CTZN Podcast: Kate Johnson

Kerri:
So happy to be in conversation with you, Kate.

Kate:
Thank you for having me.

Kerri:
So much has changed since I saw you last. For example, you're a mother now.

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
So, what is that like?

Kate:
Oh, my goodness. It is a joy in my life to be a mom. It's really big. It feels hard to...

Kerri:
It's a big question.

Kate:
... to describe. Yeah. I'll say that, let's see. My days are radically different than they were before I had my kid. And I feel like the best way to describe it, what it's like is just to give you like a snapshot of what my morning looks like now. Because earlier on, my morning was, I would wake up, try to wake up a little bit before my partner, come downstairs. make some tea, go up to my studio, do chanting, do some meditation. Get out my journal. Set aside some notes for the day. It was a really quiet morning.

Kate:
Now, morning begins at a time I don't usually know in advance when it's going to start. And my kid is seven months old yesterday. So, she's still waking up quite a bit through the night. And when she wakes up in the morning, I feed her. I bring her into bed. She does this like amazing stretching routine she's always done this thing as a kid. So, it's like this arms, legs, and she giggles and she twists and turns. She's super mobile right now. And so, I start my mornings playing with her.

Kate:
And I'll go down and make some tea for myself. Right now, I can put her on the floor and she can bang on pots and pans, while I kind of get my breakfast and stuff together. And then, we chant together in the morning. So, we do the refuge chant, the citation, the Triple Gem. We do

the Karaniya Mitta Sutta and Pali. And she loves to chant. So, sometimes she hangout next to me and feel the vibrations. And then she likes to play around the floor.

Kate:
Yeah, I mean, I was a set mom before but having a little, little baby is something totally different. And I feels like it's unexpected joy, simple pleasure. It's deep fatigue. And it's also a new relationship with my gender and in relationship with my body. So, it's been all the things. I feel like I should have been taking better notes during this time. I should have been journaling because there's a lot to say. Yeah, but that's just a little snapshot of how it is.

Kerri:
We're going to talk a lot about your book, which is called Radical Friendship. But I would imagine, and I don't have children so I don't know this, and I'm always curious about this when I speak to parents. I would imagine your understanding of relationship has changed.

Kate:
Oh, hell yeah. Yeah. I mean, I wrote about it in the book. It changed a bit having another child in my life who came in when I was seven with my partner. When I was seven? When she was seven. This is the sleep debt talking.

Kate:
Yeah, and I feel like it has ... I mean, one thing I'll say about that is that I had no idea that I was becoming a parent when I moved in with him and his seven-year-old daughter. I thought that he was going to be the parent and I was going to be this kind of person that was just around kind of and she would go to him for all the things and I would just kind of be there. Sometimes we would hang out and watch a movie or something. That's what I thought was happening.

Kate:
And it took me about a year to catch on to the fact that I was becoming her parent. And part of that was me. And part of that was that in our society, we don't even have a rite of passage for people who become parents in ways other than biologically. And there's lots of people who even aside from parenting roles care for deeply for children and are committed to them. I hear a lot of people talking about how important it is for them to be an auntie or to be a teacher or to be a neighbor lady.

Kate:
And yeah, so, it was part of why it took me a while to kind of land in that role. And then, yeah, and then this is kind of like a new landing. For this, I did have time to sit with the fact that this was part of a new era that was coming. It was evident physically. So, that was part of the preparation. And then, there were several kind of celebrations and rites of passage that I got to participate in to mark that transition.

Kate:

But I think this is something I'm still working out. I told you a little bit about the chanting, no silent meditation situation right now, which is how my practice is. And part of why I'm really, wow, happy, meaning grateful to my former self, who wrote this book, because I don't have the monastic style practice that I was doing before isn't really available to me in this moment. I know that it will be again, someday.

Kate:
But the option to practice a deep spiritual path in relationship is what I have access to right now. And that has to do with my relationship with time and patience and ability to listen and willingness to extend myself beyond what I think I'm capable of energetically or emotionally.

Kate:
And part of what's amazing about it is that it feels like totally revolutionary and unique and special, and this amazing thing, and also it feels completely ordinary. The same thing everybody's been doing around me and doing before me for a long time. And kind of big deal, no big deal. You know?

Kerri:
Mm-hmm (affirmative). My mine and ours.

Kate:
Yeah, yeah. So, that's kind of how it is now.

Kerri:
I'm glad you [crosstalk 00:07:44].

Kate:
I feel like it's something that's so big in my mind and in my life, and I didn't write a book about parenting, but it certainly the way that I show up in relationship now is informed by being a parent.

Kerri:
[crosstalk 00:08:01]. And your friendships have changed?

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
You wrote this book about relationship. And I want to ask you about your friendships in a minute, because I had a radical reckoning, I want to say, in your book, about my friendships. But what I was going to say about relationship, and I definitely got this message from your book and I've also learned this the hard way, is that relationships have probably been the deepest spiritual practice I've had in my life.

