



One Earth Sangha

# Session Six: Core Offering

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2023-24 Video

## Agreement

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## Session Profile

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Session Six: Creating and Discovering The Way

[Session Resources](#)

## Speakers in this video

- Adam Lobel

## Transcript

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### Connecting with Place

**Adam:**

So thank you and welcome everyone. In a moment I want to welcome us further, but before I do, let's intentionally decenter the human for a moment to shift beyond the anthropocentrism that often orients our experience where we tune in to other humans' eyes and bodies and the social field, and instead to actually go beyond that to the more than human world. So to begin, I want to invite all of us to connect with place, connect with the bio region, the ecosystem, the elements, the living and dying skin of Earth that we are all entangled with. And I am going to make a short offering of juniper coming from the indigenous Tibetan tradition as a way to, on behalf of all of us, to open our sense gates, open our hearts, open our body organism to the land where we are.



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*For the sky, Earth, kin, ancestors, grief, and teachings  
of this very place and this very time  
we offer to you with sadness, wonder, and trust.*

So offering to and connecting with the deep and colonized history of the lands where we are, the people who had been the caretakers or still remain as the caretakers of this land. And going back and back to even the pre-human history, the deep time, the geological Earth time of the place, wherever we are.

And with this good connection, I also want to really welcome you, welcome you further and deeper into this sacred EcoSattva journey. And to offer thanks to all of the previous teachers who have presented and opened their hearts and experience and intelligence to support us, to bring us into this really sacred moment in the EcoSattva path. And to of course thank Kristen Lou, Tashi and all of One Earth Sangha for supporting us on this path.

The EcoSattva archetype is on the one hand ancient and on the other hand quite new. And at least my understanding of this term, the EcoSattva is quite profound. It could be understood that we're simply applying the Dharma, some kind of perennial universal Dharma to the ecological crises. And there may be some truth in that, but I think it's more complex and deeper to see the ways in which the mutation and metamorphosis of our biosphere is also ecologizing the Dharma. So we're bringing the Dharma to meet the ecological reality, the wonder and beauty of the planet, and the incredible death and suffering and toxicity. And as the Earth changes, it's also influencing the manifestation of Dharma. So it's almost as if goldenrod and sweet grass, oak trees and ravens wings, mugwort and goldenrod were sprouting from within the Dharma. I picture meditators with all of this life and moss and lichen kind of growing from us. So the Dharma will change and is changing and always changes.

The EcoSattva is this archetype of a practitioner who is inspired by and transformed by this potent polycrisis moment, this moment of kairos, of radical transformation of our civilizations and our Earth. And in a way the very challenges, really the impossible challenges that we face become compost, manure and fuel to open us further and further and to allow us to cultivate the capacity to really show up in the present and in whatever the future decades bring. A new kind of Dharma practitioner is being called for from the biosphere itself, a Dharma practitioner who is rooted in place, who is ecologically and



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politically ethically responsive and nourished by the depth of practice teachings and ethics to show up to participate. So if you are someone who feels heartbreak over the desecration of our habitats of land, of animals, if you're someone who feels sometimes outraged, overwhelmed, if at times you feel numb and paralyzed because your heart is so full, if at times the sadness and the grief is almost debilitating, and at the same time you're someone who's longing to find our ecological and spiritual niche to really show up to meet this reality, then you are an EcoSattva and you're not alone. This is a gathering all around the world of other EcoSattvas who share that same passion, that same concern, the moral wound and the inspiration. And it's sacred to be part of this group so you're not alone. So yeah, a deep bow to all of you EcoSattvas.

So we're at a really precious and sacred moment in this journey of the EcoSattva. Last time Lama Willa brought us into the dark depth silence, even the hint of death at the very nadir of this journey, this bottom of the U, this depth of the dissolve into the underworld, into the canyon, into the cave womb of dark, unknowing and uncertainty, and offered really, really helpful practical advice of how to metabolize, titrate and open to that groundlessness without collapse, without totally dissolving into despair.

