

Paying It Forward: An Interview with Nipun Mehta by Nathan Scolaro

Last March, I interviewed Nipun for our magazine, Dumbo Feather -- and I left so energized by our chat! It left a deep impression and we locally got active in trying to create an Awakin Circle in Melbourne, we've published another article on "multiple forms of capital", our founders are coming out for a ServiceSpace retreat, and most recently we've been doing some kindness experiments too. I feel so grateful to know ServiceSpace, and look forward to supporting the "ripples". The photo-essay looks gorgeous in the print magazine, but below is a snapshot with some interspersed photos by the talented Ramin Rahimian. Hope you enjoy!

For more than 20 years, Nipun Mehta and his parents have been opening his doors to friends and strangers every Wednesday evening, creating a space for people to sit in circle together, meditate, share thoughts, and enjoy a meal. The invitation is to "wake up to wisdom in stillness and community," a simple gesture of service and connection that now takes place in people's living rooms across the globe. All of Nipun's life work comes front this same place of generosity, be it Karma Kitchen, a restaurant chain where the meal you eat is gifted to you from a previous customer; Kindspring, a space to practice small acts of kindness and share inspiration with others; or Laddership Circles, a transformational program for people to dive into gift economy practices and learn to lead from within. Under the umbrella organisation, Service Space, all of these projects not only seek to. but are, manifesting the gift economy -- an economy based on generosity and abundance rather than scarcity and fear.

Growing up, Nipun's mission was to either become a Himalayan yogi or a tennis pro. Whatever it was, he wanted to "be the best." He excelled at school and went on to study computer science and philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. Impressing his lecturers, he immediately got a job as a software engineer, quickly finding himself on the corporate ladder. The wisdom of Nipun at age 25 was to realise that this ladder actually had no end and didn't lead to more happiness or even a feeling of success as was promised to him. And so, while many of his peers were becoming full-time workaholics, he became a full-time volunteer, and has stayed that way ever since.

Nipun was honored an "unsung hero of compassion" by the Dalai Lama, not long before President Obama appointed him to a council for addressing poverty and inequality in the US. He talks frequently on the topic of giftivism, and how relationships in this current economic paradigm have been reduced to a very deadening, singular kind of transaction. His role is to bring an abundant mindset back into our communities, where giving might well be the ultimate reward -- and where there are many kinds of capital to trade: from

love and kindness to labour and time. Perhaps most noteworthy of all is Nipun's humility, vibrating through everything he touches, and his conviction that ego is not the core of what it means to be human. It's eco.

Nathan Scolaro: I'm wondering if you can link the work that you're doing now around generosity and kindness to something that was seeded in your childhood?

Nipun Mehta: Well, growing up, I think I had this drive to be somebody, to be spectacular, to be extraordinary. And at some point I realised that I'm not. "I'm not the Michael Jordan of basketball," "I'm not the Mozart of music." I'm just me. Then, you start to fall into your ordinariness and you open yourself up to doing what's needed. Whatever is useful. It's a much lighter way to be, a lighter mental footprint to have on the world. As I zoomed out the ordinariness of things and I zoomed in further to the inter-connected of all things, I started to see emergence more clearly. In that dance between emptiness and fullness, there's a subtle sort of happiness in just being instrument of emergence. It's deeply satisfying. That desire to want to be more is a fallacy, because you never really arrive. I tried that, actually. I did uncommon things, I accomplished goals, I reached these major milestones. I was a junior in college at the age of 17. But the last 20 years has been opening up to a different kind of motivation.

NC: It's difficult, right? Because our economy essentially is telling us that we need to achieve more, acquire more, that we need more money, bigger goals. That's where all our personal striving is coming from.

NM: That's precisely the systemic design principle that's embedded in being extraordinary — it's meant to multiply our wants instead of just fulfilling our needs. I think if we just feel into, "Oh, I have enough, I am content," then all of the sudden there's this upwelling of gratitude.

A lot of people feel that when we get to that space of contentness we won't do anything -- that we'll just be lazy. Yet, if that experience is deep enough, we actually end up having this incredible overflowing of gratitude that compels one to serve.

And in that giving we build relationships and through those relationships we cultivate this incredible network of trust. Then, in such a field of trust, a remarkably regenerative transformation can take place. So this idea of incessant striving to get somewhere sensational, and be extra-ordinary, is actually part of the problem. We've designed a society on that premise. I was part of that rollercoaster myself. But it doesn't make much sense to me now.

