Addressing Social Injustice with Compassion
by Awakin Call Editors

Professor Rhonda Magee is a faculty member at the University of San Francisco law school, an expert in contemplative pedagogy, the President of the Board of the Center for Contemplative Minds in Society, and a teacher of mindfulness-based stress reduction interventions for lawyers and law students. She has spent her career exploring the interrelationship between law, philosophy, and notions of justice and humanity. Having grown up in a segregated North Carolina, Magee developed an early interest in racial and social justice, as well as a deep sense of spirituality and inner work - both aspects of her personal life that profoundly inform her daily work. In this Awakin call conversation, with Preeta Bansal, Professor Magee shares of her commitment to inner transformation work, and the role of the inner dimensions in "ensouling" the justice system and resolving conflicts. You can read or listen to the full version of the interview here.

Sujatha Baliga: The theme for today's interview is addressing social and racial justice with compassion. Our guest this week is law professor and mindfulness teacher, Rhonda Magee. Preeta Bansal will be moderating today's interview She is an illustrious lawyer with an incredible history of working in the White House and in many other high-level positions across both private and public sectors.

Preeta Bansal: Thanks so much. I'm excited to be in conversation with Rhonda. She is a remarkable person who has combined the pursuit of justice from a legal, systems perspective with her deep, personal inner work. Thank you Rhonda for being here and thank you for your amazing work in service.

Rhonda Magee: Thank you! I am very happy to be on this call and honored to be in conversation with you and Sujatha and the ServiceSpace community in this moment.

Preeta: Great. Well, I would like to start with this question; Would you tell us how that dance between the inner and the outer worlds works for you in your day-to-day life now and how it came about?

Rhonda: What a great question. I was born in the South in 1967. It was a time when we were still in the throes of the civil rights movement and yet we had only just begun some of the deep efforts to restructure our society in the direction of more freedom and opportunity for people like me, an African-American woman. The particular location where I was born and raised was a segregated society—still quite explicitly in many ways. I was in the black part of our little southern town and there were many sorts of economic and social disadvantages that came with it yet there were also some social and community advantages. One of those advantages was that I was surrounded by people who had developed, by dint of life circumstances, a certain kind of resilience—a certain kind of

capacity to ground themselves and our community in inner resources that would support us dealing with a complicated disrespecting world.

My grandmother had been called to the Ministry, so as a very little girl I spent a lot of time with her and in her home. This gave me the chance to see how she grounded herself in her own contemplative way. Sure, it was Christian based yet it was a model for me of how one might have a deep devotional commitment to practice a discipline—a practice that would be a support for doing the difficult work in the world. My grandmother cleaned houses for other people. She did not have a glamorous job but because of her contemplative and religious commitment she had a sense of her own wholeness and value.

Fast-forward to me today—the practices I engage in are heavily in eastern meditation and traditions of study, primarily Buddhist meditative experience. So my practice every day is kind of a sitting meditation practice accompanied by study. I am also involved primarily in one sangha here in the Bay Area that is comprised of other lawyers. For me the challenge, if you will, is about making the time to practice on a regular basis—to do sitting practice. But that's not the only way I practice. There are all kinds of ways of bringing meditative practice into my life including yoga, walking meditation and journaling. The challenge really is to make the time every day for some kind of engagement with the practice. So that's what I'm about right now.

Preeta: You talked about growing up in the segregated south in the middle of the burgeoning civil rights movement. You and I have spoken earlier how that spurred you to pursue law as a method of social justice. How did you then turn to mindfulness in the midst of that focus on racial and social justice?

Rhonda: I have always seen the work of racial and social justice through a spiritual lens. Maybe because of the way that I was raised to have this kind of orientation—going beyond the material—to our common humanity that goes well beyond any categories. In law school we were indoctrinated into a world view that is heavily rights-based, heavily focused on a kind of hyper individualism. That focus emerged as a response, in many ways a positive response, to feudalism—this notion that we didn't have individual rights, but in the 20th and 21st century we have evolved to a hyper individualized notion of what it means to be a human being.

There is now a sense that without the protection of these legal rights we have no way of connecting with each other, and that we are heavily vulnerable without these rights. There is some truth to that. But this notion set us up for alienation not only from ourselves, and our deeper being beyond that which we can fit into a resume or a claim, or cause of action in law, but an alienation from each other as well, and from the planet and the non-material world in which we are embedded. I was aware of that going into law school so for me there was always a quest to bring in that sensibility. I was looking for ways to bring that in throughout my career and ultimately I found some ways to do that in a community that includes Sujatha and now you too Preeta!

