

Transcript of Super Soul Sunday, October 29, 2017

Oprah Winfrey: How are you?

Brother David: Thank you.

Oprah Winfrey: It's so great. I've been looking forward to being with you.

Brother David: Thank you.

Oprah Winfrey: Oh, thank you so much.

He is beloved the world over for his enduring message about gratefulness. It's the true source of lasting joy.

Brother David: Grateful living is to be grateful at all times no matter what happens, also in the midst of suffering.

Oprah Winfrey: 91 year old author, scholar, and Benedictine monk, Brother David Steindl-Rast, has inspired generations.

Brother David: We have the opportunity to stretch even further that people had to stretch themselves before to understand one another, to listen to one another.

Oprah Winfrey: And his TED talk has over six million views. Today, Brother Steindl-Rast invites us to embrace the spiritual practice of grateful living.

What you just said is the key that unlocks the path to a successful life. And that is trust life.

Brother David: That is the beginning.

Oprah Winfrey: That is the beginning, right? Isn't that the foundation-

Brother David: That's the foundation of everything.

Oprah Winfrey: I know the study of gratitude has been your life's work and as we now in the world are searching for ways to

find common ground, you believe that all humans share the same yearning. What is that yearning?

Brother David: The yearning is basically, I think, all humans are looking to be happy.

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: To be happy, to be joyful. And I make a little distinction between happy and joyful because we say we want to be happy, but we want to be happy with a happiness that lasts.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: And we are well aware that happiness just doesn't last.

Oprah Winfrey: Right.

Brother David: Happiness cannot last.

Oprah Winfrey: Cannot last.

Brother David: So we have to find the happiness that lasts and that happiness I call joy. And we can find that because we can find that joy even in the midst of unhappiness.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes. So for you is gratefulness a practice?

Brother David: Yes.

Oprah Winfrey: Or just a way of being? A way of being.

Brother David: It's a way of being.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: But the practice is a way of being.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: It's a way of living. That's why lately I talk less about gratitude, but more about grateful living. Because when you speak about gratitude people often think, "Oh, yeah. When something nice happens, of course I'm grateful." But grateful living is to be grateful at all times. At all times no matter what happens. And that means reaping the joy that comes from gratefulness at all times. Also in the midst of suffering.

Oprah Winfrey: And so what do you think the essence of grateful living is? If I want to live more gratefully in my life, which I'm telling you-

Brother David: First you have to ask what are you really grateful for? And there it's important to realize you're not grateful for what happens at this moment necessarily because it may be something for which you cannot be grateful. If you get news that your dearest friend has just died-

Oprah Winfrey: Right. Right.

Brother David: Or if you just faced on the news with oppression, with exploitation, and misery, and violence, you can't be grateful for that. But at every moment life give you the opportunity to do something with what life gives you. Therefore, grateful living means learning to avail yourself moment by moment of that opportunity.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: And that most of the time it's the opportunity to enjoy.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: And really help people realize that. There's 99% of the time we could enjoy and we can breathe. We can enjoy that we have eyes and ears to hear.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: Everything, everything.

Oprah Winfrey: And not wait until you have to lose your sight or have to breathe through a machine, or have some kind of disease, before you can appreciate the fact that you have all of these things.

Brother David: Exactly. That you have legs. You know this when you break a leg or when you have some difficult ... No, the hard times. But that is enjoyment. That is the opportunity to enjoy.

Oprah Winfrey: So you can imagine that in our country, as well as all over the world actually, disruption is occurring at a rate that we have never seen. I was so happy to read in *Gratefulness: The Heart of Prayer* how you see everything as an opportunity, because I've been thinking deeply about our situation. And I think this moment in our culture, in our world, in our society, is a moment that calls for each of us to step into this opportunity.

Brother David: Absolutely. That is quite a different opportunity from enjoying things.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes, yes.

Brother David: But it is also a gift, and a great gift, that in a time and a place, the whole world today, where everything is torn and-

Oprah Winfrey: Torn and broken.

Brother David: ... broken.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah. Dissension.

Brother David: We have the opportunity to stretch even further than people had to stretch themselves before to understand one another, to listen to one another.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah. To come to a common hope. And I love how you define hope. Would you share this with our viewers.

Brother David: I think hope is something very different from our hopes.

Oprah Winfrey: I think that's so important.

Brother David: Because the hopes are always something that we can imagine.

