



One Earth Sangha

Session Four: Core Offering

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2022-23 Video

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Session Profile

Session Four: Intersection and Worldviews

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Speakers in this video

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

Transcript

Kristin Introduces Noliwe

Kristin:

Greetings, friends. We are here in session four of the EcoSattva training, and it is my delight, my pleasure, my honor to welcome Noliwe Alexander. Noliwe is in the teacher training program at Spirit Rock, is currently co-facilitating the Community Dharma Leaders Program, also at Spirit Rock, and has just been an excellent contributor in the space of Dharma and speaking to issues all across the board, deep Dharma, including, but not limited to issues for communities of color. And, I couldn't be more delighted to welcome Noliwe here to contribute to session four, where we're really gonna open to the ways that the climate crisis, ecological crisis is really an echo, yet another form of the ways that these fundamental poisons – greed, hatred, and delusion – take on their



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institutionalized forms. And we see colonialism, patriarchy, hyper-capitalism, individualism, and racism intersecting and compounding the effects. Who pays the price for that? Who gets hit first and worst? We know how that goes. And yet, we need to open up and hear just the complexities of it, just for all of us to take in, no matter where we fit in the demographics. For all of us to just take in, and to pause, and to listen deeply. So here is a voice we should listen to. Thank you so much, Noliwe, for joining us, and welcome.

The Roots of Environmental Injustice

Noliwe:

You're so welcome. Hello, everyone. What a pleasure to be here. When Kristin first asked me, I thought, boy, I don't know if this is really my lane, you know... But, I realized that I really had something to say, because it's on my heart. And, when I began to look at the particular sessions that has been produced for your training, I realized that I really fit right in whatever my opinions and my views are, and what my heart is speaking to, and what's alive for me, fits really just nicely into your (session) four, which talks about racism and patriarchy. And, I want to kinda turn our lens... I'm gonna go back and forth, but there's a little bit of some strong teaching in here that I've had to learn, actually, as I prepared for this particular session with you.

And first, let me just say that I live in Oakland, California. I live in East Oakland, which is an area that has been underrepresented, under-provided for. And so, from my vantage point, I see so many things that, from other people's viewpoints, may not see. So, some of my discussions today will be coming from that lens of what I see in our communities, at least in my community. And now I know that through my own research I've been able to broaden that to see a little bit more.

But first, one of the things I wanna talk about is this idea of environmental justice. I started looking into this because I realized that our climate crisis, that we know today, and that you've been discussing for the last three sessions, and the reason why you've jumped into this training, and really have made your commitment here. The climate crisis and environmental justice are like kissing cousins, they're paired together, and we can't speak about one, we can't speak about the devastation that's going on in the planet without speaking about environmental justice. And, I'd like to probably add in there, also, economic justice. So, there's two pieces here, I think, that are very important.

And, through my research for today's discussion, I started looking at what is the definition of environmental justice? And I'd just like to take a few minutes and read three short



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paragraphs, so that you can understand that this is actually written, from the federal government of the Department of Energy. And I was shocked <laughs> I mean I was like... I was absolutely shocked that, you know, I thought we were using this word like we've used a lot of other words, trying to put them in together, social injustice, all of the ways in which we are now speaking about new languaging around what's happening in our world today. But I realized that this language has been there since the early 2000s. And so, let me just give you three paragraphs of the definition of what environmental justice has been defined by the Department of Energy.

First, it's fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no population bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences, resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations from the execution of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies. And lastly, meaningful involvement requires effective access to decision makers for all, and the ability, in all communities, to make informed decisions and take positive actions to produce environmental justice for themselves. Three really profound paragraphs.

And I think what this has left me with is my own question. And I leave you all with this inquiry. How are we doin' with this? How's it workin'? Because, from my vantage point, in East Oakland, in California, I'm not saying that it's working quite well. So, we can define environmental justice a particular way, and we can take it in from the cognitive standpoint, but then we also have to ask ourselves the question; how's this really working? And, is this something that's just written? Which oftentimes, in many policies, especially coming from the federal government, are just that. So that was really important for me to define what environmental justice looks like, because it helped me understand what environmental injustice looked like. I don't always know what I want, but I absolutely know what I don't want. And what I don't want is to be not at the table to make decisions when it affects my communities. And this particular statement, this law, this statement says that that's exactly what is supposed to happen. And, I'm not sure that that happened, so I'm asking you that same question. How's that working? What do you know? Where do you see it's working in your communities? In our world? In our global sense of connectedness?

