

Session 7.1: Conversation with Cynthia Jurs

Living in the Gift

charleseisenstein.org/gift

Charles Eisenstein: Hi everybody. I'm here with my dear friend Cynthia Jurs. I'm just going to jump right in. This is one of the themes in my book that I've really been doubting – this whole narrative of “Well, we're going to have to change now.” What if we never have to change? What if it's always a choice? And we can continue going along the path toward of a dead planet, with technological substitutes for everything – or we could choose a living planet. I think there's a similar choice here – a choice toward even more distancing and, therefore, more ingratitude, or a return of some sort. And I wonder if there's a way to formulate this selfishly, like – “Ok, more gratitude....what's in it for me?”

Cynthia Jurs: Yeah. As I was contemplating the questions you told me you wanted to talk to me about, one of the things that came to me was that generosity really comes from gratitude. So that's the beginning - this feeling of gratitude – and from that gratitude we naturally feel a response, a responsiveness, of wanting to give – because we're filled up with that sense of appreciation and gratitude. In my own experience I feel as if when I connect with that sense of gratitude, then I'm filled with energy so, selfishly, I want to tap into that as much as possible, because it gives me juice to keep going.

I remember Thich Nhat Hanh, one of my great teachers, talked about in his fourteen mindfulness trainings, for fourteen Precepts of the Order of Interbeing – which you need to plant seeds of joy. You know there's a lot of suffering in the world. If we don't have the joy...if we aren't cultivating that quality of appreciation and gratitude then we're not going to be able to make it through the hard stuff. So we have to take time to appreciate the blue sky, as Thich Nhat Hanh would say, or to smell the fragrance of the rose and stop for a moment, and take that in and feel what it does to us.

CE: It is a kind of wealth. You could say generosity is a consequence of gratitude and gratitude is a consequence of an experience of wealth. If you really experience life as rich, then of course you're going to feel grateful for it. So it's possible to have a lot of what looks like wealth, but if there's no generosity that means there's no gratitude. And if there's no gratitude then it means that person – even if they have a net worth of a hundred million dollars it means that they're not actually wealthy...because to me wealth is a feeling of freedom to be generous. So for me the “What's in it for me?” question comes down to - “How do I want to feel in the world? Do I want to feel wealthy? Do I want to feel at home here? Do I want to feel free to be generous?”

CJ: Yes. In the Buddhist teachings, which I have a long history with, we talk about this precious human life, that we are grateful for having. This precious human life which, inside of the Dharma teachings says it's precious because we have a chance to wake up. We have a chance to learn and grow and become a better person – become enlightened. But get rid of all that talk and just get down to what it means to be alive, and the opportunity that this precious lifetime presents us with, and many people are not in touch with that. Life is hard and there's a lot of suffering, but again Thich Nhat Hanh would say - the non-toothache. When you don't have a toothache, how grateful are you? But then you forget because you don't have it, to remember to be grateful that you don't have a toothache.

CE: I remember when I had a toothache I said "Boy if this only stops I'll be forever grateful." That lasted maybe for a week.

CJ: Yeah, and then life goes on. So it's something to practice actually, and I think part of the opportunity of having this precious human life is to exercise some practice – some discipline – around cultivating the attitude that brings us benefit, and when it brings us benefit, it brings others benefit. So even if you don't feel like smiling, you can still kind of give your face a little hint of that smile and it changes everything. It actually relaxes all the muscles in your face and it makes you feel different than if you're walking around with a scowl all of the time. So we have a choice.

CE: I'm thinking of my mother who has recently been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and she is so full of joy. And I'm relating that to what you said before about simplifying, because when one faces death, you have to do a lot of simplifying...a lot of letting go, and underneath that – I'm not saying that everybody with a terminal diagnosis has this – but the amount of joy that she radiates is just incredible and, like what you were saying about the sky...she appreciates things like that so much. So the simplifying, it's not just like getting closer to the source of our food, but there's also a psychological, spiritual simplifying, and this is something that I'm sure you must have some words about. Is it something that just happens when life confronts us with our illusions? Like through death, or is there a way that we can cultivate it and bring ourselves to that place of joy that we sometimes see in dying people?