NC: So how do you go from being a very high achiever stuck on the rollercoaster to someone who's really kind of humbling into a position of service and generosity?

NM: When I was in college I wanted to impress all my professors and get a job. And I did. In my third year of college I was working in a dream job. Once you get there you want to get a promotion and I did. In six months, I had two promotions and I was doing better than I ever thought I would be doing at the time. So I said, "Now I'm doing well in a big company maybe I should start my own dot com." At that time the internet was the rage. Yet, for me, underneath it there was this constant questioning of, Am I doing the right thing? I'm climbing up the ladder but maybe the ladder's up against the wrong wall? Over time what was below the radar overtook my dominant narrative. I started doing small experiments in generosity. For instance, we would go out and feed the homeless. And initially it was like, "Hey, I have food, you don't have food, I'm giving you food," but over

time it went from, “Feed the homeless” to, “Hear the homeless.” Realising that actually what we needed to do was build the relationship and then sure, you still give them food, but these intangibles of connection were actually very significant and meaningful. Not just for the homeless person but also for the person on the other side of the equation. So you start to realise how service is not just, “I am giving to you,” but something where we’re both giving to each other. At the time, I probably wouldn’t have been to articulate it, but the multi-dimensionality of things was increasingly evident. Sure, I may be giving you food capital but you may be giving me love capital. I may be giving you listening capital and you may be giving me experience capital. We’re all exchanging different gifts. It’s impossible to give without receiving.

Nathan: I love this. You just reminded me of this quote that I read on your website. You said part of your mission is to purify yourself to serve others and serve others to purify yourself. Imagine if we all had that as our guiding narrative.

NM: The beauty of that possibility is that we can activate that idea in the smallest of acts. Here and now. Even if the act is entirely invisible. An unmistakable transformation that takes place in us. When we put it all together, if I’m serving you, it’s unclear if you are the biggest beneficiary or I am. Even if I am just willing to hold that unknown, the suspension of judgement itself changes everything. It changes how I serve, changes our relationship, changes the future ripple effect that is bound to come from our kinship.

NC: And you obviously have had a high level of self-awareness. You said you had these nagging questions that it didn’t quite feel right to keep pursuing the path of vacuous growth for the sake of growth. How does the person who’s stuck in the system, who might not have been asking the questions that you’re asking, come to ask those questions?

NM: I think you observe the system and say, “Look at these unending multiplication of desires. Is it really satisfying to be on that hamster wheel?” When we accomplish something – and we’ve all had that experience of achieving -- it is satisfying, sure. But then you’re onto the next thing. It’s almost unrelenting, it just doesn’t stop. When you create a society that propagates those wheels, we are bound to face our current set of problems, like climate change and endless growth. It’s not a metaphysical thing. For me it was a common-sense thing. In my early twenties I actually did research. I went out and looked at people who had very little. A lot of monks and nuns. I interviewed them just like you’re doing now. Since I was in the Silicon Valley, I also got to interact with high achievers, with big bank balances and fame. And I looked at them and realised that happiness was not proportional to how much you had accumulated. That started to change how I felt. If I want to be happy, I just have to go out and do an act of kindness. It doesn’t have to create huge change in the world or be in the headlines tomorrow.

Who does a sincere act of kindness and comes back saying, “Oh I wish I hadn’t done that”?

NC: Yes! [Laughs].

NM: So I just kept saying, “I want to do another one and another one and another one.” And that became my life at some point. And that’s how I see myself now. I really resonate with Mother Teresa’s quote, “You can do no big things, only small things with great love.”

NC: Yeah, beautiful. It’s funny. Like a a small act of kindness, it feels like the easiest

thing that we can do. And yet I think in many circumstances it actually can be the hardest thing that someone could do, right?

NM: You know, last week I was in North Carolina for a talk. And we had dinner the night before with all the different speakers. And the guy who was going to be introducing me the next day, he came up to me and was nervous about what he was going to say. I said, "Why don't you forget about my bio. Here's a little Smile Card. Do something kind for someone, anonymously, leave a Smile Card behind that tells the recipient to pay it forward for someone else." And this kid actually took me up on it. The next day he gets up to speak in front of everybody and he's like, "At dinner last night, we were sharing what everybody does. And it comes to our next speaker and he says, 'Hey, I'm just trying to be a kind person but I realise it's hard work. It's taken me a while. I'm still on that journey.'" And when I first heard that I was like, "How hard can it be to be kind? But then he told me to not talk about his bio and instead go out and do an act of kindness and tell you the story. And I've been trying for the last 24 hours to do this act but there are all these different inner structures within me that prevent me from doing that. All of a sudden, it dawned on me that what he said yesterday was right. That actually kindness sounds simple but it's not as simple in practice." Then the kid says, "So I haven't done my act yet. But I promise to all of you that I'm going to do it, and not only that, I've got a Smile Card for every one of you before you leave the conference."

