



One Earth Sangha

Session Two: Core Offering

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2022-23 Video

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Session Profile

Session Two: Cultivating the Conditions for Transformation

[Session Resources](#)

Speakers in this video

- Kristin Barker - director and co-founder, One Earth Sangha
- Thanissara

Transcript

Kristin Introduces Thanissara

Kristin:

It's now my privilege, my honor to turn it over to Thanissara. Thanissara has been, in some ways, with One Earth Sangha since its beginning, a kind of root teacher for us. And so much of what has taken shape here--in particular, this training, the EcoSattva Training--came through conversations with Thanissara and her early guidance showing us what was possible. Thanissara has been a nun in the Theravada tradition, and she's a magnificent teacher, an author, and an activist. I really recommend her books. Time to Stand Up, Listening to the Heart, and the Heart of The Bitter Almond Hedge Sutra. These are all fantastic resources for activism that are rooted in these wisdom traditions, in the



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Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. And she's integrating not only the wisdom from the Vipassana tradition, but doing such masterful work in integrating the Mahayana side. So there's so much to learn from Thanissara, and I'm so, so glad that she's a part of and continues to be part of this training. So we look forward to this presentation. I encourage you to just really be with her wisdom. All right.

Haunted by Our World

Thanissara:

So welcome, everyone. This is session two of our EcoSattva Training. And at this point, we're beginning to go deeper into the journey that we're in, this enormous, and profound, and challenging journey, at the heart of which is a very important invitation. So I'm looking forward to exploring that journey with you during this session. Welcome.

So what I'd like to talk about today is to really context the enormity of this journey that we're in at this time, both personally in our Sanghas and communities and as a collective, and as a global collective. To context that within understanding both of the enormity of our crisis and the depth of our crisis, but also as in part, in great part, or essentially, we're underwriting this profound crisis that we're in is really one way that I think about this is it's like a crisis of consciousness and a journey of consciousness. That is that we have moved for so long, for millennia, forever, from a consciousness that separates itself out from all other living beings, from the web of life in a way that has obstructed us from a depth sense of contact and belonging within that web of life.

So as Thích Nhất Hạnh said, "We're here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness." This is an illusion that we labor underneath, that we are oppressed by, that we're just this individual being apart from everything else, and that our life doesn't have consequences and an impact, and we're not impacted by everything that's around us. So both this awakening from our separative consciousness, this is the task at hand, the invitation in our crisis, but also to just look at this as a journey. It's easy to feel that everything has gone so very wrong.

And of course, so many things are wrong about our times. As Greta Thunberg, when she talked at the UN to the world leaders, she said this is wrong that a young person, a child, effectively, like her shouldn't be having to hold the weight of what she's holding. It's all upside down. Children eating on the streets while the adults fiddle around trying to shore



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up their assets and their piles of money. So there is so much that's wrong. But there's also a process of evolution that we've been in from being, millennia ago, from being deep within the web of life in the way that the Indigenous peoples. And we, too, come from Indigenous peoples, those of us that are from a Eurocentric background, whatever background we've come from, whether we're from, originally from Asia, Africa, whatever continent, all of us, whatever skin we're in, all of us originally came from Indigenous peoples. And that contact was broken somewhere along the way.

But somewhere, there's a memory, like a haunting, ancient memory. And for Indigenous peoples, they managed to keep that flame alive of understanding that actually this Earth, we belong to this Earth rather than this Earth belongs to us, that we're not here, we've never been here from that perspective to dominate nature, that we're here to work with nature, and nature is a living presence and a living spirit that is present in all life forms including plants and trees, the oceans, the waters of the lands, the great mountains. All life forms have the spirit of consciousness, of awareness, of presence, intelligence. And even those life forms that seem so static to us like a mountain range, even that on another frequency has a consciousness as an energy. Even that which we may call matter, all of this is infused. This is a living and souled world that we're in relationship with.

So this understanding, this very ancient story of our beginnings and how we feel ourself, this is something that is within us at some level, but it's been broken, and we've been broken out of and from in the journey of our individuation, which is also part of an evolutionary part of consciousness. For whatever reasons, we individuated out of the being within that womb of Mother Nature and separated out. And have now, that journey of individuation and individualism has taken us to a point of such deep disconnection that we have got to the place of really endangering, as we know, the very, very systems, ecosystems on which our life depends. And so we've extracted, and plundered, and the whole story that we're in the midst of.

