



One Earth Sangha

Session Four: Core Offering 2

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2023-24 Video

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Session Profile

Session Four: Reckoning with Entangled Structures

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Speakers in this video

- Kristin Barker - director and co-founder, One Earth Sangha
- Dr. Michael Yellow Bird

Transcript

Mindfulness and Indigeneity

Kristin:

Welcome Dr. Yellow Bird. I am so pleased to have you join the EcoSattva Training with us this season. And I've been a long time admirer of your work and I have so many questions, so shall we dive in?

Michael:

Sure. Happy to dive in.

Kristin:



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Alright, very good. Yeah, so just broadly speaking, I'm curious if you can speak to how did you come to mindfulness and what does that mean to you?

Michael:

Mindfulness has really, for me kind of come, just emanated ... there's an origin out of my own culture, and so my contemplative life is related to being inspired and guided by the sacred beliefs and teachings of my Indigenous ancestors and culture. And I personally, like a lot of people in my community, am very fortunate to have come from a community and a family of healers, contemplatives and spiritual leaders and even prophets. Sort of, in my generation, a lot of us, and then later on too, others younger folks have had the chance to participate in these different traditional Indigenous contemplative ceremonies.

For myself, I've had the privilege and the honor of having certain spiritual rights bestowed upon me by elders and other spiritual leaders. And so that's kind of the beginning of things, just as a kid observing that and sort of being in that environment. But don't get me wrong, we were in this whole process of colonization too as well. So that was kind of slipping away while western ideas, spirituality and religion was being forced upon us. So that was kind of a balancing act for a lot of folks.

For me, gosh, I guess I started practicing meditation probably more than 47 years ago, eastern forms of meditation. And I first learned from a book back in about 1975 when I was an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota in Crookston. I found this book by Lawrence LeShan, *How to Meditate*. I had always been interested in it when I was younger. And then I started reading his book and started doing the practices in there. I didn't have any teacher other than just reading the book and doing the practices. And that was some time ago in the Midwest, in the United States. There weren't any teachers available and hardly anybody talked about mindfulness or meditation. So it was just a few years earlier, people from the States were going to places like Tibet and India for their first visits and that kind of thing. I was right at the very tail end of that, in the early seventies. So that was kind of my experience.

But the first time I really realized that I did actually engage in a mindfulness practice was when I lived on the reservation, a Native American reservation in North Dakota where I grew up. I was out riding my horse one day and then I came to this place where there was this really beautiful grove. I tied my horse up, my dog was with me, and I sat on this log in the sunshine and I was looking at the river and everything was just calm and quiet. I was just kind of enveloped and sort of surrounded by these trees and I felt the resonance of this life that was there, that other animals and spirits had passed through this place.



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We talk about that a lot when you're growing up about other kinds of sentience that exists beyond humans. And it could be plants, plant nations is what we call them, or trees or even the ground and the Earth is alive. So these are the kinds of teachings that I had. And I sat there on this log and I just began to breathe. I was probably about 13 years old at the time, about 1968 or so. And then I began to feel this sense of relaxation take over me and I just sat there and I was just focused on the river and kind of focused on the beauty of the land. I could see the horse there and the dog, everyone. We were all just relaxed. And so we kind of got into this zone and I felt this feeling of calm, really deep calm come over me.

It reminded me a lot of when I was around elders, they had this really deep sense of calm when they were engaged in a ceremonial practice and they were kind of giving out that resonance. So I guess that's probably the first time that I started doing it. And then later on I started teaching mindfulness meditation, probably in the early nineties, I guess when I was a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin and Madison. I started there and then I started teaching later on, after that. My first teaching position was at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. I had a chance to teach Indigenous kids off the streets who were at the Aboriginal Friendship Center, so they enjoyed it. And so that's kind of where I really started to bring it in. So that's how I got a start and I've been doing it ever since, mostly in Indigenous communities and programs and organizations.

Kristin:

And I'm curious, is there a connection to the Buddha Dharma in that or is it on the sort of medical model, Jon Kabat-Zinn and mindfulness based stress reduction or somewhere in between? How do you relate to those two kinds of lineages? And I also hear the contemplative practices of your own lineage, your own family history being part of what's being brought, woven together, maybe?