Kerri:
No matter how much yoga I did and how much meditation, I've done a lot of things and nothing has come close to the wisdom and learning, the opportunity to learn and to love and to be vulnerable and to fuck up and to repair and to connect than relationships. That to me has been the deepest mirror. So, I am just so grateful that you wrote about that particular thing in this book. And I wanted to know what inspired you to write about it?

Kate:
Well, it was not because I was an expert. I actually want to write it for a couple of reasons. One was just the most direct one I was giving a talk at a conference and I was asked to expand upon the talk in a book and the topic of the talk wasn't something that I felt like I had much more to say. It was kind of a call to action like we should use our spiritual practice to look at our mind and heart and rid ourselves of implicit bias, and that's possible for us as meditators.

Kate:
And so, there wasn't a whole lot more I had to say about that. But I thought that that's a difficult task. It's an annoying task. It's a task that could bring us a lot of pain and shame, potentially, the task of examining our own reactivity, our bodies, minds and hearts as they are in relationship with another human being and to really ask ourselves on a moment to moment way, are we showing up in alignment with our values and to celebrate the ways in which we are or the ways in which we're trying, but then also to be honest about the ways in which we're not. And so, I thought, why would anybody want to do this?

Kerri:
Truly, hard.

Kate:
I feel like my publisher asked me that several times while I was writing. This seems like really hard. Why would you want to do this? But I thought that, well, for friendship, I think we would. For our real diehard friend or for the possibility of having a friendship that is truly intimate and connected and liberated, that that possibility might be a reason why people would be willing to do that hard work of looking at their minds and hearts in this kind of granular way and actions. So, that's a big part of why I wrote it.

Kerri:
Yes. I want to read what you say in the book about radical friendship. You said, "By radical friendship, I mean the kind of friendship that has the potential to heal us at the very ground of our being. Wounds from when we were young, maybe even wounds from before we were brought born. The kind of friendship that forges bonds so strong that systems of oppression can't break them. The kind of friendship that helps us gather enough power and love that we can profoundly change the world."

Kerri:

And reading that made me reflect really critically about the friendships in my life. And not just how people were showing up for me, but who I was willing to throw down for. You just said that before. We have this joke in LA, who are you willing to drive the 405 for?

Kate:
I don't even know what that means, 405?

Kerri:
The traffic is so bad here that it's really hard to get around. So, you have to really love someone to get stuck in LA traffic for them kind of thing. And that's a very surface example of what I mean, but-

Kate:
I mean, it's a very everyday example. I've been to LA and had been on the ... The east side heading for west side be like, "You know, I'll see you next time." I'm like, "Wait, I'm in your city, you know?"

Kerri:
That's right. No. It's a really big city. But it made me sort of take inventory of which relationships, which friendships I have can survive in the face of white supremacy, in the face of inequality, in the face of oppression, and which ones haven't and how doing this work, and I feel like your book spoke so beautifully to this, how doing this work demanded a level of discernment from me in my relationships, and maybe boundaries, also. What does it look like to be in relationship with boundaries?

Kerri:
And so, I'm just curious, is that what you want for people to do when they read this book? Do you want people to be thinking about how do I be in relationship with integrity? How do I be in relationship with skill and courage? How do I have boundaries in relationship? What do you think is the inquiry that you want people to take from this book?

Kate:
I think part of what I'd love for people to take or explore as a possibility of friendship being a relationship that is of high spiritual value that in a world where I think the primary relationships were, I guess, culturally tend to focus on our immediate family relationships and romantic partnership, work relationships, for sure.

Kerri:
Yeah.

Kate:
And then friendship is kind of this add-on, like when you have time in your spare time kind of thing. And so, that's part of, is I want there to be consideration of the possibility of elevating the level of value that we place on friendship, and also, to consider the ways in which we might

bring the qualities of friendship into other kinds of relationships where they're appropriate, not that we have to be buddy-buddy with everybody.

Kate:
And that's part of what I'm hoping to explore in this text is that friendship doesn't necessarily mean certainly being kind, but it's not being nice or being polite or when you mentioned boundaries, I think it's so important because it's also not showing up for another person, no matter what, all the time to your own detriment, someone that that would be required in order to have a friend or to be a true friend.

Kate:
But it's like this dynamic process of inquiry and investigation that illuminates both where we have developed these beautiful qualities, heart and mind, generosity, and wise effort, and endurance, patience, and also reveals the places where we have some room to grow. And that it might be possible to when those moments come up, where those growing ideas are revealed that rather than sometimes relationships do need to end. And sometimes like the Buddha taught, every aspect of this phenomenal world has a birth, aging and death process and friendships [crosstalk 00:16:44].

Kerri:
Yeah. I love that part.

Kate:
But that doesn't have to be when we encounter hardship with one another, and that it might be possible to lean into some of these frameworks or teachings or practices in order to meet those moments and to continue to grow individually, and also together, together if the time is right, and if we're lucky.