### Hearing a New Song

And so that's where we begin today. This moment of real dissolve into the non-conceptual, the uncertain you could say, the primordial and the absolute Dharma, the emptiness. And as EcoSattvas, the primordial teaching of emptiness is one of the ways that the ecological change on our planet is teaching us. That it's not just seeing somehow deep within the essence of phenomena that we find emptiness, but the climate chaos, the ecocide, the extinction, the desecration of lands, all of this is teaching us this primordial truth of impermanence, no self and emptiness in a direct and material way. And all around the world we are feeling this.

Once upon a time, there was a person wandering through a maze. And they were walking along the rocks and living hedges of this maze and every now and then there were some other people wandering as well, and they had forgotten how they got there and where they were going. And in the distance, after a while, they began to hear some cries, some screams, and they got louder. And some of the people around them started to move even faster through the maze, faster, people were running afraid of something. And then in the distance, this person could actually first smell smoke and then hear the crackling of fire. And people started to scream - *A fire is coming, there's fire*. And so this person started to



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run faster and faster through the maze until everyone was running in fear, screaming, afraid. And after a while, this person realized that they were just running in circles, looping through the same maze, running faster, out of more fear, and the fire was coming closer. They could feel the heat and the fear intensified. And this racing, this urgency, this panic continued for a long time until eventually this one person was just exhausted, and they just let go and collapsed against the wall of one of the hedges. And people still were running by, running by. But this person just stopped. They let go. They gave in.

And in their stillness, in their unknowing, they began to hear something else in the distance, not just the cries and the screams, but something that sounded almost like a song, maybe a beautiful flute. And as they attuned their listening and their attention to this other song, they noticed that within the maze there were these small cracks and portals, doorways, that they hadn't seen when they were moving and running so fast. And this person began to follow these cracks and portals. And through that, they listened and attuned to this song even more. It became louder and louder. It guided them and it guided them outside of and beyond the maze. And they invited others to join them, to follow a new way, a new song.

This is an allegory that I heard from Charles Eisenstein. And it is a powerful teaching because many of us do feel like we're in that maze, that the fires are coming closer literally. Each year there's increased wildfires and many, many more mega fires than there have been in thousands of years. There have been massive fires in Canada, in the west of the United States, California, Oregon burning. There have been huge bushfires in Australia, fires in Siberia, the Pantanal in the Amazon on fire, huge fires, wildfires in France and Spain, Greece.

Our world literally is on fire. And amidst that, there can be such a panic, such crisis mentality, such a sense of fear, and it might seem kind of mad or impossible to slow down, to stop, to let go. And yet in that space of unknowing, of stopping, it's possible that we begin to attune to other songs, other sounds, other stories. So at this place in our EcoSattva journey, we are moving from the bottom of the U, from this dark uncertainty and depth into listening to a new song.

This is an important archetype in Buddhist teachings and in many spiritual teachings, contemplative paths around the world. This moment of entering into darkness. For example, in the Mahayana teachings of Buddhism, we have this image of learning to have a direct non-dual experience of emptiness, a non-conceptual contact with emptiness. And



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the moment before that, there are certain Mahayana texts that say the very moment before that direct witnessing of emptiness, of groundlessness, of non-conceptuality, we have to learn to tolerate that emptiness, to open to that groundlessness. This is depicted in the Zen ox herding pictures where at a point on the journey the practitioner enters into an empty circle, this empty *ensō* of, like an open sky.

In the Dzogchen teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, we hear that there is a point on the meditator's journey of total release, of an exhaustion of phenomena where everything dissolves into that groundlessness, that emptiness of unknowing, of uncertainty. So within the polycrisis, within the ecological crises that we face on our planet, we are in a moment like this, this total groundlessness. And again, with the support of Lama Willa's teachings, there are really methods to help us metabolize this uncertainty, this unknowing. This is similar to certain rites of passage in land-based and Indigenous cultures, of entering a moment where we leave the certainties of our community, we leave our identity and our name and our family behind and we dissolve. And in that collapse and loss, we enter a liminal place of real destabilization. And from that, we might arise.

