



One Earth Sangha

# Session Six: Supplemental Video

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2023-24 Video

## Agreement

---

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

## Session Profile

---

Session Six: Creating and Discovering the Way

[Session Resources](#)

## Speakers in this video

- Kristin Barker - director and co-founder, One Earth Sangha
- Dr. Dan Siegel

## Transcript

---

### Welcome

#### **Kristin Barker:**

Greeting friends. Well, welcome to this very special session that we have now featuring Dr. Dan Siegel. Dan is a well-known neurologist researcher, but why have this particular guest, why go into this particular field of neurology and what we're learning about the mind and the practices that cultivate certain aspects of mind? Because in this training, we're not so much training ourselves or equipping ourselves to be better at convincing others to take a particular action, that is, to stop bad things from happening, or create new life sustaining alternatives, or rather, the focus of the EcoSattva Training — the focus



## One Earth Sangha

really of One Earth Sangha is transforming the consciousness that we bring to any particular action or even inaction.

So in that spirit, we look not only at how we look, how we view ourselves and this world, how we view climate crisis, how we work with the thoughts that we have about it, how we work with the feelings, the emotions, the body sensations. We also are training our minds to stay present and to build its understanding of connectivity. Its integration itself. Build the integration of mind, because why? Because that creates a more resilient mind — a mind that has an increased capacity to stay inside the window of tolerance, to not fly off into hyper arousal, fight or flight, or into hypo arousal, freeze or submit. So Dr. Dan Siegel is here with us today to offer those kinds of insights so that we can really get clear on, especially if you're new to meditation, some very particular practices that can help integrate this — not only brain, but brain, body, heart system, and therefore be more present, resilient and relationally connected with our world. Okay, so with that, welcome Dan. It's so great to have you as part of the EcoSattva Training. And please, let's get into this territory.

### **Dan Siegel:**

Thank you. Thank you, Kristen, for having me. And it's really an honor to be here with everyone. The idea of thinking deeply about the mind and about resilience and about our being a part of nature and facing some of the deep challenges on the planet that include not only the outer world of what's happening in our ecological systems, but what's happening within us, within our emotional and meaning-making systems of the mind. And so we're going to go through a series of ideas to try to build a framework that I hope will be of help to you in thinking deeply about what the mind is about, what your own challenges may be, and then ways of actually strengthening your resilience so that as we move forward in facing the challenges we're going to face together on earth, we'll do it with a strong mind. We'll do some slides as we go just because some people like a visual set of guides as we go through things.

## A Framework of the Mind

And you can see on this first introductory slide that we're going to be talking about cultivating resilience. And we'll be doing this through a framework that I'm going to introduce you to called the three-P framework that really offers a way of enhancing wellbeing and building resilience. And we're going to address these fundamental questions about what is the mind, what is a healthy mind and how can we cultivate this



## One Earth Sangha

healthier mind and a healthy world by looking deeply at these questions of what the mind is. And as you'll see, one fourth question we're going to ask is why do relationships have something to do with consciousness? And how do those involve the mind so that when you think about your relationship, let's say with other people or with all of nature, that relational world from a very rigid way of thinking about the mind would be an outside thing to the mind.

But as we start to dive into what the mind is, we're going to see that the relational connections we have with people on the planet are actually fundamental to what our mind is, that relationships are not just extras, they're actually the integrity of what the mind is. So that as we'll see, there's an inner and an inter aspect to your singular mind. Now, how can we say that? Well, the possibility and proposal that you can see we're going to have to wrestle with is how can you have something that's both within and between? And one way of resolving that seeming paradox is by looking at something called energy flow. And there's a remarkable lack of use of that concept, but right now between you and me, if I stop speaking or I stop moving, there's a blockage of energy flow and some energy has an internality to it.

We can study, for example, functions within the brain or the skin and case body gives us a spatial reference. That's the inner aspect of energy flow and some happens between people and among people and among people on the planet. So it turns out that the skull nor the skin are barriers for this energy to flow. And so we can see that if we go toward energy flow as what we're looking at, we can understand how a thing like mind, a process like mind and something we can name as mind can be both within and between and yet still be the same essence, energy flow. Now, some of that flow has a certain way of forming a symbol. So we call it "energy in formation", and that's where you get the phrase energy and information where information is a subset of energy flow. So if I say ocean, that's very different from olive.

