



One Earth Sangha

Session Seven: Core Offering

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2022-23 Video

Agreement

First, a little business. By accepting this document, you agree not to share with anyone who is not registered for the EcoSattva Training. No one is turned away from the training due to lack of funds, so if you would like to share it with someone who cannot afford the registration, please let them know they can [request discounted or free registration](#).

Session Profile

Session Seven: Expressing Our Awakening Agency

[Session Resources](#)

Speakers in this video

- Tim Ream

Transcript

Examining the Phenomenal Self

Tim:

Great Master Dogen Zenji taught:

To study the Buddha way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be actualized by the myriad things.

When actualized by the myriad things, body and mind of self, as well as body and mind of other drop away.

No trace of realization remains and this no trace continues endlessly.



One Earth Sangha

Let's spend a little time studying the phenomenal self through a practice of journaling. It's an awareness practice that is not part of our Buddhist traditions, but has been shown by modern science to be highly effective at increasing wellbeing and levels of self-awareness. I'm going to give you three different prompts and the trick here is to just keep writing for the three minutes for each of the three prompts. Keep the pen on the paper, keep it moving. Whatever comes out is fine. It's not anything you ever have to show anyone, it's just an opportunity for you to use a different way to study the self. So here we go. Just keep writing three minutes. The first prompt is, "I love." Go ahead and write about what it is that you love. [three-minute pause]

So go ahead and finish up that first prompt of what it is I love. And now let's get ready to do the second prompt. Keep writing. The second prompt is, "I'm good at." For three minutes, very broadly, just write, "I'm good at." [three-minute pause]

Okay, three more minutes for this third and final prompt. From your perspective, for this three minutes, just go ahead and journal on, "the earth needs," and just keep the pen moving. [three-minute pause]

So go ahead and finish up what you're writing in that third prompt. Thank you for taking the time to get some thoughts down on paper. There's something that you can review for yourself later on.

Finding Your *Ikigai*

My name is Tim Ream. I'm a longtime environmental activist who has worked in a wide variety of contexts. Everything from lawyer to outlaw, tree-sitting and civil disobedience. And I'm also a long time Zen practitioner who studies in the Soto Zen tradition. I've been trying to bring activism and Zen sitting and Zen practice together for a long time, and it's a big focus of mine, recently. The exercise we just did is part of what is called finding an *ikigai*, kind of a sweet spot. You can see from the graphic that's up that there are actually four different intersecting circles, and we did three of those four circles. We left out the one about what it is that actually makes money. But by finding the intersection of those three circles, you might be able to find a little bit better what it is that makes most sense for you as an area to pursue your activism. It's great if you're working on things that you love, something that the earth needs and something that you're good at.



One Earth Sangha

And so thinking a little bit more, looking back to what you wrote might help give you some clues to thinking about that. And I say, "what the earth needs," but of course I'm talking about all the many varieties of activism that can help the earth broadly. That can be social justice, working on race, working on immigration, working on gender issues, working on issues around sexuality, whatever it is that is something that you're motivated to take on.

What Is Activism?

And so since we're talking about activism, I think it helps to define activism a little bit. And at least from my perspective, one very simple definition of activism is it's risking your privilege. Many of us have a wide variety of privileges that we take forward in the world. It could be around race or gender, it could be around able-bodiedness, it could be around our socioeconomic status, just the simple safety that we feel in the world, the space that allows us to take time beyond meeting our basic survival needs for ourselves and for our family, and actually being able to go out and do good in the world. And when you risk that privilege, to me, you're engaging in activism. Activism in my mind has three different components, key components. I call them care, community, and empowerment.

When we're engaged in activist activities, we're engaged in applying ourselves to what we care about. And it's really important to source that deep motivation for what it is you truly care about, what it is you truly want to engage yourself with in the world. And it really helps to be able to source that motivation in inspiring and educating and activating others. Activists sometimes have a tendency to use negative emotions to try to activate other people: shame, fear, sometimes even anger. And while sometimes those motivations work, I've often found that the motivations that are from a more positive place, from love, as Che Guevara pointed out to us, from really caring, those motivations have a tendency to keep people and keep oneself involved in activism for a longer and more productive period of time.

