

What We Nurture by On Being

What follows is the syndicated transcript of an On Being interview between Krista Tippett and Sylvia Boorstein. You can listen to the audio of their interview [here](#).

Krista Tippett, host: A few years ago, I was invited to do an event in Detroit — a city in flux, in an age of flux — on the theme of raising children. The conversation that resulted with the Jewish-Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist Sylvia Boorstein has accompanied me from that day forward. Here it is again, as an offering for Mother's Day — in a world still in flux and where the matter of raising new human beings feels as complicated as ever before. I remain so grateful for Sylvia's gift of teaching that nurturing children's inner lives can be woven into the fabric of our days — and her insistence that nurturing ourselves is also good for the children in our lives.

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

Sylvia Boorstein: Nobody tells you that. They don't say, when they hear — they don't say, Uh-oh, brace yourself. They say, Congratulations, because you know, Krista, it's both. It is congratulations. It's the most amazing thing we can do. To create a new life that comes out with fingernails and eyelashes and all its fingers and toes, it's an amazing thing. And it's extremely awakening, in the sense of knowing how vulnerable we are.

Tippett: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is On Being. I spoke with Sylvia Boorstein with a live audience, in 2011, at the invitation of WDET Detroit Public Radio and Metro Parent magazine.

I stumbled across your book about 10 years ago, I think, when I was first having the idea for this show — her book *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist* — [laughs] because Sylvia is one of the people who literally brought Buddhism to the West, to the United States, in the 1970s, and was Jewish, like a lot of the people who brought Buddhism to the West in the 1970s — a lot of people who still are household names with Buddhism in the United States.

But she's also written over the years about how she has come back to really richly integrate that with her Jewish identity, finding again, in Judaism, the imagery and poetry and ancestry and continuity that nourish her and that she's also passed on to her children. So when I thought of Sylvia as this wise person, I started googling to see if you ever wrote about children and parenting and grandparenting. What I found is that in her bio description, everywhere I could find it, she lists herself this way — she has lots of credentials, but it started out, "Sylvia Boorstein is a wife, mother, grandmother, author, teacher, psychotherapist." And I thought, That's it. This is our person.

Boorstein: Actually, I'm happy that you discovered that. I think it's true. I normally

describe myself that way. And I find that when people say, What are you proudest of in your whole life?, it's clear to me that I am most proud of the fact that my children now, really adults, all of them now — three of the four of them are in their 50s, so that's really a substantial credential — and they're all very, very nice people. And that is my best. That's what I'm proudest of. And my grandchildren are coming along, and they are very good people. And I'm so proud of that. That's the best thing. I don't think I've done it; I certainly haven't done it alone. I've done it with their father, and I've done it with their teachers and with our community. But they are, I think, my most important work in my life.

Tippett:How many grandchildren do you have?

Boorstein:I have seven.

Tippett:One thing that I enjoyed reading in — I think it was in your book *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist* — you wrote that your father's mother — that would have been your Jewish grandmother — was your first Buddhist teacher; that she used to tell you, Where is it written that you're supposed to be happy all the time?

[laughter]

Boorstein:[laughs] In fact, you have to know that I grew up in a post-Depression household. Both my parents had jobs, and I'm an only child. I lived with my two parents and my grandmother, who was widowed; my father's mother. And my parents went off to work, so my grandmother did a great deal of the mothering. And she was very, very solicitous, so that I remember her as bathing and washing and dressing me, and making braids and preparing the kinds of foods that I liked.

The only thing that she was pretty not moved to respond to was the coming and going of childhood bouts of, I'm not happy. I'd say, But I'm not happy. And she'd say — my grandmother was not a learned woman in that sense, but it's an ethnic thing to use that Talmudic turn of phrase, and she'd say, Where is it written that you're supposed to be happy all the time? And I actually think it was the beginning of my spiritual practice that life is difficult.

And then 40 years later, I learned that the Buddha said the same thing — that life is inevitably challenging, and how are we going to do it in a way that's wise and doesn't complicate it more than it is, just by itself?