### The Dark Night

A few years ago I was on a land-based contemplative journey out in the mountains in Colorado, and I had been holding space for a lot of us to grieve and to feel the loss of ecological death. But I hadn't really allowed room for my own dissolve, my own collapse, and held by the red rocks and the mountains in Colorado, smelling the sweet Ponderosa sap, melting in the sun, surrounded by wild flowers and a beautiful creek, I was held by the Earth to feel safe enough to really let go. And I started to grieve and let myself go into the real uncertainty of not knowing how and if and whether humans will emerge from the ongoing carbon emissions and toxification and plastification of our planet. And I think in general, most of us have not really caught up with the amount of change and mutation that's already occurred.

In 2011, there was a study that really strikes my heart, which reveals that of all the vertebrae on the planet by biomass, around 96 to 97% of all vertebrae biomass are human beings, our bodies and our livestock that we imprison for our mostly meat. Which means that only three or 4% of all vertebrae left on planet Earth are the wild animals, the blue whales, the big cats, the various four-legged and furry ones. Of all vertebrae, we have



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reduced that wildlife to only three or 4% of the planet. And of course, that trend will only continue. What does it mean to face that level of loss?

This brings us into this groundless darkness, this dark night of real pain. This is a sacred place for the EcoSattva, a place where we learn to abide. That actually can become a fund or a wellspring of openness because this is the teaching of no self and emptiness manifest on a geophysical level. And all around the world as human beings face these truths, it can trigger a kind of collective climate trauma. Climate trauma in the sense that not only is there trauma from having to flee from a wildfire, but also the trauma of the ongoing wounds to our planet that never seem to stop. The 24/7 capitalist technology is fracking and splicing and hacking our way deeper into this biosphere. And this extractive economy, this harmful life destroying form of life that we're all part of leaves us with this ongoing trauma, this ongoing wound where we are both perpetrators of this violence and victims of this violence at once. This is a psychologically and spiritually complex place to be. So it is with tremendous heart and care that we abide in this uncertainty, this groundlessness.

In contemporary modern Buddhist teachings many of us are quite quick to commit to letting go, letting go of thoughts one by one, letting go of ourself, letting go of our concepts. And some of us take refuge vows to let go, to follow the path of liberation rather than grasping. In this dark uncertainty of groundlessness there is also a moment of really wondering how much we're willing to let go. Are we even able to let go of some of our certainties about the role of human beings in the future, about the role of our own civilization in the future? Many of us think that what we're preparing for is a coming catastrophe, whereas in fact we're actually 500 or more years into an ancestral catastrophe, the catastrophe that has been the ongoing death of countless cultures, of stories, of languages, of human beings, and of countless habitats, of landscapes, of animals.

So we are deep in this and it's not just something to anticipate, but it's something to face and sink into and open our being to, learn to metabolize so that as our heart breaks open, as our body builds capacity to face truth, to face the real, we open rather than close in a way that is supportive, that is trauma-informed, that is able to be skillful with this radical uncertainty. So we find ourselves thrown into this ecological and civilizational scale polycrisis. And perhaps we've even chosen in some way to be here, perhaps this unknowing and uncertainty is the very space in which we arise. So in these spiritual archetypes of entering into darkness and unknowing, there's also this dawning of a song



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or of light or luminosity that allows something new, fresh and spontaneous, something emergent to arise from that space of unknowing and uncertainty.

### Uncertainty as an Ally

And it is the question here of how to attune to, how to arise again from this dark unknowing. In the Tibetan Buddhist traditions there are different kinds of metaphors or examples for this arising. For example, in generation stage visualization practice, there's a stage that's called the samadhi of suchness where we dissolve into the suchness of things beyond concept. But then there is a subsequent stage where there is an arising of compassionate luminosity from within that dark space of unknowing. And from that luminosity arises what's called a seed or the causal samadhi, which is what arises as a compassionate and awakened action or manifestation. So I'm following a similar logic here to help us move through and cross through the threshold of this uncertainty. But crossing through that threshold and being willing and able to enter that uncertainty seems so necessary for an EcoSattva. And in a way, I think each of us need to go through a prefigurative spiral where we go through in our own way, in a microcosmic way, the sense of loss, of even doom and despair, passing through that until we contact something that starts to shine or sing that guides us forward.