Michael:

Yeah, I think with regard to the Buddha Dharma, I think a lot about how the quest for being a human involved suffering, right? So there was a certain level, there was a path towards the relieving of suffering. And I think a lot of ideas in many Indigenous communities are sort of really interfaced nicely with that. I mean, the idea of impermanence, for instance, is very strong among Indigenous communities. The idea of detachment is very strong, to material things, and to life, those kinds of things. And the idea of aversion towards things I think is very strong, that strong aversions towards



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things, strong attachments towards things can lead to suffering and lead to a person feeling imbalanced. So that's one aspect of it, which is kind of interesting.

The other aspect that I've noticed, for many years, I used to be a ceremonial sun dancer, and as I said, I participated in a number of ceremonies, but listening to a lot of people talk that I knew that were a bit older than me, and they had been practicing, I would call it an Indigenous mindfulness, sort of a decolonized mindfulness, but really engaged a lot of times, inviting suffering into their lives because in order to feel this sense of aliveness, it was like we had to experience the discomfort too and invite that in to examine it, explore it, and find meaning in it as well.

I mean, they were sort of grounding this moral worth and suffering and saying that among us as Indigenous People, suffering is really sort of a beneficial kind of thing because it makes us appreciate one another in life. And so suffering was kind of in that sense according to all things in life, according to the planet, according to the trees, according to the grass, according to the animals, according to everything, and that we believe, that had the sentience to it, that all things suffer. I'll give you an example I heard recently, well within the last 10 years. I was up in Alaska and I was working with Yupik folks and I was working with a colleague there, Diane McEachern. She's teaching at the University of Anchorage, Alaska, and one of their programs outside in Bethel, Alaska. So one of the elders, we were talking about mindfulness and I was teaching a mindfulness to the Yupik community, and they got it right away.

They said, well, this is very Yupik, meditation and mindfulness and being aware. One of the elders, her name is Esther Green, and I know she's okay, me using her name because we're very good friends. She told me a story. She said, when Yupik people are out on the beach and we're walking along and we may be beachcombing or just enjoying the ocean and the beach, she said, every now and then we'll see a branch or a tree that's in the sand and it's bent a certain way and the sand is covering it. So every now and then we'll go and we'll gently remove the branch and we'll brush it off, the sand, and we'll set it in a different place because the branch, we're feeling like it wants to move, it needs to move because it's alive. It doesn't need to be in this position for a long time.

What I was really thinking about at that point when I was starting to really study a lot about neuroscience was that they're having this connection with this, what we would think inanimate object, this dead piece of wood on the beach, but their mirror neurons are kind of activating because they're seeing something that needs to be shifted in the



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environment. They feel like it needs to be shifted in the environment, so they go and do that kind of thing. And I thought, well, that was a very inspirational kind of thing to me to kind of understand that life has such a broad stroke and broad meaning to different people. If you're invested in that and doing it that way, in a way, you're relieving yourself of suffering to watch something else suffer. And so in that way, I think that was how I thought in my own contemplative life, the belief that all phenomena on Earth and beyond are inextricably linked together.

Everything possesses spirit and energy and what we've learned, all our teachings remind us that humans are not the center of all things. Instead, we would believe all life on the planet has its place in the universe. Everything is sacred, everything must be treated respectfully. We have this word called 'sakunnu', which means reckless behavior and reckless behavior towards the natural environment is the action of a contrary, right? One who acts in the opposite manner to what is considered acceptable, respectful, wise and thoughtful. And elders used to tell us this, that any 'sakunnu', that behavior to that which is sacred is going to bring catastrophe upon the people. So that's I think the awareness that I've learned a lot about. I think that can kind of connect a bit with the suffering and Buddha Dharma.

Now, is it a medical model? It could be in a sense, but I wouldn't call it a medical model. I would call it a medicine model because the way Indigenous People view the world is that things are medicine, right? The sight of something can heal you. The sound of something can heal you. The touch of something can heal you. Being in a particular place and getting in the resonance of an animal or a place or a landscape or a river can heal you, this is what we come from as human beings. And that's the belief I think of many, many cultures.