Staying with the Trouble

And I think the other piece of today that I would like to really address is how we're awakening at this time to the enormous depth of pain that we're in in the midst of this break of contact, how deeply painful it is, and how painful it is to watch the results of our separative consciousness that we're actually all really complicit at some level. However where we are, we've all sort of lived in this sense of denial, this sense of a spell, really.



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We've been under a spell that there's an endless sense of resources, that the Earth will always be here for us. And that, we cannot assume anymore at all. Just looking recently at the wildfires that have gone on, infernos, really, they're not just fires, that have sort of just gone across the planet this year as we end towards the end of 2019, the most recent ones in Australia, Southwest Australia. And the sweet koala bears that are now on the edge of extinction as their habitat is destroyed. The enormity of the hurricanes that have swept through communities like the Idai Hurricane up in Mozambique and Zimbabwe that hardly makes a blip on the news that's devastated huge swaths of towns, and villages, and communities.

And just everywhere we look, floods, and fires, and destabilization, the undermining of stable societies, the sort of war machinery. This is enormous pressure, and intensity, and devastation which is such a deep heartbreak. Let's take a breath.

So this, all of it has just been fueled by erroneous conditioning, erroneous understanding, oppressive conditioning, racial conditioning, gender conditioning, delusion, false sense of entitlement, our desire to main control, our desire to dominate, and an endless round of reactivity to our deep woundedness that comes from a separative consciousness, this break in our relationship with Mother Earth. And that has led us to this experience where there's violence and brutality, fear, a sense of isolation. And so in a Dharma practice, it can really help with this because as our teacher, Ajahn Chah, would say that the Dharma practice is, the training is preparation for when big things hit, that we do this Dharma practice in our ordinary day. Every day, in every moment, we have the opportunity to practice with how it is. And this means the training of attention, of mindful attention, to what's present now, as in the foundations of mindfulness.

So at any moment, we can take that deep breath, feel the ground beneath us, and then invite ourselves to what's happening here in my body, in my mind, in my heart, in what I feel. And whatever is happening, whatever we're being triggered by, it's actually workable once we understand how to bring that moment of attention to what's felt, to what's experienced. And we can open the attention wider if it's intense, so it sort of comes out and includes the whole feeling of the body in what's heard. We can even open our eyes and allow our gaze to rest on something that's more calming, candle flame, or natural view. And then feel our feet on the ground and take a breath. And then just knowing, as it says in the second foundation, knowing the feeling in the feeling, just knowing this is how it feels now rather than being spun into a story that then takes us, and loops us, and kind of activates us into a trauma response.



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All of this goes into, of course, very, very deep places in ourselves where it can be trauma, sort of very deep feelings of fear, and abandonment, and isolation that operate in our psyches. And we just can't really live at that heightened activation all the time. It's just not skillful. It's not helpful for our body. So it's really important to reregulate our nervous system. I find even just taking very deep breaths, laying down, right, breathing through the mouth, and really energizing the whole body, so really oxygenating the body with, sorry, not energizing, oxygenating the body with breath energy really helps to reregulate the nervous system, doing some stretching, helping to come into contact with sensation. And then bringing attention to what's felt, and the feeling is just the feeling. And then knowing that whatever's felt, the awareness which fills what is felt, which is present to what's happening, doesn't have to sorta tip into the vortex and get sort of swirled around and overwhelmed. We can stay at that place. This is the heart, the seat of consciousness. It's knowing awareness. It has a knowingness, a knowing quality, so we can know this is how it is here and now. This is how it feels.

And we can just stay there steady. And this starts to regulate the nervous system. It's starts to bring us into a sense of innate agency. And that's what's really important for us in this process, really, 'cause we can so often feel I've lost agency and I'm just being pushed along and I'm reactive. So in the face of the enormity of intensity, we're moving out of denial, but we're also skilling ourself up to manage so we can more quickly process what's being felt in the energy body in the nervous system.

So once we get beneath the cognitive mind with its stories and its freak-out, and we go to the somatic experience of the body, we can just breathe air and hold the knowing to what's felt, this feeling the feeling, the feeling, breathing, practicing the mindfulness with the breath, breathing there, touching with awareness, and move by that. Then what can happen, you'll be able to digest that emotional intensity more quickly. Your system will learn to digest it, so then you'll learn to withstand. You'll be able to withstand more pressure.