Tippett:So I want to talk tonight about that wisdom that you've learned and how it might apply to our lives as parents — not just the spiritual lives of our children, but how we nourish ourselves as we are present to them, and as we impart what we want to impart to them. I have to say, Sylvia, that you're sitting here, and you are so calm, and you radiate wisdom, and your books radiate wisdom. So it was somewhat comforting for me, for you to also describe yourself as a lifelong worrier, just talk about how being fretful comes naturally, because you talked about that from your own childhood, that your mother was ill.

Boorstein:I had reasons to be anxious as a child. My mother did have what they called in those days a "weak heart." She'd had rheumatic fever as a child, and she had, as a consequence, she lived with a chronic coronary insufficiency, and I worried about that. And she actually died when I was in my very early 20s. So I've passed more than 50 years now without a mother. I wish I'd had one longer, but when I was a child, I worried about it

a lot.

But you know what I've found, Krista? That there are people who are given to fretting without a fretful environment. I think it's actually — it's a genetic glitch of neurology and that it happens to some people and not for other people. Actually, the Buddha said we have one of five genetic fallback glitches when we're challenged. He said some people fret. Some people get angry. Some people lose heart, and all their energy goes, and they don't know what to do with themselves. Some people think, Uh-oh, it's me. I didn't do things right. It's always my fault. I messed things up. And some people need to be sensually soothed. They think, Where's a donut shop? Where's a pizza?

[laughter]

People have different tendencies. It was very, very helpful for me as an adult to learn that, because it's completely — comes without a judgment. I don't have to say, I am a chronic fretter. I could say, you know, When I'm challenged, fretting arises in my mind, and it's not a moral flaw. And it's very good for people who have a short fuse, to be able to think, You know, I have this unusual neurological glitch.

Tippett: "That naturally arises in me" — to know that.

Boorstein: "This is what happens when I'm challenged," but to take it as — I tell it to people that my glitch is that I, when in doubt, worry. I said, It came with the equipment. I'm also short, and I have brown eyes. And if I could see that in the same, neutral, it just came with the equipment, then I don't have to feel bad about it, but I can work with it wisely.

That's really the important part. When we see as adults what it is that our fallback glitch is, you can say, Uh-oh. And I think in a certain way that's a sign of wisdom, when a person begins to be able to delineate, This is what happens to me under tension.

Tippett: It's that piece of self-knowledge.

Boorstein: It's a piece of self-knowledge that makes a break in between a certain next step and that next step, and say, Oh. So that when I'm at an airport, for instance, or if I come to a place where I've agreed to meet my husband on a corner of a certain street at 5 o'clock, and I come there at 5 and he's not there, and it's five past 5 and he's not there, I could start to think, Maybe this, maybe that, maybe this, maybe that. But I think to myself, Wait a minute, that is just my peculiar neurological glitch kicking in. Probably not. You know, I could just wait here quietly. I could look in the windows. I could look at the people. I could say relaxing phrases to my own mind. I could wish well to the passersby. There are just lots of other things I can do.

[music: "Dot" by Chilly Gonzales]

Tippett: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is *On Being*: today, for Mother's Day, with Jewish-Buddhist mother, grandmother, teacher, and psychotherapist Sylvia Boorstein.

I happened to have the experience of having my first child, my daughter, while I was at seminary, while I was studying theology — which was a really interesting thing to do, to be reflecting theologically and then going through this experience of bringing life into the world.

But one of the really strong reactions I had after she was born was realizing that I'd grown up using this language of God as "father," and that it's not very — we don't reflect on what we mean, because this father-God who I always thought of was so sovereign, so powerful, right? And the experience of becoming a parent is one of excruciating vulnerability and loss of control.

Boorstein: And to be able to know that.

Tippett: And this whole thing of worrying and catastrophizing and being fearful gives you all kinds of rich, new reasons to do all of these things.