Oprah Winfrey: Right.

Brother David: You can't hope for it unless you can imagine it. But hope in this truly spiritual sense is openness for surprise. For that which you cannot imagine.

Oprah Winfrey: Real hope. With a capital H.

Brother David: That's right.

Oprah Winfrey: Is being open to surprise.

Brother David: For surprise.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: And to open your heart to that surprise-

Oprah Winfrey: As opposed to the hope for the thing that you imagine or you want or you're wishing for?

Brother David: Exactly.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: And if you trust life it surprise you and it will always give you good things.

Oprah Winfrey: Okay. So let's start right here. Because I think that what you just said is the key that unlocks the path to a successful life. And that is trust life.

Brother David: That is the beginning.

Oprah Winfrey: That is the beginning. Right? Isn't that the foundation?

Brother David: That's the foundation of everything.

Oprah Winfrey: And that's what ultimately faith is, is it not?

Brother David: We can withhold that trust or we can give it. And if we withhold it, we can try for a little while, but everything goes wrong.

Oprah Winfrey: How can people learn to not withhold it when you feel like life has given you an unfair shot? How can you develop faith, maintain, sustain faith, when you really think life has been really unfair?

Brother David: Yeah. And too quickly say, "Well, yes, you should trust in life and ..." I would be very careful. But it's the only thing that you can say. And you ask, "How can I prove that life is worth trusting?" If you know the person well enough and can be really speak from heart to heart, that's also necessary, but you can make them look back on their life. And they will see that even the worst things that happened to them turned out to be life giving. If you look back on your life, you see situations and times when everything seemed to be just terrible, terrible-

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: ... catastrophe.

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: And now out of this catastrophe, not in spite of it, it is because of it, you got where you are. And that is so encouraging. But you see mostly when you look in the rear mirror, so to say, you see looking back. And when you look forward, you can't see it. Otherwise you wouldn't be in the difficult situations.

Oprah Winfrey: Correct. But I think also developing a trust in life, even when the hard times come, you know you'll get through it.

Brother David: That is the point. Because you have experience in the past, and you can see when you look at the past, but when you look at the future, you can't see it. That's what makes it so difficult. And then you need that trust. Even though I don't see a trust that life will give me good things.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

So how do you come to be a human being who lives more alive?

Brother David: Those are the three necessary steps that have to be repeated over and over to really come alive.

Oprah Winfrey: So how do you come to be a human being who lives more alive?

Brother David: Well, first you have to stop, because we are in such a fast lane in life, most of us. Whether we want it or not, life is so fast these days. So we are really rushed along and we don't see the opportunity. See? Life offers us moment by moment opportunity. So have to stop and get into the present moment. Our shared friend, Eckhart Tolle,

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: He has really taught people that.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: You have to stop long enough to be present. And then you can listen, look, smell if necessary, whatever.

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: What is now the opportunity that life offers me at this moment? And then that is the Look, and then Go and grab it. Do something with it. When it comes to enjoyment, enjoy the moment really. Don't just say, "Nice flowers."

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: And go onto something else. But look at the flowers, let them impress you.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: So stop, look, go.

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: Those are the three necessary steps that have to be repeated over and over to really come alive. That is really the happiness that we all long for. To be alive on all levels. On a physical level, on mental level-

Oprah Winfrey: Right.

Brother David: ... emotional level, and on the spiritual level.

Oprah Winfrey: Right. I know you believe that gratitude can inspire a revolution, because during your TED talk you said, "Gratitude can change our world in immensely important ways, because if you're grateful you're not fearful, and if you're not fearful you're not violent. If

you're grateful you act out of a sense of enough and not of a sense of scarcity and you are willing to share." Since we've lived under the Power Pyramid for so many hundreds of years, can do you think being grateful inspire revolution?

Brother David: The reason why the Power Pyramid is so destructive-

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah. And tell us what you mean by the Power Pyramid.

Brother David: Yes. It is the social life, the form that we give our social life, if we are fearful. And those are the two possibilities to life. Either to trust life or to be fearful of life. Fearfulness makes you violent and the root of violence is fearfulness.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes, absolutely.

Brother David: And then this fear builds this pyramid because the one is a little high up and the others is fearful that somebody else might get there, and so used violence to oppress the others. There's already oppression.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah. So when we see the terrorists throughout the world, the violence being enacted upon people throughout the world, all those people are doing that because they're afraid.