CJ: Well I know, just drawing from my own experience, I have spent a lot of time in meditating and in retreats, where I actually say goodbye to the busy world that is so filled with activities and distractions and things to do - and just pull in, really pull in, and stop all of that for a while and simplify to where it's really just all about sitting, breathing, walking, preparing a meal, eating or sometimes fasting, and after you do that for a period of time – even just a day actually – things really begin to change in terms of one's perception because you really do begin to notice things that aren't available if you're too busy for example. And you begin to notice the blue sky, or the rustle of the leaves, or the birdsong, or things that you thought were really important become not so important anymore, and you realise what really is important and often there is that "Aha" of seeing more clearly.

It's like the sediment settling to the bottom of the glass of apple juice and you see the clear liquid. It's like that when you do take time out, and that's a voluntary simplicity, but it's a practice and it's a way of training to be able to notice things more clearly, and to be in touch with what's really important. We get so caught up in all of our reactivity and ideas and what we think we should be doing and all of this stuff - and we lose touch with what our deeper calling is, and what bring us joy, what is our offering to the world - of generosity coming out of that kind of gratitude. It's something that I've sought out and practiced a lot.

CE: So it's not just that you're on this retreat and then you get back to work. It fundamentally changes your perception and the kinds of choices you were making before will change. Because there's a critique of like - "This is all very privileged...a lot of people in the world don't have the luxury to go on a retreat etc. etc. and they don't have time to look at the blue sky etc." But you know most of the most joyous people I have met are not those who have been insulated from suffering and coddled by privilege, they are people who have been confronted with all of the things life has to offer – sometimes the most difficult.

I recently spent time with an old lady from Colombia, from *Via de Paz*. It's like a peace village there. There's stuff she's seen that is just horrifying. She's about four foot ten. She just radiates joy...radiates peace and love. And it's not because she's been insulated by privilege – it's not because she's never seen any bad things in the world. It's not because she's had time to go on long retreats. I think there's a lot of community in her life – a lot of ceremony, so what do you think? What is going on with her? How has she come to this place? I'm just speculating.

CJ: Well I think that when we are in touch with the diversity of life and the suffering that is around every corner, and not insulating ourselves from that, then we're much more fully alive and it takes courage to face the difficult things and engage with life and death issues, but it makes us feel more alive, you know, and when we can engage in a way that brings healing or peace – all the better. That takes practice. That's an art – not to get oppressed and bogged down by the world situation.

CE: At the same gathering I met some Palestinians who were very beaten down and, it's kind of an open question for me - what brings one person to that kind of radiance and another to a place of despair? And for those of us who are not confronted directly in our lives with death and suffering on that extreme level...maybe that retreat, meditation stuff on some level is for people who are insulated and wanting to return to the reality that the woman in Colombia is in all the time.

CJ: I think it can be a tool for that. It can also be a tool to escape from that as well. So it's a double-edged sword. In my own case I think it's been really helpful because I have gone to many very challenging parts of the world and faced a lot of suffering and difficulty, and so it's been helpful to balance those things out, but as you were talking, I was remembering someone I met many, many years ago.

I was trekking in Nepal, this must have been in 1985, and we stopped at some little guesthouse for tea, and right next to it was this hut along the trail, and I saw all these feathers. I love feathers and birds, and I collect feathers sometimes, and there were huge feathers and I was drawn to go down into this little courtyard and see what was happening, and in the doorway of this courtyard was this man who had no limbs. He was terribly crippled – born, obviously, that way. He had a head and a torso and he had arms and he had little legs, sort of – I can't remember exactly – but he had a little platform that his body was on, that had wheels. So he was three feet off the ground at most, and he was the most radiant being I had ever seen. And he was radiating light and joy and he was so thrilled that I had come down – and so we had this interaction. He gave me this beautiful, huge, long eagle feather. Part of his purpose was to care for the birds that somehow came to him – I don't know exactly what he did. But he was such a graphic example of someone who was terribly disabled, a life full of suffering, and yet showed no trace of being caught in that reality. He was just beaming love and joy to everybody who came by.

