



One Earth Sangha

# Session One: Core Offering

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2023-24 Video

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## Session Profile

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Session One: Arriving and Setting a Course

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## Speakers in this video

- Kaira Jewel Lingo

## Transcript

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### Welcome and Celebration

#### **Kaira Jewel Lingo:**

So dear friends, I am so glad to have the chance to be with you as part of this course, this EcoSattva Training. And right at the outset, I want to really celebrate each of us for taking the time to do this course, for the courage that that takes. Because what we're doing here is not easy. What we're taking on—as we know, no other generation of humans has had to face what we're facing. And we really need to come together in spaces where we can be supported to do this kind of deep work, to create a sense of connection with each other. Where we can be intimate and vulnerable and hold each other as we tell our truth, as we feel into what's real for us. So I really want to honor that each of us is stepping into this stream of this EcoSattva Training, and that is an act of great courage and great strength.



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So I deeply bow to each and every one of you for your commitment to going on this journey together.

### Invoking Support

So as we start this first week together, I want to invite us all to call upon an ancestor as we begin. It could be a person in your family or in your spiritual lineage or someone that you admire whose spiritual strength or creativity, compassion, innovation is a kind of anchor for you, but it could also be an animal guide, an element like the water element, fire element, or maybe a place on the planet that is a support, that's a source of support and strength for you on this journey. So think of someone, some being, some place that inspires you, that nurtures you in your care for this world in your concern for climate change and planetary health and wellbeing.

For me, in this moment, I call upon Harriet Tubman, our ancestor who went back many, many times to free enslaved people in the United States. I am connecting with her courage and her commitment to keep going each time she risked her life, the lives of the people she was leading to freedom and that never prevented her from continuing and going back to do it again and again. I call upon her because she knew she was protected. She didn't lose a single person in any of her missions. That kind of trust that she had in herself and in the world around her. The equanimity she had, being able to go forward in a very difficult situation of things that were totally unknown.

So this practice is one of opening ourselves up to something larger than ourselves that is carrying us. There is a web that we are intricately interwoven into from which we can never fall, and we can connect to that belonging and that support. So as you invoke your person, your animal, your being, your place, let it inform you and inspire you because we know that humans and all beings that are part of our lineage have known how to move forward in times of difficulty. That knowing, that ability to adapt, to innovate, it exists in each of us right in this moment.

So let yourself bring in this presence, this person, this place, this being. Call it in at the start of this training as a kind of anchor to support you for the times when you may experience difficulty or doubts or feel challenged in this course. You can invite this being you are invoking now to support you and have your back whenever you may meet challenge. So we'll just take a few moments in silence now to connect with their strength. Thank you.



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So there's two things I really want to address in this session. One is the special role of Buddhist teachings to this endeavor of meeting the climate crisis. And the second is how we can ground ourselves in embodied compassionate practice right at the outset.

### Deep Ecology and the Diamond Sutra

So you're each here because you have a sense of the value of this practice at this particular moment in history. And I want to speak to a particular way that I see Buddhist wisdom being essential to transforming our collective relationships with each other, with other species, and with the planet. So there's a teaching in the Diamond Sutra where the Buddha says, "If a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a self, a human, a living being, or a lifespan exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva." So this is the oldest text on deep ecology because it teaches the insight of interbeing. It teaches that this is because that is, this is not because that is not, that the one contains the all, the all contains the one. So this quote, this passage I just read, it's four ideas that we need to release in order to see things clearly.

### No Separate Self

So this first idea, this first notion is that of a self, a separate self. So if we look deeply, we see that our body, this—whatever we hold onto as our idea of our self, it cannot exist without the four elements. We need the heat. We need the element of fire, of air, of water, of earth to be alive.

So this idea of our body or of our selves, we really can see that they are made up only of non-self elements. They're made up of our parents who created this body, our ancestors, all the people and things that have influenced our way of thinking, our teachers, our friends, the books, the films, the news, all the things we've taken in, all the ways we were educated. And so if any of those elements were removed, we wouldn't be who we are. We wouldn't be even able to exist if we took the sun out of us, if we took the air or the water or the earth, time, space, and we would collapse. So we can really see ourselves as a continuation of our ancestors. Both our blood ancestors, whether they are our, we could say our family lineage, ancestors; whether they're by blood or adopted. We're a continuation of our spiritual ancestors and our land ancestors, those who have built up the land that we find ourselves on. So we can call upon them, their strength, and we can also be part of healing their suffering. So this is a very deep look into this first notion: that



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if we release this first notion of a separate self, we touch that we are actually one with all of life.

