

Transform Your Life Through Jack Kornfield's Most Powerful Stories: A 10 Hour Journey

“The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.”

– Muriel Rukeyser

“Sometimes you need a story more than food.”

– Barry Lopez

Module 1: The Story of the Buddha's Last Teachings

Chapter 1: The Abode of the Buddha: Teachings to Cross the Flood

Welcoming you to listen, Jack offers his modern retelling of the Mahaparinibbana-sutta, the story of the Buddha's last year of life. Sharing the importance of receiving stories through a symbolic and mythical lens, rather than a literal one, Jack invites us into the Abode of the Buddha—the boundless present moment—and elucidates ‘wise relationship’ so we can learn to cross the flood of suffering without clinging to our raft.

- The Mahaparinibbana-sutta – the story of the last year of Buddha's life
- Understanding story through the symbolic lens of myth
- The Abode of Buddha and the present moment
- Wise relationship – teachings to cross the flood of suffering

Chapter 2: No Mara, No Buddha: The Dharma as Your Guide

Opening to section two, Jack explores the myth of Mara (temptation, ignorance, sickness, etc) appearing to Buddha, and Buddha finally giving in to Mara's requests that he pass on from this mortal plane. Through this lens, Jack explores the “No Mud, No Lotus” metaphor for reconciling balance in our lives. From here, he goes on to illuminate how the student-teacher relationship goes both ways, and how your enlightenment is ultimately up to you.

- How ‘No Mud, No Lotus,’ also means, ‘No Mara, No Buddha.’
- Buddha giving into Mara, and the symbology of the earthquake which ensues
- Exploring how the student-teacher relationship weaves together
- Opening to the teachings, and then doing as you see fit
- Your spiritual life as in your own hands and heart

Chapter 3: The Motivation of the Heart: Reality Beyond Conditions

Jack opens section three by sharing a story which highlights how the worth and nobility of a human being isn't in our race or class, but a birthright dwelling in our heart. Showing how to plant seeds of goodness in this world, he describes how we can work with the roots of our karma to begin to step into the unchanging reality of love beyond conditionality and change.

- The nobility of the human heart beyond race and class
- Planting seeds with the goodness of your heart
- Motivation of the heart, and the root of karma
- The unshakeable reality of love beyond changing conditions

“Buddha was very clear that not by caste, not by race, not by birth is one higher or lower. The nobility of a human being is simply a matter of their heart.” – Jack Kornfield

“There is a reality beyond the changing conditions of form—of storms, lightning, cars, and carts—there is a timeless reality that is so clear and pure it can't be touched by the circumstance of the world.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 4: Open Handed Teachings: A Lamp Unto Yourself

In this final chapter, Jack shares the lessons imbued within the Buddha's final moments of mortal life, helping us remember the eternal spirit that we truly are. Explaining how the kingdom of love and purity is truly within, he offers us the freedom of becoming a lamp unto ourselves. To close, he spelunks the paradox of life, death, eternity, and the Great Mystery of being.

- The lessons encased within Buddha's old age, sickness, and dying moments
- Remembering in purity the inviolable spirit of who we truly are
- How the kingdom of righteousness and love is truly within
- Finding freedom and becoming a lamp unto yourself
- The paradox of life, death, and eternity

“Even in death, even amidst the most difficult circumstances, there is an inviolable spirit that you are invited to remember in purity, to know that this is who you are.” – Jack Kornfield

“Absolutely anyplace, when the mind becomes silent and the heart becomes vast, anyplace is the kingdom of righteousness. Exactly where you are is the place of liberation, is the center of justice and wellbeing. It's not found in the physical world, but wherever you are when the heart is pure and the eyes are open to see this world with compassion and freedom, this is the place of awakening.” – Jack Kornfield

Module 2: The Story of Nachiketa and the Lord of Death

Chapter 1: The Great Mystery: Initiation and Transformation

Opening Chapter 1 of this story, Jack dives into how we can take our seat in the Great Mystery of this human incarnation. Exploring how we can begin to move past the small self by resting in loving awareness, he helps us past restlessness and resistance so we can be initiated into the present moment.

