



Session Six: Core Offering

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2022-23 Video

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Session Profile

Session Six: Creating and Discovering The Way

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Speakers in this video

- Lou Leonard – Co-founder, One Earth Sangha
- Adam Lobel

Transcript

Lou introduces Adam

Lou:

Welcome to everyone to this really deep and important session six of the EcoSattva Training. Here we are, at the bottom of our exploration, at the bottom of the U, looking up the other side and beginning this process of emergence and reforming of ourselves, in light of, and really, with full awareness, of all the layers we've peeled back over these previous five sessions. I'm really excited to have Adam Lobel as our guide for this session, because it is so important to have someone like Adam, whose practice has been really deep at this intersection of the power of contemplation and reflection, but also the imperative of acting and doing so with as much balance and wisdom and passion, really, as we need, as this moment calls for. So Adam, thank you so much for being with us at this important stage of the training, and welcome.



Adam:

So, thank you so much, Lou, and thank you Kristin. As ever, it's an honor to work with both of you and to be part of the EcoSattva Training, to be part of One Earth Sangha. And I want to offer my thanks and appreciation to all of the teachers who have offered their heart and their wisdom before. I feel very appreciative to be part of this particular journey. This is certainly where my heart is, where my energy is right now, as is true of all of us who are gathering here, this intersection between the dharma, the primordial teachings and wisdom of freedom and awakening and how they intersect with this ecological crisis that we find ourselves thrown into. Whether it's up to us or not, we are in the middle of a massive transformation on our planet, and how to rouse our spirit and cultivate this way of being as an EcoSattva is certainly what I care most about. It's what's on my mind and in my heart when I wake up in the morning, and often, when I go to sleep, and certainly in my dreams. So I feel so actually at ease and thankful to be able to just be going right into the heart of the matter.

So this morning, I'm speaking to you from western Pennsylvania, and I wanna begin with a tradition that I've learned of acknowledging the land, or land acknowledgement. I'll just do this in a very simple way, which is to honor the fact that I am immersed in an ecosystem that has a deep history, of the natural landscape, the non-human beings and the humans who have been here, and in particular, I am on the land that was the ancestral land of the Osage or the Wazhazhe people, the Lenape, and the Iroquois Haudenosaunee Six Nations people, who were in relationship to this river valley and the landscape and the forests that are all around me. And their history has been one of tremendous violence, displacement, and genocide, although many of those nations still are alive and are still with us with tremendous resilience. So I'd like to honor that history as we begin our exploration today.

So, coming into open-hearted, honest, and good relationship with the particular place in which we live will be a theme that I will return to, again and again, throughout this presentation. I wanna begin here to acknowledge the past of this specific place, the specific forest and river valley that I am in right now. And each of you, wherever you are, alone or in a group, you also are embedded and immersed in the history of the particular landscape, the magic, the beauty, and the violence and destruction that is part of the history of the land in which you find yourselves. So it's a good place to begin. It's an honest and real place to begin, and it's neither necessarily depressing nor particularly optimistic.

During our last session, Lama Willa brought us so powerfully and beautifully into this space of uncertainty, of groundlessness. When we face this reality, this state of the real



that we find ourselves in with global warming, with the ecocide and the pollutants that's in the breath right now, with the loss of so much beauty around us. When we face this reality and we enter into this uncertainty, we are able to actually touch and abide with the more primordial Dharma, the deeper truths of reality that have always been the core message, the heart message, of the Buddha, and of all of the streams of Dharma that flow from the Buddha. And here, the teaching is quite simple, which is that reality, as it is, suchness, emptiness, selflessness, is vast. It is boundless. It is an infinity, and it exceeds all of our attempts with our small ego mind to control, to grasp, to understand, to know, to hold, to cling.

Reality is constantly exploding and exceeding all of the ways that we are trying to grasp. And with the global climate crisis, the material reality, the container of earth, of Mother Earth, that we find ourselves in, is giving us this teaching in a profound, powerful, infinite and mysterious way.

An Archetypal Journey

In our presentation today, I'd like to invite us from this place of depth and uncertainty, the vastness of the real, into a comportment, a way of being of an EcoSattva that can face and rest with this groundlessness, but also can spark a kind of vitality, a liveliness, a way of being that's responsive and emergent. And in this way, all I'm doing is echoing the very ancient archetype that is present in the Buddhist teachings and in many spiritual teachings around the world, of moving from a phase of letting go, of releasing, into a stage of complete unknowing, complete uncertainty and letting go. And then emerging out of that vastness, that uncertainty, that letting go, that darkness, as it were, into an emerging luminosity.