Brother David: Exactly. And they are afraid of one another that the other one would get ahead.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: So you get competition-

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: ... and rivalry.

Oprah Winfrey: Right.

Brother David: And then you get killing because people think, "Oh, that's not enough." Again, fear. Fear that that's not enough. And if you fear that that's not enough, you want to get as much as possible for yourself.

Oprah Winfrey: Correct.

Brother David: Exactly the opposite is when you trust life because then you are not fearful. Instead of violence, no violence, peace. That is exactly the world order we want. A world of peace, of cooperation, and of sharing.

Oprah Winfrey: Something I read that struck me where you were saying this time that we're all living in now, where everybody feels so divided and can't agree, that this time may be offering us the opportunity to love our enemies.

Brother David: Exactly.

Oprah Winfrey: What a concept.

Brother David: That's what we have to learn today.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: And I put an emphasis on the fact that it remains the enemy because if suddenly they became your friends, you would love your friends, but not your enemies. They remain your enemies, but you love them.

Oprah Winfrey: How is that possible?

Brother David: Well, first of all you have to say what do you mean by love.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: And the one definition if you want, it's a working definition, of any kind of love. There are so many kinds of love.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: Love of your spouse, love of your friends, love of your animals, love of your country. What all of them have together is, I say yes we belong together. Yes to belonging. Love is a yes to belonging that is not only said with your mouth, but with your whole being and lived yes to belonging. Existential yes to belonging.

Oprah Winfrey: That's a great definition. Love is a lived yes to belonging. So what I hear you saying is that you can love your enemies, love them by understanding they have as much right to belong-

Brother David: We belong together. We belong together.

Oprah Winfrey: ... belong as you do.

Brother David: Yes.

Oprah Winfrey: It doesn't mean you have to agree with them-

Brother David: No.

Oprah Winfrey: ... because if you're going to love your enemies, they have to remain your enemies, right?

Brother David: Yes. One of the aspects of loving your enemies is that you listen to them, you listen what are they saying.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: And then you say, "Maybe they are right." For a moment you may think, "Maybe they're right and not I." So you check what your opinion is against their opinion.

Oprah Winfrey: Right.

Brother David: That's already a step forward. Then you look at the issue. That would be the real thing. Let's together look at

the issue and not at our preconceived notions. So you're trying to get your enemies to look at the issues, not at their position.

Oprah Winfrey: And where can we find some common ground?

Brother David: Where we can find common ground.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: But it also means that in those aspects in which your enemies ... I say it with quotation marks because usually when you say enemies, you think you hate them. No, the enemies whom you love. In some cases, you have to do everything to thwart their purpose. If somebody stands for destruction of the environment, cuts down the rain forests, they are my enemies. I can't help it. They are my enemies. And I will do everything possible to protect the animals.

Oprah Winfrey: But will you still love them?

Brother David: I will still love them because we belong together.

Oprah Winfrey: Do you believe that every person who comes into the world has a calling?

Brother David: That would even be an entrance to living a life of grateful living, by asking yourself what do I hate to do?

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: If you start with that.

Oprah Winfrey: Do you believe that every person who comes into the world has a calling?

Brother David: Absolutely. But it's difficult to become aware of it. I think everybody has a calling. I speak of Life; it's that great mystery that we confront as human beings.

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: Life-

Oprah Winfrey: And great mystery is another word you use for God.

Brother David: For that, for life. Life, a mystery. And if you are sure that you are using the word God correctly, you could even call it God, but there are so many misunderstandings. So I call it Life. Everybody know what you mean by that. It's very mysterious. You cannot analyze it, you cannot grasp it, but you can understand it if you give yourself to it, if you let it take hold of you.

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: And life offers you things. Very different from any other person. There's never been another person that had exactly your fingerprints or the same answers to the same ... Born at this time in history that makes a great difference. And all these things make you very, very unique. And this uniqueness is your calling to live it to the full. That uniqueness, it's like a role that you are given, you see. When I say we all belong together, that is our self.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes. So the real calling for all of us is this calling that each of us as an individual has to come alive-

Brother David: Exactly.

Oprah Winfrey: ... as a human being, then express whatever that is.

Brother David: Exactly.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah. People want to come alive in their uniqueness and to be able to express what that is.

Brother David: Yeah.