So you know in the Buddhist tradition – not to harp on Buddhism – but there is a lot of instruction around practicing this way. As I say it's a practice. It's not a practice for those of us who are so privileged. I mean in the culture where it comes from these people live hard lives – that's an extreme – but they live hard lives and they are giggling and laughing most of the time.

CE: I find that the farther away from modernity I go, the more people laugh, the more they sing. The more generous they are.

CJ: Yeah - with very little.

CE: In the Earth Treasure Vase journeys you must have come across a lot of people...

CJ: Oh yes. One of the big parts of that practice is to put offerings inside of this little clay pot called the Earth Treasure Vase, and those offerings are about bringing healing and protection to the earth because the vase is then buried in a place that is asking for healing and protection, and so people come up with all kinds of things that symbolize that, to put into the vase. And I've had some amazing experiences. I remember for example I gave a vase to these renunciate monks in Thailand who are a part of the order of Arjun Cha, the Thai Forest monks, and these are monks and nuns who renounce all worldly possessions. So they have their robe, their begging bowl and a few things like a mat to sleep on – but they are completely and totally reliant on the generosity of others to feed them and take care of them...whatever it is.

And so we did a ceremony where I delivered the vase to this group who was going to take it to the border of Thailand and Burma, which is a very conflicted area, which was where the vase was to be buried. But the ceremony that we did to put offerings into the vase – and there was a group of maybe fifty people, most of whom were these renunciate monks – blew my mind, because the things that came out of the folds of their robes were some of the most valuable things you could possibly imagine. And these are monks who have nothing, and all of which was given to them. And as an example, I remember, one of these monks pulled out an amulet from Arjun Cha which he had made before he died, and it contained relics of his own. And this amulet was worth – he told me later – he said you could trade this for a Mercedes Benz in Bangkok. Because people love and revere Arjun Cha so much and so this little amulet was that valuable.

CE: It was his only possession...

CJ: Yes his most precious possession, on some level. You know, it's just a thing, but it carried all that energy and he put that into the Treasure Vase for the healing of the earth. And it goes on and on - there were just so many things like that. In that particular ceremony – Buddha relics – they have a little symbolic stupa, filled with relics, supposedly from the Buddha. In that tradition you pray and are full of reverence for the Buddha. The monk, who took the vase, opened up the stupa and discovered that the relics had multiplied. And this is something that is known to happen through great devotion, and so he was flabbergasted that these relics had multiplied. So he took a whole bunch of those and he put those into the treasure vase.

Another example is in Liberia – a very different situation from the Thai Forest monks. Here you have a country, Liberia in West Africa, where there was and incredibly brutal civil war that destroyed the fabric of society. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed, and I came in with a Treasure Vase after the war ended and people from three countries came together to give offerings for peace. It was Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia because they all share a border. And the Vase went around. There must have been about 500 people in the ceremony because they were all so completely concerned about maintaining peace and this was a way for them to come together and offer their prayers for that. But they have very, very little. These people live to the bone, they can barely put food on the table, and so they didn't have a whole lot of valuable stuff to put into the Treasure Vase.

The way that value is often expressed is through money, right? And so a lot of coins went into that little clay pot – coins from people who didn't have anything and who needed those coins to buy the

next bag of rice, or whatever it was, so it was a great act of generosity for them to put in a coin, or what they often put in was a Kola nut. Coming from the Kola tree, these nuts are chewed and given to elders out of a sign of great respect - like a very valuable offering. So it was primarily Kola nuts and coins that went into that Treasure Vase and I was struck by the fact that people could have held back. I know of people in my own life who are dealing with issues around poverty, and so many times people don't give anything because they have to hold on to it, to keep the little bit that they have, and they're afraid that if they give it they won't have anything. And here you saw these people giving the last little tiny bit they have - for the sake of peace.