And this is very important because not only will that happen, but from those emotions, you'll be able to distill at the heart of those emotions the wisdom and the purer essence of energy within those emotions. For example, anger and rage, in the heart of that, as we work with it with mindfulness and with the practices that we can do mindful awareness, the meditative processes, bringing compassion to ourselves and the body in that process, in the heart of that, there's clarity and strength. We can distill into, it's a quality of,



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really, it sort of burns away the dross. It's like it's forcing us to look and really see what's happening here and not be in some cloud of a spiritual bypass. So the anger has a purpose. It's part of our immune system, so going, wake up, feel this. And the fear is like a warning. It's the urgency of our situation. And that can be hard to handle, but we're learning to stretch. We're learning to handle these feelings.

But they seem unbearable at first. You could deflect from them. They'll just operate in our more unconscious and come up as depression and despair, panic. So we have to consciously transmute those feelings and realize that, actually, these are a gateway. They're part of our immune system, the collective. This is, well, in a way, it's like the planet waking us up by what we feel. So it's really important in all of this to understand the context we're in and understand that this is like a shamanic journey, actually. This is partly, how I think of this is like we're, this is a collective planetary journey of the shaman. And the shaman is the one in the community who is, who holds, who enters into altered states of consciousness to extract the vision for the community, to heal wounds for the community, to traverse planes of the consciousness, to connect with spirits from other realms, to connect with intelligences from other realms, to speak directly with Mother Nature and bring back that wisdom. And here, ironically, the old shramana, which is the old word for the Buddhist disciple, the shramana has the same root as shaman.

Shamanic Dismemberment

So there's a certain way, as practitioners, we are shamans. Not in the traditional Indigenous sense of the word. Although, maybe we are to some degree. But we are those that, we are potentially beings here, and this is something that we can actually do as consciousness, as a portal of consciousness. Our consciousness is awakening unto itself, actually, through us, and evolving itself through us. So the shaman is the one that brings us back home, takes us and reconnects us, brings these threads back together. But to go on that journey, to enter into these altered states, these different planes of consciousness, there has to be a dismemberment. The shaman literally dismembers themselves. They go through where their ego structure, their sense of self is dismantled. It's quite terrifying. Don't know who you are, and don't know quite where you belong. You know you have to come out of your ordinary consciousness to open to a vaster reality.

And in some ways, this is the journey of meditation as well. Every time we meditate, every time we go into that space where we have a potential to really allow ourselves to



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come out of our old patterns, to come into a space of unknowingness, to open beyond our reactivity, and to listen more deeply, and to allow ourselves to, in the times we're in, it's like it's inducting us into this dismemberment process. Everything we know and that we felt was secure is being dismembered.

For example, I'm living in Sonoma County. We had our own fires just a few weeks ago, and they were terrifying. Massive evacuations, massive parts of the North Bay area, north of San Francisco. The electricity was turned off sometimes for days. This means no petrol, no traffic lights, no internet, no shops, no restaurants. So suddenly, we're plunged into this pre-electrical reality. So that was a wake-up. These fires coming near and really destabilizing our sense of this normal world that we've been in, this world that we assume is gonna carry on in a normal way and be there in a way that we've known. And so how quickly that can change, how very, very quickly that can change. This is dismemberment on a larger scale. And this is happening all over the planet.

The Radical Simplicity of Samadhi

Things are changing very, very quickly now, and we know there's going to be very, very difficult consequences, so we have to prepare ourselves. We have to strengthen ourselves. And we have to learn to withstand and be ready inwardly for shifts of the outer world that are gonna affect us internally when things aren't as calm, or as stable, or as expected or predictable. So in those fires, as we were affected, I was contemplative. Ajahn Chah's teaching, if your house burns down, don't burn down with it. So that if things are going down, to maintain some inner sense of presence, inner strength. It's the inner, it's what we're training for. And particularly, when we're dislocated, we can be very activated in our trauma. When human beings are not trained, the mind's not trained, and we feel fear, and we get pushed out of our hearts and our awareness into our old patterning in the mind, we can become very, very quickly aggressive, violent, fear, panicky. These are not emotions that are gonna help. So how do we stay to stay rooted in this?

This is the development of samadhi, the gathering of the heart that's able. Buddha said if you develop samadhi, which means gathering and well-being, healing, and inner strength, inner presence, he said you've got to learn to withstand the impingement of the senses. We've got to actually, at that moment of when something's uncomfortable, learn to have a little more endurance, a little more strength that we can bring to that moment, a willingness to have inner sense of renunciation, to simplify. So these are things we can



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already start to do in our life. How can we simplify our situation? How can we put to one side what we don't really need anymore physically, mentally, emotionally, psychically?