On Neurodecolonization

Kristin:

So it feels like this is a good bridge to another question, which is you've talked about neuro-decolonization. So can you share with us what that means and what's on offer there?

Michael:

Yeah, so neuro-decolonization is a term that I came up with and I'm thinking about how can we use our mind to decolonize ourselves? We've heard about decolonizing the mind.



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What was really important to me is to think about how the mind was affected by colonialism and by oppression and by these different forces that are outside of us that act towards us.

Then we can go back to the Buddha, for example. I would say he was doing neuro-decolonization when he found enlightenment. You had Mara, the tormentor, and that's not really a spirit, but that tormentor in our own minds, the chatter that goes on. And so I thought about that and thought about how that has gone on after. Colonialism is still here, but when we carry those bits and pieces of colonialism that marginalize, they create self-doubt, which we know that's one of the things the Buddha said, it was one of the most powerful things that he faced, in his enlightenment was self-doubt.

Mara said, why are you doing this? Who's going to see you? How arrogant you are to think you can do this kind of thing? You have no witnesses. And of course, what the Buddha did was reach down and he gently touched the Earth and he recognized that the Earth was bearing witness to his act. And so I think that's kind of what I think neuro-decolonization is, this idea, one of my contributions has been the development of neuro-decolonization.

I've used neuro-decolonization to kind of help conceptualize what colonization is about in terms of our brain and how we heal from that. And really what it is, is that there are these, as I said, forces that exist out there. And neuro-decolonization really means training the mind to overcome the destructive thoughts, feelings, and emotions and behaviors that are associated with the traumas of colonialization. It enables an individual or community to engage in what I call this process of mindful activism, mindful anti-colonialism, mindful truth telling and mindful and compassionate decolonization. As Indigenous People, we have an opportunity to respectfully reconcile with the planet, with settlers, with anything that we've kind of been at odds with.

So that's kind of the conceptual framework of it. Neuro-decolonization begins with this period of cleansing where one begins to use contemplative practices to strip away these harmful and invasive thoughts, feelings, practices and values, all these different kinds of things that have been imposed from the outside. Cleansing practices, really, for us, when we do those, really help encourage an inventory of our own thoughts and beliefs, the themes that can return over and over again. That's part of the cleansing and how they are shaped by colonization and how they shape our mind and our body and our response and our emotions and that kind of thing.



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The first part of the model of decolonization again, is that these practices are really about creating a safe and secure place that you can kind of cleanse and that you have some agency and some control over this safety bubble that you're in, in order to begin gaining insight. Then it's a way to get people ready to mindfully, I guess, confront colonialism. And that's the first bubble of neuro-decolonization.

So the next bubble is what I call the restoration and the renaissance of mindfulness practices that were forgotten or abandoned because of colonization. But I always say they are relevant and necessary for our survival and wellbeing. And so what are those, right? So to me, it's like for Indigenous People, it's our return to these contemplative traditional ways of life. Songs, dances, prayers, symbols, ceremonies, rituals, even stories and dreams and prophecies of the people that say, this is the hardship we've come through as Indigenous People and our people have done these kinds of things to survive and go on. And a lot of that has been very enlightening because they have figured out how to find a place of balance within the world, within the planet, I guess. It's really through all those different kinds of things, that second phase of renaissance and restoration is happening.

The last piece of neuro-decolonization really involves practices that lead to enlightenment. And when I say that, I'm thinking about practices that raise our level of creativity, the creativity to birth and use new ideas, thinking technologies, any of those kinds of things. Create new relationships that contribute to the advancement and the empowerment and the enlightenment of humans and all sentient beings. So that's kind of what neuro-decolonization means to me. And that's kind of been my contribution, I think, in the world of contemplative practices.

Kristin:

And especially I love you're mentioning of agency, the ways that we can reclaim agency because, in the context of even my culture, my people, there's such a sense of this poverty of agency, of, I'm just one person, what can I do? And somehow unwinding those thoughts, having a systematic way to cleanse ourselves of those thoughts and have new ways of looking and relating to the world, to especially the living Earth community. And your story of being out in nature with your horse and your dog and gazing, the relationship between the perception and what that cultivates, the non-reactivity, the compassion, all these things just, I think can naturally arrive in those settings. So it is no surprise that many cultures have discovered over the ages these ways of relating and seeing. And when we begin to shine the light of awareness on the mind itself, what is possible to pay attention to the way we pay attention, it's so powerful. So I love hearing



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the ways that you describe it and especially the necessity of the healing, neuro-decolonization as a healing.

