



One Earth Sangha

Session Three: Core Offering Two

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2022-23 Video

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Session Profile

Session Three: Compassionate Reflection

[Session Resources](#)

Speakers in this video

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

Transcript

Recognizing What We're Up Against

Kristin:

Welcome everyone. In this session three video I'm going to build on Kritee's presentation and my conversation with Kritee to talk a bit more about what we're up against here at the level of the individual, the space of compassionate reflection, as we further our journey down the U into the nadir of uncertainty and opening to all that is confounding and confronting us, all that is up for us right now. In particular, I'm going to be speaking about and integrating here the work of Renee Lertzman, and then some elaborations on that work. So you'll find as a resource for session three my conversation with Renee. The reason that I feel like this is so important is that we know from our practice that it's



One Earth Sangha

important to name suffering, to name what is happening, to really see what it is we're up against on our way to soothing it.

We have to understand it to a certain degree. So much compassion is enabled when we are clear about what's happening. It's that story of, you know, the dog that's terrified and aggressive and we're reactive and shrink from that, and almost maybe feel angry at the dog or certainly filled with fear. And then we see the dog's foot is caught in some kind of trap. And while we're still cautious, something very different is awakened, perhaps inside where we feel compassion. And we want to get to the root of the problem that we know will alleviate the dog's reactivity. That's what we can do here by better understanding what's actually happening with all of us as we face what is underway on our planet. So climate, ecological crises writ large like species loss, loss of ecological health, the transformation of the places we love, the pollution that we see all around us, the impact on our communities, on our bodies, on our homes...this is all underway. And even if it is not immediately on our doorstep, in our neighborhood, the knowledge that it is happening, the information as it comes in creates a kind of psychological burden that we are carrying, subtle, often unnamed. So this is the first piece of suffering that I want to name, this psychological tax that may be just influencing us day in and day out.

Then let's acknowledge that for a lot of us, we participate to some degree, with what we buy, how we travel, the companies we work for. We participate in the systems that are leading to this destruction, and adding to the information that this devastation is happening that we are part of that, can further add to that burden. So that's number two, right? Number three, even as we recognize our own participation, it can be painful to witness the other, one another, participating in these systems--our friends, our family, our leadership. I know for myself that I can feel really reactive when seeing members of my own family do something that is ecologically unsound. It's painful for me. And I feel like angry at them, <laugh> at friends, at family, even as I too, maybe not that exact behavior, but in other ways, I'm not innocent.

So we bear witness to one another, friends, family, leadership, celebrity, the celebrated culture indulges in the unsustainable. So we might take from this that others don't care. They're not aware, they don't have enough information, or they just don't give a damn. So that's another piece of it--that we see others and we believe, we take from that, they don't, they don't care. And that adds to our pain, that adds to the suffering, the psychological burden that we carry. Finally, we can feel powerless in this hyper-individual



One Earth Sangha

world where people make themselves and achieve and master their universe, the fact that we are caught inside this and can't find our way out.

We sense a lack, a deep lack of agency. We're bearing this burden quietly and feel powerless, too, perhaps. Even as we really care, we don't sense that we can do much about it. So that's some of the naming that I feel like is important and you can and should add to that list. What have I left out here that is also part of the grief, the fear, the sources of anger that you carry? So Renee Lertzman, her work, starting with her dissertation on environmental melancholia, is normalizing what is happening for us, understanding it as lowercase-T trauma (see Kritee's presentation before). This is somewhat traumatic information that we're carrying, and we can get outside that zone of tolerance, that green zone where we're calm and clearheaded, clear hearted. Lertzman's work is also debunking some myths that are really important for us to debunk. So let's start there.

The Myth of Apathy

The myth of apathy--we project mistakenly that others don't care. They do, just like us...they do. It may not look like they do, doesn't look to us. Maybe they don't speak about it in the same way. But the research is in--the vast majority of us, an overwhelming majority of us, are deeply concerned about what is underway. Others care in their own way. So what she is pointing to is that they are not apathetic. Others are not apathetic. That is the myth of apathy. Instead, others are, like us, anxious. You can see she uses a set of A's here. So not apathetic, but anxious, just like us. Maybe it doesn't look just like us, but also anxious. Ambivalent. That's another A. Like us, can you allow that others, like you, sense their participation, but don't see how to extract themselves from these systems, these systems that we rely on for safety, for comfort, for enjoyment. Perhaps they don't want to move outside the norm, at least not on their own, all by themselves. Don't see how to make the dramatic changes to extract themselves from a society that is just moving down this river of ecological destruction.

So like many of us, others don't see their way out, and like us, they have aspirations to be part of something responsive, healing, restorative. Again, the politics, the sheen may be different. The presentation wildly different. The belief systems wildly different, but like us, others love this world and want a beautiful world for their children. So let's disabuse ourselves of the notion that it is complicated for us, but for others, simple. We can be clear, and the data is on our side, others care, others are confused. They feel isolated,



One Earth Sangha

perhaps powerless, caught inside of something that we just don't know how to get out of. Others are anxious, ambivalent, not apathetic, but aspirational.