[laughter]

Boorstein: Actually, no, no, it's really a fact. One of the people who — a woman, who

came regularly — I teach at Spirit Rock Meditation Center out in California, and the class is kind of a regular group of people that comes every Wednesday. And a woman came, who was pregnant with her first child, and the whole group was looking forward to her having her baby. And she took some time off after the baby was born, and then she came back, brought the baby with her, and she talked about it. She said, When I became pregnant, everybody said, Congratulations, great, great, great, great, great. And when I had the baby, everybody said, Congratulations, great, great, great, great, great. Nobody told me that I had at that point mortgaged my heart for the entire rest of my life, because my happiness now depends on this baby being well and healthy and nothing bad happening to it.

Nobody tells you that. They don't say, when they hear — they don't say, Uh-oh, brace yourself.

[laughter]

They say, Congratulations, because, you know, Krista, it's both. It is congratulations. It's the most amazing thing we can do, as you said, theologically speaking, to create a new life that comes out with fingernails and eyelashes and all its fingers and toes. It's an amazing thing. And it's extremely awakening, in the sense of knowing how vulnerable we are.

Sometimes when you say goodbye to somebody, you say, I'll see you soon. And you really, actually never know. And it would be grim to think about that all the time. But if I think about that enough of the time, I think the result of my thinking about that a lot is that I try very hard not to harbor any grudges and not to leave anybody in a not good way, and to say "I love you" as much as I can when I leave people and when I talk to my children or my grandchildren. I think that's actually the sequelae. You think about —

Tippett: The effect of being aware of how fragile and strange and unpredictable life is.

Boorstein: In fact, in fact: that the crux of what the Buddha taught is realizing that everything passes, including these lives, and it's not a gloomy or macabre kind of philosophy. It's really an understanding that that's what's true. And knowing that's what's true, I think we are mandated not to waste any time with enmity or negativity or grudges. It's so easy to make a grudge list and then nurture it.

Tippett: The world has changed pretty rapidly in this sense, as well. People tend to — you

will often have mixed families of, one parent is religious, the other is not; or they come from different traditions and their extended families may have 10 different traditions. But then when people become parents, they often still start asking this question: Do I want to pass something on? Or, what do I want to pass on? And a rabbi, Sandy Sasso, said to me once that many of us, not all of us, have a mother tongue, a tradition we grew up in, and we may have rejected that. But, she said, don't let your tradition be defined by people who may have ruined it for you — that probably is a first place to look.

Boorstein:Well, actually, the truth about me is I didn't come back to Judaism — I've never left. Many people come back. That's true. I actually never left. I had always a very cordial and warm relationship to Judaism. My family was comfortably, a fairly traditional Jewish family as I grew up. I never questioned that I was fundamentally a Jew, in the sense of my native language, as Sandy Sasso would say.

I actually was introduced to a couple of meditative paths that didn't particularly speak to me, and then I met my teachers and I went on retreat. And I was very touched by what they said, and particularly the understanding about the difference between a life inevitably challenged by pain and complications, but free of suffering; that there would be a way to train the mind to not make more suffering out of the inevitable challenges of life. And it just sounded exactly true to me. It made tremendous sense. It was like, whew, someone understands that there's something anxiety-provoking about life. And I thought that my private anxiety was mine; nobody else had it.

And I thought about becoming enlightened, that if I practiced meditation enough that the challenges of life and the pain and the disappointments of it would just — I would sail over them with great equanimity.

Tippett:That didn't happen?

[laughter]

Boorstein:That didn't happen. I tell people that I could have the most profound equanimity, and I am two words away from losing it completely.

[laughter]

And then they say, What are those two words? I say, Well, you have to understand that first the phone has to ring. Ring, ring, and you pick up the phone, and a voice says, Hello, Ma? And it doesn't sound right — the complete — [laughs] you get that ...

Tippett:Yeah, to the point of our evening.

Boorstein:... because that's a whole different story. But the truth is that we are connected with empathic bonds of tremendous energy. I wouldn't want it otherwise. I don't want to sail above my emotional life. I don't want to complicate my emotions with worse complications, by struggling with what I can't change or by reacting without thinking things through. In the beginning, I think I had a more lofty idea of what would happen if I practiced a lot. It's become a lot more pedestrian. I'd like to live kindly, with a good heart, because I'll be the happiest that way.