Decolonizing Mindfulness

So you've also spoken about decolonizing mindfulness itself. Can you say why is that necessary or another way, how is mindfulness itself colonized and colonizing?

Michael:

Well, I think one of the things that I'll first say is that prior to the extraction of eastern meditative practices and bringing them to Turtle Island and the Western hemisphere, Indigenous People had their own sets of meditative and mindfulness practices. And a lot of people don't know about that because they were wiped out during these periods of colonization. They were banned, they were outlawed, they were ridiculed, they were treated with contempt. And that's the first part of colonization of contemplative practices here on Turtle Island in this part of the world. And people then went outside of the Western hemisphere to find a sense of connection or peace or an ability to enter these states of contemplatives, right? So I think that's the first piece. The other part of that is to understand, I think, is that once those practices were brought here, they were brought for a particular kind of reason.

It wasn't to engage in any kind of change structurally, but it was change for the individual. And I think in that sense, it's very different for Indigenous People. Indigenous People are not individuals in that sense. And genetically speaking, according to cultural neuroscience, Indigenous People have a very unique genetic profile. We are collectivist cultures with a genetic variance like a serotonin transporter gene, which they call a 5-HTTLPR, that codes for collectiveness. We know that when we're collective, we're together as people, we function better, we're protected from anxiety and depression disorders. We have to go through starvation and droughts and climate change and difficulties. We do it as a group, the same thing. We treat the planet in the same way as part of our relatives, as part of our community, as part of our collectivity. We're not separate from that.

And that is what happens when your culture evolves with your genetics, your lifestyle, you develop those kinds of sensitivities and awareness to what's around you. And I think it really, as I understand, what I call now Western mindfulness was more about the person and their own stress. That stress and that anxiety and depression didn't extend to the planet. It didn't extend to all the sentient beings, the animals, the rivers, the mountains,



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the forests, those kinds of trees that Indigenous People actually believed have that sentience, right? It was more about ourselves. And so I think that's one of the things that really colonized contemplative practices. I read sometimes about the Buddha, I said people don't realize how many miles the Buddha put in, how far he walked, meeting people. He went through all these different climate zones, through rivers and waters, up mountains, through hot, through cold, through jungle.

And this was his way, I think, of understanding, if you looked at the Buddha, that shaped his brain as much as his mindfulness practice did, stepping over logs, going through water, sitting in the rain, meditating, those things shape the brain. They also shape the body. They shape the cellular integrity, your genetic profile, they shape the center of your heart. And I think we've missed that part in what I call Western mindfulness. We don't do that very often. And again, I was raised in a community where people did that. They did a lot of migrating across these different geographical spaces through water, through lands, and through arid places and so on. And that was shaping them. And of course, they had to pay attention, real close attention to the environment as they moved. And there were sacred places that people went to, sacred time, places that they could not go to because those were places that were inhabited by other celestial or sentient beings, that were there, that visited the Earth, that sort of thing.

So it was that kind of respect. I think that the colonization of mindfulness leaves a lot of that out. And so that's one of the things that I think is, that it's not about understanding the ecosystems and being part of that. It was about dealing with our own issues, which is important, don't get me wrong, dealing with stress and trauma. Those kinds of things are important, but we know from our people that trauma can be healed just as well by moving across sacred land spaces, paying attention to the land and gaining the knowledge and the energy and the teachings from the Earth, from the waters, those kinds of things. Some of the people that we had that were healers could cast out trauma by taking us to certain places and putting us in place in isolation like the Buddha did, right? I'm sure that when the Buddha left his family, he left his wife and his son, I'm sure he felt trauma, right? So how did he deal with that trauma? Meditation is one thing, mindfulness is one thing, but of course, moving through these forests and these sacred landscapes is also a healer. So I think that's kind of the components that are missing out of the current mindfulness movement in the western world.