Oprah Winfrey: Which is the mystery, the mystery, expressing itself through them.

Brother David: In that unique form.

Oprah Winfrey: In that unique form.

Brother David: That was never before.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: There is a beautiful story from the mystery tradition in Judaism where one great master prays, "Oh, God, make me like Abraham."

And the voice comes from Heaven and says, "I've already got one Abraham. I want you and your uniqueness."

Oprah Winfrey: That's right. That's right. I appreciate you saying that, "The term spirit has been so misused that I would perfectly happy to drop it completely, declare a moratorium on the word spirit, and use always the term common sense. Because in contemporary parlance that says it much better. It makes sense. It's connected with the body through the senses." I thought that was brilliant when I read that.

Brother David: I'm glad you like that.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes. Because I think the word spirit is so confusing for people. That if we start using the common...

Brother David: Sense. Common sense.

Oprah Winfrey: It the common sense.

Brother David: It makes sense. It has to do with the senses, with all our senses, and it is common to all and it leads to awareness that we are all one.

Oprah Winfrey: So this is what's so fascinating to me about your life story, is that your own path to gratefulness actually started as a teenager growing up in Nazi occupied Austria, where you witnessed the horrors of Hitler's power. So you have been in that space where it is as bad as you can get. How did you cultivate a practice of gratitude in the midst of war?

Brother David: When everything is so uncertain and when the bombs are falling left and right and you don't even know whether your house is ... Bu no means were they houses because-

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah. There were many times where the bombs would go and you were surprised that you were still alive.

Brother David: Yes, many, many times. When you live in that way-

Oprah Winfrey: So were you allowed to stay in your home? You were never taken off to a camp.

Brother David: I was in the army, in the German army. But we were not in camps. We had to live in the present moment, in "Tolle" moment, and when you live in the present moment, you are all there. That's where the stop brings you. Then you can look and you can do. Go from that moment.

Oprah Winfrey: I can imagine that the only thing you can do is focus on right now, because it's too much to try to worry about what's going to happen an hour from now.

Brother David: You have not the slightest idea.

Oprah Winfrey: And not the slightest idea.

Brother David: I remember a situation in which one of our teachers gave us homework and he said, "This is for next Thursday."

And the whole class burst out laughing, "Next Thursday? Who knows what's next Thursday?"

Oprah Winfrey: Wow. I know. I read that you didn't even know ... You never expected to live to 20.

Brother David: Absolutely not.

Oprah Winfrey: You didn't expect to make it to 20 and here you are 91.

Brother David: Yeah.

Oprah Winfrey: Wow. Will you share the lesson in gratitude you learned from keeping death before your eyes and where you got that at all times?

Brother David: What I just described, this situation in which you have to live in the present moment, because the bombs are going left and right, and in every other way of your life is in danger. This living in the present moment, that is what gives you joy in life. As I read this sentence in a little book called The Rule of St. Benedict, according to which the Benedictine monks live for 1,500 years now. We read it only because we wanted to do something spiteful against our Nazi teachers and we knew they didn't want us to read that sort of thing. That sentence, "To have death at all times before you," that stopped me deeply. And then when the war was over, it came back to my mind and I thought, "Well, that's why we were so joyful." You know? Because we had death before our eyes. We had to live in the present moment. We had a wonderful youth. I wouldn't want to trade it against anything with all the hardship.

That because I had read that in The Rule of St. Benedict, I thought, "Well, probably I should become a Benedictine monk." But I didn't like the idea at all. I was running away from it for many years.

Oprah Winfrey: Really?

Brother David: Yeah, yeah.

Oprah Winfrey: So how did you finally become a Benedictine monk?

Brother David: Well, first of all, I started studying anything, finding any alibi that I could find. So studying this and how to finish that. Studied art and then I studied psychology. Then I even went to the United States from Europe.

Oprah Winfrey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brother David: You don't go to the United States in order to become a monk.

Oprah Winfrey: No, you don't.

Brother David: I was running away from it. And then I told a friend, "If I had lived in the Middle Ages I would have joined the Benedictines, but I want that original spirit."

I told this to a friend and he said, "Oh, that's funny. I just read that they started a monastery in Elmira, New York, and it's supposed to be a reform of the Benedictine life, and they want to come back to the original fervor of the rule."

And that was it. I went there and I knew that was it. Love at first sight. And I would do it again.