### No Human Being

The second notion that the Diamond Sutra invites us to release is that of a human being. So without other species, humans wouldn't be able to exist. All the plant and animal species that surround us make up our very being. With food that we couldn't survive without. They support our immune resistance, the bacteria in our gut that's not human. It supports us to survive; all the materials we use and live from. We simply cannot exist separately from the non-human world or what I love, this common phrase now: The more-than-human world. So a wonderful example of this is we just examine the human cell. Human cells are made up of mitochondria. That's one of the elements, the key elements in a cell. And historically this was a different species that merged with our ancient single cell ancestors, allowing for the development of more complex life. So let me just read you a tiny little quote from an article on what mitochondria are and why we have them.

"Our primordial ancestor was a simple single-celled creature living in a long-term rut of evolutionary stagnation. Then something dramatic happened—an event that would literally breathe life into the eventual evolution of complex organisms. One of the cells engulfed another and merged with it as a perpetual source of energy for its host. The increase in available energy to the cell powered the formation of more complex organisms with multiple cells, eyes, and brains. Slowly the two species became intertwined—sharing some of their DNA and delegating specific cellular tasks—until eventually they became firmly hardwired to each other to form the most intimate of biological relationships. Two separate species became one.

"Mitochondrias still resemble their bacterial origin in appearance, but we can no longer exist without them, nor they without us. As vestiges of their ancient origin, mitochondria still have their own genome. It's alien in appearance and composition when compared with our own nuclear genome." So we actually share "more in common with that of a sea sponge, our nuclear genome, than with the mitochondrial genome inside our own cells." So when we talk about human beings, how we have developed, we have to see that we are completely interconnected with all other species.



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### No Living Being

So then the third notion we need to release in the Diamond Sutra is the concept of a living being. So this idea that there are things that are living and things that are inanimate. But living beings depend on what we consider inanimate to live. So we can release an erroneous hierarchy here of what is alive, being superior to what is so-called not alive. Without minerals, without air, without water, without earth, any living being could not exist. And if we look back at how life evolved, at some point what was inanimate became animate. And this is a quote from *How Evolution Works*: "Life had to come from somewhere and the theory of evolution proposes that it arose spontaneously out of the inert chemicals of planet earth perhaps 4 billion years ago." So how can we separate living cells from inert matter if they came from inert matter? So our hierarchizing has led us to disregard and harm the earth--the very source of life--thinking we are above it and better than it, more evolved than it. So that's the third notion we need to let go of.

### No Birth or Death

The last notion, the fourth notion, is the notion of a lifespan: That we have a particular birth, particular death, a beginning and ending. So what Buddhism really can offer us in this inquiry is this understanding that things arise because of causes and conditions. They don't have a real birth and death. They are on a continuum. All of us are on a continuum.

We were there in some form before we were born in our parents' bodies, our grandparents, and all of the food and water that they consumed and all of the places that they lived. All our previous ancestors; we were there already somehow. And we will continue to be there after this body passes away in those we have influenced. Maybe in children or grandchildren that we may have, but also in the matter and energy that our body will transform into.

So I'd like to quote from an article on how energy can neither be created nor destroyed. "The law of conservation of energy, also known as the first law of thermodynamics, states that the energy of a closed system must remain constant. It can neither increase nor decrease without interference from outside. The universe itself is a closed system. So the total amount of energy and existence has always been the same. The forms that energy takes, however, are constantly changing."



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So we exist in many forms before our birth and we continue to exist in different forms after our bodies die. There is no self that is carrying on, but the non-self elements that make up who we are, what we mentioned already, they continue on forming other life forms, returning back to their source. So this is important for us as bodhisattvas, as EcoSattvas on this path: To see clearly the illusion of these four notions of self, human, living being, and lifespan.

So we are not caught in those signs. So that we can treat all of life with great respect and understand their interpenetration, our interpenetration, with all of life. So if we want safety for ourselves, we must guarantee safety for others. If we want to thrive, we must see to it that all of life thrives. We don't exist out of the earth as if we could save the earth as if it's something out there. It's not separate from us. We live within the earth. So we have to save ourselves, we have to save everything.