So there's a sort of a honing down of our lives. How can we not undertake activities that are both high carbon-producing and not necessary anymore? How can we align our life in a way by what we eat, what we do, what we choose to do that is supportive of moving into the new story that we want to generate, a new birth? There's a new story arising in the midst of this dismemberment in the same way that the shaman is bringing back a new vision for the tribe. And to be led in that, not only, this is a collective, collaborative process. This is not the individual person, the hero journey of just conquering and doing it anymore my own and sort of outstripping everyone else. This is coming from a very different energy, the same energy that the Kogi talk about, same energy the Indigenous peoples talk about and demonstrated at a place like Standing Rock.

Decolonizing Ourselves

This is the story where we work as a collective, we work in collaboration. We can only do this together. The little time that I was at Standing Rock, which was probably the only decolonized space that I've been in, and therefore, it was very profound for me to be in that space, for a while, it really disorientated me, actually. I realized that I was out of my usual world. And one of the first things that happened when we went into that space was that there's sort of like a training to say you're in this different space now. This is a community that's undertaking an act of resistance to break the cycles of violence borne of the colonial mindset.

So it's a decolonized space in the extractive mindset, which is sort of the process we need to go through. We need to decolonize ourselves in the spaces that we create and come from. But what was unique in many ways, not unique 'cause it's also happened in other cultures in other times of resistance, movements, but what was powerful was how that space was rooted in a prayerfulness and in a ceremonial processes, which weren't just spoken about, were enacted every day. We'd gather in the morning in a large, by the time I got there, it was a really large circle, 1,000 or so people, and then nearly 2,000 veterans came and joined in, tribes from all over, not only the Americas but from further afield across the globe.

It was a unique gathering. The gathering that it was said the ancestors themselves had predicted and had placed blessings and prayers in that land of the Ochethi Sakowin, the



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lands of the Lakota, Dakota Sioux peoples for this time. So at the sacred fire that was kept burning the whole time where meetings would happen and there would be an open mic, one native, young person, was telling a story. And it was after an action that happened that didn't go well. And there was a lot of reflection and disgruntlement about the action because it wasn't completely sanctioned, and it was felt it didn't really come from this prayerful, ceremonial place. And so there was a sort of recalibration that was happening.

And this young man stood up, and very, very strongly and powerfully affirmed the need to come from a place of prayer, a place of ceremony that aligns with the ancestors, that's humble, that brings forth the strength of that prayer. And he told the story that actually that they were all there, we were all there because the grandmothers, the elders, and the children had asked for a response, that when the water, the river, the Missouri River was being threatened by the pipeline. And he said that if we come from a place of violence, it disrespects the ancestors, and they cannot work with us so well.

So this training of—even though we can be activated in violence when violence comes our way, the training that we have is to maintain nonviolence. And he talked about how at the height of the Iraq War, an elder grandmother prayed to the ancestors at the sacred fire asking the war to stop. And the ancestors responded saying, "Your prayer is a good prayer, but it's not enough. Everyone must pray now to stop war. We are at a precipice. We are at a precipice, and everyone must pray."

The Birthing Pains of a New World

So I didn't understand this as like a prayer to some salvation from outside of us, some sky god to come down. That's not the prayer they were talking about. This was the prayer to activate our consciousness. This is the prayer to ask for the ancestors, this mysterious power of consciousness itself to activate in our lives, to be open. It's the prayer that clears us, that where we let go, you surrender our agendas, we open into this deep listening. Because we don't really have, we don't have an ABC book, really, about how should we respond now at these times. We can look back, and we can see these other amazing, powerful resistance movements through history. But this is a completely unique time. And it requires completely unique responses alongside tried and trusted responses.

But there has to be some agility to listen into, we don't know what those responses might look like and where they may take us in our engagement. It might literally be prayer circles. It might be standing on the front lines. It might be in regenerative cultures and



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might be creating whole new ways of living together. But my sense is that what's important is that we deepen into this inner listening. This is the practice of meditation, to listen deeply into this alive intelligence, this living Dharma so we can hear that guidance of where and how we manifest the energies we manifest with, consciousness that's awakening in us that's birthing this new story and then our response within that.

So this is a... This is a time of excruciation. It's like this, it's a time we're being pushed through a birth canal, almost. Sorry, a birth channel. So this is a time of excruciation. It's a time that we're just being born. Something else is being born, and there's a sort of pushing and pummeling as a sense of when that baby's being born, it must feel like, oh, I'm dying, don't know where I'm coming out, you know? It can feel like that. We don't know the world that we're going into. There's hints, and we see some of the picture of it. But we're co-creating now. This is a moment of, this is a creation of this new world to bring forth, from our consciousness, the new world that's trying to be born.