And this is an archetype that's there in so many different traditions. We have mentioned a few times the Theory U from the Presencing Institute developed by Otto Scharmer, which has been one of the paths that we've been following, and we can find similar images and metaphors in Joanna Macy's work, for example, in the Spiral that she offers, where we move from honoring the pain of our world to seeing through new eyes to going forth and then coming into gratitude, and then this cycle repeats itself again and again. We see a similar pattern in the Zen Ox Herding Pictures, these famous early comic book drawings of a figure who moves from a state of not knowing their mind, through learning and holding a relationship with their mind to eventually transcending their mind and transcending themselves and entering into an infinite openness, a blankness, and then from that infinite openness, stepping out and emerging and returning back into the marketplace, back into the world of action and form.



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Speaking of form and emptiness, we see the same pattern in the Heart Sutra, the classic Mahayana sutra that talks about the relationship between emptiness and form, form and emptiness. In the Sandokai teachings of the Zen tradition, where there is the merging of the absolute and the relative. In the Vajrayana traditions or the third turning traditions and Tantra in Tibetan Buddhism, where there's tremendous emphasis on arising from, emerging from emptiness and taking on a particular form.

In the Catholic mystical tradition, from John of the Cross, we hear of the "dark night of the soul." a mystical unknowing, an immersion in total darkness, total uncertainty. John of the Cross breaks up the dark night of the soul into three areas, three divisions. The first is a letting go, a releasing of our previous knowledge, our previous identities, our previous certainties, even of our belief in what is most beautiful and what is real. We let that go, too. So that's like dusk, according to John of the Cross. But then we emerge, and we enter deeper into a fathomless darkness, a true unknowing, where there's no light, where we're completely blind, completely uncertain. And in that blindness, in that darkness, we have no compass, nothing to follow, no reference points at all. Only by entering into the fear of that darkness, this womb cave, this depth, can we truly let go. Only through passing through that threshold does a new light, a new dawn begin to emerge. And that new light, that new dawn, is completely different. In fact, the very senses, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body that can sense and feel that new light are different senses. We become a different being in order to attune to some other wisdom in this world.

So I could keep going. There's even more examples that I've thought of, but I'll spare you. I think it's clear that there's a certain archetype. There's a certain death and rebirth, you could say. This is also true in rites of passage in the more indigenous communities, where we leave the world behind, we enter into a liminal stage, and then we emerge. So, this is true in the spiritual path. This is true in our relationship with reality and ourself and meditation, and my goodness, this is true right now as we relate to the collapse of so many of our natural systems and the collapse of our civilization, our society, that has been so wound up and built up in relationship to a certain kind of fossil fuel industry and a certain kind of economy, and a certain kind of colonization.

So as we enter into this phase of collapse and of environmental ecocide, we, on a very, very material, concrete level, are facing this kind of loss. And so our question today is, what might it mean to enter in, pass through the threshold of this darkness, and emerge, get a glimpse of some new light, new dawn, that we might sense and attune to and take us forward into something possible?

So I've been holding space for others to work with their emotions, their despair, anger, numbness, paralysis, guilt, heartbreak, rage, fear. But in this beautiful mountain forest in

Colorado, with the moose and the pine and the mountains, I realized I had not given myself the space to really let my heart break. And so, being held by other teachers, I had a chance to really grieve and really weep. And I mean, I really did it, full-on crying with the trees, and the moose, and the mountains, and the creek, and feeling the loss, feeling how much we are destroying every second, every month, every year, the burning of forests, the death of species, and I finally broke open.

And I can tell you, it did not feel good, exactly, or even cathartic. It was deeper. It was more like an experience of such heartbreak, of such loss, of such grief, that I just didn't know what was up or down, what I believed, what I didn't believe, and I could feel this tension of, "Am I seeking the energy to kind of rise up again so I can go back and fight the good fight, the energy or spiritual warriorship? Or am I gonna finally let go of something?" And really, what emerged from that week, for me at least, was really neither. Almost a suspension of needing to figure out which is the way forward. And I think it's that suspension, that uncertainty, is precisely what the Dharma invites us into, and we can enter into that space of unknowing. But it often means letting go of some of the certainties that are really most sacred.