Both of them are sound waves, but one means the large body of water. The other means that little fruit that you eat or can make into oil. And so we can see that energy and information flow vary depending on the pattern. And on this next slide, you can see that when you look at, and these drawings are all by my wonderful daughter who's an environmental science graduate student and also an artist, this drawing helps you see that there's a triangle of human experience that shows that the energy flow can be within and between whether it's you connecting to people or you connecting to the planet and that your relationship with nature — intra-nature connections. So it's not even like between



## One Earth Sangha

you and nature, you are nature. So that's the intra-nature connection. You see this connection with people. You can be an individual, I can be an individual, Kristin can be an individual. So we have between connections, interconnections. This lets us see that our identity is not just in these bodies we're born into. Yes, we have an interiority to it. We'll call that the embodied brain, but there's also a relationality to it.

And on the next slide you can see that when we use the word mind in this immersion we're doing right now, we don't mean mind versus heart or mind as a synonym for intellect or mind as a synonym for brain activity. We mean mind as having at least these four facets. One is subjective experience. The next is consciousness that lets you know you're having the felt texture of life subjectivity. And the third is information processing. And each of these three are common descriptions of what we mean by mind.

But a fourth facet is called self-organization. And it's a mathematical property that is talked about for what are called complex systems, systems that are open, capable of being chaotic and nonlinear. Nonlinear meaning you put a small change at one point in time and it's a relatively large and very difficult to predict result. Now the ecosystem of earth is a complex system and so small changes can lead to huge and very difficult to predict results. And you can see then that your mind also is part of the complex system of earth and it's having this function. I will suggest to you that one of the emergent properties of complex systems emergence means that things are interacting with each other and giving rise to something that's larger than the fundamental elements themselves. Like a cloud, one of those fundamental emergent properties is called self-organization. And when we turn to self-organization, it may be that placing that as a function of mind allows us to see in fact that we can offer a definition of the mind — this is from 1992 — that says an embodied and relational self-organizing emergent process that's regulating the flow of energy and information. And it's worth just going to the details of this because it'll help understand how you as an individual, you as a part of a system of, let's say, people working to help work to support regeneration on our planet, you as a person working on earth as a part of this global system can build resilience that we'll define in just a moment because self-organization is emerging from this flow that's happening both within you and you can train your mind to actually change the structure of your brain in ways we'll talk about in a moment. And you're also about your relationship. So it isn't an either-or. The self-organization function of mind, of your mind, has an internal and an inter aspect to it.

Now interestingly, you can then say, how do I optimize self-organization? And this becomes extremely important for thinking about resilience. If resilience is the ability to



## One Earth Sangha

stay with a sense of flexibility and harmony in the face of challenges, and to recover when one leaves that harmonious flow and we're defining resilience that way. How do you develop resilience? Well, you might say I should develop optimal self-organization. And there's an answer from math that turns out applies to our personal lives, our interpersonal lives, our public lives as humanity, and our planetary lives as nature. So what you're about to hear is not just about your personal resilience, which of course is extremely important. It's about the resilience of relationships, of societies, and of earth, a living system we call nature.

So let's look at this notion here. Optimal self-organization arises when you promote differentiation, or permit differentiation, or let different aspects become unique and specialized. This allowing of differentiation to occur as a natural process for a complex system. And then what you do is as you have differentiation that is honored as it naturally emerges, you then create linkages, compassionate communication for human interactions and respectful ways of relating to, for example, different species or different ecosystems for nature. Now when a system is doing that, interestingly it flows like a river bound on one side by chaos and the other side by rigidity. So when you're balancing differentiation and linkage, you're actually creating a flow that goes between chaos or rigidity. And this has the qualities, this harmonious flow, that is flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized and stable. And in English, that's the nice acronym 'FACES'. So we're going to talk about resilience being how you can cultivate integration in your life to enable you to have this 'FACES' flow within and between. That's the overarching framework and that's the basis of harmony.