It has been a long journey…some 20 years now since I graduated law school. I practiced law some four or five years before going into teaching law. The entire time I was teaching law I was trying to figure out ways of doing this. Finally after getting tenure seven or so years in, I was really almost at a crisis point—feeling if I couldn't bring more of the inner dimension into law, then maybe I should be on a different path. So it was through a little bit of a Dark Night of the Soul moment as I was thinking, "Can I bring this into law?" that I found a good counselor who had her own spiritual psychology base and set of

trainings. She basically encouraged me to explore whether I could deepen my insights and community of support in law and explore bringing this inner dimension to the fore, and if I couldn't, I could always leave and I would at least have tried it. And here we are after 13 or so years in that experiment!

Preeta: That's remarkable. Having spent most of my life as a constitutional lawyer I am struck when you say so much of law is rights-based. It is about, “What am I entitled to from the system and society?” And the work of inner transformation is about, “What are my duties or what is my joy in giving to others? How can I be my brother’s keeper or my sister’s keeper? How can I look out for the other as if they are an extension of me?” As you work particularly in the area of civil rights law-- how do African-American students or other minority race students respond? They may in part have come to your civil rights classes in law school to advance rights for historically disadvantaged or aggrieved populations — civil rights and social justice rights. How do they respond to this talk of duties and obligations and giving rather than receiving?

Rhonda: That's a really good question—I would say my students see me as being engaged in a broader project. I teach classes that deal with race and American law and torts, which are about personal injury law and how to respond to it. One course I teach is called “Contemplative Lawyering” which refers to developing a legal professional identity that does embed this inner approach. So I think my students see the work that I do as part of a broader effort to bring different dimensions into the law. To be honest, a percentage of students coming into law have these same insights, or at least are hungry for something. They may not know how to name it, and they are interested in the formal system certainly, for how to resolve these challenges, but are also aware that that the formal system leaves a lot to be desired—that it hasn’t worked so well over the years and doesn't really seem to be meeting our deep human needs for healing and connection around these issues. And of course they take my classes but are also taking other classes that are much more traditionally framed.

I try to keep my students encouraged that they can be agents of change if they can think a little bit differently than the precedent has done about these issues and bring this different dimension in—in some way, over time. Not in a facile way, I want them to know it won't be easy. But it's about encouraging them to see themselves in the long tradition of lawyers as change agents.

It is challenging, but for many students, it is also like a breath of fresh air, or a cold drink of water when they needed one, a place where the cognitive and emotional dissonance that they have been feeling in law is addressed. These students have been in classes feeling like they are learning the strategy, the precedents and the rules, yet inside they know that these strategies, precedents, and rules have not changed the world and they know we need something more. So I am the person on the faculty who can say to them, “Yes—that nagging sense that you need something more—I for one agree with you on that. Now how might we together create an intellectual conversation in our law school that creates space for rethinking the law and the processes by which we resolve conflicts that allows for this inner dimension?” It can be difficult yet that is how I approach it.

Preeta: I believe many students come to law school to ensure civil rights work; feeling like the world has not been entirely just, feeling like they want to make a difference and want to change the world. For them to then be exposed to someone like you telling them; “Yes we need to change the world but maybe we also need to change our hearts and to learn to love and be compassionate.”

Rhonda: There are some students that know justice is part and parcel of love. If we are going to shift from injustice to justice in some way compassion has to be a part of that; in some way opening our hearts, not just our systems. There is a part that is about meeting those students who already have this orientation, and then there's a part that's about expanding the circle of people who would be interested in this—those are the people who don't quite get it.

Having done this work for many years I have turned to the Master Teachers of human history for guidance, from Gandhi, the Buddha and Thich Nhat Hanh who talked about and embodied teachings that met people where they were; their teachings engaged both the intellectual mind and took the system and challenged it on its terms in the quest for justice that which never has left the heart behind. I include Jesus in this model as well. Bringing a heartful engagement with the suffering that is happening under the current system—this is the system you've created and this is the suffering that is happening under that system. The system itself is part of that problem. Since I first presented my job talk at the University of San Francisco—it was on this topic and the Janus face nature of law when it comes to this quest for justice around social inequality, that it has been at the same time the source of injustice for many, many sub populations and sub communities, and the hope—and we get nowhere if we don't see the law through that lens.

