



One Earth Sangha

Session Seven: Introduction and Three Domains of the EcoSattva

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 Seven: Expressing Our Awakening Agency
[Session Resources](#)

Speakers in this video

- Kristin Barker - director and co-founder, One Earth Sangha

Transcript

Welcome

Kristin:

Greetings, friends, and welcome to Session Seven. In the previous session, we moved from this space of allowing and even hanging out with the deep uncertainty, then beginning to listen for signals that can inform us going forward, potentially refine and tune what we're already doing. And then we're really turning outward. So the first thing that I want to just establish here and acknowledge is that so many of you are already active in some way on ecological crises. And as the outer situation becomes more



One Earth Sangha

challenging, our opportunity is to integrate with that which has been fragmented, align ourselves more thoroughly and root ourselves more deeply so that we can be there for ourselves and one another, with greater wholeness serve the causes that move us. For there's no question that we are called into service. And what form that service takes and how our current forms of service might be refined—that's what we're going to explore here in Session Seven.

So that's maybe even the first thing to say here, is that engagement takes many forms and if you get nothing else from this session, I hope you'll take that one to heart. It's diverse by necessity. That's how nature skillfully operates. We also need to clarify that just as we're dealing with the psychological tax of climate crisis, that lowercase-T trauma that we talked about in Session Three, we're also challenged with a collective poverty of agency. And what I call this is "I'm Just One Person" syndrome. So we're going to explore that a little bit as well.

The Substrate of EcoSattva Practice

So in this opening video, I want to talk about the kind of substrate that we've been cultivating here and then three domains for the EcoSattva, three realms of service. The substrate is what we've been cultivating here and the precursor for the three domains. And in that we're normalizing the immense challenge to the heart and mind of ecological crisis. Let's do that first. Not just how hard these events are that present themselves in the news, but this future, this abstract future that's presented to us and how hard that is on our sense of being. I experience fight and flight and freeze in gross and subtle ways, and so might you. We can expect this in each other. This is really hard to bear. This that's already unfolding and the promise of ecological breakdown. This is suffering.

The task then for the EcoSattva is to attend to that suffering, to recognize aloud and befriend it. This is self-regulation, countering the understandable move into fight, flight, and freeze, working with our own grief, our own anger, our own fear with compassion, increasingly attuning to the subtleties, neither denying it nor being consumed by it but coming in and meeting and soothing and holding and containing and transforming. We can discover in that this radical thing: that we can actually handle it. We can actually be connected to what's going on and be okay. Wow. This is by itself service. We become here the EcoSattva because we've self-regulated. Our full hearts and minds are now available. So instead of making matters worse, we're taking care of the world by taking care of



One Earth Sangha

ourselves in this way. That's really important. It may not be the whole story, but it's critical.

This is where it begins. And our practices are essential in this effort. The way of looking that we talk so much about, the view is so important, and the practices are important. We're readying ourselves in this, not only for the acute stressors that come with just living and then living in such times as these. But we're also maybe able to meet the chronic challenges that present themselves. In the face of deteriorating conditions, perhaps less ease, less comfort, less safety in this world, we might bring a buoyancy, a resilience of heart. And this is deeply rooted in our tradition. In the *Satipatthana Sutta*: can "abide independently, not clinging to anything in this world." Self-regulated, it's this ability to affirm at a basic level, at a really core level, so immediate this primordial being, this unfathomable mystery, the joy and wonder in just being in every moment. It's not some, just a spiritual dividend, perhaps, but necessary for our wholeness.

The fact is that going forward, there will still be cause for joy. And in that, we can be joyful. We can have a big view. This world is always living and dying, part of something deeply mysterious. So we can be sensitive and connected to what's happening and also hold that big view, however, however it is you sense it, however it is you hold that. So that's a substrate, attending to, soothing when necessary what is challenging, so normally challenging to this heart and mind and regulating ourselves.