CE: And the healing to the earth. It just makes me think - How fast would this planet heal if all the millionaires and billionaires were prepared to give everything that they had, for the healing of the earth? You know, hearing that story kind of makes me want to give everything I have for the healing of the earth. And then the next question comes up - "Well how?" It's not an easy question.

CJ: No, it's not. But you know you can't figure it out. You just have to give what you can in the moment and then take the next step. The next moment invites you to do the next thing for the healing of the earth. And then that's all there is in the end, because you've come into that alignment with your calling. I mean I've been doing this Treasure Vase practice for many years now and when I do it, it really is, Charles, for me like - "I've given my life, and I will give my life for this. There's nothing else." This is all there is, and everything that I do is about that, so for me there's nothing more. I mean I have to be careful to take care of myself in the face of the vastness of the need. But, oh well, what else is life for? And it fills me with joy, actually, because I feel like I'm doing the very thing that is not only being called out in me, but is really, really needed. So that feels good. And then I get energy and it's the giving, the generosity... We think of money, for example, and it's just an energy right?

CE: That's one way to look at it.

CJ: So how do we generate energy...for change, for healing, for the restoration of harmony in the world, and peace?

CE: I'm thinking about these places on earth that have been abused, and I think that whether it's ecological abuse or humans harming humans - that's a kind of abuse of the earth as well - and so what people express - "Oh, we want to heal the earth." The earth might be like - "Really? Show me." And when people are giving their last coin - that's a really powerful prayer. If I were the earth, I'd be like - "Ah, these people really mean it. They care about me". And for me, and it's true for a lot of sick people, if you think that no-one wants you and you're not appreciated and not useful, then why would you stick around? And I think we all have opportunities to make gestures like that - that demonstrate our seriousness about what we say we want.

CJ: Yes.

CE: One way I see it as a practice is that a gesture is just at the edge of courage, and once that gesture is made then courage expands, and the next offering might be something that you didn't dare do before...but because you did that first thing, the boundary of courage has gone outward, and you become braver. So you can say that bravery, and generosity, is indeed a practice, and starting with an orientation, starting with a wish, which then puts us on alert to the opportunities to fulfill the wish.

CJ: Exactly. Yeah I'm thinking about another situation in Liberia, because after that happened I became very involved with those people and that culture – the prayers they made. They were really powerful and they really meant it. I mean you know like – anything – Let's Not Have War Again. So, when we buried the vase. It's this symbolic act, this ritual symbolic act. The vase went into the ground and the elders said - "Well, now what? We want to remember these prayers". And this was important to us, and so I don't need, nor do I want to, tell the whole story about everything that happened in Liberia from there, but a lot happened and is still going on – a whole peace-building effort that is now national (laughs), as a result of taking the little clay pot and these prayers.

I'm thinking about this gentleman by the name of Christian Bethelson who I met in Liberia, who was a general. He was first a general in the army and then a general in the rebel forces fighting against Charles Taylor, commanding thousands of troops, child soldiers and all the rest. He was a really violent man who grew up in a culture of violence and knew how to wield all those weapons.

Anyway Bethelson saw me meditate and asked me to teach him how to meditate, and I thought he must be joking. But he was serious. He'd already started to turn his life around after the war ended.

So Bethelson is an example of somebody who had a certain kind of learned courage that took the form of extreme violence and has turned that courage around to where it is so much harder for him to be patient – to be open – to be gentle. The thing is that in his heart of hearts he is one of the kindest, most generous people you'll ever meet, but he has had to unlearn the kind of behaviour that says – "you push through, and you make it happen and you exert force if you need to, and you tell people what to do." But now he is this completely different person after ten years of practicing in this way...of cultivating a deep understanding of what it means to be alive in this precious human life...and the opportunity that it is, and the gratitude that spills over from him, and that expresses itself in the work that he's doing now.

CE: Yes. I wrote about him in "A More Beautiful World". One of the things that inspired me about him is that this guy is among the worst of the worst human beings imaginable. I don't know his specific career, but I know a bit about child soldiery and what they have to do to boys to turn them into brutal killers. You don't even want to think about it.