We certainly cannot help our students effectively combat injustice without seeing the ever present need to critically evaluate the system itself. For those students who do not come in drawn to a love-based, service-based approach, when you speak to them about the inherent contradictions of the system and the need to have an ongoing critical lens on the system itself, then the questions arise: what does that critique look like, what are the dimensions of that critique? That's a way that I engage those students in conversation about the dimensions of the criticism that recognize the alienating implications of what we are living with right now. In the conversation we are able to bring in Martin Luther King's notion of justice—as love correcting that which stands against love—or Cornel West, a philosopher and contemporary racial justice advocate who speaks about justice and being what love looks like in public. We bring in these dimensions as a way of helping students to think about—if something is wrong with the current system then what is it? Might it be in part because there are ways that we need to reframe a legal strategy, legal rules, burdens of proof, different ways we think about evidence, who is permitted to be on the jury? There are specific projects we need to accomplish in law but if we can see that at least some dimension of the project has to do with how we "re-soul" the entire system, "re-inspiriting" what it means to be a human being and "re-conceptualizing" the legal subjects and objects of law in a way that is through-and-through more holistic and in a way infused with this deeper knowing that comes from a spiritual lens. Some students have resistance because when they feel like "wait this has got to be a secular engagement". Legal education has to be thoroughly secular and they wonder if I am talking about religion? Some students are defended against that—and in some ways maybe criticizing. If I do have some orientation that would make a connection between religion or law, are you suggesting a particular religion that I don't subscribe to—something that threatens my deep Christian principles?" So the more we get into it the messier and sticky the conversation can become. I think that's what we 'change agents' are about.

Preeta: That's beautiful. I am struck by a phrase that you used about "ensouling" the system and "ensouling" our system of justice and I wonder about that in contrast with the notion of embodying love and compassion. Having spent so much time in the system, it goes to a question that's been very much alive for me—does mindfulness or several of these kind of inner techniques, do they help to support the system by bringing in

ensoulment around the edges of the system, or should we be working outside of it with love, compassion and trust and embody that in the world? So I guess the question is—I have heard it said that mindfulness is to meditation what empathy is to compassion. That they are kind of light versions of the deeper inner work that's needed for true transformation. I wonder how you feel about that—embedding yourself within an institution and a profession which is very much focused on the system as it is vs. being outside of it?

Rhonda: Yeah—that's an on-going question—I have an answer for that today, probably another one tomorrow and another one 5 years from now! Because that has been the animating ongoing question certainly for me since that day or that moment where I decided yes I'm going to continue to teach. From the spiritual view, for me the challenge is to hold complexity more effectively, and to resist false dichotomies and dualities. While I understand this idea that mindfulness is one thing and meditation another, I think we can put too much into making cognitive intellectual distinctions and I say that with respect to the fact that yes there are differences. To be engaged in the world is to be engaged in making distinctions and I have found starting points for discussions that do evaluate terms. I recognize the importance of all of it, yet at the same time I think we can over-invest language with capacity to capture what is worthy of being brought into conversation.

For example, mindfulness means many different things. There is a very light version of it and then there are much deeper versions that are every bit what others might call meditation. This is funny because just last week I was on a panel to discuss cultivating empathy at the annual conference of the American Association of Law Schools, which is this national gathering of thousands of law professors where we get together and talk about law with judges. The panel's focus on cultivating empathy was grounded in awareness of the really difficult task it is to actually be in a space of empathy. Compassion is even more challenging yet there are two sides of the same coin. How well we can sit in empathy and how effectively we can act in compassion—these are lifelong challenges. So part of it is being much more capacious in our willingness and our ability to sit with these challenges. What is it that we are really seeking when we pursue bringing mindfulness into engagement with our legal system? I say "we" because each person who is involved in this is going to hold that question differently. I am interested in transforming our system. I have led retreats for lawyers that are billed as stress reduction retreats right? And yet that's not actually why I am there—I just had this conversation at the law professor's conference—yet in that space we created a mindfulness affinity group, part of a subsection of holistic approaches to law and law practices. We were having dinner in that group talking about our work to bring mindfulness into law and I was the one to say, "If I wasn't interested in transforming the system and in deep engagement with social injustice with mindfulness and compassion I wouldn't be here."