NC: Wonderful.

NM: Right? It was a beautiful moment, but the kid was right. It's hard. It sounds so simple, but it's not as simple as just willing it. There's a lot of new science about how it takes a community. If your friends are kind and generous, you're more likely to be kind and generous. Yeah, it's contagious.

NC: Actually our previous issue of Dumbo Feather was all about courage. So when you were talking then I was thinking, Oh maybe it takes courage to be kind. Because he's talking about all of these inner resistances that he's going through that's prevented him from doing the kind act.

NM: Oh big time. I think the most courageous thing we can do is to love. In any situation. This is precisely what the great legends of social change like Gandhi did. He said, "No matter what you do, no matter how many guns you bring, no matter how you intimidate me, I am going to make a commitment to respond to your actions with love. I may oppose the action but I'm going to love you because you are greater than this particular action." And that's at that meta level, but even at a micro level I remember a story of this woman who wrote to us on our Smile Cards portal, kindspring.org. She shared this incredible story of how her son was out hiking with his college friends and he slipped and fell and he passed away.

NC: Oh s***.

NM: And when he passed away, they gave his possessions to his mum. And what she found inside his wallet was a Smile Card. And this mum wrote to us while she's grieving and said, "I found his Smile Card and I realised that this was what my son was all about -- he was about kindness, about love. Even in his passing my son left me this lesson. I have decided for the next year to do an act of kindness every day. So will you please send me a few Smile Cards?" I mean talk about courage. Talk about taking your grief and having the capacity to turn it. Just as Gandhi took the hatred and turned it towards love, she took her grief and turned it towards love. These are not simple matters. Yet, if we practice those

and if we all start to tap into that space, love I think is stronger than any of the negativities we might feel. To me it is the ultimate possibility. And community really plays a big part in affording us the resilience to keep trying until we arrive at love.

NC: So tell us a bit about the community that you've created through ServiceSpace and maybe how that's evolved over the years.

NM: ServiceSpace started by building websites for non-profits. It was an online expression of generosity. We were a Silicon Valley bunch with some tech expertise, so we said, "Let's give our skills," and that's what we did. We went from there to create both online and offline hybrid projects. We had these Smile Cards which created offline engagement, but it was supported by online story sharing and community. Then there were projects that were completely offline like "Karma Kitchen" where we take over a restaurant just for a day and run it with different rules. Anyone who walks into Karma Kitchen is served a meal that they order, like on a restaurant day, except that here the check reads zero. And it's zero because someone before you has paid for you, someone you don't know. And at the end of your meal you have a chance to pay it forward. So

we took a meal experience and turned it into an experiment in expanding your empathy and ultimately growing your kindness muscles. It went from transaction to trust.

And when people are in this safe space and there is a kind of trust, the rules of the game are totally different. People behave totally different at Karma Kitchen than they would elsewhere. I remember a guy who came to the restaurant and said, "So you trust me to pay forward whatever I want?" And we were like, "Yeah, that's how it works." So he goes and tells this waiter, "Well here's a hundred. I'm going to trust you to bring back whatever change you want." He turned it around on the waiter! And the waiter is like, "Oh my God, what am I going to do?" How much do you give back? And what this guy did was stunning - he took out a 20 from his own pocket, and gave 120 back! In umpteen different ways, you have repeated stories of people behaving differently in a collective cocoon of generosity.

NC: And this is kind of a microcosm of what you call the gift economy. Is that how your understanding what ServiceSpace is doing?

ServiceSpace is a field in which greater generosity is catalyzed. Mini gift-economies are a by-product of that field. Now, in most healthy families, we can recognize a gift economy, right? I am not keeping track of how much Dad did for me and how much I did for Mum. So how do you start to create those circles of trust with people who are in our neighbourhood, with people that we don't know, with people that we perhaps disagree with or people that perhaps might have done wrong to us? If we have these invisible tentacles of kindness, compassion and courage, a kind of intertwined root ecosystem that undergirds our field, we will certainly have those gift economies, greater love and deeper connection. What are the organizing principles that nourish that kind of a field? In that sense, Servicespace is cultivating the field, gift-economies are some of the emergent trees, and trust and connection are the fruits that everyone benefits from. That field of love is the most important thing, and the rest follows.