- Taking our seat in the Great Mystery of human incarnation
- Moving from the small self to resting in loving awareness
- Restlessness, resistance, and the capacity to be present
- Initiation as a way to honor and reframe difficulties

“You have within you the great heart of compassion and awareness itself, and with that the capacity to be present for this human life, to be awake, and to do so in a way that’s liberating.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 2: Nachiketa and Lord Yama: Reflections on Death, Identity, and Consciousness

In Chapter 2, Jack illuminates the mythology and archetypes in relation to our modern culture, and begins the story of Nachiketa and Yama, the Lord of Death. Through this lens, he reflects on how life and death connect to mystical experiences and personal transformation.

- Mythology and the archetypal, modern culture and truth
- The Upanishad based story of Nachiketa and Lord Yama
- Reflections on death, life, identity, and consciousness
- Mystical experiences, perspective, and personal transformation

Chapter 3: Nachiketa’s Boons: Forgiveness and Courage

In this chapter, Jack shares about the three boons Lord Yama granted to Nachiketa when he visited the Kingdom of Death, and relates this to a South African story about healing and positivity, as well as his teacher Dipa Ma’s ability to live fully and courageously.

- Nachiketa visiting Lord Yama in the Kingdom of Death
- The three boons granted to Nachiketa from Lord Yama
- A South African story about healing through forgiveness, positivity, and love
- Dipa Ma and how to live fully and courageously within our lives and the present

“Forgiveness releases the chains of the heart, because without it, we are chained to the past.” – Jack Kornfield

“When you sit or do spiritual practice, it’s not so much to get some kind of experience, but to awaken your capacity to be truly alive and present.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 4: The Mirror of Self-Inquiry: Impermanence, Immortality, and Freedom

In this final chapter, Jack hits on how the topics of impermanence, death, and immortality are reflected in the question of self-inquiry, “Who am I?” From here, he shares on aging and witness consciousness, reincarnation, and how we can find true freedom.

- Impermanence, immortality, death, and the deathless
- Gazing in the mirror of self-inquiry, and asking “Who Am I?”
- Aging through the perspective of the timeless witness consciousness
- Rebirth, reincarnation, and the eternal cycle of birth and death
- Living and dying in true trust and freedom

“What happens when you allow yourself to see your life as a series of initiations—large and small—is more and more you trust rebirth itself.” – Jack Kornfield

Module 3: The Arthurian Story of the Legend of Sir Gawain

Chapter 1: What Women Want: Sovereignty, Respect, and Buddha Nature

To begin this story, Jack outlines Sir Gawain’s quest to answer the Hag of Beara’s question, “What do women want?” Reflecting on the potential wedding of Sir Gawain and the Hag of Beara, he explores themes of sovereignty and living with nobility from our Buddha Nature.

- Sir Gawain’s quest to answer the Hag of Beara’s question, “What is it women want?”
- The wedding of Sir Gawain and the Hag of Beara
- Sovereignty and the Buddhist advice to “do as you see fit”
- Learning to live with a loving respect and nobility from our Buddha Nature

“Sovereignty means respect, it means a loving respect for oneself, for others, for those around us. In some way, it means that we operate from the palace of our nobility, from our Buddha Nature—that you are the king or queen of your own realm.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 2: The Beauty of Vulnerability: Respecting Our River of Emotions

In Chapter 2, Jack touches on the breathtaking freedom of mindfulness through the lens of Ajahn Chah and working with beginner’s mind. Depicting how we can use mindfulness to listen

to our body, he shares how we can hold our pain with loving awareness and get vulnerable with our river of emotions.