The Willingness to Let Go

All of us, especially if you think of yourself as a Buddhist, we're all very willing to let go of ourselves, to let go of attachment, to let go of some habitual pattern, to let go of our thoughts as we return to the breath and are mindful. We're very quick to let go. We're very quick to say we're willing to give, to surrender. But it's interesting to look at what we're not really ready to let go of. So, for example, are we ready to let go of our certainty of what we want from the environmental movement? Are we willing to let go or to question, even, the role of human beings in the further of this planet, the place for our civilization?

I think many of us care so much about the earth, and we want to protect Earth, protect Gaia, protect the endangered species, protect the forests. But if we really inquire into our anxiety and our fear, for many of us, and myself included, it's actually fear of losing our way of life, fear of losing our culture, our fossil fuel-fueled existence.

So in some ways, it's the inverse of what we think, as is often the case. It's the exact opposite. We say we're protecting the earth, and what we're actually trying to do is hold onto and protect our society, to make sure that we have a place, our world, our civilization, our global society, that it has a place in the future. Are we willing to let go of that? What does that even mean?



The philosopher and theorist Claire Colebrook, she's Australian, and she often speaks about this feeling of losing our world, something we wanna hold onto, in the middle of the environmental movement. And she reminds us that many human worlds have already been lost. So, for example, growing up in Australia, there was a time when the indigenous people of Australia obviously lived on the land with a deep and ancient culture, many different languages, many different cultures, in fact, and they each had a story that they told about their land. They each had a language. They each had their own histories, their own traditions, their own names for this particular river or this particular forest or this particular animal. And when she was growing up in Australia, there was a famous documentary of the last person from one of the Aboriginal tribes, and this is the last person who spoke their language, who knew their stories, who knew their ancestors, who knew the specific names for their biome, their natural systems, who knew their world, and they were the last one. There were no future generations. So as they died, as they prepared to die, they did not just die as an individual, but their whole civilization, their whole world, their language, their culture, their stories, their dreams died with them, gone forever.

And when we look at the history of colonialism as we explored in one of our sessions, session four, I believe, we encountered the truth that our civilization, modern society, has been part of a violence that has destroyed many worlds thus far. So it's a truth about our society and our colonial history that unfortunately, so many human worlds have already been destroyed forever. Whole beautiful cultures, ways of life, languages, rituals, stories, relationship with the land, religions. Whole universes of human experience have already died and been lost. And part of the intensity and urgency that many of us feel is it's our civilization that is now really in a moment of crisis and threat. So, it's interesting to explore, what are we holding onto? What are we trying to maintain? What are we trying to fight for? What are we willing to let go of?

There is so much uncertainty, and yet, as humans, the way ego works, the way the self works, is we are always looking for certainty, looking for security, looking for a reference point. And for many of us, as EcoSattvas, it is that very reference point of the environmental work, the EcoDharma work, that can also become a reference point, can also become a kind of certainty that we cling to, and in the dark night, in the tolerating of emptiness, nothing remains. There's nothing that we take with us in that complete darkness and blindness, at first.

And maybe I'm speaking about this in part because of my own experience in a very painful, intimate way over these last few years. As some of you know, I am Acharya in the Shambhala tradition, and I've spent my entire adult life working for and teaching in and learning in the Shambhala community, which is a very large international community and



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beautiful, rich culture with three and almost four generations of practitioners, and a vision of creating enlightened society based on basic goodness and harmony with the world. So I've given most of my life to that tradition, and a lot of love and trust, and yet, over the last few years, as many as of you know, we have experienced a reckoning, a terrible crisis and collapse, because of the sexual violence, the abuse of power, and the patriarchy that has been in our own tradition, in my own tradition, and my own teacher, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, was someone who was called out through the #MeToo movement, with some really, really frightening stories of abuse.

And having lived through this, having tried to reckon and grapple with it, to know, am I trying to fight for something to keep it alive? Am I letting it go? This has been very, very real for me, and I have to say, I've gotten a glimpse of what it's like for an entire social field to collapse, to almost die, or to feel poisoned. And it is a frightening thing for humans to experience.