And so it's really important that we understand ourselves, not just see ourselves through the lens of our old condition, voices, and beliefs, and ideas about ourself, but to really honor and respect this deep journey of consciousness itself as it's awakening in us, as it's evolving in us at great speed now, and that as it's pushing forth and bringing forth this new world that's trying to emerge, trying to take root. It's at the ending of one whole age, the ending of these systems that we've been in, this oil-based age, this extractive age that we've been in, and both the reclamation of the world that we lost, the world when we were in the web of life. But it's not exactly that. We can't go back.

So but we're drawing from the memory and the examples of our Indigenous elders as hopefully they lead, and we respect, and call on them, and call on the ancient ways and the Dharma, all of the practices that we know, so that together, all of us can begin to sense into how we can move forward from these old tribal mindsets into a more collaborative world that our deepest hearts knows is possible that we are here to shepherd into reality. So this is a great task. This is like a holy grail of a different order.

Becoming Avalokitesvara

And these are the times we're in. All of this, this whole, at some level, all of this that's unfolding, the angels and the demons, the whole range, they're all resident in this one awareness of ours. And as we listen in and touch into that awareness, we can hold all of



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that, the whole range of manifestation in the same way that Guanyin, or Avalokitesvara, the great bodhisattva of compassion, is the one that listens in the "Heart Sutra," the one that leaps beyond the walls of the mind, all the old constructs of the mind, and listens in deeply, courses the depths of consciousness of reality, and touches into all forms.

Avalokitesvara is not only the one that sees the deep, inherent emptiness, actually, of all constructed formation, but touches all forms, however empty they ultimately are, with compassion. Avalokitesvara is also the one that got shattered by the enormity of the task of liberating all beings, and if you remember in the story, was put back together by Amitabha Buddha. Whenever Avalokitesvara is being shattered, they call out for help. And in a way, that's what's happening to us at this cusp, this time we're in. It's like we're being shattered, and we call for help. And it's an appropriate response. You realize we've reached the limit in a certain way of what our conditioned mind can do. And so we're in that calling for help as the center cannot hold anymore.

It's like we're being shifted into a different part of our consciousness, like a quantum shift. We're withholding from a whole different place where we can. We don't maybe know or trust that place yet, but it's possible. We hold it all, not we as this individual self structure, but this awareness, this limitless mind-heart. So in that moment, Amitabha Buddha appears, who represents the limitless life, limitless light, limitless compassion, consciousness itself, reconstructs Avalokitesvara, and creates 11 heads and 1,000 hands and eyes.

So Avalokitesvara has all of these ways, cool ways of responding. Whatever comes, there's a response, appropriate and accurate response. So this is also a great metaphor for our practice. We are being deconstructed, and it's terrifying. It's horrific to watch the destruction. And yet, there is an invitation in this that we can move in a whole different place from our being. We can listen into that place as we're being reconstructed together collectively. And through that reconstruction, and through that process, we're starting to hear this new story, not just reading about it, but we're starting to hear it. We're starting to hear it as it speaks to us from inside us, as it guides us into our next steps, as it brings all sorts of mysterious connections to us, as things unfold in magical ways because this is a magic universe at some level.

And most importantly, as it brings us into a whole different way, an old way, an ancient way, a barely remembered way back into relationship with the ground of the sacred which is Mother Earth herself, we bow to her, we listen to her, and we are being called to



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respect her and to tend to her. So may this be so. During this journey of the EcoSattva Training, we'll be here to support this collective unfolding that we're entering in together, this shamanic journey, if you like, that we're going through together.

Dismemberment and reconfiguration as we transmute those shadows, that great shadow, as we touch it with our awareness, with our conscious presence and transmute that into the light of clarity, as all of the very profound wounding and difficult emotions and feelings become fertilizer for our empowerment and our wise and compassionate Bodhisattva heart. So it's a big process, and yet it all comes down to, as Ajahn Chah used to say, just this much here and now. That's all we're ever dealing with.

Just how is it now? What's present now? Can I meet it with awareness? Can I meet it with a mode of mindfulness, and can I trust that? That is the path activity of the Dharma. And the Dharma and the path, as we engage that, and embody that, and practice that, it will, by its nature, bear fruits, and those fruits will be wholesome. So let's trust that and trust the process that we're in. Blessings and gratitude.

Dana

We hope you have found this transcript helpful. We invite you to help offset the cost to produce this transcript and the rest of the training by [making a donation to One Earth Sangha](#). Whatever you offer will be used wisely and is deeply appreciated.