- The breathtaking freedom and beauty of mindfulness
- Ajahn Chah, beginner's mind, and working with fear and truth
- Using mindfulness to listen, learn, and make friends with your body
- Holding pain and struggle with loving awareness
- Vulnerability and respecting our river of feelings and emotions

“The breathtaking freedom and beauty of mindfulness is that we can acknowledge what is, you can bow to it, you can name it with loving awareness, see that this is the way that it is, and experience whatever it is—pleasant or painful—with a gesture of respect that says, ‘And this too.’” – Jack Kornfield

**“With loving awareness, you begin to have the capacity to name the ocean of tears that you carry, the grief, the fear, the joy, the delight, the longing—all the things that make you human—to hold them all and to trust that you have the capacity to be present for them.”
– Jack Kornfield**

Chapter 3: The Respectful Heart: Listening to the World

In Chapter 3, Jack illuminates how we can shift our identity by becoming witness consciousness and touching in with our original innocence. From this perspective, he shares how when we learn to listen in a respectful way to ourselves and the world, we can begin to work past Mara's forces of aggression, temptation, and doubt.

- Shifting our identity through witnessing our mind's conditioning and views
- Mindfulness, original innocence, the compassionate heart
- Listening in a respectful way to yourself, others, and the world
- Working with Mara – the forces of aggression, temptation, and doubt

Chapter 4: The Doorway to Freedom: Mindfulness and Loving Awareness

To close out this story, Jack prescribes love as a transformational dimension of respect and describes how loving awareness is the doorway to true freedom. From here, he touches on themes of sovereignty and how we can offer our unique gifts to the world.

- Love as a powerfully transformative dimension of respect
- Mindful loving awareness as the doorway to freedom
- Sovereignty and honoring the gifts in ourselves and others
- Understanding and respecting ourselves as the world

“Another dimension of respect is love. We want it, the people around us want it, the Earth needs it. Without mindfulness, without loving awareness, we get lost in separation, addiction, grasping, protection, isolation, fear, and racism—all sources of suffering. And yet, mindfulness, loving awareness, offers us the doorway to freedom.” – Jack Kornfield

Module 4: The Story of the Bodhisattva Vimalakirti

Chapter 1: The Way of the Bodhisattva

Opening this story, Jack introduces the Buddhist text, the Mahajana Sutra, and the main character for this section we will be diving into, the Bodhisattva Vimalakirti. Next, he teaches the compassionate vow of the Bodhisattva, and shares how we can create a more loving world by using our imagination and seeing through the eyes of the Buddha.

- Introducing the Mahayana Sutra involving the Bodhisattva Vimalakirti
- Learning the vow of the Bodhisattva
- Using imagination to help envision a more loving world
- Seeing through the eyes of the Buddha

“May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge for all beings to cross the flood. May I be a resting place for the weary. May I be food for the hungry. May I be medicine for all who are sick. May I be a lamp in the darkness for those who are lost. And may I do so as long as earth, sky, and galaxies exist. Until all are enlightened, may I be here to serve them all.” – Jack Kornfield paraphrasing Shantideva

Chapter 2: Mending the World with Spirit and Service

In Chapter 2, Jack dives into the story of the Buddha sending his disciples to care for the sick Bodhisattva Vimalakirti. From here, illuminates how we can bring the spirit of love with us everywhere we go to be a lamp of love and service to help mend the world.

- Buddha sending his enlightened disciples to care for the sick Bodhisattva Vimalakirti
- Bringing the spirit of love to every corner of our lives and the universe
- Helping others by being a lamp in the darkness and offering service to mend the world
- Vimalakirti and Ram Dass’s message to find out who you truly are beyond the body

“They almost want you to feel like you can’t do anything. That’s a lie, completely untrue. You have agency, you have gifts, and you have the capacity to reach your hand out and mend some part of the world. And I don’t think anything else really satisfies our soul as much as that.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 3: Sitting in the Seat of Love

In Chapter 3, Jack helps us balance remembering our Buddha Nature and worldly self at the same time, describing how we can sit in loving awareness while tending to our thoughts and emotions. Noting how the seeds we plant will grow into this world, he offers us the magic of opening our minds and hearts to the generosity of spirit.

- Remembering our Buddha Nature and worldly self at the same time
- Sitting in loving awareness and presence, while tending to our minds and emotions
- How the seeds we plant and water will grow into this world
- The magic of opening your mind and heart to the generosity of spirit

“Speaking to the possibility of imagination and the generosity of spirit—you may not have anything, but if you open your mind and heart to someone, that makes the magic. If the heart and mind are open, people sit in the midst of something that’s beautiful and magnificent.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 4: Experiencing the Sacred Where You Are

To close out this story, Jack shares how we can experience the sacred right where we are now, and touches on how we are aware beyond our body’s conditioning. Sharing the feminist Buddhist sutra of “The Meeting of the Buddha and the Goddess,” he describes how laying down our judgment can help us see the Buddha in everyone.