The second factor I mentioned was community. Generally, we do activism with others. Even if we feel isolated at the computer, banging away to engage in an activist pursuit, we're doing it to engage others. No one of us is powerful enough to make the kind of changes we need to make in the world. We need people power. We need to be recruiting and inspiring other people to join along with us. We need people power. Oftentimes when we're engaged in activism, we're fighting projects that are profitable for the few or even sometimes just an individual. And it's very easy for people of great wealth to exercise their



One Earth Sangha

power by organizing their dollars to achieve their goals. Generally, activists don't have the same kind of economic clout and power that the people who are trying to engage in these projects or these efforts that we're trying to stop have. So we organize people and organizing people takes a lot more effort than organizing dollars, generally. So the second was the community, care and community.

The third is empowerment. The third is engaging in a practice where you are exercising your power in the world. Sometimes that means, like you have been doing for these last several weeks, figuring out ways to source your power internally, overcoming doubt, overcoming images you have of yourself that don't include the notion that you're an activist or that you're powerful enough or good enough or effective enough to make change in the world. Maybe overcoming trust that you need in yourself or trust that you need in others to help you be a part of a community making change. And for many people who have been an activist before, especially these days, people who want to activate need to figure out how to overcome the overwhelm and the burnout that they've experienced from the many, many different problems that sometimes seem so insurmountable, especially in our era, climate change.

So there are these internal factors that the EcoSattva training has been focused very strongly on. And then there are external empowerments that can also help you become a more effective activist. Building skills, building knowledge or an outline for how to create change, a theory of change in the world. Building relationships with other activists or with other entities that are powerful actors in the world to help us become more effective in our activism. Gaining knowledge, sometimes very specific about the cause that we want to be involved in, whether that's local zoning laws, federal court cases, the economics of a particular issue, power mapping, who are the people whose minds we have to change with our activism. And then there's overcoming the external factor of not having enough time to do activism. So we'll talk about some of these as we move forward in the next hour, all as a way of overcoming obstacles to becoming more powerful activists, figuring out how to source what we care about, how to join with others in community, how to empower ourselves and our allies to risk our privilege to make change for the earth that we love.

Earth Activism and Intersectionality

So as I mentioned, all of the activist skills that we're going to talk about today apply equally to all different kinds or strands of activism. Earth activism is what I'm most



One Earth Sangha

familiar with and that's what I'll keep referencing, but in the context of earth activism these days, especially people who are doing good and effective earth activism, intersectionality and an understanding of the other types of activism and the other types of social justice issues that people are applying themselves to is really critical, especially, I think, in the US because we have in this country a number of regrettable roots that make up the modern environmental movement. Much of the environmental movement from its earliest days in the United States was anti-Indigenous, anti-Indian.

There were many people who were working to protect places by throwing native people off their land or otherwise disrespecting tribes and traditional tribal uses of land. And in fact, so much of the central myth of the United States that it was an empty land that pioneers came to and settled, that myth that writes Indigenous people out of the story, was equally adopted by a lot of early and, in fact, even recent environmental activists, with the purpose of being able to declare areas off limits for wilderness or for other purposes and excluding Indigenous people as well as modern industrialization. The environmental movement has some anti-immigrant roots because of the understanding of some people that the best way to protect places in the United States was just to keep anybody else from coming here. And so the US environmental movement has had to fight that ugly piece of its history.