One of the real obstacles at this moment, however, is trying to have certainty. Thinking that in order to come out from the darkness to take on a new identity or act or engage in a fresh way means we have to know with total clarity what the future will bring. We need to have hope, we think we need to have certainty that all will work out. But the truth is we don't know. No one knows. And a lot of the environmental movement can collapse into two extremes. One extreme is the sense of hope and optimism that we will get through this, that this is a rite of passage, that humans will come out the other side, that human ingenuity and technology and inspiration will guide us through and all will be well. There will be a techno utopia and we'll all be like Ewoks living on the forest moon of Endor singing little songs together. And while that may be the case and might be a really beautiful part of this story, the truth is we don't know. No one knows where this is going and each of us will die and leave this Earth unsure.

On the other extreme, sometimes the environmental movement can move towards complete despair, a total certainty that we are going to go extinct as humans, that our civilization is doomed, that we're towards near term collapse, and that all of this ends in total despair and death. And that may be true, or parts of that may be true, but actually



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the future is much more complex. And the danger here is that the EcoSattva feels like we need to have what's called narrative closure. We need to have this total certainty that it's going to be hope or fear, dystopia or utopia. And it's really a subtle art of living to be in that place of unknowing or as feminist anthropologist Donna Haraway says, to stay with the trouble, to stay with that quivering heart that isn't sure, that doesn't know.

### Attuning to the Quivering Heart

And in fact, it's that unknowing of the quivering heart that actually begins to open up in the space of uncertainty as we stay with that living vibrating heart. And from here we begin to listen, to listen to that quivering heart and to listen to the vastness around us, to tune into the Earth and the teachings of the Earth, to tune into our body as the organism that allows us to contact the living planet, to listen to community, to others, and to begin to open beyond the habitual conceptual listening within the kind of enclosure of our thinking minds, trying to figure things out conceptually and to open to a listening that's attuned, that's empathic. As Otto Sharmer says, to cultivate a listening that's generative, a listening that actually listens others into their own wisdom. So within the darkness we begin to listen and this further allows our hearts to quiver, to openness.

This quivering heart, this vibrating sadness and vulnerability is not the sadness of depression. We each know the difference actually. You know when you're depressed, when the climate trauma or the ecological loss is overwhelming to such a degree that we move towards depression. We can feel it in our body, our heart contracts, our bellies clench, our jaws tighten, we're distracted, we're constantly picking up our cell phone, we're checking the news. We're not here. We've lost that open presence. And sometimes that's inevitable, that will happen. But the quivering heart that we find in that dark uncertainty and unknowing of emptiness is a different kind of sadness. It's the living saturated sadness and vulnerability that feels alive, that actually is curious and attuned and listening. You can tell if you're stuck in normal depression or collapse when we're just distracted and watching Netflix or moving towards our addictions.

Instead we can feel this subtle quivering heart in the silence and stillness of our practice, in being on the land and in this openness, in this curiosity, there's life force to this quivering heart. And this is the emergence of the song. This is moving from being collapsed in the maze and starting to actually attune to something, to listen in to what is being called for from the Earth. In fact, this heart is an expression of the Earth. It's an





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expression of this living quality beyond hope and fear that the EcoSattva will show up and participate no matter what, no matter what the future brings.

There will be these horrible news reports over the coming years of heat waves where millions die. We'll hear horrible news of coral reefs, bleached and dead, of more fires, of loss of habitat, of the loss of the rainforest. This is coming, but we can meet that with this living heart, this quivering vulnerability of the EcoSattva that's courageous, courage full of heart, and in fact, allowing that to open us further. This beating, quivering living heart is the seed arising, the luminous compassion and seed arising from the space. And we each know that. We each feel that. And this can be cultivated and deepened in our own practice, in community, by moving through grief rituals, by spending time alone, bringing our wounds out onto the Earth, out onto the land.