Oprah Winfrey: So how old were you when you first joined?

Brother David: I was 26.

Oprah Winfrey: So what's the life of a Benedictine monk like?

Brother David: Well we do basically three activities, kinds of activities. The one is we have a choir. We pray in choir and we pray seven times a day. Sometimes that's adjusted, so we're

basically at sunrise, at noon, at sunset, and in between those hours. So we have what we call the hours of the day. We come together, we chant. Many people nowadays like this chant.

Oprah Winfrey: Like the chanting. Yes, yes.

Brother David: They feel that. So we chant. We pray together, we chant. That is one of our activities. The other one is that we study or meditate on scripture, but also on all sorts of other things. And the third activity is working with your hands. So everybody works with their hands part of the time, for part of the day. It keeps you down to earth, as we say. That's typically Benedictine. And my favorite work, and now at my age there isn't much else I can do, is washing the dishes.

Oprah Winfrey: With your hands.

Brother David: Doing the dishes. That is also a wonderful way of stop, look, go. You feel the dishcloth; you feel the warm water, and the cold rinsing water. You are aware of it. You become aware of it. That is the joy. Most people don't like washing dishes, but it can be a real communication with life. That would even be an entrance to living a life of grateful living by asking yourself, "What do I hate to do?"

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: If you start with that and then find the opportunity in it. And that thing that up until now you hated it, now you find, "What opportunity does it give me?"

Oprah Winfrey: I think so many people are feeling overwhelmed by their anger today. How can we transform that anger into something more positive?

Brother David: Anger, I actually have a rather positive view of anger.

Oprah Winfrey: Do you?

Brother David: Anger gives you a lot of energy. So the anger in itself - that burst of energy - is something very positive. So pat yourself on the shoulder if you are alive enough -

Oprah Winfrey: If you're going to let it motivate you to do something.

Brother David: But now comes the point, how should it motivate you?

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: And it should motivate you by looking at the others as your equals. We belong together. But the anger itself, that burst of energy, let's use it. Let's use it positively. And positively means by remembering we belong together. This is our world. This one world.

Oprah Winfrey: I know. The faulty thinking is people believing that certain groups have a right to be here and others do not. That's where we've gone wrong. And you believe that one way toward a better world to remember one of the most popular commands in the Bible, which is...

Brother David: Fear not.

Oprah Winfrey: Fear not.

Brother David: That is the main thing. Fear not.

Oprah Winfrey: I know. And you said that it's in the Bible 365 times.

Brother David: One for every day of the year.

Oprah Winfrey: I don't think that's an accident. Right?

Brother David: I didn't count it but I read it, so I believe it. It's very good. For every day of the year, fear not, fear not. That is the main thing because it's the opposite of the Power Pyramid. All the fear, violence, all the fear, greed, all the

fear ... Why were we ... All these bad things and out of trust in life comes cooperation, peace, sharing.

Oprah Winfrey: Yes.

Brother David: That's what we need today.

Oprah Winfrey: Yeah.

Brother David: What we have to decide-

Oprah Winfrey: And ultimately that love. That love that says, "Yes."

Brother David: To belonging.

Oprah Winfrey: To belonging.

Brother David: We all belong together. And we live on a limited planet and we cannot have unlimited growth on a limited planet.

Oprah Winfrey: So at 90 years old, 91, what still surprises you?

Brother David: What still surprise me? Everything every day. Everything. I would have to list everything. That I can sit here and have this conversation with you. What a gift that is and what a surprise.

Oprah Winfrey: Under the oaks, yeah.

Brother David: I never expected it. Wonderful. Very grateful for it. But everything's surprising.

Oprah Winfrey: So I want to end with a passage from your forthcoming book, I Am Through You So I. You write, "Daily it becomes clearer to me. Gratitude is a celebration of love, just as love is the lived, 'Yes,' of joyful mutual belonging. Gratitude celebrates life with a joyful, 'Yes,' at every knot of the great network in which everything is connected to everything. As we live this 'Yes' with ever

more conviction, love ripens ever more abundantly in the autumn sun of life. I now see it as my main task to simply allow this to happen, since we do not die from death, but from fully ripened love."

Wow. I guess you've got to be a Benedictine monk to come up with that.

Brother David: Thank you.

Oprah Winfrey: Thank you so much. Thank you for this opportunity.
Thank you for this opportunity.