Tippett:Let's talk about this core insight that suffering — and again, we're acknowledging that parenting is the greatest loss of control we ever suffer ...

[laughter]

... that suffering results from struggling with what is beyond my control, that idea that our minds get in conflict with our experience and that that's where suffering comes from — not so much from the realities themselves, but how we struggle with them. How do you think that applies to this?

Boorstein: Well, I just remembered, actually, just before we came out here this evening, as I was sitting backstage, and I remembered I was on a flight last Friday, and there was a family of five traveling with me. And everything is progressing well — it wasn't a terribly long flight. Near the end of the flight, the two- or three-year-old, she just fell asleep, and now she's awakened, and it's late in the afternoon. Probably her naptime is way off. And she not only woke up, but she woke up and she's beside herself and crying and flailing, in the way of three-year-olds.

And I watched these two parents, and they were fabulous. Her mother was completely just consoling and quietly talking to her, not losing her equanimity at all. And I was marveling at it. I thought it was wonderful. Sometimes you see much more upset parents, but this parent was not upset. And then by and by, after a little while, the dad over here said, Pass her to me. So they changed children, and she passed this one back to him, and then he, behind me, spoke to her in such a kindly way. And slowly, slowly, she pulled herself together.

I just so admired their parenting skills. I admired it because, first of all, the child calmed herself down. They didn't whiz themselves up and create more suffering for themselves. They also didn't create more suffering for the whole plane, because sometimes when a child is getting upset and the parent becomes all upset, then you feel pulled into it. But somehow these parents' equanimity was like a calming effect around the whole plane.

And I thought, well, they were really — at the time, I thought they were really good parents. But I thought the element of their goodness was that they're acting very wise and that the wisdom involved is: this child is two and a half, and that's what two and a half-year-olds do when they're awakened from a nap in the middle of a loud and rumbling landing.

Tippett: That's also an illustration of a distinction you made when you talk about "wise effort." I found this really helpful, and I feel like that's a story about it. You said, in terms of our reactions, that there's a big difference in any moment, between asking, Am I pleased? — which, of course, on an airplane when you have a screaming child, you're not pleased.

Boorstein: These parents were not pleased.

Tippett: You're embarrassed. You think you will be less disruptive if you can make them quiet. But the difference between asking, Am I pleased?, or, In this moment, am I able to care?

Boorstein: For the child and for myself, in a kindly way.

Tippett: Here's something else you've said that's provocative and just so true. "It's not fair" — the three words "it's not fair" — have caused more trouble than any words throughout history.

[laughter]

But you know what's interesting about that is, "it's not fair" is also the beginning of our children's ethical instinct.

Boorstein:In fact.

Tippett:And to varying degrees, we live with that instinct throughout our lives.

Boorstein:I think that's a really important point, Krista. I think probably people will be able to relate to that. When you grow up in a family, in the normal course of parenting, even before the child ventures out in the world and goes to school, there are incidents where they need to share with someone or — whatever it is, they have to wait in line — and we say, We do this because it's fair, and We do this because it's fair, and we carry on about, It's fair, because it's fair.

And then they go to school, and they come home and they say, The teacher has favorites. They favor so-and-so and so-and-so over me. And you say, I'm terribly sorry, I can't do anything about that. And they say, But it's not fair. And here you are, the people who have said it's about fairness, and sometimes you have to say, It's not fair, and we can't do anything about it.

But in the larger sense, when we as adults occupy ourselves with what's not fair in the world, and we take our children with us and they hear and see and take part in the expressions of our own generosity, our own kindness, our own social activism — when I think about parenting, I think you said it before, about parenting as a spiritual practice. I think of social activism as a spiritual practice. I think of voting as a spiritual practice.

Tippett:So how do we help them walk that line between — I remember Sister Helen Prejean, who is a great opponent of the death penalty, said anger is a moral response. But then it's what you do with that anger. That's what you're saying, also — that "it's not fair" is a fundament of morality and of activism. So how do we walk that line between demonstrating that, and also, helping ourselves and our children live wisely with those feelings and those observations of life's unfairness?