NC: Okay! So we don't actually go out and intentionally design the gift economy? It's more that we cultivate these values and feelings between one another and a new way of operating emerges.

NM: Yeah, a good farmer knows that without a healthy soil, you can't have healthy fruit.

We're all farmers in the social field. As we have to tend to the soil, and the roots will invariably arise in its co-dependence, and collectively all kinds of trees will grow. Then, we won't have singular monoculture but a thriving and inter-related monoculture. That's when shift from singular tit-for-tat transactions to multidimensional relationships. I grew up in India. And when I went to a local store, they knew all about my family. So the exchange was much more than, "Hey give me some toothpaste." These days we don't even need to say that. It's just scan your bar code and get to the point. But what if the "point" was to relate more deeply? How do you start to move away from these singular transactions to much more multidimensional relationships?

NC: That's such a shift in my thinking about how we change systems. It's actually in cultivating the values and the relationships first. And from that the system emerges. Which is true of life. I mean if we look at nature that's how it works as well. It's not like nature maps out a system for its various parts and then behaves accordingly.

NM: If we build on the farming metaphor, we can't just take over a farm and say, "Hey, it's going to be organic from tomorrow." It's going to take three years for the soil to regenerate itself. What we've done as a society is we've stripped all these subtleties out of our commons and as a result all our modern solutions are more like patchwork. So I think the question is, "How do you start to go much more upstream, and address some of the more fundamental issues?"

NC: What do you see the role of money being in the future, if we do move in this direction? Should it always have a place?

NM: I think today's money has some design flaws. If you look at the mechanics of money, money is issued as debt in the world. And when you have debt, you need to have growth to pay off that debt. We assume an infinite capacity for growth, and when we inevitably hit limits, we become extractive. I'm not so sure that that's really how we want be engaging with each other. We extract not just from nature but from each other. Not only that, we start to be extractive with our own self! That's why so many people are so burned out. I think we need to shift from extractive systems to more regenerative systems. Some of that will have with redesign of money. With that, though, we also need to upgrade the way in which we relate to money. I don't think it's just an external systems issue.

Any sustainable solution has to bring external impact in concert with inner transformation, in a very real way.

NC: So let's talk about that. That work of inner transformation. I was reading about the Awakin Circles that you run. I'd love to hear a bit more about that as a starting point maybe.

NM: Oh that's amazing. Many years ago when I was in my late teens, my mum, another friend and I decided that we just don't get disciplined enough to sit in silence. So we picked a day of the week, Wednesday, seven o'clock in the night, to come together and sit in silence. No teachers, no agenda, just sit for an hour. And then in the second hour we said let's share "aha" moments from the week. Go round the circle and share at least one "aha" moment in a week. And then in the third hour, my Mum said, "Look Nipun, I've got to feed you anyway, so whoever else comes we'll feed them." The one unique thing that we did do is that we left the door open. So anybody who wanted to come was welcome to join. And that circle has continued every single week for the last 21 years.

NC: Oh my goodness!

NM: My mum still cooks. And I still help her with it. She would have fed more than 50,000 people in our own home. Every single Wednesday is still continues in that three-hour format. No brand, no donation box, no agenda, no marketing. Just word of mouth. People go up to Mum and say, "This is amazing, thank you." And she says, "No, thank you for the opportunity to be of service." You might think she's just trying to be humble saying that, but I have seen her over the 21 years. She's profoundly grateful because she has totally changed. How can you not? When one day of your week is dedicated to cooking for 50, 60 people?

One day my mum was home alone and all of the sudden she hears this, like, thump, thump, thump. In her mind, she's thinking, "Oh my God, what's going on?" The first thought that comes to her mind is she's in danger. She turns on all the lights and then she tries to identify where the sound is coming from. She hears more, thump, thump, thump, and she realises it's coming outside our living room. Then the thought that she has in that moment of fear, of panic, is, "Well, if someone's going to harm me, they could have easily come on a Wednesday, do whatever they wanted. Why am I letting this physical wall be a wall in my heart in this moment?" And with that thought Mum decides to do something, and I can't tell you how radical it is for her. She actually opens the door and decides to go and meet those threatening strangers. Whoever they are. Now, you have to really have earned your stripes to be able to do this! She walks up and she sees three young kids, and they didn't have guns, they were just throwing these oranges they must've found on a tree. As they see my Mum come out, the kids naturally started running. But my Mum reaches out to them because her intent wasn't merely to get them to stop. She had seen thousands of people come into her home and embraced them as sons and daughters and kin, and now she sees these 11-year olds and she doesn't just want them to run away. She's saying, "Hey kids, I feed a lot of people. Can I have those oranges?"