There are elements of the movement that are very misanthropic, that do not view human beings in a favorable light, and by virtue of that way of thinking actually turn a lot of people off from environmental activism. And then a lot of early environmental activism and even to this day is very classist. Quite often the people that had the time and space to engage in "the preservation movement," as it was often called, were people that had quite a bit of money. And just like Indigenous people were sometimes thrown off of their land to protect places, the same was true of poorer people to create national parks or other wild places in the US. So that's one reason to keep in mind that we need to have an intersectional mindset when we think about how we go forward with our activism.

And in fact, the context for environmental activism these days in some ways was set a few years back with the announcement of the Green New Deal and understanding that we couldn't really protect the earth and the environmental values that we care so much about without also looking at sexism, without also looking at racism, without also looking at labor issues and the plight of the poor and LGBTQI+ people. And this Green New Deal mentality has now pervaded most aspects of environmental activism, from grassroots organizers straight through to people who run foundations and decide where funding



One Earth Sangha

should go. And it is something that should pervade all of our activism. It makes us stronger to figure out what are the areas where our more narrow environmental goal meshes with other goals and where does it possibly clash with other goals? Who could be allies that we could be working with, folks who are working on labor issues, people who are working on class issues? What are the frontline communities that are most affected by a project that we might try to stop or a change we might try to make to an industrial process? Quite often these are poorer people, quite often these are people of color. Quite often these are Indigenous people who are subjected to the worst of, let's say, oil and gas drilling, the site of a new facility, refineries, and so on. So as we move forward in our environmental activism, it's critical to keep thinking about other social justice issues and where we can all work together just as much as it would be true as social justice activists to be thinking about how our work intersects with environmental activism. We are all stronger and building greater people power when we can figure out ways to meet multiple goals with the same activist campaigns.

Aligning Lifestyle with Values

There's a straightforward, but in some ways very profound foundation to environmental activism that I think is really important. Shakyamuni Buddha taught us that we should align our lifestyles with our values of caring for beings. And this led, in the early Buddhist rules and even in monastic rules to this day, to a very simple way of living, a very light touch on the earth that I think is really important for environmental activism or maybe activism of other sorts. It's for a couple of reasons. First of all, I always like to say that of the two ways of getting everything you want in life, wanting less is by far the easier. If you can figure out a way to begin to reduce the needs that you have in your life, the type of things that you feel like you have to acquire, you begin to align your lifestyle with the values that you have for the earth.

It's difficult when you fully understand the implications of a consumptive lifestyle on climate change and other environmental problems. It's difficult to reconcile activism because you have a sense of guilt for the very way that you're living your life, and going out and acquiring all the many things of a typical western consumptive lifestyle is a very stressful way to live. So to live in a way that is less acquisitive, simpler, riding bikes instead of driving cars, gardening wherever possible for food, getting clothes from a thrift store, finding out ways to just want and use less things creates less stress in your life because you're not on the treadmill of always having to have more money to acquire more



One Earth Sangha

things and you're not stressed out because you realize that you're living in a way that's not consistent with the way you want to see life on earth happen.

Living a simpler lifestyle and one that puts you less on the career treadmill type path also presents more time in your life, more time for practice and more time for activism. And it makes you a better role model for the types of values that you would want to see more widespread in our world. When someone is the first person in their neighborhood to put up solar panels or to get an electric car instead of an internal combustion vehicle. When someone in their office is the person who rides their bike, rain or shine, to work every day, they're showing people there are other ways to be in this world. What? You got rid of your television? What? You refuse to fly internationally for pleasure? All of these ways are ways of simplifying our life that have less impact on the planet and that require less resources for living that life. It's aligning our lifestyle with our values.

There's also a strong current in many Buddhist teachings of not knowing, of having a beginner's mind, having a supple and inquisitive mind that doesn't presume to know exactly what everything in the world means or even sometimes what we're seeing. This not knowing is critical to activists trying to figure out a different way to live on earth. We have to question how we transport ourselves, how we build our cities, how we build our homes, how we clothe ourselves, how we eat. This questioning, this not knowing is a critical component of building a new world and something that our teachers have been teaching us for thousands of years. A way of keeping the mind open to, what is this before me? What is this before me and what is an appropriate response?