Boorstein:I think a lot about that. I remember my father, who is now long gone, hearing me teach about transforming anger into work in the world; doing something. And he'd say, I need my anger, Sylvia. It motivates me to do all the activism that I do. And I'd say, Well, you do need it, Dad. You need it just to alert you to what needs attention. But you don't need to carry it along with you, to keep refueling you. And as a matter of fact, if you keep nurturing the flame of anger, it confuses the mind and maybe we don't respond as wisely as we ought to.

But I need the anger, as if, if I had 104 fever, it would be a sign that I need to do something about it.

Tippett:But then you let the anger ...

Boorstein:But then you let it — well, I hope that what I do is I recognize the anger as a response, actually — it's a response, I think, to what I feel underneath it, which is a fear things really aren't fair; this is not right, that this and this is happening in the world. And I think in response to that fear, which is basic, the human response is to lash out at it, when something frightens us.

Do you know what's the easiest example of that? If you come by a door, and as a joke, someone's hiding behind the door and they leap out and they say, Boo! And you get mad at them for doing it. [laughs]

Or you see sometimes — this is a terrible thing to see. You see sometimes a child rushes out into traffic, and a parent runs out and grabs it and then hits it. But what they've done is they've gotten frightened, and then they get angry.

So I think that the anger is on top of the fear, and to be able to say: I am frightened, because in the world these unjust things are happening. What can I do? And how can I have a mind that's energized to do something about it, but not reacting in anger, but responding in firm kindness? But things need to be different. Things need to be different.

[music: "Karass" by Jesse Harris]

Tippett:About 350 people joined this conversation at the Community House in suburban Detroit, Michigan. And at one point, Sylvia Boorstein led all of us in an eight-minute, guided lovingkindness or "metta" meditation. Here's a flavor of that.

Boorstein:So you don't have to sit in a special way, but if you want to, close your eyes and just take two deep breaths: in and out, in and out, in and out. Take a long breath in — and out. And in again — and out. And feel yourself sitting here. Feel yourself sitting here. Feel yourself surrounded by all these people. Feel yourself, I hope, happy and content. And think in your mind, a blessing for yourself. The metta practice, lovingkindness practice, always begins with a blessing for yourself. So think, for yourself: May I feel safe. Think those words in your mind. May I feel content. May I feel strong. May I live with ease.

Think about, past the people that you recognize in the world — familiar strangers, all the unfamiliar strangers near and far — all people just like us, with lives, who want just as we do, to live in safety and contentment, to be able to feel strong, to have lives of ease. Wish for all those people, all beings near and far: May you feel safe. May you feel content. May you feel strong. May you live with ease.

[music: "Karass" by Jesse Harris]

Tippett:You can find and download the whole eight-minute guided meditation Sylvia Boorstein did for us in Detroit, in the On Being podcast feed. After a short break, more conversation with her.

[music: "Karass" by Jesse Harris]

I'm Krista Tippett, and this is On Being. Today, for Mother's Day, Jewish-Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist Sylvia Boorstein. This conversation with Sylvia transformed how I think about parenting and helped me realize that the inner work of nurturing ourselves as human beings is not a luxury, but something we do in service to the children in our lives.

I think you've said something like that your measuring stick for how clearly you're thinking is how — if you're able to be kind.

Boorstein:Oh, I think that — I have been talking a lot about kindness in the last few years. It's such, in a sense, a humble word when we think about spiritual practices. Or if I think about 30 or more years ago, when I began to be interested in a meditative path, we

talked about things like enlightenment and revelation. And kindness is much more humble, but I actually think kindness is what I'd really like to establish in myself.

The Dalai Lama, when people ask him, What's your religion?, says, My religion is kindness. And I think it's a word that subsumes tolerance and forgiveness and graciousness and patience — all of those things are kind things. Those folks on the plane were being kind to their child, kind to each other, kind to the whole plane, by their ability to keep it together.

Tippett:What I like about kindness is that it's doable. And unlike those virtues like compassion or even tolerance, that you have to cultivate — you can be a lifetime cultivating those things — you can actually be kind to someone, even if you don't feel especially compassionate. It can be an act.