So, I'm gonna jump around a bit, I hope it's not too confusing, but, I wanna give you some views. As I said, I live in East Oakland, but I wanna give you some views from my lens, of being a nondominant person, of being a African American woman of a particular age, having lived on the planet for as long as I have. And I'm not speaking as though I'm the



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authority for all people of color, but I'm speaking from a viewpoint that may be a broad brush, but I think it has some absolute tenets in what we're speaking about. And these views is that, from a nondominant standpoint, when we talk about climate change, and what maybe communities know and don't know. That there is a sense, an overwhelming sense, that over the past several decades, when, as the environmental movement and the climate crisis has become much more part of our daily narrative, that many people and communities are just merely trying to survive. And so that we're not necessarily – and I'm saying we, not that I am that person – but we as a community, are maybe not looking at what is facing our planet today? We may be looking at how do I actually survive and take care of my children, and make a living wage? Because there, in itself, is survival. I think the other thing, from a nondominant point of view, from maybe a person of color's point of view, is that, there isn't education. There's no education advancement to teach environmental issues. We see that there's not a lot of education in many of our communities. People are fleeing public schools, they're going to charter schools and so forth. So, there's an element there, that our educational opportunities are not being afforded to many communities and many schools, and actually to churches and other places where people can get involved. I think that there is probably much more of a teaching of the status quo, let me teach you what isn't in the history books, because that's been exactly what has been going on for decades, centuries upon centuries. Let's not tell you about your people, or what the impact will happen. And so, that has been really, I think, a view that we, of color, communities of color can actually think of.

And another thing, from a nondominant point of view, is that, when we speak about climate change, or the climate emergency, and it comes to us at this stage, the stage where there's a possibility of things not being reversed, there is a sense that there is a fear of the daunting uncertainty. What can we do? And that may not be just amongst people of color and communities, I think all of us are faced with this idea that this is too much. Right, this is too much to handle. It's too much to bear. And how do we bear witness to this? How do we even have this conversation together? Or really, do we see the climate emergency as it really is? It's mentioned and then we just say, "Okay, let me move on with our lives." So, these views are not mine alone, I think that they're shared by many, many people. And are definitely shared by communities, communities of color, marginalized communities, communities that have been at the impact, and beset with oppression, poverty, discord, and being left alone to try to surface all of these, this narrative and this dialogue.

As Kristin mentioned, I'm a teacher at Spirit Rock, also in the teacher training program right now. So much of what I am living through is the same thing that you're living through in this program, and that is, how do I bring my practice, how do I take this



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information that I'm learning, through the EcoSattva program, or training program, or even through my own influences... how do I take this in and try to bring this into my Dharma life? And I started to look at this as, let me look at it from, again, my point of view, a woman of color, living in a particular area at a particular age, and where I'm at today. How do I look at it through the lens of the three evils, those ways in which the Buddha said that we suffer? The causes of suffering, the second noble truth; greed, hatred, and delusion. You know, through greed we can see that the colonized way in which we have been living in America today, and across the globe, really has a mindset of rendering people less than, rendering their resources less than, taking from, instead of giving to. And I think that when we look at this through cosmology of the Buddhist tenets, and we look at these three evils, and we look at greed being one of those places in which we can separate ourselves from the colonization, we can begin to decolonize our mindsets. We can start to look at the lack of abundance differently. We can begin to look at poverty differently, although it exists, and we have some great examples of people who are on the front lines of really identifying and stressing that poverty in this country is real. But we can begin to change our mindsets around scarcity, and begin to bring in this tenet of greed, clinging, wanting, into a different way in which we look at the climate crisis today, and our role in it.

We can look at the second element of what the Buddha said creates this deep suffering in us, and that's hatred. And believe me, racial and oppressive landscape that has been laid out in our marginalized communities, and in our particular beings, exists fully today, as it did centuries and centuries ago. It's seen differently today. We may not quote unquote look at slavery the same way, but we're looking at children being separated at the borders, we're looking at Islamophobia, we're looking at all the different isms that are there.