First Domain: Serving the Earth

Okay, so now to the domains. The first domain for the EcoSattva as I'm laying out here is also in some way internal. But it has this, maybe it's private. And this is the service to nature herself, or you might think about it as serving Earth or serving the human not yet born, or the other who is not human. It's that kind of service, mindful and nourishing of our relationship, our give and take relationship with Earth. And here we can root in the reality of karma that our behavior matters. It has material and social consequences. How we consume, how we move, how we use energy, et cetera, what we buy, what we don't buy contributes to an aggregate. There is material outcome for that. It might be small, but it contributes to a dynamic.

And perhaps even more importantly, we're reinforcing or challenging norms. You want to make a difference on climate, you already are in those ways. So it has that impact either in the material physical world, incremental, small, but real, and also in the social sphere.



One Earth Sangha

Our behavior matters. And in that, perhaps again even more powerfully, it can be rooted in our values in that sense of service to the other.

So there's an inherent value. I don't need to know if it's going to make a difference either in the material world or even in the social space. I'm acting in alignment with my values. I'm recognizing necessary reciprocity. Perhaps even experimenting, exploring the value of renunciation. Absent of should or shame or any kind of judgment, I'm coming from something because I care about it and I'm in service to that. We can recognize, recognize, taking from nature as requiring a kind of giving to nature. That causing harm, that taking from, I mean, nature is in some ways, brutal, right? It's hard what happens outside the human realm. And so we're participating in something that does have harm involved. But we can sense our relatedness and honor the taking. Our opportunity is to bring consciousness, dignity, reciprocity to that relationship, enliven and enchant even, whatever words feel alive to you in that. Our relationship with the rest of nature.

So, for example, you know, one of the things that I've been exploring just for myself without any imposition from the outside is knowing what I know about flying, how much do I want to fly? And I've brought it down to one trip a year. And it's really hard, I have to say no to so much. And some travel takes so much longer, but that's where I am right now with it. Not out of pressure or guilt or even a sense that there's a whole lot of material difference, because I know it's very very incremental.

But the knowledge that of course it matters in the social and material world and it also matters to my relationship to myself and to Earth. And I, so I just find I don't want to fly anymore. It just feels bad. So I cut out of it, as much of it as I can and that's my agreement with Mama Earth right now is to just be conscious of it and to recognize and honor that there is harm being done with a flight that I make. It might play differently with you and you might think and be right in some ways that even my one flight a year is too much.

But we can all be honest, we can all be conscious, compassionate, and real with ourselves in this. We can stay connected from the moment of booking all the way through to the last, you know, retrieving the luggage from the baggage claim. That we can stay conscious of what's underway and work with it and bring compassion, and not, not shove it away and enfragment ourselves in this way because we're aligned with our values and because it does matter in the outer world as well.



One Earth Sangha

Second Domain: Serving Those Around Us

Okay, second domain of the EcoSattva, the interpersonal. Service to those immediately around us, embodied in the other who's right here, the friend, the family member, the coworker, the neighbor. So what we're doing here is working with our relationship to the other. We're bringing forward that substrate and we can share a radical gift, the gift of someone who is in a basic way okay with what is happening. What, what, okay with what is happening? Are you kidding me? Handling it, not just barely, but perhaps deeply at ease. Why is this service an important service at that?

We as humans, we co-regulate. We take signals, powerful signals, from one another. So that possibility of co-regulating is deep and it has to be recognized as service. We do this through the holding and meeting, the suffering of others with compassion and also necessarily with that ease. We're not absorbing their suffering, not resonating to the degree, you know, and validating horror but we're honoring that we're all challenged with this and that fight, flight, and freeze to some degree, however they're manifesting in all of us is pretty normal. Like that's to be expected, this is really hard.