And so this morning for example, I woke up and I was feeling not so good. I had unfortunately read the news yesterday and all you have to do is read the newspaper and you get this sinking, helpless, hopeless feeling, despair. And I went to sleep. Having done that, I try not to do that, but I did it. And so I woke up with this heavy feeling and I did a practice that I'm going to teach you how to do, that totally shifted me out of the despair and into a sense of vitality and hopefulness.

### Witnessing What's Present

Now what did I do? Well, this is something you can see here on this slide is I tried to optimize self-organization and by thinking about it deeply, you say, well, if I can take this notion of the mind being the self-organizing and bidirectional process that is naturally emerging from the systems I'm in, and I can allow differentiation and linkage to happen,



## One Earth Sangha

that would be how you would optimize the flow. And I would do that by taking the view of the mind as this regulatory process, and any regulatory process you can both monitor, like when you ride a bike, you monitor where you're going and you modify what you're doing. And this modulation will be to modulate towards integration.

Now this morning then what I woke up is I needed to do a practice that stabilized this mindsight lens. This way we're monitoring what's going on. So if I'm in a state of despair rather than running away from my emotional state and trying to distract myself with more news, or just trying to do external things, I go inward. If you're reading the news, if you're hearing about the state of climate crisis, and you get that hopeless sinking feeling that many of us who care about earth can feel, running away from the feeling will allow the non-conscious continuing feeling to dig its teeth more deeply into your psyche so that much of what happens in the mind is not in consciousness.

So now what we're saying is we're going to use consciousness to essentially build these three legs of a tripod where you're going to have objectivity be one where let's take my condition this morning of despair. I see the despair as an object that's in my mind. It's not the totality of who I am, it's an object of my mind in that moment. It's an emotional state. So when I have that kind of objectivity, I'm building the first leg that allowed me to see clearly, to monitor with stability. So the next, we can then do something with it. The next leg of the tripod, if you will, is openness. That is instead of saying, oh my God, it's a beautiful day, I should just feel happy. What's wrong with me? I feel despair. You stupid day and stop feeling that way. No, I'm open to being with what is.

Some people might call this openness the gateway to acceptance. Because before you can accept, you actually have to be with what it is. And a number of people, including Tara Brach, this beautiful acronym that I learned from Jack Kornfield called RAIN, where you recognize what's happening, you accept it, you investigate it, and originally you non-identify with it. And now Tara has beautifully shifted it to you, nurture it. And in that approach, it's basically built into this one leg of our tripod that you're open to what is with a kind of kind loving regard. Or as Trudy Goodman Kornfield and Jack Kornfield say, like Ram Dass would say, you are bringing loving awareness. Or Shauna Shapiro would say kind attention. And this is, I would call it kind intention. There's an intention to bring a kindness at this moment to being open.

So now we have objectivity, openness, and the third leg that you build is the leg of observation where you're going to cultivate this capacity to actually be an observer who



## One Earth Sangha

can realize, oh, I have a tendency to not want to feel despair. So that's this tendency of this person and this body. So I better work extra hard to be open to it, or I can over-identify with the despair as the totality of who I am. But instead, what I want to do now is have it as an object in my mind. So this view allows you to see that here you're building the tripod that lets you stabilize this mindsight lens, this lens that lets you see the mind, the monitoring part of regulation, so that you can then do something about it by integrating the information that's happening here.

### Integration and Resilience

And on this next slide, you can see that sometimes energy goes through us in pure form. For our wording we would probably call that sensation, but sometimes those bubbles, if energy is like the soapy water of a bubble thing, you have the wand, the wand is like the mind. Sometimes the mind has energy flow in a way that's pure bubbles, pure energy, like I go blah, blah, just pure energy. But other times you form it into information like despair, believe it or not, is a form of information. Emotion evokes motion as it has a symbolizing process that gets you ready to act. Or in the case of despair, feel like you can't act and you now have this way where you can see emotion as inextricably woven with meaning, right? So at this moment then I'm looking now at the information flow where energy is in this diagram, two plus three, you've taken the energy flow, you've turned it into information. Now what despair means for you and what despair means for me may be actually quite different. Maybe I had a trauma when I was a child or maybe I had a trauma more recently, or maybe I have relatives who are substance abusers and I felt incredibly despairing when they would continue to be doing self-destructive things. Each of us is uniquely different, and so when we say what's the meaning of the despair for you, it could be very different than the meaning for me, even though we may use the same words despair there.