But what this hatred has done in our beings, if we allow that to happen, it's created this great degree of mistrust, fear, anger. And it's created, actually, a hatred towards the communicator and towards the subject. So, when we think about climate change, we think about mistrust, we hear a lot of things in the news, do we trust it? And especially when we think about what has been done. We talked about the environmental justice language that's in from the Department of Energy, and I asked you that question, how's it working? And when I think about this idea of trust and mistrust, it leads me to think about Flint, Michigan, and the water crisis that's happening there. And it's directly in communities of color. I think about what's happening in San Francisco, in landfills where they're building low income housing, specifically in communities of color. I think about New Jersey, where there have been old, old industrial plants that they're now trying to, – they can't even eradicate all of the toxicity that's there – wanting to build it around communities of color. I think about the spraying of pesticides in our agricultural fields,



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where migrant workers are exposed. I think about the dangerous pipelines that are running through North America, and that impact on Native lands.

So, when we hear about the climate crisis, and we think about how we distrust the communicator and the subject, it brings about a whole different layer of complexity in our understanding.

And then our last, what we called three evils, is delusion. And these are these conditions, both external and internal, that, oftentimes, when we are not aligned with our practice, we think it doesn't affect us, it has no impact on us. But actually, in many, many places of this world, we're all being affected, one way or the other. We're being affected with our breathing, we're being affected, so we can't walk through our world with this delusion. And then, we also have to look at the perpetrators, those who are big business, big agriculture, all of those places where this type, the people who are cutting down the rainforest in South America. These are perpetrators. We also have to think about their delusion. How much are they not seeing? How much do they care not to see? They must know the impact. We have to know the impact. Of what all of this is happening is for us.

So, when we take this into our daily practice, we can begin to flesh out and kind of look at places that our own habitual mind, our own greed mind is present. Our own mind of aversion and hatred is present. Our own mindsets of delusion are present. And we can begin to work on what that looks like to change that. Just like with our practice, just like with your sitting practice, or your meditation practice. Whatever you are doing, this can be part of what you take in.

And these are really weighty and hefty conversations that I'm now approaching and having with you in this next section of your training, but I think that they're necessary. I know that change cannot happen by myself alone. And I think that we all have a responsibility to make the change happen the way we wanna see it. And it isn't that we just slough it off and think that it has no impact on us. This is real, today. And it's real within the communities in which I live. It's real within future generations, who will be impacted far more than we will.

Decolonizing Engagement

So, this next piece that I'd like to talk to you a little bit about, for our program today, is around looking at the mythology of people of color and communities of color. 'Cause I don't think that there's a direct representation that really speaks to the fact that there are people who bring awareness to the climate crisis. I think that the dominant cultural beliefs and behaviors has been that we only talk about this, and it's spoken to a white



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liberal, as we say in Buddhism, upper middle way, communities. And I think we need to wake up to that mythology, that climate crisis and the conversation is only looked at through those lenses, or through those people, because I think that, if you do the research, there are people who are on the ground floor in communities, not just Flint, Michigan, but other places, Georgia, who are testing water, testing soil, to see where communities can be built, looking at what has been built, looking at urban planning in a totally different way. So that's a mythology that needs to actually be demystified.

And also, I think that part of this understanding of what we see in the press, that actually takes us away from knowing the impact and people who are actually doing a tremendous amount of work, is to see that only the people on the front lines are the ones being recognized, who are white. And that, again, is a myth. And I'm here to bust that myth.

Greta Thunberg, I just read yesterday, Time Magazine voted her person of the year. And I am ecstatic, because she is one awesome woman, young woman. She has the courage to stand in her truth. She has given voice to the voiceless around the climate crisis. And she has stood toe-to-toe with some of these world leaders, and said, "Listen to me. This is my future. It's not yours anymore." So I really have nothing but praise for her, and the efforts and the courage that she has taken on to do this work. She's actually taught a whole group of people, including myself, to look at how I travel, the actual carbon footprint that I put on the world.

But I wanna say that the press, the social media networks, and everything, has failed to see that there are so many other young people, elders, who are actually on the front lines doing this work. When they were praising, when I saw on social media that there was a tremendous amount of praise for Greta, I was overjoyed, but I also saw that there were so many young people, Latinx, African Americans, Islamic young people, people of Asian heritage, young children and elders alike are on that front line.