Kerri:
I reflected a lot about the aging part and about how relationships change, as we change. And to your point, as I've become more of myself and in all of the ways, some relationships haven't grown with me and how I've had to let them die and then grieve them. And how some relationships were born in those moments.

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
When the people that I needed to show up that could meet me where I am were just miraculously there. That random person who was exactly where you needed them to be in the right moment to say the exact right thing. And then you just drop in so deep right away. And so, it doesn't matter how long you've known them or what you have in common even.

Kate:

Yeah.

Kerri:
It's like a divine moment of connection.

Kate:
Yeah. I mean, that's totally possible. And as you speak about it, I'm thinking to be able to have that, does require a certain amount of presence on its own, because I think the ability to actually ... One of my favorite definitions of mindfulness is the ability to know what's happening when it's happening. And I relate to that so much because I identify as a slow processor. Sometimes it takes me months or years to know what had happened. But I'm working on it with my practice.

Kate:
And I think the ability to know what's happening in a moment of a friendship aging or dying and to say, "Oh, wow, this is what's happening now." And in some cases, there are clear boundary violations, instances of harm that cannot be forgiven or cannot be forgiven right away. And sometimes, as you say, we can't grow with each other for a variety of reasons. They're just how life is. And so, to be able to be present and enough to say, "Oh, this is this relationship's aging or dying process," or that it's changing right now.

Kate:
And that it may not be anyone's fault and it may be just the life cycle of this relationship. And that that's okay. And then we can still love and honor that and bow to that relationship and what it's given us without needing the relationship lasting forever to continuously justify the existence of the relationship and the value of it.

Kerri:
I feel like you're describing my divorce. But I really appreciate you saying that and the wisdom and the mindfulness to know when a relationship has run its course. There was so much suffering for both of us in the clinging or the trying to fix it or the trying to make it right or the trying to force the other person to be what you wanted them to be, even though that's clearly what they were in. And when we surrendered, it was like our relationship shifted.

Kate:
Would you say you're friends now?

Kerri:
Yeah, it took a moment for us to get there for sure. There's a lot of pain and harm and healing that had to be done. So, time mattered in that. But we respect each other. We admire each other. We root for each other. We're both in different relationships. So, I mean, it's like nothing like I would have ever imagined. But it changed. And in some ways, it was reborn in the death of one formation of the relationship into another.

Kate:

Yeah, yeah, which I think can happen, too. Just to acknowledge together we have this transition to make and, man, I think with a formal contract, like a marriage, you have a contract from which to renegotiate. I think friendships can be so hard, because it's like, well, what are the terms here? What did we agree to? What are we committed to here? And we don't always have those conversations with friends, but I think we could. I think we live in a time where we could.

Kerri:
Yeah.

Kate:
I mean, that's one of the things that's really cool about living in this particular time is even in the past few years, I feel like the acknowledgement of the importance of friendship and also that there are needs that we have within friendship that can be made explicit one another. And that that could be a thing. That can be a thing that we do. I mean, I think that that is the proposition of kalyana mitta, spiritual friendship.

Kerri:
Yeah.

Kate:
I feel like that kind of conversation is one that's available to us. And then, having had that, we kind of have a ground for future conversations of, well, where do we need to refresh or recommit or shift what our relationship is here in an intentional way. And in the same way, I really appreciate you talking about the ability to discover or really to see and sense when a new friendship is emerging and to embrace that moment.

Kate:
And I think as adults, I mean, this book is not about how to make and find friends explicitly, although I think there are some things of value here to be said and what it is to step into risk and vulnerability and just let our wish to make friends be known. I mean, that's a part of it, too, is just to be able to say, "Hey, I like you. I think you're cool. Do you want to talk more?"

Kate:
But those kinds of connections can happen all the time. And, yes, we may not be able to invest in depth relationships with every single person we have a spark with in our life. And wouldn't it be great if we felt the spark if there was ... I mean, I think this is, again, where mindfulness comes in to, if we're able to know that there's a spark when there is one and appreciate it. Whether or not we use that as a jumping off point into this new relationship with this individual, can we just be with and see and sense and enjoy that moment of connection, and know that that's possible, as opposed to the mentality of no new friends.

Kerri:
Yeah. Or old friends or only hold on to old friends.

Kate:
Yeah, yeah.

Kerri:
Right?

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
Like the ones we inherited in school or in college.

Kate:
Those are the real ones.

Kerri:
Yeah. You made me think a lot about, it sort of reminded me of inherited family and chosen family and how, as we get older, and the way that I was thinking about your book is like it's like a PhD in the practice of friendship, right? Because you're calling people to do friendship in a different way. Like how friendship isn't because you were just thrown into a room together or because you went to school together, or you know what I mean? Or because you had a shared circumstance, although often friendships can emerge from that, that are beautiful and deep and radical.

Kerri:
But that friendships can be really intentional. It's funny, because I loved what you were describing around the spark because some of my deepest friendships came out of a really vulnerable moment where I met someone. I really liked them and I kind of like did a blind date thing where I was like, "Would you like to go out with me?" And it was like there's some vulnerable leap of my heart, you know?