Boorstein:It's an act, and I think it's on the way to actually, genuinely being compassionate. The way I keep thinking about it, Krista, is when I'm kind in any circumstance — whatever; if someone cuts in front of me in line — [laughs] you go in with a basket in the supermarket and someone zips in right in front of you, and you only have two items in your basket anyway, so they could have not. So your mind thinks a thought. But when my mind thinks a thought like that — Grrr, they shouldn't have done that — in that moment, I'm complicating my own mind with my own negativity, which I'd rather not do.

But if I could catch myself to that and instead think to myself, Who knows? Maybe he's late for some place, maybe he really needs to be — maybe this is urgent. May he be well. May he get there in good shape. May he live happily — then I don't really mess up my own mind, and I arrive — so I'm two minutes later in the supermarket checkout. So I've done myself a kindness. And the wisdom, I think, that comes from not upsetting the mind is: you never know. I really don't know where that person is going. And you never know whether it's good to go out now or two minutes later. Maybe — you know, who knows what traffic he'll get into, or I? Just to not fight with the moment. There they are. Why complicate it? I think we're in the habit of doing that a lot.

Tippett:And I suppose we model that for our children, then, and they become like that, too. Do you have thoughts about passing this kind of idea, this kind of teaching, on to children?

Even as I say that, I realize that probably the best way is to be like that. [laughs] I remember my daughter, who's 17 now, she said to me the other day, So is this one of those "do what I say, not what I do" things?

[laughter]

So I assume you model this, but do you talk to your children or your grandchildren about kindness, about this kind of ...

Boorstein:I think it probably comes up in the conversation from time to time. I don't bring it up as a sermon. But I think by what we respond to and what we nurture, that's really what grows in our children.

One of my friends has a story that he likes to tell, which I've heard now as a Native American story; I've heard it as every kind of a story, but as a wise grandfather saying to his grandson — or it could be a wise grandmother saying to her granddaughter, I have two wolves in my heart. One is loving, and one is vicious. And they're at war with each

other. And the grandchild is saying, Which is going to win? And the grandparent's saying, The one I feed.

So I think our children learn to speak in a tone that we speak in, or to hold people kindly if we do. I had in my mind — I wanted to tell this. I've never said it in a public audience, but I just thought about it recently. I decided that — I'll find out soon, if this is a good analogy. But I was thinking about the GPS in my car. It never gets annoyed at me. If I make a mistake, it says, Recalculating.

[laughter]

And then it tells me, Make the soonest left turn, and go back. I thought to myself, I should write a book and call it Recalculating, because I think that that's what we're doing all the time: that something happens, it challenges us, and the challenge is, OK, so do you want to get mad now? You could get mad, you could go home, you could make some phone calls, you could tell a few people you can't believe what this person said or that person said — indignation is tremendously seductive, you know, and to share with other people on the telephone and all that. So to not do it and to say, Wait a minute — apropos of you said before, "wise effort" — to say to yourself, Wait a minute, this is not the right road. Literally, this is not the right road. There's a fork in the road here. I could become indignant, I could flame up this flame of negativity, or I could say: Recalculating. I'll just go back here.

Tippett:Well, this is an example of technology instilling us with spiritual discipline. [laughs] We find so much to criticize.

Boorstein:[laughs] And no matter how many times I don't make that turn, it will continue to say, Recalculating. The tone of voice will stay the same.

[laughter]

Tippett:That's good. I think it's a good analogy.

[music: "Long Trip, Eh?" by Mark Orton]

I'm Krista Tippett, and this is On Being, today with the warm and wise, Jewish-Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist Sylvia Boorstein.

[music: "Long Trip, Eh?" by Mark Orton]

Sylvia, I want to ask you — to this question of raising children, human beings, who are kind, who have a heart for the world in a world that's troubled — when you and I met on a panel in Southern California two years ago, you told a story about leading mindfulness teaching sessions. And you told a story about, I think it was a man, who at the end of it said, I'm frightened to go back out into the world. I feel so vulnerable, and in here I'm safe. But I don't know how I can be out in the world and be vulnerable.