Kristin:

There's something about the ways that mindfulness can actually support modernity's



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projects by keeping that separation, that focus on, if you're suffering about racism, you should sit with that. If you're suffering about climate change or ecological breakdown, you should sit with that. That's, I think, quite pervasive, honestly. And I think what we're trying to do here at One Earth Sangha is really examine those and see how true they are and where do they lead. Importantly, where does that lead, that way of thinking versus other ways of looking, other ways of thinking.

Michael:

I guess for me, there are certain kinds of practices that I call mindful decolonization practices. And some of those practices that are really important is the understanding of how we engage ourselves in confronting colonialism. How can we observe it and understand it? How do we get beyond ourselves and our feeding ourselves, taking only care of ourselves, but how can we become more of a beacon, I guess, to do that kind of thing? And I think that's the idea, is that I was creating some practices about observing and confronting colonization and to encourage people who do the practices to bring a sense of curiosity, openness, and hopefulness in the practices and anapana practices where you do the inbreath and the outbreath.

It's the idea of when you've got someone moving to that place where they're beginning to cleanse themselves. In neuro-decolonization, it's like you actually, with the inbreath, you see colonization of the mind and all its different forms, breathing in. Breathing out, seeing colonization of the mind, and then you sit around, you talk about that with your teacher, you talk about that with your people in your sangha, whoever you're practicing with. What does that mean to see that colonized mind that you have?

And then you go to the period of liberation. How do you teach yourself liberation from colonization on the inbreath and the outbreath? How does it feel? And then moving on, you experience colonized emotions. What are they, inbreath, colonized emotions? Maybe it's the doubt that someone's planted in you. Maybe it's the idea that someone has given you that you're not worthy because of your race or your color or whatever, your gender or whatever it is. And then again, you explore that. You take time to explore that. What are the colonized emotions, like the Buddha did, those kinds of things like the four things, the desire, the hatred, the self-doubt, all these things that came to the Buddha. And then how do you release these unskilled emotions? That's the idea, is allowing yourself to unleash those kinds of things. That's kind of a period of cleansing.



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And then you're going to another set of practices where you're breathing in and awakening to the systemic oppression that exists for all things. And then the next practice is, I'm dismantling domination. I'm dismantling oppression, right? It's like you're getting your body and your brain and yourself to begin to be in that place.

And the final part of the practice is establishing yourself among the ruins of colonization, right? It's like, now I see it, now I can feel it. Now I can see what's going on, that kind of breath. And then the final breathwork is breathing in rebuilding the destruction caused by colonization, breathing out, rebuilding the destruction caused by colonization. And so from the ruins, you're actually beginning to rebuild after you do this cleansing. And that's kind of what mindful decolonization is about. And of course, rebuilding can mean developing connections and coalitions and collaborations with people to do it hand in hand, arm in arm, breath by breath, whatever it takes.

And of course, before that, as the teacher, I would help students develop their intentions, to set their intentions. Why is this important? Why is attitude everything here? Why did the Buddha say what you think you become? Those kinds of things are all in preparation to help the individual begin to open themselves up to analyze and confront colonization through their practice. So that's kind of what mindful decolonization is about, and that observation, colonization confronting it in these different kinds of steps. It's an engagement that tells us we can go out, we can make change. We can go beyond ourselves.

Mythologies of Domination

Kristin:

So we shared a video a while back, which we'll include in the supplemental resources here for session four on *Decolonizing the Mind*. And you shared a painting that depicts Manifest Destiny. And I'm just going to, for purposes of the video here, just share that. So to my eye, we're sort of talking about, we talk a lot in mindfulness about the conditioning of the mind and what we've been conditioned to, how we relate to ourselves and the habits that we form in that, and how we can kind of unwind some of those skillfully with mindfulness. And this to me speaks of cultural conditioning, a way of looking, a self-conception, in this case, of the American ideal of Manifest Destiny. And I would just love for you to speak to why you shared this painting, what you think it communicates that we so need to understand, not just maybe about the American idea of Manifest Destiny, but colonization around the world, of this sort of global phenomenon.