This for me is not just about stress reduction and it is not just about helping lawyers deal more effectively with a really messed up system. Those things are almost inevitably a part of the work. So part of my own practice has been to be patient with meeting the system where it is—meeting the needs of the members and the participants where they are. If people are needing relief from the day to day stresses of the system, I'm there in some measure to provide that and yet, if I didn't have this bigger view, this view of radical interconnectedness, this view of the deep need—that is life's ethical call at the moment—for us to really live what we can see about our inherent interconnectedness. The challenges that are showing up in global warming and climate change, all of the political challenges that we see today, the wars, these crises that we are dealing with, and that we sometimes turn to law whether domestic or international to help us with, they are

calling out, crying out for a kind of deep almost meditative retreat-like engagement with the question of who we are as human beings, so-called individual human beings, always of course embedded in community and interconnected to everything. Who we are and what we are about when we try to “resolve” these issues, moving from the—God bless all of those in the Enlightenment era who gave us this notion of individual rights and the Declaration of Independence and the rights of humanity. Of course it was “Man” at the time—those things got us here.

The challenge for today is to see the need for that system to be brought into another period of enlightenment. It is not just about what the judges have said, but what are the human being and the human experience telling us about what justice is calling for? What does it mean for my sense of self as being embedded in a world which is alive and through-and-through not just with human interests but the non-human world and the spiritual world and the environment? What is the deep engagement with our embedded-ness and all of that it suggests for what the law should be? That is a huge call. I have to have some patience with my entire field which I know is not quite ready to re-envision the entire system. I feel that I couldn’t be in this system if I didn’t keep my vision clear, and then the challenge for me is to find ways to be in real conversation that translates my vision or moves from where I see where we might go to where we are right now, what kind of languages my students must be competent in, what kind of strategies must they be competent in to deal with the system as it is, yet to not be defeated by the system as it is, and to continue to be inspired in themselves and inspirited by a vision that is bigger and more capacious than what they are given by the current law and policies.

Preeta: Going back to your roots—growing up in the segregated south, being drawn to Civil Rights, and the legal struggles—where do you see yourself now? I have often said when I talked about this where did the real change come about—was it Thurgood Marshall was it Martin Luther King or was it Rosa Parks? Was it a lawyer, was it the religious leader, the spiritual leader or was it the ordinary person acting with integrity and dignity? Obviously it’s all the above. Do you see yourself now as an agent of socio-political change principally or someone who is devoted to personal spiritual change? What do you see in this moment as your principal focus?

Rhonda: So that’s a really beautiful question. Nothing is accomplished without personal commitment, and that includes any kind of change one might want to see in the world. I certainly see myself on a path that is about personal transformation and deepening commitment. That is itself really challenging. Like most of us, I grew up embedded in a world that wasn’t a monastery, I wasn’t born separated out from a social context and the particular social context was one where there was a lot of poverty, a lot of the kind of social dysfunction that travels often with poverty and lack of opportunity. Often communities like that turn inward on themselves and that certainly was something I saw up close and lived with as well. Families where there was abuse in the household, alcoholism and all types of dysfunction, that I think are about personal failings and are wholly predictable consequences of systemic injustice. For me, I see myself very much as being on a path that is about personal transformation, and perhaps in some ways have always seen myself in that way. Even from the position of the playpen in the community in that little small home where all this chaos was actually happening, almost fifty years ago now. Back in North Carolina, as a small child I had somehow had that sense that there was a much, much deeper kind of way of being. I always had a sense that there was something more that I associate with spirituality. Even as a child growing up in that situation I didn't feel that my horizons were limited by it. Yet I always had a sense that if that were to be true in the world I would have to have my own personal commitment to transformation, it wasn't just going to manifest itself.

Deepening my own personal practices is my first priority—living my commitments. That is not always easy when I am working at a traditional law school in 2017 San Francisco, with a life partner who has his own obligations in the world of professional and social work, family connections and commitments. So living with integrity is an ongoing challenge. Integrity is what arises from my contemplative and personal practice commitments. There is certainly a link and I do see it as my personal practice path, if you will, to work on myself and my own capacity for freeing empowerment and for seeing myself rightly in ways that honor my own experience which has been about racially embodied existence in a world where race has mattered very much, and a gendered existence in a world where gender has mattered very much, and a class position that has straddled poverty to wealth anyways. So living right on the dot of the embodied experience that is real in a certain way, and that particular path, and I think we're all given a particular path, that informs the kinds of ethical work, social justice work that we might each be called to, as we deeply transform ourselves through our personal work.