NC: Brilliant.

NM: [Laughs]. What a transformation. So, the Awakin Circles are a very simple structure and container for a lot of inner work to happen. First hour, sit in silence. Second hour, listen to everyone. In the third hour, you're giving and receiving. Host give, guest learn to receive. It's all quite ordinary, right? But that's precisely why it's amazing!

It's a respite from the sensationalism. It helps us stop multiplication of wants and desires, by simply resting in the moment, breathing, being with each other.

Just that, and an inexplicable collective gratitude arises. And the hosts aren't even trying to capture that gratitude. They're saying, "Pay it forward. Do something kind for someone else, and wherever that is, that is our family too!" Now, Awakin Circles are in a hundred places around the world. Including Melbourne!

NC: Really? I want to do this! And it's not like we need to be facilitators or anything. It's just welcoming people into your home?

NM: You trust in the inherent principles of love that if you are coming together in this way, whatever needs to happen will happen in that field. So just by being your ordinary content self you are in service to what emerges. And this microcosm becomes a perfect example of the kind of systems that we could potentially create in the world. It's about letting go, surrender and trust in the flow. As soon as we trust in our innate ability to connect in this gentle way, we move from direct reciprocity, which is, "I give you this, what are you

giving me?" to indirect reciprocity where I do something for you, you pay it forward, that person pays it forward, and the circle of what goes around comes around. So imagine we're all standing in a circle. I give a shoulder rub to the person in front of me. That person gives a shoulder rub to the person in front of them. And then ultimately whoever's behind me gives me a shoulder rub. Now so everyone gets a shoulder rub. But if you go to a massage parlour and you say, "Give me a shoulder rub and here's five bucks," that's singular direct reciprocity. Of course, there is a problem here. In a circle of indirect reciprocity what happens is that I may actually give a fantastic shoulder rub to the person in front of me, but I may not get such a great shoulder rub! Right?

NC: Yes, that's true! [Laughs].

NM: So there's a cost to it. But what's the opportunity? The opportunity for paying that cost is that you get the circle. You get a deep connection with each, and at a very basic level, there's a collective energy to it. But then there is intelligence of that energy that changes the way in which we behave and changes the patterns of our relationships.

NC: Aha, when we're limiting ourselves to the kind of transaction that we have at the moment, we're missing out on other kinds of value or currency, for want of a better word.

NM: Our entire bodies are antennas for so much data, if we want to call it that. If you're just using me for a massage and giving me five bucks in return, you are completely minimising that potential. But if all of these people come together and connect in the context of a larger grid, just imagine the flow of goodness that is possible. Imagine the collective intelligence that can arise from that kind of a circle. That's the potential. If you're comparing the circle massage with what you get at the massage parlour, you're comparing apples and oranges because the real reward for this is actually something that happens way more upstream.

NC: Love that.

NM: Like an Awakin Circle. You can't pay back at an Awakin Circle, you just have to pay forward.

NC: I was thinking before actually how crazy we've got with gift giving. With my siblings or whatever, how we kind of have an agreement between us on the monetary value of the gift we spend for one another. And if I spend less on him than he did on me, then that's suggesting something about our relationship and cause for fire. Like isn't that insane? And limiting as well to all the potential that we could be getting out of the connection.

NM: Totally. Yet everyone can understand the value of small acts of kindness. When these acts get connected, you get something like a Karma Kitchen. Bunch of UC Berkeley researchers tried to study it and they came up with a seminal paper titled, "Paying more when paying for others." That actually if the context is right, people will actually contribute more because we are wired to give. And there's a lot of neuroscience now behind it. Eventually, it becomes clear that we're all quite tangibly connected to everything, and we have the potential to from a dial-up connection to a 5G connection! Of course, if we are to actually do justice to all that flow of energy and data, traditional structures and leadership models won't suffice. In place of leaders, what we will need are ladders. Ladders allow emergence to rise up. They don't merely plan and execute, but instead search and amplify. The use of coercive force to control or dominate a situation now feels like an act of desperation. Because a ladder knows the intricate nuances of how everyone is related to each other, he or she just creates a small little nudge and that

nudge creates a cascading ripple effect. Everyone wants to be the tipping point, to be extra-ordinary, and to be in the lime light, but ladders know the power of the ordinary 37th snowflake in an avalanche. Such ladders, I feel, will allow our culture to give birth to a whole new realm of possibilities - where your gift won't be valued by a price tag, but by something far more priceless.