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Michael:

Well, yeah. It was a very well-known painting back in its day in, I think 1876. A gentleman by the name of John Gast did this painting for a travelog to encourage settlers, White Settlers to move west from the east. And of course, people were afraid of all these things, right? They didn't understand these things. They didn't understand the wild animals, they didn't understand the land. It was a wilderness that was told to people and that God wasn't there. Savages lived there, and it was foreign to them. Just like when Europeans began to wipe out the buffalo in Europe, they began to wipe out the wolf in Europe. They began to cut down all the forests to change the landscape. And what we see here is this Manifest Destiny, that the belief in this God, this White God had ordained and encouraged White People to go and to create civilization all across the western, central western United States.

And so in order to do that, they had to have an icon. And the icon in this particular picture is this woman, sort of levitating and floating above the Earth here, known as Columbia. And if you look at her, she's got all the trappings of all the beliefs that Christianity holds. She's very angelic looking. Her skin is what they would call fair skin. Darker skin is not fair skin, you would say it's unfair skin. And she's got, of course, the blonde hair and she has robes, white robes floating around her. So that's always a sign of purity. And then you see the color of her flesh of course, and you look, see on top of her head there, the star, that's called the Star of the Empire. And it's where you get the Empire State Building and this idea of the US being an empire in the world, and her moving across there.

And she's got something in her hand. If you look at it, people say, what is that? And people say it's a Bible. And they'll say, well, no, it's something even more powerful than the Christian Bible. It's a school book. The Bible, you could take it or leave it, but the school you couldn't. It was a compulsory learning about the greatness of western culture and society. And of course, she's stringing across all these telegraph lines and communication, bringing communication where there was no communication or any way of communicating out in the west.

And if you notice in front of her, the darkness and behind her is light. And she's chasing away the darkness, all the evil and all the darkness. You see behind her, all these western implements of modernity and civilization, stage coaches and trains and boats. And then you see at the bottom, people cultivating, as if Indigenous People didn't cultivate right?



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And that's how they regarded them. Then you see in the center, the miners going out to extract all the sacred, all the precious minerals. And which brings us to, again, this thing about climate change, the extraction of minerals, the extraction of fossil fuels and so on. This was all seen as being civilized.

Then in front of all of them, you can see all the threats that exist. So you see at the bottom of the page on the left-hand corner, a wolf, a single wolf running, and then you see the Native Americans running and all looking back in fear. Then you see at the top, you see the buffalo running. And one of the things to make note of is that Westerners consider these all apex predators as competition with the western ways of living, right?

They almost wiped out the wolves. The wolves almost went to extinction. The buffalo were almost completely wiped out, millions and millions of buffalo down to a herd of about 24. Native Americans in the contiguous 48 states in the US were probably numbered anywhere from 10 to 12 million by 1800 or so. There were only 239,000 people left, less than a quarter of a million people down from about 10 or 12 million people. Most of that was genocide, and it was smallpox blankets, it was slavery, and it was murder and just ethnic cleansing of Indigenous People. But they did the same thing to the buffalo, to the eagle, to the wolves, to anything that they felt was a threat to them that they feared, which was interesting because the Indigenous People had learned how to live side by side with all of these, with wolves, with buffalo, with eagles, with anything that was seen to Western Settlers as a threat.

So you see this whole thing moving forward and this gave White Settlers, Americans, the confidence that they were going to clear this. They were going to search and destroy or clear this space of all these threats to Manifest Destiny. And God had ordained this kind of thing to happen. So there was nothing harmful or sinful or, there was no crime about it, but it was like these things were lesser forms of life. And on the way, of course, they dammed up rivers, they extracted minerals from the Earth, they cut down forests, they killed, caused extinction of things like the passenger pigeon and other species. And now we find ourselves again in this sixth extinction where we've kind of again, human activities have been the driving force for the last 600 years here, on Turtle Island, in the United States and in Canada.

So it's something that just didn't happen yesterday. It happened hundreds of years ago, and that's what it took to kind of build the society that we live in now today, the destruction of all these different kinds of things. And of course, creating this place where



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human beings live in this sort of very opulent luxury sort of life, that they live without, and trying to reduce all the suffering and pain without understanding our place in this. So this is what Manifest Destiny is. And of course, you can find Columbia in even more modern pictures when you watch movies. Now today, Columbia is still featured there, but it looks a bit different.