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
And how I've saved some friendships by having boundaries and almost like redirecting or, I don't know if that's like a recalibration of a friendship, you know what I mean, around what matters and what I needed and what they needed. And so, I'd love if you could talk a little bit more about what you've learned, especially in the writing of this book about boundaries and the role of boundaries in maintaining and growing radical friendship.

Kate:
Yeah. Well, I think that the heart quality that I've leaned into most often when considering either setting the communicating my own boundaries or receiving someone else's boundaries is the

heart quality equanimity. And I talked about this a little kind of towards the end of the book that the quality is the Pali word is upekkha, it means something like literally to look over as if from a mountain.

Kate:
But it's the kind of love that is able to be in touch with the truth of change, like we just talked about that kind of birth, aging and dying processes, is the kind of love that is able to be in touch with the truth that sometimes we don't get what we want. Sometimes we don't want what we have. That we're not in control, ultimately, of even how we feel, let alone how someone else experiences us or the world. And the heart that has been able to be in touch with all these truths and to love anyway would be steady in that love.

Kate:
And so, part of that is the kind of just looking over as the being able to take this wide view of our own life and of our collective life. And the stability of that heart quality comes from that, that spaciousness. And so, I bring this up with relationship to boundary, because I know that in my friendships, when I express a boundary, which can be often indicative of change, like I've changed and something that was okay, is now not okay, or something that I liked before I don't like anymore.

Kate:
And so, I'm communicating that this is the truth of impermanence. Something has shifted for me or something has shifted in their behavior and I'm getting feedback on that. That part of what it brings me into is this sense of risk of losing the relationship and lack of ability to control how that person receives me. And so, it's great when a person ... My experience mostly with boundaries is that it takes a little time. There's the expressing the boundary. And then usually, there needs to be a little pause or gap for myself or for the other person to really integrate and digest what's being asked for, what's being offered.

Kate:
And that, my first, we're just going to focus on what it is, if I'm expressing a boundary, my wish is for it to be like, "Sure, no problem. Let's do this right away." And oftentimes, it means actually just allowing the person the dignity of their process with what I've shared with them. And they're honoring their responsibility to themselves and their right to say, "Yes, this will work for me or not," and kind of being loving with them, even in a moment where I know that I can't control how they're going to respond to me and I can't control whether or not they're going to want to be in relationship with me anymore.

Kate:
I think when it comes to being on the other side of things and like receiving someone's statement of boundary, it's hard for me. It is hard for me. I feel like part of the reason why it's hard for me to state boundaries is because it's hard for me to receive them, too. I feel that moment of, "Oh." It can bring up shame. Oh, my gosh, I've been doing something wrong. It can

bring up this feeling of, "Oh, I like the way it was before. I don't want to change. We're stepping into this unknown territory. I'm not sure if I'm going to like it."

Kate:
And so, I think for me, in that moment of receiving someone else's boundary, when I don't like it, my mind often tries to find fault with the way someone's expressed it. I'm like, "Oh, well, they didn't have to say it this way."

Kerri:
You use that word.

Kate:
Yeah, yeah. Their job was a little tight. And so, I'm searching for a language here. I think it has something to do with allowing their expression to be their expression, even if it's a little more kind of harsh or aggressive than I would have liked, knowing that if we're in a friendship relationship, they're probably doing their best to be real with me and to express something that's important to them.

Kate:
And so, I think the equanimity there is, can I hold in my mind at this moment the totality of our relationship, even though this part feels really hard, and not lose sight of the whole being that is our relationship, and the whole being that is this person even in this moment, where they're indicating the need for something to change in a way that I feel uncertain about.

Kerri:
Yeah, it's funny because you're making me think about how in those moments, I often learn a lot about myself, too, my relationship to myself. Because often if I'm triggered by someone else's boundary, or lack thereof, it has more to do with me in my own relationship with myself than it does with whatever they're doing right or wrong, and how those moments when we take the leap and speak the need or receive another person's need are like magical moments. Really beautiful things have come out of moments like that.

Kate:
Oh, yeah.

Kerri:
Unexpected.

Kate:
For me, sometimes it's just like, "Oh, that's possible to do." I get triggered when people set boundaries around things that I would like to set boundaries around that I have not.

Kerri:
Yeah. That's right. That's right.

Kate:
Gosh, how dare you have working hours? You know?

Kerri:
That's right.

Kate:
But I also thought it was so-

Kerri:
How dare you ask to get paid for something?

Kate:
What you said about triggered by someone's boundaries but also triggered by lack of boundaries, I thought was really right on also.

Kerri:
Well, it's funny, when you were talking about when you're afraid to ask set boundaries for yourself, I was thinking about how for, I have just a sordid history of never setting boundaries. And so, because I have not set boundaries, what would happen for me to meet my own needs is I would manipulate people. Or I would try to control what they were doing because I needed my needs to be met. And I would be afraid to ask for my needs because I was afraid of getting a no.