- Seeing and experiencing the sacred right where we are
- How we are aware and alive far beyond our body and conditioning
- The feminist Buddhist sutra of ‘The Meeting of the Buddha and the Goddess’
- Laying down our judgements to see everyone you meet as the Buddha

“All of our ideas of purity and impurity, all the judgements of the heart, the notions of who’s better and who’s worse, all those evaluations—they’re really a limitation. It’s possible instead to love with the eyes of love, to see every being that you meet as the Buddha.” – Jack Kornfield

Module 5: Stories on the Foundations of Mindful Loving Awareness

Chapter 1: Yeshe Dondon: Healing Through Deep Listening

Opening this story by reflecting on mindful loving awareness and deep listening as gateways to healing, Jack shares on Dr. Yeshe Dondon’s (the Dalai Lama’s personal physician) trip to Yale and the lessons that were learned through watching his loving awareness in action.

- Mindful loving awareness and deep listening as gateways to healing
- Dr. Yeshe Dondon’s (the personal physician to the Dalai Lama) trip to Yale
- The way loving connection and wise attention can transform a life
- Listening to the pulse of the world, as well as each other

- Loving awareness and the heart's capacity to hold this human incarnation

“Healing—not just healing of the body, but healing of who we are as human beings together—comes, first of all, out of a capacity for deep listening, for a sense of connection with life that lets us understand.” – Jack Kornfield

“Basically, loving awareness allows us to have a trust in the greater capacity of the heart to hold this human incarnation with all its tainted glory, its beauty and its pain, in a very different way when we listen deeply.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 2: The Foundations of Mindful Loving Awareness

In Chapter 2, Jack outlines the foundations of mindful loving awareness and how we can meditate by bringing attention to the body without judgment. From here, he shares a story of aging and having the proper spirit for loving life, and how listening to the pulse of the earth brings about wise response.

- The Foundations of Mindful Loving Awareness
- Meditation and bringing attention to the body without judgment
- A story of aging and having the proper spirit for loving your life
- Listening to the pulse of the earth, and wise response

“This is a radical act when the Buddha said that there is a healing which takes place when you bring a loving awareness to the body—to that which is painful and that which is joyful.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 3: The Universe is Made of Stories: Jerry Brown and the Divine Mother Durga

In Chapter 3, Jack touches on the mindfulness of feeling and expanding our window of tolerance. Noting how the untrained mind is an enemy while the trained mind is a friend, Jack dives into a story of Jerry Brown, climate change, nuclear weapons, and the Divine Goddess Durga.

- Mindfulness of Feelings
- Expanding our window of tolerance
- The untrained mind as the enemy; the trained mind as your friend
- How the universe is made of stories, not atoms
- Jerry Brown, climate change, nuclear weapons, and the Divine Mother Durga

“Our life revolves around feeling—it directs our love, our longing, our hate, our fear, all of those kinds of things. The gift of loving awareness is that we can begin to actually know this domain of feelings and not just be caught up in them.” – Jack Kornfield

“By becoming loving awareness you are no longer lost in the thoughts; you actually have a choice.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 4: The Stories You Tell: Mindfulness of the Truth

To close this story, Jack leads a guided practice on how we can move past the stories our mind creates, explores how we can use loving awareness to discern our thoughts, elucidates the mindfulness of Dharma, and explains the power of becoming “The One Who Knows.”

- A guided practice on moving past the stories our minds create
- Using loving awareness to discern our thoughts
- Mindfulness of the Dharma
- Becoming the witness, the ‘One Who Knows’

“Find a place within reality, within your experience, that can see suffering and joy, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, birth and death, all arising as they do. Because this is what human incarnation offers you—to become the great heart of compassion and spacious wisdom.” – Jack Kornfield

Module 6: Conflict Through the Lens of Stories

Chapter 1: Sometimes You Need a Story More Than Food: Terry Dobson and Aikido

To open this story, Jack reflects on how we can use the modality of storytelling to help us work through conflicts in our lives and the world. To illuminate this, he shares a story of Terry Dobson and the true meaning of the practice of Aikido.

