



One Earth Sangha

Welcome Video

Offered by Kristin Barker and Lou Leonard

Agreement

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Transcript

Kristin Barker:

Well, hello everyone. And welcome to One Earth Sangha's EcoDharma Exploration. Very first time that we're exploring this kind of format. And I'm so grateful to you for giving it a try with us.

Lou's going to talk more about the format in a few minutes, but I just wanted to take a moment here to talk about the themes, what we're going to be exploring, and why we think that this is an important exploration, this remembering reciprocity with Earth and bringing together the wisdom traditions of Indigenous and Buddhist perspectives. Why would we want to do that? Why do we feel like that's what we want to build our Earth Day set of events and offerings around.

So I want to share a little bit about that, as I come to you from Rock Creek Park, not too far from my place here in Washington, DC. This is a place that I really love. I come here to practice. I come here to walk



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and to sit, and it's really relevant for this exploration that we're doing together.

So let me say a little bit about where that came from, why it is we would want to invite Thanissara and then Pennie Opal Plant, and Alison Ehara-Brown. These three leaders to whom I am so, so, so grateful for agreeing to come together and offer their wisdom for our community.

So the premise goes like this, that perhaps amongst many commonalities, these two traditions bring three fundamental and really important insights, really relevant from our perspective, to what's happening right now with human society and our collective relationship with Earth.

The first one of those is that human beings are inseparable from the causes and conditions that give rise to our existence. And, specifically, the vastly complex, accrued over eons, Earth's ecosystems that we are not apart from, we are embedded, we arise from that and never, never leave it, at least in the embodied sense that we are in nature. That's the first insight.

The second is that our wellbeing at every level depends on individual and collective understanding of that insight. Collectively, we have to understand that, because our survival as a species depends on it. And individually it situates us in relationship with nature in a more potentially wholesome and reciprocal participatory way. That can lead to a sense of meaningfulness that counters the meaninglessness that pervades so much of the modern culture.



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Then the third insight is that sufficiently understood, sort of following from the first and second, these have the power to critically reorganize our priorities and our pursuits in the direction of authentic wellbeing for ourselves, for all of our relatives, for generations to come, for all beings seen and unseen, born and unborn.

Then furthermore, I would suggest for the Buddhist tradition that there is a fourth premise. That whereas Indigenous cultures can condition into their memberships and do, that first insight, our embeddedness with the rest of nature, that the rest of us moderns, we're out of luck. We're not going to get it, not really. We can conceptually understand it, but we won't be able to viscerally know it. So we'll see struggle to attain a full and embodied insight, understanding, of that embeddedness, of our interdependence of our interbeing, as Thich Nhat Hnah calls it.

But yet these insight practices provide the means for just that. That is, we have the power through these wisdom, the way that we are invited through the contemplative practices to look and to see, we are invited to see the three characteristics. We are invited to see the non-satisfactoriness of outer conditions, the impermanence of outer conditions and our non-separation. We can be invited to see our ecological membership, our embeddedness in what Pennie Opal Plant calls the sacred system of life.

We can decondition that separative consciousness and then explore the relative truth of our ecological embeddedness. And then we can see where that leads. We can discover what that sets the conditions for, what arises when we look and experience ourselves and the world and each other that way. So we can know it by its fruits, as Jesus said. We can know its goodness by its fruits. We can see that this is wholesome, that this leads to well-being, that there are certain



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renunciations that start to come naturally from that, not as judgment of us being bad or wrong for consuming and using and objectifying and exploiting the Earth. We start to see that it leads to a different relationship and a sense of meaningfulness of our lives and of our words and of our actions. This we suggest is part of EcoDharma, the evolution of Dharma that stays true to its roots.