Kate:
Yeah. It is so vulnerable. I mean, I think we're touching on a couple different areas of vulnerability, that vulnerability of reaching out and trying to connect with a new friend, but also yeah, renegotiating a relationship and through an exploration of boundary. And yeah, that fear of hearing a no or being rejected, and then what happens next.

Kerri:
Yeah, that's it. That to me is where the relationship gets juicy is where do we go from here? And I feel like you write a lot about this in your book. When you hit that snag or in those moments of whether it's conflict, or change, or birth or death or aging, to me, the practice part, the spiritual part is, okay, where do we go from here?

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
What's next in a moment of complete uncertainty and I wasn't able to control the outcome, because you never can, even though you wish you could, by the way.

Kate:
Yeah, I think that's right. I like that you said that this is like ... Because one of the things that happens in those moments is you have this intensity of presence that is in such a spiritual state, if we're willing to meet it and have the capacity to kind of tolerate that level of crisis and intensity, which I do think that's a good reason to practice just, anyway, is that when these moments come up, maybe have the inner capacity and the bigness to actually be able to stay there with them and to not kind of turn away and also not kind of smash through them.

Kate:
Yeah, and then, in those moments of moving into unknown territory with a friend and not knowing what's going to happen next, to be able to discover and build it choicefully together and this moment to moment way, I think, is this practice of relational mindfulness. When we're practicing mindfulness on our own, it's like paying attention what's arising in us, the interplay and the cause and effect experience of thought and emotion and by sensation and sound.

Kate:
When we're kind of looking at it within this body-mind-heart system, but then we add another person or group of people you were navigating, we're navigating all of that together, and we're shaping. We're shaping what comes next actually. I think it's a little more engaged. And the words come out from these creative, then mindfulness practices on our own, not to knock silent sitting practices [crosstalk 00:36:21] for many years. But there's something that we can do with another person where we can shape our relationship and shape our connection together that feels also beautiful and necessary and a part of spiritual path.

Kerri:
Yeah, and I'll just confess that I have definitely tried to control my spiritual practice. There have been times where the ritual has been so rigid and everything had to be a certain way, that there wasn't a whole lot of space for me to learn, and observe and listen. And that doesn't exist in relationship. Relationship just doesn't allow for that. You just can't control all the conditions, no matter how much you want to or you try.

Kerri:
So, relationship has really taken that to a new level for me. And I can see now the ways in which I'll try and manipulate my yoga practice to be what I find comfortable, or easy, or familiar. Whereas relationship never gives me that.

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
It's always like a beautiful wild card with so much to teach me.

Kate:

Yeah, yeah. I do know and I feel like it is, the word that came up for me as I was listening to you was humility. There's something about that not being able to control someone else's response or how they move with you in the world, that that to me feels like a doorway into one, the truth, that control that we thought we had of our own practice or our own mind or whatever, it's always an illusion also.

Kerri:
Yeah, that's it.

Kate:
And then also that in the Buddha Dharma, we talk about ego or the sense of self and part of what I learned about that self-construct, which we say is it's not that it's not real, but it's not what we think it is. That we think it is solid kind of siloed.

Kerri:
Yeah.

Kate:
And that part of what that self-constructs thinks it is, is in charge. So, whenever we are in circumstances where we realize that we are not controlling experience and that we're not actually in charge of the unfolding of karma in this moment to moment way that it's an assault on the ego and the ego doesn't like it, but it's also this doorway into a more truthful and right relationship with even our self, which is that of being intimately interconnected all the time.

Kerri:
Well, and the truth of our interconnection and interdependence that we try to deny constantly and dominant culture in all of our obsessive individualism. And you tell the story in the book about being in a silent retreat and feeling the need to do it the hard way, totally relate to you.

Kerri:
You said, "Turns out I couldn't just put my head down and bulldoze my way to nirvana." And that totally resonates with me. Because not only have I tried to like bulldoze my way into a lotus pose or a backbend, but I've tried to bulldoze my way through activism and social justice work many a time.

Kerri:
And in the book, you tell a story about an interaction that you and I had around the fight for 15 campaign, where I literally bulldozed my way through that project. I prioritized outcomes over people and in the process, damaged relationships, one of which was ours. And I, by the way, write about the exact same story in my book, because it was such a formative moment for me and my own awakening and learning and also human-ing, fucking up, fucking up and learning how to actually navigate that.

Kerri:

And what I learned in that process is so much of what you talk about in this book, with distance and teaching and mentorship and coaching, I realized that I was so much more committed to outcomes and you mentioned control, to being in control, to controlling the conditions and the results, and the productivity of people, and the winning, the outcomes of activism, which is so counter to why we do activism.

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
And how much it cost me, including how it damaged our relationship. And so, I'm so grateful for this book, especially in how it pushes us to lean into the parts where someone fucks up, someone gets harmed, relationships are impacted, and then what happens next? Where do we go from there?

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
And so, I'd love to hear from you that part of where do we go from here when those things happen, when that happened for us? Because to me, that's where radical friendship sometimes begins.