- How sometimes you need a story more than food
- Using stories to work through conflict
- Terry Dobson and a story on the practice of Aikido
- Using conscious vantage to place yourself within a story

Chapter 2: Ram Dass, the Dalai Lama, and Offering our Unique Gifts to the World

In Chapter 2, Jack opens to Ram Dass’s teachings of learning to love everyone, dives into Dr. Sanjay Gupta’s lessons learned from the Dalai Lama, shares a passage from the Dhammapada on the healing power of love and truth, and reflects on the importance of offering our unique gifts to the world.

- Ram Dass and learning to love everyone
- Dr. Sanjay Gupta and lessons from meditating with the Dalai Lama
- A passage from Buddha from the Dhammapada on the healing power of love and truth

- Offering our unique gifts to the world

Chapter 3: The Empress's Three Questions

In Chapter 3, Jack shares the Tolstoy story of the Empress's Three Questions, touching on themes of forgiveness, compassion, service, and presence, all through the lens of the Bodhisattva, happiness and awakening.

- Thich Nhat Hanh, Tolstoy, and the Empress's Three Questions
- The empress's pilgrimage to receive wisdom from the wise hermit
- Forgiveness, compassion, reconciliation, service, and the present moment
- Bodhisattvas, meaning, dignity, happiness, and awakening

Chapter 4: The Story of Abbot Anastasius: Freedom and the Heart of Compassion

In Chapter 4, Jack relays the story of the Abbot Anastasius, the thief, and the book. Through the lens of this story, he dives into integrity and generosity, how we can live in The Way through tending the heart and quieting the mind, and the importance of navigating uncertainty with a sense of peacefulness.

- The story of Abbot Anastasius, the thief, and the book
- The beauty of integrity and generosity
- Quieting mind, tending the heart, and living in the Way
- Navigating life peacefully within wild uncertainty
- Freedom and the heart of compassion

“These stories really talk about who you are in the deepest sense, what’s possible for you, and what’s possible for us as human beings. For you are larger and more noble than you think, and it satisfies you in a way almost nothing else can.” – Jack Kornfield

Module 7: Stories on Climate Change

Chapter 1: The Four Noble Truths of Climate Change

Opening these stories of climate change, Jack shares about his teacher's, Ajahn Chah's, first trip to the U.S., and his amazement at the forests. Connecting our inner wellbeing with the wellbeing of the natural world, he outlines how the causes of climate change are rooted in the human heart.

- Ajahn Chah's first trip to the U.S. and his amazement at the forests
- The connection between our inner wellbeing and the wellbeing of the natural world

- The causes of climate change as rooted in the human heart and delusion of suffering
- Wise understanding and acting with integrity

“There’s this very deep connection with our inner-opening, with our own well-being, and the well-being and connection with the natural world around us.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 2: Pollinating the Earth with Love: The Man Who Planted Trees

In Chapter 2, Jack connects Thich Nhat Hanh, interdependence, and how we can work on our internal climate. From here, he shares a movie clip on pollinating the earth with our love, and offers a moving Taoist story of “The Man Who Planted Trees.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh, interdependence, and working on your internal climate
- Louie Schwartzberg and pollinating the earth with love
- A Taoist story of ‘The Man Who Planted Trees’ about destruction, heartbreak, nourishment, and regrowth

“It’s not ‘victim and perpetrator.’ We’re part of a big family and we’re all in it together.” – Jack Kornfield

“Wherever we are in this dilemma of climate change, it is not the end of the story. The seeds that you plant and the possibilities of these seeds are what will renew the earth.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 3: Responding to Climate Change: Saving the Planet with Love

In Chapter 3, Jack contemplates how we can respond to the threat of climate change by having a sacred relationship with our humanity and the planet. Through this lens, he shares the importance of saving the earth out of love rather than fear, and tells a story of Buddha’s past life as a selfless parrot.