NC: So are you training people to become ladders?

NM: Yeah, lots of people were coming to us with that need, and to be honest, we didn't realize we even had that expertise, but it's turning out to be quite impactful. We host various Laddership Circles, which are six-week peer learning journeys. It's got a "hands" component of personal practices we do in our material lives. It's got a head component of looking at different kinds of case studies and reflecting on a potential story. And of course, the heart component of learning in a community, from each other. All that has led to many profound inner transformations and very different project designs.

A woman in Los Angeles shifted her yoga studio from "transaction to trust", an art director in Philippines allowed act of kindness as a form of payment for her theatre shows, a doctor in Texas took the gutsy step of going beyond price tags in the field of medical insurance. That's something. A Church minister started teaching courses with "priceless pricing", principals of various schools took the course and initiated compassion ideas with their students. Just this month, we're completing a circle with senior teachers of an international meditation movement. We've had a Noble Peace Laureate take the course, and even a former billionaire, alongside so many everyday heroes. Learning how to operate with flow and relationship, instead of accumulation and transaction, is not common in our paradigm today, and there's a real hunger for it. Of course, on our end, we really don't know what will happen in a particular Laddership Circle - no "10 steps to becoming a great ladder". Because it's emergence. So we can't honestly promise anything, but the sincerity draws people, and the inner transformations through the process have been surprising and humbling.

NC: It's interesting 'cause I'm always thinking about how to be a better leader. I'm always asking that question and looking for conferences or workshops that will address it. But now I'm thinking maybe that's not the pursuit.

NM: There's no recipe. It's a metaphorical shift from manufacturing to gardening. In manufacturing you can say, "Here's the recipe, I'm going to apply it N times, and scale." Cookie cutter approach, right? But when you're a gardener, you know that there are all these other inputs. You can't control the sun. You can't control the rain. But you can control so many other factors. So you are in concert with all of these factors. You are just supporting the emergence. You cannot look at a sapling and say, "I need a Tomato by Tuesday." That's manufacturing, which is predicated on control and knowing the recipes. Our business schools today are set up precisely to leaders who can take over manufacturing plants. That's good, and certainly has its place in the world. But everything can't be manufacturing. Compassion, for example, cannot be manufactured. It has to grow. Now, there are people who try to apply the manufacturing mindset to compassion too. Scientists are trying to break compassion down into its component parts, and say, "Hey, Nathan is compassionate when his brain releases oxytocin and serotonin. So let's just give him a compassion pill." And we are not doing ourselves any favors, if all we have is the hammer of manufacturing. Then, everything looks like a nail. If we are smarter, we'll learn how to couple manufacturing with gardening.

NC: I was going to ask about hope and are you hopeful for what we can create beyond the

systems we live, but I don't even think that's the question either. It's like, all of this is happening. You're doing it, you're a ladder creating the ripples. And this almost feels inevitable what will emerge from new ways of interacting. Although there's still some fear in me I guess given the forces we're up against.

NM: Isn't it love that gives us hope?

We're all born with nine months of an unconditional gift from our mothers. We know generosity. We have received generosity in a way that we can never even pay back.

And if we're just tuned in, we know that all we can do is pay forward. Once we start to tap into that, our biochemistry supports it, our social connections support it, nature supports it -- and we're in greater harmony. It feels lighter. If you look at the other route of control and of domination, where is that getting us? We have a shockingly unequal society, we feel isolated, are disconnected from each other and the systems that we're embedded in. There are no real solutions for things like inequality. We are not able to address climate change. We don't even know how to have deeper conversations about artificial intelligence. With each solution we create, it seems like we're creating five new problems. I'm not being fatalistic. There has certainly been progress on many metrics, but we can do better. We can do better if we learn how to garden, if we combine Leadership 101 with Laddership 101. Yes, the sensational draws our attention, but if we deepen our awareness, the ordinary is every bit extraordinary. In that sense, the ServiceSpace journey has been about creating a field that honors the sacred in the subtle. When we do that, kindness is no longer a cute add-on to a tedious, mechanistic world - it's actually a revolutionary impulse to bloom into our oneness.