But it's much like what happens in this convert Buddhism that we are operating in and are studying in, here in the west. We sell it to the middle way because it's the easier sell, but we forget to actually say that there's an inclusion piece that needs to be looked at. I know, and I've seen that young people of color have the same veracity, and the same courage that Greta has. I mean, press down, I mean really. And yet, in order to go in communities that are going to be impacted first, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to do that. Because it's not seen, again, the education isn't there, the conversation isn't there. But, these young people and elders are bringing awareness and change to areas that have not changed before.



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There are young people and elders, who are standing up in Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador, standing up about the deforestation of the rainforest. There are people who are standing up in North America, around the pipelines. They are not just the Standing Rock people, there are other communities, other Native lands who are being impacted. There are people in every single state, and parts of the world, who are standing up, and these are not just people from dominant cultures.

But I'd also like to mention, as much as we wanna praise everyone for doing the work, and I think we should, that we should also be very, very mindful about stepping in, knowing that, okay, so not everyone's there, let me go into these communities, that we don't begin to garner a mentality, that I tend to call the savior mentality. That, white people can go in and fix it. These are not the solutions that we need. These are not the resolutions that we need. This creates the separation. This is, of course, the patriarchal view of what has always happened. If we don't begin to look at the inclusionary pieces, the places that we are not separate, as the Buddha has spoke to so often, as Thích Nhất Hạnh speaks to, we are one with this earth, if we walk softly on it, if we walk hard on it, we are one with the earth. We are one with all that we are together, this interconnectedness, then we can't leave not one person out. And we can't go in saying that we're gonna fix it and you're not a part of that fix, or that resolution. I think that we need to back off if you're a dominant culture person. You need to say, wait a minute, what's being done already? Because there's much to be done, and there are people in the community already doing this work.

And I think we need to recognize that, much like has already been spoken to in other sessions for you, we need to look at what traumatic effect will climate change and the climate crisis have on communities? On people? The humanists of us? How much can we take? And then, taking this deeper look to see, so if it's affecting me, possibly as a white person, what is it affecting the communities who are mostly impacted? When there's already traumatic residue from histories of intergenerational trauma. This is our job here. This is your job, to take this deeper look. And I absolutely request, I mean, I ask you from my heart, don't cop to this I'm gonna go in and save the world. That won't work. You're creating harm in doing that.

And we all have a responsibility. It's not just people in this program. It's not just people who are diligently and with strong commitment to really trying to change the course of where we're going, whether it's all the policies that are now getting eroded in the United States or not. We all. My grandson has a responsibility. My nephew has a responsibility. We all have a responsibility, all of our communities. As we say with Metta, without



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leaving one person out, in every direction, we have to go down this path of freedom and peace.

So, some of the things I've been thinking about, is I've been thinking about this particular session, this place of how do we blend racism, patriarchy, and this colonial mindset into separating, breaking it down, as I said, I'm gonna bust that myth, I'm gonna tear it down, I'm gonna decolonize my mind. And hopefully you can begin to see the small places in which there's an opening for you to do the same.

An Invitation to Listen Deeply

But with that comes, for me, an invitation for you. A deep, deep invitation to listen deeply to yourself. It's part of our practice. What is the mind doing? How is the mind performing? There needs to be some sureness in our steps, to take the challenge on, to say, "I'm going to listen deeply." Not just to what's happening in my mind, but I'm gonna listen deeply to what's happening in other communities. And then, begin to look at what that process feels like for you. And when you think you've had just about enough, go back and return back to the listening. Return back, there's so much more to subtly, the nuance of listening. Understanding. Letting go. Relinquishing. Renunciating. There's so many steps to being able to have a broader view.

So this is my invitation to you, is to practice listening with an egoless sense, taking yourself out of the I, me, my, and actually saying, what does it look like in this world, in this planet, in this climate, outside of me. What does it look like for someone else, this sense of how can I belong to a bigger world? How can I look at it from a different lens? A different viewpoint? A broader sight? And then, I invite you to practice: after you've done this deep listening, what is coming alive for you now? What speaks to you? What calls you into action? What makes you want to either be a deeper practitioner, or a stronger activist, or a community communicator, or a policy and change maker? Or somebody who maybe just sits and listens, and sees what other communities are doing, and then asks to see how you can enter into that gateway. Instead of making yourself so visible, why don't you see what's happening. See what's coming alive when you listen and you stand a bit on the periphery.