Now at this moment in terms of what I did this morning that I'm going to introduce you to in a moment is I know that from science, this is the basic take home lesson from neuroscience in a division of neuroscience called neuroplasticity, that where attention goes, neuro firing flows and neural connection grows, that I am not helpless to work with the very structure of my brain to create a change in how my brain and my head, the heaviness I have in my chest, the nauseous feeling I have in my belly. All these things can go along with despair or even a feeling of shame that we as a humanity have caused these problems, feelings of guilt, which is different from shame that we've done something wrong, but shame like there's something wrong with us. All these feelings of anger, of



## One Earth Sangha

sadness, of grief, all these things I feel in my body, I feel them in the head part of my body and they affect the way I interact with people. So they're absolutely part of what we're calling mind, and I'm going to not be passive about approaching them. I'm not going to run from them. I was once in a meeting with Al Gore was up on stage and he said this very powerful thing that part of the problem with environmental challenges is that people go from denial to despair in a nanosecond. And that space in between denial and despair is exactly what any of us who are trying to help earth need to cultivate emotional resilience, which is the same as mental resilience, resilience of the mind, so that we can widen what I call the window of tolerance so that I can stay with the feelings of what are going on right there and not have to escape them. This is what a resilient mind would be.

So how did I do it this morning? Well, years ago there were two universal findings that E. O. Wilson beautifully calls 'consilience.' These consilient findings across a number of different disciplines were that one, integration like we've been exploring is the basis of wellbeing and resilience. And number two, that consciousness is needed for change. And this is just from studying things like psychotherapy or education or parenting, that in all those ways you help someone change and develop and grow their mind. You need people to be awake and aware. You need them to be conscious. So when you take those two ideas and then combine them together, you come up with a very interesting simple statement: the integration of consciousness. And what we're going to talk about now is how you can integrate consciousness to build a more resilient mind.

So this morning, what I did when I went from feeling despairing and down and heavy is I made sure that even though it was a busy day, that I would do my regular practice of what's called the 'wheel of awareness'. And the wheel is actually a table just through this wall over here in our office where there's a center that's glass and an outer part that's wood. And I would bring my patients up to try to see if they could integrate consciousness up from the table where they're surrounding by chairs and a couch. I'd bring them up from the chairs and couch around this table and I'd say, let's integrate consciousness. And we would use one of the things that holds up the table, looks like a spoke. So we'd have a singular spoke, and you can see it on the diagram here, that's a metaphor for the focus of attention. The integration of consciousness would mean you're going to differentiate different aspects of consciousness and then link them. We put all the knowns on the rim of this table. No one wanted to call the table of awareness. So it's called the wheel of awareness, and the hub represents awareness itself — the knowing, and then systematically moving the spoke of attention around, we'll do a part of that today and





## One Earth Sangha

we've had lots of people access our website, [drdانسiegel.com](http://drdانسiegel.com), to freely get this resource where they can do different versions of the wheel that we have.

### The Wheel of Awareness

What does it involve? I'll just give you the basic instructions and we don't have time in this segment to do the practice. I'll invite you to do it on your own.

You begin by just grounding yourself and if the breath feels safe and comfortable, you do that. Some people prefer the fingers or the toes, and here what you do is you have the spoke systematically, be metaphorically in either you see it in your mind or it's the idea of it moving first in the first segment, which is the first five senses, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching. Take a deep breath, then move the spoke systematically through the body. The sensations of the interior of the body, which include of course, muscles and bones, genitals, organs, like intestines, respiratory system, and the heart. You systematically do this exploration of interoception, the sixth sense. You then move the spoke over again this time to what you can call mental activities, emotions like the despair I felt, looking at thoughts, memories, hopes, dreams, longings, desires, all of this and more beliefs are put right here in the third segment, we'll just call it the seventh sense, just to keep the numbers going.