CJ: Let's not think about it.

CE: So to take someone like that, and for him to become a peace worker...if it can happen to him, it can happen to any person that you've ever written off as irredeemable. And the question that arises is, "How does that transition happen, and what role can we play in making that happen for others, and for ourselves?" I think that you kind of touched on it when you said – "In his heart of hearts he's the most gentle, generous person you've ever met." And to be able to see that, not as a piece of dogma that – "everybody has a good heart" – but as an actual practice of actually seeing that in everybody, especially the people that we hold in judgment. To see it, then you can invite it into expression. If you don't see it, and you see that person as irredeemable, and I don't care who it is – it could be Donald Trump, whoever you are writing off – I find if I can see that in a person and speak to that part of them, then it's like I'm inviting them into a different reality and it's a really strong invitation, especially if they've reached a point in their life where stuff's not working for them anymore.

CJ: Well that's often what happens – that trigger – that's the catalyst. It certainly was with Bethelson. I think he realised that there wasn't much else he could do down that path and it was time for a change, and there was always that person inside of him, it just wasn't nourished.

CE: There's not a lot more that he could do down that path and it was time for a change. I wonder if we could apply that to our civilization too? That's a perfect description.

CJ: Yeah.

CE: There's not a whole lot more we can do. What? Higher skyscrapers? Bigger pits? Bigger engineering projects? I mean, come on...Better video conferencing?

CJ: (Laughs) And the thing for me personally, when Bethelson asked me to work with him, I thought there was no way I would have the capacity to do that. You know – who am I to take on a person like him? What would I possibly offer him, and how would I have the tools, given my own life experience, to meet him? He didn't give me a choice. He kept pestering me until I finally said "Okay, here's how you mediate. Take a breath. Stop." You know, and then it just started to unfold, and what I discovered, thankfully – here's an opportunity of gratitude that I had for him – because I became a very powerful person, having to work with him. You know, he gave me my power in a certain way. He didn't realise that he was doing that. But I had to draw from deep resources to meet him.

CE: Well he saw that in you. He was inviting that into expression.

CJ: Yeah. So both of our lives have changed, and I realised capacities within myself that I didn't know I had, and I think that's true for every single one of us – when we say "Yes" to the moment - even if we don't know how we're going to do it - we say "Yes" and we do it anyway, we discover that we have these tools within ourselves. You know, how are we going to turn around this terrible mess we're in on the planet? If we stop and think about it and try to figure it out, we get completely overwhelmed, we get shut down and scared and can't even imagine what it would take.

CE: Right. It's an impossible task.

CJ: It's an impossible task. But when we are getting back to the generosity and the gratitude...when we are connected to those forces, and we give just a little bit. You know even just a little bit – something small that's in our little world, it's contributing.

CE: Yeah, and it triggers the generosity of the universe. Generosity's contagious, so you perform an act of generosity and it comes back -for example, in being matched up with the right person at the right moment to develop a gift that is ready for expression. It's like our entire path is mapped out in a way, almost unavoidably. That's the generosity of the universe. You could not have engineered that.

CJ: No. And so going back again to the whole idea of practice – you know, practicing being this open vessel – where the universe can express itself through us, and even in small ways we can invite that to flow through us and then, maybe it grows.

CE: So, the noise you can hear now, in our recording – that's the rain, the thunder and the wind which is quite a gift here in very dry New Mexico - a drought year, and it said zero percent chance of rain today.

CJ: (Laughs). You never know what the universe is going to bring. But prayers do help and a lot of people say "Oh gosh, what's a prayer going to do?" I mean the Dalai Lama himself said prayer is not enough – you have to work. But it's the beginning of something and it does invite a certain responsiveness. Like you said earlier, the earth loves it when we give something, when we make an offering, when we express ourselves in the depths of our heart of hearts. And you love it when I do that, right? It makes you feel good. And I love it when you do and you know it's that little seed...