Nurturing the Capacity for Wise Response

Kristin:

So as we start to wrap up here, I just wonder if you can speak to this place of those who feel like there's so much we need to respond to in this world, and there is the necessity of recognizing racism and colonialism and patriarchy, and then the ecological objectification as well. And so how can we really open ourselves up to all the dimensions of this? Maybe we could just call it sort of separative consciousness, the lack of understanding of our embeddedness in Earth and our relatedness, and how incredibly helpful that is to the brain that you speak to so well, how conducive that is. There's the chance that we get overwhelmed by the news, by all this difficult information that comes in, and there's the potential to kind of recover from that. So maybe this is, you've spoken about dreaming beyond the limits of coloniality, coming into right relationship with people and planet. How can we work with the difficult news that comes in and find our place of responsiveness, find our place in this story where we can actually take all this in and not collapse?

Michael:

Yeah, I mean, there's really some interesting things that are being written these days that I think a lot of scholars are really opening up to us. One of them is understanding the chatter in our brain. The introspective theory talks a lot about that chatter in our brain, and we know that with mindfulness practice, a lot of people who engage in mindfulness as a therapeutic approach to healing, that chatter and that self-doubt in the brain is very important. That's one thing, and that's very important to maintain that. But we don't, I'll often put anything in there besides quieting the chatter. So I think the next level that is being written about is also what people refer to as the expectation effect. Like Buddha said, what you think you become. It is very simple in that sense because now research is showing how powerful the placebo and nocebo effects are.

There's been another sort of examination of that and how we have this capacity, this sort of built-in capacity to begin to develop very, very strong responses to how we age, if we



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think about aging as a positive kind of thing, and how we do in life. So you've got scholars and researchers writing about the expectation effect. Someone by the name of Carol Dweck who wrote about mindset, whether the fixed mindset or the growth mindset, and those people that, students and university students and youth and school age students, anyone who has a growth mindset, that believe that every day I get stronger and stronger every day, my emotions get more and more, healed every day, my brain gets smarter and smarter, are actually talking to their body on a cellular level that gives it a thrive message, not only in the brain that develops more neurons through neurogenesis, and by some of those kinds of things and practices that we do creates a higher level of endocannabinoids in our brain when we engage in things that challenge us.

It's all pointing toward, that people have this capacity for great transformation in themselves. And then to bring that in a much larger sort of way to community, and to the planet, really, because we have to always remember the word that I used earlier was the word called 'sakunnu', which means actions of a contrary, to kind of stay in our own bubble, to only tend to ourselves. And there are some, believe me, there are some that I know, that have complex traumas, and that's probably where they'll be for much of their time. But for most of us, if we don't get outside of our bubble, we understand that catastrophe is going to continue to unfold. So we need to really focus on some kind of more mindful decolonization as I mentioned earlier, the sacredness of our life, the short time we have, the impermanence and also the ritual that it takes for us to engage. And that comes through a lot of practice. That comes through belief and we instill that belief in kids every day with Carol Dweck's growth mindset. They understand I'm going to get smarter every day if I do this over and over again, I'm going to grow more neurons, my brain's going to get smarter every day. So we know those models are out there. We just have to bring them together and work them into our practice, work them into our communities.

Kristin:

For the good, not only of this individual, but for the field of being, for the living earth community. I'm so inspired listening to you, Dr. Yellowbird. It's so encouraging the ways that you weave together neuroscience and this ancient Indigenous wisdom tradition, it's deeply, deeply inspiring to me. And you used the word medicine before, and I think it's such important medicine for us to be able to recover ourselves and discover that agency. And so again, just the resonance with the Buddha Dharma here as well is very inspiring to me. The ways that you're saying, just as the Buddha said, with our minds we make the world, of course there are limits to that. It has to be grounded in authentic reality. But



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there's something so true about that, and we're just beginning to understand just how true that is. So thank you, thank you. Thank you for taking time to speak with me today. And yeah, I wish you the best. May this conversation serve the larger field of being.

Michael:

Yeah. Thank you so much.

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.