Activist Storytelling

It's important to realize the importance of stories to activism. Humans are driven by stories and the dharma teaches us that really stories are what we have access to. In our normal day to day existence, we tend to make things real. We tend to think we know what's happening, but really our memories are just stories. They're just faint representations of the complex reality of what's going on.

It's important to understand that aspect of the dharma and how it applies to activism because I've come to believe, as many others have before me and do now, changing consciousness, changing the story that we tell ourselves is perhaps the most important and most effective form of activism that we can do. The stories that we have now, the stories of our nations, the stories of our societies, the stories of ourselves are failing us. They're failing the earth and we need new stories. We need a different kind of



One Earth Sangha

consciousness to move forward in a better way. In activism, I like to think that there are people who are better at story-making and people who are better at story-telling, although there's no clear line between the two. Sometimes you'll hear in activism, people talking about vanguards. And I think of those oftentimes as people who are leading the change for new stories. And then I think about people who are movement builders. And quite often those people are people who are telling stories, new stories, to broader and broader segments of the population and building allies as they do that. So let's think a little bit about what story-making might mean.

For example, let's take the example of someone who is sitting in a tree to protect a forest. That person is creating a new story. They're telling a story about how it's more important to keep the tree standing than to cut the tree down. It's more important to have the intact forest than it is to have the lumber. And they're telling a story about themselves being willing to risk their privilege, to take some chances, to make some sacrifices, to help us understand a different story that's better for our earth. In stories, you need characters, you need actions. A person sitting in a tree is a character in a story. A woman who is taking care of children outside the fence line of an oil refinery is a character in a story. An Indigenous person who is trying to create a national monument in a place that would otherwise be given up for extractive mining is a character in a story, and people need characters in stories. Activists often want to focus on the facts and the figures and the law and the science, and that's good to an extent, but it won't help people engage if they don't have characters telling those stories. It's nice to have some science; it's better still when a scientist who is doing the research can tell the story. It's nice to have people opposing a mining project; it's better still when we understand what values they have at stake for themselves as individuals or for their families so that we can better relate to, have empathy for and compassion with, the person who is a character in that story. And then those characters evolve through a good story-telling. So it's important to think in terms of actions, in terms of campaigns, how are characters in those stories evolving?

What are the messages that are being conveyed by those characters within those stories, messages that help to raise consciousness and think about the world in a different way? What are the settings of those stories? And what are the visual aspects that help a person place themselves into the story so that they can become a part of it? Whether that's simply agreeing on an issue or whether that's taking up an action to write a letter, to make a contribution, to come to a protest. People need to see themselves as part of the story.



One Earth Sangha

And those stories have to have emotional components. We have to see that there's something really at stake for people, not something is at stake for the earth, not something is at stake for society, but something that is at stake for the characters that we've come to care about as part of the story. Now this is all part of story-making. And even in story-making, we need to understand how, often, a person who is sitting in front of a camera, writing a story, talking to a reporter, they are just the top of a pyramid of people who support them underneath. There are people who wrote press releases, who built websites, who took photographs, who did research, who wrote politicians, who clicked on the button that said, "Please take action." There's a pyramid of people and a foundation of small donors and people who just take small actions that help to promote a story with a story-making character at the top of that pyramid.

So while those story-makers are important, don't reify them. Don't make them more important than all of the other people who are contributing in their ways, doing activism, to help create a story that can then help raise consciousness. And then in telling these stories, as we take a campaign from an initial problem to some sort of resolution, to some sort of vision of how things can be different, we need to remember that there's a natural evolution to the types of actions that take place in an activist campaign, that happen along a storyline, when we're really telling a good story of a campaign. People might sit in a tree, people might go to a congressperson's office, people might protest outside of a timber mill. All of these different parts of a story can lead up to a resolution where a forest is actually protected by an act of an administration or by an act of Congress. So these are all forms of story-making. And then once news stories are made, there are all kinds of ways of telling stories. There are the media. I mean, sure, we can tell stories one on one, person to person, but really effective story-telling takes all kinds of uses of the media. That media can be professional, corporate media – radio, television, print – or it can be media that we make ourselves and distribute through social networks or through other kinds of online media or through our own, older forms of video-making and print distribution.