First five senses in the first segment. Second segment is the sixth sense interoception interior of the body. Now we're exploring mental life by both opening up to whatever's there, but also then studying how things come and go. And then in an advanced stage, and if you don't feel up to it, just do the beginner's wheel on the website, but if you feel up to it, you can do the part where you bend the spoke around so that the energy and information flow is shifting. So now you're directing energy into the hub itself. You're basically focusing attention onto pure awareness. Some people like the experience of just having the spoke disappear or sending the spoke out and retracting it or just leaving it in the hub. It's all the same. The idea is just to drop into pure awareness. Some people like the phrase aware of awareness, all those words are not the thing itself. Like any word, it's just an approximation. So you have the experience of just being in pure awareness. We'll talk about that in a moment. And then you take a deep breath, you then straighten the spoke out, move it over to the fourth and final segment, which for many people working in the ecological sphere, this becomes an extremely important part. And before we get to practice that, what I really want to do is just show you this three-P framework and then we'll actually do the practice because I think that would be a really useful order.



## One Earth Sangha

In this fourth segment, let's just call it the eighth sense, it's our relational sense. It's opening to the sensations of the reality of our interconnections, our connections with people who might be physically close to us, further away, people we work with, we live near in neighborhoods, towns, cities, states, provinces, the country you're in the world. And then moving to nature, to all living beings, animals and plants that live in your neighborhood, your city, your town, your state, out to your country to the whole world. And then what we do is statements of kindness in there of love and care, metta statements. So you make these positive statements that we'll do in just a few minutes.

### Three Pillars of Mind Training

What you're doing in this whole practice is you're using attention to stream energy and information flow into awareness called focal attention, and it's like aiming the beam of a flashlight. And amazingly, you may be familiar with the research on the three components of classic mostly Buddhist practice that has been studied, which includes samatha — where you're focusing attention, vipassana — where you're opening awareness, and metta — where you're doing this practice of developing loving kindness. Those three practices are often studied in different approaches from ancient practices, from wisdom traditions, and they can be called focused attention training, open awareness or open monitoring training and kind intention training, those three things. In the wheel, fortunately all three are embedded in one practice, where the first two segments you're doing focused attention training, the third segment, you're doing open awareness training, and the fourth segment you do kind attention training.

So it's just good fortune that what research independently established from their very careful controlled studies are the three essential components to get all sorts of findings that you'll see in a moment. They're all built into the wheel. So you get changes in the brain that involve, essentially when you look at all the different studies, making the differentiate areas more linked. So what do we mean by that? The hippocampus grows, the corpus callosum connecting left and right grows, the prefrontal cortex grows, and the connectome is more interconnected. The only reason you need to kind of get a feeling for that is that by growing integration the brain, you are changing the structure and function of the brain in exactly the ways that research shows all forms of regulation depend upon. So if you're building the capacity for say, resilience, this is how you do it. An integrated brain creates a resilient mind. If you look at the Smith et al study from 2015, you'll see that the best predictor of happiness and health was how integrated your brain was, how



## One Earth Sangha

interconnected the connectome was. So there's a lot of science behind this that I talk about in a book called *Aware* or a book called *the Developing Mind*, the third edition. There's lots of science behind all these global statements I'm saying, but just know that an integrated brain is a resilient mind, and so you can actually change the structure and function of your brain in the ways that correlate with resilience. So this is what the three pillar mind training does.

The following five things are just absolutely mind blowing. And if you told me 15 years ago when I first got into this work that I'd be able to show you this list of empirically shown controlled studies that demonstrate this, I just would say you're out of your mind. Now that we've defined the mind, we can say that. You're going to reduce the stress hormone cortisol. So in terms of building your resilience as you work to serve earth and as earth is waiting for us to arrive, we need to do this from the inside out.