So this listening extends to be open to the communication of our bio region, of the places where we are, the living planet. There's constant communication, whether that's a hawk soaring above, a change in the weather, something seasonal, new migration patterns of animals, bird song or the silence of bird song, a certain rock formation, the flow of a river. The EcoSattva receives so much gift and communication when we listen to the Earth. So part of attuning, part of this listening that helps us emerge from this dark unknowing is the support of a living planet. So if you don't yet have a practice of just wandering or sitting, and it could be in a park, it could be on your balcony, in your apartment. It could be even listening to just plants and the beings that are all around us all the time and receiving the guidance and instruction from the biosphere, from the living Earth.

So as we emerge from this darkness into this dawning, or as we start to hear this song that pulls us forth, we might meet a kind of skepticism or a modernist hesitation. A lot of modern Buddhism is based on personal willpower, a kind of personal strength. We are practicing, we are training our mind, we're brain hacking, we're cultivating mindfulness. But there's also a great tradition within the Dharma of real humility, of going out into the rivers and mountains, of hearing the teachings of the 10,000 things and actually receiving guidance from pilgrimage sites, from lakes and caves, from the more than human world. And so it's okay to surrender to that listening that opens to the teachings of the living planet. And this helps us discover our own longing, opens that quivering heart even further.



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### Finding Your EcoSattva Identity

It's much easier in a sense to deconstruct our identity, to let go of self, than it is to discover new subjectivities, new identities. And in a way the EcoSattva is discovering a new kind of identity, but it's an identity that's free from identification. It's an identity that's free from fixation. It's an identity or a being, a sattva that's oriented towards Earth, towards our home, towards the eco. And I want to encourage you to find your ecological niche, to find your identity or subjectivity as an EcoSattva, that is calling to you from the Earth, from your heartbreak, from the despair, that is singing to you, and follow that song, follow that light, and through that to discover new ways of being for yourself.

Now, let's get practical. How do we do that? Within all of our guilt, in our complicity, that we drive a car or our cell phones have lithium batteries or the technology we use or the food we eat is destructive. How do we do that within our guilt?

Well, the first step here is real friendship with yourself, gentleness towards yourself, to not give into what's called a responsabilization, where neoliberal dominant powers want you to feel that it's up to you personally through your life changes to solve all of the climate crisis. And of course, that's impossible. None of us can be pure. None of us can be perfect within this mess. So let go of that self aggression and that guilt. Don't be bothered if somebody accuses you of not living up fully to your kind of eco Dharma talk. Be patient, find friendship with yourself. Be gentle towards yourself. The guilt, the self aggression, the pushing. It doesn't help.

Secondly, develop strength. See your own life as an art form that you are cultivating like a samurai sword that you're hammering and pounding and then heating and then dowsing in cool water, that the challenges you go through are actually building capacity and strength for the coming decades. And that that's a spiritual practice and an ecological practice. It's not just for you and your lifestyle or even your awakening. It's for Earth and behalf of Earth. So strengthening, taking care of your physical health, working with your trauma, which most of us have. Being able to have a bodily and somatic relationship with our nervous system and the sacred path of nourishing our being as an expression of the Earth. Our body is nature. Our body is this Earth. So kindness towards ourself and gentleness, but also strength.

A third key point at this moment on the EcoSattva journey is relating with, opening to and preserving that vast open mind that we encounter when all of our certainties and



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unknowing dissolve, actually preserving that open space. So it's not quite that we enter into darkness and then there's light and the darkness is gone. But rather like the Sandōkai says in the Zen tradition, there's the merging of light and dark like a box and its lid, like two arrows meeting in midair, like the foot before and the foot behind in walking. There's a non-duality between dark and light, emptiness and appearance. So this third point is to preserve and sustain a relationship with rest, non-conceptuality, emptiness and openness.

And lastly, the fourth key point for the EcoSattva is also having a relationship with play, with spontaneity, with creativity, with trying stuff. It's not that we emerge from the bottom of the U or from the bottom of the canyon or emerge from the womb and then are born perfect with a new EcoSattva identity and we have all the answers. We know exactly what we're going to do and how we're going to respond to the climate crisis. No, it's much more iterative. It's much more organic, like a growth that's gestating and being born like a budding. And there's an experimenting quality over and over again, of a ripening, a testing.