So as we encounter the other who is in some form of distress, that distress might be in that moment fight or freeze, you know, freaked out, depressed, submitting, going under, or, you know, hypo, hyperaroused or hypoaroused. The potential for us here is to counter that implicit message of this is intolerable, I can't be with this. So we can counter that, we can be the embodiment itself of mindfulness, the container that can listen to and hold grief or fear or rage and resonate, but is not caught up in it. The mindfulness that sees grief is not caught up in grief. The mindfulness that really sees terror is not itself terrorized. We can embody and bring that mindfulness.

So of course we've practiced—potentially a lot of us have practiced this in our communities—embodying the mindfulness. Not being the therapist, certainly not solving the problem, but co-regulating, signaling that it's possible to be in touch, even intimate with this, and being okay. I can hear your distress and bring compassion. Thích Nhất Hạnh talks about in the Gulf of Siam, the Vietnamese boat people caught in rough seas or storms, and that people will panic and boats would sink—except for that, if there was that one person who was steady and strong, the ferryman, the ferrywoman just continuing to stay present, to stay regulated. What a gift. That saves lives.



One Earth Sangha

The other might not in a kind of internal turmoil but in some kind of flight. The distraction, hyper distraction: "Not going to think about this, la la la la la," or denial, you know, technology will save us, or whatever. So sometimes it's service to find the way in, where we can actually stay connected with the other, but help bring in the integration of that which is before our eyes being fragmented. We can be skillful in how we talk how we bring up climate crisis, oh my gosh "in mixed company." Not collaborating, not colluding in collective silence. But also not projecting that folks don't care, right? We know that from Session Three. It's a lot more complex than that.

Nor are we going to grab them by the shoulders and shout, "Wake up," right? For somebody who's traumatized, it's probably not a good idea to shout, "Wake up! Would you please wake up and give a damn." This is part of what we're trying to undo partly in this training, right, and get to the complexity of what's going on for us here. So this can be really powerful. We're countering the tendency for all of us to be suffering in silence. And we're also helping ourselves and one another prepare without fight, flight, or freeze for less ease, less comfort, less safety. Now is the time for us to support one another in this in ways that are actually effective.

So this might be, you know, by addressing the airplane in the room, with the ways that our consumption is outsized with what the Earth can handle. That's hard, and Renee Lertzman and also Ro Randall, others on climate conversations really can help a lot with this, but I'll just point to one aspect of this. That people feel judged and that's really the critical piece that you're working with externally. And then internally you've got to be sure that you're not projecting your anxiety. "Am I just projecting my fear and anxiety about climate crisis out onto the other?" And it's like, "I need you to be different than you are because I'm having such a hard time handling this." So if it's coming from there, maybe hold off.

So we need to work with our tendency to judge and the reality that people, even if we're not judging, will feel judged. And we know what that's like. We know how hard, how much pain is embedded in feeling judged by the other. And especially if they're telling us to stop enjoying something that we enjoy. It's hard territory, right? So how can I be with this and stay connected?

Normalize the ambivalence, normalize the fight, flight, and freeze. Normalize the resistance, bringing your own vulnerability. And also if you can get there, if the conversation gets that far, the underappreciated benefits of being aligned with values.



One Earth Sangha

When the situation presents itself, and it's not always available. That's part of the critical discernment, to know when an authentic conversation is available and when it's not and to what degree. How far might I be able to go, because what I don't want to do is have it shut down and for there to be further disconnection, for the walls to go up and then they're even more rigid.

If I am calm, if I am regulated, can I bring the challenge in relationship to the other and consider that part of my EcoSattva service? Appreciate all that it takes, the courage, the skillfulness, the training. We experiment to get better at it. And we can also be compassionate of ourselves in this because part of the stress that we're up against is not only the reality, our basic eco anxiety, but the social tension around it and how it's being experienced. That's part of the dukkha that we are also working with. So being compassionate of when it doesn't go well and appreciating yourself for staying in it, true, not being reactive yourself, and learning.