It's going to be stressful not just now, but in the time ahead. So we really need to be building an integrated brain. Number one. These next five things — you want to build each of these five. you want to lower your stress hormone cortisol, three pillar practice will do that. You want to, as you can see here, enhance your immune function so you are able to deal with challenges of infection, for example. You want to improve your cardiovascular risk factors so you lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, make your heart in your chest work in a more balanced way with your head with something called heart rate variability coherence. Don't worry about it, it just means that your different branches of your nervous system are integrated basically. You want to reduce inflammation, which is the main cause of illness these days, so that you are actually altering the non-DNA components, the acetyl groups and the methyl groups that are sitting on top of the region of the genes that are controlling inflammation in the body.

And when you look at David Cresswell and colleagues' amazing study that did a control group of relaxation training versus mindfulness training, well, actually it was three pillar training, you found the epigenetic changes to reduce inflammation only in the three pillar training group, not in the relaxation group. I mean, relaxing is good. So not to put down relaxing, but it's not the same as this three pillar training. Okay so that's amazing. And then another amazing thing is you're going to optimize an enzyme called telomerase that Elizabeth Blackburn who got the Nobel Prize for discovering this system and her colleague Alyssa Epel wrote a beautiful book called *The Telomere Effect*. And when Alyssa saw the manuscript for *Aware* where I was summarizing all this stuff and she said, you need to say it slows the aging process. So that's amazing. If you look at that list, that's just



## One Earth Sangha

amazing. And as we said, Smith et al have shown that if you want to make your self healthy and every measure that was measured, integrate your brain, make your connectome more interconnected, three pillar training will do that.

So this is like we are at an amazing moment for us to be having this discussion. The earth is in crisis. The mind is challenged to stay well and to stay resilient. We don't just do this alone. You need to start from the inside out, do three pillar practice, and the wheel gets you all three in one practice. So it's why I do it every day. And we need to work collectively as a community of collaborative, connecting, compassionate individuals who care about what's going on. And as my hero, our heroes, really, Joanna Macy beautifully says, you got to do it with incredible vitality. As Gary Snyder says, the poet, you don't do this out of fear, you don't do it out of anger, you don't do it out of guilt, you do it out of love. And as Mary Pipher says, you do this together, but you do it a lot of pizza and a lot of music because you got to have a lot of fun.

### I-Me-Mine and the Default Mode Network

And I'll just say one thing now as we move to this slide on the default mode network, and you've probably heard about this and it's worth summarizing just so you can get a feeling for it. In this short version of discussing this, I want to be really careful not to overstate certain things because people will say really simplistic things about the default mode network, and it's not consistent with the science. So I want to be really careful here. Basically, when you go in a scanner and no one gives you anything to do, they say just wait five minutes and then we'll get going. This is the part of your brain that's very active. So because it's active without being told to do anything, the word that's used is default, you default to that. Now, it turns out that this network is mostly midline, not all of it, but mostly midline from the middle part here, the medial prefrontal cortex, and then it goes back to an area called the posterior singular cortex, and then it loops around and actually connects to the limbic area in various ways, but let's just call it mostly midline just so you can get a general feeling for it.

Now, these regions are important for insights. They're important for autobiographical memory, they're important for your autobiographical story, they're important for empathy. They're important for making a map of your mind and a map of others' minds. So it's a mindsight mapping set of areas, especially the medial prefrontal cortex. So there's nothing bad about this. Here's the story, whether it's contemporary culture or just certain individuals, when the default mode is excessively differentiated from the rest of the



## One Earth Sangha

networks of the brain, so it's not that it's bad, it's just that it gets all worked up about itself, it leads to depression or it's associated with depression, it's associated with anxiety. It's associated with a sense of a separate solo self.

So now let's repeat what I just said. It's not that this network is bad, it's that if the balance of differentiation linkage is now pushing toward an excessively differentiated default mode, then it's associated with things that are not consistent with wellbeing, depression, anxiety, separate selfhood where I'm not connected and I'm isolated. Those are not very healthy. As studies show, the more people use the term I-me-mine, which comes from the default mode network, the more likely they're to have a soon a heart attack. So it's an amazing thing. So again, the default mode network is not bad, but excessively differentiated default mode network activity leads to a sense of an isolated solo separate self.