And what's so important about seeing these four notions clearly is they are the source of our fear, our suffering, our othering. They're the source of how we have harmed our planet and come to this place of great crisis. So the deluded view or ignorance of these four notions is at the core of this emergency that we find ourselves in. And these teachings can bring us back into alignment with reality, with skillful view that can enable skillful action to emerge. We cannot have skillful action and an appropriate response if we don't see things clearly. So the Diamond Sutra is very helpful in correcting these fundamental delusions at the heart of our society, our human world.

### A Dangerous Delusion

So in the light of the letting go of these four notions, I'd like to speak to how we might work with and practice with this rather serious diagnosis that our species has been given simply because of the reality that we live on an earth that has limits. And our capitalist society, which is our global society, and even communist countries, practice exploiting the earth and other species in this separating way of humans above nature. So this capitalist society is built on endless growth and these two realities—our capitalist society and an earth which has limits—are not compatible. Capitalism and planetary health. We cannot espouse endless growth on a finite planet where if everyone on the earth now were to live with the same standards we have in western countries, we would need nine earths to have enough resources, but we just have one.



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So we can see that this has led us to a very dangerous place, this way of living. The structures that we rely on are crumbling in many places, but if we step back and look at where we've come to as a human society now through the lens of a great deal of suffering that hasn't been healed, one generation passing on unhealed suffering to the next, we can see that this is what's been informing our choices of how we create our societies.

So to me, it's helpful to have that lens of transmitted suffering because it can help us to have compassion also for the poor choices we've made that have led us to coming to a place of self-destruction. And it's important to note that these practices we have cultivated as a human society aren't necessarily ones that we chose. We didn't choose to inherit that suffering from previous generations. They didn't choose to receive it from the generations before them. So we are all responsible for what we have, and yet we are also not at fault. We are responsible. We need to take care of this mess, and we can. And yet we also want to have compassion for the great suffering that this ignorance and greed and hatred has given rise to.

So having this attitude of forgiving ourselves from the outset for all the ways in which we've received and continued deep ignorance and harm, I think is a helpful framing. So we can still make huge shifts now. And all of us are or we wouldn't be here. I'm sure we are trying to live in ways that may go completely against ways we've been trained. And it's also not always so easy to do that, to make other kinds of choices because we live within a structure where we're all dependent on fossil fuels, for example. And for the most part, it's very difficult not to live in a way that doesn't continue this harm of a fossil fuel-addicted society. So we can have an attitude of holding ourselves with great compassion, with the eye of interbeing; aware that we are a continuation of all previous generations. And we can see clearly what we have been transmitted and use our practice of compassion, of wisdom to transform the suffering that's been passed on to us so that we don't pass it on to future generations, as much as possible.

## Touching Reverence

So there are beautiful ways that these Buddhist practices can help us to find our way back into alignment and come back into right relationship with the earth and with the more-than-human world. One of these is reverence. And this journey of healing that our whole species needs to make, it begins with reverence and with knowing ourselves to be children of the earth, that we belong to the earth. There's a beautiful calligraphy that my teacher Thích Nhất Hạnh used to create with the calligraphy brush and ink on rice paper.



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It said, "Reverence is the nature of my love." So that is our journey of reconnecting to this quality of reverence. Reverence for the earth. Not taking for granted the beauty, the power, the nourishment that our earth is providing us all the time.

So we can be—when we take in news, when we take in information about the climate crisis, it may touch off urgency, fear, despair, grief. We need to hear the truth about what is happening. And all of those emotions that I mentioned have an important place. And in this course we will learn to become intimate with them and to befriend them, to let them be our teachers. And our response to this time of crisis also needs to and can come from a space of nourishment of what we love about this planet. Both things are needed in our response because connecting with our reverence, with our sense of wonder is a very important source of energy and it's a resource that we will need to cultivate and draw upon regularly.