CE: Yeah and to get back to the "What's in it for me?" It's to come fully alive to...like..."What are we here for?" We're not here just to survive life. We're here for something; to commit to something; to participate in something - and if we hold back from that, we feel half-alive. And our whole society is set up to kind of maintain us in a half life. But let's say – "We're sick of that."

CJ: We are really sick of that. It's not a life. It's so sad and it's so debilitating and it's not going anywhere – except for death, and destruction.

CE: Yeah. I'm thinking about this part about recognizing the Giver, the Lover, the Gentle Being inside everybody, and then applying it to myself, too. I recognise the power of that – even when somebody sees me that way - I become that. So even if they don't bribe me – all they have to do is see it. They don't have to leverage that or provide inducements, or say "So, if you do that, than I will approve of you." All they have to do is see me that way and I'll step up to the plate. And I wonder if there's a practice – where we practice seeing ourselves that way – where we really see our basic goodness. I think that's a Buddhist term right? There's a "goodness". We just see it. And then, for me, it is to see it and then to resist that part that says - "Well now I've got to do something." Simply to see it.

CJ: Yeah I think it's such a trap to think that we always have to do something, and when we act in that way – "Now I'm going to..." whatever it is – it shuts off that deep core resource of gentle kindness and generosity, sometimes. You can muscle through, and you can make things happen. We've all done that, and the Western world, at least, is built on that, but it's not really working anymore so there's another place to access within ourselves to bring about the kinds of changes that we're hoping for. And that, to me, looks like stopping all of that, and being with that feeling of – in the terms we're talking now – generosity, love, caring – what we care about. You know you don't have to do anything with it right away. To grow it you want to contain the energy. You want to get familiar with it – let it percolate like a stew on a stove. You've got to let it cook. And then it gets really delicious. But if you take it off too soon, you know, it won't be so good.

So you let it percolate, and feed it, and get comfortable with that part of yourself so that, then, after it becomes familiar – your orientation really begins to change, you see through those other eyes and that is your reference point instead of the other. Then the actions that come to you to do from that place are really different, and they're not conditioned by the same old stuff. And that's where we want to act from. So it requires us to kind of take another breath – not just plunge forward in the same old way – but to really allow ourselves to mature in a way. And to trust...

CE: I think that it's especially relevant in a cultural setting where our urge to act gets channeled into actions that actually perpetuate the status quo and don't change anything, and they just divert that energy before it has a chance to mature into deeper understanding which could change things at a

deeper level. It just gets kind of siphoned off into these contentious, loud issues of the day that are just happening on the surface.

CJ: Right.

CE: When I first started to grapple with this idea that I don't have to make myself do anything – that from a different seeing of myself – and this applies to the way we see each other too – from that different seeing, changes happen that make me into a different doer. But I don't have to make myself do anything. I thought – Oh, it can't be that easy. Because what's underneath that? Because I'm bad, right? So I have to make myself do things, otherwise I will do bad things. I have to make myself do good things. There's this subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – omnipresent war against myself, and I think that is the mirror of the war on nature; the war on each other, you know, forcing, forcing, forcing...and not trusting that we're not like that. And the world is not like that. The world is not something that needs to be tamed. It has order and beauty and gifts inherent in

CJ: Yeah. The web of life is innately intelligent and we are a part of it. We're not separate from it. We are a part of that web of life, so when we come into that deepest heart of hearts within ourselves and we begin to sense our place, our part, even in tiny glimpses, we come to realise that "God - I'm not a bad person. I'm part of this incredible beauty and magic and ferocity and everything else." It's all there.

CE: The story of the women giving their last coin; the monks giving...when I heard that I felt that part of myself stirring. There's a part of me that's like "Yeah I'd do that," and so these stories call that, they invoke that. They're really powerful stories and for everyone listening I just want to take a pause here and just see if you feel that – that stirring in you too. Feeling that what those men and women did

CJ: And children...

CE: Children too. Like, you were that child. You were that man. You were that woman. It's in you. This is an unquenchable desire to give everything to what we care about most.