It feels very important, however, to make a distinction between a world, a human culture or a civilization that is destroyed from within, through the collapse of its own structures or its relationship with the natural environment, which is often what's happened throughout history. That's one thing. But it's quite different for a culture or a civilization or a world to be forcefully and violently colonized or destroyed through genocide and violence, and I don't want to conflate those two. But the overall point is throughout history, many of our most beautiful human cultures and worlds have indeed been destroyed, either from without or from within. And we are facing a similar moment ourselves.

Attuning to a New Way Forward

So, I've learned a lot through this process. I've hurt and grieved a lot through the process. But one of the things that I feel I've experienced and got a foreshadowing of what it's like for a whole social system to fade, to collapse. And this is a bit, I think, of what the EcoSattva journey really is, as a spiritual archetype. It's almost as if each of us need to pre-figure, to get a glimpse of what it is to cross through this threshold of not knowing, of spiritual blindness, of tolerating emptiness, of real uncertainty and not knowing, to move through it and to metabolize it, as we spoke about that last time, and then emerge from it with a new being. And within the Shambhala community, many of us are trying to discover that. Some people have just left the community entirely and found other ways forward. It's been very brutal, but like I said in the context of the EcoSattva Training, I think in some ways, this is the journey all of us are on, where we each need to go through a small spiral, a little microcosmic journey of entering into this despair, this unknowing, and then finding our own emergence, our own way through it, so that we can guide

others, support others, and really be Bodhisattva, EcoSattvas in this earth, for each other, for our world.

And I wanna gesture now a little bit towards that emergence. We've entered into this. We've crossed the threshold of not knowing, of uncertainty, of the heartbreak that I felt out on the land, really letting myself grieve. We've entered into this unknowing, tolerating emptiness, and now, what is it we attune to? We've collapsed in the maze in exhaustion. How do we begin to hear this new song? How do we attune to a new way forward?

Believe that the next moment is actually feeling our hearts, a kind of sadness or tenderness that emerges when we do metabolize, when we do exhaust the struggle for a moment. The only thing that remains is this genuine heart of sadness, this broken heart of our humanity. There's a love, even if there's uncertainty, even if we don't know what is coming, there is love. And, part of this particular kind of heartbreak or vulnerability or tenderness of sadness comes from our acceptance of not knowing what the future is, comes precisely from not having an answer. And we've spoken about this again and again throughout this training, of giving up the certainties or either dystopia or utopia.

How We Think about the Future

I wanna bring in now a very short kind of introduction or basic teaching from a field called Future Studies, and help us return to the heartbreak and the sadness from a slightly different perspective. There's a thing called Future Studies. Sometimes people show up in your life at just the right moment, and I've had the very good fortune to meet someone who's a futurist, a professional futurist. And this is a field of both academic reflection and design. It comes from an interesting background, but one of their phrases is that all of us think a lot about the future, we just don't do it very well. In other words, there's an art to thinking about the future. And the role of the future has a huge impact on the EcoSattva, our sense of thinking we know what the future is. It will all fall apart, it will definitely fail. We will move towards collapse. We are moving towards the uninhabitable earth. Or on the other hand, it's all gonna work out, there will be a technological fix, or humans will summon our huge hearts and our incredible ingenuity and create something beautiful, and it will be an amazing rite of passage. Either way, there's a sense that the future is really affecting us.

So according to future studies, the future is not in the future. The future is the present. In other words, when we say future, when we think we know what is coming on this earth, that sense of the future is an image or a feeling in the present. What we think of as the future is an image or a feeling in our heart, in our minds, and circulating in our cultures in

the present, and that future that's in the present, that present future, the trace of a possible future, impacts us tremendously. And I think it's a huge force in the environmental movement and in the spiritual dimension of the environmental moment.

So in future studies, they say when we're not so good at thinking about the future, first of all, we think that the feeling we have in the present actually is a kind of foreshadowing of the future. But in reality, it's something that's just in the present. We don't know. None of us know what the future holds. But they also say that we tend to have a monolithic sense of what that future is. Either dystopia, total collapse, complete loss, the nightmare scenario of refugees flooding over walls, tremendous violence, brutality, drought, loss of agriculture, total violence... the kind of nightmare vision that many of our movies and books, dystopian literature evoke. Or there's a utopia future: It's all gonna work out. We'll have ecotopia, and we'll all live in Ewok villages in the forest on the forest moon of Endor and sing little things and be one with Gaia, and it's gonna be great. And of course, neither are true. And we don't know, just like everything else in our life.