Preeta: I have one last question. You have talked about your grandmother and watching her in prayer and meditation every day and how that was an undercurrent, even as you pursued the interest in systemic reform. As you turned to mindfulness and became a student of Buddhism did you have any reconciliation that needed to happen between your Christian origins and some of the Buddhist tools and techniques that you've adopted?

Rhonda: I guess I have always been critically engaged with Christianity, so seeing the teachings of Christ as one thing, and seeing the kind of cultural adaptations of those teachings into something we call Christianity that looks like this in one place and looks like that in another. My quest and it's actually quite true with the teachings of the Buddha and trying to live and follow those teachings—it's a very individual path, and I've always been drawn to a way of holding these traditions in that way. It's not that I don't respect that religious communities have much to offer, but I do believe that there is much more to be gained by inter-religious insight, by looking for the common ground between these traditions.

I've somehow always believed that—that there are just core dimensions of this work that resist delineation in sectarian terms and separate religious terms. So I know that is anathema to some people and others find that really challenging. I just never really have. Many in my family hold this very differently, although I believe my grandmother would agree. For me, the teachings of Christ that were so much about being with society's castoffs, spending time with the disinherited, the discarded, and bringing a kind of compassionate love to bear on that work, that felt to me like the Buddha's teachings which were more about getting the mind clear, sort of noticing the way the kind of traditional ways we cause our own suffering-- to me there's a beautiful conversation between the original teachings of the Buddha and the original teachings of Christ, that if we don't bring the two together we're missing a lot. So I have had my own personal way of reconciling those. The "heartfulness" and the lovingness of Christ who would be with the whores and with the people who were challenged, and also to see the Buddha's teachings and examples about constantly not being fooled about how hard it is to be clear how hard it is to stay in a place of awareness and the ongoing nature of the human challenge of not being caught up in the three poisons; ignorance, attachment and aversion. I think there is just a deep call right now for really finding the next level of enlightenment—lessons that can reach an ever broadening circle of humanity. And I'm up for that!

Preeta: Wonderful!

Sujatha: We're so glad you're up for that! It was such a joy listening to the two of you. Each of you has an amazing capacity to fully engage both your hearts and your minds in this very beautiful and necessary conversation.

Rhonda I wanted to ask you to talk about something. I know you have done a lot of incredibly deep thinking in your work around what you call color insight, and you also have this deep meditative approach to some of the things in our society that really divide us. I appreciated your discussion of the patience that is required of us attorneys when we are talking about bringing mindfulness to the law, and how people want to be expeditious and use it as a tool in a sense to be better at their jobs or whatever. I don't mean to externalize, this is definitely true for me personally, and that I need to have patience with parts of myself. I think what I have most trouble with is something we've talked about with both our spiritual selves and with other spiritual folks who want to do the spiritual bypass around some of these things—the kind of "We are all one" cliché. I think when we jump really quickly to things like forgiveness and compassion without really excavating the horrors that we suffer that are requiring us to dig deeper—having the deeper experience of those things... I know that was a really compound question but I just wanted to set the stage to ask you to talk a little bit about what that deep meditative approach is to these hard things so that we don't follow the spiritual bypass—and can you also talk about what is this color insight that you asked us to engage in?

Rhonda: There is such a communion that arises in this work. To look more deeply at this question of bringing insights to bear on issues of racial injustice and to examine what it takes and what I mean by development of color insight. When I previously said that I think everybody's particular human life is sort of a gift I don't mean this from a Pollyanna sense, since I know there is a lot of suffering in the world that we each have experienced, and some more than others. I also don't mean to suggest a utilitarian or lightness about any of that as a facile way to serve—that you just take your suffering and simply turn it around as a gift. Yet I actually do think that the particular path we have each been fortunate to survive or otherwise we wouldn't be on this call. Whatever its journey, whatever its privileges and benefits, for each of us, has been perfectly suited to teach and to be a source of teaching for others.