So what we want to suggest is that this is in part an outcome of modern culture. In a collectivistic society, we haven't studied it, but it might not exist like this. And you can look at all sorts of differences between individualistic cultures like the United States and collectivistic ones, for example, like in South Africa with ubuntu — 'I am because we are', or Japan. And there's all sorts of amazing things that Helen Immordino-Yang, Mary Helen Immordino-Yang discusses with looking at how culture shapes the very structure and function of the brain. We won't get into that here, but just to say that it's a scientifically reasonable thing to say, that this default mode network may be encouraged to cultivate a separate self by the message you get from your parents, your teachers, your peers, society in terms of media, even science, that for 2,500 years we've said the mind is just from the brain and the self is in your body. And this may be actually a fundamental problem that's not only leading to personal suffering.

And of course wisdom traditions have taught this for thousands of years, but in modern times, we can see this as an outcome of the incredible rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide throughout our populations in contemporary culture. I once asked the Dalai Lama about why did western culture have this issue? And he said, don't call it Western, it's in the East and it's in the West. It's just contemporary culture. So we can just use the word contemporary culture. If you take your hand and put your hand like this default mode network, if this is situated in your brain, like this would be this midline set of structures here basically. And what you want to do is make the brain more integrated, which is exactly what three pillar practice does. It makes an excessively activated differentiated default mode become more woven in a balanced way with the rest of the brain.



## One Earth Sangha

### Practicing with The Wheel of Awareness

So let's talk about the wheel practice. This practice can take anywhere — the basic wheel, about 20 minutes, the more advanced wheel, about 25 minutes. Research by Amici John, others suggest to get the three pillar practice to have a real positive effect, you need at least a dozen minutes a day. So that's probably a minimum. And as Richie David said recently in the meeting we were teaching together in New York, he said, we just don't know can you do that in four, three minute aliquots or two six-minute ones, you have to do all at once, we have no idea. So just try to get your dozen daily minutes in, however works for your schedule. That's what we know for now. I particularly like the wheel of awareness because it has all three pillars in one practice. So you're getting all the basic nutrients you need for the mind, and it has a kind of wholeness to it that I'll just describe to you.

As we go through the first five senses, once you ground yourself in your breath or whatever feels comfortable, you let the breath go, you then invite your mind to imagine being in the hub of the wheel. You then go through the five senses moving the spoke one by one. And as you go from hearing to seeing, for example, you let go of hearing and then move to seeing you, don't try to accumulate them all at once. Let go of the one you're on, move to smell, to taste a touch, take a deep breath. And now what we've done is we've allowed the mind to begin to settle and to allow energy patterns from outside of the body to be differentiated from each other through the sensations. Five senses.

Now you take a deep breath, move the spoke over. Now we're going to look at energy patterns inside the body systematically starting with the face and then going throughout the body from muscles and bones, then moving to the genitals, the intestines, the respiratory system from the sinuses down into the chest for the lungs, expanding, contracting then to the heart, then taking in all the signals from the body. So now we've done basically in these two segments. We've done focused attention training, the first of those three pillars. And now as we open to whatever signals come from the body, this is very important for cultivating resilience because you want to invite the wisdom of the body. So when I was feeling despair, I might feel this heaviness in my chest, a nausea in my belly, I might feel a tightening of my muscles. Whenever I watch the news, I get this kind of stuff. So you really want to let the body be your friend. And we've done studies at UCLA to show that the more interoceptive capacity you have, the larger your right anterior insula is, which is the pathway from these signals of the body up first to the right



## One Earth Sangha

hemisphere where you register the body for interoception, perception of the interior. And people who have that can regulate their emotions more effectively. They can actually have more insight and empathy, and it's built by just such a practice. So body scan like that.

Then what you do is you take a deep breath after you've gone through the heart region and et cetera and opened up, now you're moving to the open awareness training of beginning with mental activities, the spoke there. You invite anything in in the first part. In the second part, you add study how things arise, stay present, leave awareness, and then if you're going to do the advanced stage, you're going to bend the spoke around and I'll just show you what that looks like. You can see on these next slides. You can bend the spoke, you can retract the spoke, you can keep the spoke in there, or you can have no spoke at all. And when you do that then, you're inviting yourself to explore in an open monitoring kind of way, what awareness itself feels like. So this is the open awareness part of the three pillar training.