There's an African saying in communities, it's called Ubuntu, and Ubuntu means I am because we are. This is this place of non-separation. This is the place that I can't do this without you. But I will definitely know if I'm being harmed by you. But we've got to come together in a totally different way. How do we build community resilience? How do we build grassroot efforts that don't look like they looked, I would say, 40 years ago, when



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we were looking at women's liberation movements, when it became exclusionary of women of color, and really moved in the direction of only those in the dominant stratas? How do we actually put boots on the ground, so that it aligns to social and economic justice agendas?

This is an inquiry, this is an invitation for you. This is the work that we're doing today. It looks very, very different than what our ancestors did, because we're asked of more of us to do. We have so much more to do right now. We call this a climate crisis because it is. But we also call it justice, because it is.

One thing I've asked myself, as I'm doing this work and I'm learning more, and I'm taking myself outside of my seat, outside of my cushion, what is the quivering of my heart? What does my heart speak to? How does it open up, compassionately, to other communities? To my community, here in East Oakland. How do I cultivate wise relations between both these movements, the climate crisis movement, and environmental justice movement? How do we bridge that? How do we bring that together? So that we're not talking about two separate things, and we're not walking down two separate paths. How do you start to become real?

Walking this Path Together, Now

One of my teachers has been Eugene Cash, and that's one of the things he always says, "And so, let's get real together." 'Cause I'ma tell you, it's time. If nothing else happened to me about five years ago, I went to an international Buddhist conference at Omega, and they had two particular subjects, one of them was on racism and race in Buddhism. Beautiful presentations by teachers who actually knew their subject matter, and it was quite profound because we had teachers from every lineage, from around the world. And the second subject that we were talking about was the climate crisis. And we had people like David Loy, and others who actually have done such a tremendous amount of work.

And I had somebody come up to me and say, "What did you think about that race topic?" And I had to be very honest with them and I said, "You know, I wake up every day like this. So, race is not a topic for me. It's actually how I wake up and I breathe every day."

But what blew me away, and took the blinders off me, and began to wake me up, was around the climate crisis, 'cause I had absolutely, five years ago, did not have all of the data that I have today. This is the time to get real focus. If not now, then when? We have to practice this deep listening. We have to do it on the cushion and off the cushion.



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So this is my invitation to you. Begin to look at what environmental justice, more so, environmental injustice, looks like on our planet. Where do we draw the line? Where do we say enough is enough? EcoSattva family, I say it's now. For me, enough is now. Enough was then, five years ago. But it's so much now. I have a grandson that I'm thinking about. And I have future generations that I'm thinking about. This isn't for the faint of heart, as you well know, you signed up for this program, being in this training because there's a deep amount of care that you have. But take a look at your heart right now, as I speak. Do you find a quivering that's happening? Do you find something alive for you? Are you waking up just a little bit? Are you letting go a little bit? Are you walking towards freedom a little bit?

You know, it's been my pleasure to do this work with Kristin and One Earth Sangha. I didn't know if it was right for me, but I see now it is. As a black woman in America today, this is my charge. And it's my charge to go into my community and do this work, and to align myself with others who are already doing the work. And that's my ask of you. Don't go and try to fix it, like I said. Go in and ask the question. Go in with eyes wide open and blinders off.

And as a very, very dear, dear, deep friend of mind says, and teacher, "Let's awaken together. It's our time." I've got a little bit of emotional stuff goin' on. As you can tell. But just remember these words, "I am because we are." Ubuntu. I can't do this without you. But let's do it from an awakened state. Let's do it from a place where we can separate ourselves from the three evils, and walk this path together. I thank you so much for your time, and your patience. Thank you. Yeah.

Kristin:

Oh my goodness. That was exquisite and beautiful and exactly the opening to the fullness of it, the complexity that is inside this heart, in my relations, either with my own fellow practitioners in the dominant, or my fellow practitioners, people of color, the fullness of the way that we do this, and the call to feel that quivering heart couldn't be more perfectly timed for where we are right now. Thank you. I am just full of gratitude right now.



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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.