And so the way I was thrown into a world in a segregated American southern town with all of the chaos I mentioned, in a body that was racialized by others as black. I didn't come into the world as a tiny infant thinking of myself as a black woman but those are the terms of the passage in this social setting. I am aware of that and I can at the same time be aware of the fact that it is not all of whom I am, nor that these concepts do not fully capture who I am. But it would be foolish for me in this context not to be aware of the way in which my particular embodiment is read in this culture, through the lenses of race, culture, class and education. I know this is happening in the world. And I know that I am an agent of that as well, that I do almost inevitably in the social world, in processing and recognizing people's social identities and inquiring in some ways explicitly or implicitly about what that means and how they came to their views. That deep awareness and engagement with reality again to the degree that we are not living in a small hut somewhere totally disconnected, if we are in the world and in these different settings, if I am in the United States of America today, for me not to be aware that race and gender are issues that will meet me whether I want to engage with them or not—I must be aware of that, right? When I endeavor to engage others around these issues I recognize that their particular packaging and embodiment is going to be, just as mine has been, a setup.

To use the language of John Welwood, who is a spiritual psychologist, a student of Buddhism and who devised the term “spiritual bypassing”. He wants us to think about how we come to these challenges that the Buddhists call marks of suffering and marks of existence. The suffering around wanting things to be permanent that is inevitably impermanent, right? These are all ways that we create our own suffering and including those that are tied to identity. His teachings, as far as I've read them, help us to see that we are, speaking on the social and relative plane of existence that is not fully comprehensive of our absolute being in nature, but on that social plane we are invited in certain ways we have cultural histories we have genders and lineages and stories particular stories, and we are set up in a certain way to see things and to be understanding about certain things, and to be blind and unaware about others. I don't know fully what it is like to be, let’s say a transgender male growing up in Durban South Africa—about that experience. Having some humility about the fact that our particular embodiment and positionality does indeed set us up for knowing and having some felt experience about some things and not really knowing about other things. That’s important!

I think that's where humility comes in. It can be a difficult term for those of us who have felt a life of disadvantage and disrespect. We’ve been humiliated. You should also have humility when you engage with other people about this—that can be difficult for us to understand and hear. But I think that on the path of development, we heal from our humiliation. If we are women of color and we lived a life of poverty and we've been abused, we know that we have our own healing to do, and that can be the center of our spiritual work. But as we heal, we can encounter a white male who appears to be very privileged; we won't know that person's full experience so we have to have humility if we are to engage on a fully human and spiritually informed level with that person. We can only hope that others will engage with us in that way too. So it takes a certain amount of patience but it also is an area where we must seek to develop our capacity to hold all of these different dimensions of truth, and to work on our own issues even while we honor and respect that other people might be works in progress.

We are trying to meet people where they are with compassion for the fact that we are all struggling in some way. Our struggles are not the same but we are all struggling, and to bring love and compassion to that is the core of the work. It is to say, no we are not going to bypass we are going to bring insight. I use the term color insight and it’s not just about race, it’s the insight from the tradition of Vipassana and the tradition of those Buddhist teachers who ground us in a capacity for calm awareness that can, over time or maybe in some instances, happen somewhat episodically and suddenly, yet we develop some insight into the true nature of reality and that same kind of developmental path can happen around understanding and how injustice arrays around identity, that is to be in calm engagement, to sit with what does it mean to be racialized in this way, gendered in this way, and then to develop some insight into how these identities might be showing up in our lives right now, might be factoring into why some of us feel alienated, some of us more vulnerable, some of us more protected, even now in this space in this setting in this group, that’s what I mean by color insight and I do see it as a way of walking the path that is about knowing suffering, knowing there are causes of suffering and there is a way to be released from that suffering through practice. It’s bringing all that to bear on those particular issues of our lives.

Sujatha: Wonderful. I’m going to go to the first caller.

Caller: Hi this is Kozo from Cupertino and I want to thank all three of you for all that you

are doing in the world of law which you know for me is a difficult other. But I have an observation and a question. My observation is that all three of you who are doing really powerful work with compassion in law are women. There is this gender force, I call it, and then gender lack on the other side. In terms of spiritual paths, I find surrender to be one of the most powerful and important aspects of the spiritual journey and I think about Gandhi and I think about Nelson Mandela—how they were both lawyers and they both were adept in the law rooms yet in their quest both spiritually and politically they surrendered deeply. They stopped the argument and they surrendered to ahimsa, non-violence, Mandela surrendered to prison—so I am wondering how, Rhonda, how do you see that working within the framework of law where surrender is such an important part of the spiritual journey but so antithetical to law to arguing and to the courtroom. You rarely see a lawyer say "I surrender—I'm going to take one for the team." Would you comment on this?