So I'd like to just share a story of an important moment of reverence for me. When I was young, our family lived in Kenya. And one time my dad took me to the coastal city of Mombasa and then we went up to a village near the city. He was doing development work there. And I went off to this huge tree. In that area of the world, there are these very, very huge trunk trees. Trees with huge trunks and branches that go sideways for a while before they go vertical. And I went and lay on a branch. I just laid my whole body on this big thick branch. I remember looking up at the sky through the leaves. It was very hot and humid there, and it felt like the atmosphere was just this kind of cloak enveloping me. The air was thick and the cicadas were really loud. It was like this buzz of life all around. And I remember feeling very supported by this tree and that I could just let everything go. I was so content I could have spent the whole day there. I had no sense of time and I didn't feel I had to do or be anything lying on this tree. I felt completely held by the tree and really by the whole planet, through the tree. There was this great sense of peace in me and around me. I experienced it as a place of deep rest and of deep belonging. And I knew that I was totally okay. I knew that everything was okay in that moment.

I returned to that moment many times in my life and it continues to be a kind of teaching for me. I was only eight or nine, but that tree, the cicadas, the sky is still a part of me. It will never leave me. And that sense of what that tree and what nature in that moment taught me about who I really am.

So I invite you to think back to a place that you knew when you were growing up as a child or as a teen or as a young adult. A place that really nourished you. And it may be





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that it was an animal that you were friends with or some other moment of connecting to life. Maybe it was with another person, a baby, or friend. But at a time where you were in awe, where you felt wonder. Maybe inspired by the nature around you. But a moment where you had time and space to just be in a place and let nature teach you, let nature guide you. Maybe letting another animal or plant species teach you about your own humanity. Perhaps there was a moment when you slowed down enough to take in the truth of change and impermanence or interdependence. A time when you touched your own unconditional belonging. See if some memory arises, a time of inspiration in nature or in connection with another life form.

And if a memory isn't arising, that's fine. You could also imagine one that you would've liked to have happened that can also evoke the same feelings in us. So what's important about reflecting on these moments of inspiration, of awe, of wonder with another living being or someplace in nature, is this deep sense of belonging that they can engender in us. That we have a place, that we are wanted, that we do matter, and that we're totally okay just the way we are. We don't have to become something else, we don't have to be something else. So that's a gift that nature offers us and we can bring to mind those kinds of resourcing memories as we go through this course together. We can remember them or we can create them, we can imagine them because this is part of who we are. It's part of how we are humans, to have this sense of oneness.

And so this aspect, this attitude of reverence, when we're really with something we revere, we see it clearly. So we really see what's going on. Our senses, our being is really open to what's happening around us. And so if we love something or someone, we want to know the truth about them. We don't just want to see our idea of them. And as a society, we tend to live with an idea of our planet, our ecosystems, that they will always be there as they are now, or that they exist just for our benefit. That's part of those notions of separation, those four notions we need to release.

But if we look at this planet and our world and our own species and our very selves, we see that the way we have been living has led to the real possibility of the collapse of our societies, of a great threat to our species. So we've been given possibly a terminal diagnosis as a species, and we can take the road of denial, the road of resistance, of despair, of numbing out because it's so painful to see this. But there is a path that is quite empowering, of really accepting that we are in very difficult times, times of real change and great uncertainty also. And really accepting this can be healing and even refreshing, as counterintuitive as that sounds. The more we can open up to the full range of our



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emotions around climate change and take in how all-pervading this reality is. We actually release and unleash power in ourselves to take meaningful action. If we don't see things as they are, we can't have access to the real capacity. Each of us has to respond with our own unique talents, insights, and gifts.

### Embodied, Compassionate Practice

So in the second piece to close out our session, I want to speak to the elements of practice that are important to establish from the beginning. How we can establish an embodied, compassionate practice. What are the foundations of a practice that can really sustain us throughout this course?

So there's a beautiful teaching that comes from a Tibetan master who wrote a text on how to be a bodhisattva around 1000 AD. One of the verses in this text, the 37 points, 37 verses. One of them says something like, whatever you are doing, wherever you are, know the nature of your mind. And with that mindfulness, give rise to the intention to act for the benefit of all beings. So we can really take this as a practice. That we always want to know what is the state of our mind, what is arising in our mind at any moment? And using that awareness, we inquire: How can I in this moment live for the benefit of all beings? And we know that includes all human, all more-than-human, animate, inanimate, so-called inanimate, all of life. So that's one practice.