Kate:
Yeah, yeah. Wow. Well, I think it's amazing that as I was writing this incident, you were writing this incident somewhere else from your-

Kerri:
And we didn't even tell each other about it.

Kate:
And, yeah, it was such an impactful moment, such a lightning rod moment. I know, for me, and my understanding of how the world works and how you want relationships to work and what some of the patterns that I bring into relationship are, both when entering in and also like when harm happens. And yeah, I mean, what I remember where I went from there ... Well, let me just say this.

Kate:
I think I'm really glad we're back in relationship now. And I feel like that moment was a huge teacher for me. And the lessons that has taught me have evolved over time. I think that the earliest on lesson was to be explicit in my agreements with people and to not just blindly trust that every friend that I get introduced to by someone else's friend will necessarily play by the same rules or have the same way of approaching relationship and approaching community in mind.

Kerri:
Yeah.

Kate:
And I think that that's something that I learned over and over again in communities that there sometimes will be, I mean, much more so than what happened with you and I, like a person who's seriously and intentionally committing harm over and over again in a community and people will be like, "Well, how did this person get here?" And it's like, "Oh, I thought they were with you." "No, I thought they were with you." You brought them to that party, and everyone thought they were cool because they were just here.

Kate:
And so, there's this sense of, well, we actually have to take the time to, even when there's this excitement of alignment and there's a of the moment need, we haven't take the time to kind of establish, well, who are we to each other? And what our commitments. It doesn't necessarily need to be a lot of time, but something, to really set a foundation.

Kate:
And so, that was part of it. I think, as time went on, my learning of that moment had to do with learning to trust my own perception of what's happening. I mean, I think part of my delay, oftentimes, when something's going on that's not quite right is that I, and this has not disconnected from what it is to have been raised in and swimming in white supremacy culture, that there's so much self-doubt in a cultural context that consistently tells us that what we see happening isn't happening, that actually things are okay and actually, it's our fault.

Kate:
And so, I think that that came over time of this understanding of I was actually ... I was seeing something unfolding and I was perceiving reality clearly, but I doubted my perception so much that I didn't speak up and say anything at the time. And I think that that third learning also kind of came in around, use your voice, Kate, use your voice and just say it. And that it's okay if there's a misunderstanding. It's okay if I was wrong. It's okay to check in.

Kate:
And that, I mean, something that I'm still learning is and I think this is a part of what I was hoping to bring in with the writing as well that, how much grief I have for the times that I have abandoned myself because I prioritize someone else's comfort over my own well-being and didn't want to upset, didn't want to cause a fuss, didn't want to offend, and therefore, kind of ate the hard parts of the experience.

Kate:
So, I mean, for us, I feel like there was this real gap in space and time where I knew that things were changing for you. I knew that you were in relationship with really good people that I trusted. I knew that you seem to be from your public facing activities, in a real kind of reckoning

with your own social location and positionality as a white woman from ... I don't know exactly your class background, but you know what I mean?

Kate:
Like this woman who's coming to support and to lift up activism and social justice, especially when it comes to like racial justice. And so, I thought...

Kerri:
Well, I had a lot to learn.

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
Because I mean, when I think about how much has ... What I knew then and I just want to say, Kate, that I actually remember you speaking up.

Kate:
Did I?

Kerri:
You did. We had a conversation and I couldn't hear it. And it's funny when you were talking about trust your gut, when I was thinking about that I learned in this experience is question yourself fully, Kerri, because you've been indoctrinated in self-righteousness and arrogance and entitlement and know-it-all-ness.

Kate:
What did I say?

Kerri:
I just remember us having a conversation. I mean, I don't remember a ton of the details of it, but I remember you confronting me and pushing back. [crosstalk 00:49:33]. You did it. And I thought it was like a really good conversation. And I remember being super defensive and I had a whole story, which is total white supremacy about what I was doing and why I was doing and capitalism. I remember being really justifying the, like, but we have to make change. You know?

Kate:
I remember this now. I remember this. Kerri, I remember this.

Kerri:
And you gave me the gift of ... I just want to name that you spoke up and you gave me the gift of feedback. You gave me the gift of intervening and being, what the fuck. You know what I mean?

Kate:

Yeah.

Kerri:
And how I wasn't ready to hear it, because I just wasn't far enough along on being able to see clearly how compromised I was by whiteness and by my attachment to all of the things that come with white supremacy and capitalism and fuck, I had so much to learn in that moment. And I learned so much.

Kerri:
If I didn't learn it in that moment, Kate, I learned it in the reckoning many months and years afterwards when I got to reflect on how I was wrong, period, end of story. I was wrong, and I caused harm. And what I chose to value, what I chose to prioritize cost me so much more than what I gained. And that really, I just want to say, it really helped me recalibrate how I showed up in this work and it inspired me to lean back, actually, and go slower. And I contracted the organization. Don't be so fucking ambitious. Don't build an empire, just make a contribution. You know what I mean?