It's very important, when we're telling these stories, that we're getting people interested and engaged, that they themselves want to become story-tellers. You post something, that's interesting, if a person reads it, it has some impact. If they then share it, it has further impact. If the story-telling includes an opportunity for someone to take an action at the end of the story, "click here to send a letter to your representative," then you've helped them become a part of the story and you've given them an incentive to become someone who is going to continue to tell the story and to amplify that story to more



One Earth Sangha

places. I like to say that there are maybe four stages to the most important part of activism and that most important part of activism is creating new activists. And those four stages are educating, inspiring, empowering, and activating.

And we do that with the stories that we tell. So even though we have characters and actions, we also have educational components. Mother, outside of the fence line, how are the fumes coming out of this industrial facility affecting your children? Inform us. Educate us about that. It's the first step. The first step to creating a new activist. How do they get educated about an issue that they're ultimately going to take action about? The next step is inspiring. A person has the knowledge, but now they have to feel like they want to do something about it. Do they see other people in the story taking action? Other people who maybe were just like themselves, not engaged, but when they learned something, they became inspired to do something? So we educate them, then we inspire them. Now they want to do something, but how can they do something? They have to be empowered.

They have to learn what it is they can do. If the congressman just changed his opinion about this, if the city council just voted in the next upcoming council meeting, now we're beginning to empower a new activist. They're learning: ah, there's something that can be done. I've learned about the problem, I'm inspired to make change, now I've learned something I can do. And now you have to lead that horse right to water. You have to activate him. Would you like to go with me to the next city council meeting? Would you like to go with me to visit the city counselor? Would you click on this button to send the city counselor a letter? So we take them right through that fourth stage, and we actually help them to become activated. And we do this with our stories. We do this with a set of activist tools of making stories, telling stories.

Organizing and Campaigning

Now, another way of breaking this up is: organizing and campaigning. This is another dichotomy without bright lines among activists. Some people are very good at getting other people to engage, natural-born or well-trained organizers. They know a lot of people, they stay in touch with a lot of people. When they put out the call to rally or to get involved, they can inspire a lot of people to come along. They've shown them what they need to do and engage them in organizing. Other people are what I call, more campaigners. They might be people who are better at strategy, better at research, better at power mapping, finding out the answer to the question: if we are going to win this campaign, who needs to make a different decision than they're making right now? What



One Earth Sangha

piece of paper needs to be signed? What vote has to happen? And who do we need to move to do that? Where are their leverage points? What are their motivations? So, campaigners try to figure out how to organize a campaign by figuring out what's the problem, doing the research, figuring out how to communicate it. Where are the leverage points within the campaign? What are the motivations that help people move off their current position?

And so it would be interesting now to think of yourself a little bit, maybe going back to the ikigai, the “what I love, what I'm good at, what the earth needs right now,” and thinking about, do I see myself more as a story-maker? Do I like to get out there and be at the forefront and role model and create the kind of change? Or do I see myself more as a story-teller, a person who helps amplify other people's voices? Do I see myself more as an organizer who can bring people in and get people involved, call the meeting, come up with an outline, facilitate the meeting, have the coffee and the snacks ready to keep people going, get the rides organized to go to the action? Or do I see myself more as a campaigner? Yeah, put me behind that computer, I want to do the research, I want to strategize, I want to know all the angles so I can help let other people get engaged in the campaign and be more effective. Do I see myself more as a vanguard working with a smaller group of people to really set the stage for new kind of change? Or am I more of a movement builder who helps bring people along step by step to a higher or better level of consciousness for what the earth needs? And then with some of those answers in mind, or with just a thought about how you might like to take your next step to figure that out, you can start thinking about different ways to get engaged.