CJ: I often invite people to make offerings, and it doesn't have to go into a Treasure Vase. You can go up onto a favourite vista point, or down to the beach, or find your tree or your rock, and just connect with that deep caring – whatever it is that you love, that you care about – and then make a little offering. If you were in the Native American tradition you might offer tobacco or cornmeal, or maybe you would take a coin from your pocket and stick into the ground or throw it. You know people do that in fountains – they throw coins into fountains and make a wish. So there are so many different ways of making an offering, but to really feel it and take a moment to just feel into that place, and then to formulate a little intention. Because that's all prayer is, is an intention. Formulate some kind of intention and then make an offering of generosity to whatever it is, you know, wherever you are. And then see what comes from that.

CE: I feel that, for me, the offering has to be a little bit precious. Corn meal and tobacco was very precious because it took a lot of work to produce these things – so I'm thinking, what if it's burying a one hundred dollar bill or something like that? And where that took me is a kind of offering that I'd like to make, that works on a more rational level too, which is – if I stay in a hotel, I like to leave a ten dollar bill, maybe, it could be a twenty dollar bill with a note on it for the cleaning people that

says, whatever I'm inspired to say. Last time I said – Thank you for your hard work and your beautiful heart. And that's a kind of offering.

CJ: Totally.

CE: You're letting go of it and it's going into the great unknown and the rational part of my brain is also satisfied because I imagine for some person making minimum wage, some immigrant maybe, you know ten dollars is quite significant. There was a time in my life when ten dollars was significant. So there's a little bit of (sucks in a breath)...you know that's the feeling I look for...

CJ: That's so true Charles – to give just a little bit beyond your comfort level, or something that's really precious to you that you might wish to hold onto – because there's that grasping in us...that attachment, that keeps us stuck. I think that's probably why the monks are renunciates, because they really are after a liberation. If we're holding on, it won't happen. So it's to connect with that bigger place.

CE: And there's sometimes, maybe such a thing as attachment to renunciation.

CJ: Sure.

CE: So what I'd also like to recognise is even if there is that feeling of (sucks in a breath), there's also a feeling of readiness. Like, maybe this thing that I have, like a crystal that someone gave me; a painting. If there's a feeling of (breathes out a sigh) – it's ready to pass it on. And maybe sometimes it's not ready; maybe it's still serving something in me and it's not time yet. So it can go both ways.

CJ: Yes, you're right. I'm thinking about another situation if we have time, and I'm not sure where this fits in, but I was in Congo with one of the Treasure Vases and I took it, towards the end of the trip to the Pygmy people in the Forest, because I wanted them to be the ones to bury that Vase in the Congo - because healing the Congo is desperately needed in many, many ways. But it felt like they were the ones to bury the Vase in the Forest and, also, the Forest needs protection because it's providing oxygen for the whole earth over there, and everything else. So it was an amazing experience to go and meet these Pygmy people who are one of the oldest cultures on earth. When I got to their village they had been preparing and they brought out one of the most amazing meals I've ever had in my life.

Everything was gathered in the Forest that we ate. Traditionally they don't cultivate the land. They are hunting and foraging people. So they had gone out into the Forest and had brought everything to eat from the Forest, wrapped in leaves and little basket things, and they had found salt, certain kinds of wild peanuts that they'd ground into peanut butter, and it went on to some other kind of thing that you all ate with your hands, and there was fruit. And it was such an incredible meal and I was with one of the elders – a gentleman who was also Pygmy, from Rwanda, who had come with us, who was more worldly – who had experience with U.N. things. He kept exclaiming – "This is the real food...this is the *real* food, and he just went on and on. He was so thrilled to have that offering made, and it was like the most generous offering that they could possibly have made for us, and it was such that the king – they called him the King of the Pygmies, the chief of that particular village tribe where we were – also gave to this other (Rwandan) elder, his staff. He gave him his most powerful object – ceremonial object – just gave it to him out of honour, recognition and respect.