Kerri:
So, I learned a ton from that. And that's why I wrote about it, because whether you intended to or not, and I'm sorry that that happened, because I'm sorry that that had to happen for me to learn. I don't like learning when other people get impacted and harmed. And I just want you to know that I am grateful. I deeply appreciate the gifts that you gave me. And I'm changed because of it.

Kate:
Well, I am glad we're having this conversation, because I am now, it's kind of filling in the coffee that we had and the conversation that we had. And I do remember now. And yeah, I mean, I think the tough thing is you are not wrong in that situation was urgent and dire and needed a response. And I think that that is what is so hard about friendships within movement relationships when we're working together, and we're working for change, and we're also trying to be good to one another is that the tasks are huge and we see impossible. We can work endlessly and tirelessly on them and never take breaks. And some of us do.

Kate:
And so, the scope of the issue and what the needs of, in terms of the attention and the quickness to action are real. And also, I think you're right. The cost, if we allow the pace of capitalism to dictate our response to capitalism and patriarchy and white supremacy and imprisonment, all of the ills that seemed, that do in some ways require this urgent attention or urgent response, that if we allow them to dictate our pace, they will eat us alive. They will destroy our relationships with one another, and they will win.

Kerri:
I feel like though, what you're naming feels like it's like the paradox that we're wrestling with right now. And you speak about this in the beginning of your book when you said, "We have to stop

and feel and not rush into action." And I'm just thinking about the history of reactionary activism that I've been a part of, but that also our culture is caught up in and what Bayo Akomolafe says when he says, "These times are urgent. We must slow down."

Kate:
I haven't heard that. [crosstalk 00:54:18]

Kerri:
And so, I don't know the answer to this question, but I feel like you're naming it which is how do we balance that? How do we balance acknowledging and confronting and taking on the enormous and urgent and critical and dire issues of this moment and not dissociating, slowing down enough to feel and be present with, centering relationship and people's lives and experiences above all things. How do we find that?

Kate:
Yeah. The balance is dynamic.

Kerri:
Yeah.

Kate:
It is always shifting. And that's part of why it's good that we have this capacity to be awake, because even as you were saying the need for the times are urgent, you must slow down. I was thinking, yes. And I sometimes work in spiritual spaces, where I'm like, "Oh, no, we actually have to speed up here. We are going a little too slow."

Kate:
And so, it really depends on who we are and who we're talking to. It depends on our ability to make our next right action at the next right speed. It depends on our ability to really know ourselves well and to listen to the reflections we're getting from the people we trust around us about how we're showing up to listen to the universe in terms of what our impact is.

Kate:
Because, yeah, I feel like my work primarily has been in meditation and wellness, and especially Buddhist communities and yoga communities, although I've lived in and out of activism and direct action and advocacy work. Most of the time, I end up supporting people who do that work when they can't go on anymore to restore and to find a new way to be in that sustainably. And so, I feel like the more that I learned about myself, I think that's my right role in the revolution is supporting leaders. But, yeah, I think it depends. I think that balance depends and...

Kerri:
It's probably messy, too.

Kate:

Yeah.

Kerri:
It's like both ends sometimes.

Kate:
Yeah, yeah. I mean, when it was coming up [inaudible 00:57:16] super strong is just like, it depends on who we are. It depends on our capacity to really notice and be honest about what we're noticing about what's happening inside of us as we act, what the response is in, as I said, listen to the universe earlier, but really, how other people around us are responding to us. Because I feel like there are in relational encounters, all of these information, all this communication on verbally about how we're showing up and how the people around us, whether they're friends or coworkers or family are being impacted by our presence and what we're showing.

Kate:
And I know, for me, it does take a certain amount of slowing down just to be able to see that and note that and to inquire. "Wow, I see your eyebrows really raised and your head kind of fell back when I said that thing. What's happening for you in that moment?"

Kerri:
Yeah.

Kate:
"Am I coming on too strong again? Or, am I doing that thing?" That's what I think the sweet spot when you get into branches, where you can just say, "Am I doing that right? That thing?" And they could be like, "Yup." And you're like, "Okay, got it. Got it."

Kerri:
Just give me that code word or that symbol, just signal to me when I'm doing that thing.

Kate:
I know what you're talking about.

Kerri:
Yeah, exactly.

Kate:
And we can just begin again.

Kerri:
And I can love you in that. Like you do this thing. It drives me mad and I love you in that.

Kate:

Yeah,

Kerri:
Because of it and I love the way you're trying to work with it. And holy moly, so many things, and things we're aware of and working on and things that I can't even imagine how much I'm unconscious of, that I still engage with and do and fall prey to and...

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
And I'm grateful for friendships, people in my life who love me enough to reflect and mirror back to me when I'm not seeing or when I'm forgetting. Or when I'm out of alignment.

Kate:
Yeah. Totally. And to bring back the balance word again, I think there is ... I know on my friendship with myself, there has been a need for a balance of attention between the places that I need to grow and to celebrate the places where I'm actually doing it. Because that's there too. And I mean, I think this is a aspect of supremacy culture, too, right, to never have what we're doing the good enough to not acknowledge the ways in which we're growing and trying so hard and to only focus on the things that need to be changed or perfected.