Go online and ask yourself, what are the kind of organizations doing the kind of work I want to do? Do I want to work internationally or globally with people all around the world trying to create some kind of really profound international change? Am I more local? Is there just a particular area in my place, a river, a trail that needs help that I want to be involved in? Who are the groups working internationally on the issues I care about or locally on the issues I care about? Do they offer opportunities to volunteer? Do they have meetings that I'm invited to be a part of? Are there other people that I know among my friends or broader associates who would form a small group, an affinity group, or just a group of friends that might want to learn more about an issue and get more involved? And from there, there are ways to really expand your activism.

There are plenty of groups that are willing to take on volunteers that can engage in as complex an activity as you can show them you can take on and successfully accomplish.



One Earth Sangha

There are groups that offer micro grants or that re-grant money from other groups so that you can find resources you need to take on projects that you care about. And there are even ways to begin exploring new careers in doing this kind of work. So the field is as big or as small as you're ready to take it on. It can be something as simple as going out and picking up litter along a river that you care about on a Saturday afternoon before the rains come in your area. Or it can be as big as getting involved with a group that hits your sweet spot about what you really care about and figuring out ways how you can get more and more and more involved till the point where you're actually starting to inspire and bring more people along with you and acquiring resources to do that kind of work. All the way up to taking a path where you actually are going to change the work that you're doing and the career that you're engaged in so that you can really focus your life energy on exactly that which is motivating you at the deepest level. It's all available to you. And in some ways, the first part of it is changing your own story about who it is and who you are and how you want to show up in the world.

Beginning with the End in Mind

Just a couple more thoughts for you as you embark on this new chapter, as you delve more and more deeply into your activism. It's always important to keep in mind the goals. Sure, your personal goals, but also what are the goals of your activism? Or even better, what is the goal of the work that you're doing right now? This is especially useful for a particular activity that you're engaged in, a rally, a protest, a letter writing event. And for a campaign, it's always important to keep in mind, what exactly are we striving for? Who needs to make a different kind of decision? What is that decision? How are we going to get it? And then from your goal, it's beneficial to have a couple of clear strategies that feed into that goal. How am I going to get that particular politician to change her vote, for example?

Or, how am I going to get that corporate executive to decide to drop that particular project? So there might be a strategy of public pressure, there might be a strategy of personal meetings, and then we're going to get into individual tactics that feed into that strategy. So an individual tactic around pressuring a politician might be a letter writing campaign. It might be a visit to the office where you invite the local TV station along. It might be developing an outreach flyer that is going to inform voters in that politician's district about what their position is and what their position should be. If you're always thinking in terms of, what are my goals, what are my strategies, and what are my tactics,



One Earth Sangha

you're going to come up with more directed behavior that's leading you to a better way of achieving what your aims are for your activism. So, goals, strategies, and tactics.

I think it was Zen Master Lin-Chi, Ch'an Master Lin-Chi, the founder of the Rinzai School, who said: "When you know who you are, then you can be of a little bit of help." And you've engaged now for seven of your eight chapters in this long process of knowing better who you are and figuring out better how it is that you can help. Don't be afraid. Figure out: what is it that I love? What is it that the earth needs? What am I good at? How can I take the internal work that I've done, the activist skills I've been acquiring, and jump out there? You don't need to solve the world's problems in the first try, and you don't even need to succeed in the first try, But you do need to try. So I encourage you, take all this great learning and all this great work you've done. Figure out what the first step or the next step is for you. Give it a try and whether you succeed or fail, learn from it and keep on moving into the next chapter of your activism. That's what millions of people have done before you and millions of people are doing every day as they continue to try to figure out how they can be more effective at changing the things they care about in their community for the benefit of the earth. Thanks so much for your work.

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.