Third Domain: Serving the Collective

Okay, so then to the third and perhaps more classic domain of the EcoSattva, serving the collective. Again, deeply dependent on that substrate of what we've been cultivating, the self-regulation, the attunement, the metabolization of crisis. So this piece, your expression, expressing awakened agency is yours to discover or if you've already discovered something that feels really alive for you and is leading someplace that you really feel called to go, to refine and to pursue and to deepen. Emptiness here becomes form and so we will experience that and how it can feel so inadequate and how it falls short and can be so heartbreaking or not living up to its potential, that's the nature of it. Can we normalize that too?

So here we in the Joanna Macy framework, we're countering the systems of harm and we're facilitating alternatives that affirm and nourish life. And we have to recognize the ways in which other social issues, other callings interrelate, intersect with our calling to serve on the ecological space, the climate crisis, all the ecological issues, questions of racial justice, questions of justice of all forms, health, all these different domains. They intersect and we need to get good at bowing to each other and really honoring the ways in which each of us feel called in very diverse ways and that is part of how nature operates. That is part of her genius is to invest in diverse forms. These are the thousand eyes and hands of Guan Yin and we need to not recruit each other away from the issues



One Earth Sangha

or even the degree of radicality of that. “You need to be more radical.” Mm, that’s not actually how nature operates. So let’s unpack that a little bit more.

We can have a narrow view about activism. Can we recognize with honesty that engagement, devotion, sacrifice—it doesn’t look just one way? Challenging the state, getting arrested, or engaging in policy issues is super critical and very hard to get right and I bow to those who serve in this way. But it’s not the only way. Indeed, to be strategic, we need to look to nature. In ecosystems, both radical and incremental change are expressed. They are needed and they contribute to health. So getting arrested is valuable, though not for everyone and not everywhere and not every situation. So is knocking on doors, so is having these conversations, these other realms of the EcoSattva domains.

But so is the quiet, technical, seemingly mundane day in and day out work of remaking our systems, what we do and how we do in alignment with ecological issues. It’s much more quiet, but it’s the channeling of one’s skills into maybe a different career, maybe the one that wasn’t going to give me so many rewards, me as a person, but was going to be so much more deeply aligned with my sense of calling. So I might have a marketing skill that I’m really excited about and I can use that to serve profitability and a culture of not enough, or I can sacrifice the material gains that come with that pursuit in service of sustainability and sufficiency and so good enough.

So this necessarily, in terms of the issues and how radical and how quiet and how technical and how much heroism is involved, it needs to be diverse. That’s how nature does and we can learn from her in that. And we can look for common marks, the ways in which there is a foregoing of wealth or recognition or a life of pleasure or safety, comfort, of ease. I am foregoing in service of. There is a sacrifice to make sacred. Something is being made sacred in that withholding, in that renunciation, in the going a different way.

Truly we are called to pay down all the ways in which this ecological debt has been accumulated in the form of our safety and our comfort and our debt. That’s really an important thing to recognize. And it has inherent value. The other does not need to recognize what I am doing. And if you recognize it in another, it’s so valuable the ways in which they are serving. That we are manifesting values, this is connecting heaven and earth.



One Earth Sangha

So whatever the action is, when held and recognized by myself, recognize it in the other. I can be a balm to anxiety, an homage to the loss that I sense of all that has been lost so far. An offer of protection for that which still may be lost, and a service to life.

So I'm not going to recruit you from the form and the issue and the content that is calling you, but we can see these common marks and affirm these common roots and this beautiful common expression. Whatever our service, we can attend to, and must return to nourishing the source. And it can be experienced as an ethical demand, a calling. Always incomplete, always falling short, riddled with disappointment. Right, let's just expect that. It will be so messy. And sometimes it'll be really beautiful. But relating to that sense of the purposefulness of it, the meaningfulness of it is how we sense and develop and then express our agency. And that's what we're here exploring here in Session Seven. So thank you for listening. I hope you enjoy the next presentation and I invite you of course, as always, to explore the inquiries and practices with us.

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.