If we think about our relationships or our marriage or our future relationships with our children, we never think of it in these black and white terms. Or if we do, we haven't ever been married or actually had children or been in any real relationships, because they're confusing, they're a mess. They're all over the place. And it's the same for our future. And we don't know. And so in Future Studies, they talk about possible futures, probable futures, and preferable futures. So I've found this helpful for me. I tend towards the dystopian side of things. I found it very helpful for me as a practitioner to really acknowledge that I don't know, and that even the nightmare scenarios can lead to tremendous beauty and something uncanny, something weird, something unexpected, and at the same time, to open up the recognition that there are possible and preferable futures that I want to work towards, that I want to move towards.

Heartbreak as Seed of the EcoSattva

So here, we're negotiating this relationship between having a fixed outcome or giving up altogether, and this brings us back to the heartbreak, of really not knowing, of really living with the sadness and the vulnerability, and it's this heartbreak, this sensitivity, where we do have such a longing for a more beautiful world. We do want to live in harmony with the earth. We don't wanna give up on humanity. For me, it's not so simple to just say, "Oh, humanity's a cancer on the planet. It's better if we just wipe ourselves out." No, I love people. I love what humans create. I don't wanna just give up, and that's part of the sadness, and I see the impact on our world. Out of that tender heart of sadness, which isn't depression.



There's a big difference between this vulnerability and the sadness of not knowing, and being stuck in depression. Depression is fixed, it's heavy. We sink down into the dark night of the soul. We move into a kind of depression, despair, giving up, and we know the difference. We know it in our body. We know it in our habits, 'cause we sit around just watching reruns or Netflix, or binging TV, or shopping, or moving towards our addiction. If that's what you're doing, that's depression. That's not the genuine heart of sadness. If there's a genuine heart of sadness, it tends to lead towards a kind of life. You can feel it right now in your heart. You can feel this almost sprouting that comes from our heartbreak, and it's full of energy. It's vibrating, it's alive, it's tender. It's incredibly human. It's very natural, very much part of the earth. And that heartbreak, that vulnerability, is, I think, the seed of the bodhisattva, the seed of EcoSattva. It emerges from the emptiness, from the not knowing, from having no certainty about our outcomes.

Going Beyond Hope and Fear

So the quality of it is to go beyond hope and fear, beyond hope that everything will work out on planet earth, and beyond fear that it's all going to be a disaster. In the highest teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, we speak of a meditative state that is free from hope and fear. Free from hope relieves us from that part of our mind that's constantly manipulating, trying to get us into a certain state, you know, that good, peaceful, meditative state, that openness that we love. In the highest practices of meditation, it's that very desire to get into that peaceful state that blocks the most vast and open awareness. And it's also beyond fear – beyond fear that we're always gonna be stuck in samsara, we're always gonna be stuck in our habits, beyond fear of the worst possible outcomes for our own lives.

So all of humanity right now collectively, we are stuck in hope and fear, and you can feel the battlegrounds. You can feel the polarity, the polarization around hope and fear. This doesn't really serve anyone, and part of the exhaustion is the collapse into the dark night, is letting go of hope and fear. But coming from the heartbreak, this leads to incredible strength. To be free from hope and fear is a huge relief. It leads to infinite energy, because there is no outcome we're looking for. We have abandoned any hope of fruition.

If we don't know the future on earth, and in some ways, it doesn't matter what the future is. The spirit of the EcoSattva is a feeling of, "I will do this no matter what. I will love this earth, I will love human beings, I will fight for ecological justice. I will do what I can to heal and to protect and support, because that's what I am." That's what this song that I'm starting to attune to is inviting me into, not because I'm guaranteed an outcome, not because I know what the future is, but it's much smaller. It's much more humble, this seed of vulnerability in the heart. It wants to sprout as, "I don't know." I live this way. I live as an EcoSattva no matter what, because this is who I've always been, and this is



what is most genuine in my heart of hearts, not because there's any guarantee of any outcome. Again, relying on professional future studies, we really don't know, we really don't know.

So thank you, and I want to encourage you to look at some of the guided practices that are connected with this session that we'll offer to bring this into your own experience, and I wish you much joy and ease and rest on your journey.

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.