And that story came back to me as I was thinking about interviewing you on this subject, because I think as a parent, there's a version of that that goes through my mind: how much do I expose my children to? How do I teach them to be kind and open to the world's pain, and vulnerable? And yet I want them to be safe, and I actually want them to be tough out in that scary world, at the same time. Talk to me about that.

Boorstein:As a child who's growing up, inevitably they live in the world, and they'll hear about things. If they live in a house that's relatively peaceful — and we have a certain amount of control as parents, about how much the TV is on and what's on the TV and how much they are confronted by the pain of the world. And you know what I think?

Since for myself, really, sometimes the pain of the world seems incomprehensible and unbearable to me, but I think if there's anything that balances it, it's the wonder at the world, the amazingness of people — how kind they are, how resilient they are, how people will take care of people that they don't know.

If somebody falls, or someone's in trouble in a public place, people take care of them. People take care of people that they don't know — that human beings have that ability. I don't think they have to learn it. They don't have to have lessons. I think we're a companionable species, for the most part. Every once in a while, we meet hermit-type people. But for the most part, we're companionable and congenial, and we care about other people, and we take care of them. So to be able to look at human beings and say, Human beings are amazing. Life is amazing. The sun came up in the exact right place this morning. And celebrate seasons.

I think that's a wonderful part of being part of a group of people who celebrate seasons and birthdays and holy days, so that here we are again, at another time, in another season. And there's that great cosmos out there to look at, and imagine people going up into space and looking at the stars, and our ancestors looked at the same stars.

I think that there's a way of, if I keep in myself a sense of amazement — I tell my grandchildren, Look at this moon. It's a three-day moon. It's the best moon. It's better than a two-day moon. A two-day moon is kind of skimpy, you really can't see it yet. And a four-day moon? Eh, it's already on its way to a moon. But a three-day moon is just beautiful. It's my favorite moon.

And if I show that to them, then they begin to think, Oh, it's my favorite moon, a three-day moon. [laughs] But that just happens to be me. I like moons. Everybody will do it in their own way.

But I think that always balances. When the Buddha taught about needing to see the suffering in the world so that we could respond with compassion, he also talked about the preciousness of life and the need to take care of it. And I think they're both.

Tippett:It's cultivating those two at the same time. I mean, that's also something I think — our children give us new eyes, especially when they're very little, to see the world. Actually Trent, my colleague, was talking about taking a walk with his son the other day. And I remember those moments when your children are little, and it's like everything has been invented for them. And they name it. And everything is fascinating.

Boorstein:Can look at one flower for a long time, because it's amazing, when you start to do that. I have a friend who ends all of her emails — you know where you have an automatic signature, and you put your automatic signature? Her automatic signature says, Stay amazed. And I love that.

Tippett:This is also making me think about how we need to be attentive to what our children can teach us, as well as what we want to impart to them, because some of this they know, and they actually know more immediately than we do, because we lose it. I remember watching something terrible on the news the other day. And my daughter said,

So many beautiful lives in the world, and this is what they focus on.

Boorstein: Well, I think the beautiful and wonderful lives in the world — I certainly am not a sociologist of journalism — aren't as compelling images as the others.

Tippett: They don't make good headlines.

Boorstein: They don't make good headlines. It would be wonderful — [laughs] I don't know if it would be commercially viable — if there were a channel that had all wonderful things in the news.

Tippett: I don't know. It's hard to make good news sexy. It is. I think about this a lot, as a journalist.

Boorstein: But somebody could do that. Some entrepreneur could figure it out.

Tippett: Maybe. But I think it's like kindness. It's the stuff of moments. But it can be absolutely transformative in moments, and these beautiful lives are transformative in moments. But we have to train ourselves to look for them.

Boorstein: There were two things that you just said. One of them is that when we are really paying attention, which is what mindfulness is, we really connect with other people. Lots of times, I think, for reasons of rush or whatever, even with our own children, we're not completely there. I have a friend whose grandchild said to him — it's a grandchild with whom he spends a lot of time — he was visiting and staying at the house and doing whatever — he said, Grandpa, do you love me? He said, Of course I love you. You do know that, don't you? He said, Yes, but I don't feel it when you aren't paying attention to me. So there is something about really paying attention.