Rhonda: I appreciate your observation about the gender force. I do think there is something to be reflected on. It invites a reflection on what we mean by surrender and the different ways it shows up in places and times. When I look at the lives of Mandela and Gandhi and King, King wasn't a lawyer but wanted to seek a PhD in Philosophy and ended up doing divinity partly because he didn't get into the program of Philosophy but you know Philosophy can often be about arguing a particular point. All three were very interested in these kinds of ways of being in the world that were about engaging systems intellectually and arguing with them, and yet, their life paths did go through right, deep surrender as a dimension of their practice and their social change work. For me, I think one doesn't have to relinquish the role of lawyer to be engaged with surrender, in fact, I think if you are trying to do social justice work at all today, whether in law or not given the circumstances and the nature of the challenges, we inevitably have to surrender a lot as we go. And choosing when to pause, and be patient, and surrender for now as I would put it, which is a way that I see these models of surrender as you mention, they kind of shifted the terms of the debate I don't think they relinquished—I think of King from the Birmingham Jail writing that letter and saying to the Christian ministers out there who don't understand why we need civil disobedience this was just saying these laws are profoundly unjust and this is how we are going to fight them not that we are not going to fight them but that we are going to fight them in a different way. So how we surrender is a really interesting and profound question, but to not necessarily be caught up in a sense of "it's either surrender or fight"—it's much more nuanced than that to me. And there's a certain kind of spirited fight that goes with the kind of surrender that these models embody and there's a certain kind of surrender engagement that the best lawyers who are staying in the system are in, those of us like Sujatha embodying and working in the spaces of trying to change the systems to bring in restorative justice. It's staying in the system and speaking the language of it and going to Harvard and Yale law schools the center of the powers of the legal universe and saying even here we need to talk about restorative justice. That is a way of sort of taking the energy of surrender but not leaving the arena. And I think that's what we're asking of ourselves.

Sujatha: It makes me think of some of the death penalty lawyers, who really are somehow able to hold both truths. That somehow everything that they do matters and that everything in the universe is going to operate the way it's going to operate. Thank you, Kozo, for the question. Now, some comments and questions from the web.

From Ebony (via the web): Thank you all for having and sharing this conversation. Can Miss Magee give an example of a specific activity besides critical evaluation and conversation that illustrates her approach to teaching law with compassion? Rephrased can she give an example that compares her teaching approach and the traditional

approach to the same issue?

From Amit (via the web): First I want to say thank you for being the person you are and using your life to be an agent of change. Not just for others but for also focusing on you. I think that is the part that many people myself included at times sometimes forget that if we really want to make a change in the world we have to start with ourselves and to see you do this on both fronts is inspiring and I wish I could jump through the phone and give you a big, big hug. Also I have two questions for you: What skillful means do you use when you engage in this type of dialogue especially with other lawyers when the conversation is so often at the level of intellect, and ego how do you move it down to the Heart level? And question 2, how do we make the personal societal awareness in mindfulness more a part of the legal mainstream conversation whether it is at the law school level or say in the Am law 200 firms or legal publications?