And it was funny because they had also woven a basket for me that was one that you wore over the forehead and then it went down the back, and it's for what you gather and pick. And they gave me a sleeping mat woven from reeds, and there was a lot of laughter because the King of the Pygmies was indicating that that was where I would sleep with my "husband". And people sleep together on their mats and then it became clear that there was some interest in sharing the mat (laughs). So we laughed about that for the whole, entire rest of the time and we decided he was my husband and all the rest of it – it was really funny...and so warm, and welcoming, and sweet, and charming. But truly, that was an example of one of the most incredibly generous experiences I've been on the receiving end of. So I just offer that into the mix of this conversation, for what it's worth.

CE: Thank you for that. I take it as a glimpse of a future that could happen again on earth. That's wealth.

CJ: That's wealth.

CE: And I think we miss that wealth – that's the real food. And we miss that food - and it's not just the food, it's everything that a culture like that has, and lives by. I can just feel the yearning to have that. And I can understand why people are so greedy, you know. If you don't have that then what can you replace it with? More and more and more and more, but it never beats it. And if we could just have real wealth again then this planet would be in much better shape, and we wouldn't be really sacrificing anything. At the time it feels like a sacrifice, but later you realise...

CJ: Well we are in the midst of a huge sacrifice on the planet in terms of the loss of ecosystems, and cultures, and languages – so many things – and we have done that to ourselves. It is a sacrifice that has been made.

CE: Yeah but not toward real wealth. It has been a sacrifice toward poverty.

CJ: Right, but it could lead us to the recognition of real wealth. If we don't have it, then we realise what's precious.

CE: Yeah. Sometimes we don't even know what's missing. Stories like that connect us to what's missing, and we think "Oh (breathes out) okay that's what I want now."

CJ: The blue sky is a rare thing in many places in the world. They don't even remember what blue sky is. Or you see the stars again, and you haven't seen the stars in years because it's so polluted. And then you see the stars again and you go "Oh my God, look at this beauty!"

CE: Yeah - reconnecting to the generosity of this world - so much beauty everywhere.

CJ: And remembering - coming back to the simple things that remind us of why we're here, and what is important to us in our heart of hearts – what I am I here to do, to give, to be? What is that little quiet voice calling? If I listen carefully, stop for a few minutes, take another breath. For Bethelton it was stopping all of that and returning to just here and now. I think that, in and of itself, allowed him to make peace with himself. He's still making peace with himself. He'll go on his whole life, but, he was able to change because there is that other part that was, kind of calling to him, like – "Hey wait, what about me?" Maybe if I meditate? And sure enough...

CE: Yeah. It's very evocative – "Hey what about me?"

CJ: We've sacrificed the earth, we've sacrificed the water, we've sacrificed the air, we've sacrificed ourselves to be perpetuating this cyclic existence – this round that goes really nowhere in the end. And that part of ourselves that we've sacrificed over and over and over, is still in there going – "Uh huh...hello...what about me...are you there...are you at all ever going to pay attention to me?" And that's the part of us that...you know if we really all come together and act from *that* place, we will have that more beautiful world. We will.

CE: Yes.

CJ: So feeding a spirit that is filled with beauty and grace and power and majesty – and not that other thing that's going nowhere fast.

CE: So that moves me to maybe conclude with just a moment of gratitude for all of the things that are bringing that part back to life – or back into recognition...when sometimes it was totally lost. But the world has not given up on us, and we are reunited. The potential is there and from that – nothing is impossible.

CJ: Nothing is impossible, no. And to focus on that and feed that spirit with our lives and with our energy and our love – and our generosity – and to not really give a whole lot of energy to that other system. Why would we? It's kind of a waste of time. So let's do that, let's give thanks for this incredible opportunity that we have to connect with what's really important, and to give ourselves to that – fully, completely...for the rest of our lives.

CE: Here it is.

CJ: Yeah! Anything is possible.

CE: Great. Thank you so much Cynthia.

CJ: Great pleasure – a joy. Thank you Charles.

Ends