complexities.

I think that if we can move our work, whatever work we're up to, whatever kind of desire that we have for our own development in life, to be willing to face discomfort and receive it as opportunity for growth and expansion and a commentary about what is now more available to us, rather than what it is that is limiting us and taking something away from us, that we will — in no time at all, we will be a society that enhances the lives of all our species. We will be in a society that thrives and knows that the planet must thrive with us. We will be in a society that knows that no one that is suffering serves the greater community, and that no one that is suffering is not an indicator of the ways in which the society itself is suffering.

Ms. Tippett: I like that faith of “in no time at all.”

Rev. williams: In no time at all.

Ms. Tippett: I'm impressed with that. [*laughs*]

Rev. williams: In no time at all. [*laughs*]

Ms. Tippett: You mean that?

Rev. williams: I really do. I think we have — we are evolving at such a pace — even what we're experiencing now in our society, we're just cycling through it. We're digesting the material of the misalignment. We're digesting the material of how intolerable it is to be so intolerant. We're digesting the material of 400, 500 years of historical context that we have decided to leave behind our heads, and we are choosing to turn over our shoulders and say: I must face this, because it is intolerable to live in any other way than a way that allows me to be in contact with my full, loving, human self.

Ms. Tippett: I felt very — like you, just because of what I pay attention to — as we walked through 2016, I felt like this human drama is what we have to grapple with when this is over, and it doesn't — it's gonna be there, whoever wins. And then I felt a lot of resistance to that awareness in the last year — everybody — a lot of people, all around, digging down into the trenches. But now I'm suddenly feeling like — there's something you said right after the election of 2016, I think it was *Lion's Roar*. You said, “I don't have a lot of words, but I have a lot of faith. I know the road feels low and winding, and we seem to need the pain to cut to the

core to emerge from the sleepwalk of despair and feel through the numbness of disconnect and indifference. But if we let ourselves feel this, we will be better for it.” And I’m kind of now feeling bad about — I’m feeling like I was impatient, because this is — to let yourself feel is hard. It’s a lot to ask, and I do kind of feel like that is emerging. I don’t know, I’m just wondering if you also have that sense.

Rev. williams: Yeah, absolutely. And it’s part of it. It is part of it, to go through the fits and the denial. There’s a death happening. There is something dying in our society, in our culture, and there’s something dying in us individually. And what is dying, I think, is the willingness to be in denial. And that is extraordinary. The willingness to be in denial is dying in a meaningful number of us, the tipping point. It’s always been happening, and when it happens in enough of us, in a short enough period of time at the same time, then you have a tipping point, and the culture begins to shift. And then what I feel like people are at now is, “No, no, bring it on. I have to face it; we have to face it.” We have to face it; I also think, what people know is that, short of a nuclear war, we’ll survive it.

[music: “Deltitnu” by Aydio]

Ms. Tippett: Reverend angel Kyodo williams is the founder of the Center for Transformative Change in Berkeley, California. She’s the author of *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living With Fearlessness and Grace* and *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*.

[music: “Deltitnu” by Aydio]

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Ms. Tippett: Our lovely theme music is provided and composed by Zoë Keating. And the last voice you hear, singing our final credits in each show, is hip-hop artist Lizzo.

On Being was created at American Public Media. Our funding partners include:

The George Family Foundation, in support of the Civil Conversations Project.

The Fetzer Institute, helping to build the spiritual foundation for a loving world. Find them at fetzer.org.

Kalliopeia Foundation, working to create a future where universal spiritual values form the foundation of how we care for our common home.

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The Henry Luce Foundation, in support of Public Theology Reimagined.

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