And now imagine sending the spoke to this fourth and final segment of the rim where you let yourself just open to the sense of relatedness to human beings that might be close to you, family and friends, to people who live in your neighborhood, to people who live in your town or your city, to include all people who live in your country, to not just members of our human family, to members of all living beings on earth, all plants and animals, all living beings. As we open to these interconnections with all living beings, we'll take the beautiful statements of care and kindness that are present in a wide array of traditions, knowing that science has affirmed what these wisdom traditions have said for generations, that actually making positive statements of care and kindness within our inner voice can bring not only positive changes out into the world of our relationships, but it brings positive changes within these bodies we're born into.

We'll send those same elaborated wishes out to an integrated identity. So integration is honoring differences and promoting linkages. So it's not blending everything together like a smoothie. It's more like a fruit salad where you keep the distinct aspects present. Now, we're collecting a way to do this in languages all around the planet, but in English, one way we found very simple and helpful is me plus we equals 'Mwe', M-W-E. Here you get the bodily and you get the relational, relationships, not just to people, but to all of nature. So send these same elaborated wishes out to 'mwus'.

Let this rest with you, this feeling of what this relationality means in our lives and your individual life and your relational life, and letting this wheel of awareness practice come



## One Earth Sangha

to a close for now. And this whole wheel of awareness came from this scientific reasoning in the nineties of integrationist health, conscious need for change, integrate consciousness, and it matches classic Buddhist practice, classic Ayurvedic practice. People in the Muslim tradition have said it matches that I've spoken with people from the Lakota tribe, people in the Polynesian tradition. It's remarkable, the consilience of this science-based integration of consciousness practice across many, many, many wisdom traditions. So if one of those is your background, that's beautiful, and there's no reason for us to have conflict or fighting about who invented it or who came up with it first or who's got the right theory about it. It's just what is going to help develop resilience so we can actually help Earth. This is what it comes to. I don't have a background in any particular meditative practice, and when I teach with people like Jack Kornfield or Sharon Salzberg, I come as a clinician and as a scientist to collaborate with them to find consilience.

And as we get now to this fourth segment, I'll say, I was teaching with Sharon Salzberg. I said, Sharon, you beautifully teach us about metta, about loving kindness from the Buddhist tradition. What exactly is loving kindness? We were in this beautiful church in New York City, and she said, Dan, essentially loving kindness is embracing the reality of our interconnections. And I took a deep breath because that's exactly what we need on earth, is that the 'solo self', whether you have the self be just in your body or just people like you, whatever, or separating humanity from nature, all those can be different ways of interpreting the 'solo self'. By denying the reality of our interconnection, we're destroying life on earth. So loving kindness, yes, is kindness and love and care and compassion. It's beautiful. It's fantastic. And I love Sharon's teachings of the Buddhist tradition of metta, that's all fantastic, and it fits into resilience. Beautiful. The work of Barbara Fredrickson shows this, the self-compassion of Kristin Neff and Chris Germer beautifully in research show this. So this is all, we're all on the same page. The lack of integration on earth is challenging individual wellbeing and ecological wellbeing.

### **Kristin Barker:**

Excellent. Thank you so much, Dan. So great to have you walk us through this contemporary understanding of what mind is, and then what are the conditions that are necessary for resilience, this integrative consciousness, and then also this very simple, easy to visualize the wheel of awareness and how that supports the development of not only a resilient mind, but one that has the felt sense of interconnection, especially for those of us who might be new to the practice, but even those who have been practicing for a long time. To get a sense for what these various things that we do in our meditative practice, like a body scan, what that might be doing from perspective of neurology and





## One Earth Sangha

how it is things like exploring that metta practice, that connection to other beings and sending kind regard, why that's important and what capacities that's building in our minds, a lot of motivation to do these practices. Okay, so this conversation continues. We have another segment below, but if you don't have time for that, I invite you to check out the resources section for sure, because that's where you're going to find links to Dan's work and in particular, a guided meditation version of the Wheel of Awareness. Thank you again, Dan. Great to have you here.

## 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.