Rhonda: Thank you all for these questions Ebony and Amit—and for the hugs and appreciation. I send that right back to you because I am sure we are all trying to engage in ways that are making a difference. So I honor everything that everyone who is taking time to be on the call is contributing already as well. So to speak to the question about examples of teaching—I am eighteen to nineteen years into this particular Law School and have succeeded on the terms of my institution. This is how we do things, we go in with a sledgehammer and have to go in and sort of look around and figure out what it is that they are asking of us, what are these terms and how can we meet them? But once we do that I've found that it gives you a little bit of leeway to start to change the terms. So what I've been able to do is introduce these practices as a kind of pedagogy for social transformation that I can bring into my Law School classes. So in each of them, in different ways whether it's a personal injury law class or my contemplative lawyering class I can bring these practices in explicitly more or less. Let's take the race law class where I have a lot of content that is sort of traditional case law content on the one hand and then make this effort ongoing at the same time to bring in these practices. So what I do is I have gotten permission to give myself more space as we do this work. Traditionally in a law school class you are racing through tens of cases a weeks, right those of you who have been in law school know that the pace and the scope of coverage is so broad it doesn't leave a lot of time and space for the kinds of reflective increase that I have brought to bear in this contemplative pedagogy married with the substantive work that needs to be conveyed. If I didn't go to my Dean and say I'm going to need more time, I'm going to need permission to cut out some of the coverage to give more time in reflection and pausing in deep conversation and deep listening and working on ourselves in this classroom space, if I can't do that we're not going to learn in a deeper way. And I went to my Dean and asked for that and I got that. I wasn't able to do that at first but I was eventually and am able to do that now. I say that as an encouragement to those of you who are working in institutional settings where you see some changes that should be made—again patience—I couldn't do it in year 1 but I am certainly doing it in year eighteen!

So what I do I have curated and selected particular important cases that help speak to convey legal substance around the development of the equal protection jurisprudence for example, or the development of the discovery doctrine by which we justified taking the land of this country away from Native Americans. So pulling those particular cases out, like Immigration cases, important ones that would help demonstrate the way immigration law has been a vehicle for racial oppression in the country, identifying a number, but then realizing if I am going to do this in my contemplative way instead of teaching forty cases a semester we are going to teach fourteen and then allowing time and space to read and do the analysis and pull out the dimensions of thinking like a lawyer and analyzing ways, but

at the same bringing in meditation. So we sit together. We do everything from personal meditation practice commitments right, I invite them to practice in class and out of class. I give them support for that online and in-class, and we practice sitting meditation, we do the compassion practices such as Loving Kindness meditation. I have introduced this to them by explaining the way that research has confirmed that these practices actually have been shown at least in some degree to help us deal with bias and to deal with the challenges of conversations on this topic. So they come into the classroom settings now ready to learn on all these Dimensions. Now you're starting to re-conceive what it means to study law embedding the notion that you study it substantively, and you have a role in this—you look at your own life, as your life history has perhaps taught you something about this substance. And you work on your emotional kind of reactivity and your place in all of this as we engage with each other around what justice might look like informed by the study. That's how I do it. It is taking the traditional "Think like a lawyer" approach, slowing it down enough so that we can infuse it with spiritual practice. But I don't call it spiritual in the class I call it mindfulness or awareness because I'm in an institutional setting where I need to use that secular language. But it is kind of a way of embedding every dimension of what we talked about and marrying it with the intellectual work. That is an example of how I teach that.

Now, in terms of bringing this into law settings, they are surprisingly reaching out more and more to people like me to come and offer presentations. It's a challenge to bring it into a continuing legal education model, which is like an hour and a half where you come into the law firm. You offer maybe some sitting and offer some comments and Q&A's and then you go away and you wonder if it's had any impact. But increasingly firms are asking for that. More and more people from those firms are coming to retreats for lawyers. And as I said before often they are motivated by the desire to deal with issues in a utilitarian way, with stress or with conflict that is raising Intercultural, racial or gendered social identity-based conflict that is happening in their firms. So they have been calling me to come and offer presentations and workshops that feel frankly a bit too one-off but I do it because I think the introduction to these principles of applying an inner dimension to law practice is in itself an invitation that might lead to deepening work and if I can open the door and support people by saying "here's how you can follow up", I'm willing to do that work as a service.

Sujatha: Thank you so much for the wonderful answers to these questions. We are coming to the end of our time together. If I could just ask you really briefly—how is it that we can as a larger ServiceSpace community support your work?

Rhonda: Thank you so much. You know the message I've been carrying really is about how each of us has a role to play in helping advance understanding and compassion around the many ways that social identity bias, in particular, causes suffering in the world. And so I would just invite everyone on the call, everyone in the ServiceSpace community, I mean I assume that many already are doing this, but I invite us all into deep kind of communion around and commitment towards seeing our spiritual work as the very place where we actually work on and help others work on social identity-based bias and suffering because you know that kind of suffering is happening pervasively in our world and in our midst and I personally believe that the insights and tools of spiritual work are beautifully capable of helping support liberation that begins with ourselves as individuals but actually has an interpersonal and a systemic dimension as well.

Sujatha: Thank you so much.