What seems most clear to me is that children pick up what their parents live. My friend Jim Finley, who's a Christian contemplative psychotherapist, said, I learned to pray, sitting next to my mother in church. And what I understood from him is that he didn't learn the words of the prayer, he learned the feelings out of her body as she sat there.

I think that children learn that from us. When we bless them in a natural way, if it's part of our way, then they feel all right about it. [laughs] We used to have certain kinds of blessing rituals in our family — we still do. But at some point I elaborated on them. So we'd finish a blessing, like the blessing at the end of the Sabbath, and then I'd say, And now everybody kisses everybody. And they all did it, for a certain amount of years, until my eldest grandchild at some point — we finished the ritual, and I said, Now everybody kisses everybody — he said, I don't think everybody does this in their family.

[laughter]

And then so — all of a sudden he didn't want to kiss his girl cousins, I think. [laughs] But so the kissing is extra. [laughs] Blessing is blessing.

[music: "Air & Ground" by Los Angeles Guitar Quartet]

Spirituality doesn't look like sitting down and meditating. Spirituality looks like folding the towels in a sweet way and talking kindly to the people in the family even though you've had a long day, or even saying to them, Listen, I've had such a long day, but it would be really wonderful if I could just fold these. I'd really love folding these towels quietly, if you

all are ready to go to bed without me — or whatever it is.

But I actually think that spiritual parenting — people often say to me, I have so many things that take up my day. I don't have time to take up a spiritual practice. And the thing about being a parent who might think of themselves as a wise parent or a spiritual parent, it doesn't take extra time. It's enfolded into the act of parenting. You fold the towels in a sweet way. It doesn't take extra time.

Tippett: So Sylvia, one thing following on that. Lovingkindness meditation is also towards one's self. You share a story in your writing about precisely that. But you share what you often say to yourself when you're in a moment of anxiety. So I think this is just great advice. I'm going to hang onto this: "Sweetheart, you are in pain. Relax. Take a breath. Let's pay attention to what is happening. Then we'll figure out what to do." I think that's a fabulous — these are fabulous sentences for one's self and for one's children.

Boorstein: I'm so pleased that you found that. It's tremendously pleasing to me, because I meet people in some significant number who tell me that they say to themselves — in moments of distress, they say — I say to myself, Sweetheart, you're in pain. Relax, take a breath.

I love that. A whole bunch of people out there saying to themselves, Sweetheart ...
[laughs]

Tippett: So as I promised, I want to end with a poem. We're going to let Pablo Neruda have the last word, because you mentioned this in your writing as a poem that you always have with you. And I printed it out, and I think it's beautiful, and I wonder if you'd leave that as a gift for all the rest of us.

Boorstein: This is called "Keeping Quiet."

Tippett: Thank you, Sylvia Boorstein, and thanks to all of you.

[applause]

Sylvia Boorstein is a founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California. Her books include *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist* and *Making Friends with the Present Moment*.

Special thanks this week to WDET Detroit Public Radio and Metro Parent magazine.

[music: "hospital no. 32" by Lateduster]

The On Being Project is: Chris Heagle, Laurén Drommerhausen, Erin Colasacco, Eddie Gonzalez, Lilian Vo, Lucas Johnson, Suzette Burley, Zack Rose, Colleen Scheck, Julie Siple, Gretchen Honnold, Jhaleh Akhavan, Pádraig Ó Tuama, Gautam Srikishan, April Adamson, Ashley Her, Matt Martinez, Amy Chatelaine, Cameron Mussar, and Kayla Edwards.

The On Being Project is located on Dakota land. Our lovely theme music is provided and composed by Zoë Keating. And the last voice that you hear singing at the end of our show is Cameron Kinghorn.

On Being is an independent, nonprofit production of The On Being Project. It is distributed to public radio stations by WNYC Studios. I created this show at American Public Media.

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