So we take account of that situation. This is what we're up against here. This is what we're working with. And we recognize that we all have strategies for coping with this complication, this small version of ecological trauma that we carry, this psychological burden. Some might be vulnerable to depression, despair, others take refuge in blame and anger. Still others might just want to disconnect from the whole thing, say it's too late, as a way maybe not to feel this. Take refuge in distraction through media, pleasure, consumption. So I invite you to see the complicated situation that we are in internally here and bring compassion. Just like to that dog, with its paw caught in the trap, we can see these strategies of distraction--maybe even the disconnect of it's too late, you know, party like it's 1999--are for working with what might be vague, confusing, unnamed, what can seem absolutely unworkable.

So if the vast majority of us are carrying this complicated ecological fear and grief, and then projecting incorrectly that others don't care. Like we're flattening, like maybe like me, I don't know what to do, so nobody else seems to care, so I'm not gonna care. But the importance of norming, of seeing that no one else seems particularly engaged, or, you know, only the activists are really freaked out, but people in my everyday life don't seem that concerned--that can be really reinforcing to the behavior that I'm not gonna act like, I'm not gonna divulge that I'm really confused and befuddled about what to do. So if, again, the vast majority of us are carrying this complicated ecological fear and grief, projecting that others don't care actually makes matters worse. If someone is subtly confused and terrified, grabbing them by the shoulders and telling them to wake up and start caring might seem helpful. It's not, it's not. We know from our own practice, we know from our own experience, that blame, shame, judgment, aggression, these just send folks like you and me further into our coping strategies. So there's these sort of primary things that are going on inside of us around this, the sort of complicated situation. And then we add to that the projection that others don't care. And then maybe with our own trauma, we sometimes shake them in ways that just further the dynamic.

Transformative Compassion

So what are better ways forward? We start by invoking mindfulness. We name it. Invoking mindfulness as a compassionate container. Before we come up with strategies and solutions--that's for the other side of the U-- right now, I invite your heart to break,



One Earth Sangha

just to see how hard this is for us to bear, how confusing it is, how our projection, how our own somewhat complicit, confused participation in it can further complicate that tangled mess. And then we project that others don't care because they don't seem to be acting like it because like us, they're kind of going with the flow. And then we judge them or shout at them or, yeah, project somehow that they don't care.

So if we can bring the compassionate container of mindfulness to this, that is the beginning to untangle this tangle. To learn then to stay, to stay with that shaking, painful heart, to understand our despair as valid, but not the end of the story, maybe. This is the invitation of this part of the U, dropping into more uncertainty, letting go of what we think is necessary, where we know this is all headed. Not to say, we're not questioning the science here, but right now we're just opening up to being with, right now, what's present, and making room for all that might emerge there, including resources we don't know we have. But we can't do that if we're not staying with the trauma. We can also affirm this primary pain that we feel as we bear witness to what is happening in our world, as testament to our belonging. We are earthly beings. We are earth consciousness reflecting back on itself. Of course it hurts; if it didn't, what would that say about us? This is love. This is love losing. And that is grief. This is love fearful of what might be lost in the future. That is the anxiousness. This is love that wants to be part of healing. So bring mindfulness, learn to stay, affirm our belonging, affirm this suffering as a testament to our belonging. Then we can share our concern and confusion with others; you know, Brene Brown, so great on this, right? Bring the shame and the complication to the surface and where you can, where it is sufficiently safe, share it with others. Come out as confused and concerned, <laugh> this will normalize and make it easier for others to be honest. And we will be disconnecting less, attacking each other less, judging and shaming each other less, and avail ourselves to more compassion and wisdom. Compassionate, courageous climate conversations, not to convince anyone of anything, not to get someone to care. Remember, they already do. But to bring to the surface what's really going on for you and make room for what's really going on for others.

This is a route not only to individual, but collective responsiveness. And then I invite you to think about your own participation in these systems. As you know, the individual and the collective are interdependent, right? We can extract ourselves, and it's really good to figure out ways to disentangle ourselves from the harmful industry, and that's really wonderful and necessary, necessary. And understand the taking from life is part of life. No one can be innocent and still alive. We can't shrink our carbon footprint to zero unless we die. And even then <laugh>, there's carbon emissions from death. So the option is for



One Earth Sangha

us to lean into indigenous ways of looking which invite us to reciprocate. Yes, we take from nature and we can give, we must give back, join, collaborate with nature. That is the participation that is possible rather than the minimization and shrinking from life.

Are we powerless? We are part of a culture. And so we can, by being real with one another, join with others. Collaborations are everywhere. And then we'll talk more about this on the upside of the U. But joining with other people, joining with nature, just hold that out as a space for untapped possibility, that will be further explored later in the course; while innocence is not on offer, participation with life is. But for now, I invite you to use the contemplations, use the inquiries to take inventory for what's going on for you internally. To be honest, and to discover in the space of compassionate reflection that a lot of this may be going on for a lot of us, even though it doesn't look the same. And that our reactivity to the projection that others don't care is actually part of the problem. Normalizing the complexity, the care, the ambivalence, the anxiety, the aspiration--that will help us be more honest and attuned to ourselves and one another. So that's the possibility I wanted to offer to you. Thank you for listening. And we'll see you later in the course.

Dana

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