So try something, listen into your ecosystem around you, your bio region, and see what's needed. Where is there pain? Is there a river that you love that's being polluted? Is there a new petrochemical plant? Is the fracking industry active? Where does your waste go? How are the water protectors and Indigenous land protectors around you engaging? What are they doing? Could they use your humble help? What's happening that you care about? But entering into that activity playfully and spontaneously and make mistakes. We're not going to know how to do it right all the time. So try something. Listen to the feedback from others and from the phenomenal world, listen to the feedback from the people closest to you, if they're pointing out that you are entering into this urgency or what Indigenous scholar Kyle White calls the crisis epistemology. If you're moving towards burnout and you're kind of overdoing it and people are pointing that out, listen to them and maybe allow your EcoSattva activity to be seasonal, right? In the winter, Mother Earth goes dormant and there may be times where you need to rest.

And other times where you're like the spring and you have energy and capacity, you want to play, you want to offer, you want to engage, you want to act, and to do that in a way that's right for your body and your moment in the world. Not all of us have to be direct action activists, but some of us do need to be. Not all of us need to work within the belly of the beast of the kind of centrist politics working within the institutions. But some of us definitely need to do that. Not all of us need to be experimenting with really cool speculative futures and technological experiments in a kind of solar punk creative way.



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But some of us need to do that. Not all of us need to work with ecopsychology, with helping to heal the climate trauma and support others on a heart level, on a grief level. But some of us need to do that. There's room for all of us as EcoSattvas, all the different sparks and play and manifestation that arises from the darkness.

So again, those four points are gentleness and kindness towards yourself, let go of the guilt and the self-hatred; strength, cultivating your body, your life as an artwork; open non-conceptual awareness, preserving a relationship with that unknowing, that groundlessness, that ultimate emptiness, practice, rest; and fourthly, play, spontaneous action, iterative responsiveness where we ourselves are the spontaneous, compassionate resonance of awakened activity. This has always been the culmination of the Buddhist journey to actually become someone that pervades this Earth with compassionate activity, but that can be playful and even pleasurable, even blissful. What could be better amidst all this mess than to discover this compassionate life, this thriving and joy at this even erotic dimension, finally breaking out of our paralysis, our unhelpful unknowing, and actually finding a way to show up, to play, to love.

In the traditional Mahayana teachings of the six Paramitas, the six perfections, of generosity, ethics, meditation, patience, and prajna or knowledge. Each of those activities are pervaded by emptiness. And the more patient we are, the more generous we are, the more energy we enact: generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and prajna, the six Paramitas. The more we engage those activities, the more that deepens our non-dual relationship with openness, emptiness, and primordial freedom. The deeper we go into primordial freedom, the more we're able to enact that generosity, that discipline and ethics and the patience and the energy. This supply, this wellspring that comes from being attuned to truth, to suchness. So action and openness are not a duality. They are inseparable in the EcoSattva path and the Bodhisattva path.

So to close, before we move into a guided meditation together, I just want to connect heart to heart and say that even though we don't know for sure how this story ends, we do know that this next stage, this next chapter in the story is going to be really difficult. There is a lot of pain and geophysical karma that has already accumulated on the planet that will play out with the climate emissions and with the climate chaos, with what seems like the doubling down of the fossil fuel industries to continue their violence and their deception. There's so much injustice, ecological environmental racism. There's so much that we are going to face. And what I want to say to you is, you are not alone in this. We are not alone in this. It will get hard. But right in the midst of that is where this quivering



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heart breaks open in the midst of the uncertainty. And we can ride that into action, into participation in a way that's right for you and your life. So when your heart breaks, when you are feeling that despair, know that we're together in this. And as EcoSattvas, we are the gestures of this Earth showing up to meet this moment. And through this we arise from the dark uncertainty, that groundlessness with the luminosity and this birth, this seed of the EcoSattva that arises in action and coming from love.

## Dana

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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.