- How we can respond to the threat of climate change and the destruction of the environment
- What it means to have a sacred relationship with the each other, the planet, plants, animals, and earth
- Not saving the planet out of guilt, anger, or fear—but out of love
- A story of the Buddha’s past life as a parrot selflessly helping a forest fire

Chapter 4: Reversing Climate Change: Empowering the Earth and Having Fun

To close out the stories on climate change, Jack shares solutions for reversing climate change, the power of educated women for helping the planet, the troubles of capitalism, and how we can empower ourselves to have fun while standing up for what matters.

- Paul Hawken and solutions for reversing climate change
- The power of educated women for helping the planet
- Capitalism, the lie of hopelessness, and becoming empowered
- Having fun while standing up for what matters

“The earth wants to renew itself. It doesn’t take that much—a little bit of water, a few seeds planted here and there, and then all of a sudden it happens. The Earth knows in some way. It’s alive. It’s part of you. The Earth wants to work with us to renew itself.” - Jack Kornfield

Module 8: Stories of Buddhist Master Ajahn Chah

Chapter 1: Celebrating the Life and Teachings of Ajahn Chah

Opening this section, Jack reflects on the life and teachings of one of his most beloved teachers, Buddhist Master, Ajahn Chah. To do so, he remembers Ajahn Chah’s first trip to the U.S., and offers stories of what it was like living as a monk in Ajahn Chah’s forest monastery in Thailand.

- The life and teachings of one of Jack’s most beloved teachers, Ajahn Chah
- Jack’s time as a monk in Ajahn Chah’s forest monastery in Thailand
- Ajahn Chah’s first trip to the United States and his wonder at the nature

Chapter 2: An Island of Sanity: Life at the Forest Monastery

In Chapter 2, Jack offers vulnerable memories from his childhood, notes the “vipassana facelift” retreats generally create, reflects on Ajahn Chah’s forest monastery as an island of peace and sanity, and shares how we can stop the outer war by ending the war within our own heart.

- Vulnerable sharings from Jack’s childhood and upbringing
- Retreats, selfless service, and the “vipassana facelift”
- Ajahn Chah’s forest monastery as a zone of peace and island of sanity
- Ending war by stopping the war in our human hearts

“There was the jungle, and you’d enter the monastery and there were long paths that were swept clean everyday—that was our job as monks and nuns with long bamboo brooms. It didn’t matter if you swept the path absolutely clean and by the time you finished the leaves had already fallen back on the other end. The point was somehow to do it with graciousness and beauty, and to make the sweeping a part of the rhythm of life.” – Jack Kornfield

Chapter 3: Taking the One Seat in the Middle of It All

In Chapter 3, Jack illuminates Ajahn Chah's meditation wisdom of "taking the one seat amidst it all." Through this lens, he shares how we can find freedom in our heart by getting intimate with emotions like anger, and accepting how we are rather than how we think we should be.

- Meditation and "taking the one seat"
- Dharma, suffering, and the freedom of the heart
- Getting intimate with emotions like anger
- Accepting how we are, rather than how we think we should be

***"For Ajahn Chah, meditation wasn't about gaining some special state, but it was taking the one seat in the middle of it all, stopping the war against the way things are, and instead, quieting the mind, bringing the spirit of loving awareness here, letting things settle; and then noticing when you get entangled, when you get caught, when you get afraid and reactive, and discovering that it's possible to see that with loving awareness and not get so caught, to find an inner freedom."* – Jack Kornfield**

Chapter 4: The Fearlessness to Be Present

To close out this section, Jack shares how we can be present for our emotions with loving awareness, explores the wisdom of Ajahn Chah through the lens of humor, tenderness, and presence, and shares a story of Ram Dass's ability to live in unconditional love.

- Being present for our emotions with loving awareness
- The wisdom of humor, tenderness, and freedom
- The fearlessness to be present
- Peace and letting go
- Ram Dass, the glance of mercy, and unconditional love

***If you let go a little, you will have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace. If you really learn to let go, you can move anywhere freely."* – Ajahn Chah**