Another important practice is to just feel the breath, to feel the body. So we can breathe in and breathe out. Notice the touch points, the places our body is making contact through the feet, through the hands, through the bottom, through the back, wherever our body is touching something. Throughout the day, throughout our daily lives, we can notice as we move, as we sit, as we lie down, just this act of breathing, the bodily sensations of contact, of heat, of pressure, of tingling. What is our present moment experience? We can connect with the senses, what we're taking in through our eyes, our ears, our nose, our tongue, our skin, and other places of contact.

So we can really remember that we have a body, really feel our body, feel our breath. That's what's happening in this moment. Another thing that can help us to stay connected to our bodies and to our experience moment to moment is walking. Just knowing that we're walking around moving our body. If we are rolling in an assistive device, we can know that we're rolling. And so we can really feel through the bottom of our body that's connected to the ground, that we are part of this earth, that we're not isolated, we're not



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cut off, and we can connect to the aliveness of the earth when we walk or we move on the earth.

We can also use anytime we're moving as a chance to stimulate our awareness, this noticing the state of our mind that I mentioned just before. So you might choose a small area of where you walk every day. Maybe it's from your home to the bus stop if you take the bus or maybe it's a short part of the path that you walk up the steps or that you take in your work workday. Maybe it's the small place from your bedroom to the bathroom. That you really have the intention to walk or to move on that part of your path with attentiveness, with awareness, being mindful of this step and then the next step or this movement in your assistive device and the next movement, what that feels like to move on that part of your path each day. To be in your body as you move in just that one section of your walk, of your path.

So Thay, my teacher Thích Nhất Hạnh, had a treaty with his stairs in his Hermitage. And he made a vow to always walk up and down those stairs mindfully. And he—part of his agreement with his stairs was if he would forget and be lost in thought going up a few steps, he would go back and walk it again, being very mindful of each step. So we can bring that into our practice to really encourage a sense of knowing that we have a body, knowing that the earth is a very precious being with which we're in constant connection. And that every time we move on the earth, we can move in awareness of that connection.

And the last piece I would name is that whatever is arising in us, that we can set the intention to come back, to be present for ourselves, to be a kind and friendly gardener to the garden of our mind and heart. And that nothing that is growing in the garden of our heart and mind is an enemy. So if we notice in this journey that we have suffering, confusion, there's numbness, there's anger, there's fear, despair, grief, any emotion that we find difficult or challenging, that we just set the intention now to see those energies, those mind states in us with kindness, with compassion, with friendliness. That we can learn to embrace them, we can learn to be close to them, to be intimate with them, to take good care of them. And that all of those emotions can be very helpful teachers to us on our path.

## Other-than-Human Kin

I said that was the last one, but there's one more. As we called on a source of strength at the beginning of this session, we can also have a place in nature or close to a living,



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natural being that we visit regularly. Or it could also be an animal guide, some animal that we feel connected to, that we invoke in our minds. But if you can go to an actual place on a regular basis while you're taking this course, a park bench or a tree outside near you, a spot of grass, and visit that place regularly. You can stand there, you can sit there, you can walk there. Just be there on a regular basis and just invite that place to be part of your EcoSattva Training journey. And as you visit it over time, if you can, even daily spending a few moments, even just taking a few breaths there in silence, feeling your body there. Just notice how your relationship to that place may change over the course of these weeks. Notice how what is there changes, how you might notice different things each time, especially as seasons change. And just have the intention to be in connection with that place.

If being outside isn't something that's available to you, even a house plant that you develop a relationship with, you really study it. You really spend time close to it, physically close to it, connecting with it.

And the animal guide is another option. If there's some animal that you may never have encountered in your life but you feel drawn to that animal, or maybe you have had many encounters with such an animal, you could make it a point on a regular basis to connect with that animal in your mindfulness practice to open up yourself to whatever that animal guide might wish to share with you, whatever you might wish to share with that animal that you feel is somehow connected to you supporting you.

So I really wish all of us a very fruitful time on this course. And may there be a great deal of wisdom and joy and letting go that happens for each of us on this journey. May the Diamond Sutra wisdom guide us, of letting go of these four notions. And may these beautiful practices in the Buddhist tradition of coming home to ourselves, of knowing that we have this body, this breath, these steps, guide us and keep us grounded in this moment so that we can be our best selves to meet the difficulties of this time. Thank you so much for your kind attention.



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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.