I want to say one more thing here, which is that taken together, these insights, they can maybe counter this narrative that is sometimes quite subtle but pervasive in our movements for ecological and sometimes social justice. And that is the narrative that humans, and maybe especially white humans, non-Indigenous humans, we're kind of a hopeless case. We're never going to get it. And that aversion, that maybe self-aversion can seem so true, and even necessary. Yet, it's not going to get us where we want to go, I would argue. It's not true. It doesn't lead to the outcomes that we so want for ourselves, for justice, for the Earth, for what Pennie Opal Plant calls the sacred system of life.

Instead, the understanding of the truthfulness of our ecological existence, of our embeddedness with the rest of nature, the visceral understanding of that, as well as the causes and conditions, perhaps, of how that sense of separation would arise - the Buddha taught: it comes from clinging - that starts to counter that and situates us in a belonging, in a meaningfulness, in a reciprocal relationship with the Earth.

And that is the stuff of EcoSattva path activity. That is bold, compassionate, accountable, wholesome responsiveness. So simply put, bringing these two together, these Indigenous ways of looking, those Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous wisdom together with Buddhist wisdom and practices, these have practices and wisdom to



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share with one another, and with the movements that they both influence, and with the wider world.

I'm so glad and so grateful that you would enter into this exploration, both in content and in form with us here around the occasion of Earth Day. With that, I'll turn it over to Lou, and he's going to say a little bit more about the format.

Lou Leonard:

Thanks, Kristin. Hi everyone. It's really lovely to have you here with us for this month of practice together. For those of you that have been on the One Earth Sangha journey for a while, you know that we're constantly looking to learn from our work, and really try new ways to support our community, and find ways to practice that are skillful and really appropriate to these times, to this living Earth community that we're part of.

We're excited for this particular practice together this month, because it's an innovation, it's an attempt at something new, a new way to practice. But it's new in a way that really tries hard to learn from things that we've done in the past. We know from the EcoSattva training and the feedback that we've gotten from all of you who have taken it, how powerful a period of deep practice can be. Practice that includes different forms, different ways of connecting with each other and with the Dharma and with the living Earth. Whether it's guided practice, whether it's inquiry practice, whether it's really Dharma offerings that we receive, but really the key to this formula is practice together.

So what we're trying this month is a form of that formula, that formula of different types of practices done in community, done in Sangha, and done deeply within the context of wisdom from great teachers. That's what this month of practice together is. We're hoping, actually, to make



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this a new form that we offer regularly to you all, where you can engage with each other, bring your groups together, and engage in a month of practice from time to time. So we're really interested in your feedback on this experiment, and we hope to do more of it in the future.

Of course, there really couldn't be a more powerful way and time to work with this new form of practice than this month, a month that holds Earth Day in it. And to do it with teachers who represent really something that's quite important to us at One Earth Sangha and something that we've been working hard to do, which is really to bring together voices from Indigenous traditions to hear kind of directly from those leaders the practices that they have been stewards of and really have helped to fashion, and how to connect that with the wisdom of the Dharma.

So we're able to do that in this month of practice with two really powerful voices from the North American Indigenous traditions, as well as, of course, our beloved teacher and guide Thanissara.

So we know that, of course, our community is a global one, but because we're based in the United States, we lean on teachers, and in this case, the Indigenous traditions that are here in North America. We hope that this really can be a continuing opportunity to connect with Indigenous wisdom, Indigenous teachings from throughout the world. So thank you all for being here with us for this experiment in a month-long practice. We hope it serves you all and serves the living Earth community. Back to you, Kristin.

Kristin Barker:

Okay. Well, thank you for that, Lou. And again, thank you so much to our teachers, to our leaders, Thanissara, Pennie Opal Plant, and



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Alison Ehara-Brown. We're so, so grateful, so fortunate to have you with us. I'm grateful to this forest for the role that it has and continues to play in my life. And I'm grateful to you, our Sangha, for being with us on this journey. Please share with us how it goes, and then we'll see you when we all come together. I hope you can join us on April 25th, that Sunday, when we'll do the live gathering, the culmination of this exploration. Until then, go well, be well, and thank you again.