Kate:
And yeah, I think in writing this book, there were definitely times where I was writing this book. And I was like, "Am I an awful friend? Do I even have any friends?" That inventory process because [crosstalk 01:00:13]. And then I think part of our inventory has to include, these are the ways that I have been generous. These are the ways that I have been kind. These are the ways that I have been willing to show up and learn from my mistakes. And I think that the willingness to allow in our acknowledgement of those experiences is a part of navigating the path, because it helps our hearts to stay buoyant. Otherwise, it's just too hard.

Kerri:
Thank you for saying that. I feel like that's like the forever reminder I need of like, "Oh, yeah, and you have to be friends with yourself, too."

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
Actually, to be a good friend to other people, you actually also have to be friend to yourself. Totally.

Kate:

Well, I hadn't even thought about it exactly that way. And I think that's totally right. Usually people say you have to love yourself before you love other people but I don't think-

Kerri:
I'm working on that.

Kate:
That's hard. Like whoa, there, buddy. But no, I do think when it comes to ... Well, I think of love as a state, like a divine state, but I think of friendship as a series of activities. And part of what I think is so true about what you said was, you have to be friends with myself in order to be friends with someone else. If I'm not friends of myself and I'm trying to be friends with you, I bet the relational missteps are so much more likely to occur, because I'm not showing up for myself. I'm not articulating my boundaries. I'm not telling the truth. I'm not showing up in my full presence.

Kate:
And then ultimately, I feel disappointed in this relationship when it doesn't feel like you really know me or you don't know what [crosstalk 01:01:52] before. So, I think that part of being friends to ourselves, it protects our relationships, too, from hurting us without meaning to because we didn't know who we were, what we wanted and what we need in.

Kerri:
My last question for you is this quote that I took out and I wrote and I stuck it on a Post-It on my desk. There's a lot of those, by the way, in this amazing book. And it is, finding your people and finding your freedom are two parts of one and the same spiritual path. What did you mean by that?

Kate:
Can you read it to me again?

Kerri:
Yeah, finding your people and finding your freedom are two parts of one and the same spiritual path.

Kate:
Yeah.

Kerri:
Bumper sticker.

Kate:
Part of what I meant by that is that when I think about specifically finding your freedom, and it's articulated in the Buddha Dharma and that articulation in the path to liberation, that spiritual friendship is not actually an optional part of that path. Sangha is not like an add-on. It's a

foundational vehicle. It's a central vehicle for liberation and not in a way where we're using people to get liberated, but that from the point of view of interdependence, it's like, liberation can only happen together. So, that's one way.

Kate:
Another way is just what we've been talking about all along is that in the process of relationship, there was a period of time in my life where I thought maybe monastic path was the path for me. And I went on some really, really long retreats and I talked to a lot of monastics and I kind of tried to, as much as I could, access that experience without ordaining fully and finally came to this place where I thought actually know that the path of relationship is more difficult for me, that I could probably ... That's where the good work is for me in this life.

Kate:
And that I think all of us are different. Like I said, there's 84,000 Dharma door, so we have plenty of opportunities and options for how we become free. But I think for some of us, being with people and being in relationship is what allows our hearts and minds to grow, is what inspires us to let go of what's between us and the full expression of our intrinsic luminosity and love.

Kate:
And so, I think there's sometimes where ... I've certainly said this before with regards to romantic relationships, I think I've said this even before in relationship with when looking at trying to start or maintain a relationship with someone I really respect or care about this idea that I need to get myself together first and then I can be in relationship with you. First, I will fix myself completely. And then I will present myself to you fully healed and you-

Kerri:
Or perform my relationship with you.

Kate:
Yeah. And that now, it's like, not one and then the other, it's both together friendship and freedom.

Kerri:
Like tango.

Kate:
I also like tango.

Kerri:
Like dancing, because you kind of have to move together as one unit, but you're doing different things and you're constantly locating yourself, and you have to be responsive to the other person, but you can't force them to do what you ... Anyway.

Kate:

Yeah.

Kerri:
I don't know why that came up. I don't dance tango, by the way.

Kate:
I just had this beautiful image of you with a flower in your hair, getting dipped on the dancefloor. Tango is cool. But yeah, I mean, I think that, right, the dance and the dynamism of it and the both of us togetherness of it I think that that's right.

Kerri:
And the joy of that, of allowing something unexpected to emerge.

Kate:
Yeah, maybe that's why the dance metaphor felt so good.

Kerri:
Maybe.

Kate:
It's like the joy, the emergence of it, the life affirming nature of it. Yeah. And I think especially in tango, too, there's so much play, like the possibility for wonder and surprise. Yeah.

Kerri:
Yes. Kate, I am so grateful for this book, for me, personally, but also for the movement and the world. And I'm just so grateful for our relationship and for the opportunity to get back in relationship and for all that I've learned and all the ways that I've healed and grown because of knowing you, so thank you.